Back to the Future? Look North – It’s Positively Medieval!

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List of Abbreviations

EETS       Early English Texts series. EETS volumes are designated ‘e. s’ (extra series), ‘o. s’ (ordinary series), and ‘s. s’, ‘supplementary series’. Places of publication and publishers are provided for each text.

JEGP       Journal of English and German Philology

JMEMS      Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies

LALME      The Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English

MED        Middle English Dictionary

OED        Oxford English Dictionary

PMLA       Periodical of the Modern Language Association of America

REED       Records of Early English Drama
Abstract

This thesis explores how and why medieval religious dramas respond in particular ways to lived meteorological and environmental phenomena – specifically, bad weather in the form of floods and geological features such as coal – and interrogates how these responses produce particularly situated dramas of resilience, refuge, salvation, reform, and rehabilitation. Examining first the medieval religious plays of the Flood found in the York Corpus Christi Cycle, the Chester Mystery Cycle, and the Towneley manuscript, it argues that local place affects re-workings of biblical narratives in specific ways that are shaped by historic, lived experiences of floods.

I then focus on the rural settings of the pastoral plays by the Wakefield Master – partly in order to redress what some scholars identify as an imbalance in scholarship on medieval religious drama that continues to favour urban spaces, and also in order to foreground particularly locally situated ecocritical and ethical, ecomaterialist relationships between the human and natural worlds. I contend that each drama relies upon the determinative power of the local in order to interrogate local identity formations, local allegiances and tensions.

Situating the thesis at the intersection of environmental humanities and the ‘spatial turn’ in literary studies, it argues that medieval religious drama offers a compelling framework through which to explore how the ‘local’ brings human and non-human spheres of influence together, differently, in each place. In doing so, each play site lays claim to an ecologically theorized divine favour that joins people in multitemporal and even imaginary spaces in a special, shared, sacred environment.

The thesis’ later focus on the pastoral plays by the Wakefield Master extends the claims for sacred ground in a local environment, but I argue here for a multitemporal ethical ecomaterialism that has currency and relevance to our current climate crisis. The thesis then reaches beyond an anthropocentric, Christian worldview, to explore how the shepherd plays by the Wakefield Master offer brief glimpses of inter-faith harmony.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning. Where I draw and build upon work previously submitted, this is clearly highlighted and referenced accordingly.

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Dedications

For all my family, near and far, past, present, and future.
Introduction: Ecologies and Place in Medieval Religious Drama

The opening of the Wakefield Master’s *Prima Pastorum* directly conlates the mutability of the weather with the changing fortunes of human experience:

Lord, what thay ar weyll that hens ar past!
For thay noght feyll theym to downe cast.
Here is mekyll vnceyll, and long has it last:
Now in hart, now in heyll, now in weytt, now in blast;
Now in care,
Now in comfort agane;
Now in fayre, now in rane;
Now in hart full fane,
And after full sare.¹

These lines reflect medieval proverbial practices that frequently turned to the varying challenges that meteorological events brought in order to exemplify how human fortunes were as changeable as the weather.² But this opening also has an ‘asynchrony’ that links weather to human fortunes in the past, present, and future.³ Starting by addressing those who ‘hens are past’ (l. 1), the shepherd then immediately invokes the present, indicated by the ‘Here’ (l. 3), and ‘Now’ (l. 4). Congratulating those in the past (or those who have since passed on) for not having to suffer the present misfortunes, the first shepherd then looks to the future as he predicts the movement of a heart from one that is now ‘full fane’ (l. 8) (joyful), to one that will be ‘after full sare’ (l. 9) (sorrowful).⁴ Acknowledging the multitemporality of environmental change and its deep imbrications with human fortunes over time, the shepherd exhibits a clear understanding of

¹*Prima Pastorum*, in *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*, ed. by A. C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), pp. 29-43 (ll. 1-9). All further references by line number and in parentheses are from this edition.
³The term ‘asynchrony’ is from Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) where Dinshaw uses the term to refer to the different, multiple temporal systems that collide with the present.
⁴s. v. ‘fain (adj.)’; s. v. ‘sore (adj. (2))’, *MED Online* [accessed 28 March 2022].
the influence of ecological mutability upon pasts, presents, and futures. For this shepherd, environmental mutability is eternal and materially connected to his (and others’) spiritual, emotional, and physical welfare.

Instantiating the constant interconnectedness of ecological and temporal change, *Prima Pastorum* prioritizes the ‘nowness’ of such connections and emphasizes, in an almost prescient moment of ecological awareness, their global reach. The shepherd’s insistent repetition of ‘now’ (eight times in the middle of his opening monologue) presses the current urgency and extent of the relationships between changeable weather and human suffering or joy, noting that ‘Thus this warld, as I say, farys on ylk syde’ (l. 10). After acknowledging the global applications of such relationships, his concern then moves to his own situation as he switches to first person narrative to describe his ‘mekyll tene’ (l. 20) – his own present sufferings, which could be physical, spiritual, emotional, or a combination of all of these.5 The recurring ‘nowness’ of this shepherd’s environmental vulnerability thus speaks universally, to both global and local audiences, past and present, both distant and proximate, and propels the drama beyond its historical moment into conversation with the climate crises and vulnerabilities we are experiencing now.

The ‘nowness’ of past climatic vulnerability is enunciated even more forcefully in *Secunda Pastorum* when, in addition to the meteorological realism evoked by the opening remarks that illustrate the freezing cold of winter, the third shepherd likens the incessant rains to Noah’s Flood:

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Was neuer syn Noe floode sich floodys seyn,
Wyndys and ranys so rude, and stormes so keyn—
Som stamerd, som stod in dowte, as I weyn.
Now God turne all to good !I say as I mene,
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5 See s. v. ‘tene (n. (2))’, *MED Online*, where *teyne* can imply physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering [accessed 28 March 2022].
For ponder:
These floodys so thay drowne,
Both in feyldys and in towne,
And berys all downe;
And that is a wonder.⁶

The shepherd collapses eschatological time to equate his lived, present experience of floods (in a New Testament narrative) with those he imagines were endured in the Old Testament story of the Flood.⁷ Harking back to the Flood gives this shepherd some hope that God might intervene in this present meteorological crisis and ‘turne all to good!’ (l. 130) – that God might change the weather in the present in order to avoid replicating in the future the destruction caused by the Flood of the typological past.⁸

When documenting their shared environmental vulnerability, both shepherd plays make it clear that this is closely tied to place(s). Secunda Pastorum creates a vivid picture of a Yorkshire shepherd enduring the freezing cold as he ‘walkys on the moore’ (l. 10), with legs that give way and ‘fyngers [that] ar chappyd’ (l. 3). The second shepherd amplifies the struggle with the weather, describing it in terms of personified ill intent as ‘spytus’ (l. 57) and ‘hydus’ (l. 58) – spiteful and cruel – as it freezes his shoes to his feet.⁹ Similarly, in Prima Pastorum, ‘The rott’ (l. 26) has killed all of the shepherd’s sheep. While Lisa J. Kiser notes that ‘rot’ was a disease caused by the parasitic liver fluke, which has led some critics to accuse this shepherd of poor animal husbandry, the specific nature of the rot is not defined and could equally refer to foot rot.

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⁶ Secunda Pastorum, in Cawley, ed., The Wakefield Pageants, pp. 43-63 (ll. 127-35). All further references by line number and in parentheses are from this edition.
⁷ For a recent study on religious drama and time, see Daisy Black, Play Time: Gender, Anti-Semitism and Temporality in Medieval Biblical Drama (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).
⁸ Harking back to the Fall, the shepherd equally re-visits God’s Old Testament promise never to bring such another universal destruction upon humanity, and the covenant (signified by the rainbow) God made with humans to cement this promise.
⁹ s. v. ‘spitous (adj.)’; s. v. ‘hidous (adj.)’, MED Online [accessed 03 December 2021].
a disease to which sheep are more vulnerable in winter when their feet are constantly soaked in water or swampy ground. Thus humans and animals are joined in their susceptibility to adverse climatic conditions experienced in the harsh environment of rural Yorkshire, yet the shepherds never seek shelter in order to escape the inclement conditions.

It may be the case that there simply was no shelter available, but while the shepherds endure the freezing outdoors, they also exhibit close relationships with the land they occupy. Despite the severe weather, the shepherd of Prima Pastorum sleeps with his head ‘as heuy as a sod’ (l. 21) – as heavy as the sod of earth that meets his eyes as he naps. Though he momentarily considers abandoning ‘the contré’ (l. 29), he does not, and instead considers buying more sheep despite ‘all this hard case’ (l. 45). This shepherd is drawn not only to his sheep, but also to the land upon which he endures his hardships. Similarly in Secunda Pastorum the ‘moore’ (l. 10) that the first shepherd refers to is designated by him as part of ‘oure landys’ (l. 13), and there appears to be some spiritual or emotional benefit in walking and talking to oneself in this land, and pausing to ‘abyde on a balk, or sytt on a stone’ (l. 49), as this ‘does [him] good’ (l. 46). This land of moors, mounds, and stones has the potential to improve the shepherd’s wellbeing as it offers him the opportunity to alleviate his worries, even if only temporarily.

Shepherds have a necessary presence in this biblical episode. Yet beyond that, the shepherds of both plays give rise to the notion that for specific communities, particular places can offer both environmental (meteorological, geographical, geological, or topographical)

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10 Lisa J. Kiser, “‘Mak’s Heirs”: Sheep and Humans in the Pastoral Ecology of the Towneley First and Second Shepherds’ Plays’, JEGP, 108:3 (2009), 336-59 (p. 350). On the impact of continued wet weather specifically on the sheep population of the late-medieval period, see Bruce M. S. Campbell, The Great Transition: Climate, Disease, and Society in the Late-Medieval World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), esp. pp. 209-11 where Campbell explains how sheep were vulnerable to the multiple viruses and pathogenic micro-organisms that thrived in sodden, unsanitary conditions.
challenge and comfort. In addition to enduring frost, snow, sleet, and rain in this rural landscape, the shepherds also experience the land as spiritually restorative. When the third shepherd of *Secunda Pastorum* spots the other shepherds approaching, he momentarily considers turning to avoid them and describes them pejoratively as ‘two all-wyghtys’ (l. 139) – two monsters or strange creatures, or even devils. However, he instantly regrets this slur and reproaches himself: ‘Bot full yll haue I ment’ (l. 141). The shepherd admits to ill intent and words with regard to his fellow shepherds, and acts immediately and willingly to repent of his uncharitable thoughts and speech: ‘As I walk on this bent, | I may lyghtly repent, | My toes if I spurne’ (ll. 142-4). To show his contrition and seek atonement, the shepherd determines to walk on the field and repent as he stubs his toes against the ground or on stones. Each time he stubs his toe, a purifying power reverberates through his body, cleansing the shepherd of his previous sinful thoughts and speech. This rural ground has the capacity to spiritually restore the shepherd as with each strike the effects of his sinful speech and thoughts are diminished. With no ceremony or prompting, this lowly shepherd casually articulates the quotidian idea of a spiritual relationship between his material environment (here the ground or stones) and himself.

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11 In the notes accompanying this line in *The Wakefield Pageants*, Cawley notes that the compound *all-wyghtys* is unusual and occurs nowhere else, p. 106. See s. v. ‘wight (n.)’, *MED Online* [accessed 28 March 2022].
12 See s. v. ‘menen (v. (1))’, *MED Online* for *ment* meaning spoken or intended [accessed 28 March 2022].
13 See s. v. ‘lightli (adv.)’, *MED Online* for *lyghtly* conveying both senses of immediacy and willingness [accessed 28 March 2022].
14 See s. v. ‘bent (n.)’ for ‘field’, and s. v. ‘spurnen (v.)’ for stubbing the toe; *MED Online* [accessed 28 March 2022].
16 This notion corresponds to role of the natural, material world in religion and redemption discussed in Sara Ritchey, *Changing Perspectives of the Material World in Late Medieval Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), though her focus here is on women writers and trees, flora, and fauna. See also *Essays On The Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Lisa Kiser and Barbara Hanawalt (Notre Dame: University of Notre dame Press, 2008); *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen.
The local, material environment that the shepherd encounters has the power, agency, and vibrancy to effect spiritual transformation. While the shepherds’ earlier meteorological realism recounted their acute sufferings in the bad weather of their local environment, this later brief episode illustrates how the same place and people are intimately connected to the spiritual beneficence located in its geology. These contrasting points underpin this thesis as it asks how and why medieval religious dramas respond in particular ways to lived meteorological and environmental phenomena – specifically, bad weather in the form of floods and geological features such as coal – and interrogates how these responses produce particularly situated dramas of resilience, refuge, salvation, reform, and rehabilitation. Examining first the medieval religious plays of the Flood found in the York Corpus Christi Cycle, the Chester Mystery Cycle, and the Towneley manuscript, it argues that local place affects re-workings of biblical narratives in specific ways that are shaped by historic, lived experiences of floods. I then focus on the rural settings of the pastoral plays by the Wakefield Master – partly in order to redress what some


18 The identity of the putatively titled Wakefield Master remains unknown, and scholarship reflects the uncertainty around the dramatist’s degree of involvement in the Towneley plays and their (or the dramatist’s) connection to Wakefield. On this see, for example, Garret P. J. Epp’s recent introduction to the Towneley Plays for TEAMS Medieval Texts Series, available at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-towneley-plays-introduction> [accessed 15 May 2020]. In Peter Happé, The Towneley Cycle: Unity and Diversity (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), Happé acknowledges the Wakefield Master’s hand in sections of various plays in the Towneley manuscript, but maintains the traditional attribution of six plays to the Wakefield Master not only on account of shared patterns of versification, but also their dialect and their sustained commitment to lyrical, proverbial, local language which for Happé , confirms an intimate connection between these plays and their locality, p. 59. Where I subsequently refer to these plays as the Wakefield plays, this is for reasons of brevity rather than an attempt to imply any firm connection between the plays and the city of Wakefield though, as the thesis will show, I maintain some connection with the wider, more rural area covered by the medieval manor of Wakefield.
scholars identify as an imbalance in scholarship on medieval religious drama that continues to favour urban spaces, but also in order to foreground particularly locally situated ecocritical and ecomaterialist relationships between the human and natural worlds. Each drama relies upon what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen terms ‘the determinative power of the local’ in order to interrogate local identity formations, local allegiances and tensions. Situating the thesis at the intersection of environmental humanities and the ‘spatial turn’ in literary studies, it argues that medieval religious drama offers a compelling framework through which to explore how the ‘local’ brings human and non-human spheres of influence together, differently, in each place. In doing so, each play site lays claim to an ecologically theorized divine favour that joins people in multitemporal and even imaginary spaces in a special, shared, sacred environment.

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19 See Barbara D. Palmer, ‘Early Modern Mobility: Players, Payments, Patrons’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 56:3 (2005), 259-305, where Palmer notes a ‘skewed focus on town playing’ in scholarship on late-medieval drama, (p. 266). I use the term ‘ecomaterialism’ here to signify the thesis’ move beyond a solely ‘ecocritical’ reading of the chosen material that suggests a focus solely on the natural world. Here I follow Randy P. Schiff and Joseph Taylor who, in the ‘Introduction’ to *The Politics of Ecology: Land, Life, and Law in Medieval Britain*, ed. by Schiff and Taylor (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), pp. 1-30, use the term ‘ecomaterialism’ to signal that this perspective ‘moves criticism toward the important task of bringing human and nonhuman actors into a single vista’ (p. 10). On the different scholarly approaches to ecocriticism and ecomaterialism along which the thesis is situated, see Miranda Griffin, “ʻUnusual Greenness”: Approaching Medievalist Ecomaterialism’, *Exemplaria*, 20:2 (2018), 172-81.


As has often been noted, the cycles of York and Chester have distinctive urban features. Written and performed in regional vernacular verse, the plays asynchronously situated the biblical past in present places. Broadly conceived, they were local productions by and for the laity that translated biblical events from Creation to Doomsday in order to encourage expressions of communal Catholic piety and civic pride. Produced by members of the artisanal and mercantile guilds, the plays’ didactic religious message came in tandem with their function as collaborative enterprises that represented fraternal, or communal, identity and civic allegiances and pride. Replete with instances of bawdy humour and slapstick asides, their enduring popularity presaged their suppression during the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Notwithstanding their official prohibition, such plays (occasionally even singular productions) proved durable vehicles for audiences resistant to religious reform – especially in the rural areas of northern England where traditional Catholicism maintained its stronghold and where,

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23 While evidence is available that documents play performances in York and Chester, no direct evidence survives that relates to any productions of the plays in the Towneley manuscript, including those attributed to the Wakefield Master. While some evidence supports performance of plays at Wakefield, (see, for example, Barbara D. Palmer, “Towneley Plays” or "Wakefield Cycle" Revisited’, Comparative Drama, 21:4 (1987-88), 318-48), it cannot be assumed that those plays were those in the Towneley manuscript. On evidence of play production in Wakefield drawn from the three surviving entries in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls and their performance injunction in 1576, see also A. C. Cawley, Jean Forrester, and John Goodchild, 'References to the Corpus Christi play in the Wakefield Burgess Court rolls: the Originals Rediscovered’, Leeds Studies in English, NS 19 (1988), 85-104.


26 On the manuscript history of the York Cycle, see ‘Introduction’, in The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290, ed. by Richard Beadle, EETS s. s. 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xi-xxiv (pp. xi-xxxiii). For similar on the Chester cycle, see ‘Introduction’, in The Chester Mystery Cycle, ed. by R. M. Lumia and David Mills, EETS s. s. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), ix-xl (pp. ix-xxxiii). There are no clear dates for either the authorship of the plays in the Towneley manuscript or its compilation, but in The Towneley Cycle, Happé suggests that individual plays could have been written at different times, from 1420 onwards, and that the manuscript was compiled later, possibly during the Marian period (1553-58) and the (brief) revival of Catholicism, pp. 15-17.
according to Eamon Duffy, ‘Protestant authorities walked warily’ when undertaking the ‘formidable and chancy task’ of suppressing drama which expounded Catholic doctrine.27

Early scholarship on these cycles tended to focus on their orthodox approach and didactic aims, with little interest in place. Writing in 1955, Hardin Craig maintained that ‘medieval religious drama existed primarily to give religious instruction, establish faith, and encourage piety’.28 For Craig, whatever else the dramas did, their ultimate goal was to promote religious orthodoxy. V. A. Kolve’s still influential work of 1966 developed a more nuanced view of what the genre represented.29 Kolve seized upon the ludic qualities of the dramas to propose a distinctly medieval mix where the vitality of the dramas promoted religiosity alongside human understanding within a special game world; however, for Kolve, the plays were always plays and were not ‘designed to represent reality’.30 The importance of place did not feature in such scholarship; its focus on the universality of the plays’ religious message meant that any difference between rural and civic religiosity was not discussed.

The seminal work of Mervyn James, published in 1983 and coincident with the ‘spatial turn’ in literary studies, recognized for the first time the importance of place specifically in medieval religious drama and focused on the corporate, urban productions of these cycles.31

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27 Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 579. In Clifford Davidson, Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain (London: Routledge, 2007), Davidson cites the example of the Kendal play, witnessed by a man who links it to similar plays seen at Preston and Lancaster, which was only suppressed in 1605, p.70. Though not strictly speaking a play which would fit into any biblical sequence, in Palmer, “‘Towneley Plays”, or “Wakefield Cycle” Revisited’, Palmer notes the astonishingly late date of the c.1628 anti-Protestant play performed at Nidderdale (now in North Yorkshire) as an example of enduring pro-Catholic sentiment in northern England (p. 339).
29 Kolve, The Play called Corpus Christi.
James argued that the play cycles depicted civic society in bodily terms and, especially in larger towns such as York or Chester, the plays were a mechanism ‘by which the tensions in the diachronic rise and fall of occupational communities could be worked out’. Even without these cycle plays’ titles advertising their civic provenance, their urban environment is evident from their texts, leading more recent scholarship to discuss the implications of the space of the city as theatre. Exploring the divisions and control of people and space within the city of York leads Sarah Beckwith, for instance, to conclude that, rather than exemplifying community cohesion, the cycles were ‘bearers of endemic fissures and tensions in late medieval urban life’. While Beckwith is responding to the ‘spatial turn’ in literary studies, the nature of her project maintains the focus on urban productions and civic religiosity.

Cities and large towns were not the only areas that witnessed medieval religious play production. Occasionally rural parishes joined forces to produce one play, facilitated by late medieval mobility networks which allowed villages and smaller towns regular, if not always easy, access to each other. However, the same civic concerns and situatedness of the medieval cycle plays cannot be said to apply to such rural efforts, or indeed the pastoral plays of the Wakefield Master under scrutiny here. Rural experiences of religiosity differed from civic ones, and some religious texts were tailored to accommodate the spiritual needs and concerns of rural inhabitants. The value of the local and the rural to the Wakefield pastoral plays occupies a

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32 James, ‘Ritual, Drama, and Social Body’, (p. 15).
33 See, for example, Pamela M. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Oxford: Boydell and Brewer, 2006); Beckwith, *Signifying God*. See also *Performing Environments*, ed. by Bennett and Polito, where various urban centres are discussed, with no focus on rural space.
36 Of the six plays traditionally attributed to the Wakefield Master, the four pastoral plays are *Mactatio Abel, Processus Noe Cum Filiis, Prima Pastorum*, and *Secunda Pastorum*.
major strand of the thesis as it further reveals the sedimented, intimate relationships between local language, ground, and ‘northern’ peasant identity. In doing so it adds to the still relatively under-represented study of rural space and place in medieval literature.\(^{38}\)

As the Wakefield pastoral plays document the sometimes harsh realities of late medieval rural, religious peasant life, I argue that they also construct a locally situated community that shares insider knowledge and experience of that community’s positive and negative understandings of, and relationships with, that landscape.\(^{39}\) Peter Happé points to the importance of rural place in these plays:

there is little here to suggest the problems of urban life or indeed of the culture of craft guilds. Indeed the Wakefield Master seems interested in shifting the social context away from York towards a more rural predicament.\(^{40}\)

While the Wakefield dramatist shows clear familiarity with the York cycle, and much of his work displays a religious orthodoxy in common with both York and Chester, his work differs from, and is sometimes critical of, civic drama cycles.\(^{41}\) Yet even in the few instances when

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\(^{38}\) On this see, for example, Classen, ‘Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: A Significant Domain Ignored For Too Long by Modern Research?’, in *Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, pp. 1-191.


\(^{40}\) Happé, *The Towneley Cycle*, p. 186.

\(^{41}\) See Ruth Nisse, *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 76-79. Here, Nisse argues that, using the York plays as his primary exemplar, the Wakefield Master ‘wrote his contributions in polemical contrast to the urban form of the Corpus Christi cycle’, p. 77.
scholarship has acknowledged the importance of the rural land to the pastoral plays by the 
Wakefield Master, it has tended to overlook the positive, spiritual aspects of their relationship 
with their rural land that I indicated earlier in this introduction. Part of what this thesis 
demonstrates is how, in these pastoral plays, rural, local land can be both degenerative and regenerative – equally and simultaneously a source of physical, economical, spiritual hardship 
and of succour.

(Un)Common Ground: Devolutionary Dramas of Northern Identities, Language, and 
Dialect

In this thesis I argue that the plays can be read as sites which self-consciously foreground place 
and local language in order to promote the status of northern English civic and rural religiosities 
and identities. In so doing, each play area resists the claims for a London-centric English proto- 
nationalism evident in some late-medieval texts, at the same time as they register and interrogate intraregional and intra-civic differences. I argue that such differences are lodged in the texts of

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42 For example, in Margaret Rogerson, ‘The Medieval Plough Team on Stage: Word Play and Reality in the Towneley Mactatio Abel’, Comparative Drama, 28:2 (1994), 182-200, Rogerson briefly considers the soil conditions of late-medieval West Yorkshire and their relevance to the size of the plough team in Mactatio Abel, but does not recognize any spiritual attachment to that land. Similarly in The Townley Cycle, Happé notes the clear link between place and dialect apparent in these plays, noting the local references to place names, but concludes that none of this evidence can pinpoint the provenance of play or dramatist, p. 16.

43 This corresponds to the potential for material to signify degeneration and regeneration made in Bynum, Christian Materiality, p. 30.

44 The subject of incipient (or imagined) nationalism in the late medieval period is too large scale a topic to cover in detail in this thesis, but my thinking here corresponds to that of, for example, Kathy Lavezzo in Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), where Lavezzo notes the internal forms of estrangement and 'domestic difference[s]' that stymie notions of proto-nationalism in medieval discourses that sought to repress and displace just such differences, p. 13. On notions of late-medieval nationalist thinking, see the collection of essays in also Lavezzo, ed., Imagining a Medieval English Nation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) where each essay highlights the multiple factors that variously contributed to medieval fantasies of English nationalism, pointing also to the same period as one that witnessed the construction of multiple, contingent, and conflicting notions of 'Englishness' that inhere ideas of inclusion and exclusion. See also Patricia Clare Ingham, Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Cohen, ed., The Postcolonial Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
religious drama across civic and rural northern England, and they are specifically tailored to appeal to divergent audiences and allegiances that arise differently across particular northern rural areas and cities, or even at different points in that city’s procession route.45

Linking York, Chester, and the Wakefield plays is their situation in, loosely speaking, ‘northern’ England – but thinking in terms of the medieval norths of England, in the plural, captures the complex realities and particularities of northern English identities and religiosities more accurately than any assumption of monolithic regional unity.46 Imagining medieval ‘norths’ of England reflects the distinct, yet geographically related, northern identities that the dramas from York, Chester, and the manor of Wakefield construct. I suggest that each of the plays explored here promotes a self-conscious localism that reveals tensions within (or differences between) a north/south divide, local ‘north/north’ divisions, or intra-regional and intra-civic tensions within the medieval ‘norths’ of England. The Middle English word regioun referred to geographic divisions within a country, but could also articulate a distinction between the rural and the urban, the ‘rural area around a town or city, field, countryside’.47 Thus, while all of the plays under discussion here originate from the norths of England, each northern region is distinctive and therefore each drama is capable of signifying variation between those regions as

45 The notion that different pageants could change their signification according to pageant station (which may be gender-oriented) has recently been suggested by Robert W. Barrett, Jr., Against All England: Regional Identity and Cheshire Writing, 1195-1656 (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 77-9, and in Mary Wack, ‘Women, Work, and Plays in an English Medieval Town’, in Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England, ed. by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 33-51.

46 Regionalism in medieval drama proves useful, for example in Barrett, Against All England, where Barrett investigates what he terms ‘intranational tensions between Cheshire and the larger English community’, p. 15, but regionalism equally risks overlooking the differences and tensions inhered in localities within a particular region. Though not medieval in focus, see also Karl Spracklen, ‘Theorising Northernness and Northern Culture: The North of England, Northern Englishness, and Sympathetic Magic’, Journal for Cultural Research, 20:1 (2016), 4-16.

well as differences between the rural and the urban within one region. The term ‘local’ (rather than the more broadly speaking ‘regional’) is therefore used when speaking specifically of an area within a region, such as the (predominantly rural) medieval manor of Wakefield that sat within a similarly northern region as the city of York. This differentiation will become more apparent as the thesis discusses evidence from southern England that articulates a very real fear of ‘northerners’ in general, alongside concerns from the city of York, of the perceived ‘threat’ posed by fellow northerners who lived in the ‘high and wild’ areas beyond the city.

In attempts to locate ‘the north’ of England, rivers were ordinarily employed to demarcate regional boundaries. For example, the MED offers a geographic definition of northern as ‘of or from northern Britain, esp. the region north of the Humber’, and also illustrates the term north as being understood in a less geographically specific sense to refer simply to ‘northern England’.

Bruce M. S. Campbell takes into account the conflation of historic administrative, ecclesiastical, and geographical divisions to conclude that, for a long period, ‘the Trent tended to persist as an administrative fault line’ between the north and south of medieval England. Helen M. Jewell notes that while ‘thirteenth century officialdom made the Trent a dividing line’ demarcating north and south, boundaries were porous and interpreted loosely. Jewell also points to the ‘different degrees of northernness in feeling’ within the north thus defined and

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48 On these differences, see Town and Country in Medieval North Western Europe: Dynamic Interactions, ed. by Alexis Wilkin, John Naylor, Derek Keene, and Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).
49 See s. v. ‘local (adj.)’; ‘localial (adj.)’; ‘locali (adv.)’, MED Online, for usage that demonstrates an understanding of the local applicability of, for example, legal statutes, or simply local in respect to space [accessed 06 January 2022].
51 s. v. ‘northern(e adj.), (2 (a)); s. v. ‘north’ (adj.), (1(b)), MED Online [accessed 20 January 2022].
suggests thinking in terms of a far north, a middle north, and a near north. However, it may be the case that any sense of being northern, to whatever degree, inhered simply in not being southern – something made evident in one’s dialect. While not writing in regard to drama, several scholars hold late-fourteenth century literature, particularly that of Geoffrey Chaucer, responsible for cementing notions both of a north/south divide and a perception of southern superiority that inheres northern inferiority. They identify Chaucer’s use of northern dialects as an attempt to instantiate a London-centric notion of what connotes ‘proper’ speech - a notion that seems especially pertinent to the work of the Wakefield Master who has Mak, the sheep-stealing shepherd of *Secunda Pastorum*, feigning a southern accent in order to persuade his peers of his superiority. This fools no-one and instead Mak is told to remove his southern tongue and replace it with a turd. The shepherds’ ability to discern southern speech models, and their replacing of the southern tongue with a turd, challenges the hierarchy implicit in a north/south divide based upon dialect, at the same time as it confirms that those differences are felt and heard.

The origins of this dialect hierarchy can be traced back to William of Malmesbury’s twelfth-century text *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, which states that ‘the whole language of the Northumbrians, especially in York, was so uncouth that “we southerners” could not

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54 Ibid., p. 24. Jewell admits some variations in these categorizations, recognizing that in some definitions the counties included in the near north category are not considered northern at all, but Jewell’s work does address the variations in degrees of historic northerness and aims to bring some perspective to a subjective, yet textually manifest, identity marker; ibid.


56 The idea that Mak’s southern speech acts as a regional counter to a north/south dialect hierarchy has been in circulation for some time now. See, for example, Cawley, *The Wakefield Pageants*, p. 131.
understand it’.\textsuperscript{57} This early testimony to language and dialect hierarchies was repeated almost verbatim in Ranulph Higden’s fourteenth-century \textit{Polychronicon}; in his English translation of the text from 1387, John Trevisa describes the speech of northerners as ‘so scharp, slytting and frotyng and vnschape’ that southerners can barely understand it.\textsuperscript{58} As John B. Friedman remarks, Trevisa’s translation linked character to language and dialect, judging northerners as more unstable, cruel, and hostile than other English people.\textsuperscript{59} Such linguistic and cultural differences linked to place were acknowledged in other medieval texts too. Merja Stenroos cites the example of the fourteenth-century poem \textit{Cursor Mundi} which contains an explanation of why it translates from the poem’s original southern English:

\begin{quote}
In sotherin englis was it draun,
And turnd it haue i till our aun
Langage o northin lede,
\textsuperscript{60}bat can nan oiper englis rede
\end{quote}

The English language is clearly linked to place here, though no hierarchy is evident, only the difference between southern and northern English.

While each of the dramas discussed here is written with varying degrees of dialect markers, the use of northern (Yorkshire) dialect is most apparent, and most pertinent to this thesis, in the rural dramas of the Wakefield Master.\textsuperscript{61} These plays, particularly \textit{Mactatio Abel},

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Repr. from Jewell, \textit{The North-South Divide}, p. 198.
\item[61] On the ‘northernness’ (or otherwise) of the dialect in the York plays, see Stenroos, ‘\textit{Langage o northin lede}’, in \textit{Revisiting the Medieval North of England}, ed. by Auer et al, pp. 39-57. On the similarities between the dialect of the Chester plays and other north-west dialects, see Andrew Albin, ‘Aural Space, Sonorous Presence, and the
\end{footnotes}
document a sustained effort to maintain their northern, rural distinctiveness, evident through their persistent use of dialect-heavy, demotic language by the rural characters. In addition to the north/south linguistic diversity, another concern that some late-medieval writers tussled with was the perceived ‘problem’ of rustic English.\textsuperscript{62} William Caxton’s late fifteenth-century \textit{Eneydos} captures the northern/southern dialect diversity apparent in late medieval England as it recounts the difficulties some northern English merchants encountered when wanting to buy eggs in southern England.\textsuperscript{63} But when deciding upon the form of English to appeal to most readers (and thus ensure commercial success), Caxton further complicates notions of ‘proper’ English by dismissing the language of peasants, choosing not to engage in the kind of English suited to what he describes as ‘rude uplondyssh’ men.\textsuperscript{64} Caxton openly eschews the language of the ignorant, common, or ‘uncivilized’ population that he locates in rural areas. As Andrew Taylor puts it, Caxton’s linguistic hierarchy sets ‘provinces against metropolis and rude peasants against people of taste and education’.\textsuperscript{65} An important strand to this thesis is thus the importance of dialect language, and the argument that the linguistic dexterity, complexity, and dialectal versatility evident in the language of the lowly yet erudite characters in the pastoral plays of the Wakefield Master challenges such hierarchies and their presumed authority.

\textsuperscript{62} This point corresponds to the sociopolitical hierarchies in English writing that were also operative in the late Middle Ages. See for example, Helen Barr, \textit{Socioliterary Practice in Medieval England} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); \textit{The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280-1520}, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999); \textit{Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530}, ed. by Lee Patterson (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

\textsuperscript{63} Briefly, the northerners ask a southerner for \textit{egges} but the southerner, who understands eggs as \textit{eyren} does not understand the northerners. The story can be found at: <https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item126611.html> [accessed 29 March 2022].


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
Re-examining the linguistic complexity and dialect of the remaining Wakefield pastoral plays also allows me to question what we think we know about what these plays are saying. In doing so, I argue that the dialect and language of the lowliest characters share centre stage with their ecocritical content in order to extol an ethical ecomaterialism that debunks linguistic, social, and religious hierarchies. Servants and shepherds voice vibrant collusions with geological matter and proverbial animals in order to re-calibrate their relationships with the spiritual truth and self-governance. Re-figuring northern peasants as an erudite and ethical community, I demonstrate how their ethical ecomaterialism moves beyond its local, medieval moment to coincide with urgent, current debates on ethical attitudes towards our relationships with the material world, at the heart of which lie questions of social and environmental justice.

**Ecocritical Engagements Turning Through Time and Space**

Thus far, scholarship has tended (with few exceptions) to overlook what medieval drama can tells us about the powerful roles played by place and their particular ecologies to articulate the ‘nowness’ of ecocritical and ecomaterialist engagements therein. Much like the shepherds discussed earlier who collapse eschatological time in order to render present their climatic vulnerability, this thesis argues for the modern applicability of the medieval ecological thinking in these dramas. As it does so, each part of the thesis revolves around different, yet related,
strands of ecological thought dictated by the dramas’ interweaving of place with water, coal, and human/animal crossovers. Each part therefore responds, as I stated earlier, to the intersection of the so-called ‘spatial’ and ‘ecocritical’ turns in literary studies in order to focus on the asynchronic, lived experiences of climate catastrophe in relation to place. Further, the latter parts of the thesis turn again to situate it in the field of ethical ecomaterialism that scholarship now recognizes as new materialist ecological thought. This ethical development of ecomaterialist studies emphasizes place-sensitive connections, trans-corporealities, and material agencies in what Kate Rigby describes as an ‘ethics of more-than-human “mattering”’ that transcends faiths and secularism ‘in the pursuit of greater social, or, more inclusively, transpecies, justice’.69 Thus while each of these ‘turns’ is related, no monolithic model of ecocritical thought can be said to apply equally to each part of the thesis as I respond to the material peculiarities of water, coal, and human/animal overlaps in the dramas in different-yet-related ways.

For these reasons, I have termed each part of this thesis a volume. The etymology of the word ‘volume’, both in medieval and modern senses, locates it in the Old French volume (which denotes a work of some size), noting that this stems originally from the Latin volvere, meaning to turn, or revolve.70 Separating the thesis into volumes, rather than the more usual chapters, therefore reflects the varying, though related turns and movements in ecological thought that each volume brings, echoing the etymological roots of the word ‘volume’.71 Additionally, each volume title includes the suffix –gate to signpost the sense of connectedness and movement each

70 See s. v. ‘volume (n.)’, <https://www.etymonline.com/>; MED Online; OED Online [all accessed 20 April 2020]
volume argues for. In Middle English, the suffix –gat or –gate denoted an approach taken, or a sense of transition from one place to another.\textsuperscript{72} ‘Watergate’, ‘Colliergate’, and ‘Manygates’ therefore reflect the idea of the different-yet-related spatial and ecocritical turns that each volume presents. As a noun, gate also encompassed meanings of movement through environments - including journeys and also departures and destinations.\textsuperscript{73} Its centrality to each volume title therefore also indicates how each volume represents an ecocritical journey in its own right, one that has both a point of departure (introduction) and a destination (conclusion), and that each volume contributes to the thesis’ overarching ecocritical journey through selected medieval religious drama that pinpoints how related, yet distinct, ecological encounters can be mediated to promote the hope for ethical care and respect for places and populations both human and non-human.

**Volume Summaries**

This section of the introduction provides a brief description of the sections that comprise each volume of the thesis. ‘Watergate’ devotes a section each to considerations of the Flood plays from York, Towneley, and Chester, and explores how each drama can be seen as a response to the lived experience of localized flooding. Extremes of weather beleaguered the later European Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{74} Across England (and beyond), periodic and often fatal floods blighted crops, damaged buildings and bridges, and wreaked havoc upon vulnerable communities who had inadequate defence systems to protect themselves. From c.1300 onwards, for the next approximately five hundred years, the seesawing climatic events of the so-called ‘Little Ice Age’

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\textsuperscript{72} s. v. ‘–gate(e suf.)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 09 January 2021].
\textsuperscript{73} See also s. v. ‘gat(e, n.), (2)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 09 January 2021].
\textsuperscript{74} See, for example, Brian Fagan, \textit{The Little Ice Age: How Climate Change Made History 1300-1850} (New York: basic Books, 2000). More evidence of this is presented and discussed in the main thesis.
\end{footnotesize}
brought extremes of floods and droughts, and heat and cold, forcing medieval Europeans to adapt in various ways to environmental phenomena that were often seen as divine retribution for human sin.  

Brian Fagan considers the important impact that prolonged and frequent rainfall and storms had on late-medieval populations, suggesting that that ‘to ignore them is to neglect one of the dynamic backdrops of the human experience’.  

Taking the next step, I explore how individual dramas treat the weather as a dynamic, active force, placing it centre stage. Each section illustrates how the Flood dramas work as counter-texts that embed geographical and meteorological realism into their texts in order to promote the promise, or hope, of physical or spiritual salvation for those living in a specific community.

York’s susceptibility to floods has been recorded since Roman times, and David M. Palliser lists major flooding as a regular event throughout York’s medieval period. The relatively proximate floods of 1315, 1328, and 1348 show that York’s low-level situation in the Vale of York (much of it lying less than fifty feet above sea level) rendered it vulnerable as the

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76 Fagan, *The Little Ice Age*, p. xv. On the idea that medieval societies recognized and attempted to address ecological crises see also John Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: Crucible of Nature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Richard C. Hoffman, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). These crises often resulted in an adversarial relationship between humans and the weather that was represented in medieval literature. On this, see Michael W. George, ‘Adversarial Relationships between Humans and the Weather in Medieval English Literature’, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 30 (2014), 67-81, who acknowledges the realism of the shepherds’ response to the bad weather in the Wakefield Master’s *Secunda Pastorum* (p. 77). See also Classen, ‘Consequences of Bad Weather in Medieval Literature from Apollonius of Tyre to Marguerite de Navarre’s Heptaméron,’ *Arcadia* 45 (2010), 3–20 where Classen suggests that bad weather was ‘skillfully utilized as a major theme in a wide range of literary texts’, (p. 20).

77 This point, also pertinent to the subsequent volume, follows the call for re-contextualization made in Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Here, historic flooding acts in Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory as an actant whose social relevance to each individual re-working of the Flood narrative acts alongside its biblical message.

78 David M. Palliser, *Medieval York: 600-1540* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 6. Here Palliser assumes the likelihood of flooding during and after York’s Roman period and notes that, despite the paucity of evidence to confirm earlier medieval floods in York, the city would probably have suffered from the floods recorded elsewhere in Yorkshire in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.
repository for excess water flowing from the uplands which bracketed York to the east and west. While the river systems created trade routes and communication networks for the benefit of medieval merchants, artisans, and York’s increasingly mobile society, the same systems also always carried the imminent threat of catastrophic flooding. Later investments in flood defences confirm York’s self-aware environmental liability, but the flood of 1564 which claimed twelve lives exposes York’s continued vulnerability to the very real and constant danger posed by devastating floods. In presenting the city-as-ark, I argue that the York Flood plays cement a relationship between shipwrights and God that justifies the needs of environmental extraction and the aspirations of human manufacture in order to appease an artisanal and mercantile ethos. Building the ark in York is divinely approbated, and the city-as-ark remains a place of refuge for its environmentally vulnerable citizens.

My reading of the Towneley play of the Flood follows the hills and moors of the text to argue that its undulations reflect the drama’s appeal to the rural swells and falls setting found in the vast medieval manor of Wakefield in order to promote that area as a site for potential refuge. Given that any re-working of the biblical flood narrative has to engage, even figuratively, with the notion that the ark will eventually find refuge on a hill, this section asks whether those who already occupied the actual physical high ground (such as the medieval residents of what is now rural West Yorkshire) imagined themselves as also occupying the moral high ground. Although many of the lowland areas of this undulating ground did experience flooding, access to hilltop locations enabled residents to retreat to the high ground. Unlike York, whose play I suggest

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79 Ibid., pp. 4-6.
80 See <http://www.historyofyork.org.uk/themes/tudor-stuart/ouse-bridge> for an account which states that this flood caused the central arches of the Ouse Bridge to collapse and twelve houses were lost to the river, along with twelve lives [accessed 02 June 2020].
depicts the necessity of staying within the confines of the city, these upwardly mobile inhabitants could hope for an escape from a flood. This section also considers how Towneley’s *Processus Noe Cum Filiis* dramatizes a prioritization of divine creation over human manufacture.

The final section considers how the location and geography of the border city of Chester participate in its particular rendition of the Flood narrative. Chester’s medieval cityscape included a riverscape which, like medieval York, rendered it liable to disastrous flooding. Unlike York, however, Chester was (and still is) an undulating city – thus, from this thesis’ perspective, it straddles both of the main features identified as informing the flood play texts of the York and Towneley versions: flatness and hills. In addition, specific places in Chester held special significance for certain groups of Cestrian society. According to Robert W. Barrett, some performance stages for viewing the plays appealed to audiences in gender-specific ways, and men and women were attracted to different place stations. Exploring the gendered dynamics of place available to medieval Cestrians, this section considers the fluidity of the city’s identity and asks how its Flood play creatively corresponds to – even toys with – the potential unleashed by the city’s amalgamation of identities. Re-examining the role played by Noah’s wife, I read her as a potential female Christ figure who prepares her closest allies for an inevitable, yet doctrinally orthodox and therefore good, death. Spiritual salvation, rather than physical escape, is thereby offered to the audience of the Chester Flood play. Though blighted by floods, each locality is blessed by God. And while some humans perished, most did not. I read the dramas as counter-texts that create uniquely situated Flood narratives that allow each site to bespeak a particular medieval understanding of the phrase ‘God’s own country’ in order to promote notions of the

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81 Specific examples of such events are reserved for discussion in the full chapter.
city as the Ark (York), hills as sites of natural refuge (manor of Wakefield), or the city as a site of spiritual salvation in the event of death (Chester).  

The next volume, ‘Colliergate’, explores how Mactatio Abel engages with long-standing exegetical debates in the Judeo-Christian traditions prompted by the laconic biblical account of the killing of Abel in order to reappraise the implications of what is being said by the brothers and God. The opening sections of this volume illustrate how Mactatio Abel explains why God favours Abel’s offering but not Cain’s, and how it shows that both brothers’ misunderstandings of God’s words precipitate Cain killing Abel. The later sections of ‘Colliergate’ argue for a re-interpretation and rehabilitation of the character Garcia who emerges as the only figure capable of spiritual change in Mactatio Abel.

Reading Garcia as the only character in Mactatio Abel with whom an audience, eventually, can identify entails understanding a key dialect word. After Cain admits to fratricide and tries to implicate Garcia in disposing of the body and claiming a king’s pardon, Garcia remarks that Cain eats only cold coyle, and that he himself needs to eat more. In a Yorkshire dialect, coyle (in its variant phonetic spellings) means coal. The notion of eating coal in Mactatio Abel points to Garcia’s desire for spiritual purgation as he seeks to distance himself from Cain’s lies. Garcia seeks reform, but such a reading is only accessible when the dialect

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83 On the meanings and interpretations of ‘God’s own country’, see the link to the phrase s. v. ‘god (n.)’, OED Online where it has been applied to various countries, or regions, to depict them as places especially favoured by God [accessed 06 January 2022].
85 The following link shows many modern dialect poems with coil meaning coal with sound links to readings in dialect: <http://www.yorkshire-dialect.org/contents.htm> [accessed 02 February 2021]. See also Ben Taylor a poet from the Wakefield area, reading his poem The Collier at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRzd1m9TfX1> [accessed 03 February 2022]. An explanation of this dialect feature is available at <https://www.yorkshiredialectsociety.org.uk/yorkshire-dialect-explanation/> [accessed 02 May 2021].
inflection of *coyle* as coal is recognized and understood. As many scholars note, though some overlook, dialect is a central feature in the work of the Wakefield Master to such an extent that, as Happé remarks, it is difficult to imagine this dramatist’s work ‘operating in circumstances separate from their roots’.86 The dialect is difficult (even testing a Yorkshire native like myself at times), but not engaging with it risks participating in a colonial practice of meaning-making which would subordinate or even ignore it.87 Reading *coyle* as coal permits previously unnoticed networks to emerge whereby coal acts as an ecosemiotic marker that links the play to the coal-rich environment of the medieval manor of Wakefield, and coal has purgative qualities to restore Garcio’s spirituality.

Garcio’s figurative eating of coal grounds the exploration of the *full* vibrant materiality of coal and its agentic capacity on Garcio’s body and his spirituality in the later sections of ‘Colliergate’. Coal is the material medium that enables Garcio’s elemental salvation, and it is his practice of previously ingesting coal (though not enough) that has caused his black anus. While his black anus seems, at the start of the play, to connote a ‘darkness’ of character (or indeed physical blackness) often synonymous with the pejorative stereotyping of what might loosely be termed ‘others’, including rural northerners or peasants, I argue that Garcio’s blackness points to his capacity for eventual spiritual wholeness.88 Garcio emerges as a reformed Everyman character, and the play can thus be read as a morality play where Garcio’s spiritual rehabilitation

87 On the colonial practices of language subordination see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge Classics, 2004), 139-70, referenced further in the body of the volume.
88 This point corresponds to those made by Cord J. Whitaker in *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019) where Whitaker explores the necessary blackness central to medieval Christianity. This book, and others with regard to blackness and racist stereotyping, and their overlaps with northern and rural stereotyping are discussed in much further detail in the later sections of ‘Colliergate’. Equally, coal’s blackness adds to scholarship that seeks to move ecological thought beyond its primary association with the colour green; see for example *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green*, ed. by Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
stands a moral example for a rural, northern audience. Coal here further secures this rural place as a site favoured by God, as the material for purgation and spiritual reform lies in the ground beneath. This volume closes with a salient pointer to the environmental crisis that envelops us today fuelled by the demand for fossil fuels - coal cannot purge in absentia.

Continuing the thesis’ consideration of the Wakefield pastoral plays, the concluding volume ‘Manygates’ proposes directions for future research – on particular human/animal overlaps in *Prima Pastorum* and *Secunda Pastorum* that I argue occur under the guise of the animal mask. Exploring issues of northern, rural peasant identities that were described in medieval texts such as John Gower’s *Vox Clamantis* in animalistic terms, this final, shorter volume focuses on the proverbial language used in these plays that links the characters specifically to dogs and pigs in order to address criticism of the anthropocentrism some scholars identify in postcolonial approaches to texts, and to expose the species specificity at work in the human/animal crossovers in the shepherd plays. A medieval audience may have been primed to understand, or even expect, mimicry in their drama, as it is a literary device extolled in the hugely influential Distichs of Cato, a text that is referenced directly in *Prima Pastorum*. This volume therefore sees the shepherd plays as attempts to rob deprecatory images of their reprehensible human/animal associations, and to diminish their claims of veracity in relation to northern, rural peasant identity. In doing so, they also offer momentary glimpses of inter-faith

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89 The term ‘animal mask’ is from Neel Ahuja, ‘Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World’, *PMLA*, 124:2 (2009), 556-63. This builds on the animal overlaps in these dramas identified in Kiser, ‘Mak’s Heirs’. The research presented here builds on that of Cohen in *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011).


91 Much more is said about the Distichs of Cato in the main volume.
harmony with groups such as Jews who shared pejorative animalistic associations, and equally challenge those.\textsuperscript{92}

Moments of religious harmony in the shepherd plays reveal fleeting, yet tantalizingly promising, instances of racial and inter-faith harmonies that point not only to how past selves viewed themselves as different-yet-related. Others here are brothers – amity replaces enmity and, briefly, possible communities are reconstructed. Early in this introduction I identified the asynchrony of medieval drama. Beyond the local reach of this asynchrony, the thesis closes by pointing to the longer distance relevance for the claims made within to speak to the hope for possible futures. These possible futures recognize the precarity of our current climate crisis, and urge for a re-thinking of our relationship with coal that is attentive to its \textit{full} materiality. The possible futures are equally conditional upon understanding the potential intricacies of a past imperfect – yet one that still, even if only fleetingly, dared to dramatize hope and the potential for ethical change.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{92} This corresponds to the work of, for example, Elisa Narin van Court, ‘Socially Marginal, Culturally Central: Representing Jews in Late Medieval Literature’, \textit{Exemplaria}, 12:2 (2000), 293-326.

\textsuperscript{93} This ethical asynchrony corresponds to the work of Deborah Bird Rose, in ‘Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time’, \textit{Environmental Philosophy}, 9:1 (2012), 127-40.
Volume I of III: ‘Watergate’

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Flood and Faith in York, Towneley, and Chester

The biblical story of the Flood, found in Genesis 6-9, depicts a vengeful God set to destroy all the living creatures of the now corrupt and wicked world save Noah, his family, and the animals chosen to accompany them on the ark. The story was apparently widely known in the medieval period, as the oft-cited example taken from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Miller’s Tale* shows when the wily clerk Nicholas questions his gullible landlord John the carpenter’s knowledge of the Flood:

“Hastow nat herd hou saved was Noe,  
When that oure Lord hadde warned hym biforn  
That al the world with water sholde be lorn?”

“Yis,” quod this Carpenter, “ful yoore ago.”

John’s quick affirmation suggests that even this naïve character was familiar with the biblical narrative, or at least keen to give the impression that he was. His subsequent ambiguous qualification that either the Flood happened, or he had heard the Flood story, ‘ful yoore ago’ (l.

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96 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Miller’s Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 68-77 (ll. 3534-7). All further references by line number and in parentheses are from this edition. See Lawrence Besserman, ‘Lay Piety and Impiety: The Role of Noah’s Wife in the Chester Play of Noah’s Flood’, in *Enacting the Bible in Medieval and Early Modern Drama*, ed. by Eva von Contzen and Chanita Goodblatt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 13-27 (p. 16), and Jane Tolmie, ‘Mrs. Noah and Didactic Abuses’, *Early Theatre*, 5:1 (2002), 11-35 (p. 12) for two examples of studies on English medieval religious drama that cite Chaucer’s tale to attest to the widespread understanding of the biblical Flood narrative among the general population of medieval England. There are of course other medieval literary sources available to prove the popularity of the Flood story, such *Cleanness* and *Cursor Mundi*, and the complaints of the shepherd in the *Towneley Secunda Pastorum* who compares the rain to that of Noah’s Flood. See Ad Putter, ‘Sources and Backgrounds for Descriptions of the Flood in Medieval and Renaissance Literature’, *Studies in Philology*, 94:2 (1997), 135-59 for an overview.
3537), suggests that either, or both, of these cases is true. Chaucer’s tale furnishes more detail with regard to Noah’s wife, illustrating that her silence in the biblical episode had already inspired much speculation on her role in events surrounding the Flood. Nicholas presses John’s knowledge further:

“Allou nat herd,” quod Nicholas, “also
The sorwe of Noe with his felaweshipe,
Er that he myghte gete his wyf to shipe?
Hym hadde be levere, I dar wel undertake,
At thilke tyme, than alle his wetheres blake
That she hadde had a ship hirself allone” (ll. 3538-43)

By the fourteenth century, the biblical account of the Flood – and the absence of any detail on Noah’s wife within it – had spawned imaginative supplements recounting Noah’s trouble getting his wife aboard the ark.97 While much modern scholarship on the medieval dramas of the Flood focuses on the traditionally truculent character of Noah’s wife and unpacks it in terms of traditional gender dynamics and hierarchies (or ideas of gendered compassion or family dynamics), ‘Watergate’ explores the relationship between the biblical Flood dramas and the lived experience of flooding in medieval York, the manor of Wakefield, and Chester.98

97 Although God instructs Noah to board his wife upon the ark and subsequently to ensure she disembarks, throughout Genesis 6-9 she remains nameless and voiceless. As Besserme notes in ‘Lay Piety and Impiety’, this lack of detail inspired Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic interpreters to supply imaginative and vivid renderings of what she might have done or said, from Late Antiquity and into the Early Middle Ages, ‘in sermons, homilies, Latin and vernacular biblical paraphrases and literary recastings’, adding that English dramatic portrayals of her up to the Early Modern period were ‘similarly multifarious’ (p. 14).

98 See, for example, Tolmie, ‘Mrs. Noah and Didactic Abuses’, where Tolmie looks at the same three Noah plays to explore violence against women, and their resistance to it; Theresa Coletti, ‘A Feminist Approach to the Corpus Christi Cycles’, in Approaches to Teaching Medieval English Drama, ed. by Richard K. Emmerson (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990), pp. 79–89 where Coletti exposes the misogyny of the dramas and suggests that female characters are marginal, rather than central, to the texts (p. 80); Christina M. Fitzgerald, ‘Manning the Ark in York and Chester’, Exemplaria, 15:2 (2003), 351-84, where Fitzgerald suggests that the York and Chester Flood plays present fantasies of idealized patriarchal bonds which, although Noah’s wife temporarily disrupts them, ultimately prove successful in achieving a masculine dominated spiritual societal rebirth (p. 383); Ruth Evans, ‘Feminist Re-enactments: Gender and The Towneley Uxor Noe’, in A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck, ed. by Juliette Dor (Liège: Liège University Press, 1992), pp. 141-54. Of the five extant English versions of the Flood drama, two exceptions to any study of Noah’s wife’s reluctance to board the ark
As outlined in the introduction to the thesis, recurrent bouts of bad weather throughout late-medieval Europe meant that some communities experienced environmental catastrophes, particularly flooding, regularly and on a large scale – so much so that the notion of the European later Middle Ages as ‘The Age of Storms’ has been in circulation among environmental and climate historians for some time now.\footnote{See, for example, Tim Soens, ‘Flood Security in the Medieval and Early Modern North Sea Area: A Question of Entitlement?’, \textit{Environmental History}, 19:2 (2013), 209-32, where Soens locates the coining of the term ‘The Age of Storms’ in scholarship dating from the 1960s and 1970s (p. 210). See also Richard C. Hoffman, \textit{An Environmental History of Medieval Europe} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) whose coverage of medieval environmental catastrophes such as floods and droughts, and their attendant effects such as famine and pestilence, closes with a thinly veiled critique aimed at medievalists of any discipline who ignore, or avoid, discussion of the interconnectedness of medieval European natural and anthropogenic changes and their profound effects on contemporaneous literature and culture, p. 377.} While the same period witnessed a wave of well-documented mortality crises such as plague and famine, until recently, the part played by bad weather and climate change in these crises, and literary responses to the environmental challenges of the period, have not been considered, or are treated as little more than background material to dramatic texts.\footnote{In Kathleen Pribyl, \textit{Farming, Famine and Plague: The Impact of Climate in Late Medieval England} (Cham: Springer International, 2017), Pribyl makes exactly this point as she discusses the impact of medieval climate change, such as the onset of the Little Ice Age, on agriculture and disease particularly in East Anglia, p. 4.} Throughout late-medieval England, frequent flooding prompted proactive responses such as the raising of floor levels in buildings, or even moving an entire manorial house uphill, and constant attention to flood defences by civic bodies and church leaders.\footnote{See Christopher M. Gerrard and David N. Petley, ‘A Risk Society? Environmental Hazards, Risk and Resilience in the Later Middle Ages in Europe’, \textit{Natural Hazards}, 69:1 (2013), 1051-79, where Gerrard and Petley also note the many royal commissions in England between 1280 and 1449, some 153, undertaken as responses to concerns voiced over the state of flood defences (p. 1068). Though these commissions refer specifically to the Thames river estuary, the propensity and liability of late-medieval England to succumb to floods is highlighted throughout the article.} As Ellen F. Arnold notes, in some instances medieval authors used disaster narratives to promote resilience to impending natural disasters, and the Flood narrative held particular resonance for readers of those narratives in places of environmental precarity, where people had
either lost their lives to floods or had survived them, and been displaced by floods. Even literary floods have the potential to destabilize and upset traditional spatial and social boundaries – as Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale* shows, the flood trope leads to disruption and the displacement of characters within its domestic setting. The mere threat of a flood causes characters to move from their traditional, allotted places. It dislocates John from his regular sleeping place, leaving him hanging from the rafters in a tub, and it allows Alisoun and Nicholas to relocate to where ‘the carpenter is wont to lye’ (l. 3651). This volume suggests that real floods, experienced in the places of York, Wakefield, and Chester, inform the dialogue of each drama and expose each place’s particular form of resilience in the face of impending environmental disaster.

Adopting a local perspective I re-examine three medieval deluge dramas that all originate from (roughly speaking) northern England to examine how each play engages with local environmental phenomena, local allegiances, and local pride and prejudices. The importance of space, place, and site-specificity in medieval drama has attracted recent scholarly attention, and the notion that some pageant stations along the routes of civic cycles could hold special significance for particular plays is gaining traction. The subsequent sections ask how each play from historically (and presently) flood-prone areas suffuses the biblical Flood narrative with local significance to the extent that the plays double as dramatic religious narratives and

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103 In the case of Chester, its position also in close proximity to northern Wales and its importance as a site of religious significance for both Welsh and English medieval society comes under consideration in the final chapter of this volume.

104 On medieval space, see *Medieval Practices of Space*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). For a collected works with a focus on place and drama, see *Performing Environments: Site Specificity in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama*, ed. by Susan Bennett and Mary Polito (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). For a recent book that champions the idea of site-attachment to one play in particular in the civic cycles, see Theodore K. Lerud, *Memory, Images, and the English Corpus Christi Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 95-104. Further examples are cited later, where pertinent.
domestic coping mechanisms for dealing with medieval floods.\textsuperscript{105} When watching the York play of the Flood from, for example, the station at Ousegate, it surely must have been impossible to separate imagined biblical Floods from real local flooding. Paying special attention to how each text voices specificities of space and place that speak to and of their local spatial and temporal environments, ‘Watergate’ argues for an understanding of particular local networks apparent in the dramas that operate around local axes of praxis. Bruno Latour’s work on Actor-Network Theory (henceforth ANT) aims to ‘render vivid’ new avenues of enquiry and to reveal ‘a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled’.\textsuperscript{106} For Latour, anything that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference is an actant, therefore an actant could be an object, but equally an actant could be a looser category such as environmental factors.\textsuperscript{107} Accordingly, I explore how a mixture of urban and rural plays engage with particular environmental features, a broad category which might cover, among other things, material, cultural, meteorological, geological, geographical, and topographical phenomena. These, I argue, make particular differences to local dramas of the Flood as each play dramatizes uniquely situated responses to the biblical deluge. ‘Watergate’ explores how features of each of the plays’ environments produce particular networks which add site-specific influence to the familiar Christian Flood narrative in order to tailor each drama uniquely to a local audience that has lived experience, or memory, of flooding.

\textsuperscript{105} See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert, ‘Introduction: Eleven Principles of the Elements’, in \textit{Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Fire, Water} ed. by Cohen and Duckert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. 1-26, where Cohen and Duckert note the modern relevance to the aims stated here, which have relevance to, and precedent in, literatures of the past, where we find ‘a store house of provocations for present environmentality... [which prompt] innovative reencounters with historical frames that powerfully foreground worldly activity and material agency’ (p. 4).


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., p. 71.
For a medieval audience steeped in religiosity, an ideal method of promoting local religious authority would be to combine biblical narratives with credible dramatic recreations that echo elements of the immediate, recognizable environments of any potential performance place—in this way the dramas ‘bring the bible home’ as events unfold in sophisticated anachronisms and displacements. In doing this, I argue, the three flood narratives under discussion each read as plausible, authoritative texts which, inasmuch as they promote local religiosity, also provide plausible, authoritative, varying accounts of northern exceptionalism, each of which demonstrates its own religious primacy. The texts thus operate as counter-texts where each area represented in the plays promotes the legitimacy of their own locally-produced account of the flood narrative.

Thinking of these plays as counter-texts accounts for why each place treats the same material in different and distinctive ways. Although his context is a modern one, Homi K. Bhabha’s work on cultural difference is useful to think with as he cautions against generalizing the contingencies and contours of local circumstance, and stresses the importance of the articulation of cultural differences along with ‘the performative nature of differential identities’. Bhabha’s emphasis on language as the primary mode with which to enunciate difference has drawn scholarly criticism, but given that the texts under scrutiny here are dramatic dialogues, his focus on articulation and performance offers key methodologies which I adopt and

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adapt in order to unpick the localization of medieval religious culture that I argue is a central tenet common to all three versions of the biblical Flood narrative. What emerges from each story is the importance of location and memory, and how these concepts are articulated in different ways for different localities. In the early fourteenth century, Thomas Bradwardine commented upon the comingling of story and place, noting that ‘locations are like wax tablets, on which we write’, and, as Anke Bernau points out, Bradwardine ‘adds that these spaces should ideally be “real” rather than imaginary, as one could secure one’s familiarity with them by living in them’. Even if the plays were only read, rather than actually witnessed, they both re-vivified and memorialized the Flood narrative. As Mary Carruthers explains, the idea that ‘whatever enters the mind changes into a “see-able” form for storing memory’ held currency throughout the medieval period. So at the same time as the act of reading or performing a play brings that story to life in the present, real space familiar to the reader or audience, it also fixes the narrative as a memory of a past event, available for future retrieval. The question I consider in the following sections results from the twin processes of re-vivification and memorialization, both working within a real and present environment: what differences in each account of the Flood narrative might have been influenced by the real-life witness, or memory, of actual, sometimes regular, disastrous floods, and how might such experiences account for specific variations in each re-working of that narrative?

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110 See, for example, Benita Parry, ‘Signs of Our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha’s The Location of Culture’, Third Text, 8:28/9 (1994), 5-24, where Parry argues that Bhabha ‘allots ontological priority to the semiotic process,’ so that, for Parry, meaning moves from the substance of any narrated event to the act of enunciation (p. 9).
111 Thomas Bradwardine, ‘De Memoria Artificali’, repr. In Anke Bernau, ‘Beginning with Albina: Remembering the Nation’, Exemplaria 21:3 (2009), 247-73 (p. 265). In the notes accompanying this essay, Bernau acknowledges that Bradwardine was not the first to adopt medieval spatial theory, but his approach is more varied that that of Thomas Aquinas or Albertus Magnus, and his broader scope moves beyond the limits of rooms to the inclusion of land, (n. 45, p. 70).
While the biblical Flood narratives from York, Chester, and those in the Towneley manuscript with some connection to the area of Wakefield all do the job of delivering the religious narrative, the different ways in which they do so reflect their shared vulnerability to a very real environmental threat: their (still current) susceptibility to catastrophic flooding. Beyond bringing home a generic re-telling of the biblical Flood, each drama brings the bible story to their particular locality. In the case of York, I posit that civic allegiance and the promise of renewal assuage the effects of flooding – though the threat of the flood remains a very real one. The Towneley version mitigates against the effects of flooding as I contend that, while again the Flood has to happen, the text offers glimpses to show that this Noah and his family could escape to the rural high ground. Chester offers a Flood narrative that likewise cannot prevent the occasion of a flood, but offers an assurance of a good death and eternal salvation for those not on board the ark. Whether it is the civic allegiance and promise of renewal in York, or the moral high ground in Towneley, or the mediation of a middle-ground in Chester, each play creatively fuses a religious focus with elements key to its own locale in ways that best make sense to its real and immediate environments and audiences or readers.  

**Eborarkum: Text and this City**

The intimate association of the guilds of medieval artisans and merchants with York’s lavish Corpus Christi cycle has a long and well documented history. Richard Beadle (among many others) confirms that the York cycle was very much ‘part of the urban *habitus*, the entire set of interrelated social processes and rituals by which people associated with the crafts chose to

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113 Many scholars have noted the important intersections of place and religion, and theories abound. For a recent summary, see Jean Halgren Kilde, ‘Approaching Religious Space: An Overview of Theories, Methods, and Challenges in Religious Studies’, *Religion and Theology*, 20 (2013), 183-201.
live’. A consistent feature of this particular urban *habitus* was (and still is) its liability to flooding. David M. Palliser notes that while medieval York’s riverside situation at the confluence of the Ouse and the Fosse was crucial to the success of trade, its position within the spacious lowland of the Vale of York, surrounded by hills which drained into the Vale, meant that the potential for local flooding was historically real and always imminent. Thus, although the story of Noah and the ark is a necessary addition to complete a cycle of biblical events from Creation to Doomsday, this particular narrative had more environmental currency for the residents of medieval York than has previously been suggested. 

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115 In January 2021 the river Dee once again burst its banks at Chester in the aftermath of Storm Cristoph. Roads were closed, residents were evacuated, and businesses along the Dee were flooded. Images and information available at: <https://www.cheshire-live.co.uk/news/chester-cheshire-news/gallery/photos-show-river-dee-bursting-19681319> [accessed 29 February 2021]. Despite significant modern investment in flood defences, the same storm caused similar events occurred in York where both the Ouse and Fosse rivers burst their banks and flooded Riverside homes and businesses. Drainage into low-lying surrounding areas also caused further disruption as roads became impassable, and residents unable to vacate their homes were advised to re-locate to the highest levels of their properties. Information and images available at: <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/local-news/gallery/27-pictures-show-devastating-impact-19672155> [accessed 29 February 2021].

116 David M. Palliser, *Medieval York, 600-1540* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 4-7. Palliser lists floods occurring consistently in York from the times of its Roman occupation and later, in 1130, 1236, 1328, and 1348, pp. 6-7. Here, Palliser also notes a subsequent absence of evidence detailing major flooding until 1565 which he suggests might be due to a civic programme of flood defences and the gradual raising of the city to higher ground levels by slow the accumulation of domestic refuse. The major flood of 1565, however, shows that the defences ultimately proved inadequate.

117 In David Hey, *A History of the South Yorkshire Countryside* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Books, 2015), Hey notes that flooding was, on occasion, also a national event as in 1346 when the entire country was drenched, when ‘from mid-summer to Christmas, the rains fell almost without intermission p. 73. The mid-summer timing of these rains could very feasibly have coincided with the feast of Corpus Christi, thus rendering a flood narrative even more pertinent to an audience’s lived experience of catastrophic flooding. See also Michael W. George, ‘Adversarial Relationships between Humans and Weather in Medieval English Literature’, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 30 (2014), 67-82, where George notes that, in the immediate aftermath of the Black Death, the extreme weather events of the fourteenth century resulted in failed harvests (which led to the Great Famine) and the spread of disease, prompting some authors to paint inclement weather as a true adversary such as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Alternatively, some authors chose not to represent these harsh realities in their work, but rather to present idealized versions of clement weather. On the weather as an adversary in medieval literature see also Albrecht Classen, ‘Consequences of Bad Weather in Medieval Literature from *Apollonius of Tyre* to Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptameron*, *Arcadia*, 45 (2010), 3–20.
Reflecting the city’s medieval status as a centre of artisan craftsmanship controlled by
guild politics and allegiances, the York Cycle devotes an entire play to the building of the ark,
and represents the efforts of Noah to persuade his wife and family to join him afloat the ark as a
separate episode. Dramatized as an event of two halves, the York Flood narratives represent the
twin aspirations most pertinent to its Christian citizens and artisanal or mercantile community:
the spiritual value of skilled craftsmanship and the assured presence, or rebirth, of the fabric of
the city. There exists a vast amount of scholarship on the importance of work and labour in the
York cycle, yet none so far which accounts for how The Building of Noah’s Ark is not only an
encomium to labour, but also to a novelty predicated upon the extraction of environmental
material. Clifford Davidson remarks that, despite the unquestionable importance of material
culture to the York cycle, ‘a purely materialist approach ... will not do’, as he goes on to explore
how York’s civic space might have affected performance of, and reaction to, the plays.
Taking Davidson’s spatial approach a step further, this section is attentive both to York’s
ecological vulnerability and its environment of material production. These plays were, after all,
performed outside. Davidson explores York’s cityscape, finding a city ‘saturated with religious
imagery’ which provided ‘a means of symbolically entering, especially through the sense of
sight, into the critical realities involved in human existence’. One of these critical realities for
inhabitants of medieval York was living in a cityscape that included rivers, and which was, on
regular occasions, saturated by floods.

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120 Ibid., p. 111; p. 123.
Indeed, real floods had historic consequences for both York pageants and their records, and proved fatal for some poor souls. The notes to Beadle’s critical edition of the York plays states that no play was performed in 1565 when the Ouse Bridge, which featured as a play station on the medieval pageant route in York, collapsed. Donald Woodward cites historical records describing the intensity of this fatal flood, stating that it was ‘such a water that it overthrew two bows with one arch and twelve houses standing upon the same bridge, and by the fall thereof was drowned twelve persons’. Floods were partly responsible for the poor condition of some of the records we consult today (in 1892, floods damaged leaves of the Ordo Paginarum section of the A/Y Memorandum Book), showing that despite the passage of centuries and changes to York’s environment, flooding repeatedly left its mark in this instance on the archives of the civic authorities that administered play production. Flooding appears as a constant actant (in the Latourian sense) throughout the history of York’s residents and its play productions, a meteorological phenomenon which accounts for how local networks in The Building of Noah’s Ark appeal to a civic audience in need of the promise of renewal and restoration. One way to both negotiate the catastrophic biblical Flood and to prepare for the ever-present local threat of floods and their attendant destruction and disruption was to present the skilled labour of master shipwrights in The Building of Noah’s Ark as both divine and divinely ordained.

Despite Davidson’s objection to an exclusively materialist approach to the York cycle, the attention this play devotes to the ethos of manufacture cannot be underestimated as, from the

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122 Donald Woodward, Men at Work: Labourers and Building Craftsmen in the Towns of Northern England, 1450-1750 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 6. Although this flood was caused by excess water from thawing ice rather than excessive rainfall, it is still indicative of the very real danger posed by floods to the lives of the residents of York.
outset, a specific vocabulary of work attributed to God ties the civic environment of York’s The Building of Noah’s Ark to the material and spiritual necessity of work. This vocabulary illustrates that God did not simply think or speak the world into being – Creation in this play is a result of divine handiwork which casts God in the familiar role of master-craftsman. The play opens with God saying ‘Fyrst qwen I wrought this world so wyde’ (l. 1), where wrought, the past participle of wrihten, means ‘to construct’ rather than simply to make or create. Not only does this choice posit God as a master craftsman, it creates a visible connection to the shipwrights whose ascription to this pageant appears immediately above the first line of the play in the fifteenth-century register. The word wrought is repeated some five times in God’s opening speech, setting the tone for the play an encomium to skilled labour as exemplified, extolled, and exercised by both God and the shipwrights. Nicola Masciandaro points to the biblical distinction drawn between work as a symptom of postlapsarian decline (where Adam is destined to

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124 Nicola Masciandaro, The Voice of the Hammer: The Meaning of Work in Middle English Literature (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 121. Masciandaro aims to give voice to labour as a significant category of experience, one that speaks of ‘mentalties’ rather than materialities, p. 9. See also Boboc, ‘Lay Performances of Work and Salvation in the York Cycle’, where Boboc also relies on Masciandaro’s work to trace the use of the words werke, craft, and travail (though not the more everyday wrihten) in The Building of Noah’s Ark and other plays to argue that “through the performance of work and good works these plays show their audiences the path to good citizenship on earth and salvation in heaven,” (p. 250).


126 s. v. ‘wrihten (v.)’, MED Online [accessed 05 January 2018].

127 The York Plays, London, British Library, Add MS 35290, fol. 24v, available at: <https://www.bl.uk/> [accessed 01 September 2020]. Beadle notes the paucity of records pertaining to the shipwrights, and suggests that it is possible that they were self-regulated, but there are two references to the shipwrights in the Ordo Paginarum of 1415, both of which refer to the shipwrights building Noah’s ark. See Beadle, ed., ‘Commentary’, in The York Plays, ed. by Beadle, pp. 1-463 (p. 42). In Heather Swanson, Building Craftsmen in Late Medieval York (York: University of York, 1983), Swanson makes the point that the carpenters and associated crafts boast the longest set of guild ordinances surviving from late medieval York, and the carpenters consistently top the tables of craftsmen included in Swanson’s tally from 1301-1534, pp. 39-41. Swanson further remarks that, among these associated crafts, the carpenters were also involved in shipbuilding and specific distinctions for shipwrights as separate groups ‘were usually blurred in practice’ p. 11. It is highly feasible, therefore, that the amount of artisans involved to some extent in the building of ships in medieval York far outweighs the number accounted for under only the term ‘shipwright’. Along with other ports, York built ships for the Crown, and between 1375 and 1380 York had a record twenty-five ships in royal service, and the busy artisans at York also built two barges for the king in 1372 and another in 1377; see Palliser, Medieval York, p. 192. This output certainly seems to suggest a large and evidently skilled body of shipbuilders, apparently in high demand.
primitive hard toil on the land), and the representation of skilled work necessary for salvation via the building of the ark, remarking that ‘repeating and refashioning authoritative texts was a subtle and potent means of simultaneously invoking their authority and transforming canonical into local meaning’. In this re-working of the canonical mandate to construct an ark, divine authority subtly yet potently acquires local meaning significant to both a civic body in need of the promise of renewal after repeated floods, and an artisanal community engaged in innovative practices who, when the Flood arrives, are not on board the ark.

In addition to specific vocabulary that sets God up as a master craftsman, the York dramatist goes to some considerable lengths to emphasize the importance of the hand in the building of the ark. God is willing to teach Noah the skills necessary to build the ark, and he anticipates Noah’s concerns about his lack of expertise, saying ‘All yf thou can litill skyll, | Take it in hande, for helpe sall I’ (ll. 47-8). The sense of these lines seems to be that God is telling Noah not to worry about his present lack of skill because, in time, he will help him – and the lines only coincidentally connect the words *skill* and *hande*. Yet there is a degree of uncertainty in the phrase ‘Take it in hande’ (l. 48) that could suggest a more significant connection between God, actual hands, and Noah. The *MED* suggests that the phrase *in hande* relates to a temporal signifier, meaning ‘close in time, shortly, [or] soon’, thus giving a sense that Noah’s lack of skill can be taken as short-lived because, soon, God will help him. However, a Boolean search in the *MED* of all four words in the half-line reveals three further contemporaneous examples of the same phrasing, each of which gives a locative sense to somebody taking something in their hand – a crown in one instance, and payment in the other two. In the lines quoted, ‘in’ appears to be

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128 Masciandaro, p. 69.
129 s. v. ‘hond(e) (n. 1d)’, *MED Online* [accessed 03 January 2018].
130 Ibid., [accessed 03 January 2018].
used as a preposition and therefore can impart a positional, rather than temporal, sense of the word as ‘in, inside, [or] within’. Reading ‘Take it in hande’ (l. 48) as both a line of dialogue and an inbuilt stage direction, the actor playing God could either raise his hand, or even take Noah’s hand with his own, so that gesture and dialogue work together to forge visual and verbal links between God, hands, and artisans. In reality we can never know the true intent of this little half-line, but the possibility of a manual relationship (of hands) between God and Noah at least plays with the relationship between God and the artisan manufacturers. The artisans are then portrayed as figuratively touched by the hand of God. As Helen Cushman states, ‘[t]ouch has always been a theologically loaded subject in the Christian tradition, and a gendered one at that’, thus it is entirely right that God chooses Noah and only ever Noah, the original male artisan, to allude to the possibility of touching the Divine.

Neither is the instance discussed above an isolated one. Towards the end of the play Noah says to God: ‘I thanke thee both with herte and hende’ (l. 146), a line which rhymes, appropriately, with ‘Abowte this werke now bus me wende’ (l. 148), and ‘He that to me this crafte has kende’ (l. 150). Thanks to God with heart and hand defies absolute definition and could imply references to prayer, divinely ordained work by hand, or touching, even possibly shaking, the allegorical hand of God. Cushman expands further on the privilege of priestly touch, noting that ‘only priests were actually permitted to touch the Host or even the sacred vessel with

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131 s. v. ‘in (prep)’, MED Online [accessed 03 January 2020].
132 As speculative as this may sound, it is a possibility that the ambiguity of ‘Take it in hande’ (l. 48) invites, a point which corresponds to John J. McGavin and Greg Walker’s remarks in Imagining Spectatorship From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) where they acknowledge the varying appeal of certain sections of plays to differing audience members, noting that ‘the responses they would have provoked cannot always be predicted. Indeed, they are likely to have been multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory, precisely because of their power’ p. 16.
133 Helen Cushman, ‘Handling Knowledge: Holy Bodies in Middle English Mystery Plays’, JMEMS, 47:2 (2017), 279-304 (p. 282). Here, Cushman cites evidence from A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge to show the extent of serious concerns about representing touch on the medieval stage.
their bare hands’. This audacious drama seems intent on at least blurring the meaning attached to the hand as the trope is immediately copied in the ensuing play of *The Flood*. Noah’s opening lines are ‘That Lord that leves aylastand lyff, | I love thee ever with hart and hande’ (ll. 1-2).

Similar phraseology evokes similar ambiguity on the role of the hand and, as throughout *The Flood* play in York God has no speaking part, it is tantalising to read this as Noah’s figurative farewell handshake with God – an adieu à Dieu. God’s physical presence is no longer necessary to the plot: he can exit the stage as the narrative moves from the familiar territory of salvific work in an urban environment – the perfect place for an artisanal partnership in perfect harmony with God – to the unfamiliar territory beyond the city walls.

York’s *The Building of Noah’s Ark* also uses this Old Testament story to deify (and therefore legitimize) the category of newness aligned with work. Only God could create *ex nihilo* in the Middle Ages and, as Patricia Clare Ingham explains, ‘human innovation is thus derivative rather than originary, a humbler, second-order power able to rearrange pre-existing creation in new ways, but unable really to entirely invent new things’. It is, then, perhaps unsurprising when, in two successive lines, God promises ‘Bot wirke this werke I wille al newe | Al newe I will this worlde be wroght’ (ll. 24-5). When spoken and written as consecutive lines, rather than separated by a space for modern versification, the lines read almost as a tautology – a doubling

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134 Ibid., (p. 283).
135 At least, that is, for the male artisans represented by Noah. As he apparently works in isolation, Noah’s wife is apparently privy neither to knowledge of Noah’s labour, nor knowledge of God’s warning of the Flood. As Daisy Black remarks in *Play Time: Gender, Anti-Semitism and Temporality in Medieval Biblical Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020) Noah seems to blame God for this state of affairs, suggesting a ‘God-ordained silence’, yet nowhere in either of the Flood pageants does God directly forbid Noah to divulge his work, and the reason for it, to his wife, p. 86. Noah’s wife’s apparent lack of knowledge surely harks back to the Fall, and Eve’s disobedience regarding the tree of knowledge, thus representing a moment of temporal collapse and intertextuality between the two events, and an almost comedic tone to this play’s suggestion that Noah has been working on the ark for ‘A hundereth wyntyr’ (l. 133) without her knowledge.
of words and meaning where the mirrored lines are connected and balanced by the promise of a new world wrought by either the handiwork, or will, of God, or a combination of both. This repetitive couplet hammers home in monosyllabic form the references to this work and this world, thus extending and reflecting to include anyone within earshot in the overarching ‘artisanal ideology’ integral to the identity of both the craftsmen of medieval York and its plays identified by Sarah Beckwith and, more recently, by Nicole R. Rice and Margaret Aziza Pappano.

The meaning of ‘this worlde’ (l. 25) oscillates between the macro and micro levels, the universal and the particular. As such, it can reference either (or both) a general sense of ‘the world’ at large, and the ‘world’ of York and its inhabitants. Even if only for the duration of the play, York, ‘the city, becomes a teatrum mundi’, promoting the artisanal ethos and aspiration lying at the heart of this civic world – a stage on which its own demise and renewal will be enacted. The monosyllabic, repetitive, alliterative couplet demands to be sung as the recurring ‘w’ sound adds a jaunty buoyancy to God’s promise to re-make the world, and the repeated chime of ‘al newe | Al newe’ (ll. 24-5) rings out like a bell heralding this domestic new world.

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137 The York Plays, Add MS 35290 (f. 24v) confirms that this line separation is a modern editorial choice, so that all of God’s opening address to Noah here reads as one long speech where the actor receives no direction as to where, or how, to space the lines. Available at: <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_35290_fs001r> [accessed 01 September 2020].

138 Sarah Beckwith, Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 53; Rice and Pappano, The Civic Cycles. Where Beckwith argues that the artisanal ideology in the York plays emphasises manufacture as central in York, and that a mercantile-driven attempt to portray a model of social unity was only ‘the wish-fulfilment of its most illustrious members’, p. 53, Rice and Pappano discuss the cycles of York and Chester to extend Beckwith’s claims for the pre-eminence of artisanal ideology throughout the cycles by additionally identifying artisanal ‘claims to enfranchisement, skill, and localism that run throughout the cycle[s]’, p. 33.

139 Martin Stevens, ‘City as Stage’, in Four Middle English Mystery cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 17-71, (p. 30). On this, see also Pamela M. King, The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), where King reads York as a local stage for performances of lay piety understood in relation to the liturgical calendar to illustrate ‘how the milieu in which the cycle was generated and received understood its connection to their own place in the grand design’, (p. 9).
While the optimistic, buoyant tone seems a perfect fit to laud the shipbuilders’ craft, crucial to fulfil the divine promise of postdiluvian renewal, a sudden shift occurs in the next line’s ominous warning of the cost this new world entails: ‘And waste away that wonnys therin’ (l. 26). As a stark reminder of both the biblically mandated demise of the rest of the world, the line also stands as a grim memorial, a sobering epitaph, to the very real lives lost to flood in York’s past, or possibly within living memory, as the plays were last performed at Whitsun in 1569, only four years after the fatal flood of 1565.140

Each time the repetitive lines ‘Bot wirke this werke I wille al newe | Al newe I will this worlde be wroght’ (ll. 24-5) are reiterated at successive pageant stations they reinforce God’s promise to renew the originary founding act of making the world, and reiterate a typological biblical exegesis where the New supersedes (rather than supplants) the Old. The Old Testament promise resonates on York’s present-day local stage as reassurance that the city will always be re-made and renewed, exhibiting what Ingham calls the “nowness” and thus the newness of ... stories from times long since past.141 Indeed, while cautioning against too rosy a view of a golden age in medieval York, Palliser presents a wealth of evidence which illustrates huge programmes of building and re-building between 1361 and 1472.142 The world that was medieval York was, during this period at least, constantly being made new and being renewed. Yet, as noted above, the couplet is only almost a tautology. The second line, ‘Al newe I will this worlde be wroght’ (l. 25), admits God’s will to legitimize human agency in the construction of this new world, signified by the impersonal be wroght. In the biblical context, this is perhaps unsurprising as Noah has to build the ark which is, after all, a totally new construct – nothing like it has ever

141 Ingham, The Medieval New, p. 59. Italics in original
142 Palliser, Medieval York, pp. 181-9.
existed before and God has to impart new knowledge to the previously unskilled Noah. Yet equally, authority for newness extends beyond the biblical context and legitimises human participation in its pursuit.

If the biblical context represents the global, or macro level, then, the civic environment of medieval York is the non-human actant that localizes this global at the micro level. Yet, as Latour points out, localizing the global does not explain what the local is, and so the question of how the local is being generated remains. To answer this I trace the category of newness beyond its biblical Old Testament context, and its typological imbrication with the New Testament – a combination which the play cannot contain or monopolize – to illustrate that the local in the civic environment of medieval York was one invested equally in both innovation and old civic allegiances. Sarah Rees Jones claims that, during the city’s fourteenth-century expansion, ‘new streets’ housed ‘new industries’ such as parchment-making, metalworking, and gold-smithing. However ‘new’ these specific industries actually were, they were all actively engaged in producing new things and were therefore invested in the ethical ambivalence associated with novelty. Thus when Noah refers to the ‘nayles that are both noble and newe’ (l. 107) required to fulfil his divinely ordained task, the global, biblical newness repeated earlier by God extends to enjoin a local network of newness present in medieval York – one that is traceable to God and therefore legitimate. As James Davis notes, the Church acted as a lubricant as much as a brake to innovation in the Middle Ages when, especially from the thirteenth century

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143 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 192, italics in original.
144 Ibid.
146 The reservation on how new these industries actually were comes from *The York Plays*, ed. by Beadle, where Beadle points out that parchment makers appear in York civic records from the late thirteenth century, though bookbinders only from the mid-fourteenth century, p. 57. This corresponds to the ethical ambivalence associated with novelty discussed throughout Ingham, *The Medieval New*. 

onwards, religious, ethical, and moral attitudes to innovation became more flexible to facilitate the resulting economic benefits. In practical terms, it makes sense for Noah to use new nails to build the ark. Yet the nails are not just new, they are ‘both noble and newe’ (l. 107), where *noble* can mean ‘of good quality, workmanship or material’, but can equally signify ‘memorable’.

Co-locating (alliteratively and thematically) memory along with the untimely modernity of new nails conforms to the particular theological importance of Noah stories which hark back to the Fall while they foreshadow both Redemption and Judgement. However, the monosyllabic twinning of ‘both noble and newe’ (l. 107) also hammers home the point that these nails are good, memorable, and new, and they should be remembered in sharp contrast to the nails used in the Crucifixion which they explicitly foreshadow, and which Jesus himself describes as ‘nayles that were unrید’ (l. 67), where Davidson glosses *unride* as monstrous. The positive description of Noah’s memorable and new nails here provides spiritual comfort to those artisans involved in the production and use of nails, and the combination of the new nails, used to construct a new craft, fits Richard W. Unger’s claim that as the medieval period progressed, representations of the ark came to represent positive technical innovation.

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148 Scholars have already commented upon Noah’s use of only the best tools and materials to build the ark. See, for example, Boboc, ‘Lay Performances of Work and Salvation’, where Boboc argues that ‘the play focuses on [Noah’s] tools as a means of salvation’, (p. 251).
149 s. v. ‘noble’ (adj.), *MED Online* [accessed 08 September 2020].
151 *The Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalene*, in *The York Corpus Christi Plays* ed. by Davidson, pp. 335-39. See *MED Online*, s. v. ‘unride(adj.)’, for definitions meaning excessive, inordinately great, or indeed monstrous [accessed 08 September 2020].
symbolism of the ark as the Church and of Noah as a type of Christ was, according to Beadle, ‘widely understood’. The making of the ark and even its component parts extends this religious symbolism so that innovative practices, and their associated materials and artisans, are divinely endorsed by their association with the Church and Christ. Given that Noah’s ark was also well-known as a mnemonic device in the Middle Ages, such endorsements are also committed to memory. Noah’s new and memorable nails can, then, be read as reflecting the local civic environment of the new industries and new (or renewed) buildings and bridges that flourished in medieval York’s heyday, generating local networks that revolved around the category of the new carrying the authority, and memory, of the old.

While York’s natural environment rendered it historically vulnerable to the elements, its civic, urban environment was predicated upon human mastery of many elements – proof of which remains today in some of York’s medieval street names: Stonegate, Colliergate, Coppergate, Ousegate. Newness, in medieval York, demanded natural raw materials that came

‘medieval memoria took the inventive function of human memory for granted, and emphasized it. Indeed, those who practiced the crafts of memory used them – as all crafts are used – to make new things’, (p. 3), italics in original.

154 See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, where Carruthers explains the dual understanding ‘of arca, “chest” as both the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant’, p. 51, and goes on explain how contemplation of the ark aided the rhetorical processes of memory and invention, with Hugh of St. Victor’s memory diagram of the ark functioning as an investigative device for meditation, composition, and personal moralization, pp. 293-336. On the ark as memory see also Christiana Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 39-48, where Whitehead notes the importance of place in Hugh’s writings on the ark as a memory chest, where place seems to refer to the ark as a compartmentalized box in which to locate particular memories, but it could just as easily be envisaged that the place of the ark, here in medieval York, is equally memorialized. See also Sarah Elliott Novavich, *Shaping the Archive in Late Medieval England: History, Poetry, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 52-83, esp. pp. 59-66 for further on Hugh’s ark of memory.

155 York’s claim to both the authority of the old and the promise of the new not only applies to the theological context where the promise of the New Testament follows the Old Testament, it can be seen in the equal claims for temporal novelty and antiquity when, according to Beadle, the city was ‘basking in its newly achieved status as a county in its own right under the charter bestowed upon it by Richard II in 1396’, while at the same time, as Palliser notes, the city’s ‘Roman greatness’, however tangled in myth, was still celebrated in medieval York. Beadle, ‘Introduction’, in *The York Plays*, ed. by Beadle. (p. xxiii); Palliser, *Medieval York*, p. 20.

156 On the street names, see Palliser, *Medieval York*, p. 117.
from beyond the city walls and, accordingly, God is not only a master craftsman – God is the religious authority for novelty and the exploitative environmental practices of extractive industries. After Noah admits his inadequacies in the craft of shipbuilding, God issues instructions, beginning with: ‘Take high trees and hewe thame cleyne,’ (l. 73). Although the measurements and contents of the ark do later acquire some detail in the bible, the initial instruction to Noah is fairly sparse in specifics; Noah is simply told: ‘Make thee an ark of timber planks’ (Genesis 6. 14). In the York version, Noah does not just need timber planks – God’s commission specifically entails high trees which Noah must hew clean. In Middle English, tree could mean wood, timber, or even refer to the wooden cross of Jesus’ crucifixion, but the idea here does seem to be high trees, as it fits with Noah’s wife’s comment in *The Flood* that she now understands why Noah ‘hast to the forest soght’ (l. 128); Noah was chopping down trees to build the ark. Again, practically speaking, high trees would provide longer lengths of wood, and would therefore be most suitable for building the ark. There is movement, or at the very least ambiguity, between these two accounts of God’s commission, where the bible clearly calls for timber planks (dead wood already chopped, prepared, and available to use), and the York play

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157 The same passage in the Latin Vulgate, also available at: <http://drbo.org/> , reads ‘Fac tibi arcam de lignis laevigatis’ [make your ark from smoothed wood, translation mine], thus it appears that the York version introduces a retrogressive moment, tracing the smoothed wood back to its source - the high trees [accessed 08 September 2021].

158 s. v. ‘tre (n.)’, *Med Online* [accessed 01 March 2021]. In the York *Crucifixio Christi*, the text usually uses the word *crosse*, but on one occasion the word *tree* is used by one of the soldiers to refer to the cross of the Crucifixion. See *Crucifixio Christi*, in *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. by Davidson, pp. 292-301 (l. 74). Perhaps unsurprisingly, throughout the York play of the Fall, the word *tree* is consistently used to refer to the Tree of Knowledge. Noah’s wife’s comment here complicates an assumption of her lack of knowledge regarding Noah’s ark building project. She appears to know that he has been spending time in the forest, but does not divulge how she knows this. Given that there is no specific mention of the ark yet, it would appear that we are to assume that it is on stage somewhere, in which case it could be that Noah’s wife’s remark is simply an assumption based on what she now sees. Yet this is by no means certain. It could equally be the case that her curiosity was piqued at Noah’s disappearing early and returning late for a hundred winters such that she followed him. If so, then perhaps Noah’s grand project was not such a secret after all, and she has had many years in which to build up resentment towards Noah and his ark, and Noah’s failure to divulge the reason for his activity. Admittedly, much of this is speculative, but Noah’s wife’s admission that she knew, or assumed, where Noah was invites more questions than it answers.

159 See s. v. ‘heigh (adj.)’, *MED Online* where high usually brings an altitudinal implication, rather than one of mere size [accessed 01 March 2021].
goes back a step to call for high trees from which to get the timber – living trees in their natural state, presumably similar to the ones in the forest that Noah’s wife alludes to.

In addition to new nails, Noah also requires newly hewn trees to build his new construction – not the old, already dead timber of Genesis. The movement corresponds to Gillian Rudd’s consideration of plants, animals, or minerals as “other details” which do something more than merely add to an effect of verisimilitude.¹⁶⁰ The demand for living trees, rather than repeating the call for timber, gives a vital nowness to this live newness – a presentness and real immediacy.¹⁶¹ According to Rudd, green reading questions ‘whose “real” is operating at any given time and what undercurrents may be at work in those apparently insignificant “other details”’.¹⁶² The detail of trees rather than timber planks corresponds to real, late-medieval practices in York, where its artisanal community depended upon exactly such materials to practice their craft. Such demands meant that York itself held insufficient resources of wood to fulfil the increasing needs of craftsmen, and thus neighbouring forests were depleted in order to satisfy civic demand.¹⁶³ While Christina M. Fitzgerald claims that The Building of Noah’s Ark

¹⁶⁰ Gillian Rudd, Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 11.
¹⁶¹ See s. v. ‘tre (n.)’, MED Online, where tre could mean both living tree and/or timber [accessed 29 January 2022]. The reality corresponds to the huge building programmes in medieval York to which I referred earlier. As Swanson notes in Building Craftsmen, p. 3, while many religious houses and places of worship were built in stone, perhaps most notably York Minster, secular and domestic building entirely in timber was the norm. Similarly, in Medieval York, p. 293, Palliser remarks that even towards the close of the medieval period, most domestic buildings were timber framed dwellings.
¹⁶² Ibid.
¹⁶³ See Della Hooke, ‘Royal Forests – Hunting and Other Forest Use in Medieval England’, in New Perspectives on People and Forests, ed. by Eva Ritter and Dainis Dauksta (Dordecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), pp. 41-59, where Hooke points out that deforestation became a problem in England in the fourteenth century when the forests were increasingly exploited as sources of timber, especially for timber used in shipbuilding (p. 54). This problem was so severe that it necessitated the intervention of royalty. As Teresa Kwiatkowska shows in ‘The Sadness of the Woods Is Bright: Deforestation and Conservation in the Middle Ages’, Medievalia, 39 (2007), 40-47, Henry III suspended timber exploitation in many English forests in 1257 because of the destruction caused, and two centuries later Henry VI (1422-1471) expressly outlawed ‘any felling or hewyng down’ of new trees (p. 45). The situation appears not to have remedied quickly as Kwiatkowska further notes that Stuart England was so widely deforested that it relied on imports from the Baltic and ‘the untapped forests of New England’ to supply the need for ship timbers (p. 44). God’s instruction to Noah in the York play then appears to directly defy contemporaneous royal edict. See also
‘authorizes and naturalizes an exploitative economic practice’ between master (God), and apprentice (Noah), it also authorizes - even naturalizes - the human right to exploit the finest resources available which are, according to God, simply there to ‘Take’ (l. 73), and then to ‘Make’ (l. 75) with. Fitzgerald reads this play as a nostalgic fantasy that underpins a homosocial dream of intimacy between artisan and God. My reading of it shifts the focus from men to natural materials in order to reveal that the play also invites a future perfect fantasy that authorizes and naturalizes exploitation of the (real) environment in the name of innovation.

This Old Testament story endorses all that is new and made or re-made in York, including the ark and its figurative promise to a local population of refuge from floods, with scant regard to the greater environmental cost.

York had to be re-made and renewed after successive floods, and this New Jerusalem, this city of God, was the city-as-ark – the protector of the micro-world that medieval York represented – where (some) residents could stay and survive a flood because the real alternative

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Swanson, *Building Craftsmen*, who notes that most timber suppliers were not York residents, and that York had to rely on imports from surrounding rural areas (p. 29).

Fitzgerald, ‘Manning the Ark in York and Chester’, (p. 373).

Biblical endorsement for environmental exploitation is a defence often cited by more conservative evangelical Christians and one that this play does promote. The gradual recognition of the need to bring together religious beliefs and environmental stewardship has been recently addressed by Cherice Bock, ‘Watershed Discipleship’, in *An Ecotopian Lexicon* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), pp. 305-16. The following websites show the increasingly visible commitments from groups of Christians to address the issue of climate change and its relation to religion: <https://watersheddiscipleship.org/alliance/> [accessed 09 March 2021], and <https://operationnoah.org/> [accessed 09 March 2020]. According to Davis in *Medieval Market Moralities*, an increasing urban reliance on rural materials was also symptomatic of the gradual move from feudalism to proto-capitalism in the later Middle Ages, p. 18.

In eschatological terms, this matters not as the trees would presumably perish beneath the forthcoming Flood, or indeed survive the deluge. Yet as God’s words are repeated year upon year in the play’s performances at York, they instantiate a utilitarian approach to the environment which captures problematic interpretations of the purpose of Creation in Genesis which oscillate between a relationship where humans co-exist with the environment as stewards of God’s creation, and one in which they exert total dominion over it. Such differing interpretations form the basis of arguments in the sources listed in the previous footnote. For more on this, see Whitney Bauman, *Theology, Creation, and Environmental Ethics: From Creation Ex Nihilo to Terra Nullius* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
was, apparently, unthinkable. Towards the end of The Building of the Ark Noah addresses God and expresses his love for God’s teaching, but then says: ‘I thanke thee both with herte and hende | That me wille helpe fro angris hill’ (ll. 146-7), where Davidson glosses angris hill as ‘resentfulness’. Considering that only Noah and his family have been chosen to survive global devastation, and God has just confirmed his protection of Noah and all of his worries: ‘I sall thee socoure for certeyne | Tille alle thi care awey be kaste’ (ll. 142-3), it is difficult to understand what Noah has got to feel resentful about here. A Boolean search of angris hill in the MED brings up only this specific example of its use, noting that hill is in this instance interchangeable with ill, and denotes hardship, which in turn seems to make sense to a paraphrasing as ‘resentfulness’. Yet if the actor playing Noah placed stress on the word hill, then the phrase could also be implying (or at least toying with the notion) that what Noah needs help with is negotiating an angri hil, a hill that is ‘dangerous, [a place of] suspicion and mistrust’. In this reading Noah, a York city dweller, has to leave his familiar environment in order to survive the Flood and conform to the biblical narrative, yet feels some reluctance at having to do so. Chester Scoville argues that the York cycle as a whole displays a deep suspicion of the countryside, reflecting how the inhabitants of York saw the environment outside the city as a site of hostilities that threatened the relative security of their internal, urban environment. When portraying

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167 See Slater, ‘Finding Jerusalem’, where Slater acknowledges the medieval urge to re-present the holy city of Jerusalem in domestic urban landscapes, and the example she finds in Pontefract illustrates that medieval West Yorkshire sought its own identification with Jerusalem, perhaps even in competition with that most prestigious medieval holy city of York.

168 Unfortunately, this folio in Add MS 35290 is blank.

169 It could be the case that Noah is alluding typologically to the eventual demise of the world at Doomsday, yet this still seems incongruous within a dramatization of Divinely secured personal salvation and freedom from worries.

170 s. v. ‘angry hill’, MED Online [accessed 08 September 2020].

171 s. v. ‘angri (adj.)’, MED Online [accessed 09 September 2020].

172 Chester Scoville, ‘But owthir in frith or felde: The Rural in the York Cycle’, Comparative Drama, 37:2 (2003), 175-87. Scoville draws this contrast by comparing ‘the ancient and baleful statement “Maledicta terra in opera tuo” (“Cursed is the earth in thy work”) (Gen. 3:17), with the striking portrayal of heaven as a city, the New Jerusalem where death, sorrow, and toil will have been eliminated (Apoc. [Rev.] 21)’, (p. 175). The idea of the goodness of
events outside the city, the York plays do so very selectively to represent both a genuine perception and a ‘scripturally mandated contrast between the dangers of the rural and the goodness of the city’. For this civic Noah, the city is refuge and the hills a necessary evil, one which he and his family must endure in order to get back to their haven, the New Jerusalem of the city of York.

In *The Flood*, Noah’s wife echoes Noah’s mistrust of what lies beyond when initially she refuses outright to board the ark, remarking: ‘I am nought bowne | To fonde nowe over there fellis. | Doo barnes, goo we and trusse to towne’ (ll. 79-81), where *fellis* connotes hills, mountains, or upland moor or pasture. The hills present a trial, something she is unwilling to put herself through and, unlike the ‘harde lande’ (l. 77) that she is accustomed to (*harde* can mean close-by as well as dry), the hills are *there* – somewhere in the distance but definitely opposed to *here*. In addition to placing the hills in an oppositional place, a closer look at Noah’s wife’s specific use of *there* introduces an exclusionary possessive dimension to the hills. The word *there* is spelled *yere* in Add MS 35290 (f. 28r), not *pere* as it has historically been transcribed, and the *MED* records this alternative spelling as a regional variant of the possessive pronoun *their*. As homophones of one another, one word can signify the dual distancing of the

cities in particular gains further traction with the biblical confirmation that ‘Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised in the city of our God ... on the sides of the north, the city of the great King’ (Psalms 47. 2-3).

173 Ibid., (p. 175).
174 In King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City*, King views the focus on worship of the city as central to York’s cycle, citing fifteenth-century evidence from York which casts the city as so special as to be favoured by God; York was presented as ‘a site privileged by divine recognition’, which allowed for the possibility of specific equations between events in sacred history and local experience, pp. 196-203.
175 s. v. ‘fel (n. 2)’, *MED Online*, [accessed 09 March 2021].
176 See s. v. ‘fonden (v. 1)’, *MED Online*, meaning ‘To put (a person, his strength, skill, etc.) to a test or trial; s. v. ‘hard (adj.)’, Ibid [accessed 10 September 2020].
177 s. v. ‘their(e) (pron.)’, *MED Online* [accessed 10 September 2020]. For a full account of this anomaly that discounts the possibility of scribal error and consults *LALME* to show the usage of *yere* meaning *their* in West Yorkshire, see Gillian Redfern, ‘The Implications of the Thorn that isn’t a Thorn in the York Noah’s Flood Pageant’, *Notes and Queries*, 264:2 (2019), 195-7.
hills as both ‘over there’ and ‘theirs’– near enough for the audience to actually see from the flat lands of York (especially if the actor pointed to them in the distance), yet far enough away to be unfamiliar territory belonging to the people of the countryside and not to those of the town. The hills are alien territory, and Noah’s wife is initially unwilling to venture there.¹⁷⁸

The place of urban loyalties becomes even clearer in the very next line with the urge to ‘trusse to towne’ (l. 81). Here the implication seems to be that Noah’s wife is urging her children to pack up and go back to town. However, when spoken out loud, the alliterative ‘t’ sound carries across all three words, resulting in what sounds more like ‘trust to town’ – indeed, it is practically impossible for the phrase not to sound like this. While Noah’s wife voices her loyalty to (and reluctance to leave) York’s civic environment, she concomitantly illustrates her concern that fleeing the proverbially pancake-like city would mean negotiating unfamiliar territory – hills occupied by domestic others, the foreigners and aliens who lay beyond the city walls.¹⁷⁹ Echoing medieval York’s civic, geographic, and political allegiances, Noah’s wife’s discourse is uniquely tailored to appeal to an audience mistrustful of the unregulated surrounding uplands which, according to Palliser, ‘could shelter rebels, freebooters, and outlaws’, and is indicative of ‘the threat of domestic difference’ identified by Kathy Lavezzo.¹⁸⁰ Noah’s wife seeks comfort in her

¹⁷⁸ In Martin W. Walsh, ‘High Places and Travelling Scenes: Some Observations on the Staging of the York Cycle’, Early Theatre, 3 (2000), pp. 218-32, Walsh recognizes that in the York plays covering the Passion, ‘high places are evil, secular spaces’, (p. 144). This is perhaps unsurprising given the events that unfold on these hills, but here there is no reason, other than to connote domestic difference and civic allegiance, to portray the hills beyond York negatively. See also M. L. Holford, ‘Language and Regional Identity in The York Corpus Christi Cycle’, Leeds Studies in English, xxxiii (2002), 170-96, where Holford identifies a sustained scribal effort ‘to distinguish the civic from the rural’, (p. 186).
¹⁷⁹ Strictly speaking, foreigners came from another country, and aliens were domestic others from beyond the city walls. See Rice and Pappano, The Civic Cycles, p. 299 n.14, and Meg Twycross, ‘Some Aliens in York and their Overseas Connections: up to c. 1470’, Leeds Studies in English, 29 (1998), 359-80 (p. 360) where Twycross provides etymological detail on the two terms and their nuanced meanings in late medieval York.
¹⁸⁰ Palliser, Medieval York, p. 4; Kathy Lavezzo, Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 13. Lavezzo’s point chimes with the notion that, in a postcolonial context, Noah’s wife is participating in what Bhabha calls in The Location of Culture ‘the differentiating order of otherness’, and instantiating a colonial discourse where the other is the non-urban
familiar urban environment and is distrustful of the countryside, even though Noah reminds her that ‘fowrty days are nerhand past | And gone sen it began to rayne’ (ll. 85-6). Despite both her son’s and husband’s warning of imminent catastrophe, Noah’s wife’s reservations about what lies beyond register as local jingoism where leaving the city almost seems like punishment to her, rather than refuge – her home is, was, and always will be in the built-up environment of the city, not in the upland, other rural space.\textsuperscript{181} In The Flood, the only time the land and hills beyond the city receive positive attention is when they are necessary and useful, as when Noah declares that he can ‘se here certaynely | The hillis of Hermony’ (ll. 263-4). Only these hills are gratefully received – the sight of the hills that secure their eventual disembarkation and the promise not just of salvation, but of future civilization.

Any promise of refuge that The Flood play holds for a local audience potentially escaping a real flood comes replete with hope for a future re-building of York and economic success for its citizens. When Noah issues the dove that returns with evidence that life has been restored to the drowned earth, he dispatches his avian scout with specific conditions attached to its mission. Noah commands the dove ‘Owre comforte to encresse’ (l. 238) and to benefit ‘owre prowe’ (l. 241), where prowe entails ‘material advantage [and] monetary profit’.\textsuperscript{182} Further, Noah orders the dove to act as his surveyor in order to discover where on the earth it is possible to ‘belde and byde’ (l. 244). The dove returns with the promise of a future linked directly to rebuilding the environment beyond York. p. 64. On this, see also Scoville, ‘Bot owther in frith or felde’, where Scoville detects a colonizing impulse throughout the York plays.

\textsuperscript{181} Expulsion from the city was indeed a legal punishment levied upon offenders. See, for example, Toni Mount, A Year in the Life of Medieval England (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2016), where Mount cites The York House Books of 1483 that reveal Margery Gray (otherwise called Cherrylips), a prostitute, ‘was ordered by the mayor to remove herself beyond the boundaries of the city by the evening of the following day and not to live in the city again, under penalty of imprisonment’, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{182} s. v. ‘prou (n.)’, MED Online [accessed 10 September 2020].
shelter and security of an urban environment – a new York.\textsuperscript{183} Noah’s pressing concern is with re-building an environment which can increase their wealth and comfort – York’s civic status as the enabler of artisanal wealth, regardless of the environmental or human cost, is ultimately reaffirmed.\textsuperscript{184} At the close of a play that dramatizes worldwide devastation is a future that re-imagines the re-building of this city-as-ark or, indeed, ark-as-city.

**Towneley: Occupying and Taking the Moral High Ground**

Flood narratives would have resonated powerfully with inhabitants of vulnerable areas. David Crouch notes that in the case of Hull, a sea port that suffered heavily from repeated floods throughout the later Middle Ages, the Plough Day ‘Noah’ play of the Holy Trinity Guild was ‘performed annually between 1461 and 1536’, and this involved just one stand-alone pageant rather than something like the lavish cycles associated with York.\textsuperscript{185} Although the example of Hull illustrates the environmental vulnerability of a coastal area, I shall later discuss the reality of inland flooding that had direct relevance for audiences of the Towneley drama of the biblical Flood. Given the association of *Processus Noe Cum Filiis* with the vast area of the medieval manor of Wakefield, I will first explore how the contours of the text – the high ground of hills

\textsuperscript{183} See s. v. ‘belden (v.)’, and s. v. ‘bilden (v.)’, *MED Online*, where both entries show that ‘belden overlaps bilden in both form and meaning’ [accessed 11 September 2020].

\textsuperscript{184} Although it could be argued that the Flood narrative complicates the claims for environmental cost (see n. 73), each time the plays are performed, or even read, the utilitarian value of the natural world in and for York is re-emphasized.

\textsuperscript{185} David Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity, and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire 1389-1547* (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), p. 105. Although, as Crouch explains, this play has pagan origins, its durability is testament to its popularity. Throughout this book Crouch stresses the importance of guilds and their activities to smaller towns and more rural areas such as Alne, Thirsk, or Tickhill which have evidence, albeit on a smaller scale than York, of performing rituals, processions, and plays in these less populous communities. For an overview on the effects of floods on Hull and the Humber Estuary, see James A. Galloway, ‘Coastal Flooding and Socioeconomic Change in Eastern England in the Later Middle Ages’, *Environment and History*, 19:2 (2013), 173-207, where Galloway recounts the catastrophic floods particularly of the fourteenth century where entire towns were annihilated, houses were washed away to sea, and bodies were washed up from the churchyard and had to be reburied further inland (p. 187). See also David Hey, *The Grass Roots of English History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), where Hey also cites evidence of fourteenth-century floods during which some Yorkshire townships were lost to the sea, and churches had to be re-located further inland, p. 52.
and moors – speak of (and to) a northern English upland location, and how a geographical realism is embedded within the Towneley Flood narrative. In doing so, I argue that Towneley’s upland geographical realism registers local and inter-regional differences to compete as a northern, rural counter-text to the civic York version of the Flood narrative. In Processus Noe Cum Filiis, I argue that occupying the literal high ground allows the characters to imagine avoiding a flood, thereby affording them the moral high ground over their low-lying neighbours in York.

In an extensive appendix to his book Piety, Fraternity, and Power, Crouch lists most (but not all) locations of guilds operating in medieval Yorkshire. Alongside more familiar cities such as Doncaster, Pontefract, Sheffield, and Bradford, Crouch also includes less populous, smaller, and more rural areas such as Penistone, Silkstone, and Knaresborough. Beyond their affiliation with guild activity, all of these areas share a topographical and geographical connection – they all sit on high ground in some part of Yorkshire. Despite their altitudinal advantage, these sites, like York, were also susceptible to floods. As David Hey points out, the areas mentioned are not ones of continual elevation; they are undulating and have low-lying wetland areas that, from the early medieval period, were managed successfully as flood plains. However, the effects of flooding were exacerbated when ‘turbary’ rights granted to (among others) the Abbey of St. Mary’s in York led to an increase in the digging of peat for industrial and domestic use in cities like York, which reduced further the level of the lower wetlands and caused serious,

186 Crouch, Piety, Fraternity, and Power, pp. 252-64.
187 Bradford is officially England’s highest city, and there is an urban myth still in current circulation that Sheffield, like Rome, is built on seven hills.
unmanageable flooding which the local inhabitants avoided by locating their settlements on the higher ground.\textsuperscript{189} For such inhabitants, potential audiences of the Towneley Flood play, the Flood narrative must have had extraordinary correspondences to their lived experiences of coping with, and evading, floods that were exacerbated by civic demand for peat.\textsuperscript{190} Understanding this significance of floods to these rural, local realities, allows us to read this play, in Bhabha’s terms, as a dialogic process that registers local ‘cultural antagonisms and articulations’, where York (both the city and the plays of the Flood) represents the ‘hegemonic moment’, and Towneley (the medieval manor of Wakefield and this play) responds by dramatizing a northern, rural ‘claim to cultural [and religious] priority’.\textsuperscript{191}

In \textit{Processus Noe Cum Filiiis}, poetic and literal elevations inscribe both the religious legitimacy and the topographic advantages of the wider upland areas of the medieval manor of Wakefield.\textsuperscript{192} A rural congregation of the northern house of God in the uplands of England could have understood its own ‘elevated’ position as evidence of legitimate religious privilege as their topographical advantage places them literally closer to God than their low-lying northern

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., pp. 80-1. In addition to coping with national and regional floods caused by medieval climate changes, this area and its residents also had to endure floods directly caused by human demand for, and the extraction of, peat. See also Peter J. Brown, ‘Coping with Disaster’, in \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Later Medieval Archaeology in Britain}, ed. by Christopher M. Gerrard and Alejandra Gutiérrez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 154-68, where Brown remarks that, where possible, floodplains were avoided for permanent settlement (though their resources remained valuable), raising the possibility that land-value and social status became connected to topography, ‘with the most important buildings and institutions occupying the highest ground while the poverty stricken endured low-lying land which was inundated regularly’, (p.162).

\textsuperscript{190} Hey makes the point that while digging peat was a valuable by-employment for local farmers, the largest profits went to the local gentry and ecclesiastical institutions who owned, or were granted, the ‘turbary’ rights to the peat moors, and they made great advances into the peat moors, pushing peat extraction to a huge scale, transporting loads of 20,000 to 40,000 turves of peat to cities like York. See Hey, \textit{A History of the South Yorkshire Countryside}, pp. 79- 80.

\textsuperscript{191} Bhabha,\textit{The Location of Culture}, p. 255.

\textsuperscript{192} The medieval manor of Wakefield covered a vast area (some 150 square miles), reaching into counties we now recognize as West and South Yorkshire, and bordering south Lancashire, encompassing huge tracts of rolling uplands and lowlands. See Brian Barber, ‘The Record of the Manor of Wakefield: A UNESCO-Recognised Resource’, \textit{Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society}, (2017), 1-8 (p. 2). Text available at: <https://www.yas.org.uk/Portals/0/WCR%20by%20Barber.pdf?ver=2017-12-29-103530-010> [accessed 02 March 2021].
neighbours. While cities such as late-medieval York colonized the sky with sacred buildings like
the towering Minster, the natural landscape could also be interpreted, or imagined, as sacred
space.\textsuperscript{193} Similarly, while the bible can offer positive affiliations for cities: ‘Great is the Lord,
and exceedingly to be praised in the city of our God’ (Psalms 47.2), it also links places of
altitude and the rural with safety and sanctity. After all, the ark came to rest on high ground
(Genesis 8. 4), Jesus preached his sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), and the same psalm that
could be interpreted to render the city of York as biblically ordained proclaims that God resides
‘in his holy mountain’ (Psalms 47. 2).\textsuperscript{194} I argue here that Processus Noe Cum Filiis presents a
deliberate, rural attempt to counter the artisanal and civic aspirations, ideologies, and
innovations, and the religious and economic primacy of the urban and flat city of York.

From the very outset the Towneley Flood play frequently presents words associated with
the dynamics of difference, and subsequently elevation and illumination. It is Noah, rather than
God, who opens the play with a lengthy account of the events of Creation presented as a prayer


\textsuperscript{194} See also Albrecht Classen, ‘Introduction’, in Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: The Spatial Turn, ed. by Albrecht Classen and Christopher R. Clason (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 1-192, where Classen notes the capacity for high ground (especially mountains) to sustain dual meanings in the art and literature of the Middle Ages. While the sheer physicality was threatening, hills and mountains ‘could provide divine inspiration’, they could be the site of God’s Passion, or an important backdrop for human events, (p. 37). Classen cites (and translates) from Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch, ‘Der Berg als Bildmetapher in der Kunst des Mittelalters’, Das Mittelalter, 16 (2011), 47-71, who writes that mountains ‘assume quite often attributive functions, for example by lifting a figure up to heights... [and] [f]or this purpose a small indication was enough, such as a slight elevation’. (p. 38). In certain contexts during the high Middle Ages, the mountain assumes a metaphorical meaning, almost exclusively in Christian iconography and, Saurma-Jeltsch adds, ‘increasingly, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we observe an intuitive/sensitive correlation between man and mountain’, ibid.
to God with an emphasis on divine creation. Understandably, a Creation narrative places much emphasis on making, but the emphasis here is on divine making rather than human manufacturing or construction. Noah introduces God as ‘maker of all that is’ (l. 1), whose power is repeatedly attested to have maide (ll. 3-9) all things. The principal definitions of both the noun maker and the verb maken introduce the notion of God as the Creator who created ex nihilo – no manual dexterity is implied at this point, God’s creation occurs as a result of divine will. Whether medieval audiences would have understood this lexical nuance is debatable, but the constant repetition of the word maide, occurring nine times in Noah’s opening narrative, in contrast with the single use of ‘wroght’ (in l. 4), emphasizes making, rather than constructing, the world, and deviates from the association in York’s The Building of Noah’s Ark with artisanal crafts and human skill.

Noah’s Creation narrative then moves on to twin elevation with illumination, creating an ‘elevated’ style that matches the geographical elevation of the play’s potential medieval audiences, and also renders their naturally elevated, rural position as illuminated by their proximity to heaven, and thus divinely favoured. At the same time, these moves undermine the

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195 Noah’s Creation account is a feature unique to the Wakefield play; see Warren Edminster, The Preaching Fox: Festive Subversion in the Plays of the Wakefield Master (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 76. In both York’s The Building of Noah’s Ark and Chester’s Noah’s Flood play it is God who opens the dialogue.

196 In Masciandaro, The Voice of the Hammer, maken receives little attention other than to note that it is a very general term, related to manufacturing and construction but less specific. It could be argued that this emphasis occurs similarly in the Towneley, York, and Chester plays of the Creation, nevertheless the point still stands that, in Processus Noe Cum Filius, Noah’s description of the Creation instantiates a distinction between Divine and human creation within the same play. The emphasis on manufacture and the appeal to an urban audience of artisans (especially shipwrights) and merchants evident in York’s The Building of Noah’s Ark are notably absent from the Towneley play of the Flood. Even when Noah does ask for divine inspiration with building the ark, it comprises of no more than a two-line prayer to God (ll. 251-2), and the actual construction appears to take only two stanzas (ll. 253-61, and ll. 271-9). In the stanza that come between these lines, the attention is on Noah’s weakness, old age, and the suitability of his clothes and, by the stanza that follows them, his work appears complete (ll. 280-8).

197 s. v. ‘maker (n.)’; s. v. ‘maken (v.)’, MED Online [accessed 6th January 2018]. Later in the play God does say that he made ‘Duke, emperour, and kyng, with myne awne hand’ (l. 74), but this is a rare instance and seems more a result of the necessity for rhyming form than significance of content.
legitimacy (and primacy) of civic iconography. The visual culture that this play foregrounds is one of naturally occurring light, rather than the man-made aides to visual piety like the stained glass windows which provided an artificial backdrop to civic drama in York.198 This play initially links brightness, and therefore goodness, with elevated phenomena both real and ethereal:

The son, the moyne, verament,
Thou maide; the firmament;
The sternes also full feruent,
To shyne thou maide ful bright.
Angels thou maide ful euene, all orders that is,
To haue blis in heuen: this did thou more and les,
Full meravelous to neven. (ll. 6-12)

It is possible to imagine the actor voicing these words standing atop a hill or a moor while reaching for the heavens with his arms raised ready to embrace God – acting as a medieval lighting (rather than lightning) conductor.199 The invocations of the sun, moon, sky and stars function as further vertical directives that draw an audience’s eyes, and implicitly the actor’s hands, to heaven – the edition used here prefaces Noah’s prologue with the information that he is praying to God; thus such a posture seems in keeping with the text.200 Hands, eyes, and the heavens are connected in imaginative theatrical proximity to create an understanding that Noah’s

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198 See, for example, Palliser, Medieval York, where Palliser comments on the extensive use of stained glass in many later medieval religious buildings in York in addition to the magnificent examples found in the Minster windows, and confirms that York preserves ‘more later medieval stained glass than anywhere else in Britain’, p. 184. See also Jill Stevenson, Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) for a study on the interrelatedness of visual culture, religious performances, and the body with a specific emphasis on York.

199 Much scholarship on late medieval drama focuses on internal locations, but the late sixteenth-century testimony to a Corpus Christi play in Kendal reveals that Jesus’ crucifixion was portrayed as taking place on a tree, rather than a cross, indicative of continued rural, outdoors performance where the environment functions as part of the setting. See William Tydeman, ed., The Medieval European Stage, 500-1500 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 264.

200 Before Noah speaks his first line, we are given the information that ‘Noah, alone, prays to God’, in Cawley, The Wakefield Pageants, p. 14.
elevated situation renders him closer to God: they are spiritually connected along a vertical continuum to enable Noah to communicate a natural communion with God via his divinely elevated space – a topographical advantage unavailable to the residents of medieval York.\footnote{The point I make here sits well with Janette Dillon’s observation in The Language of Space in Court Performance 1400-1625 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) that studies of drama can benefit profitably from attention given to the workings and relationships between ‘minute details of posture, gesture, movement and physical environment’, p. 5. It also seems pertinent here to recall the points made by McGavin and Walker throughout Imaging Spectatorship on the importance of speculation and imagination in order to fully address the range of potential meanings and understandings possible for early drama, especially in the absence of documentary records for production and audience response relating to this play.} A deliberate pause after the word ‘heuen’ (l. 11) could accompany a dropping of the arms to direct the celestial radiance to the audience or the ground, conducting the divine, eternal light of angels down to the human audience on earth, bestowing upon and around them the resplendent brilliance of all that is good from on high to those on high – for it is very light.\footnote{See Eva von Contzen, ‘Embodiment and Joint Attention: An Enactive Reading of the Middle English Cycle Plays’, in Enacting the Bible, ed. by Goodblatt and von Contzen, pp. 43-62, where von Contzen notes how characters in medieval drama can refer to what they are doing by certain speech acts, but also that there are occasionally implied references in the characters’ speech acts which ‘strongly suggest that they were accompanied... by gestures, such as pointing or turning to an object or another character’, (p. 44). The colon added by Cawley here does seem to suggest a deliberate pause.} The stars do not simply shine, they are ‘full bright’ (l. 9), and they are ‘full feruent’ (l. 8). Not just full, the stars are ‘perfect’ in their ‘ardent’ light – word choices which translate equally to fervent human devotion and prayer.\footnote{s. v. ‘ful (adj.)’; s. v. ‘fervent (adj.)’, MED Online [accessed 14 September 2020].} The emphasis on light here does more than merely relate God’s creation.\footnote{The superlative qualities of the light here enhance the description of God’s creation of light in the Creation plays of the Towneley and York plays. In Towneley’s The Creation, the sun, moon, and stars receive mention, but the light is simply ‘fayre to se’ (l. 21), or the equated to just ‘the bright’ (l. 26), or ‘day lyght’ (l. 52). See The Creation in The Towneley Plays ed. by Garrett P. J. Epp, available at: https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-creation [accessed 01 March 2021]. In York’s second play, The Creation Through the Fifth Day, in Davidson, ed., The York Corpus Christi Plays, the sun and moon represent only ‘two lyghtis, one more and one lesse’ (l. 95), and heaven is ornamented by non-descriptive ‘sternys’ (l. 122). The York Creation play does, however, give the detail that ‘Dymnes to wast be downe and dale’, (l. 104), a line that acknowledges that, on hills and dales, dimness lessens and brightness prevails. As Peter Happé remarks in The Towneley Cycle: Unity and Diversity (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), the York cycle is the closest analogue to the Towneley plays and, while some plays borrow}
The lighting of the altar was of particular importance for the moment in the Mass when the priest consecrated the Host, and lights also had a general significance for the laity whose chief relationship with the Eucharist was a visual one.  

The light conducted from heaven to earth at the opening of the play transforms this rural earth, this ground, into an altar. Moreover, the natural, divine light that seeps from the narrative speaks of this higher ground as occupied by angels when God later confirms that he made man not simply to be like angels, but to reside alongside them in their elevated lustre: ‘to be | All angels abuf’ (ll. 82-3). As Donnalee Dox remarks, medieval drama ‘gives the theoretical space of imagination a place’, thus even if only imagined, place ‘was no less tangible than those spaces more easily defined by players and special effects’. In this sense the audience can imagine, and experience, a bodily and spatially figured communion with the angels on high. However, in a sharp and directionally opposed move these elevated angels swiftly become neighbours to low-lying demons into whom they may potentially be transformed.

Lest there should develop an overweening pride from an association of Towneley audience with angels, Noah recalls the example of Lucifer who was so proud of his brightness and beauty that ‘He thoght hymself as worthi as hym that hym made’ (l. 19). God ‘therfor he hym degrade, | Put hym in a low degré’ (ll. 20-1). God downgraded not just Lucifer, but ‘Hym

extensively from the York cycle, there is also the possibility that other episodes were influenced by details from York – not only to emulate them, but also possibly in order to differentiate from them, p. 7.


207  That Noah wishes to align the higher land he occupies with that of angels corresponds to the medieval metaphor of the scala naturae, (Ladder of Nature) which imagined a sliding scale of sentience where nature divided the world into ascending degrees of being, with God at the top. See Kellie Robertson, Nature Speaks: Medieval Literature and Aristotelian Philosophy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), where Robertson points to the influence of Boethius’ model of this ‘ladder’ on later medieval authors (such as Chaucer). Boethius’ version of the scala imagined ‘a force emanating downward from the Creator toward his creation, rather like the sun’s rays’, p. 57. Further, Robertson points out that the scala naturae represented a hierarchy that allowed ‘for a transparent valuation of ontological categories in terms of their relative distance from God’, p. 58. Imagining Noah at the top of the ladder, on the high ground, thus figures Noah closer to God than any low-lying neighbours.
and all his menye’ (l. 22). Warning against pride or attempting to align oneself with God, Noah’s religious context also includes what could be construed as a vague topographical contour for Lucifer and his fallen company: God puts them ‘in a low degré’ (l. 21). *Degre* has meanings that can imply stages, or degrees, of social rank or status, but equally it can denote physical position and situation.\(^{208}\) Noah makes it clear that the latter meaning applies here when he adds ‘*wher* he may be vnglad’ (l. 22), giving a spatial, locative dimension to Lucifer’s ‘low degré’ (l. 21) which now has to be *somewhere*.\(^{209}\) If, as I have argued, this play speaks to the inhabitants of the divinely elevated rural north of England, then the low situation where God sends Lucifer could be gesturing (as indeed the actor playing Noah could be physically gesturing) towards the actual lowlands occupied by the city and citizens of York.\(^{210}\)

As a riposte to its low-lying civic neighbours, whose lavish cycle worshipped God, the Holy City as a domestic Jerusalem, and the crafts involved in its production equally, the rural audience of this play occupy the physical and moral high ground, the Holy Land, where they can see the (divine) light all around them.\(^{211}\) In what is ostensibly a prologue that serves as a build-up

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\(^{208}\) s. v. ‘degree, (n.)’, *MED Online* [accessed 18 September 2020]. Concepts of both status and place would apply to Lucifer’s ‘fall’.

\(^{209}\) s. v. ‘*wher* (adv., conj.)’, *MED Online* [accessed 20 March 2022]. The primary sense given here alludes to place.

\(^{210}\) This could reflect some of the contemporaneous tensions between rural and civic populations in medieval Yorkshire that emanated from enclosure acts which, according to Christopher Dyer, in *An Age of Transition?: Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), put the most profitable tracts of land under the control of local, city-based gentry. As a project initiated in the thirteenth century, Dyer sees the apogee of enclosure in the early sixteenth century, with the country-wide discontent in the effects of enclosure (such as rural poverty and the decline and depopulation, even desertion, of smaller rural towns and villages) evident in the setting up of an official inquiry, ‘the so-called Domesday of Inclosures’ in 1517-18, p. 67. That this was an issue pertinent to York and its environs is suggested in Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), where Kermode cites merchants and noblemen of York who remained city dwellers while pursuing entrepreneurial schemes in their extensive rural holdings, p. 18. On the effects of enclosure found in the Wakefield Master’s *Prima Pastorum* and *Secunda Pastorum*, see Lisa J. Kiser, ‘‘Mak’s Heirs”: Sheep and Humans in the Pastoral Ecology of the Towneley First and Second Shepherds’ Plays’, *JEGP*, 108:3 (2009), 336-59. For evidence of later medieval disputes about enclosures in Yorkshire, see Briony A. K. McDonagh, ‘Subverting the Ground: Private Property and Public Protest in the Sixteenth-Century Yorkshire Wolds’, *The Agricultural History Review*, 57:2 (2009), 191-206.

\(^{211}\) The worship of both God and the city in York is well documented and informs the title of King’s book, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City*. Less well commented upon is the section in the new *Ordinacio pro Ludi*
to events of the great biblical Flood, Noah’s opening account of Creation looks primarily up – up to the sun, the moon, the stars, and heaven, and only once drops down to Lucifer’s low level, mirroring the undulating forms of the rural environment which, as I have argued elsewhere, the Wakefield pastoral plays bespeak.  

Yet immediately after mentioning Lucifer’s displacement, Noah goes on to remark that ‘Soyne after, that gracious Lord to his likenes maide man, | That place to be restord, euen as he began’ (ll. 28-9, italics added for emphasis). God makes man in his likeness, and he also restores man to the place he had formerly created – man fills the place left empty by the rebel angels. According to Noah, once the bad angels have been relegated from their elevated position, man inhabits the high ground now restored and replete with its former divine favour. From the perspective of a non-civic, elevated, and divinely illuminated community, the low-lying neighbours in the contrived lights of medieval York are at a remove from divine grace.

York was and still is a city of stained glass; a city that not only used lights 

Corporis Christi introduced in 1476, which concerns the aims of play performances ‘to þe honour of þe Citie and worship of þe saide craftes’, repr. from Beadle, ‘Introduction’, The York Plays, ed. by Beadle, (p. xxxvii), italics added for emphasis. The full text of this document, reproduced by Beadle, makes no mention of the worship of God, only to the city and the crafts. See s. v. ‘worshipen (v.)’, MED Online, where worship was used both in religious senses with regard to rites and ceremonies, and in secular senses to enhance the reputation of, or bring honour to, someone or something or, indeed, to ‘value oneself (overly)’ [accessed 03 March 2021]. See Slater, ‘Finding Jerusalem’, where Slater points to an area in medieval Pontefract (also in West Yorkshire) called ‘Munioie’ which, Slater argues, was understood as a recreation of Mount Joy on the approach to Jerusalem (pp. 216-7). Though much of Slater’s article focuses on the civic and urban understanding of Pontefract as a Holy City, it seems that there was also corresponding, equally significant, Holy Land around Pontefract, and such land was, as I argue for a geographical location for Processus Noe Cum Filiis, on high ground.

I first made this argument in Gillian Redfern, ‘Knowing Me, Knowing You: Three Knowingly Northern and Knowingly Different Medieval Mystery Plays By the Wakefield Master’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, University of Manchester, 2017), where the hills and dales I identify here, and subsequently, also appear throughout the two Wakefield shepherds’ plays where the characters inhabit moors and fields, and their cracking alliteration matches the rugged, craggy environs of rural West Yorkshire. Even at the close of Noah’s opening dialogue (which does in effect cover events up to Doomsday), Noah seems assured that a place in ‘thi hall | In heuen’ (ll. 67-8) awaits him and his family after their inevitable ‘fall’ (l. 66). The high ground, even the eventual spiritual heights of heaven, seem a given certainty in this play.

On the understanding of this meaning for these lines, see Cawley, ed., The Wakefield Pageants, p. 95.

On a recent visit to York Minster, a tour guide informed me that, on a clear day, the Minster is visible from a distance of twenty-five miles. However, local residents posit that the Minster is visible from a distance much greater than this and, indeed, there is a plaque in Green Moor, South Yorkshire, attesting to the fact that it is visible from the viewing platform there, extending the range to approximately fifty miles. See s. v. ‘elevacioun (n.)’, MED Online, for the understanding of relating to both altitudinal elevation and the raising of the Host, and Ibid., s. v. ‘elevaten’ (v.) which equally illustrates a variety of usage, and gives the notable example of Ranulph Higden’s Polychronicon
to accompany the pageant processions and light the churches, but one that directed and reflected light through its proliferation of stained glass. Elsewhere, King notes that the early years of the emergence of York’s lavish cycle coincided with the commissioning of the Great East Window in York Minster, with its image of God the creator at the highest point of the window under which are the words *alpha et omega*. As Jill Stevenson remarks, this spectacular brilliance stood in dramatic contrast to nearby landscapes, and allowed York and its inhabitants to participate in and convey ‘the sense of a more elevated world’. Elevation and light mattered in York’s sacred civic spaces but, for rural Yorkshire inhabitants, *Processus Noe Cum Filiiis* emphasizes the brilliance and beneficence of natural light experienced in an actual elevated world – or even in such an imagined world. This moral positioning is further secured by weaving in more claims to actual topographic and tangible high ground.

In the play, the notoriously truculent character of Noah’s wife makes a salient remark when she delays boarding the ark. She categorically refuses to leave until she has ‘on this hill

where Higden writes that Paradise is not a region elevated above the globe, it is on earth (Higden suggests probably somewhere in the east) and ‘considered to be a large tract of country’. See *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis; Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by J. R. Lumby (London: Longman and Co., 1865), p. lxxv. Text available at: <https://archive.org/details/polychroniconra00lumbgoog/page/n80/mode/2up?q=Paradise> [accessed 04 March 2021].


Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*, p. 109. The spectacular brilliance must also surely have been a necessary one to offset the impediment to natural light exacerbated by the extensive building projects outlined throughout the thesis.

The character of Mrs Noah and her truculence, disobedience, and violent relationship with her husband has received much critical attention. See, for example, Tolmie, ‘Mrs Noah and Didactic Abuse’, where Tolmie, citing many examples of such criticism, reads Mrs Noah as an Eve figure who, even within the tradition of transvestite drama, enacts female error in order to expose, though especially in the Towneley version not to wholly undermine, forms of female rebellion. Mrs Noah is rebellious, even at one point wishing her husband dead, and, while others, such as Edminster, read her as a figure of extreme comedic proportions in the Bakhtinian carnivalesque model, Tolmie delivers an astute reading of Mrs Noah whose spousal death wish, as Tolmie remarks, remains unresolved. The issue I pursue here, however, is one which exposes her draw to the land – land on which Noah and his wife find at least a degree of harmony.
spon a *space* | On my rok*’ (ll. 337-8, italics added for emphasis).\(^{219}\) In the York version of the story, the hills are only ever alluded to vaguely, possibly visible in the distance but not part of the York cityscape. In contrast, this hill is *here*. There is, according to Mike Pearson, ‘a shift from the *optic* to the *haptic* in the apprehension of landscape’, and this hill, in its evident proximity, seems a tangible topographical feature.\(^{220}\) The potential for the haptic experience relies on the deictic quality of the word *this* in conjunction with the hill – this hill has to be imagined here, not over there somewhere in the distance, in order for the line to make sense.\(^{221}\) The rock too seems to have to be present for the possessive phrase, ‘my rok’ (l. 338), to make sense.\(^{222}\) Given these details it is not too speculative to imagine the actor playing Noah’s wife reaching out to touch a rock, or stamping a foot on the actual hilly ground, adding a loud, possibly echoing or reverberating thud to underscore each monosyllabic word of ‘on this hill spon a space | On my rok’ (ll. 337-8). It is perfectly conventional that Noah’s wife should refer to spinning as she registers the enduring representation of women’s work, but the spinning reference also presents her with an opportunity to weave in an apparently important detail of her rural environment. She belongs to the rural community that occupies the hills that, in the York version of the Flood, Noah’s wife was reluctant to test herself over. The hills that the York Noah also feared are

\(^{219}\) While *space* used here seems to suggest a temporal meaning, indicating that Noah’s wife will remain on the rock on the hill until she has spun for a time, the multiple meanings found s. v. ‘*space* (n.)’, *MED Online* [accessed 05 March 2021] allow for the possibility of *space* to refer equally to ground, land, or territory, thus linking its meaning to the *place* and *grace* voiced by Noah only two lines earlier.

\(^{220}\) Mike Pearson, *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), p. 11. This does not discount the potential for replicating a hill on a stage, but Noah’s wife’s attachment to the hill does receive further emphasis and, given that the ark does eventually come to rest on a ‘real’ hill that is re-imagined later, the suggestion does seem to be that we are to imagine physical hills rather than staged ones.

\(^{221}\) See also von Contzen, ‘Embodiment and Joint Attention’, in *Enacting the Bible*, ed. by Goodblatt and von Contzen, where Contzen points to the use of deictics in medieval drama to ‘draw attention to the proximity and co-presence of objects’ (p. 45).

\(^{222}\) The possessive relationship between Noah’s wife and her, or this, rock corresponds to the intimate lithic-human storied relationships and enmeshments described in Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), where Cohen attests to the ‘haptic impulse to mineral union’, p. 54.
spiritual and physical home to this family, and Towneley’s Noah’s wife is reluctant to leave her rural, upland, shelter.\textsuperscript{223}

These people in this elevated space have a covenant with God, an organic one that eschews neighbouring local claims to privileged religiosity and situates them as closer to God and touched by God in communion with their landscape.\textsuperscript{224} Their hill and their rock which constitute their church is all around them, and the allusions continue as Noah’s wife repeats her insistence that, despite the rising waters, she will continue her spinning ‘Apon this hill’ (l. 365).\textsuperscript{225} The hill seems to be the thing, as her daughter-in-law reminds both her and the audience that ‘ye may spyn, moder, in the ship’ (l. 361) – the high land is the thread pulling her to the ground as much as the work of spinning.\textsuperscript{226} Similarly, it is appropriately Peter, Jesus’ rock, to whom Noah calls out (l. 367) for spiritual assistance – augmenting the layering of lithic, organic

\textsuperscript{223} In \textit{The Towneley Cycle}, Happé also notes the apparent interest in hills evident in the pastoral plays by the Wakefield Master, adding that this dramatist ‘seems interested in shifting the social context away from York’s urban culture’ towards a rural predicament’, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{224} It seems pertinent here to point to representations of hills in other plays of the Towneley manuscript in which intervention by the Wakefield dramatist has been identified. According to Happé in \textit{The Towneley Cycle}, these interventions are ‘focused within the Passion sequence’, p. 72. Looking at \textit{The Crucifixion} play, Jesus is referred to as being crucified on high (l. 46 and l. 664), a loose referent which may just indicate the height of the crucifix, and it is made quite clear that his crucifixion took place on Mount Calvary (l. 83), not a random hill or mountain. In \textit{The Ascension}, however, the description of hills fits exactly with Noah’s wife’s description of them, as Jesus asks his disciples to stay with him ‘right on this hill’ (l. 45), and later Simon urges them to move ‘fro this hill’ (l. 420). In \textit{The Crucifixion}, then, the hill or mount is clearly named and definitively elsewhere, whereas in \textit{The Ascension}, Jesus, like Noah’s wife, voices a potentially haptic this hill. While I am not suggesting that Noah’s wife figures as a saviour figure in this play, the point is that both characters, in plays where hills are ‘good’, are given the opportunity to suggest to the audience that the hills are the ones that already, in an outdoors performance area, surround them. Quotations by line number from both plays are from \textit{The Towneley Plays}, ed. by Epp, available at: <https://dl.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/epp-the-towneley-plays>, [accessed 06 March 2021].

\textsuperscript{225} See, however, Peter Meredith, ‘The Towneley Pageants’, in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre} Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn, ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 183-210, where Meredith argues that in this play, the ark ‘is not the church’ (p. 172). Meredith regards the arguments between Noah and his wife as symptomatic of an exaggerated version of a squabbling married couple, arguing that the play showcases the Wakefield Master’s skill in creating a well-told story which reflects the variety of the world, ibid.

\textsuperscript{226} The pull of the land here corresponds to Gaston Bachelard’s explanation of topophilia as a term useful for thinking of how people, in various ways, express their love of place and spaces, and how that space might be defended against adverse forces. See Gaston Bachelard, \textit{The Poetics of Space}, trans. by Maria Jolas (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), p. xxxi.
connections to divine foundations and eternity. None of this repetition is actually necessary to relate the story of the Flood, but the technique works to relate not just the performance, but the *place* of performance to the *place* potentially occupied by the audience. Writing with regard to Early Modern theatre, Lloyd Edward Kermode explains that:

> The constant presence of extra-diegetic material that is not related inherently or permanently to the fiction being told in a performance ... contextualizes and alters not just the audience’s experience of the play for specific performances, but the *meaning* of the play’s action itself, in the present moment.

In this context, the use of such material allows the Old Testament narrative to become elastic through time and space – in this present moment and this apparently hilly environment the Flood story sticks not really to the ark, or even to water, but to the ground. The hilly environment makes a difference to textual details and situates not only Noah’s wife, but also Noah on a hill. In the exchange between them, Noah is already aboard the ark when he asks her to ‘com into this place’ (l. 335) – the ark, then, must also be perched on a hill. Noah does not have to shout to his wife, as the direction ‘Noah speaks to her from the Ark’ (above l. 343) confirms. In reality, for

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227 In *The Preaching Fox*, Edminster notes the extended association of rock, hills, and St. Peter here. While Edminster reads Mrs Noah’s *rok as staff*, figuring her as spinning on a staff (or distaff), Edminster notes that the phrase also ‘recalls Christ’s foundation of his church upon the “rock” of Peter’ p. 84. Further, Edminster argues that ‘when Uxor sits down to spin upon her “rok” the play suggests that she also makes a symbolic transition into the ecclesiastical body of the Church’, ibid. Although, noting her rebelliousness, Edminster later clarifies his reading of Noah’s wife, arguing that ‘Uxor portrays a Church in rebellion against Christ’, and the pattern of her rebellions ‘make coherent and damning accusations against the orthodox ecclesiastical structure of the Church... that parallel accusations made against the Church in the anti-clerical and anti-ecclesiastical literature of the day’, ibid. Noah’s wife is famously rebellious in this play, but the point I make here is how the extended associations of hills, rock, and St. Peter can figure this place, somewhere in the rural medieval manor of Wakefield, as the body of the Church – a medieval God’s own country.

228 See Meredith, ‘The Towneley Pageants’, where Meredith remarks upon the Wakefield Master’s ability to create situation (geographic as well as contextual) with specific word choice and, despite the debates that continue on the provenance of the manuscript, Meredith points out that the town (or manor) name of Wakefield does appear at the top of this play, directly under the title (p. 162).


230 The idea of the elasticity of the biblical narrative in drama is a longstanding one, evident in scholarship since the seminal work by V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1966).
the duration of the play, the ark never does sail away, but the extra-diegetic detail of the hill reinforces the significance of this particular ground in this particular play to the extent that the continual presence of high ground throughout the play renders the elevated environment as a central character of this narrative.

While there is a lack of evidence for any specific place of performance for this play attention to the spatial, topographical directions in the text, points to possible performance spaces, suggesting, along with what we know of medieval drama, that a rural, elevated outdoor location is either intended, or intended to be imagined, or both.\textsuperscript{231} And as Noah began the play by building this suggestion, he closes the play by mirroring it. Before any bird has left this ark, Noah declares that he ‘may towch with my lufe the grownd evyn here’ (l. 462). While \textit{lufe} could refer to the palm of the hand (as Cawley glosses it in the edition used here), it could also be expressing Noah’s love, or praise, of the ground.\textsuperscript{232} However slippery the word \textit{lufe} may be, Noah and his wife both seem impatient to leave the ark. Noah remarks that ‘We haue been here, all we, | CCC days and fyfty’, (ll. 456-7) and, on Noah’s third attempt to assess the depth of the water that (apparently) surrounds them, his wife impatiently asks ‘How long shall thou hufe?’ (l. 461). \textit{Hufe} can mean to wait, or linger, but equally it can refer to a ship floating, rising to the surface of the water, or resting at anchor.\textsuperscript{233} The \textit{here} that Noah refers to then could be the hill that they were all already on, and thus Noah and his wife are participating in a complicit understanding, also available to the audience – that they were always already on the high ground.

\textsuperscript{231} On this see also Meredith, ‘The Towneley Pageants’ where Meredith notes the renewed interest in the potential for ‘open-air’ productions that these plays evoke, rather than the modern proscenium-arch theatres, (p. 159).

\textsuperscript{232} s. v. ‘lof (n. 1)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 25 September 2020]. In the most recent edition of this play, Epp glosses \textit{lufe} as ‘oar’, with no accompanying note. See \textit{Noah}, ed. by Epp, available at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams> [accessed 28 September 2020], (l. 668). Presumably this definition stems from the meaning of the word \textit{lof} pertaining to some nautical device, though the \textit{MED} definition does not suggest oar. See s. v. ‘lof (n. 4)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 26 September 2020].

\textsuperscript{233} s. v. ‘hoven (v.)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 28 September 2020].
literally and spiritually, and, taking Cawley’s gloss of *lufe* as the palm of the hand, they can reach down and touch it too.\(^{234}\) They are, as Noah says (almost ironically given their constant fighting), on ‘The hyllys of Armony’ (l. 466), surrounded by ‘toppis of hyllys’ (l. 469). As Noah’s wife voices her delight: ‘Thise are of mercy tokyns full right’ (l. 471), it appears that the only common ground they share is of the topographical kind, on the high ground.

When they eventually leave the ark, after Noah’s wife again reminds them and the audience that ‘Here haue we beyn, Noy, long enogh’ (l. 532), it is not a promise of re-building that stirs Noah, but wonder of the green land that surrounds them: ‘Behald on this greyn!’ (l.534). In this rural, elevated landscape, the first thing Noah remarks upon and sees is greenery. The subsequent absence of cart and plough, tree and bough, that he remarks upon is guess work, signified by the ‘I weyn’ (l. 535), and ‘I say’ (l. 538). The ‘Many castels’ (l. 538), and ‘Grete townes’ (l. 539) that Noah alludes to are assumptions of distant effects of flooding, coming as they do with the remark that ‘I say’ (l. 538), rather than the *seeing* and believing inhered in Noah’s exhortation to ‘Behald on this greyn!’ (l.534).\(^{235}\) The only thing Noah is certain of is this green place and their future security that, with God’s help, they ‘May com to his light’ (l. 557) in the place where they always were: ‘in this space’ (l. 552). At the close of the play, Noah repeats the *grace, space, and place* rhyme (ll. 551-3) that he and his wife toyed with earlier in the play.

\(^{234}\) Although coming centuries after this play, there is an entry for ‘lufe’ in Francis Kildale Robinson, *A Glossary of Yorkshire Words and Phrases* (London: John Russell Smith, 1855) which reads: ‘The Lufe, the open hand. “Give us thy lufe, not thy fist”, a clasp of the open hand’, p. 107. Equally, s. v. *loof* (n. 1) in the *OED Online* shows medieval examples which use this word in this sense occurring in, for example, *Cleanness* and *Mandeville’s Travels*, though naturally with variant spellings [accessed 29 September 2021].

\(^{235}\) Note the use of *Behald* here, a word that, while it could mean to gaze, or to look, was often used in a spiritual sense to mean inward contemplation, and in a religious sense with reference to belief, faith, and devotion. See s. v. ‘bihalden (v.)’ *MED Online* where, for the latter sense, examples are supplied from the *Wycliffite Sermons* and the *Cursor Mundi* [accessed 06 March 2021].
and, after a cursory acknowledgement that the dead, those who were ‘prowdist of pryde’ (l. 543), might be admitted to grace, returns to the theme of his opening narrative to deliver a final prayer:

I pray hym in this space,
In heven hye with his to purvaye vs a place,
That we,
With his santys in sight,
And his angels bright,
May com to his light.
Amen, for charité. (ll. 552-8)

The first line quoted here succinctly complicates whether Noah is praying to God from the space where he (Noah) is, or whether the implication is that Noah prays to God who occupies the same space as he does, as the I, us, and we pronouns move Noah’s speech from discussion of the dead back to himself and his family who are, once again, situated on high alongside saints and angels. Praying that God might ‘purvaye vs a place’ (l. 553) suggests not just the arrangement, or provision, of a place, but the foresight and foreknowledge of a previously arranged agreement – an understanding of a situation considered, agreed, and arranged in advance. The promised land of these northern rural uplanders holds at least the possibility, if not a guarantee, of enduring a flood because their Holy Land was also already the high land. Closer to God are they in their medieval ‘God’s own country’.

Deevinity and Diversity in Chester

Bordering northern Wales and north-western England, medieval Chester occupied a marginal location, remote from the political and ecclesiastical heavyweights of medieval London and York. Yet, distant as it was from these centres of power, Chester’s geographic position provided

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236 s. v. ‘purveien (v.)’, MED Online [accessed 06 March 2021].
ideas of its regional distinctiveness and centrality to its residents. This section examines how
the Chester Flood pageant exploits the city’s location, and historic perceptions of features within
its location, to argue that the Chester play resists direct participation in the opposing pulls of the
civic and the rural, and constructs a narrative that is uniquely fashioned to appeal to its local
audiences and their sense of Chester as a legitimate centre of medieval Christianity. As Robert
W. Barrett Jr. has shown, Cestrian identity has a textual history derived from both Welsh and
English sources that situate Chester as central, rather than peripheral, to a local mapping of
medieval Christianity. Building on Barrett’s work, this section explores how the Chester play
of the Flood bolsters claims for Chester’s central role in local Christianity, and considers how
Chester’s historic identification as a female city can nuance the role of Noah’s wife in this play.

From the twelfth century onwards, Chester is praised as a special site when Lucian’s *De
laude Cestrie* celebrates it as a blessed environment – a city whose sanctity is tangible, and
Lucian feels ‘privileged to touch upon things close by, to sing of these environs’. Barrett
elucidates how Lucian, probably a monk at St. Werburgh’s in Chester, used a combination of
allegorical etymology and topography to imbue Castra Diva’s Latinate origins with divinity,
and to read the city’s landscape ‘as the literal level of scripture’. Lucian’s interpretation of the
cruciform nature of Chester’s four main urban thoroughfares (and monasteries) allowed him to
promote the idea of another northern Jerusalem, one which relied upon what Catherine A. M.

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237 On this, see Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, pp. 73-6.
239 Lucian, *Liber Luciani de laude Cestrie* (p. 50), repr. in Barrett, p. 29.
240 Ibid., p. 37. Little is known with certainty on the identity of Lucian. In the AHRC funded project *Mapping Medieval Chester*, the suggestion is made that much of what we know about Lucian is inferred from his writing and his emphasis on Chester and on the proper organization of monasteries makes it extremely likely he was a monk of St Werburgh’s. See *Mapping Medieval Chester*, available at:
<http://www.medievalchester.ac.uk/texts/introlucian.html#d241e3271> [accessed 12 March 2021].
Clarke terms Lucian’s ‘God’s eye view of this holy city’. Lucian writes, according to Clarke, from the ‘privileged prospect over the city offered by the walls’, giving him an elevated, aerial advantage in order to promote a palimpsest of spiritual semiotics that he saw built into the compact city of Chester. As C. P. Lewis notes, while the walls of late medieval Chester enclosed and looked in upon a small space, they also allowed a viewer to look out across the open aspect of extensive meadow, beyond to the hills of Wales, and ‘from Watergate the prospect to the west was of the tides and shifting sands of the wide, long estuary of the Dee’. Thus Chester had a mixed panorama that afforded its inhabitants differing geographical, topographical, civic and rural outlooks and environs.

The lifeblood of this city was the river Dee, and constant negotiation with more than occasional catastrophic flooding was part of the ebb and flow of everyday lives and livelihoods. Historic evidence shows that fatal floods occurred in the same years as the city’s pageants were performed:

In the year 1551 there happened a very destructive flood, by which great numbers of cattle were destroyed in Saltney-marsh, and several lives were lost in the

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242 Ibid.


244 Records of flooding in Chester date from the thirteenth century. See Jane Laughton, Life in a Late Medieval City: Chester 1275-1520 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008) where Laughton recounts the river Dee flooding Chester in 1280 and the mid-1280s, and Chester remained under the threat of floods throughout the medieval period on account of ‘the “skittering” sands of the Dee, an unpredictable river with a constantly shifting channel’, p. 173. The late thirteenth century seems to have been a particularly bad year for Chester, as one record reveals that in 1278 the Dee bridge ‘was overthrown by a great flood’, and in the same year the city ‘was reduced almost to ruins by a great fire’. See Thomas Catherall, The Stranger’s Companion in Chester: Containing a Sketch of its Ancient and Modern History, a Walk Round the Walls, Visit to the Cathedral, and a Description of Eaton Hall, 8th edn (Chester: F. P. Evans, 1849), p. 89. Text available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112089205410&view=1up&seq=103&skin=2021> [accessed 03 March 2021].
Suburbs and neighbourhood of Chester: in 1584 happened another great flood, occasioned by a violent storm of thunder, lightning, and hail. As Barrett further remarks, Lucian promoted the idea of the sanctity both of the land and water in Chester – the water that on occasion brought death both to people and animals also brought life and a spiritual health which Lucian linked directly to the current of the waters in Chester. Medieval Chester was a city of liquid as much as lithic proportions – boundaries followed rivers, and ditches, as much as walls, formed barriers. Neither was (or is) Chester flat, and the nomenclature of the church ‘Saynt Maries-on-the-Hill’ shows that again, some sacred spaces occupied the natural high ground. Additionally, Lewis identifies a complicated network of jurisdictional boundaries operating in medieval Chester, with ecclesiastical authority extending well beyond the city walls, and he recognizes the geographic extent of the ‘liberties’ which were ‘located beyond the fields and meadows at some distance from the town’. Here, when Noah’s wife vows that she ‘will not owt of this towne’ (l. 200), there is no hint of fear or suspicion of the rural other – a point which reflects Chester’s strong rural connections and rather points to the fact

245 Rev. David Lysons and Samuel Lysons, *Magna Britannia: Being a Concise Topographical Account of the Several Counties of Great Britain* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1810), p. 563. Although the plays were no longer performed by 1584, the productions of 1572 and 1575 could still have been performed within living memory of some Chester residents, and the earlier flood of 1551 falls well within the period of play production in Chester. In Lawrence M. Clopper, ‘The History and Development of the Chester Cycle’, *Modern Philology*, 75:3 (1978), 219-46. Clopper notes that play production in Chester was more sporadic than in York, and conjectures that Chester’s plays developed from a fourteenth-century single performance at the end of the Corpus Christi procession to the expanded three-day Whitsuntide performances of the sixteenth century, which were still performed (though now at Midsummer) in 1575 despite the Archbishop of York’s prohibition (p. 242). In Catherall, *The Stranger’s Companion to Chester*, Catherall also notes the flood of 1551, and the detail that ‘timber trees [were] left on the top of Dee bridge’, p. 92, suggests that this was a particularly violent flood.

246 Barrett, *Against All England*, p. 37. See also Liz Herbert McAvoy, “Ȝe beoð ϸe ancren o Ḑlond … as ϸe weren an cuuent of … Chester’: Liminal Spaces and the Anchoritic Life in Medieval Chester’, in Clarke, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City*, pp. 99-113, where McAvoy also notes Lucian’s propensity to cast the river Dee as the Divinely provided harbinger of life and death (p. 105).

247 Lewis, ‘Framing Medieval Chester’, (p. 48).


249 Ibid., (p. 46). The liberties extended the rights of Cestrian freemen well beyond the city walls, and civic connections with an extensive rural hinterland were recognized well before the 1506 charter declared Chester a county in its own right.
that she has a job to do before she boards the ark, a point to which I shall return. Chester’s geographical position allowed for a unique, extensive panorama that looked out to a hybrid, extramural topography, at the same time as it afforded its hybrid inhabitants (and those further afield) a microcosm of sacred abundance – holy water, holy hills, and holy land.\(^{250}\)

Chester was saturated with religious significance, and the diverse Cestrian audience had narratives by Lucian and Henry Bradshaw to compound their understanding of Chester as a site of special religiosity, complete with local miracles. Central to late medieval Cestrian Christianity was the abbey of St Werburgh, and I argue that the continued local importance of this female saint after whom the abbey is named accounts for the treatment of gender, religiosity, and place in this play. Laura Varnam points to an anonymous ballad appended to the 1521 printing of Henry Bradshaw’s *Life of St Werburge* where ‘the author describes St Werburgh as a precious treasure and, employing a term most commonly used of the virgin, as “*aduocatrice*”’.\(^{251}\) St Werburgh was a local, home-grown, female saint whose miracles concretized Chester’s sacred status, and she became ‘a potent icon for the abbey’s campaign for autonomy and sovereignty’.\(^{252}\) During the sixteenth century, competing claims for control of the city came from the abbey and the city’s civic authorities, resulting in internal social conflict.\(^{253}\) Thus while St Werburgh’s abbey promoted its own religious authority and autonomy – this view of the abbey’s importance was not shared by all members of the community it served. Yet, as Jane Laughton shows, evidence of bequests to the shrine of St Werburgh dated to the late medieval period.

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250 In *Against All England*, Barrett points to Chester’s continued awareness of its hybrid identity, as ‘neither truly English nor truly Welsh’, p.3.


252 Ibid., (p. 115). Briefly, St Werburgh’s miracles consisted of taming a flock of wild geese until they confess their sins and desire absolution, and resurrecting a dead goose at the request of its avian company. See Varnam, ‘Sanctity and the City’, in Clarke, ed. *Mapping the Medieval City*, (pp. 117-8).

253 Ibid., (p. 125).
shows this female saint was important enough, at least to some people. In addition, Keith D. Lilley cites late medieval Welsh poetry that describes Chester as ‘a focus of pilgrimage and devotion’, because they believed that the holy cross, carried to Chester by the river Dee, ‘incorporated a fragment of the “true cross” discovered by St Helen’. Not only was late medieval Chester a city where religion was paramount, it was a centre where religious symbolism, sacred to disparate groups, was drawn from a wide area and concentrated in a small one, creating a medieval mind-map of this space as uniquely, spatially, and spiritually significant to different users of that space. In Bhabha’s terms, this exposes ‘the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference’; the same space of holy land, blessed by holy water, was venerated differently by different users – all of whom could, at particular locations and at different times, have witnessed this play.

However, these differences and their favoured religious affiliations all have feminine origins. Lucian’s devotion to Chester specifically marks out the city as a feminized space, addressing it as ‘she’, a tradition that Liz Herbert McAvoy locates in an early thirteenth-century text of *Ancren Wisse* – a text which also originates from Chester. Given the importance of the female St Werburgh to the identity of the abbey, I suggest that this play works creatively both with and against inherited traditions relating to both gender and religion in order specifically to court what Theresa Coletti terms an ‘ambiguity of perception’ which is ideally suited to this

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254 Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City*, p. 68. In Helen Fulton, ‘The Outside Within: Medieval Chester and North Wales as a Social Space’, pp. 149-68 in Clarke, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City*, Fulton points out that Chester was a significant place for the Welsh too and, although ‘they were not officially recognized as legitimate users of the city’, they found ways to transgress official limitations ‘by occupying the religious space of the church of St John the Baptist where they worshipped the holy cross’ (p. 150). Fulton also notes that some men of Welsh descent did hold senior offices in medieval Chester such as that of mayor (p. 152).
256 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 313.
257 Lucian, repr. in Clarke, ‘Introduction’ (p. 8); McAvoy, “3e beoðbe ancren of Englond … as þah 3e weren an cuuent of … Chester’, pp. 99-113, bothin Clarke, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City*. 
religious, yet diverse, place.\textsuperscript{258} Diversity appears to be a fundamental preoccupation of the Chester cycle; Coletti further remarks that the emerging critical consensus seems to be that ‘the cycle’s religious ideology is as mobile as its sixteenth-century pageant wagons’.\textsuperscript{259} Along with Coletti’s overall assessment of the religious ambivalence in the Chester cycle, I argue that in Chester’s version of the Flood narrative, the fluidity of interpretation relies on the porosity and slipperiness of symbolic language so that, as the wagons proceed, the meaning of the language becomes flexible according to the place of performance.\textsuperscript{260} Strategically crafted moments of linguistic ambiguity create double meanings that both reinforce, and subsequently defy, traditional mobilizations of gender norms and patriarchal religious privilege. If Chester was indeed imagined as a feminized city, then it was also one whose aquatic influence was always present; even if the river Dee was not always actually visible (although from some stations it would have been), it was legible in the street names and almost tangible when watching a performance of Noah and the Flood.\textsuperscript{261}

Prior to the events of the Flood, attention is drawn to fluid other than rainfall. The word \textit{slake} appears four times throughout Chester’s Flood pageant (ll. 23; 118; 260; 303) with divergent meanings, one of which is ‘to quench [or] slake thirst’ and, on three of the occasions where the verb appears, it is God who voices it.\textsuperscript{262} A delivery containing repeated intonations and emphases on this particular word could suggest (or even reinforce) a link between God and drinking. Notable too is the balanced usage of \textit{slake}, with two occurrences coming before Noah’s

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid., (p. 535).
\textsuperscript{260} The plays underwent constant revision up to the sixteenth century and were last performed in 1575. For an overview, see Coletti, ‘The Chester Cycle’, (pp. 531-3).
\textsuperscript{261} One of the stations for performance was Watergate Street, another was on Bridge Street; see Barrett, \textit{Against All England}, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{262} s. v. ‘slaken (v.’), \textit{MEDOnline} [accessed 18 September 2020].
wife and her gossips’ ‘drinking episode’, and two after, creating a chiastic structure pivoting around the ‘drinking episode’. The allusions to drinking and God take on further significance as they are later combined with an emphasis on blood. On three occasions in very close succession, God mentions ‘blood and fleshe’ (l. 289), then ‘They that sheden blood’ (l. 295), and again, ‘blood’ (l. 297). Admittedly God is issuing instructions regarding the propriety of future eating and moral conduct, but the insistent repetition of blood in such close proximity seems either unimaginative, or highly symbolic.263 This language is deliberately bloody-minded – as the actor speaks the words, repeatedly, he figuratively has the blood of God’s speech in his mouth. John T. Sebastian argues forcefully for the reading of blood throughout the Chester cycle as a complex signifier whose ‘multiplicity, ambiguity, polysemy, ahistoricity, and even affectivity’ cannot be overestimated.264 I propose that in this play, in this place, symbolic blood is the liquid that offers flood-prone Cestrians the promise of a good death regardless of which religious doctrine suits current tastes.265

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263 In Cohen, ‘Drown’, in Veer Ecology: A Companion for Environmental Thinking, ed. by Coehn and Lowell Duckert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2017), pp. 246-67. Cohen notes how this section of the Chester play situates Noah and his family as the first carnivores, and that blood and flesh referred to here was commonly understood to prefigure Christ’s ultimate sacrifice and his eventual resurrection (pp. 254-5). While this may be true, I go on to explore the significance of blood in relation to the wine that Mrs Noah and her good gossips go on to drink.


265 In addition to Coletti’s remarks upon the mobility of religious significance in the Chester cycle, in Thomas K. Lerud, ‘Negotiating the Reformation in the Northwest: The Reinvention of the Chester Cycle’, Reformaion, 8:1 (2003), 1-39, Lerud also remarks how the Chester cycle, even after the changes wrought upon it after the influence of the Reformation, represents a movement ‘towards mutual accommodation rather than hostility’, (p. 7). Lerud also notes that, even after the Chester plays had been moved to Whitsuntide (the central holiday of the Protestant calendar), there was a time when ‘a procession—complete with the traditional carrying of the Blessed Sacrament—and play still existed for Corpus Christi’, thus concomitantly preserving the Catholic auspices of the Corpus Christi holiday (p. 11). See also Clopper, Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) where Clopper recognizes revisions made to the Chester cycle to accommodate Protestant practices, pp. 268-94.
This holy blood that offers hope from a holy Flood comes from a further consideration of fluidity suited to a Cestrian audience’s familiarity with female saints – that of gender. In keeping with Chester’s female-gendered status, my reading of this Flood play sees Mrs. Noah as a Christ figure who offers salvation to her sisterhood as they prepare to die a good death. Nicole Nolan Sidhu considers feminist interpretations of the character of Noah’s wife which, she argues, rely on static appropriations of a misogynistic tradition, pointing out that these traditions do not necessarily perform an identical function in every cultural iteration. Many factors can alter misogynistic interpretations of a character, and Sidhu highlights the possibilities for the unruly figure to act as a medium ‘through whom authors can articulate ideas that would otherwise be taboo ... [or] to air risky ideas in safety’. The ‘unruly’ figure of Mrs. Noah has received much critical attention; Katie Normington posits that in the drinking scene, Mrs. Noah’s character ‘is significantly undermined by the debauchery of her drinking and gossiping’, and Fitzgerald singles her out as ‘the one disruptive force that threatens the harmony of Noah’s fantasy guild-family’. Rice and Pappano offer a more positive appraisal, noting that she does participate, at least on some level, in constructing the ark, and it is she who subsequently is willing to sacrifice herself for others. They argue that by depicting the gossips drinking malmsey wine, the dramatist aligns them with wealthier audience members, and their drinking does ‘not signify debauchery but may evoke the ceremonial drinking or the drinking in fellowship that

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267 Ibid., p. 218.
269 Rice and Pappano, *The Civic Cycles*, pp. 174-81. In fact, it is Mrs. Noah who is the first female to offer physical help, and the other female characters follow her example.
accompanied every civic or occupational event in town’. This does indeed conform to a merchant-orientated play text but, given Coletti’s point regarding the cycle’s complex negotiation of religious differences in Chester, and the aforementioned sanctity of this space to a diverse audience, I suggest that the ceremonial drinking happening in this episode admits the possibility of a specific kind of Holy Communion delivered by Mrs. Noah to her gossips that could be recognized particularly at feminized play stations.

Much of this depends on an understanding of what the term ‘gossip’ signified throughout the longevity of the cycle’s production. The word derives from god-sib(be), and its primary meaning has religious significance as it referred to ‘one’s sponsor at a baptism or confirmation, a god parent’ rather than merely a friend or companion. The examples given for this usage in the MED extend into the sixteenth century, and an occasion for the word’s meaning as ‘god parent’ arises in the Towneley Secunda Pastorum when the third shepherd wonders how god parents were found so quickly: ‘Bot who was his gossypys so sone rede?’ (l. 559). Given the later date of compilation currently ascribed to the Towneley manuscript, and the later date for this version of the Chester play of the Flood, it seems likely that even a later audience would have been familiar with the religious implications of the word ‘gossip’. As Susan E. Phillips explains, ‘In Middle English, “gossip” refers not to speech but to a pastoral office, connoting not triviality but spiritual responsibility. A gossip was a godparent, a baptismal sponsor bound in spiritual kinship to both the godchild and its parents’. This close relationship suggests a spiritual

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270 Ibid., p. 182.
271 s. v. ‘god-sib(be) (n. 1)’, MED Online [accessed 22 September 2020].
273 Susan E. Phillips, Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p. 6. Rice and Pappano discount the relevance of this understanding of the word gossip, as they argue that ‘at this point “gossip” still carried the primary meaning of a “familiar acquaintance”’, p. 181. However, given the longevity of the cycle’s production, it is unclear to which point in time
sorority between Mrs Noah and her gossips, and would account for her apparent eagerness to
save their lives and permit them on board the ark, as her words to Noah seem to imply when she
delays her own boarding:

But I have my gossips everyechone,
one foote further I will not gone.
They shall not drowne, by sayncte John,
and I may save there life.
The loved me full well, by Christe.
But thou wilte lett them into thy chiste,
ellis Rowe forthe, Noe, when thy liste
and gett thee a newe wyfe. (ll. 201-8)

On one level, Noah’s wife clearly articulates her claims (or hopes) that her gossips will not
drown, she will save their lives, and Noah will let them onto the ark or else he can find himself a
new wife. Yet Noah’s wife’s language here reveals another, more spiritual level of meaning
which adds complexity to her apparently straightforward claims. Most scholars agree, either
directly in their translations or indirectly in their interpretations of this passage that the chiste
Mrs Noah references here relates directly to the ark which she wants her gossips to be allowed to
board.\textsuperscript{274} Yet this is the only time in the play where the word \textit{chiste} is used to apparently refer to
the ark.

With the exceptions of Noah’s boat/\textit{boote} wordplay (l. 245), and his reference to ‘this
vessell’ (l. 97), each time God, Noah, the narrator, Japhet and his wife refer directly to the ark,

\textsuperscript{274} See, for example, Besserman’s own translation of \textit{chiste} used here as ark in ‘Lay Piety and Impiety’, in \textit{Enacting
the Bible}, ed. by Goodblatt and von Contzen, (p. 20), and Normington, \textit{Gender and Medieval Drama}, and
Fitzgerald, ‘Manning the Ark in York and Chester’, where both work unquestioningly throughout on the assumption
that Mrs. Noah only means ark here when she says \textit{chiste}.
they all use a form of either shippe or ark. They are preceded by an impersonal ‘the’, giving the shippe, or the ark, rather than the personal ‘thy chiste’ (l. 206) used here by Noah’s wife. In addition to meaning the ark, chiste can also refer to a person’s chest, or heart, as the repository of the soul. On a spiritual level, what Noah’s wife is calling for here is that Noah open up his heart, or soul, to her gossips – that Noah let them ‘into [his] chiste’ (l. 206), into his heart, so that they shall not drown where, in addition to recalling the physical act of drowning, ‘drowne’ (l. 203) can also convey the spiritual sense of plunging into damnation. Given, as Besserman notes, that Noah foreshadows Christ in plays of the Flood, it is surely more than coincidental that this spiritual understanding of chiste as heart or soul comes in the line directly after Mrs Noah’s invocation of ‘Christe’ (l. 205). Linking thematically Christ and the half-rhyming chiste, Noah’s wife is making an anachronistic, yet heartfelt, plea to Christ (here in the form of the blissfully unaware Noah) to save her gossips’ souls as they face inevitable drowning – hence her subsequent (and again anachronistic) appeal to ‘sayntcte John’ (l. 203), a saint whose importance in the Middle Ages was, according to Richard Marks, in the transition from life to death. Noah’s wife is disruptive, and she does, at least for the time being, refuse Noah’s request to board the ark, but she is also keen to ensure her spiritual sisters are taken into Christ’s heart as they are about to die. These juxtaposing parts played by Noah’s wife thus conform to the Eva/Ave, or Eve/Mary, dichotomy commonly found in medieval literature, and explains how Noah’s wife is capable of polarizing critical opinion. Although the subsequent

275 For God see ll. 19, 114, 130; for Noah see ll. 51, 82, 96, 150, 156; For Japhet see l. 241; for Japhet’s wife see l. 192. The examples for the narrator occur in the introduction, and in the brief expositions between ll. 80-1, 112-3, 160-1, and 260-1. There is one alternative allusion to the ark as howse (l. 177) by Cam’s wife, necessitated by the demands of the rhyme scheme of this section where howse simply rhymes with crowse and mowse (ll. 178-9).

276 s. v. ‘chest(e) (n. 3)’, MED Online [accessed 19 March 2021].

277 s. v. ‘drounen (v.1c)’, MED Online [accessed 19 March 2021].


279 On the Eva/Ave tradition see, for example, John Flood, Representations of Eve in Antiquity and the English Middle Ages (New York: Routledge, 2011).
‘drinking episode’ does, on one level, figure Mrs Noah disobeying her husband to join her gossips for one last drink and a song (in the Eva tradition), I situate her along the Ave or Mary tradition, where she joins her gossips in one last act of communion in order, in the tradition of the *artes moriendi*, for them to die a good death.  

As the time of their death by drowning approaches, Noah’s wife, who is also a mother, joins her spiritual sisters. Yet curiously, if indeed it was her intention, she makes no mention of the possibility of them boarding the ark, and the gossips make no such plea. Rather, Noah’s wife appears to have come equipped with enough wine for them perhaps to drown their sorrows, or at least to allay their very real fears which the opening of the full ‘drinking episode’ alludes to:

The fludd comes fleetinge in full faste,  
one everye side that spredeth full farre.  
For fere of drowninge I am agaste;  
good gossippe, lett us drawe nere.  
And let us drinke or wee departe,  
for oftetymes wee have done soe.  
For at one draught thou drinke a quarte,  
and soe will I doe or I goe.  
Here is a pottell full of malnesaye good and stronge;  
yt will rejoyse both hart and tonge.  
Though Noe thinke us never soe longe,  
yett wee wyll drinke atyte. (ll. 225-36)  

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280 On the medieval tradition of the *artes moriendi* which pointed the way to a good death, see Thomas M. Izbicki, *The Eucharist in Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 178-220, and Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 301-31. On Mrs Noah and the Eva/Ave tradition, see also Besserman, in ‘Lay Piety and Impiety’, in *Enacting the Bible*, ed. by Goodblatt and von Contzen, who notes that ‘Uxor Noe [is] both a reprise of Eve, the mother of all living things, and a forerunner of Mary, the Queen of Heaven and source of grace and salvation for all who seek it’ (p. 23).

281 As many critics have noted, due to an annotation in one of the manuscripts of the Chester cycle there is the suggestion that the lines quoted here represent ‘The Goode Gossipes Songe’, or that this note alludes to a song not included in the manuscript. Yet as Rice and Pappano note in *The Civic Cycles*, there is no concrete evidence that the women join together in song and, even if they do, the song (judging by the dire circumstances outlined in its opening content) could very well be a lament, p. 181. Indeed, the manuscript annotation might well refer to something akin to what Duffy terms, in *The Stripping of the Altars*, as ‘the vernacular rhymes used by the laity at the Elevation of the Host’ which were often concerned with securing grace in the hour of death, p. 341.
The opening line of this episode injects an element of urgency to the proceedings, as one of the gossips remarks that the Flood is rushing in, on every side, ‘full faste’ (l. 225) and, recalling Noah’s wife’s earlier use of the dual meaning of drowne, the gossip also relates her ‘fere of drowning’ (l. 227). Again, while the gossip appears to refer here to her understandable fear of drowning, the notion of her fear of plunging into damnation for dying without receiving communion, or giving her last confession, can also be inferred from the word drowning. Dying a sudden death (as she also seems to fear here given the speed of the Flood) was, according to Eamon Duffy, universally dreaded in the medieval period as it denied a person the chance to confess their sins, condemning the unfortunate soul to dying in sin.\(^{282}\) Immediately following the gossip’s admission of their fears, a collective call invites them to ‘lett us drinke or wee departe, | for oftetymes wee have done soe’ (ll. 229-30). Here, depart can refer to their imminent death as much as their departure from the play, and the subsequent admission that they have often joined together to drink implies that they have often partaken communally in, specifically, ‘malnesaye’ (l. 233), malmsey wine.\(^{283}\) This is an important detail because, according to Matthew Milner, the wine used during the late medieval period for that most fundamental, religious, collective drinking ceremony of Holy Communion ‘was usually claret, or malmsey’.\(^{284}\) This particular wine


\(^{283}\) See Norman Simms, ‘Mrs Noah’s Secret: A Psychohistorical Reading of the Chester Cycle Third Pageant’, *Parergon*, 14:2 (1997), 15-28, where Simms also notes the detail of the malmsey wine, and its links to communion wine as an affirmation of faith. Simms too identifies Mrs Noah as ‘a container for guilt and an icon of saintliness’, (p. 16). Where I differ from Simms is in my suggestion that Noah’s wife never intended for her good gossips to board the ark – she makes no secret of her mission to save their souls with the drinking of communion wine – her intentions are registered in the double meanings of her language. I also suggest that an audience’s understanding of the two versions of Mrs Noah, saint and/or sinner, might have been influenced by where, in Chester, an audience viewed the play.

‘will rejoyse both harte and tonge’ (l. 234), where a spiritual understanding of the word *rejoyse* meaning to exult, or to take pride in martyrdom, or to rejoice in the divine presence, could indicate that Noah’s wife joins her gossips to take communion in order that they might take God to their hearts, via their tongues, as the gossips prepare for death.\(^\text{285}\) As Milner notes, during the early reformation, the communion ritual was altered rather than banned, but touch was still the fulcrum of traditional sacramentality and as such, ‘touches had to be visually witnessed’.\(^\text{286}\) Allowing Noah’s wife and her gossips to dramatize drinking communion malmsey must have involved these (transvestite) female characters touching the vessel containing the host – a gendered touch ordinarily forbidden via patriarchal religious privilege, yet one suited to an audience situated in a city of feminine sanctity.\(^\text{287}\) 

On a figurative, spiritual level, Mrs Noah and her gossips’ drinking recalls the many examples given by Caroline Walker Bynum of medieval spiritual women who, after drinking communion wine, described themselves as intoxicated, or inebriated with holy wine, and thus spiritually restored by the figurative blood of Christ.\(^\text{288}\) Reading Mrs Noah as delivering, even for their Easter celebrations – presumably the bread and malmsey wine specifically for the Easter communion. See J. P. Collyer, ‘Original Papers: St. Margaret’s Southwark’, in *The British Magazine and Monthly Register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Information*, 32 (1847), 481-650 (p. 638). Text available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=chi.79237495&view=1up&seq=646&skin=2021&q1=Malvesyn> [accessed 03 March 2021].

\(^\text{285}\) s. v. ‘rejoisen (v.)’, *MED* Online [accessed 19\(^\text{th}\) January 2018].


\(^\text{287}\) See Twycross, “‘Transvestism’” in the Mystery Plays’, *Medieval English Theatre*, 5:2 (1983), 123-80, repr. in Twycross, *The Materials of Early English Theatre*, ed. by Carpenter and King, pp. 185-236, where Twycross presents archival evidence to show that it was the norm for men to play the roles of female characters in English mystery plays. In *Indecent Exposure*, Sidhu makes a similar point, emphasizing the fact that male actors often borrowed the clothes of real women – a point that, for Sidhu, underlines how medieval transvestite theatre exposes ‘not sexual difference but sexual sameness’, p. 208. The impossibility of knowing whether an individual medieval audience member recognized the female character, or the male actor in female character, or both, shores up my argument here – the choice is available for the individual to decide and attach whichever interpretation seems most pertinent to them.

\(^\text{288}\) Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, 2\(^\text{nd}\) edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Throughout this book, Bynum cites numerous medieval examples of women such as Catherine of Genoa, Angela of Foligno, and Catherine of Siena, who described themselves as inebriated with sweetness from communion wine, or intoxicated by holy wine.
handling, the communion wine, raises the potentially alarming, even blasphemous, possibility of interpreting her as a female priest. Yet, as Bynum makes clear, such a reading suggesting a ‘startling reversal’, might not be as unexpected as one might assume:

Medieval worshippers knew that women were barred from clerical orders and from places near the altar where God was handled; they knew that one justification for such prohibition was the gender of the human body born of Mary. Increasingly from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, they saw woman as quintessential recipient, man as quintessential celebrant, maker and controller of the body of God. Yet they occasionally saw the New Testament account of the Presentation in the Temple as a moment at which Mary—the vessel that bore God’s body—was priest.289

Bynum’s point, that a medieval audience could be receptive to a female priest, thus moves the ‘drinking episode’ towards a more spiritual understanding, where the admission of excessive drinking can be read figuratively in terms of a shared medieval female spirituality, or as a confession of sin—a last confession made to Mrs Noah-as-priest as the good gossips prepare to meet their death.

As part of a last rites ceremony, consumption of the body and blood of Christ foreshadows not just eternity, but also ultimately resurrection, as the gospel of St John promises when Jesus says: ‘He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day’ (John 6. 55).290 Noah’s wife’s insistence that she delays boarding the ark until she has shared a final communion with her gossips brings them the taste and promise of

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289 Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 278. As Bynum makes clear, an equal but opposite reversal takes place in the mass when ‘priest and God are symbolically woman (although they are other things as well)—woman as food preparer, woman as food’, Ibid.
290 This gospel surely has unique significance to this play in this place given the sanctity of the church of St John the Baptist in Chester (especially to the Welsh) and the two references to St John within the play (ll. 112 and 203), both of which centre around the figure of Noah’s wife. These references to St John can also act as a shout-out to, or an acknowledgement of, the Welsh presence in the audience.
salvation, or even resurrection, rather than mere destruction. For a local audience, viewing the play alongside the banks of the river Dee, which occasionally brought the threat of real death via real flooding, this play offers hope for their futures in the present, and an account of the biblical past that explains how their souls will ultimately be saved. As Sheila Christie puts it, ‘details in the play which may initially seem to be anachronistic actually serve to construct extra-scriptural, locally situated narratives which would have been coherent for contemporary audiences’. Drinking the malmsey wine completes the traditional Catholic last rites ritual of the viaticum, and appeals to those audience members whose religious tastes still hankered for more than just an interpretation of the real presence – they could imaginatively partake in the drinking of the Host and, during the Corpus Christi procession, they could figuratively take in the body of Christ. For those of a Protestant persuasion, they could just as easily partake by figuring these dramatic presentations as just that – a legitimate interpretation of the real presence. Either

291 Equally, drinking this communion wine also necessitates raising the glass, thereby possibly alluding to the Elevation of the Host.  
293 See Ibicki, The Eucharist in Medieval Canon Law, where Ibicki remarks that during the later Middle Ages viaticum entailed an ordered three-fold ritual consisting of penance, anointing, and then receiving the actual viaticum which was carried in a procession to the dying. There exists the possibility that the work performed by the women to build the ark, not a traditional presentation of women’s work, represents penance; the anointing figures as they prepare to ‘Annoynte’ (l. 75) the ark, and the drinking of the malmsey completes the three-part ritual. Izbicki further notes that later English reforms took these rites very seriously, and ‘eventually even the processions were suppressed’ as the more traditional Catholics believed that even the sight of the host carried throughout the streets could signify that ‘they were in the very presence of the divinity’, p. 214. The later prayer book and reforms of 1552 delivered much harsher restrictions upon traditional Catholic rituals. See also Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars, pp. 466-77, where Duffy registers the huge gulf between the prayer books of 1549 and 1552, particularly with regard to the rites of the dead. The sacrament could no longer be carried through the streets as the procession was banned, and the late medieval sense of community that was traditionally attached to funerals, where the living and the dead were not separated but bound by ‘affection, duty, and blood’ came under increasing attack, p. 475.  
294 See Paul Whitfield White, ‘The Chester Cycle and Early Elizabethan Religion’, in The Chester Cycle in Context, ed. by Dell, Klausner, and Ostovich, pp. 111-35. Throughout this chapter White urges for the consideration of a degree of religious tolerance and fluidity during early Elizabethan reform, especially in Chester, and points out that the 1549 prayer book contained important concessions, one of which was to allow for an interpretation of the real presence, though subsequent reforms were much more radical.
way, in this city-as-ark, both the lives of those who survived the flood, and the souls of those who did not, are spiritually joined.

It should, perhaps, come as no surprise that Noah’s wife is a potential saviour figure as Japhet closes his appeal urging his mother to board the ark with the words ‘for his love that [you] bought’ (l. 240). This phrase runs repeatedly throughout the York cycle where it is voiced by Jesus and, according to Besserman, it is a formulaic phrase which occurs often throughout the devotional literature of medieval England.\footnote{Besserman, ‘Lay Piety and Impiety’, in Enacting the Bible, ed. by Goodblatt and von Contzen, (p. 22).} Equally, immediately preceding the drinking episode Noah invokes ‘Chrystes blessinge’ (l. 222), and immediately afterwards he calls his wife ‘marye’ (l. 247). Yet Noah remains unaware of the importance of his wife, a point which makes God’s parting address to him as ‘servante deare’ (l. 326), and finally as ‘my darling dere’ (l. 328), sound rather empty and somewhat ironic. In contrast, Noah’s wife and her daughters know their place, and the gossips know where their place is not. Despite their fears, they neither weep nor beg to board the ark – they appear to know that they were never meant to be on the ark.\footnote{It seems that the first gossip to express her fears is calmed by the interjection of another voice when the first-person voice changes to ‘good gossippe, lett us drawe nere’ (l. 228), and the tone becomes more tranquil and resolute. The subsequent mention of ‘Noe’ (l. 235) points to the suggestion that this is now Noah’s wife speaking, as she moves the pronouns from the first person ‘I’ to the collective ‘us’ and ‘we’, indicative of the sense of community and communion that she delivers.} As they receive communion, or viaticum, they ensure their spiritual afterlives, and their relatively calm (or at least non-hysterical) acceptance of their fate makes sound religious sense in this environment. They know they are about to die and, in the tradition of the artes moriendi, they can now die well – something that corresponds to Duffy’s point that, with regard to medieval
piety, this idea was neither nihilistic nor straightforwardly pessimistic.\textsuperscript{297} Part of living a good Christian life was to ensure one died a good death, which Noah’s wife allows her gossips to do.

A positive reading of female agency in this play may be connected to the fact that it came under the sponsorship of the Waterleaders and Drawers of Dee. As Rice and Pappano have discovered, ‘civic murager accounts reveal frequent payments to women for “carrying of sande & water”’, and documentation exists to show that women were employed as water-drawers.\textsuperscript{298} Furthermore, ‘[t]he Waterleaders’ company is unusual among Chester guilds in having a relatively large number of women enrolled as members’.\textsuperscript{299} Women also apparently favoured specific places in Chester from which to watch the plays, and Barrett highlights the case of Anne Webster, the widow of Chester mayor John Webster, who wanted to retain the right to rent the same ‘rowme, or place for the Whydson plaies in Brudg-gate strete’ in 1568 as she had done on two previous occasions, (most likely the 1561 and 1567 performances).\textsuperscript{300} Barrett suggests that this sustained spectatorship on Anne Webster’s behalf also shows that places to watch the plays in Chester, official ones or not, were gendered spaces.\textsuperscript{301} It may indeed be the case, as Barrett also notes, that ‘spaces inflect performance even as performance shapes them in turn’; thus the significance of individual plays alters when they are performed at different places.\textsuperscript{302} Bridgegate Street and Watergate Street did appear to attract females in medieval Chester.\textsuperscript{303} If, as Barrett argues, stations such as Abbey Gate were male-oriented performance sites, then according to

\textsuperscript{297} Duffy, \textit{The Stripping of the Altars}, p. 305. As Duffy further explains, the medieval preoccupation with dying a good death ‘was seen as a means of prolonging the presence of the dead within the community of the living, and therefore as the most eloquent of testimonies to the permanent value of life in the world of time and change’, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{298} Rice and Pappano, \textit{The Civic Cycles}, p. 177.
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{300} Repr. in Barrett, \textit{Against All England}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., p. 78.
\textsuperscript{302} Barrett, \textit{Against All England}, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{303} On this, see Laughton, \textit{Life in a Late Medieval City}, p. 160.
Anne Webster’s repeated particular preference, Bridgegate Street seems to have attracted female audience members.\(^{304}\) When performed at a male-oriented site, this play could have generated a more negative response to the character of Noah’s wife. When performed at a female-oriented site, a more positive appraisal might have ensued. McGavin and Walker have recently called for ‘an approach to reception dynamics that will pay much closer attention to the individual spectator, and to the range of possible variations of impact and response within any given audience that a particular scene or action might provoke’.\(^{305}\) While the Chester plays as a whole do seem to speak to and of a patriarchal, mercantile elite, this play’s Mrs. Noah and her good gossips, her ‘flocke’ (l.71), or spiritual sisters raise the possibility of gender-fluid religious agency and human compassion, perhaps especially when performed in feminized places and witnessed by women. As a play performed by transvestite actors, in the hybrid environment of medieval Chester, perhaps the character of Mrs. Noah was always capable of polarizing critical opinion.\(^{306}\) In this place of (possibly) gendered places to see and hear the plays, performed throughout the long medieval negotiations of both religious reform and conservatism, perhaps the appeal to polarity was entirely the point.

\(^{304}\) Barrett, *Against All England*, p. 77, where Barrett also claims the High Cross as a ‘male-identified site’. Of course there could be crossovers and intrusions into any site, but Barrett recalls the language of the 1533 and 1556 ordinances of Chester’s corn market, situated in the space outside Abbey Gate, to argue that the distinction made there ‘between person as male citizen and wife as female subordinate establishes the degree to which the corn market was ideologically marked as a male space’, ibid. Barrett goes on to suggest ‘the explicit targeting of the first-station performance toward the all-male audience of the clergy, monastic or otherwise, and for the second station’s orientation toward the city fathers, the elite among Chester’s overwhelmingly male franchise’, pp. 77-8.

\(^{305}\) McGavin and Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship*, p. 18.

\(^{306}\) Not only can Mrs. Noah seem both ‘unruly’ and holy, the drinking episode can also be read in conjunction with the marking of some play sites as masculine spaces to render this episode an example of the affirmation of a fraternal bond through drinking. See Mary Wack, ‘Woman, Work, and Plays in an English Medieval Town’, in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 33-51, where Wack suggests exactly this with regard to the episode’s relevance to the Pentice, another site associated particularly with masculinity (p. 39).
In medieval feminized Chester there was a way to have a ‘good’ flood, with holy blood and holy water – with a gender that better fits the biblical brief of this ‘holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’ (Revelations 21. 2). The mobility and possibilities of meanings attached to the Flood pageant in medieval Chester may indeed have been as skittering and changeable as the river Dee but, as this section has shown, it can, like the same episode in the York and Towneley versions, offer hope to audiences both medieval and modern in exploring, and illustrating resilience to, a shared environmental vulnerability. York offers the promise of civic survival and renewal; Towneley the possibility of escaping a flood; and Chester the consolation of spiritual salvation. Where these stories meet, despite their local and regional differences, is on the common ground of creatively re-working Flood narratives replete with particularly local networks that reveal locally situated, and therefore locally significant and distinct shifts in focus. As each drama revivifies the biblical narrative on its local ‘stage’, memories of historic flooding combine with that narrative to commemorate lives lost to very real floods in each locality. Each locality’s historic and current meteorological vulnerability demonstrates the trans-temporal, asynchronic urgency of the duty of care we have to our planet in the impending climate disaster within which we find ourselves, but each dramatic re-working of the Flood narrative also offers at least a glimpse of hope for future resilience in our present moment.

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307 On the ‘skittering sands of the Dee’, see Laughton, Life in a Late Medieval City, p. 173.
308 See also, particularly with reference to the Chester flood pageant, Cohen, ‘Anarky’, in Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times, ed. by Tobias Menley and Jesse Oak Taylor (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), pp. 25-42, where Cohen interjects his prose with amplifications of Noah’s wife’s voice in the Chester play, though for Cohen, Noah’s wife remains a ‘boozey’ gossip who ‘chooses her drinking companions over immurement in the family ship’, (p. 36).
Volume II of III: ‘Colliergate’

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Coal for Cabbages in *Mactatio Abel*

This volume marks the remainder of the thesis’ concentration on the pastoral plays by the Wakefield Master in the Towneley collection, and focuses on the biblical story of the killing of Abel presented in *Mactatio Abel.*

Whereas the previous volume explored the influence of local flooding and topography in relation to particularly local adaptations of Noah’s Flood plays, this volume examines how a locally available element in medieval West Yorkshire, namely coal, has a previously unrecognized vibrancy in *Mactatio Abel.*

Eating coal, even if only figuratively, accounts for why Garcio refers early in the drama to his ‘blak hoill bore’ – his black anus. The agency of this local geological feature acts upon García’s body and soul, thus revealing the somatic and spiritual ecomateriality of coal in *Mactatio Abel.* Considering García a more complex and versatile character than previously assumed, this volume will explore how García’s black anus initially seems to correspond to his ‘dark’ character, how and why García raises the notion of eating coal, and how eating coal corresponds to the purging of sin and signifies the potential for salvation available to all, even avowed sinners, under the umbrella of universal

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310 Coal could be encountered incidentally in the medieval manor of Wakefield, and was a common feature of the landscape, as John Leland’s mid-sixteenth century itinerary proves with the remark that ‘there be plenty of veines of se cole in the quarters about Wakefield’, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543*, ed. by Lucy Toumlin, available at: <http://archive.org/details/itineraryofjohn101lelaup> [accessed 18 August 2017], p. 42. Sea coal has a long history, and while earlier mentions of this substance appear to refer to what we now know as jet, examples ranging from the thirteenth century onwards appear to be referring coal deposits ‘in the ordinary modern sense’. See s. v. ‘sea-coal’, *OED Online* [accessed 06 January 2019]; s. v. ‘se (n. 1b)’, *MED Online* [accessed 06 January 2019].

311 Cawley’s glossary in *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle* suggests that ‘hoill’ (l. 7) here means ‘hollow’, and that ‘bore’ (l. 7) connotes ‘hole’. It makes little sense to suggest that García is speaking of his black hollow hole; see s. v. ‘hol(e) (n. 2)’ for hole referring specifically to an external bodily orifice or hole such as the anus; see also s. v. ‘bore (n. 1)’, for bore meaning specifically anus hole (this seems to produce a tautology – thus see s. v. ‘bar (adj.)’ where bore could be a dialect version of the adjective ‘naked’, implying that García is referring to his black, bare anus, though this dialect spelling is not listed in the *MED*. All *MED Online* [accessed 28 October 2020]. It is only towards the close of the play that García alludes to eating coal, and the chronology of this allusion is important to an understanding of why and when he makes this reference. Thus while this section discusses García’s black hole in relation to eating coal, the actual moment where this allusion appears is held back for discussion in order to place it in its necessary context.
Christianity. In doing so, the volume offers a re-interpretation of the ‘comic’ exchange between Garcio and Cain that comes near the end of Mactatio Abel to demonstrate that the two characters are conversing on entirely different levels, both physically and spiritually. Ultimately, Garcio’s admission that he needs to consume more coal casts the geological environment of the medieval manor of Wakefield as the potential source of elemental salvation, thus troubling the well-documented history of coal as a singularly polluting element synonymous with filth and disease. This local holy ground has the purgative, restorative qualities necessary to rehabilitate Garcio whose eventual recourse to orthodox Christian symbolism re-models him as an Everyman character with whom a local, rural, peasant population could identify. Reading Mactatio Abel as a drama that corresponds to late medieval debates on the human body’s imbrication with the natural world to promote ideas of reconciliation and spiritual reformation, this volume argues for Mactatio Abel to be considered as a local effort that, at its close, offers what Sara Ritchey describes as ‘the promise of matter’s ultimate and eternal redemption’.

Eating coal thus corresponds to Stacey Alaimo’s notion of ‘trans-corporeality’ in Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010) where humans are ‘the very stuff of the material world’, p. 20. Although Alaimo’s focus is a modern one, her ideas correspond to my suggestions on coal, Garcio, and the ‘interconnectedness’ of humans and their material environment. See also Jane Bennett, Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), where the material agency of coal that I suggest also corresponds to Bennett’s ‘vital materialism’ that has activity, force, energy and agency, p. 38. Coal’s agency upon Garcio also recalls the interconnectedness, or mesh, used by Timothy Morton in The Ecological Thought (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010) to draw attention to the web of associations connecting humans and environments, echoing Morton’s coining of the term ‘dark ecology’ where Morton suggests that dark ecology can restore thoughtfulness back into ecological thinking, p. 16, italics in original.

Coal had long been considered as a source of disease, filth, and illness and as a derogatory marker of racial alterity, societal dysfunction, and low status by the late medieval period. See Elizabeth S. Leet, ‘Comorbid Coal: Fyld and Desaise from Thirteenth-Century England to contemporary Appalachia’, postmedieval, 10:2 (2019), 250-65 where Leet discusses how coal’s transhistorical ecomateriality brings it into conversation with racial difference and notions of embodied ecological otherness co-morbid with filth and disease. While Leet recognizes how coal ‘forces morality and amity into conversation with racial difference’ amongst, in this instance, American coal miners, it is for Leet a friendship based upon ‘a fraternity of filth’ (pp. 255-6).

Sara Ritchey, Changing Perspectives of the Material World in Late Medieval Christianity (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 3. Ritchey emphasizes how late-medieval attempts to combine the material and spiritual worlds expressed a concern specifically for the local. On this, see also Essays On The Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ed. by Lisa Kiser and Barbara Hanawalt (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008); Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington: Oliphant Books, 2012); Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe, ed. by John Howe and Michael
Mactatio Abel elicit a sacred reading of the immediate material world in order to expose how, in conjunction with the coal of their local environment, people can be spiritually re-generated.

**Ecomaterialism and Ethics in Mactatio Abel**

Where scholars have previously read allusions to both Cain and Garcio eating ‘coyle’ (l. 426) as relating to some form of cabbage soup, I propose the Yorkshire dialect that runs throughout the Wakefield plays can suggest that Garcio is alluding to the consumption of coal. The notion of eating coal makes particular sense in the coal-rich environment of medieval, rural West Yorkshire, and coal functions here as an ecosemiotic marker of that environment. For a brief explanation of this (modern) phenomenon, see [accessed 02 May 2021]. It is perhaps merely a fortunate coincidence, though equally perhaps a salient one, that the National Coal Mining Museum for England is located in Wakefield, in modern West Yorkshire, and directions for travel there take you through the village of Horbury, a village mentioned in Secunda Pastorum. See [accessed 03 May 2021]. Following the particular agency of coal in Mactatio Abel allows me to trace new associations, associations that, as Bruno Latour notes in Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network –Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) mean that we ‘become sensitive again to some very odd types of assemblages’, instead of sticking resolutely ‘to the repertoire of already accepted social members’, p. 248. Latour’s work informs this volume as it explains how the connections and interactions made with coal depend upon an understanding of the workings of particular networks within particular environments; local dialect peculiarities read coylle to mean coal and allow the agency of coal to ‘unfold [its] own differing cosmos’, p. 23. As I note later, however, Latour limits the political and ethical aims for these connections and assemblages.

Coal and coal mining have a long history in Yorkshire and its surrounding areas. See John Hatcher, The History of the British Coal Industry, Volume 1, Before 1700: Towards the Age of Coal (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), where Hatcher traces the history of coal-mining in Yorkshire from the Roman period onwards, noting that religious houses were prolific producers, consumers, and traders in coal and charcoal, and despite coal’s noxious smells and dirty residue, it was much cheaper than burning wood (which, from the mid-fifteenth century on was increasingly scarce), thus the poor were notable consumers of coal, pp. 413-9. Monk Bretton Priory, a Benedictine house in what is now South Yorkshire, worked local coal and iron from the twelfth century onwards, and the brothers here were referred to locally as the black monks not simply on account of their black attire, but because of their association with coal. Information available at: [accessed 30 December 2018]. This is the same Priory referred to in the discussion of the medieval lease, at n. 127. Rievaulx, a Cistercian abbey in what is now North Yorkshire, was so successful that by 1545 enough iron ore was being smelted to keep four furnaces busy, and they continued until local supplies of charcoal and timber were exhausted. On this, see [accessed 30 December 2018].
Mactatio Abel, the notion of eating coal exposes the play as a medieval eco-drama where the local geological environment is a crucial, transformative participant in García’s eventual turn towards spiritual rehabilitation. Figuratively speaking, in a coal-rich area where the thick, black residue of coal lingered in the air, it was commonplace in the recent past to hear people say that they felt as though they had been eating coal. Growing up in just such an area, I remember hearing this, and also recall people eating coal to ease indigestion. In earlier periods, especially in poorer areas where houses were not equipped with chimneys to draw out the coal smoke, bodily absorption of carboniferous dust would have been inevitable. Indeed, the adsorptive qualities of coal were well known in the medieval period as Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ immensely popular De Proprietatibus Rerum, translated into English in the fourteenth century by John Trevisa, confirms: ‘[b]y his blakeness cole defouliþ and smyttiþ and infetiþ alle þing þat he touchiþ’. Medieval drama regularly utilized coal to darken the skin and clothes of, for example, bad souls, or devils. Marking those destined for damnation, coal enabled the creation of a visible binary, as the good souls, set for salvation, were white.

317 For the late-medieval manor of Wakefield, the sheer scale of the cloth industry made it a leading consumer of coal, such that the area was known as ‘Wool Coalfield’. Necessary for heating dye-vats, scouring cauldrons, and drying kilns, coal was crucial to the late-medieval boom in the wool industry. On this, see G. D. Newton, ‘Surface Coal Mining and Graving in Leeds, West Yorkshire’, Folk Life Journal of Ethnological Studies, 54:2 (2016), 162-70, (p. 163). On the history of mining throughout Yorkshire see also Robert Lindsay Galloway, A History of Coal Mining in Great Britain (London: Macmillan, 1882, reproduced in 2012).

318 For a first-hand account of sucking coal as an aid to indigestion, see <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n17/florence-sutcliffe-braithwaite/tesco-and-a-motorway> [accessed 30 October 2021].


320 Text from Stephen Batman’s revised edition of John Trevisa’s translation of De Proprietatibus Rerum, Batman vppon Bartholome his booke De proprietatibus rerum, newly corrected, enlarged and amended: with such additions as are requisite, vnto every severall booke: taken foorth of the most approved authors, the like heretofore not translated in English. Profitable for all estates, as well for the benefite of the mind as the bodie (London: Thomas East, 1582), available at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A05237.0001.001/1:24?rgn=div1;view=toc> [accessed 10 March 2022]. The conflated spellings and subsequent confusion regarding coal and cole are easily visible in this searchable edition of De Proprietatibus Rerum where the spelling of cole is used interchangeably to signify both coal and the vegetable col. Entering the word cole in a search of the text illustrates both examples amply.

Yet any such binary between black and white souls belies the fact that, in medieval Christianity, a soul had to be both black and white. As Cord J. Whitaker’s *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* shows, black was a necessary metaphor used in the Middle Ages to connote spiritual wholeness, though often conflated with physical blackness to conform to what, in modern terminology, would be considered race-thinking. Thus the first section of this volume supplies some background for the drama, and explores how Garcio’s ‘blak hoill’ (l. 7) toys with the pejorative medieval stereotypes attached to northern, rural peasants that correspond to modern notions of racism, though ultimately this section shows that Garcio’s blackness signifies his early capacity for spiritual degeneration and reform. The second section illustrates the failings and spiritual intractability of both Cain and Abel in contrast to Garcio’s physical and spiritual flexibility in order to account for why *Mactatio Abel* needs the figure of Garcio, and the third section considers Garcio’s blackness in relation to his eventual spiritual regeneration through the eating of coal.

Eating coal thus becomes indicative of the elemental salvation extolled by the perennial medieval favourite Richard Rolle in his fourteenth-century work *Incendium Amoris*. Indeed,
the salvific capacity of the ground has historic counterparts, as these examples from Christian soldiers preparing for battle show:

In 1302, at the Battle of Courtrai, a priest stood before the Flemish peasant army holding the consecrated host in his hand; and each man, kneeling down, took a particle of earth in his mouth, as a sign of his desire, and an acknowledgement of his unworthiness, to receive the sacrament. There followed the astonishing victory of this lower class infantry over the French cavalry. Before the Battle of Agincourt the victorious English troops are reported, upon King Henry V’s command to advance, to have made a similar communion... when the soldiers themselves performed a kind of consecration of the soil, stooping down before it and receiving it directly into their mouths, before running forward shouting into battle.  

Although the first example documents a priest consecrating the earth, both examples demonstrate how consuming sacred earth brought spiritual and physical strength, and ultimately victory, to the peasant armies. In contrast to pejorative stereotypes that cast peasants as wild dirt-eaters, such examples demonstrate how this estate gained spiritual nourishment from the earth beneath their feet. Earth as soul food shows the interconnectedness of humans and environmental matter, emphatically situating an understanding of materialism in the Middle Ages, while also exemplifying a tri-partite connection between the natural world, humans, and faith. In addition

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325 The medieval period is often overlooked in studies of materialism that regularly jump from ancient to Early Modern periods and texts. On this, see Kellie Robertson, ‘Medieval Materialism: A Manifesto’, Exemplaria, 22:2
to participating in just such a triad, Garcio’s blackness reveals (or indeed revels in) the cultural differences between a civic and a rural appreciation of coal. While York depended upon coal to light the fires of the artisans, to line the pockets of the merchants, and to darken its cycle’s bad souls, the poor of rural West Yorkshire, such as Garcio, sought spiritual, rather than solely material, profit in their local coal and understood its full vibrancy and agency as a source of religious purification.  

Admittedly, Garcio’s anus has a lot to answer for in this volume, but the investigation illustrates that Garcio’s blackness, both physical and spiritual, is a black for good in medieval northern, rural England.

**Filling in the Gaps and Leaping to Conclusions**

The scriptural source for the drama, Genesis 4. 1-16, supplies scant detail regarding events which precipitate the world’s first murder.  

While the bible recounts that Cain, the eldest of Adam and Eve’s two sons, is a husbandman, and Abel, the youngest, is a shepherd, when they make their offerings to God (comprising the fruits of the earth from Cain and the first of the flock from Abel), ‘the Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offerings. But to Cain and his offerings he had no respect’ (Genesis 4. 3-4). God’s apparently arbitrary disfavour angers Cain to the extent that he kills Abel – a fratricide given equally sparse detail as the bible reveals only that ‘Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and slew him’ (Genesis 4. 8). The laconic account continues with Cain’s punishment where God curses him to toil on infertile land, and banishes him, but also

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326 I single out York here as the closest major city to the environment of the Towneley plays but, as Richard C. Hoffman points out, all medieval cities operated as colonial centres that had to import environmental resources from beyond their immediate boundaries. See Richard C. Hoffman, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 236. Neither the York nor Chester cycles bear witness to the spiritual, salvific materiality of coal that I argue for in *Mactatio Abel*.

protects him from potential murderers (who would be punished sevenfold by God) by setting a mark upon him so that ‘whosoever found him should not kill him’ (Genesis 4. 15). Following this, Cain apparently thrives and goes on to build the first city until he is accidentally slain by Lamech (Genesis 4. 23-4).

The lacunae evident in the biblical account of Cain and Abel proved fertile ground for subsequent medieval literary responses, both exegetical and secular, that plugged the gaps with surplus material to render more vivid this brief, shockingly violent, Old Testament murder story.328 For example, both Cain and Abel’s offerings change to bundles, or tithes, and the (biblically undefined) weapon used by Cain becomes, most often in England at least, the jawbone of an ass.329 According to Ruth Mellinkoff, the nature of the ambiguous ‘mark’ of Cain was understood by early exegetes, both Christian and Jewish, to fall into one of three possible categories: a mark on Cain’s body; a movement of Cain’s body; or a blemish associated with Cain’s body.330 Occasionally depicted with horns, Cain in medieval English drama becomes associated with demons and devils or, as Clifford Davidson notes, the ‘wild man of medieval and

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328 For an account of the exegetical understandings and questionings of the Cain and Abel story, see John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). On this, see also Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (London: Ashford Colour Press, 2015). There survives a vast amount of artwork and iconography which supplemented the brief biblical account of this episode. For an overview see Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1981), where the focus is obviously on the figure of Cain. For how this iconography relates to English religious drama, see Clifford Davidson, ‘Cain in the Mysteries: The Iconography of Violence’, *Fifteenth Century Studies*, 25 (2000), 204-27, where the focus is also on the figure of Cain. The emphasis on Cain in art and iconography corresponds to Rosemary Woolf’s point in *The English Mystery Plays* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972) that Cain usually receives much more attention from dramatists than Abel – an emphasis which, for Woolf, denotes ‘dramatists’ interest in showing a continuation of the Fall’, p. 124.


Renaissance tradition but also a demonic figure destined for hell’. Tropologically, Abel represented the antithesis of Cain who became the archetypal, unrepentant villain guilty of the most heinous murders, as the example in the early medieval poem *Beowulf* makes clear by establishing a direct ancestry linking the monstrous Grendel to ‘Caines cynne’. Typologically, Abel embodied orthodox Christianity as a priest-figure, or was understood to foreshadow Christ in later medieval Christian commentaries, while Cain represented the Jews who rejected Jesus. Scholars have acknowledged that parts of *Mactatio Abel* are confusing and difficult to read, and this volume will offer new interpretations of those sections of the play to illustrate how they correspond to the debates that sought to fill the gaps and answer the questions that the brief biblical narrative generated. Despite the apparently ‘unorthodox’ notion of eating coal, events in *Mactatio Abel* prove to be much more orthodox than previously acknowledged. In some English medieval religious dramas, a noticeable supplement to the Cain and Abel story comes in the form of an extra-scriptural character. Accordingly, *Mactatio Abel* introduces Cain’s servant, whom Cain refers to interchangeably as boy, or Pikeharnes, whereas the

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331 Davidson, ‘Cain in the Mysteries’, (p. 212). The figure of Cain also became synonymous with physical and spiritual blackness, a point to which I shall return later.


334 On *Mactatio Abel* as puzzling, confusing, and difficult to read, see Edminster, *The Preaching Fox*, p. 54.

335 This point echoes Happé’s remark, in *The Towneley Cycle* that while the plays in which the Wakefield Master had a hand display signs of social subversion, ‘his orthodoxy is not in question and his contributions support the emphasis upon Catholic doctrine’, p. 83.
manuscript consistently marks out the servant boy’s speech with the name ‘Garcio’.\footnote{Similarly, the York cycle’s imperfect Sacrificium Cayme et Abell supplies the character Brewbarret, but there appears no equivalent in the Cain and Abel episode of the Chester cycle’s second play, The Creation of the World. See Sacrificium Cayme et Abell in The York Corpus Christi Plays, ed. by Clifford Davidson, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), pp. 42-6. Unless specified otherwise, all subsequent references to this play are from this edition. The Creation of the World in The Chester Mystery Cycle, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, EETS s. s. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 31-41. For Garcia in the Towneley manuscript, see The Towneley Cycle, A Facsimile of Huntington MS HM I With an Introduction by A. C. Cawley and Martin Stevens (Ilkley: The Scholar Press, 1976), ff. 3r-7r. On what remains of, and the historical additions to, York’s Sacrificium Cayme et Abell, see Richard Beadle, The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play, EETS s. s. 24 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 35-41. The imperfect state of the manuscript and the later additions make any direct comparisons with Mactatio Abel problematic, though there are areas that compel just such comparisons, especially at the beginning and end of Sacrificium Cayme et Abell, where the original text remains.} Garcio is a Latin term often used to denote a male servant and, in English medieval manorial accounts, was used specifically to identify one who had reached the age of twelve.\footnote{On the use of garcio in English manorial accounts, see H. S. A. Fox, ‘Exploitation of the Landless by Lords and Tenants in Early Medieval England’, in Medieval Society and the Manor Court, ed. by Zvi Razi and Richard Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 518-68 where Fox notes that before the age of twelve, the boy-servant would have been registered as a puer and upon reaching the age of twelve the term changed to garcio (p. 521).} Garcio is therefore a threshold character; a boy servant who is on the cusp of manhood and susceptible to the influence of his master, Cain.\footnote{Cain repeatedly refers to Garcio as boy, a term that Garcia also uses of himself: ‘thi boy’ (l. 418). Using boy rather than lad could be a pejorative choice, but it also suggests a youth, or adolescent, rather than a young man. On this, see P. J. P. Goldberg, ‘What was a Servant?’, in Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages, ed. by Anne Curry and Elizabeth Matthew (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000), pp. 1-20. See also Nicole R. Rice and Margaret Aziza Pappano, The Civic Cycles: Artisan Drama and Identity in Premodern England (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), where Rice and Pappano note that servants were often considered easily influenced and dependent upon the example of their master, pp. 148-50.} More than merely symbolic of an underling, or a servant of Cain, Garcio emerges as a pivotal character whose early performance suggests that he is destined to mirror Cain, but whose later, significantly altered, performance presents Garcio’s spiritual transformation as a model for individual introspection.\footnote{Medieval religious drama functioned, on one level, as a didactic medium to promote individual introspection. The audience would have understood that this was part of the ‘game’ in medieval religious drama, where the comic or irreverent (ludus) was accompanied by the moral example (seria). These notions have been in circulation since the publication of V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966).}
In the blustery opening of *Mactatio Abel*, Garcio’s capacity to embody degenerative change becomes immediately apparent as his initially buoyant, amiable address swiftly descends into a combination of threats to, and curses upon, the audience:

> All hayll, all hayll, both blithe and glad,  
> For here com I, a mery lad!  
> Be peasse youre dyn, my master bad,  
> Or els the dwill you spede.  
> Wote ye not I com before?  
> Bot who that ianglis any more,  
> He must blaw my blak hoill bore,  
> Both behynd and before,  
> Till his tethe blede.  
> Felows, here I you forbade  
> To make nother nose ne cry;  
> Whoso is so hardy to do that dede,  
> The dwill hang hym vp to dry! (ll. 1-13)

Given that the main subject matter of the play involves a fratricide, Garcio’s opening audience address, which depicts them as ‘both blithe and glad’ (l. 1), and himself as ‘a mery lad!’ (l. 2), appears incongruous and, for some critics, indicative of Garcio’s role in *Mactatio Abel* as a subversive fool whose invocation prepares an audience for elements of comic role reversals involving violence, parody, and obscenity. Accordingly, Garcio demands silence from the audience, and issues the following crude warning: ‘Bot who that ianglis any more, | He must blaw my blak hoill bore’ (ll. 6-7). Garcio, then, threatens that anyone who continues to talk must blow his bare, black anus. While ostensibly this threat is simply an exaggerated utterance

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341 In the most recent edition of *Mactatio Abel* for the TEAMS Medieval Texts Series, Epp glosses the word ‘hoill’ (l. 7) simply as ‘anus’. Text available at: [https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-killing-of-abel](https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-killing-of-abel) [accessed 28 October 2021]. As scholars such as Edminster in *The Preaching Fox* pp. 58-9 have noted, Garcio’s threat would place a person’s mouth in close proximity to his anus, a common scatological medieval device where sinners (and devils, heretics, etc.) co-located the upper and lower bodily strata which contravened the Christian struggle for
indicative of Garcio’s ebullience, the black anus introduces a chromatic and somatic detail that links Garcio to the pejorative association of blackness with moral degradation, irrationality, sinfulness and folly common in medieval drama.342

Garcio seems intent on invoking the colour black. He could have referred to his blue or brown anus – both alternatives with medieval currency used to describe someone or something dark-skinned, leaden or ash-coloured (as in black and blue), or something dark or dull.343 Each alternative retains the monosyllabic quality of the original line and, arguably (though perhaps not tastefully), a brown hole might more easily connote an anus to an audience – medieval or modern – more readily than a black one. A black anus, however, indicates Garcio’s early association with spiritual degeneration, reflecting the binary present in much medieval English religious drama that figured bad souls as black and good souls as white.344 Bad souls appear in, for example, the Towneley Creation play, when the demonic double of the bad angel describes himself as having grown ‘blak’ as a result of his fall along with Lucifer; or the York cycle’s Doomsday play where the first anima mala bemoans the fate of the sinful who, denied redemption and salvation, are destined to dwell in hell ‘with feendes blake’; similarly the York

bodily (and spiritual) uprightness and separation of the head from the lower body – areas where devils and evil resided. On this, see Martha Bayless, Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: The Devil in the Latrine (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 72-97.

342 On the pejorative associations of blackness in medieval drama and their repercussions in later, and modern, racist stereotyping, see Hornback, ‘The Folly of Racism: Enslaving Blackface and the “Natural” Fool’, Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England, 20 (2007), 46-84. On the specific example cited here from Mactatio Abel, see also Stevens and Paxson, ‘The Fool in the Wakefield Plays’, where they connect the blowing of Garcio’s black anus (and Cain’s later repeated calls for Abel to kiss the devil’s arse) to ‘the ritual particulars of the Black mass’, (p. 69).

343 s. v. ‘bleu (adj.)’; s. v. ‘broun (adj.)’, MED Online [accessed 28 October 2021].

344 In medieval art too there existed a tradition which cast the devil, imps, demons, the damned and their hellmouth destinations as either black or dark-coloured. See Debra Higgs Strickland, Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), where she points out that the medium of stained glass often used dark colours (red, purple, brown, dark blue or green) to substitute black in such images in order to make what otherwise would have been an ‘unmodulated blackness’ more readily apparent, p. 83.
cycle’s *The Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer* where the fallen Lucifer recognizes that his previous ‘bryghtnes’ has changed to ‘blakkeste’.345

Garcio’s black anus thus offers a glimpse of his moral corruption and gleeful depravity, expressed also in his repeated cursing of the audience upon the devil: ‘Or els the dwill you spede’ (l. 4), and: ‘The dwill hang hym vp to dry!’ (l. 13). Over the two stanzas of his opening address, the audience receives a threefold denigration as Garcio slides from calling them initially ‘Felows’ (l. 10), to ‘Gedlyngys’, (l. 14), and finally ‘Harlottys’ (l. 22).346 Garcio’s swift fall, from the ‘mery lad’ (l. 2) to the degenerate reprobate who curses on the devil, is not one that he appears to want to take alone, as his language figuratively pulls the audience down with him. Addressing both the individual (*he* and *hym*), and the entire collective (*‘euerichon*’ (l. 22)), Garcio explicitly includes those who are Cain’s ‘men’ (l. 20). More than a *nuncio* figure who, according to John J. McGavin and Greg Walker, merely ‘raises audience expectations for the imminent arrival of a vicious character’, Garcio’s sudden shift implicates the entire audience as either potential, or willing, participants in (or witnesses to) spiritual demise.347 Given that medieval English religious drama was widely understood as a specular medium to convey moral

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345 *Creation*, in *The Towneley Plays*, ed. by Epp, (l. 136), available at <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-creation> [accessed 02 May 2021]; *Doomsday* in *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. by Davidson, pp. 382-91 (l. 143); *The Creation of the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer*, Ibid., pp. 20-23, (l. 101). There are numerous other examples that depict bad souls, devils, and/or non-Christians as black in English medieval religious drama. On this, see Erik Wade, ‘*Ower Felaws Blake*: Blackface, Race, and Muslim Conversion in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*’, *Exemplaria*, 31:1 (2019), 22-45 where Wade cites, for example, the black devils who are cast out from Mary Magdalene’s body and consigned to hell in the Digby *Mary Magdalene* play. Though Wade’s aim here is to illustrate that performative blackness is manifestly artificial, it underpins a logic of racial otherness which ultimately points towards the necessity of conversion. In the Digby play, Wade remarks, conversion ‘is figured as entry into a community that is both Christian and white’, (p. 36).

346 See s. v. ‘gadaline (n.)’, *MED Online* where *gedlyngys* can refer to a companion in arms or fellow man, but can also imply a person of low birth, a scoundrel or base fellow, and even a bastard [accessed 02 May 2021]. See also s. v. ‘harlot (n.)’, *MED Online* where *harlottys* is a term of abuse that has a range of inferences from idle rogue to reprobate, male lecher, or whore.

teachings, Garcio’s early role in *Mactatio Abel* not only prepares the audience for the entry of Cain, it also pushes the audience to see themselves, or their potential selves, succumbing to the dubious charms of Cain and thus joining him in his spiritual depravity.\(^{348}\)

Garcio appears to be working a familiar audience here; he knows that some of them are Cain’s men, and he also knows that the entire audience knows Cain, and possibly his biblical role, very well indeed, as the line ‘Full well ye all hym ken’ (l. 16) illustrates. The audience also appears to know Garcio, as the assumption held within his semi-question ‘Wote ye not I com before?’ suggests. This relationship highlights a tension where Garcio’s abusive language is directed towards people who are familiar to him, and who are familiar with Cain, and suggests that Garcio (and Cain) acts as a dark mirror-figure in whom audience members see themselves reflected.\(^{349}\) If Garcio finds himself on the cusp of following the morally egregious path exemplified by the path set out by his master Cain, so too might the audience.

There were, after all, some areas of crossover in medieval imaginings of rural peasants and Cain.\(^{350}\) Although Cain was frequently figured as the first builder of cities, in late-medieval exegesis and some medieval drama Cain was also closely allied with peasants.\(^{351}\) Both Cain and

\(^{348}\) See McGavin and Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship*, where they explain that the power of the mirror tradition in medieval art and drama was that it could be a means of revelation and distortion. However, English drama, according to McGavin and Walker, ‘appears to have stressed moral revelation as the mirror’s true value: it could show you as you truly are, not as you think you are... and potential versions of oneself’, pp. 123-5.


\(^{350}\) If, as I suggested in the ‘Introduction’ to the thesis, these plays reflect the rural ground of the manor of Wakefield, then that is also where I place any potential audience.

\(^{351}\) For Cain as the first builder of cities, see Quinones, *The Changes of Cain*, pp. 23-40. For the late medieval exegesis of Cain allied to the peasant classes in medieval religious drama see Sturges, *The Circulation of Power in Medieval Biblical Drama*, p. 97.
peasants were frequently imagined pejoratively in late-medieval western literature as spiritually
degenerate, lazy and uncooperative, foolish, sub-human, aggressive, eaters of dirt who were also
often dark-skinned, or black. For Paul H. Freedman, Cain represented the ‘ur-peasant’ of the
Middle Ages and, given the early example set by Garcio, his underling offers close parallels to
all of the aforementioned derogatory stereotypes often attached to images of both Cain and
peasants. Garcio’s spiritual depravity sees him cursing the fact that Cain thrives; he readily
meets violence with violence as he returns Cain’s blow immediately, and he deliberately falls
below even the level of the animals in Cain’s plough team as he places their food ‘behynd thare
ars’ (l. 45). Early Garcio is tainted by both physical and spiritual blackness, and represents a
blurred conflation of medieval stereotypes in which a medieval peasant population might
recognize their own typecasting.

Garcio’s later allusion to eating coal might also serve to reinforce a grammar of racial
difference founded upon a logic of ecological alterity that differentiates between rural blackness
and the apparent preference for civic piety to emanate lightness and material whiteness.

Madeline Caviness points to a move, specifically within the late medieval period at York, from
the flesh tints previously utilized in artistic depictions of saintly Christians to the ‘truly “white”’
skin tones associated with Christian sanctity, noting that ‘saints in paradise gleam as white as

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353 Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, p. 91. However, the Cain of *Mactatio Abel* is not a peasant; he is a rich farmer with land, a servant, and a plough team.

354 On the *scala naturae* Garcio thus, at least temporarily, exists at a sub-human level below that of the animals. On the *scala naturae* in medieval thought and literature, see Robertson, *Nature Speaks*, pp. 55-60.

355 The notion of ecological alterity corresponds to the ‘ecological others’ in Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), where Ray discusses ways of delineating ‘virtuous “environmentalist bodies” from environmentally impure bodies’ that can reinforce other social hierarchies such as class, or the differing environmental allegiances of the rural and civic body, p. 3.
their garments, like [a] fourteenth-century Saint John from York Minster.\textsuperscript{356} Therefore despite Whitaker’s claims for the necessity of spiritual blackness with regard to individual medieval Christian wholeness, equations of material whiteness and brightness with sanctity still proved durable and popular, apparently especially so during the later Middle Ages in the stained glass of civic centres such as York.\textsuperscript{357} Like the moors, hills, and vales discussed in the previous volume, coal was a feature of the rural environment inhabited by the pastoral plays of the Wakefield Master.\textsuperscript{358} Thus contact, familiarity, and the transfer of blackness from coal to bodies would have been an everyday occurrence for the peasant population of rural West Yorkshire, potentially aligning them physically and spiritually with the black souls of the previously cited example of the York cycle’s Doomsday play.\textsuperscript{359} Garcio’s black anus, his verbal and physical aggression, and his diabolical references set in motion the potential for an understanding of Garcio as a character replete with what Dorothy Kim terms ‘racial prosthetics’ whereby Garcio and, by extension his audience, become imbricated in a drama that explores rural, peasant identity in a logic of racial performance that explores a tension between black, rural bodies and the civic tendency to associate Christianity with the colour white.\textsuperscript{360}

\textsuperscript{357} See also Heng, The Invention of Race, where Heng claims that whiteness was the colour usually associated with the nobility and elites in medieval Europe, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{358} See Newton, ‘Surface Coal Mining and Graving in Leeds, West Yorkshire’, where Newton discusses the late sixteenth-century practice of ‘graving’ in West Yorkshire whereby local residents skimmed freely available surface coal from the ground – a practice that Newton claims originated in the peasant economies of earlier centuries (p. 163).
\textsuperscript{359} See Michel Pastoureau, Black: The History of a Colour (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), where Pastoureau points towards the mid-fifteenth century as responsible for a cultural sedimentation of the demonization of the colour black such that coalmen were ‘creatures of the devil’ who were ‘black, dirty’, and seemed to come from ‘the infernal abyss’, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{360} Dorothy Kim, ‘Reframing Race and Jewish/Christian Relationships in the Middle Ages’, Transverso: Journal for Jewish Studies, 13 (2015), 52-64 (p. 57). By ‘racial prosthetics’, Kim refers to the potential for black material extensions of the body and behaviours to enable the racial performance of blackness as an accessory that aides, or enacts, pejorative racist stereotypes. See also Wade, ‘Ower Felaws Blake’, where Wade makes the more general point that, in late-medieval drama, ‘light-skinned characters usually become black as a result of their sin’, (p. 28). Although Garcio’s ‘blackness’ and ‘dark’ character would not have been understood in terms that equate directly to
In addition to the contrived brightness of its stained glass, noted in the previous volume, York’s Minster stood as a beacon of spiritual and material brilliance illuminating the surrounding countryside thanks to its construction in magnesian limestone – a material known to be reflective in sunlight. The glistening magnesian limestone ensured that its message of bright religiosity carried for miles across northern England – as it still does today, visible on a clear day with the naked eye at a distance of at least twenty-five miles. If one adds to this the apparent preference in some medieval civic drama for whiteness to be conflated with Christian purity of spirit, and blackness to represent the diabolic opposite, there arises the possibility that York’s status as a regional centre of religiosity promoted the assumption that whiteness and brightness alone was next to godliness – that civic piety was white and bright. The corollary of such regional, civic preferences meant that the transfer of blackness onto the external (white) body still held negative currency, hence black was used to represent devils and damned souls. García’s coal blackness, a conflation of figurative, physical and spiritual indicators, represents a rural noir which, while it resists the monochrome whiteness apparently considered desirable in cities such as York, still preserves the pejorative stereotypes associated with blackness and therefore simply accounts for García’s dark side.

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362 See ‘Watergate’, n. 121 for the estimated distances from which the Minster is visible.
363 Note, for example, the marked contrast in the opening of the York Cycle’s *Sacrificium Cayme et Abell* where rather than a lowly character such as García introducing the play with his black hole, an ‘aungell cleere, as cristal clene’ (l. 5) opens the play.
364 If tracing the agency of coal in *Mactatio Abel* only serves to underscore García’s ‘dark’ nature, then its agency seems limited. In Latourian terms, this point exemplifies the limits of the political (in which I include racial and ethical) relevance for ANT and any new associations it might uncover. According to Latour, because ‘[y]ou use the same old repertoire of already gathered social ties to “explain” the new associations ... you partake in the expansion of power, but not in the re-composition of its content’, p. 260. Latour’s point here then would mean accepting that introducing coal and its inherent blackness brings a new association into view, but one that simply operates within
Garcio’s blackness could then correspond to the notions of ‘otherness’ that medieval peasants shared with what might loosely be termed ‘other others’. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen points out that the broad spectrum of reasons for dark skin pigmentation included those which associated people of the lower social orders with dirt and/or animals until ‘[m]edieval peasants, Saracens, and Jews shared darkened skin as a signifier of their inferiority and proximity to the bestial’.\(^{365}\) As discussed in ‘Watergate’, people beyond York’s city walls were routinely called foreigners, or aliens, or what might simply be termed as others. These others fulfil ‘familiar stereotypes about foreigners, medieval and modern’, in that they readily eat what the overarching cultural norms would consider to be ‘matter that does not constitute human aliment’.\(^{366}\) Garcio’s allusion to eating coal could ‘fit’ such stereotyping and potentially align him with other others, allowing the negative stereotypes casting Garcio as simultaneously diabolic, subversively foolish, and spiritually degenerate to remain untroubled. However, re-evaluating Garcio’s blackness can re-present Garcio as a figure capable of change, whose blackness points to his potential for spiritual improvement, rather than merely his function as symbolic of regional wildness and/or subversion.\(^{367}\)

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the same framework as it always has done. In this sense, expanding the association of blackness of coal could merely replicate the racist stereotyping previously mentioned. On the limits of Latour, see Keir Martin, ‘Knot-Work Not Networks, or Anti-Anti-Antifetishism and the ANTipolitics Machine’, *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 4:3 (2014), 99-115, where Martin explains that unpacking traditional distinctions without generating at least the potential for political application results only in the reproduction of ‘entanglements’ without political [or ethical] agency. (p. 111).

\(^{365}\) Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 201. The differences, however, at least in medieval England, between these groups would be on religious grounds and population numbers. While the Saracens and Jews to whom Cohen refers would have been Muslim and Jewish, the peasants would have been Christian, and this complicated notions of their sub-human nature. In addition, peasants formed the majority of the population in medieval England, whereas Saracens and Jews were very much minorities in terms of numbers. On these points see Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, pp. 15-16. For an article that addresses the often overlooked Muslim or Islamic faith in relation to the term Saracen, see Shokoofeh Rajabzadah, ‘The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure’, *Literature Compass*, 16:9-10 (2019).


Competing with the negative connotations of blackness were its associations with fertility and Christian wholeness.\textsuperscript{368} There are signs, then, that Garcio’s early blackness may point to his potential for Christian ‘fullness’. Medieval readers were encouraged to recognize the mutuality that the apparent binary categories of blackness and whiteness symbolized, and to remember that blackness and whiteness can cohere in a single being, in both bodily and spiritual senses.\textsuperscript{369} Using the term ‘contrariety’ to describe the interdependency, rather than opposition, of blackness and whiteness in medieval identity formation and religious symbolism, Whitaker illustrates that, despite blackness’s easy availability as signifier of sin and moral deficit or lack, medieval black metaphors (especially in, though not limited to, spiritual and theological texts) demand a more complex understanding to reveal how they were crucial to Christian wholeness and salvation.\textsuperscript{370}

One body could signify, or occupy, both black and white and ‘in the Middle Ages, blackness and whiteness were so intimately connected that a figure could shift between them with greater facility than we would expect now. In fact, spiritually and theologically, he had to’.\textsuperscript{371} Accepting spiritual blackness was part and parcel of the universal Christian belief in the acceptance of one’s own sins and virtues, and thus a crucial part of the constant struggle for spiritual improvement.

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\textsuperscript{368} See Pastoureau, \textit{Black: The History of a Colour}, where Pastoureau remarks that black was also fertile and earthly, vital and fecund, and as such black was the colour associated with the \textit{laboratores} of the medieval feudal system, p. 46. Pastoureau’s point on black, earthly fertility links back to Bartholomaeus’ remarks in \textit{De Proprietatibus Rerum} where he notes that while earth is black and ugly, it is also fertile and all good and precious things grow from it, thus the virtue of the earth is hidden within. Text available at: \texttt{https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A05237.0001.001/1:24?rgn=div1;view=fulltext} [accessed 04 March 2022].

\textsuperscript{369} Whitaker, \textit{Black Metaphors}, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., p. 99.

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., p. 103, italics in original.
The notion that Garcio’s black anus is merely a devilish jest, where his black hole seems simply to reflect the darker side of his character, thus begins to seem less certain. Perhaps his blackness is also indicative of his wholeness, his *no lac*. Exactly such a possibility is expressed in the opening lines of this anonymous Middle English poem:

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Summe men sayon þat y am blac.
yt ys a colour for my prow;
þer y loue þer ys no lac,
y may not be so wyte as þou.
blac ys a colur þat ys god-
so say y & many mo; ³⁷²
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The opening of the poem clearly favours its anonymous subject’s identification as not only black, but black and proud: ‘a colour for my prow’ (l. 2). This blackness is good and wholesome, signifying ‘no lac’ (l. 3), and the sentiments expressed here are shared by ‘many mo’ (l. 6).³⁷³ At first glance then, the poem does indeed present the speaker’s identification as black; a black that is perhaps reflective of the speaker’s skin colour resulting from labouring outside, or with the earth, or perhaps even with coal.³⁷⁴ While these lines promote the notion of positive domestic

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³⁷² Anonymous, ‘Summe Men Sayon ’, in *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. by Russell Hope Robbins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 30-31 (l. 1-16). Further references by line number and in parentheses are from this edition where the poem has the title ‘In Praise of Brunettes’, which seems misleading and I therefore refer to the poem by the first few words of its opening line. A full version of the original poem is available online at <https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/summe-men-sayon-y-am-blac> [accessed 21 October 2020]. See s. v. ‘hol(e) (adj.)’, *MED Online* where hole (or hoill) can mean wholeness or completeness, and can indicate the morally upright and spiritually saved [accessed 20 October 2021]. Given the emphasis on language and word play and puns that runs throughout this play, it is very likely that a pun is intended in the reference to Garcio’s ‘blak hoill’ to hint towards his future spiritual salvation. For the emphasis on language in this play, see Martin Stevens, ‘Language as a Theme in the Wakefield Plays, *Speculum*, 52:1 (1977), 100-17, where Stevens remarks that ‘the Wakefield Master brought to the Towneley Plays an active interest in the uses of language and that he did so to the extent of making that subject a major thematic concern in the cycle’, (p. 101). For the use of puns and wordplay specifically in *Mactatio Abel*, see Blair W. Boone, ‘The Skill of Cain the English Mystery Cycles’, *Comparative Drama*, 16:2 (1982), 112-29 (p. 123).

³⁷³ See s. v. ‘prou (n. 1)’, meaning ‘benefit, advantage; good-fortune, well-being’, *MED Online* [accessed 24 August 2021].

³⁷⁴ This corresponds to Denise Kimber Buell’s point in ‘Early Christian Universalism’, in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. by Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 109-31, that medieval discourses on human identity drew from ancient texts, so that ‘the ancient notion that individuals may acquire characteristics from their environment’ still held currency (p. 130). Although, as recent scholarship has shown, late- medieval England was culturally diverse, the fact that the speaker says that only
blackness, the poem also marks a sliding scale of whiteness, as the line ‘y may not be so wyte as þou’ (l. 4) suggests. Blackness and whiteness thus seem intimately connected here, and the closing lines of the poem express a desire for fusion, to create Whitaker’s ‘contrariety’, where black and white identities combine as two parts of one whole.\footnote{Whitaker, \textit{Black Metaphors}, p. 45. Using the analogy of pepper, the poem closes by bringing both colours together as it attempts to also draw together field and town.}

While the poem’s specific context is elusive, its attempt to fuse the often distinct categories of black and white skin colour has other counterparts in western medieval Christianity’s paradoxical understanding of beauty and virtue existing in both whiteness and blackness.\footnote{See Heng, \textit{The Invention of Race}, where Heng records the apparent contradiction beginning in late thirteenth-century Europe where ‘white is the colour of beauty and sanctity’, yet at the same time, the phenomenon of the black St. Maurice proliferates to such an extent that it raises ‘the possibility that \textit{blackness itself holds a power to counter the dominant medieval discourse on its meaning}’; pp. 238-9, italics in original. Heng explains that ‘Maurice is black but a saint: someone who visually embodies the early Latin Christian theme that blackness sometimes coexists with beauty as a resounding paradox – \textit{nigra sum sed formosa}, says the bride in Canticles, I am black but beautiful’, p. 238. See also Mary Carruthers, \textit{The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), where Carruthers discusses Bernard of Clairvaux’s commentary on the same \textit{nigra sum sed formosa} passage, remarking how this reveals that, for Bernard, ‘many things are made more beautiful, more pleasing through the colour black’, leading Bernard to conclude that ‘things are altogether more beautiful, \textit{res ambae pulchrae}, when their contrary qualities act mutually on one another’, pp. 67-9.} If, as Geraldine Heng posits, such an understanding ‘freed the European imagination to conjure with the meaning of \textit{blackness}’, then it is feasible to suggest that Garcio’s black anus represents a blackness which renders him ready to accept spiritual change.\footnote{Heng, \textit{The Invention of Race}, p. 184, italics in original.} That Garcio offers glimpses of his capacity for spiritual flux, a fluidity that Garcio embodies both in physical and spiritual direction, is often overlooked. Garcio does indeed take God’s name in vain when he curses the fact that Cain thrives: ‘Godys forbot, that euer thou thrife!’ (l. 38), but he also invokes God’s authority to exemplify his capacity for telling the truth about some of the...
audience members: ‘But I trow, bi God on life, | Som of you ar his men’ (ll. 19-20). As Cain struggles to get his plough team to move, Garcio’s call alone makes them move quickly: ‘Say, Mall and Stott, will ye not go? | Lemyng, Morell, Whitehorn, io! | Now will ye not se how thay hy?’ (ll. 41-43).\(^{378}\) Cain refuses to acknowledge Garcio’s success, and suggests that it is lack of food that prevents his animals from pulling the plough: ‘Gog gif the sorow, boy. Want of mete it gars’ (l. 44). Garcio is much more capable of handling the animals than Cain, and apparently also knows that Cain is wrong to suggest that they lack food. Their reluctance at Cain’s hand suggests his incapacity to inspire movement rather than the animals’ hunger, and Garcio bests his master in mastering the plough team. Thus it is immaterial whether or not Garcio feeds them and, rather than concentrating on how Garcio misplaces the food ‘behyn thare ars’ (l. 45), the emphasis here should be on how Garcio nimbly flits from below the level of the animals to immediately above them when, in the very next line, he ‘tyes them fast bi the nekys, | With many stanys in thare hekys’ (ll. 46-47). Garcio has the ability and agility to descend \textit{and} ascend; to move below \textit{and} above the level of the animals.

Garcio’s character shows inconsistencies, flexibilities, and capabilities that reveal his latent potential for spiritual rehabilitation. Yet his own recognition of this need becomes apparent only after he realizes that Cain has indeed murdered Abel. Scholars have previously noted that Cain and Abel represent polar opposites in this play.\(^{379}\) My reading suggests a more nuanced

\(^{378}\) See s. v. ‘hien (v.),’ meaning to go quickly, hasten, or hurry, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 03 August 2021]. Though the focus of my argument aims to highlight the latent potential for spiritual and physical movement in the character of Garcio, it is noteworthy that Cain’s trouble with his plough team suggests that this Cain is out of place in this rural pursuit. This Cain is one who seems set to become more at home in a civic environment rather than a rural one, an indication of his role as the first builder of cities. For further reading on ‘citizen’ Cain see Quinones, \textit{The Changes of Cain}, pp. 23-40.

\(^{379}\) On the apparently irresolvable polarities evident between Cain and Abel in medieval drama see, for example, Boone, ‘The Skill of Cain’, and Bennett A, Brockman, ‘Comic and Tragic Counterpoint in the Medieval Drama: The Wakefield \textit{Mactatio Abel’}, Mediaeval Studies, 39 (1977), 331-49.
relationship where Cain and Abel appear as mirrored, inverted opposites of each other. Both Cain and Abel are equally resistant to spiritual change and, as such, they represent characters that are spiritually too black or too white. Representative of the twin forces of an immovable object and an unstoppable force, both Abel and Cain fail to fully acknowledge or understand each other’s concerns and their spiritual stasis is mirrored in their shared reluctance to move physically in contrast to nimble Garcio. Existing interpretations of the play have tended to overlook the extent to which Mactatio Abel engages with orthodox medieval exegetical debates that sought to fill in the gaps of the Genesis story. When these are taken into account, our reading of Garcio is transformed, as his character is inflected by the failings of both Cain and Abel.

**Why Mactatio Abel Needs Garcio**

As Garcio leaves the scene of the action, Cain and Abel are immediately pitted against each other. While Abel greets Cain with a blessing, Cain echoes Garcio’s earlier words and retorts with the profanity ‘Com kis myne ars!’ (l. 59); compounded later with ‘kys the dwillis toute!’ (l. 63). The audience is presented with an apparently straightforward choice: morally and spiritually speaking, it would seem correct to side with Abel from the outset. Yet both Abel and Cain urge the other either to move, or keep his distance – and each is as inflexible as the other. Abel’s blessing ‘God... Spede’ (ll. 57-8), is met with Cain’s profane reply in which Cain also warns that he should physically distance himself from Cain: ‘Thou shuld haue bide til thou were cald;’ (l. 61), and then orders Abel to ‘Go grese thi shepe’ (l. 64). Abel ignores Cain and, in his preaching to Cain on the necessity of tithing, requests him to ‘Com furth, brothere, and let vs gang’ (l. 74).

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380 In Boone, ‘The Skill of Cain’, Boone also identifies the notion of the brothers’ misunderstandings in Mactatio Abel (though not in the same ways as I explore) and remarks briefly on how this corresponds to the biblical narrative, but for Boone the brothers’ misconstructions rely on an equally apportioned vanity that leaves Abels’ spiritual understanding unchallenged and Garcio’s role unquestioned (pp. 121-3).
and further exhorts Cain to move, adding ‘let vs weynd’ (l. 78). Not only does Abel insist on the spiritual value of sacrifice and tithing, he is insistent that Cain has to move in order to make the sacrifice. Cain steadfastly refuses with a straightforward ‘Nay’ (l. 93), whilst also dismissing Abel’s sermonizing as ‘vayn carpyng’ (l. 90). Abel verbally mirrors Cain’s accusations of ‘vayn carpyng’ (l. 97) and tries again to get Cain moving: ‘let vs be walkand’ (l. 106). From this point on, Cain delivers lengthy explanations of his unfounded complaints – each of which is met by Abel’s very short, unsympathetic responses in which he perpetually insists that they ‘fvrth togeder go’ (l. 131), that they ‘weynd sone’ (l. 132), ‘com furth’ (l. 144), and ‘Hy we fast’ (l. 146).³⁸¹

Cain, in turn, resists Abel’s pleas – either by ignoring them and instead giving an account of how God has neglected him, or by repeatedly inverting Abel’s earlier blessing: ‘The dwill me spede if I haue hast’ (l. 135; ll. 147, 151). Even when Cain finally meets Abel’s calls for urgency, he does so only because he grudgingly accepts that he has to, and his acceptance takes the form of a typically indignant concession: ‘Bot well I se go must I nede; | Now weynd before—ill might thou spede!— | Syn that we shall algatys go’ (ll. 164-6). This seems an almost meta-theatrical moment which has more to do with an acknowledgement that the tithing has to take place somewhere else and that, in the ‘plot’ of the drama, the action does have to move on to the actual event of tithing; he thus only agrees because they were always going to go to the

³⁸¹ Cain’s complaints about the medieval Church’s emphasis on tithing and the nature of peasant poverty in Mactatio Abel have garnered much sympathetic response. In The Preaching Fox, Edminster suggests that, as an enforced tax, the medieval tith levied by the Church was, of all obligations, the most onerous, and the one which an audience would most have resented, p. 61. See also Sturges, The Circulation of Power, where Sturges suggests that a contemporary audience would have been sympathetic towards Cain’s lengthy complaints, pp. 110-12. See also, however, Hans-Jürgen Diller, The Middle English Mystery Play: A Study in Dramatic Speech and Form, trans. by Frances Wessels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), where Diller remarks upon Cain’s sound arguments, though for Diller, Cain is a hypocrite; he is a ‘rich farmer who beats his servant and his beats in anger’, p. 231. When Cain deliberately selects the worst of his sheaves to offer as his tithe, keeping the best for himself, his actions align him with the greedy farmers who oppress the poverty-stricken shepherds at the start of the Towneley Secunda Pastorum, and the figure of the self-serving yeoman feigned by the character Mak.
place of sacrifice ‘algatys’ (l. 166). There is no meeting of minds here – Cain’s constancy in his refusal to meet the plural *us* and *we* that are embedded in Abel’s petitions for physical movement changes only because it has to.

Prior to the necessity of moving the drama along, both Abel and Cain are mirrored inversions of each other. While Abel is persistent and unyielding in his righteous faith, Cain is equally obstinate in his lack of faith. Both are as static in their insistences and resistances as each other. Both are deaf to the pleas of the other. Both either bless upon the Lord or curse upon the devil. Both remain physically inflexible until the play has to move the action along. Where Abel consistently responds to Cain’s woes with brief reminders of his religious obligation to tithe, Cain responds with equal consistency, yet provides contrasting, lengthy accounts of his supposed woes. Abel has been understood by, for example, Warren Edminster, as typologically representative of the obligations of orthodox Christianity, figured as a priest. As a priest, Abel seems an impatient one who is unwilling (or unable) to engage in lengthy exegetical debate with Cain. With particular regard to Cain’s monologue on the hardships he apparently endured when his crop failed, Abel’s response is hardly a charitable one. Abel simply asks Cain to ‘say not so’ (l. 130) before changing the subject to physical movement again. Cain evidently recognizes that Abel is trying to rush him along, but he refuses to hurry, issuing the humorous curse ‘The dwill me spede if I haue hast’ (l. 135), and continues to make the logical argument

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382 s. v. ‘al-gate(s) (adv.)’, *MED Online* [accessed 01 May 2021].
383 Cain’s lengthy accounts of his ‘problems’ could be a delaying tactic meant to conform to the view that Cain’s tithe met with God’s disapproval because it was not delivered in a timely manner. This view was popular among medieval Christian exegetes. On this, see Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition*, pp. 48-53.
384 Edminster, *The Preaching Fox*, p. 60.
385 Cain’s ‘delaying tactics’ that document his reluctance to tithe might at first seem to contradict, or account for, any claims for Abel’s impatience. Yet both of these characteristics can be true at the same time – Cain can be grudgingly and deliberately slow to tithe at the same time as Abel is impatient for him to do so without further inquiry or debate.
that, were he to give away all his ‘good’ (l. 139), then this would render him destitute and
dependent on charity himself. Ignoring Cain’s logical, if uncharitable and therefore unchristian,
reasoning, Abel now presses Cain to hurry further because, according to Abel, he is ‘full ferd
that we get blame’ (l. 145). Abel’s reason for wanting Cain to hurry, that he is afraid lest
someone should blame them, seems more of an excuse given to avoid theological debate with
Cain rather than any legitimate reason for the need for speed.\textsuperscript{386} After all, surely no one would
blame Abel for any delay in the tithing if the reason for that delay was exactly the kind of
exegetical debate that a conscientious priest should be engaging in.

Abel’s shortcomings in his ‘priestly’ role correspond to those of the priests criticized in
late medieval texts such as John Wycliffe’s \textit{De Officio Pastorall}. This text makes it clear that a
priest is the conduit between God and man and, as such, a priest’s failure to teach, or to explain,
God’s will, is an error of office that is judged to be more sinful than the sin of an ordinary man:
‘a prest shulde be a mene bitwixe god & þe puple & teche þe puple þe wille of god, it is knowen
þing bi skile þat whanne he erriþ in þis offiss he sinneþ more þan opere men’.\textsuperscript{387} As a typological
priest figure, Abel appears \textit{unable}, or unwilling, to counter Cain’s economic logic with Christian
teaching. Cain’s steadfast obstinacy precludes the possibility of any positive Christian impact
Abel’s exegesis might have had upon him; yet Abel’s failure to even attempt this, coupled with
the sense of impatience Abel demonstrates with his repeated attempts to hurry Cain along,

\textsuperscript{386} See Edminster, \textit{The Preaching Fox}, where Edminster also notes the temporal factor introduced by Abel,
remarking that this does not form part of the biblical story, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{387} \textit{De Officio Pastorall}, in \textit{The English Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted}, ed. by F. D. Matthew (London:
Trübner & Co., 1880), pp. 405-57. (p. 409). Text available at:
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/AEH6713.0001.001/1:29?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> [accessed 08 June 2021]. As
Edminster notes, this text does seem a pertinent one to cite here as \textit{De Officio Pastorall} uses the same simile of a
priest as a preaching fox alluded to by Cain as he mocks Abel after he attempts, poorly, to explain to Cain why they
must tithe: ‘let furth youre geysye; the fox will preche’ (l. 84). See Edminster, \textit{The Preaching Fox}, pp. 61-67 where
Edminster gives a lengthy exposition on how Abel feeds into contemporary medieval sentiments on onerous
religious obligations and corrupt, or inept, clergy.
bespeak a typological priest whose role is, at best, problematic. Indeed, Abel’s shortcomings might well have been instantly recognizable to a medieval audience more familiar with the biblical emphasis on the virtue of patience than a modern one. A medieval audience might well have welcomed some patient exegesis or teachings on Christian charity from Abel, rather than his brief interjections that disregard Cain’s points and inject a sense of urgency to the act of tithing.

So far, Cain and Abel offer inverted images of each other, and their shared physical stasis suggests a shared inflexibility of spirit. As far as the mirror-function of medieval drama goes, any audience might have difficulty in choosing which of these characters to identify with. Abel’s brief interjections of pious rhetoric are unimaginative, unedifying, and lacking in theological nuance. Cain’s ripostes, though fiendishly entertaining, go on too long and become wearisome and repetitive. Although typologically Abel represents the Church, or a priest, in the biblical episode Abel is neither – he is merely Cain’s brother and, as such, his overbearing piety perhaps understandably irks Cain. Given that throughout the play Abel addresses Cain eighteen times as brother, it seems apparent that this familial relationship is the one most important to an

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388 The importance of patience in medieval Christian religious thought is emphasized throughout De Officio Pastorall, particularly for holders of priestly office who should show ‘ensaurnple of mekenesse, pacience & heuenly lif & charite’. See De Officio Pastorall, ed. by Matthew, (p. 276), available at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/AEH6713.0001.001/1:21?rgn=div1;submit=Go;subview=detail;type=simple;view=fulltext;q1=pacience> [accessed 30 July 2021]. Many late medieval works testify to the cultural significance in the period on the virtue of patience which stemmed from biblical sayings and the story of, for example, Job, and secular works such as the anonymous poem Patience. For discussions of these and other texts, including discussions of patience in preachers’ handbooks and how the virtue was disseminated regularly to the laity in sermons, see The Triumph of Patience: Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ed. by Gerald J. Schiffhorst (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), esp. Ralph Hannah III’s chapter, ‘Some Commonplaces of Late Medieval Patience Discussions’, (pp. 65-87).

389 On the underdeveloped character of Abel, see also Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), where Prosser describes him as ‘a stuffed shirt’, arguing that ‘the impression of a pompous do-gooder is made inevitable by the author’s treatment of him’, pp. 76-8. See also Dorrel T. Hanks, ‘The Mactatio Abel and the Wakefield Cycle: A Study in Context’, The Southern Quarterly, 16 (1977), 47-57, where Hanks notes the paucity of lines afforded to Abel, and the scant depth of content that those lines contain (p. 50).
understanding of the drama. Nevertheless, whether understood tropologically and analogically as Cain’s spiritually righteous brother, or typologically as a priest, Abel’s insistent recourse to the necessity of tithing bespeaks an unquestioning acceptance of duty and an uncritical observance of religious rituals. It could be argued that Abel’s compliant Christianity illustrates his religious and ethical superiority, and his singular focus on the act of tithing reveals his orthodox, obedient and holy simplicity. Yet his inability or unwillingness to debate or exegetically dispute any of Cain’s claims also opens up the possibility that Abel is quietly docile because he lacks the religious insights, verbal dexterity, and wit with which to engage or challenge Cain.

Abel’s ability to expound upon the word of God, for the benefit of either the audience or Cain, is cast into further doubt at a crucial point in the play when God intervenes as Cain remonstrates furiously at his smoking tithe. Edminster has noted the repetition in this particular section of the word *teynd* or *tend*. What this section will show is how the much-repeated word *teynd* is understood differently by Cain and Abel and is subsequently used in yet another way by God. When considered in conjunction with differing understandings of the word ‘alowed’ (l. 296), this suggests that both Cain and Abel misinterpret what God says to Cain. While each brother is convinced of the correctness of his own interpretation of God’s speech, both fail to

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390 See Edminster, *The Preaching Fox*, where Edminster remarks that ‘*t*he word “tend” or teynd” is used twenty-one times during the 131 lines of the offering scene alone, usually in the context of an argument between Cain and Abel over what constitutes a proper tithe’, p. 62. Edminster’s tally is correct, though specifically this preponderance occurs in the burning of the tithe scene and, as this section will expose, this word is not always understood by each brother in the same way. Throughout the entire play, the word *teynd* or *tend* appears twenty-eight times, and illustrates Cain’s knowledge and usage of the same word for different meanings, such as in ‘How that I tend, rek the neuer a deill, | Bot tend thi skabbid shepe wele; | For if thou to my tend tent take’ (ll. 247-9), and ‘Bot now, syn thou has teyndid thyne, | Now wil I set fyre on mine’ (ll. 273-4). The various meanings of the same word here refer to tithing, tending sheep, attention or intention, and igniting a tithe. Each usage of the word and how it nuances what Cain and Abel understand are discussed in further detail as they occur in the text. Given that the Wakefield Master’s work is synonymous with verbal dexterity and what Happé in *The Towneley Cycle* recognizes as his ‘witty inventiveness’, p. 60, it should perhaps come as no surprise that an overreliance on the same word actually points to the word’s variable meanings and potential for misdirection and misunderstanding.
comprehend that the other hears a different message. Ultimately, however, neither understands the spiritual import of God’s speech to Cain.

Cain struggles to ignite his tithe and, in an uncharacteristic moment of self-consciousness, admits that this causes him emotional distress: ‘It will not bren for me, I traw. | Puf! this smoke dos me mych shame—’ (ll. 276-7). Specifically, it is the smoke emanating from Cain’s tithe that causes him shame. There is no indication here that Cain interprets this as a sign of God’s displeasure – only that the smoke causes Cain shame. Subsequently, as Cain blows onto the tithe to encourage the flame to take hold, the foul-smelling smoke almost suffocates him: ‘Had I blawen oone blast more, | I had beyn choked right thore. | It stank like the dwill in hell’ (ll. 281-3). Rather than offering any words of comfort or encouragement, Abel is openly critical of Cain and his tithe, saying only ‘Cam, this is not worth oone leke; | Thy tend shuld bren withouten smeke’ (ll. 285-6). According to Abel, none of Cain’s protestations are worthy of attention because, quite simply, Cain’s tithe should have burned without smoke. Abel’s words are hardly those one might expect from either a sympathetic brother or priest, and they imply that Cain’s smoking tithe is symptomatic of tithing incorrectly and/or indicative of some fault in Cain

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391 The notion that Abel’s murder resulted from a sibling misunderstanding was an ancient one, debated by exegetes both Christian and Jewish. See Provan, Discovering Genesis, where Provan remarks that medieval (11th and 12th century) Christian bible scholars consulted Jewish counterparts for help in reading Genesis, and later medieval readers of Genesis ‘followed and developed the lines of interpretation laid down for them in the preceding centuries’, p. 22. Provan points to the late medieval period as one that witnessed an increasing interest in a movement back to the Hebrew and Greek sources of the bible to compare them with the Latin Vulgate, p. 30. On the brothers’ misunderstanding, see also Shai Cherry, Torah Through Time: Understanding Biblical Commentary from the Rabbinic Period to Modern Times (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2007), pp. 91-93. On the difficulty of interpreting what God said to Cain, see also Byron, Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition, pp. 53-58.

392 Cain’s shame corresponds to the line in Genesis 4. 5: ‘his countenance fell’.

393 Abel’s assertion that Cain’s tithe should have burned without smoke has no biblical foundation and is an unusual claim given that, in many other accounts of this episode in medieval drama and beyond, Abel’s burning tithe also produces smoke. The difference in the smoke is usually that, while Cain’s smoke is often foul-smelling and descends to hell, Abel’s is sweet-smelling and ascends to heaven. On this, see Davidson, ‘Cain in the Mysteries: An Iconography of Violence’, (p. 210). See also Liam O. Purdon, The Wakefield Master’s Dramatic Art: A Drama of Spiritual Understanding (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), where Purdon refers to Cain’s smoking tithe in Mactatio Abel as a ‘nearly asphyxial pyrotechnical cloud, the only one of its kind in all of the mystery plays’, p. 44.
– though Abel’s characteristic reticence to explain any further leaves both reader and audience guessing.

Both Cain and Abel are perturbed in different ways by the smoke, and Abel’s curt response about the ‘improperly’ burning tithe quickly turns Cain’s shame into anger. As Cain voices more threats and profanities, God intervenes:

Cam, whi art thou so rebell
Agans thy brother Abell?
Thar thou nowther flyte ne chyde.
If thou tend right thou gettys thi mede;
And be thou sekir, if thou teynd fals,
Thou bese alowed therafter als (ll. 291-6). 394

Scholars have traditionally read this interjection by God as a warning to Cain on the perils of false tithing. 395 In such readings the word tend relates to the tithe, and the final three lines of this passage are taken to mean that if Cain tithes correctly he will be rewarded appropriately, but if he tithes falsely (or incorrectly), then he will be rewarded accordingly. 396 Yet this passage can also support a reading of a perplexed God who wonders why Cain is so antagonistic towards his brother because, whether Cain ignites his tithe correctly or incorrectly (where tend now relates to the igniting of the tithe rather than the tithe itself), God gives his word (‘be thou sekir’ (l. 295)),

394 See Stevens, ‘Language as a Theme in the Wakefield Plays’, where Stevens notes the brevity, straightforwardness, and ‘homely eloquence’ that characterise God’s speeches in plays with which the Wakefield Master has some identification (p. 102). Citing Catherine Dunn, Stevens remarks that this represents the voice of the Church that speaks with clarity and concision, ibid. God’s speech is short and to the point here but, as the remainder of this section will show, the ‘straightforwardness’ of God’s words proves to be elusive to both Cain and Abel.

395 See, for example, Sturges, The Circulation of Power, where Sturges interprets this section as God giving his reason for rejecting Cain’s improper tithe, p. 111. None of the editions consulted here offer any alternative meanings for the word tend or teynd here other than tithe. Cawley’s glossary only ever allows for the meaning of ‘tithe’ in this play and offers no further clarification of these lines, and The Towneley Plays, ed. by Stevens and Cawley provides no gloss on these lines so presumably, this edition also assumes that God is talking about tithing here. In Epp, ed. The Killing of Abel, Epp also gives the impression that God is issuing a warning on false tithing as he translates the final line of God’s speech as ‘you will be paid accordingly’. Text available at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-killing-of-abel> [accessed 01 May 2021].

396 Such a reading would then conform, more or less, to the vague passage in Genesis 4. 7: ‘If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?’. 
that Cain will still receive his favour.\footnote{397} On the one hand, Cain understands God to mean that if he ignites his tithes correctly he will reap his reward. Yet, crucially, Cain also understands a reassurance from God that even if he ‘teynd fals’ (l. 295) – even if he ignites his tithe wrongly – he will ‘bese alowed thereafter als’ (l. 296); Cain will still receive God’s favour thereafter, in the same way.\footnote{398} Understanding God’s words this way means, at least to Cain, that whether or not his offering smokes as it burns is of no consequence to God.\footnote{399} To Cain, God’s words also eschew any perceived inadequacy in the tithe itself.

Characteristically, however, Cain pretends not to recognize God, asking ‘who is that hob ouer the wall?’ (l. 297), and ‘who was that that piped so small?’ (l. 298). That Cain does in fact recognize God swiftly becomes clear as he goes on to doubt God’s sincerity, and attempts to account for God’s compassion by suggesting that either ‘God is out of hys wit!’ (l. 300), or that ‘God is not [his] freynd’ (l. 302).\footnote{400} Cain’s spiritual degeneration is such that he either cannot recognize God’s grace, or does not trust it, or both. Cain remains so fixed in his spiritual decline that he even considers evading an omnipresent, omniscient God by fleeing: ‘On land then will I

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\footnote{397} s. v. ‘tenden (v. 3)’, ‘to set (sth.) on fire, light, ignite’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 01 May 2021]. Cain uses this same verb slightly earlier when he remarks that, since Abel has ‘teyndid’ (l. 273) his tithe, then so too will he ‘set fyr’ (l. 274) to his. The quotation from God given in the text thus seems, at least to Cain, to be referring to the proper or improper burning of the tithes, rather than the tithes themselves. The confusion arises in the close links between the verbs\textit{ tenden} and\textit{ tenthen}, where\textit{ tenthen} refers to the practice of tithing and, in \textit{Mactatio Abel} both verbs meaning to ignite and to tithe are given the same spelling. See s. v. ‘tenthen (v.)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 01 May 2021]. Cain, then, derives his understanding from the context which here (and immediately prior to God’s speech) is clearly the burning of tithes, rather than the tithes themselves. See also s. v. ‘siker (adj. 4a)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 01 May 2021] for its adjectival meaning as fully assured, or guaranteed by Divine decree or promise.

\footnote{398} See s. v. ‘allouen (v.)’, \textit{MED Online} where examples are given with the spelling ‘alowed’ to mean commended, or praised, or receiving God’s favour found in late medieval religious texts such as \textit{The Wycliffite Bible, Speculum Christiani}, and \textit{The Pilgrimage of the Soul} [accessed 1 May 2021]. The \textit{and} at the start of God’s penultimate line in the passage quoted supports the point that Cain understands this is a reassurance from God rather than a warning – if this had started with a \textit{but}, then the inference might more clearly have been a more negative one, suggesting that if Cain had tithed falsely then his just rewards would have been equally forthcoming.

\footnote{399} What does matter to God is the spirit in which the tithe is given, as I will explain later.

\footnote{400} If indeed God’s address to Cain was to be understood in terms that relate to good and bad tithing, then Cain’s remarks here would make little sense. While an interpretation of God’s words as relating to good and bad tithing might stretch to one that allows Cain to imagine God as not his friend, it would not account for why Cain might suggest that God is out of his wit.}
flyt’ (l. 303). Juxtaposing Cain’s spiritual stasis with this plan for rapid physical movement illustrates how Cain persistently and perversely misunderstands the need for, and nature of, movement. Here, it is his spiritual soul that should be turning to a benevolent God, rather than his physical body thinking of evading God.

Despite the fact that God makes clear mention of ‘thi brother Abell’ (l. 292), Abel makes no reference to God’s words to Cain, nor to Cain’s deliberate distortions of them. Abel is clearly present at this point, and therefore hears God’s speech, but offers neither guidance nor counsel to Cain in interpreting God’s words. Given the value that Abel places on his relationship to Cain, evident in how astonishing Abel says it would be to their father should they separate as he reminds Cain ‘Ar we not brether, thou and I?’ (l. 157), and how he has reminded an audience of this relationship some eighteen times, often signifying his affection with the address of ‘Leif brother’ (l. 106), or ‘Dere brother’ (l. 154), it seems fair to expect some brotherly discussion on God’s intervention. Instead, Abel offers merely a single line in response to Cain’s idea of flight: ‘A, Caym, brother, that is ill done’ (l. 304). While Cain mistrusts, or deliberately misinterprets, God’s assurance of charity, Abel appears deaf to it. Abel responds only to Cain’s suggestion of physical movement here and disregards the opportunity to expand upon God’s address to Cain and its focus on Cain’s spiritual restoration. When Cain subsequently remarks that he might go somewhere so that ‘God shall not me see’ (l. 307), Abel again fails to comment on Cain’s futile attempt to hide from an omniscient God, and reacts instead with the suggestion of an alternative destination for himself: ‘I will fayre | On feld ther oure bestys ar’ (ll. 308-9). At the moment when Cain believes that God has reassured him that his smoking tithe is irrelevant, Cain’s priest-brother Abel remains silent and prepares to abandon him. Yet Cain’s fixation on his smoking tithe remains undiminished.
As Abel prepares to leave, Cain bids him to stay because, he says, ‘We haue a craw to pull’ (l. 311); a proverbial way of saying that they have a dispute to settle.⁴⁰¹ The source of the dispute they have to settle lies in the mismatch Cain perceives between Abels’ words on the impropriety of Cain’s smoking tithe (‘Thy tend shuld bren withouten smeke’ (l. 286)), and God’s attempt to reassure Cain that whether he ignites his tithe correctly or not, he might still receive God’s blessing.⁴⁰² It is significant that Abel’s unsympathetic admonition came immediately after the smoke from the tithe almost suffocated Cain, and that the poorly burning tithe caused Cain to feel shame.⁴⁰³ Able says nothing to alleviate Cain’s physical or emotional distress – only adding to it with the invidious message that Cain’s protestations are worthless, and offering the unhelpful remark that his tithe should burn without smoke. While God’s words cannot be doubted, centuries of biblical exegesis bear witness to the fact that various interpretations of God’s words are possible, even at the same time. Presumably, then, Abel has understood God’s address to Cain as a warning in relation to tithing, or the burning of the tithe, where if Cain tithes or ignites his tithe well he will be rewarded favourably, but if he tithes or ignites his tithe badly, he will be punished.⁴⁰⁴ Abel understands Cain’s smoking tithe as symbolic

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⁴⁰¹ For this translation, see Epp, ed., The Killing of Abel (l. 313), available at: [https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-killing-of-abel] [accessed 30 July 2021].

⁴⁰² The dispute that Cain insists that they have still to settle corresponds to the oblique words of Genesis 4.8 which are often, as in the case of the online version of the Douay-Rheims Bible used here, joined together with the later words of the same passage to give the impression that Cain spoke to Abel and suggested that they go into the field where subsequently Cain kills Abel: ‘And Cain said to Abel his brother: Let us go forth abroad.’ Yet other biblical sources differ, and suggest a conversation between the brothers. See, for example, The Bible: King James Version with the Apocrypha, ed. by David Norton (London: Penguin Books, 2006), where the same passage reads ‘And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, that when they were in the field’, p. 6. The difficulty of knowing what Cain and Abel actually spoke about can be traced back to the Hebrew bible where similar opacity is evident. For comparisons of Christian and Hebrew versions of Genesis 4.8 see, for example, Cherry, Torah Through Time, p. 74. See also Byron, Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition, esp. pp. 63-72 where Byron explores how, from ancient times onwards, exegetes and translators of the bible, including the Vulgate, sought to fill the gaps found in the Hebrew version of Genesis 4.8.

⁴⁰³ Cain’s smoking tithe was often understood as indicative of God’s displeasure at Cain’s tithe which should have burned cleanly like Abel’s. On this, see Byron, Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition, pp. 50-53.

⁴⁰⁴ As, indeed, many scholars have understood God’s ‘warning’ to Cain. The confusion here relies on the slipperiness of the verb allowen used by God when in the final line of his address to Cain when, after discussing the good or bad tithing or igniting of the tithe, God says ‘Thou bese alowed therafter als’ (l. 296). See MED Online s. v.
of God’s displeasure with Cain. Cain, on the other hand, understands God’s address only in relation to the burning of the tithe and also that, whether or not he ignites it properly, or whether or not it smokes, he will still receive God’s favour.

Part of tithing properly, according to Abel, is the burning of the tithe without smoke, but Cain is under the impression that the smoking tithe is irrelevant to God. From Cain’s point of view, he is rightly vexed by this perplexing state of affairs and is left wondering why his brother should admonish him for a badly burning tithe since it does not matter to God. This is why Cain presses Abel further. The ‘fowll dispyte’ (l. 314) that Cain seeks to settle with Abel lies in the question that Cain clearly asks of Abel after God’s intervention: ‘whi brend thi tend so shyre, | Ther myne did bot smoked, | Right as it wold vs both haue choked?’ (ll. 317-9). If, as Cain believes, God has assured him that the smoking of his tithe is of no import, then Cain wants to hear Abel’s account for the difference in the way their tithes are burning. Abel might have pointed to the fact that Cain’s tithe consisted of the ‘warst’ (l. 224) sheaves, and contained ‘Thystyls and brerys—yei, grete plenté— | And all kyn wedys that might be’ (ll. 202-3), which might account for the smoke. Yet Abel does not. Steadfast in the belief that his own interpretation of God’s words is correct, Abel instead declares: ‘Godys will I trow it were | That myn brened so clere; | If thyne smoked am I to wite?’ (ll. 320-2). Again, Abel’s words offer little counsel or consolation to Cain, amounting as they do to an admission that Abel believes that it

‘allouen (v.)’ where, while the majority of the translations of this verb have positive attributions relating to acts of mercy, charity, worship or virtue, it can also refer to being paid in kind, or requited [accessed 03 August 2021].

405 This point corresponds to exegetical debates that considered what the brothers had talked about and posited that, if Cain had sought clarity, counsel, or consolation from Abel, then it must not have been forthcoming. On this, see Cherry, Torah Through Time, where Cherry discusses different readings of the lacuna in the biblical narrative where some identify Abel’s refusal to enter into dialogue with his pained brother an abdication of filial and spiritual duty that flouts the sentiments expressed in Deuteronomy 22.3 demanding that one brother not remain indifferent to another’s distress, p. 92.
was simply God’s will, coupled with a rather callous self-exculpatory rhetorical question that seeks to excuse himself from any blame.

Abel’s abrupt response to Cain’s question illustrates how blindingly sure he is that he has interpreted God’s words correctly, and it also highlights how at odds the brothers’ understandings of the meaning of what God said are. Cain’s continued confusion about his smoking tithe might have prompted Abel to clarify the misunderstanding – to point out to Cain that he has misinterpreted God.406 Again, Abel does not, and his insistence that God’s will caused his tithe to burn clearly suggests that Abel assumes he has found favour with God whereas Cain, with his smoking tithe, has not. This point, along with Abel’s uncharitable remark that he is not to blame for the differently burning tithes, is the one that leads directly to his murder by Cain. Immediately after what Cain views as Abel’s contradictory, self-aggrandizing words, Cain clearly states ‘We! yei! that shal thou sore abite’ (l. 322). It is not God’s displeasure that irks Cain in this play; it is Abel’s assumption that his own cleanly burning tithe signifies God’s favour, and that Cain’s smoking tithe signifies God’s displeasure, that pushes the stubbornly spiritually degenerate, easily violent Cain to fratricide.

It might seem, then, that Abel’s interpretation of God’s words was right after all: God was discussing the rights and wrongs of tithing, and therefore Cain understood God incorrectly while Abel had it right. Yet this is far from certain. There is a third interpretation of God’s words available that fits the biblical narrative and would have appealed to the play’s medieval audience of the rural poor. Regular bouts of famine would have precluded the peasant poor from offering anything other than the warst fruits of the ground which surely would, like Cain’s tithe, have

406 On the perceived misunderstanding see, for example, Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition*, pp. 65-72 where Byron discusses how exegetes from ancient times built on a supposed conversation between the brothers to illustrate their opposing theological understandings. See also Cherry, *Torah Through Time*, p. 92.
burned with a degree of smoke. Yet even if the rural poor offered such a tithe, it would still have been a valuable sacrifice if it was given willingly and generously. Cain’s measly tithe is deliberately chosen to consist of the worst sheaves as he selfishly reserves the ‘best’ (l. 196) for himself. The quality of Cain’s tithe is decided by choice, not by necessity, and it is given with a mean spirit. Cain’s decision to grudgingly offer only his poorest quality sheaves seems almost a cruel parody of a genuinely poor audience who might not have had the luxury of choice. This is where the import of God’s words to Cain becomes apparent as they reassure an audience that the quality of the tithe is of no consequence.

The part of God’s address to Cain that caused the brothers’ misunderstanding was ‘If thou teynd right thou gettys thi mede; | And be thou sekir, if thou teynd fals, | Thou be alowed therafter als’ (ll. 294-6). These lines seem to correspond directly to Genesis 4. 7, where God advises Cain of the following: ‘If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door? but the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it’. The right or false teynding of Mactatio Abel thus corresponds to the well or ill doing of Genesis 4. 7. The teynd that God speaks of is one that urges neither attention to the physical tithe nor the way in which it burns or smokes. What God

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407 Another corollary of the bouts of bad weather attested to in ‘Watergate’ was the frequent occurrence of famine throughout England and beyond. See, for example, Bruce S. Campbell, The Great Transition: Climate, Disease, and Society in the Late Medieval World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), esp. pp. 267-331, where Campbell discusses the deleterious effects of climate change and frequent outbreaks of both war and plague on crops and harvests which resulted in widespread famine, felt perhaps most notably in England in the Great Famine of the fourteenth century. See also Clifford Davidson, ‘York Guilds and the Corpus Christi Plays: Unwilling Participants?’, Early Theatre, 9:2 (2006), 11-33 where Davidson notes the harvest failures in Yorkshire of 1433-40, and again in 1500-02. See also Diller, The Middle English Mystery Play, where Diller remarks that any identification the audience might have felt with Cain would have been in the sense that they were familiar with rude and irascible farmers, thus making Cain close to his audience only in the sense ‘in which murderers and exploiters are close to their victims’, p. 231. Diller’s point is a salient one as this Cain is not a poor peasant and his choice of the worst sheaths, when he eventually offers his tithe, is not a proverbially Hobson’s one. Cain deliberately and freely chooses to offer only the worst of his crop, an observation that might indeed have been interpreted as a cruel irony, or parody, by a genuinely poor, rural audience.

408 Licence is always taken in any dramatic re-working of biblical narratives, but these lines do indeed seem to correspond here, appearing as they do, in both the bible and the play, immediately prior to the brothers speaking and, subsequently, Cain killing Abel.
means, and what both Cain and Abel fail to comprehend, hinges on the word *teynd* being understood on an internal, spiritual level that relates to the *intent* of the subject who is offering the tithe rather than an external, physical one that relates to the object that is the tithe.\(^{409}\)

In God’s words *teynd* corresponds to intention, and relates to the spirit in which the tithe is offered, rather than the tithe itself.\(^{410}\) In other words, what God actually says to Cain is that if he ‘tend right’ (l. 294), that is, if Cain tithes with good intention, he will receive his reward from God, and if he ‘teynd fals’ (l. 295), that is, if he tithes with ill intent, then he will be repaid accordingly. God has no interest in the quality of the tithe apart from what it might reveal about the intentions of the person tithing.\(^{411}\) In this sense, the *teynd* echoes Genesis 4.7. What God wants is a change of heart from Cain; a change in inner attitude that could remedy how his tithe smokes. That Cain fails to comprehend this, and interprets God’s words as a kind of potential release from the shame of his smoking tithe, is perhaps unsurprising. Cain’s stubborn spiritual degeneration should perhaps prepare any reader or audience to anticipate just such a misunderstanding on Cain’s part. Yet crucially, and of special importance with regard to the subsequent reintroduction of Garcio, ‘pious’ Abel also fails to recognize the spiritual implications of God’s words to Cain.

\(^{409}\) In Boone, ‘The Skill of Cain’, Boone identifies the inevitable failure of Cain’s sacrifice as symptomatic of his ‘deficient spiritual state’, claiming that the York, Chester, Towneley, and N-Town versions of this drama all contain a debate between Cain and Abel about the reasons for tithing ‘and the proper and just frame of mind that is requisite for a successful offering or tithe’, (p. 124; p. 114). Where I differ from Boone is in my suggestion that in the Towneley version, no such debate occurs.

\(^{410}\) See s. v. ‘tenden, (v. 1)’, *MED Online* for a third definition of *teynd or tend* relating to states of mind and intention [accessed 08 August 2021].

\(^{411}\) Again, this point reflects exegetical debates that sought to account for God’s otherwise arbitrary, almost capricious, disdain for Cain’s tithe. On this, see Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition*, pp. 39-50, where Byron discusses such debates that considered the possibility that God favoured Abel’s offering because Cain’s was deficient in quality, or Cain witheld some for himself, or because Cain delayed the act of tithing. *Mactatio Abel* raises all of these possibilities, but God’s words to Cain echo the interpretation of Genesis 4.7 most favoured, according to Quinones in *The Changes of Cain*, by Christian exegetes who accounted for God favouring Abel’s offering because it was offered with good intent, whereas Cain was condemned as a person whose mind was against God, p. 50.
Abel’s conviction that he has understood God correctly leads him to believe that it was God’s will that favoured his cleanly burning tithe over Cain’s smoking one. Abel never refers to God’s speech, and never voices any doubt about why God favours his tithe over Cain’s. What Abel fails to realize is that the only reason that God favours his tithe is because Abel initially offered it ‘in good entent’ (l. 178). Abel’s pious self-righteousness and his indignation towards Cain’s tithing all stem from his concerns over the quality of Cain’s tithe. Abel berates Cain for offering a measly tithe, which comprises the worst sheaves, thistles, and berries while Cain keeps the best for himself, and rebukes him thus: ‘Caym, thou tendys wrang, and of the warst’ (l. 224). The *wrang* that Abel detects here is one that seems to relate to Cain reserving the better sheaves for himself, coming as it does on the same line as Abel illustrates his disdain for the poor physical quality of Cain’s tithe. Similarly, Abel’s concern remains rooted in the physical aspects of Cain’s tithe and how it burns – evident when he points out the deficiency he perceives in Cain’s smoky offering: ‘Thy tend shuld bren withouten smek’ (l. 286). Abel’s exclusive focus on the physical attributes of Cain’s tithe and the way in which it burns thus arguably betrays his own spiritual failings. If, as Quinones remarks, the Cain and Abel strife was often understood as reflecting ‘the Jewish-Christian struggle’, then Abel and his representation of the Christian Church do not emerge from this re-telling of the sibling rivalry entirely unscathed.412

At no point does Abel mention to Cain the importance of spiritual *intent* when offering a tithe.413 Abel’s early remarks to Cain on the act of tithing point out only that ‘oure tend shuld be brend’ (l. 73), and that ‘First we tend with oure hend, | And to his loftynge sithen be brend’ (l. 102-3). Nothing in Abel’s instructions elaborates upon the necessity to tithe with a good spirit – all

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413 In Purdon, *The Wakefield Master’s Dramatic Art*, Purdon recognizes the difference in intent between the brothers’ offerings, but not the import of God’s intervention, p. 44.
Abel’s instructions amount to are that the tithe should be burned; that first of all they offer the tithe with hand *not* their heart; and then it should be burned in praise of God. Though Abel frequently invokes God’s name, and reminds Cain ‘Of Godys grace’ (l. 117), or to tithe properly ‘For drede’ (l. 246) of God, or so that ‘God of heuen be thi freynd’ (l. 258), he makes no direct mention of spiritual intent. He urges Cain to ‘teynd right’ (l. 222) three times, but it is not clear that even Abel truly understands what tithing correctly means, and it is only through blind obedience, rather than spiritual understanding, that Abel offers his tithe with ‘good entent’ (l. 178). As Abel kneels to offer the tithe, he exhibits the correct practice and procedure as he recites a formal prayer to God which includes the line ‘For I gif it in good intent’ (l. 178) immediately prior to burning the tithe. Abel has previously admitted to knowing the ‘custom of oure law’ (l. 69), because ‘Oure fader vs bad, oure fader vs kend’ (l. 72). Abel only knows what to do, how to do it, and what to say because they have been taught by their father, and the prayer he recites while offering his tithe is merely the rote parroting of a customary worship practice that only coincidentally includes the *good entent*. Abel does not have the spiritual insight which would enable him to debate with or challenge Cain successfully – he simply knows unquestioning obedience, unlike Cain. Nevertheless, assured of his own righteousness, Abel overlooks entirely the need to at least attempt to educate Cain on the need for good intent, and he continues to fail in his brotherly/priestly duties as he too misinterprets God’s message. Cain does not attempt to recite the prayer that contains the *good entent* (or even offer a deliberately distorted one) as he burns his offering – and neither does ‘pious’ Able remind him, nor rebuke

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414 See ll. 174-81 for Abel’s sacrificial prayer.
415 In Boone, ‘The Skill of Cain’, Boone also identifies the importance of language in *Mactatio Abel* and notes Cain’s concentration on the physical aspects of his tithe and the way in which it burns, though not Abel’s similar focus (pp. 121-4). Even if Abel’s obedient and unquestioning tithing could be interpreted as virtuous, his constant criticism of the way in which Cain’s tithe burns, even after God’s intervention, suggests that Abel values a cleanly burning tithe over the virtue of simple spiritual obedience.
him for not doing so. Abel could have offered reassurance to Cain if he had understood God correctly himself. Abel could have pointed out to Cain that, as long as the tithe is given with ‘good entent’ (l. 178), neither the tithe itself nor the way in which it burns matters to God. Abel could, potentially, have assuaged Cain’s shame and anger, but Abel fails to do so.

If Cain is too spiritually corrupt to comprehend the spiritual rehabilitation that would please God, then Abel is too preoccupied with preaching the necessity of adequate tithing to interpret the anagogical import of the words of God to Cain as, typologically speaking, a good priest should or, indeed, a compassionate brother should. If God’s words were indeed meant as a warning to Cain, then presumably they would have come sooner; the timing suggests a God intervening in an attempt to give spiritual direction, yet both Abel and Cain fail to recognize this. Abel’s own spiritual oversights and familial failings will prove to be almost as important as Cain’s in ensuring that they will be the things he dies on a hill for. Spiritually, Abel is too white – a monochrome (and therefore spiritually incomplete) flat white who is too sanctimonious and blindly obedient to recognize his own shortcomings. Cain is spiritually too black – an equally monochrome flat black who is incapable even of comprehending God’s mercy. What the audience witnesses then is Cain murdering his brother, apparently because Abel’s tithe burnt ‘so shyre’ (l. 317), while Cain’s ‘did bot smoked’ (l. 318).

While Abel dies, Cain addresses the audience directly in anticipation of their moral outrage and condemnation, threatening to ‘amend wars then it is’ (l. 332) should anyone even dare to think he ‘did amys’ (l. 331). Abel is dead by Cain’s hand and Cain is guilty, unrepentant, and therefore damned. It might seem that any potential audience would now permit Abel the

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416 Cain does offer a deliberately distorted, disrespectful ‘prayer’ immediately after Abel has recited his (see ll. 183-9), but not when offering his own tithe.
moral high ground. Yet, as this section has argued, Abel is not a character with which an audience might readily identify. His lack of exegetical insight, his misinterpretation of God’s words, his sanctimonious insistence on correct tithing procedures, and his constant refusal to admit any of Cain’s (unfounded) claims on the burden of tithing challenge any audience’s capacity for sympathy with Abel.\textsuperscript{417} Thus neither Cain nor Abel possesses the spiritual flexibility needed to model virtuous relation or spiritual change. Re-enter Garcio.

**Truth, Lies, and Rehabilitating Garcio**

Thematically, the play could end after God’s curse on Cain. Thus far, Mactatio Abel has succeeded in accounting for the arbitrary reason behind the fratricide of Abel, all the while remaining uncritical of God. Yet the drama continues in order to illustrate how a third party, namely Garcio, responds ethically to Cain’s crime and ultimately proves a character with whom an audience can fully identify. When Garcio initially rejoins the play, things seem set to continue as before as he swiftly responds to Cain’s call, crying ‘Master, master!’ (l. 385), and immediately suffers a blow from Cain which he meets with a curse. Indeed, Garcio seems resigned to his fate: ‘Thus am I comen bofettys to fott’ (l. 392). Cain replies with what sounds like a joke: ‘Peas, man! I did it bot to vse my hand’ (l. 393) and then casually informs Garcio that he has killed Abel, asking him to swiftly dispose of the remains: ‘I slogo my brother this same day; | I pray the, good boy, and thou may, | To ryn away with the bayn’ (ll. 394-6). In the same short section of dialogue, only two lines after Cain jokes about hitting Garcio just to use his hand, Cain drops the bombshell that he has killed Abel and now begs Garcio to run away with the body.\textsuperscript{418}

\textsuperscript{417} For an alternative viewpoint that maintains an element of sympathy for Cain, see Sturges, *The Circulation of Power in Medieval Biblical Drama*, pp. 111-6.

\textsuperscript{418} This is a change to Cain’s suggestion a few lines earlier that both he and Garcio ‘shuld bery hym both in fere’ (l. 383). Cain appears to be thinking quickly here and the abrupt change of plan seems to indicate that, were Garcio to agree to do Cain’s bidding, then Cain could feasibly attempt to blame Garcio for the murder of Abel.
Adopting a kind of scorched earth policy, Cain openly attempts to implicate Garcio in the murder of Abel after the event. Though Garcio had nothing to do with the fratricide, Cain’s request indicates that, while Cain knows that he himself is doomed for eternity, he also wants to take Garcio down with him. Garcio’s reply bespeaks his horror at Cain’s revelation: ‘We! out apon the, thefe! | Has thou thi brother slayn?’ (ll. 398-9). Garcio’s shock is clear here as he seeks confirmation of Cain’s crime. It is inconceivable to Garcio that even Cain would do such a thing, and Garcio’s moral compass is pressed further when Cain replies with another joke: ‘I saide it for a skaunce’ (l. 401). Now, when Garcio realizes the enormity of his master’s crime, he seeks to distance himself from Cain and renounces him: ‘Here I the forsake’ (l. 403).

From this point on Cain has lost even the support of his long-suffering servant Garcio, and Garcio begins his return to the fold of Christianity. Most scholars interpret Garcio’s ‘ferde of grevance’ (l. 402) as alluding to his reasonable fear of injury from Cain, and most also interpret Garcio’s acknowledgement that the ‘bayles vs take’ (l. 405) within a legal framework to mean that Garcio fears that the bailiffs will soon be here to escort them away for trial. While such interpretations are certainly feasible, an alternative interpretation might focus instead on Garcio’s return to Christianity as he turns away from Cain. Garcio’s ‘ferde of grevance’ (l. 402) would in such a reading foreground his fear of offending God should he participate in Cain’s plan. His

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419 Were Garcio to agree to Cain’s request to dispose of Abel’s body, then Garcio would be guilty as an accessory after the fact and punishable by law to the same degree as the murderer. On this, see Brockman, ‘The Law of Man and the Peace of God: Judicial Process as Satiric Theme in the Wakefield Mactatio Abel’, Speculum, 49:4 (1974), 699-707 (p. 699).
420 See s. v. ‘forsaken (v.)’, meaning to repudiate, withdraw allegiance from, or ‘to disavow or deny (God, the saints etc.)’, MED Online [accessed 28 October 2021]. Garcio is withdrawing any allegiance or spiritual attachment he once felt towards Cain.
421 All of Cawley’s glosses on these lines support these interpretations, as do those of Epp, ed., The Killing of Abel, available at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-killing-of-abel> [accessed 06 May 2021]. The same gloss for bayles used here specifically to refer to the sheriff’s bailiffs also appears in The Murder of Abel in The Towneley Plays, ed. by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, Early English Text Society s. s. 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 656.
concern about the ‘bayles’ (l. 405) might then be a reference to the fires of hell that await the damned at Doomsday. Understanding Garcio’s words in anagogical, rather than purely legal, terms corresponds to the clear spiritual undertones of Garcio’s forsaking of Cain as he distances himself morally and ethically for his earthly master. Distancing himself thus, Garcio comes to occupy the moral high ground – a stance recognized by Cain when he subsequently, and sarcastically, addresses Garcio as ‘syr’ (l. 406) and begs him for mercy: ‘I cry you mercy!’ (l. 406). By acknowledging Garcio’s higher moral status, notwithstanding the sarcasm, Cain reveals that he is aware of, and responsive to, Garcio’s shifting allegiance. While Cain remains legally Garcio’s master on earth, Garcio’s concern for saving his soul from the fires of hell indicates the beginnings of the restoration of his faith and his turn to his saviour and eternal Master.

Garcio voices his disbelief that Cain could authorize a royal pardon which, were he to acquiesce to his master’s request to dispose of Abel’s body, might allow him to escape punishment. When Garcio asks, incredulously, how Cain intends to do this: ‘How will thou do, long or thou thirfe?’ (l. 411), Cain replies: ‘Stand vp, my good boy, bilife’ (l. 412). While Cain’s instruction that Garcio should stand up could be interpreted figuratively, implying that Garcio should keep his resolve and go along with Cain’s plan, Garcio’s exasperation with Cain’s overestimations of the extent of his powers first to implicate, and now to exculpate Garcio, have restored Cain’s servant’s belief in God, and not Cain. Garcio appears to have fallen to the

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422 See s. v. ‘grevaunce (n.)’; s. v. ‘bal(e) (n. 2)’, MED Online [accessed 08May 2021]. Understanding bayles as the fires of hell corresponds to Noah’s remark in the next play by the Wakefield Master in Cawley’s edition, Processus Noe Cum Filiiis, that Lucifer and the fallen will ‘burn in bayle for ay’ (l. 26).
423 Cain’s sarcastic plea for Garcio’s mercy here echoes Cain’s earlier words to God when he admits to losing hope of redemption: ‘Syn I haue done so mekill syn | That I may not thi mercy wyn’ (ll. 358-9).
424 To a medieval Christian audience, saving one’s own soul was a fundamental tenet of religious doctrine. On this see, for example, Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 338-76.
ground, or to his knees at this point, and Cain’s command that Garcio stand up and believe in
him, then, can be understood as an order from Cain that seeks to undo Garcio’s kneeling,
presumably to God. Characteristically and cynically disregarding Garcio’s ethical turn, Cain
reiterates his intention to issue a pardon and demands that Garcio goes along with this plan. Cain
orders Garcio to voice his approval to all of his forthcoming claims to royal pardon by crying
‘oyes, oyes, oy!’ (l. 417). Not only has Cain tried, in vain, to implicate Garcio in the murder of
Abel, but he now requires Garcio’s collusion in his attempt to persuade the audience of the
veracity and legitimacy of his claims.

Garcio’s exasperation and refusal to participate in Cain’s sham proclamation is evident in
his mocking response: ‘Browes, browes to thi boy!’ (l. 418). Following this is the exchange
between Cain and Garcio that has confounded many scholars, and it is here that I suggest that
Garcio is referring to eating coal as a purgative to cleanse himself from his earlier sins of the
tongue and secure his own salvation. I cite it in full here as it is central to witnessing, and
understanding, that each time Cain makes a claim, he includes Garcio in that claim. Each time
Cain feigns royal prerogative either to exonerate himself, or to declare himself truthful, or to
legitimize any other of the false claims Cain makes, he implicates Garcio.425 Garcio is aware of
this and his spiritual distancing from Cain now manifests itself in replies that deconstruct Cain’s
lies at the same time as they speak Garcio’s truth. While Cain reels off his false claims, Garcio’s
responses are rich in a proverbial language that exists on a very different spiritual level to Cain’s.

425 See Sturges, *The Circulation of Power in Medieval Biblical Drama*, where Sturges makes the point that Cain’s
proclamation directly addresses the audience (along with Garcio) as witnesses, thus ‘they are directly implicated, or
invited to implicate themselves, in those very attempts’ at claiming pardon, p. 116. While my reading of this passage
differs from Sturges, who sees it as an opportunity for the audience to extend their sympathy towards Cain, Sturges’
point about implicating the audience in witnessing Cain claiming a false royal pardon is a salient one, and one that
Garcio’s attempts to distance himself from (and purge himself of any accusation of) telling lies thus also proves
exemplary for the audience.
With creative vocabulary that proverbially, colloquially, and figuratively echoes acts of purgation and cleansing from the sin of swearing falsely, Garcio admits his shortcomings as he prepares for his spiritual transformation:

Cain:     I commaund you in the kyngys nayme,
Garcio:  And in my masteres, fals Cayme,
Cain:     That no man at thame fynd fawt ne blame,
Garcio:  Yey, cold rost is at my masteres hame.
Cain:     Nowther with hym nor with his knafe,
Garcio:  What! I hope my master rafe.
Cain:     For thay ar trew full manyfold.
Garcio:  My master suppys no coyle bot cold.
Cain:     The kyng wrytys you vntil.
Garcio:  Yit ete I neuer half my fill.
Cain:     The kyng will that thay be safe.
Garcio:  Yey, a draght of drynke fayne wold I hayfe.
Cain:     At thare awne will let them wafe.
Garcio:  My stomak is redy to receyfe.
Cain:      Loke no man say to theym, on nor other—
Garcio:  This same is he that slo his brother.
Cain:      Byd euery man thaym luf and lowt.
Garcio:  Yey ill-spon weft ay comes foule out
Cain:      Long or thou get thi hoyse, and go thus aboute!
          Byd euery man theym please to pay.
Garcio:  Yey, gif Don, thyne hors, a wisp of hay! (ll. 419-39).

Visually and audibly, this section is split equally between the two characters, allowing both Cain and Garcio single line interjections to which the other seems, on one level, to respond. However, arranging their lines this way also allows both audience and reader to hear and see that Cain and Garcio are speaking on separate levels. Though physically joined on the same page, their language is spiritually worlds apart. Scholars have puzzled over this section of dialogue and generally reduced it to a set piece of comic stichomythia, where Garcio engages in silly sarcasm or jokes about food.\(^{426}\) I read this passage as a continuation of Garcio’s declaration that he has

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\(^{426}\) See, for example, Happé, *The Towneley Cycle*, where Happé recognizes the mutual dislike apparent between Cain and Garcio, and regards the aims of the comic devices in this passage as serving merely to highlight why Cain was eventually exiled so comprehensively, p. 127. See also Edminster, *The Preaching Fox*, where Edminster
forsaken Cain, and the exchange as one that highlights Cain’s continuing self-interest and spiritual demise, while establishing Garcio as the moral example for the audience.

Garcio cannot in real terms escape his servitude to Cain. Thus his early rejoinder to Cain’s command (made, according to Cain, ‘in the kyngys nayme’ (l. 419)), is ‘And my masteres, fals Cayme’ (l. 420). Here Garcio clarifies the fact that this command is made in his master’s name, and reminds the audience that Cain has no real regal authority. From the very beginning of this exchange, then, Garcio sets himself against Cain. While Cain deals in lies, Garcio responds with pithy counters that cut to the truth. Much of what Garcio says in the exchange is proverbial; a technique that belies the gravity of Garcio’s words, which operate on an entirely different spiritual level to the subject of Cain’s misguided attempts to claim regal protection. Cain’s next comment, ‘That no man at thame fynd fawt ne blame’ (l. 421), seeks to exculpate both himself and Garcio from any fault or blame. By including Garcio in his request for exoneration from the crime, however, Cain directly implicates Garcio in the crime.

427 Edminster notes that the exchanges between Cain and Garcio reveal Cain’s authority as a sham, but he maintains that Garcio’s addition operates only on the level of festive comedy where Garcio plays to the crowd ‘with winks, nudges, and perhaps an occasional falsetto’. See also Diller, The Middle English Mystery Play, where Diller reads Garcio’s role here as one that the audience laughs along with as he unmasks the Cain’s proclamation of royal pardon, though for Diller, Garcio’s role is pure parody, p. 231.

428 Happé notes that the Wakefield plays are rich in proverbial language, evident especially in characters of lower ranks (such as Garcio), where the particular advantage of ‘the pithy concentration of proverbial language is appropriate to both the comic and the serious in what these characters have to say’, p. 61, italics added for emphasis.
Garcio is, of course, guiltless with regard to the fratricide, as anyone who has witnessed
the play would be well aware. Garcio’s reply to Cain can therefore be understood proverbially,
where the line ‘cold rost is at my masteres hame’ (l. 422) means that what Cain is saying is old
news.\footnote{For the proverbial meanings, see Bartlett Jere Whiting, Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases; From English Writings Mainly Before 1500 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 489. Text available at: <https://archive.org/details/proverbssentence0000whit/page/489/mode/1up?q=cold> [accessed 02 May 2021]. See also s. v. ‘rost(e) (n. 1)’, MED Online for the understanding of speaking of cold roast meat meaning to tell stale news [accessed 20 July 2021].} There seems, indeed, little point in Cain urging the audience to absolve both himself
\textit{and} Garcio from any crime as the audience has evidently witnessed Cain slaying Abel alone.
Garcio further objects to Cain including him, as ‘his knafe’ (l. 423), in the murderous event,
suggesting that Cain ‘rafe’ (l. 424) – that Cain is speaking in a foolish manner and deviating
further from moral rectitude.\footnote{S. v. ‘rafen (v. 1)’; s. v. ‘rafen (v. 2)’, MED Online [accessed 02 May 2021].} Ignoring Garcio, Cain proclaims next that both he and Garcio are
‘trew full manyfold’ (l. 425). While Garcio’s earlier devilish antics might cast doubt on any
claims for him to be considered as entirely \textit{trew}, Garcio is not, unlike Cain, guilty of murder and
is therefore, in comparison to Cain, \textit{trew}.\footnote{See s. v. ‘treu(e) (adj.)’, MED Online for the many different contextual meanings this adjective carries, ranging from being trustworthy, law-abiding, having integrity, and being honourable, to being steadfast in faith and devotion to God, to name but a few [accessed 28 May 2021].} Moreover, Garcio is guiding the audience through
Cain’s false claims for royal pardon here, flagging up Cain’s lying – a sin that has many biblical
proscriptions.\footnote{There are numerous examples to be found in the bible that warn of the sin of telling lies and of how displeasing this is to God. See, for example, Proverbs 6. 16-20; Proverbs 14. 5; Proverbs 14.25; Proverbs 19.9.} After Garcio’s turn to religion upon discovering Cain’s crime of fratricide, and
his refusal to implicate himself in the disposal of Abel’s body, he now seeks to highlight Cain’s
mendacity at the same time as he alludes to an act of purgation in order to cleanse himself of the
sin of speaking falsely.

This is the point at which Garcio responds to Cain’s truth-claim by invoking a figurative
phrase, saying that Cain ‘suppys no coyle bot cold’ (l. 426). According to Cawley’s glossary, this
line means that Garcio is suggesting that Cain ingests only cold cabbage soup or some form of pottage. *Coyle* here is taken as a variant of *col*, meaning ‘a pottage of garden greens’ as shown in the *MED*.\(^{433}\) Yet each of the other examples provided by the *MED* for this definition actually contains not only a variant of the word *col* (such as *cale*, *coule*, or *kale*) but also has either the word pottage or gruel attached, so that it is quite clear that a thin soup, or porridge-like mixture made from kale or garden greens is being described. The example in *Mactatio Abel*, however, does not – it simply says *coyle*, with no mention of either pottage or gruel. In fact, all Garcio actually says of Cain is that he ‘suppys no coyle bot cold’ (l. 426). The *MED* appears to be endorsing a figurative, or loose translation – the only way Cain can eat ‘no coyle bot cold’ (l. 426) is if it is in the form of a soup.

As explained earlier, in a Yorkshire dialect the word *coyle*, pronounced *coil*, can also mean *coal* and, allowing for the interchangeability of the letters *i* and *y*, this alternative definition as *coal* is equally validated via the *MED*.\(^{434}\) Even if the insertion of the interchangeable *i/y* letter is a scribal indication of a long vowel, the homophones *cole* and *coal* still apply and the possibility that Garcio is alluding to Cain eating coal, whether physically or figuratively, remains.\(^{435}\) The sense then could be that Cain ingests only cold coal. In his very next line, Garcio

\(^{433}\) s. v. ‘*col* (n. 1)’, *MED Online* [accessed 30 October 2020].

\(^{434}\) s. v. ‘*col* (n. 2), *MED Online* [accessed 20 January 2022]. See Gillian Redfern, ‘Knowing Me, Knowing You: Three Knowingly Northern and Knowingly Different Medieval Mystery Plays by the Wakefield Master’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, University of Manchester, 2017), pp. 29-31 for the initial discussion of this idea which I draw upon and extend in this piece.

\(^{435}\) Though speculative, it is nevertheless feasible that a lay audience, unfamiliar with scribal practices, would have pronounced each letter of the word, thus equating a local medieval pronunciation of *coal* as *coyle*, or *coil*, with the modern local custom. See Rev. Joseph Hunter, *The Hallamshire Glossary* (London: W. Pickering, 1829), where Hunter acknowledges the local dialect pronunciation of *coal* as *coyle* and explains that he ‘had long thought the *coyle for coal* was a mere vulgarism till [he] met with it in an abbey-lease of the reign of Henry VII’ (p. xxii). Hunter later gives both spellings of *coyle* and *coal* alongside each other in his alphabetical glossary and further explains that ‘if this is a corruption, and not a true archaism, then it is an antient one, and not effected by the unschooled vulgar; for in a lease of the Prior of Bretton to a Wentworth, in the reign of Henry VII the word is throughout written *coyle*’, ibid., (p. 26). Hunter gives no bibliographical information for this lease, but his evidence does place the historic spelling of *coal* as *coyle* within areas which would have been part of the vast medieval manor
says of himself: ‘Yit ete I neuer half my fill’ (l. 428), where the *yit* at the start of this line is used as a conjunctive collocator linking this line to the previous one. Taken together, Garcio’s lines then read ‘My master suppys no coyle bot cold … Yit ete I neuer half my fill’ (ll. 426-8). Read thus, these lines imply that Garcio is also accustomed to consuming coal (though not specifically cold coal like Cain), and wants or needs more, and his ‘blak hoill’ (l. 7) is symptomatic of this practice.\(^{436}\)

This may seem a strange premise, and one which highlights the difficulty of interpreting a dialect text where a failure to recognize or take into account its inflections can result in a reader overlooking the connections that bind the dialect speaker (and audience) linguistically as well as geographically to their environment. As the cultural critic Raymond Williams puts it:

> In certain areas, there will be in certain periods, practices and meanings which are not reached for. There will be areas of practice and meaning which, almost by definition from its own limited character, or in its profound deformation, the dominant culture is unable in any real terms to recognize.\(^{437}\)

Williams’ point underscores the power of the local which is, by its very nature, unfamiliar and therefore possibly unrecognizable to anyone who is unaware of those local customs and practices, or the meanings of particular dialect terms.\(^{438}\) Carol Symes has argued that the criteria used to find, extract, classify, and edit the surviving artefacts of medieval theatre are often

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\(^{436}\) Garcio therefore corresponds to Julie Orlemanksi’s notion of a symptomatic subject discussed in *Symptomatic Subjects: Bodies, Medicine, and Causation in the Literatures of Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).


\(^{438}\) Disallowing the local dialect verges on a colonial reading practice that denies the performance of local language. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004) where Bhabha discusses ‘the differential systems of social and cultural signification’ in language, p. 325. In Bhabha’s terms, local dialect appears as ‘the foreign element in the midst of the performance of cultural translation’, unreadable or untranslatable to non-locals, ibid.
inadequate, and asks scholars to recognize that studying medieval drama is ‘the study of a vital performative element within the surrounding culture’.\footnote{Carol Symes, ‘The Appearance of Early Vernacular Plays: Forms, Functions, and the Future of Medieval Theatre’, \textit{Speculum}, 77:3 (2002), 778-831 (p. 779).} Claiming that recent editorial praxis has tended to consider medieval play scripts as ‘cut-and-dried, obvious’, Symes points out that some editions ignore the plays’ relationship to their surroundings, to the everyday life of a particular community and to the potential for local traditions of performance.\footnote{Ibid., (p. 789).} While she does not pay particular attention to dialect, applying the ‘inherent ambiguities’ she identifies in medieval drama to ‘translations’ of medieval dialect words permits productive, even provocative, new suggestions which cement further the organic relationship of \textit{Mactatio Abel} to its local environment.\footnote{Symes, ‘The Appearance of Early Vernacular Plays’, (p. 813).}

We can see this in the example I quoted earlier with regard to bad, black souls in the \textit{Creation} play of the Towneley manuscript, where the whole line reads: ‘Now are we waxen blak as any coyll’, where the line is unequivocally translated as ‘now we have grown as black as any coal’.\footnote{See the latest edition of the ‘Towneley Creation in \textit{The Towneley Plays} for TEAMS, where Epp also translates this instance as coal, text available at: \url{https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-creation} (l. 136). This is also the quotation given by the \textit{MED Online} to exemplify a regional spelling variation (s. v. ‘col (n. 2)’) to mean coal [accessed 30 January 2022].} This play is not one of the six usually attributed to the Wakefield Master but, as Peter Happé points out, there is evidence of this dramatist’s intervention in many other plays in the manuscript, and the Wakefield Master shows an awareness ‘of the techniques of anticipation and retrospect’.\footnote{Happé, \textit{The Towneley Cycle}, p. 83.} Happé’s points raise the possibility that the \textit{coyle} voiced by Garcio is merely replicating the dialect and meaning of the word \textit{coyle} of the preceding play. As Happé further
remarks, all the other plays in the manuscript by the Wakefield Master are written in the same Yorkshire dialect, illustrating a ‘closeness to demotic speech’ to showcase ‘the richness of linguistic experience’, and each play is ‘intimately associated with the sense of place engendered by such local language’. 444 This specific regional inflection of the word coal – one which is still in common use in some areas of Yorkshire and South Lancashire today – relies on the understanding of dialect which is richly observed in the Wakefield plays, yet consistently underestimated. 445

From an orthodox religious point of view, there is sound, Christian reasoning to underpin a claim for Garcio figuratively eating coal, as coal has biblical authority on its purgative and cleansing qualities:

And one of the seraphims flew to me, and in his hand was a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: Behold this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquities shall be taken away, and thy sin shall be cleansed. 446

The live coal here presumably means hot coal, indicating why the seraphim needed tongs to take it from the altar, and this hot coal has rehabilitative and spiritually restorative capabilities. The context immediately preceding the biblical quotation makes it clear that it is the notion of sinful speech that is being referred to, an analogy appropriate to Garcio’s characteristically ebullient and pugnacious verbosity evident in the opening of Mactatio Abel. More relevant at this stage in

444 Ibid, p. 59-63. See also Stevens, ‘Language as a Theme in the Wakefield Plays’, where Stevens notes the wealth of ‘earthy proverbs’ and ‘salty and resourceful dialectalisms’ so distinctive in the plays of the Wakefield Master, noting also that the Wakefield Master is a ‘most persistent and colourful user of dialectalisms as local references’, (pp. 104-5).

445 See, for example, Epp, ‘Re-editing Towneley’, The Yearbook of English Studies, 43 (2013), 87-104, where Epp discusses the many choices and issues faced by modern editors when editing new editions of medieval texts, though Epp does not discuss the dialect that forms such an integral part of these plays.

446 Isaiah 6. 6-7.
the play, however, is the biblical context to this passage from Isaiah that suggests that failing to call out sinful speech when you witness it entails guilt by association.\textsuperscript{447} Introducing the eating of coal specifically at this point in the drama, then, demonstrates Garcio’s recognition of Cain’s continuing lies and his willingness to challenge Cain on them. Garcio’s remark that he too does not eat enough coal also illustrates an admission of his own imperfection and his need to eat more coal – a figurative endorsement of the universal striving of Christian subjects through and with their imperfections towards the ultimate goal of salvation. The hot coal can redeem one’s character by removing iniquities – in other words, the coal can cleanse the soul when placed in, or near, the mouth or lips.\textsuperscript{448}

There are numerous literary examples, both religious and secular, that attest to the widespread use of the hot coal analogy to exhort purgation, overcome evil, and encourage acts of charity, deriving presumably from biblical examples such as the one given from Isaiah, and the imperative in Romans 12. 20: ‘thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head’.\textsuperscript{449} One particularly salient example occurs in a story the late-medieval northern English \textit{Alphabet of Tales} where a man, found guilty of witchcraft, is sentenced to death by burning. On the verge of his death, the

\textsuperscript{447} Discourses on the sins of the tongue were popularized and laicized in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and such discourses spread from clerical participants to the non-elite English laity and even to the non-literate of late-medieval English society. On this, see, Sandy Bardsley, ‘Sin, Speech, and Scolding in Late Medieval England’, in \textit{Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe}, ed. by Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 145-64, where Bardsley further notes that sins of the tongue were closely scrutinized and annotated in pastoral manuals, and the English church ‘enforced its jurisdiction over speech not only from the pulpit and in the confessional but also by means of its courts’ (p. 146). See also Edwin D. Craun, \textit{Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) where Craun claims that late-medieval pastoral literature in particular was ‘insistently ethical’ in its concerns for exposing sins of the tongue, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{448} See also Whiting, \textit{Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases}, where Whiting lists references to the beneficence of hot coal found in the \textit{Wycliffite Bible} relating to ‘the heete of charyte, ether of the Holy Goost, ether of the brenyng heet of penaunce’, p. 92. Text available at: <https://archive.org/details/proverbssentence0000whit/page/92/mode/1up> [accessed 03 May 2021].

\textsuperscript{449} The MED cites multiple examples too numerous to mention individually here, but they can be found in the quotations provided s. v. ‘col (n. 2. a)’; s. v. ‘col (n. 3. b)’ [accessed 30 January 2022].
tale reveals that a woman ‘putte a grete colle in his mouthe & said “I sale putt away þi prayers”’ – the coal in the mouth thus purges the accused as it casts out his demons. The coal apparently did the trick as his burial site subsequently witnessed many miracles, and a church was erected in there in his honour. According to Elma L. Johnson, dialect studies on this Alphabet of Tales manuscript locate its northern English provenance more specifically to the area around the West Yorkshire/Lancashire border, a rough geographic provenance overlapping that generally attributed to the Wakefield plays, pointing perhaps to a local understanding of the purgative qualities available from the (even figurative) consumption of coal.

Coal offers Garcio the chance to purge himself of his previously sinful tongue where, in his opening address, he insulted the audience and cursed upon the devil anyone who made a noise: ‘The dwill hang hym vp to dry’ (l. 13). The black, polluting material ordinarily understood as co-morbid with filth, disease, and death is, for a local audience, more fully appreciated as a freely available local resource understood – even if only figuratively – to also possess the rehabilitative agency for elemental salvation via personal purgation. In this sense the coal offers a local audience a similar ‘real-but-spiritual’ heat that can ‘consume a person’s sins’ that

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450 ‘Luxuria Multa Mala Facit’, in Alphabet of Tales: An English 15th Century Translation of the Alphabetum Narrationum of Etienne de Besançon, from Additional MS Add 25719 of the British Museum, ed. by Mary Mcleod Banks (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trüber & Co., 1904), p. 309, text available at: <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/AlphTales> [accessed 20 September 2020]. The story goes that the accusation resulted from a man’s continued rejection of a female admirer’s advances who contrived, along with her cousins, to account for this inexplicable state of affairs by accusing him of sorcery and witchcraft, which ultimately led to his demise. I use the word ‘demons’ as a figurative translation s. v. ‘preiour (n.)’, meaning ‘predator; fig. the Devil’, MED Online [accessed 20 September 2020].


452 This point echoes Alaimo’s in Bodily Natures when she states that ‘[i]f nature is to matter, we need more potent, more complex understandings of materiality’, p. 2. See also Duckert, ‘Earth’s Prospects’, in Elemental Ecocriticism, pp. 237-68. Much of what Duckert writes here corresponds to how I envisage the interconnectedness of coal and human (at least Garcio) in Mactatio Abel, though chronologically my arguments push for recognition of this same interconnectedness in the medieval period, earlier than the period Duckert discusses.
Jean Abbott equally identifies in Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris*.\(^{453}\) Given the West Yorkshire provenance shared by *Mactatio Abel, Alphabet of Tales*, and *Incendium Amoris*, a local, rural appreciation of the spiritual agency of coal’s ability to purge sins and reveal truth emerges – one that binds the human and the immediate material environment together in a reparative, restorative moral example.\(^{454}\)

The vibrancy of coal reveals the richness of the moral contribution the local material environment made to a medieval audience. Eschewing any distinction between separate human and non-human worlds, minerals, stones, rocks, coal, and humans were linked in the process of medieval world-making. As Kellie Robertson remarks, ‘medieval stones were irrepressibly vital: inner “virtues” bestowed on them quasi-animate powers of motion and action, while “mineral souls” linked them to the plants, animals, and humans further along the *scala naturae*’.\(^{455}\) For a discerning local reader, Garcio’s consumption of coal links the human and non-human local worlds in a spiritual lesson in the pursuit of truth with biblical (and therefore divine) approbation.

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\(^{453}\) Abbott, “*Ac si ignis elementaris ibi arderet*: Richard Rolle’s Elemental Love”, (p. 444). Abbott explains how Rolle describes his love of God in terms of a real-but-spiritual fire that behaves in a physical way that shines, melts, boils, and can consume, or purge, a person’s sins or keep them warm. As Abbott further explains, Rolle’s willingness to explain this real-but-spiritual fire in highly physical terms leaves his audience at a carefully crafted impasse between metaphor and reality (p. 445). The same can be said then for Garcio’s allusion to eating coal. See also Peter Murray Jones, ‘Image, Word, and Medicine in the Middle Ages’, in *Visualizing Medieval Medicine and Natural History, 1200-1500* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), pp. 1-24, where Jones discusses another possibly northern English manuscript that bears an image of a hand reaching from heaven to put burning coal on a man’s tongue, a motif borrowed from Isaiah 6. 6-7 in which the burning coal purifies sin (p. 5).

\(^{454}\) The geographical proximity of these texts and their shared appreciation of the agency of coal relates to the importance of place and knowledge-making discussed in Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), where Code theorizes a kind of geographical insider knowledge that can destabilise traditional master-narratives and produce a social imaginary using ‘effective systems of images, meanings, metaphors, and inter-locking explanations-expectations within which people, in specific time periods and geographical-cultural climates, enact their knowledge and subjectivities and craft their self-understandings’, p. 29.

\(^{455}\) Robertson, ‘Exemplary Rocks’, in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. by Cohen (Washington: Oliphant Books, 2012), pp. 91-121 (pp. 92-3). As Robertson further explains, ‘[w]hile the rock occupies the lowest rung on this ladder [the *scala naturae*] it is nonetheless part of the reciprocal linkages that bound all things together in this ontological chain’, (p. 99). According to Robertson, a medieval audience would have understood stones (in which I include coal) to have ‘not inner lives per se, but a recognizable potential agency’ that enabled all types of rocks to pose complex moral questions, (p. 94).
While Garcio’s earlier antics documented his spiritual and physical flexibility, his later ascent-only trajectory is confirmed as his desire for interaction with purgative coal restores his spiritual equilibrium. Garcio’s exemplary coalition with coal thus demonstrates the salvific potential of the universal Christian message to all those who understand and seek it, while illustrating a local, uniquely situated interpretation of the interconnectedness of the human and non-human worlds in rural medieval West Yorkshire. Garcio’s spiritual rehabilitation depends upon a local understanding of a kind of geophilia entailing an appreciation of the healing potential of coal that extends to each local audience member who hears it, or local reader who recognizes it.

The quotation from Isaiah accounts for why, according to Garcio, Cain ‘suppy no coyle bot cold’ (l. 426). Cain consistently refuses to repent his own spiritual blackness and therefore he can never be fully purged of his sins – he cannot benefit from the divine purgation offered by the hot coals. Yet neither is he fully condemned by God – although outcast, he still carries the mark of Cain which sets him apart and denotes God’s continued protection of him until he receives his full judgement in the afterlife. In this sense, Cain gets only half the advantage ordinarily ascribed to the purgation offered by the hot coal: he gets the cold coal. Cain has no redeeming qualities in this drama – he is avaricious and tithes with bad intent, murderous and frequently violent towards Garcio (whom he later threatens to hang). Overall, as Edminster puts it, Cain is ‘the symbol of wilful sin’. Failing to accept, or attempting to atone for, his spiritual darkness

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456 The term geophilia comes from Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), where Cohen discusses what he terms a ‘human-lithic enmeshment’ evident in some medieval (and ancient) writings that, for Cohen, ‘offers an invitation to a geographesis in which human hand and lithic potency compose a petric duet’, p. 26; p. 27. In addition to the human and the lithic, however, at least in *Mactatio Abel*, is the importance of local (place and knowledge) that works alongside the lithic and the human to compose a tri-partite partnership that joins place, human, and coal in a vibrant medieval mix.

457 Rolle’s interest throughout *Incendium Amoris* is in preparing and the individual soul for the division of souls at the Judgement via a process of elemental purgation and salvation. Cain’s failure to partake of the purgative coal thus leaves his soul damned for eternity. On Rolle’s particular interest in Judgement, see Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, p. 56.

compels Cain, by his own admission, to dwell ‘with Sathanas the feynd’ (l. 466), showing that Cain is well aware that God’s full judgement awaits him in the afterlife.

Cain never admits to eating cold coal. Indeed, the only geological reference Cain makes is one that links him to his biblical role as the first builder of cities. When Cain presumes that, for his crime, he will be found and killed, he requests to be buried ‘in Gudeboure at the quarrell hede’ (l. 367), at the head of a quarry in Yorkshire – a pertinent request given that the prized magnesian limestone used in the protracted building of York Minster, and the stone used in the building and repair of York’s city walls, came from quarries throughout Yorkshire, close to Wakefield.⁴⁵⁹ Cain’s only recourse to a local geological resource is couched in terms that bespeak this utilitarian extraction for civic purposes and his insistence that he be buried at a quarry head ensures that his link to the building of cities will endure in Mactatio Abel along with his infamy for fratricide.⁴⁶⁰ Cain’s moral bankruptcy precludes him from forming any spiritual attachment to any elemental resource – the choking smoke from his tithe is anathema to him and hints at his incapability for any spiritual rehabilitation that might be found, even figuratively, in coal.

⁴⁵⁹ See G. K. Lott and A. H. Cooper, ‘Field Guide to the Building Limestones of the Upper Permian Cadeby Formation (Magnesian Limestone) of Yorkshire’, English Stone Forum (2005), 80-9, where Lott and Cooper list the Yorkshire quarries that supplied the limestone to York Minster as Tadcaster, Sheburn-in-Elmet, Ponefract, Doncaster, Bramham, and Hampole (p. 85). As their table shows, Hampole was the quarry that provided the magnesian limestone used for York Minster in the latest medieval period, from 1512-30. Presumably, the quarry at Tadcaster had been depleted of its stocks by then, as it had been supplying stone for York Minster over a period of roughly two hundred years, from 1225-1425. Given the proximity of some of these quarries to the manor of Wakefield (especially Hampole), the Wakefield Master and his audience might have been aware of this depletion of local resources for civic projects. Lott and Cooper’s text available at: <https://englishstone.org.uk/York_files/ESF%20-%20Lott%20-%20Cooper-1_1.pdf> [accessed 03 June 2021].

⁴⁶⁰ Cain’s links to the building of cities could be why the York masons were never involved with the York cycle’s Sacrificium Cayme et Abell. See Beadle, The York Plays, Early English Texts Series, s. s. 24, pp. 119-24, for a discussion of the involvement of the Masons in various pageants over time, though never Sacrificium Cayme et Abell. The huge workforce of predominantly itinerant masons switched affiliations to pageants regularly, thus the lack of any association with Sacrificium Cayme et Abell might indeed suggest that their embarrassment with the connections of murderous Cain outweighed any pride they might have had in the links between Cain and the building of cities.
Contrastingly, Garcio’s ready recourse to proverbial, or metaphorical, spiritual nourishment in the form of coal reflects his growing self-awareness and his gradual process of spiritual change. Gone is the rauous Garcio of early *Mactatio Abel*; here is the later Garcio, self-reflective and aware of his own previous shortcomings. Now, in this later exchange with Cain, Garcio’s tone is more measured. Each response to Cain’s ridiculous claims is carefully thought out, and many correspond only to himself as introspective comments on his own readiness to receive spiritual nourishment and prove his own innocence. Given the traditional translations of many of Garcio’s responses relating to food, they have collectively been assessed as a dark parody of the Eucharist, or relating to a feast in the festive theme.\(^{461}\) Garcio’s next expression: ‘Yey, a draught of drynke fayne wold I hayfe’ (l. 430), followed by his admission: ‘My stomak is redy to receyfe’ (l. 432) do indeed appear to conform to either of these assessments, but given that Garcio is responding to Cain’s lies in an attempt to exculpate himself and prove that he takes no part in Cain’s lies, there is a more pertinent explanation available that addresses Garcio’s specific aims.

The draught of drink that Garcio wishes for and would joyfully drink is one that would further prove his innocence in the same way as it does for Mary and Joseph in the late-fifteenth-century East Anglian N-Town play, *The Trial of Joseph and Mary*.\(^{462}\) That apocryphal episode recounts the trial of the holy couple for adultery, where the court attempts to assess the guilt or

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\(^{461}\) See, for example, Edminster, *The Preaching Fox*, p. 69.

\(^{462}\) See s. v. ‘willen (v. 1)’; s.v. ‘fain (adv.)’, *MED Online* [accessed 20 August 2021]. In *The Towneley Cycle*, Happé notes that comparisons between the Towneley manuscript and the N-Town plays are inviting as both ‘seem to have been assembled without a direct connection with known arrangements for performance of the whole or of parts’ and each is ‘held together by its ill-fitting banns’, p. 3. For a tabulated list displaying the very many parallels of material in the N-Town and Towneley plays, see ‘Corresponding Material Between N-Town and Other Late Medieval English Plays’, in *The N-Town Plays*, ed. by Douglas Sugano, Teams Medieval Texts Series, available at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-corresponding-material-between-n-town-and-other-later-medieval-english-plays> [accessed 08 August 2021]. There is no direct parallel in Towneley to the apocryphal N-Town trial play, but the numerous parallels that exist between Towneley plays and other N-Town plays renders some crossover with the trial play a distinct possibility.
innocence of Joseph and Mary, and later their accusers. In order to settle the matter, the Bishop intervenes and establishes a truth test in the form of a drink, or potion:

Here is the botel of Goddys vengeauns -
This drynk shal be now thi purgacyon.
This hath suche vertu by Goddys ordenauns
That what man drynk of this potacyon
And goth serteyn in processyon -
Here in this place, this awtere abowth -
If he be gylyt, sum maculacion
Pleyn in his face sal shewe it owth. (ll. 234-41)

The truth-testing drink, according to Emma Lipton, was meant to be understood as an ‘alternative model of language as a solution to the problems and inadequacies of medieval legal practice’ that could illustrate who was lying and who was telling the truth.\textsuperscript{464} As an antidote to Cain’s lies that parrot the legal jargon of a regal pardon, the drink Garcio craves is one that carries divine force because its virtue was ordained by God.\textsuperscript{465} As Lipton further remarks, the drink invites specific comparison to the sacrament of the mass but, in contrast to clerical administration of the sacrament, the N-Town trial play appeals to the lay community who constituted the audience and offers drama itself as a site for moral regulation.\textsuperscript{466} As, I argue, does Mactatio Abel.

\textsuperscript{463} Trial of Joseph and Mary, ed. by Sugano, in The N-Town Plays, available at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sugano-n-town-plays-play-14-trials-of-mary-and-joseph> [accessed 08 August 2021]. The last lines of this quotation clearly suggest that those who are found guilty of lying will exhibit a visible in their face. Mary and Joseph both partake of the truth-testing potion and are found innocent by their lack of visible sign. Their detractors undergo the same test, are found guilty of lying, and repent while bemoaning their ailing souls or, in the case of the first detractor, his burning head.


\textsuperscript{465} See Stevens, ‘Language as a Theme in the Wakefield Plays’, where this point conforms to what Stevens identifies in the work of the Wakefield Master as an overriding concern with the falsity of man’s word as contrasted with the Word. (p. 106).

\textsuperscript{466} Ibid., (p. 134).
Garcio is not suddenly or randomly thirsty, nor is he revelling in a parodic, festive, mocking of the mass ceremonies; he is desperate to prove his innocence and to distance himself from Cain’s lies. The purgative coal that he admits to eating only half his fill of proves his awareness of his own spiritual shortcomings, and the purgative drink that he craves illustrates his own moral regulation as he deflects Cain’s lies with a desire to show his truth. In *Mactatio Abel* Garcio is the lowliest of all the characters, yet he is the only one who exhibits sufficient spiritual self-awareness and flexibility with which to redeem himself and act as a moral exemplar with whom an audience could identify. As Martin Stevens puts it:

> The most profound of the Towneley pageants always are concerned with bringing awareness of the sacred to the profane. In the larger perspective, such common men as [Garcio]... become representatives of the audience. Consequently, whatever they learn stands empathetically for what the popular Corpus Christi spectator must also learn in the course of the dramatic performance. It is thus that the concept of the sacred is made most directly meaningful by the playwright.  

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Gone is the profane Garcio of early *Mactatio Abel*; here is the profound Garcio of later *Mactatio Abel* who remarks, quite solemnly, first, that he is ready to receive the sacred truth-testing drink: ‘My stomak is redy to receyfe’ (l. 432), and, second, that Cain ‘slo his brother’ (l. 434). What the spectators learn from Garcio is that, while Cain remains a doomed character, Garcio is a reformed one, as they too might be.

That Garcio and Cain are speaking on spiritually different levels is mirrored in the way that they inhabit physically different levels for the duration of this verbal exchange. As the back and forth dialogue ends, Cain tries once more to issue an order to Garcio, saying ‘We! com downe in twenty dwill way!’ (l. 440), later repeating the instruction almost verbatim: ‘Com

467 Stevens, ‘Language as a Theme in the Wakefield Plays’, (pp. 114-5).
downe yit, in the dwillys way’ (l. 450). Garcio ignores him, instead addressing the audience, but Cain’s futile command reveals that he and Garcio are indeed on separate levels, with Garcio occupying the literal high ground.\textsuperscript{468} If, as I argued in the previous volume, characters on the physical high ground can also occupy the moral high ground, then Garcio is both physically above Cain, and morally superior.\textsuperscript{469} There is nothing in the text to indicate when exactly Garcio took to the high ground, but it makes sense that it would be after Cain tells him to stand up, after Garcio understands the enormity of Cain’s words and his hypocrisy at claiming a king’s pardon – that is the moment that precipitates the rehabilitation and reformation of Garcio.

After Garcio dismisses Cain’s request to extract payment from the onlookers, his parting address to the audience is one that has been construed as a satirical benediction that ‘inverts the customary blessing that the more sacrosanct characters typically bestow upon the audience at the pageant’s end, transforming it into a curse’.\textsuperscript{470} My appraisal of Garcio’s closing address differs. As Garcio’s faith and spirituality have been restored, his final speech urges the audience to understand the promise of universal salvation made by God, his eternal Master, to all Christians:

\begin{quote}
Now old and yong, or that ye weynd,
The same blisseyng withouten end,
All sam then shall ye haue,
That God of heuen, my Master, has giffen.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{468}Although, as noted earlier, direct comparisons between the York cycle’s \textit{Sacrificium Cayme et Abell} are problematic, it is worth noting that while in \textit{Mactatio Abel} Cain twice orders Garcio to come down, in \textit{Sacrificium Cayme et Abell} Cain twice orders his unruly servant Brewbarret (at roughly the same point in the play) to ‘Come up, sir knave’ (l. 77), and ‘Come up sir’ (l. 79), raising the admittedly speculative possibility that \textit{Mactatio Abel} represents a rural, direct, oppositional counter to the tendencies found in York’s civic dramatization of the same biblical episode.

\textsuperscript{469}See Cami D. Agan, ‘The Platea in the York and Wakefield Cycles: Avenues for Liminality and Salvation’, \textit{Studies in Philology}, 94:3 (1997), 344-67, where Agan discusses how actors’ movement can focus viewers’ attention on the Christian doctrines of contrition, salvation, and redemption. As Garcio apparently moves somewhere above Cain at some point, the audience witnesses his transcendence both physically and spiritually – a movement which, according to Agan, is often coupled with a direct audience address, and ‘can take on serious consequences to the audience who is to be viewing a lesson in their own salvation’ (p. 347). Although Agan is not referring directly to events in \textit{Mactatio Abel}, the point holds.

\textsuperscript{470}Ramey, ‘The Audience-Interactive Games of the Middle English Religious Drama’, (p. 67).
The gentle rhythm and language of Garcio’s closing address here contrasts sharply with his verbally flamboyant and raucous opening address, where audience members were reduced to harlots and Garcio threatened to make them blow his black hole till their teeth bled. This reformed Garcio of later Mactatio Abel addresses his audience congenially and inclusively as ‘Now old and yong’ (l. 444), and proceeds not to invert the customary blessing, but to deliver it. He offers God’s blessing to all, with a gentle reminder to use it well throughout life, and closes by acknowledging that God bestows this benediction freely. Both the form and the content of Garcio’s parting address differ markedly in tone and style from his opening speech that fluctuated between audience harangue and raucous welcome. Garcio is a spiritually reformed character, and his closing remarks reflect his rehabilitation as they calmly offer the audience spiritual guidance and counsel.

Garcio has ultimately chosen the correct spiritual path as he re-enters the Christian fold at the end of Mactatio Abel. The audience has witnessed his rehabilitation, and has witnessed his transformation into an Everyman character who exemplifies the potential each person has for redemption in the universal Christian tradition. Garcio’s ability to embody change, as he transitions from devilment to devotion and from Cain’s servant to God’s, renders Mactatio Abel

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471 Throughout this volume I have maintained the punctuation added by Cawley for all quotations. However, the capitalization of Master and the commas inserted in the line ‘That God of heuen, my Master, has giffen’ are my own addition. Punctuation is always a matter of editorial choice, and adding these commas her clarifies my claim that Garcio’s address acknowledges his recognition of the gift of salvation given by his Divine Master. Omitting these commas, as Cawley and other editors do, promotes the notion that Garcio is still referring to Cain as his master – a notion that runs counter to the context of what Garcio has just been intimating throughout his exchange with Cain as he seeks to remind the audience that Cain, his earthly master who he has verbally forsaken, is both a murderer and a liar.
more of a morality play than has previously been recognized. Read as a morality play, Garcio in *Mactatio Abel* presents the audience with a mirror in which they might see themselves – flawed and whole, pious and impious, spiritually black and white – complete with all of the contrarieties that these categories suggest. Spiritual change and growth in *Mactatio Abel* entails becoming blacker on the inside through (even figuratively) eating coal. The black matter of coal transcends human and non-human borders as its ethical agency proves invaluable to ameliorating Garcio’s spiritual state. Coal’s agentic capacity extends beyond mere surface or bodily effects; it purges and cleanses Garcio’s soul. This coal is trans-corporeal moral compass material – a black for good in rural, medieval West Yorkshire where coal has the capacity to offer spiritual self-regulation and rehabilitation.

Yet the message of hope that *Mactatio Abel* extends surely acts beyond its immediate historical moment. Re-contextualizing *Mactatio Abel* permits a glimpse of a past imperfect and a future conditional, and offers a transhistorical lesson that things could have been, and could be, different. Cain killed Abel because he chose to react murderously to a misunderstanding. Abel remained so steadfast in his righteousness that he also failed to consider

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472 See Pamela M. King, ‘The End of the World in Medieval Religious Drama’, *Literature and Theology*, 26:4 (2012), 384-99, where King eschews the traditional divide between medieval religious drama and morality plays, arguing that any such division is not hard and fast as a number of religious plays that ostensibly depict scriptural history are infiltrated by characters that move the narrative into the realm of tropological allegory. Where I differ from King, especially with regard to Garcio’s role in *Mactatio Abel* (not discussed by King), is that these characters ‘remove the narrative altogether from geographical specificity’ (p. 393). The geographical specificity of coal-rich medieval West Yorkshire is central to an understanding of the role not only Garcio plays in this drama, but also coal.

473 The term ‘contrarieties’ is from Whitaker, *Black Metaphors*, pp. 48-67.

474 This offers a very different view of coal’s potential moral agency in the medieval period than the notions of filth, disease, racial alterity, moral corruption and societal dysfunction discussed in Leet, ‘Comorbid Coal’, (pp. 251-5).

475 This point corresponds to Alaimo’s notion of trans-corporeality in *Bodily Natures* which demands ‘understanding the substance of one’s self as interconnected with the wider environment’, p. 20.


477 See Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, where Latour urges that ‘re-contextualizing context’ can help to illuminate new paths and implications arising from multiple types of agencies, pp. 192-3.
that he may have misconstrued God’s words. Both could have reacted differently, but neither did. Neither was capable of changing his moral stance and that proved to be the downfall of both. The only character to emerge well from Mactatio Abel is Garcio, because of his capacity for change. And it was free will, not divine intervention, that precipitated this change in Garcio – a change that documents a character capable once of delivering one of the most visceral four-word one-liners in medieval drama (‘Till his tethe blede’(l. 9)), eventually capable of bestowing a generous benediction. It is the possibility for change, located in imperfect characters, that offers hope that our future imperfect selves might be different, might be more compassionate, could be more empathetic, and could be more honest.478

B(l)ack to the Future

The message of hope from Mactatio Abel extends beyond an anthropocentric worldview. If Garcio is the character who embodies change, then that change depends not only upon Garcio, but upon his ‘inbodying’ of the environment. The notion of eating coal is foundational to Garcio’s spiritual transformation and eventual salvation as it enables his transition from potential sinner to devout repentant. Central to an understanding of this play is its imbrication with its immediate environment that contains the salvific, healing, black coal so crucial to the spirituality of its imperfect, local community. Beyond staking a claim for the ‘medievalness’ of studies in materialism, Garcio’s black anus illustrates the intimacy of the local medieval connection between people, place, and ethically agentic coal that offers valuable insights and aspirations for

478 The point about honesty does seem a particularly pertinent one to appeal to a modern audience, accustomed as we are to hearing accusations of ‘fake news’, and regularly witnessing speeches by politicians being ‘fact-checked’ to verify claims made within them. The recent episode where MP Dawn Butler was ejected from the House of Commons after Mactatio Abelr accusing Boris Johnson of deliberate deceit highlights that, at least in Butler’s opinion, problems with telling the truth exist at the highest level of British government. Story available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jul/22/dawn-butler-ejected-from-commons-for-saying-johnson-has-lied-repeatedly> [accessed 23 July 2021].
modern environmentalism. The local ecomaterialism in *Mactatio Abel* corresponds to the provocations identified by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert in *Elemental Ecocriticism*, where they suggest that imaginative reencounters with historical texts can powerfully foreground polytemporal local activity and material agency, and that:

writing against the reduction of the [local] world to commodity (resource, energy) is a powerful aid to activism. Supposedly outdated articulations of elemental activity and the fraught human-nonhuman collaborations they convey can propel care, grasp, and justice.479

The notion of eating coal is both a reminder of a past in which people, environment, activity, and material agency effected spiritual re-generation, and a nod to the present and future need to remember and respect the environment’s precarity, dynamism, and moral agency rather than valuing its commoditization. Ultimately, the morality of *Mactatio Abel* teaches that the potential for mutability is hope. That people can and might recalibrate their relationships with, and the way they think about, care, value or commodify, their lived environment must be worth hoping for. Seeing coal as a hopeful part of re-envisioning an ecological community is both crucial and incredibly fraught, especially considering the role played by coal historically in the economic ‘success’ of Britain’s Industrial Revolution and the enduring global dependency on this precious and precarious fossil fuel initiated, according to some, by Britain’s example.480

480 I refer here to the work of Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso Books, 2016), where Malm offers a Marxist critique of the capitalistic model that Britain adopted towards its coal deposits during the Industrial Revolution and the age of steam. According to Malm, this served as a model for other countries and precipitated the current global environmental crisis. See also Stephen J. Pyne, *The Pyrocene: How we Created an Age of Fire and What Happens Next* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), where Pyne acknowledges how coal (via steam power) equally enabled (further) British exploration and colonization practices, creating colonies that would, in turn, emulate the model of coal-fuelled capitalism exploited and exported by the British, pp. 82-3.
It may indeed seem anathema to environmentalists to even consider a salvific coal that was understood as a spiritually vibrant, positive force. Yet only by doing so does the entirety of its materiality become visible, and the urgent need to keep the coal where it was becomes even more apparent and pressing – as I said earlier, coal cannot purge in absentia. As I conclude this volume, the fact that China, India, Russia and the USA (four of the world’s most prolific consumers of coal, the single biggest contributor to climate change) did not sign a pledge to reduce their carbon emissions by phasing out coal dependency might indicate a degree of hopelessness. However, the fact that forty other countries did sign up to the (admittedly limited) pledge surely must be at least a glimmer of hope for a future re-calibration of our modern relationship with coal. Given the nation’s historic role in exporting the coal-as-capital model it may seem cruelly ironic, hypocritical even, to suggest that Britain can in any way presume the moral high ground on this issue. Indeed Britain cannot, but the emergency is here and now, and we must start somewhere, urgently. It is a truism perhaps worth repeating that the past cannot be changed. Yet hope that the future holds at least the promise of a change in our relationships with coal is, at worst (or indeed at best), a glass half full.

Volume III of III: ‘Manygates’

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Human/Animal Crossovers: Directions for Future Research

This thesis has offered ecocritical and ecomaterialist readings of medieval religious drama to illustrate how regional drama corresponds both to lived meteorological phenomena, and geographical, geological, environmental features. In doing so, discussions of resilience and refuge explored particularly locally situated responses to lived environmental phenomena that identified medieval moments for hope in the modern world. The thesis has also illustrated how reappraising the dialogue of medieval drama, particularly *Mactatio Abel*, can reveal avenues of research that have timely consequences for both local *and* global climatic challenges. Further pursuing the research topics covered in this thesis will enable my study on the remaining pastoral plays attributed to the Wakefield Master (*Prima Pastorum* and *Secunda Pastorum*), to explore how, and to what extent, these plays invite an animal studies reading that moves beyond an anthropocentric, purely Christian worldview.\(^{482}\) Both shepherd plays, but particularly *Prima Pastorum*, document moments of human/animal crossovers, and future research will examine how and why such intersections rely heavily on proverbial pigs and dogs for their imagery. Lisa J. Kiser acknowledges that ‘there are strange and interesting identity swaps taking place between humans and animals’ in *Prima Pastorum*: ‘[t]he humans are “becoming animal” and the animals are gaining humanity’.\(^{483}\) Kiser focuses on linguistic similarities between markers of animal and human identity to argue specifically that the shepherds are presented *as* sheep.\(^{484}\)

\(^{482}\) *Prima Pastorum* and *Secunda Pastorum*, in *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*, ed. by A. C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), pp. 29-63. All further references by line number and in parentheses are from this edition.

\(^{483}\) Lisa J. Kiser, “‘Mak’s Heirs’: Sheep and Humans in the Pastoral Ecology of the Towneley First and Second Shepherd’s Plays”, *JEGP*, 108:3 (2009), 336-59 (p. 352).

\(^{484}\) Ibid., (pp. 352-5).
Where I differ from Kiser is in the conclusion that these shared identity markers serve only to draw parallels between humans and sheep. Further research will allow me to investigate the animal language and signifiers evident particularly in *Prima Pastorum* that document pig/dog/human crossovers to illustrate how such language and signifiers can be understood rather as ‘animal masks’ that work to expose and undercut traditional stereotypes that equated rural, northern peasants with beasts, especially pigs and dogs.\(^{485}\) Though at this stage my research is preliminary, and therefore my claims come with a degree of speculation, I also aim to investigate whether (and why) participating in the human/animal overlaps with pigs and dogs situates the shepherds of *Prima Pastorum* alongside others who have historically received such pejorative stereotyping – specifically Jews.

With the exception of Kiser’s work, the majority of scholarship on *Prima Pastorum* focuses primarily, indeed in some cases solely, on the orthodox binary messages of the play, both secular and religious. For example, many years ago, A. C. Cawley classified the shepherds’ feast as simply ‘a humour of incongruity [achieved] by mixing together aristocratic and plebeian dishes’, while somewhat later, Suzanne Speyser recognized the play as ‘a comic exploration of the reliability of sensory perceptions in distinguishing between illusion and reality’ with regard to Christian religious doctrine on the miracle of, and belief in, transubstantiation.\(^{486}\) Robert Adams posited a straightforward reading of the shepherds as pasteboard types of Synagogue versus Church who characterize ‘the corrupt spiritual leadership of the word of the Old Law’.\(^{487}\)

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\(^{485}\) Further discussion on the ‘animal mask’ follows.


More recently, Robert S. Sturges sought to move scholarship on both of the shepherd plays towards a consideration of their participation in, and critique of, the manorial economy of medieval Wakefield, yet Sturges still considers *Prima Pastorum* ‘a reflection of one medieval strain of stereotyping peasants, the one that classifies them as stupid;’ a play in which ‘the nonexistent flock is a pathetic but ridiculous fantasy of self-improvement’. Each of these examples stimulates further research, as all of the authors cited here appear to rely upon over-determined models: of what constitutes peasant and princely fare, a merely comic exploration of illusion and reality, a firm and fixed tension between Synagogue and Church, and a confirmation of the medieval ‘stupid peasant’ trope. Differing from work that relies on traditional binaries and confirmation of stereotypes, my research would question how those binaries become blurred in the shepherd plays, how derogatory medieval peasant stereotypes are strategically deployed and subsequently defused, and how particularly *Prima Pastorum* engages with illusion and *ludus* to imagine the possibility, or *seria*, of a (brief) inter-faith shared humanity that extends beyond the local reach of these plays. Beyond their medieval symbolism as shepherd-priests, my work will also explore how *Prima Pastorum* exploits what Katherine C. Little terms ‘a particularly medieval predilection for thinking symbolically’. Viewing the shepherds of *Prima Pastorum* as symbolic of rural, northern peasants, future research will also ask how this drama potentially

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489 Little, *Transforming Work*, p. 10.
exposes a rural/civic distinction in the historic treatment of Jews, and a (limited) rural appreciation of Christianity’s Judaic heritage.\footnote{The rural/civic distinction does seem pertinent here as, according to Little in \textit{Transforming Talk}, the contrast between the town and the country was one of ‘the most important pastoral conventions’, p. 109. I say limited because even though I detect what I term a Jewish presence in the early part of \textit{Prima Pastorum}, this presence fades after the birth of Christ, and Christian orthodoxy then prevails. The term Jewish reflects the claim by many scholars that, despite the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290, Jews and their part in biblical history meant that the figure of the Jew remained a necessary and mutable construct which later medieval authors utilized variously. On this, see for example, Sylvia Tomasz, ‘Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew’, in \textit{The Postcolonial Middle Ages} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 243-60; Anthony Bale, \textit{The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350-1500} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Steven F. Kruger, \textit{The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Cathy Lavezzo, \textit{The Accommodated Jew – English Antisemitism from Bede to Milton} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Jeremy Cohen, \textit{Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).}

\textbf{Toying with Peasant Tropes in the Shepherd Plays}

The late Middle Ages held antithetical views towards the peasant population. In his survey of images of the medieval peasant, Paul H. Freedman acknowledges ‘the vocabularies of both hostile and laudatory representations, their interaction, reconciliation, and opposition’.\footnote{Paul H. Freedman, \textit{Images of the Medieval Peasant} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 2-3.} At the same time as the figure of the peasant was praised for performing the biblically endorsed and socially necessary roles of manual, rural labourer, images of peasants which depicted them as inferior by nature and thus suited to toil and exploitation proliferated, and they were derided as dull-witted, bestial, filthy, malformed, lazy and even subhuman.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 140-59.} Similarly to Freedman, Lee Patterson cites late medieval arguments which served ‘not only to explain the peasant’s subjection as a function of his sinfulness but to define the peasant as in effect belonging to another order of being, as a member of a different race, a nonhuman’.\footnote{Lee Patterson, ‘“No Man His Reson Herde”, Peasant Consciousness, Chaucer’s Miller, and the Structure of the Canterbury Tales’, in \textit{Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530}, ed. by Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 113-55 (p. 135). See also Alcuin Blamires, ‘Chaucer the Reactionary: Ideology and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales’, \textit{The Review of English Studies}, 51: 204 (2000), 523-39, where Blamires identifies Chaucer’s Plowman, Miller, and Reeve as the three characters who constitute the peasantry that the tales attempt to contain, where the Plowman is an idealized peasant created to ease real...
Patterson points to the enduring, pernicious influence throughout the Middle Ages of the sentiments expressed by John Gower in his ‘imaginative’ re-telling of the events of the 1381 so-called Peasants’ Revolt in the animalization of the peasant classes in his *Vox clamantis*:

> When Gower says, in book 5 of the *Vox clamantis*, that the peasantry “is a race without power of reason, like beasts,” he is not only repeating a ubiquitous vilification but characterizing the peasantry as a race of subhuman creatures whose fallen nature requires subjection.⁴⁹⁴

Patterson goes on to argue that Chaucer’s ‘The Miller’s Tale’ recognizes, and participates in a struggle against, such pejorative stereotyping, ‘not least by subverting and mocking the very terms with which the reigning ideology sought to stigmatize and oppress peasants’.⁴⁹⁵ By engaging with the very terms and ideologies that Gower (and others) used to deride the peasant population, I argue that *Prima Pastorum* achieves the same: it mimics texts that wrote the peasants as wild animals, specifically grunting pigs and wild dogs, more brutish in origin than Brutish.⁴⁹⁶

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⁴⁹⁵ Patterson, “No Man His Reson Herde”, (p. 137).

⁴⁹⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae* was one of the most enduringly influential origin myths which charts the genealogy of Britain back to the arrival of Brutus. For an overview of British origin myths, see Anke Bernau, “‘Britain’: Originary Myths and the Stories of Peoples’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, ed. by Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 629-48. Two sections of Book I of John Gower’s *Vox clamantis* cast peasants as grunting pigs and barking (latrantes) dogs (ll. 299-460), and peasants are described as ‘Quidam porcoriu m grunnitus horridores | Emittunt’ (ll. 802-3), ‘some emitting the horrible grunting of pigs’ [translation mine]. Latin text available at <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~esalisbu/Vox%20Clamantis/Vox%20Clamantis_Part1.pdf> [accessed 01 January 2022]. Further research would enable me to investigate whether the ‘frotyng’ that Ranulph Higden ascribes to the sound of the English language, especially around the areas of York, implies that they sound like pigs, as *frotyng* is a term Higden also uses in relation to these animals. See *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by
Along with Sturges’ estimation of the shepherds of Prima Pastorum as fulfilling the role of stupid peasants, most other scholars seem to agree that the shepherds are irrational, imaginative fools who are only restored after the sight of the infant Christ. Speyser offers an orthodox religious reading of them as necessary fools who ‘shout about imaginary sheep as though they were there’ in order to show that they are ripe for a miracle.\textsuperscript{497} Norma Kroll sees them as ‘irrational or witless’ shepherds who ‘lack merit and sense’, while Peter Happé offers a more reserved critique of them as engaging in ‘folly’, though this folly is again only to show them in need of religious recuperation.\textsuperscript{498} And the shepherds do seem to exhibit all the stereotypes about witless or irrational peasants in need of spiritual salvation: they argue over imaginary sheep, and they discuss buying more sheep when they have neither money to buy them nor pasture on which to feed them. The third shepherd scorns the ‘wyttys thyn’ (l. 172) of the first two, and Iak Garcio, classing all three shepherds as ‘foles all sam’ (l. 179), berates them even further by saying that, of all the fools between heaven and hell, ‘Ye thre bere the bell’ (l. 186).

Even Iak Garcio’s rationality seems fragile as, after an interjection by the first shepherd, he too participates in the folly, remarking that the imaginary sheep are being fed: ‘Thay are gryssed to the kne’ (l. 189). Yet in the same play and before the angel has appeared to them,

\textsuperscript{497} Speyser, ‘Dramatic Illusion and Sacred Reality’, (p. 9).
\textsuperscript{498} Norma Kroll, ‘The Towneley and Chester Plays of the Shepherds: The Dramatic Interweaving of Power, Conflict, and Destiny’, Studies in Philology, 100 (2003), 315-45, (p. 324); Peter Happé, The Towneley Cycle: Unity and Diversity (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 65. Other scholars attach the familiar stereotype of the lazy peasant to these shepherds and their need for spiritual restoration. See, for example, Liam O. Purdon, The Wakefield Master’s Dramatic Art: A Drama of Spiritual Understanding (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), pp. 70-2, where he remarks upon the susceptibility of the Towneley shepherds to indolence and lethargy. Similarly, on the ‘rather dreadful shepherds’, see Gary D. Schmidt, ‘“Vides Festinare Pastores”: The Medieval Artistic Vision of Shepherding and the Manipulation of Cultural Expectations in the Secunda Pastorum’, Neophilologus, 76 (1992), 290-304 (p. 293), though, as evident from the title, Schmidt’s focus is on the shepherds of Secunda Pastorum.
these same shepherds exhibit in-depth knowledge of the changing economic environment which is responsible for their plight (as explored by Kiser), and they subsequently participate in complex linguistic patterns which, while occasionally toying with animal imagery in further homage to the base, bestial peasant trope, also elevate them to the level of competent scholars, clerics, lawyers, musicians, and knowledgeable medieval foodies.\textsuperscript{499} Thus any description of the shepherds as representative of the stupid peasant trope fails to address or account for their explicit erudition, and the notion that these knowledgeable shepherds are, rather, mimicking, or playing with stereotypes gains weight. It does indeed seem irrational to accuse the shepherds of acting or speaking irrationally when they knowingly engage in folly. In addition to mimicking peasants’ stereotypical stupidity, both of the Towneley shepherd plays, but particularly \textit{Prima Pastorum}, employ proverbial dialogue and imagery that mimics their pejorative alignment with animals. Further research into their associations with the sounds, habits, and imagery of pigs and dogs, would explore to what extent they create troubling, yet creative, parallels with the deployment of animalistic traits that were historically attached (with similarly egregious intent) to Jews, and what such correspondences might reveal.\textsuperscript{500}

\textbf{Shared Environments}

The human/animal overlaps in the shepherd plays are not confined to comparisons with sheep, and many occur in the proverbial sayings favoured by the Wakefield Master. Peter Meredith points out that ‘not only does he use them as typical part of human language, but he uses them

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{499} On the effects of enclosure upon their land, see Kiser, ‘Mak’s Heirs’, (pp. 336-44). On the erudition displayed by the shepherds, see Nisse, \textit{Defining Acts}, pp. 79-80.
\item \textsuperscript{500} This research would then move into the field of animal studies recently adopted by some medieval ecocritics, though with an emphasis on species specificity. On the importance of species specificity, see Cary Wolfe, \textit{Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
\end{itemize}
naturally; they are character-creating, not merely decorative.\textsuperscript{501} There is nothing accidental or incidental about the choice of proverbial sayings – they sit within a carefully constructed framework that trades in the currency of human/animal boundaries, creating characters that blur the animal/human divide. In \textit{Prima Pastorum} the first shepherd issues an oxymoronic invitation to his peers: ‘Syrs, let vs cryb furst’ (l. 208). He respectfully addresses them as \textit{Syrs} but then invites them to join him in eating ‘from a manger’, as livestock do.\textsuperscript{502} He continues the animalistic theme when he suggests ‘let vs go fodder | Oure mompyns’ (ll. 209-10). Again, he includes himself in these animal allusions, where \textit{fodder} means specifically ‘to feed (cattle)’ and, according to Kiser, \textit{mompyns} is ‘a word used to describe animals’ teeth’.\textsuperscript{503} They are all equal in the company of animals – a point possibly alluded to by Iak Garcio when he says ‘youre bestes ye ken’ (l. 190).

While this phrase seems to refer to the shepherds recognizing their sheep, the slippery transmission of the line could imply that the shepherds know that they are beasts. A similar implication is made by the second shepherd when he proverbially suggests that ‘fyrst must vs crepe and sythen go’ (l. 100), where \textit{crepe} primarily means ‘to crawl like a snake or worm’.\textsuperscript{504} This serpentine reference perhaps directs a reader back to the Fall in Genesis, towards the early role of labour and animal husbandry in producing food contained therein, but it also represents the shepherds as even lower than four-legged animals: the literal underbellies of society.\textsuperscript{505}

\textsuperscript{502} s. v. ‘crib (v)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 20 May 2021].
\textsuperscript{503} s. v. ‘fodderen (v.)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 20 May 2021]; Kiser, “Mak’s Heirs”, (p. 352). The \textit{MED} definition specifically refers to cattle here, rather than sheep. Despite extensive research, I have yet to discover any other quotation, other than the example from \textit{Prima Pastorum} used here, where \textit{mompyns} refers directly to animals’ teeth, and Kiser gives no evidence to substantiate her claim.
\textsuperscript{504} s. v. ‘crepen (v.)’, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 20 May 2021]. This particular proverb loosely means that they must crawl before they can walk.
\textsuperscript{505} In Katie L. Walter, \textit{Middle English Mouths: Late Medieval Medical, Religious, and Literary Traditions} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Walter makes the point that the upright posture of humans
During the references to food for the ‘feast’, listed alongside various foodstuffs are ‘Both befe, and moton | Of an ewe that was roten’ (ll. 220-21). This particular rotten meat is ‘Good meat for a glotton’ (l. 222). Cawley notes that this reference to gluttony comes originally from a French rather than an English proverb, which perhaps again alludes to the shepherds’ linguistic repertoire. The shepherds’ literary feast, the one which, according to the text, the shepherds ‘Lay furth’ (l. 211) before themselves, includes meat fit for a glutton and, immediately after this addition, the first shepherd issues a sharp imperative: ‘Ete of this store’ (l. 223). They are all encouraged to eat even the rotten meat that is only fit for a glutton – to eat like greedy pigs.

The association of gluttony with pigs has a long textual history, one which Karl Steel locates in a fourteenth-century English preacher’s handbook which states that “just as a pig pokes its head and snout into everything, even the garbage, so gluttons want to try everything”. At the same time as the shepherds oscillate between French and English food terminology, and at the same time as they display detailed knowledge of aristocratic tastes, fare, and culinary techniques, they all equate themselves with the notoriously greedy pig. Similarly,

compared to the ‘bent bodies of animals’ was the basis for asserting human positioning below angels but above the created world, p. 50. A self-referential twinning with snakes or, even worse, with worms who can burrow underground, potentially casts these shepherds as animals with their heads bent towards earth and, in the case of worms, animals which eat filth and cannot look up to the heavens and are denied the humanity of a rational soul.

This also conforms to the stereotype of gluttony often attached to the peasant. On this see Freedman, Images of the Medieval Peasant, pp. 152-63.

At the same time as the shepherds oscillate between French and English food terminology, and at the same time as they display detailed knowledge of aristocratic tastes, fare, and culinary techniques, they all equate themselves with the notoriously greedy pig. Similarly,
as the shepherds of Secunda Pastorum joke with each other about barking at the moon when they begin to sing, so too the shepherds of Prima Pastorum exchange canine, and subsequently porcine, insults at the point of their singing. The first shepherd says ‘Let se as ye yelp!’ (l. 422), to which the third shepherd replies: ‘Thou art an yll qwelp’ (l. 426). The rhyme here highlights the animalistic associations for both shepherds – one shepherd accuses another of sounding like a yelping dog when hitting the high notes, while the other returns the canine imagery and identifies his co-shepherd as a wicked dog.510 Yet they do all go on to sing together, after which the second shepherd extends the animal imagery even further with the line ‘Fayre fall thi growne! Well has thou hyde’ (l. 432). According to Cawley, the first half of this line means “‘may good befall your snout”; a grotesque way of proverbially saying “good luck to you”’.511 The grotesquery that Cawley identifies here seems to lie in the word snout which now recalls the bodily attribute of a pig. The shepherds are joined in sound and body to both dogs and pigs across episodes where they sing in harmony, and apparently the shepherd who was accused of yelping like a dog when attempting the high notes has done rather a good job of it. Both Cawley and Garret P. J. Epp translate the hyde of ‘Well has thou hyde’ (l. 432) as ‘sped’, but there is no textual evidence to corroborate a feeling that the shepherd sped through his part of the song.512 The hyde here then seems to refer back to the comment made by the first shepherd, ‘Let se as ye yelp’ (l. 422), indicating that, when encouraged to perform the high notes akin to a yelping dog, the shepherd did so successfully. This would give a meaning something like ‘well has thou highed’; in other words, the shepherd took the animal imagery seriously and did well when hitting the high notes.

Serjeantson, and T. Waldron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 191-200 where Woolgar notes that even in more prosperous times, any meat or fish would have been a rare treat for the poorest peasants.

510 See s. v. ‘i(l)e (adj.)’; s. v. ‘whelp (n.)’, MED Online [accessed 28 November 2021].


Yet rather than merely mirror their animalistic stereotypes, they mimic them in order to address them ethically and defuse them.

**Medieval Mimicry**

The shepherds of *Prima Pastorum* are mimicking their stereotypical bestial attributes in order to disrupt them. At the same time as they engage with the very terms in which they have been historically rendered sub-human and incapable of reason, they illustrate detailed scriptural knowledge, and familiarity with classical authors such as ‘Virgill’ (l. 386), and ‘Caton’ (l. 392). As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen confirms, medieval identifying constructions were sustained through repetitive acts of representation, so that their veracity could be challenged at the moment of their embodiment. By displaying their erudition, then, the shepherds both embody and resist the animalistic tropes that rendered them subhuman. The work of mimicry here recalls the work of Homi K. Bhabha, who argues for mimicry’s ludic potential in a postcolonial context, where mimicry ‘represents an ironic compromise’ which has the power, via a doubling or reproducing, to dispel pejorative, hegemonic ideologies of identity.

Or more pertinently, given the animal imagery in *Prima Pastorum*, the work of Neel Ahuja on ‘the animal mask’. Ahuja cites Frantz

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513 This would suggest that *hyde* is a past tense form of the verb s. v. ‘heien (v.1a(e))’ meaning to raise the voice, and the *MED Online* gives an example of its use in this sense in a late fifteenth-century Wycliffite tract: ‘Crie, cese not, hie þi voice as a trump, and schew to my peple þer synnis’ [accessed 22 February 2021]. Alternatively, the shepherd could be responding to the ‘dog/man’ imagery in terms that correspond to animal skin where he is suggesting that he sounds so much like a dog that his skin resembles the hide of a dog. See s. v. ‘hid(e) (n. 1)’ *MED Online* where *hide* can refer to both human and animal skin [accessed 22 February 2022].

514 This chimes with Jason Stoessel, ‘Howling Like Wolves, Bleating Like Lambs: Singers and the Discourse of Animality in the Late Middle Ages’, *Viator*, 45: 2 (2014), 201-36, where Stoessel argues that animals served as anthropomorphized mirrors for moralized human behaviour, and that by ‘embodying and performing the ironic role of the singing animal, poets and singers attempt to momentarily usurp social authority by assuming an inferior status while delivering amoral lesson to their listeners. They invite the reader and listener to recognize that this supposedly enforced condition of the irrational animal is unbefitting to a rational human within the discourse of animality’, (p. 236).


Fanon’s ironic response to the colonial vocabulary of animalization where the colonized (akin to whom I have suggested the peasant population or audience of the Wakefield plays might be considered) are only too aware of the derogation intended. Yet despite this, Fanon claims the colonized ‘roar with laughter every time they hear themselves called an animal by the other. For they know that they are not animals’. As Ahuja further explains:

By ironically appropriating an animal guise, the performer unveils a historical logic of animalization inherent in processes of racial subjection. The performance of the animal mask does not necessarily entail identification with nonhuman species, but it always points to the historical conjunctions of social difference and species discourse. It may also, on occasion, envision alternative multispecies relationships.

In other words, understanding that there is always a level of irony (or mimicry) at work in the dramas’ manifestations of human/animal identifications means that the appropriation of the

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518 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), p. 8, repr. in Ahuja, Ibid, (p. 557). Fanon’s claim highlights one of the potential corollaries of scholarship in animal studies where an uncritical collapsing of the divide between humans and animals could theoretically lead to a point where derogatory comparisons between humans and animals are legitimized. This section addresses this potential problem which, according to Fayaz Chagani, in ‘Can the Postcolonial Animal Speak?’, *Society & Animals*, 24 (2016), 619-37, postcolonialism has thus far failed to tackle adequately. Chagani (who criticizes the anthropocentrism of Bhabha) acknowledges the problem, while at the same time pressing the urgency of such enquiries: ‘it may not be possible, or more important, desirable to erase the boundary between humans and the “rest” once and for all. And yet it must at the same time be ceaselessly questioned’ (p. 633).

519 Ahuja, ‘Postcolonial Critique’, (p. 558). Ahuja’s ‘mask’ here operates not as an actual mask, rather as part of a performance that ironically re-presents the rhetoric of animalization in order to disrupt the logic inherent in colonialist discourse which assumes ‘the untameable animality of the colonized’, Ibid. I understand the ‘mask’ here as capable of operating on both external and internal levels so that the performer can either look or act like an animal, or both. Real animal masks were of course a regular feature of medieval drama. See Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, * Masks and Masking in Medieval and Tudor England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2002) where Twycross and Carpenter point out that ‘as masking develops during the fully Christianized society of the High Middle Ages, “demons” join animals and women as the most favoured, or at least most criticized, types of disguise’, p. 36. It may be the case then that a medieval audience was more attuned to recognizing an animal mask, real or figurative, than a modern audience. See also Kiser, ‘Animals in Medieval Sports, Entertainment, and Menageries’, in *A Cultural History of Animals in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Brigitte Resl (Oxford: Berg, 2011), pp. 103-26, where Kiser notes that while human performers often imitated animals, animals were also commonly trained to imitate humans and, by the late medieval period, ‘locally available animals … almost certainly routinely featured’ in religious drama (p. 125).
animal mask does not underpin an uncritical or straightforward equation of humans with animals.\textsuperscript{520} 

Mimicry was a rhetorical and literary device of subversion known throughout the medieval period, and its source is expressly alluded to in \textit{Prima Pastorum}. When the second shepherd berates the first for reciting clerical Latin, he specifically alludes to Cato: ‘It semys by youre Laton | Ye haue lerd your Caton’ (ll. 391-92); a reference which Cawley’s glossary ties directly to the distichs of Cato.\textsuperscript{521} Cato’s distichs were used as a standard Latin primer text, and their significance it is difficult to overestimate. According to Elaine M. Treharne they were hugely influential, enduringly popular, and comprehensively read and understood throughout the Middle Ages in a much broader context than their usual description as an educational grammar school staple might suggest.\textsuperscript{522} The distichs, which Treharne describes as ‘verse pairs dealing with a moral or practical point of wisdom, couched in proverbial form’, were so popular that they even functioned as a kind of medieval inspirational wall art.\textsuperscript{523} Repeated recourse to the distichs by writers such as Geoffrey Chaucer and William Langland has led Fraser James Dallachy to

\textsuperscript{520} On animal specificity, see Wolfe, \textit{Animal Rites}, where Wolfe argues that by ‘overleaping the specificity of the discourse of species’, readers can fail ‘to see that these cross-racial identifications remain critical rather than merely stereotypical’, p. 15. In what follows, it is crucial to understand that the animal mask (or mimicry) is deployed in the dramas as a critical strategy in order to creatively and provocatively identify with other ‘others’ who have been historically and pejoratively aligned with animals, and to trouble such identifications.

\textsuperscript{521} Cawley, ed., \textit{The Wakefield Pageants}, p. 186. Epp’s more recent edition of this play also makes the connection to the distichs of Cato in the same lines from the play. Text available at: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/epp-the-shepherds-1> [accessed 18 February 2020].

\textsuperscript{522} Elaine M. Trehane, ‘The Form and Function of the Twelfth-Century Old English \textit{Dicts of Cato’}, \textit{JEGP}, 102:4 (2003), 465-85. Treharne suggests that the distichs were probably composed in the third or fourth centuries by an anonymous author (though erroneously attributed to Cato the Censor and subsequently to Dionysius Cato) and they provided popular reading material, for a variety of functions, from the early Middle Ages onwards.

\textsuperscript{523} Ibid, (p. 465). In Wayland Johnson Chase, \textit{The Distichs of Cato: A Famous Medieval Textbook} (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1922), Chase attests to the late medieval familiarity of the distichs which were learned by heart in the scholastic environment, respected by the clergy for the wisdom they offered, and held in a similar esteem to, and enjoyed the equal authority of, the writings of the Church Fathers, p. 4. See Heather Blatt, \textit{Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) for the distichs’ use as wall art in a Yorkshire setting, pp. 133-4.
conclude that the moral couplets infiltrated ‘all medieval thought and literature’.\textsuperscript{524} Similarly, Richard Hazleton wrote many years ago of the peculiar esteem afforded to the distichs in the later medieval period, evident in the great number of texts paying homage to the distichs’ wisdom by repetition, allusion, and echo.\textsuperscript{525} With particular regard to the repetition of deceptive words, the distichs offer the following lesson:

\begin{verbatim}
And yf thou fynde the sonne of doubleness,
The fals dissimilour yf thou espye
With peinted words and hert ful of falsnesse,
Thou maist in no wyse better blere his ye
Than to serue hym with his own trecherye.
With words fayre and friendly to departe
Mene thou the same and art begyle by arte.\textsuperscript{526}
\end{verbatim}

Words, the distichs advise, can be \textit{peinted}, a loose verb that can imply (among other things) painted over, like a surface veneer that hides something beneath: words, language, and arguments that are feigned, deceitful, or give false representations of something.\textsuperscript{527} The best way to deal with words like these is to meet them on the same terms: ‘to serue hym with his own trecherye’ (l. 230) – in other words, to mimic them.

Following on from the previous quotation, the distichs offer this further advice:

\begin{verbatim}
Preue þou never a man by ouer-peinted speche
For vnдрre fayre wordes is ofte annexed gile.
The word is gay, but frendship is to seche.
As it is sayd, such craft is in this Ile:
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{526} \textit{Parvus Cato; Magnus Cato}; trans. by Benet Burgh, ed. by Fumio Kuriyagawa (Tokyo: Seijo University English Monographs, 1974), ll. 226-32. All further references by line number and in parentheses are from this edition. I am indebted to Bale whose book \textit{The Jew in the Medieval Book} first drew my attention to this text, pp. 33-4.
\textsuperscript{527} s. v. ‘\textit{peinten (v.)‘}, \textit{MED Online} [accessed 19 November 2021].
Yet summe thinke yl, whan they their tongues file.
The whisteling fouler makes mery songe,
And so the brid begileth he amonge (ll. 233-9).

While warning that fair words can often conceal guile, this section closes with a proverbial reference to how a crafty bird catcher might best trick birds – by whistling like a bird himself. Perhaps this form of entrapment is one also practiced by the peasant-dog-pig shepherds of the shepherd plays. If, as the proverb suggests, the best way to get what you want is to mimic your prey, then it is via the trickery of mimicry that Prima Pastorum beguiles readers (and audiences) into believing that the peasant shepherds are bestial, sub-human, and irrational, only in order to overturn these assumptions. As the distichs further point out:

The poure folkes also somme tyme be ful wise.
A seruant sumtyme may be ek of gret sapience,
Thaugh al he be had in litel reuerence.
Rewarde his wit, yf it be worth the whyle;
For vertu is hid vnder many a habit vile (ll. 701-05).

Peasants can be wise and they can, as I suggest these peasant shepherds do, hide their virtue beneath a troubling and opaque mask.

**Peasants and Other Others**

While a Jewish presence has already been detected in Prima Pastorum (see, for example, Adams), in such readings the relationship between Church and Synagogue remains a vexed one, where each faith is hostile to the other. This thesis suggests that attention could productively turn to the early focus in Prima Pastorum on harmony, and interest in humanity that scholars have noted in the work of the Wakefield Master, in order to explore moments of inter-faith harmony.
and community. The Wakefield Master’s attention to harmony is often attributed to his religious orthodoxy but, as exemplified in ‘Colliergate’, this dramatist’s orthodoxy can take quite unorthodox turns and his work demonstrates a keen interest in and knowledge of eschatological debates and their place in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. It may be then that the ‘reformist, even potentially radical significance’ that Little perceives in this (and other) pastoral texts is one that fleetingly imagines moments of social and religious harmony in unorthodox, sometimes discomfiting ways (for example, via the animal mask). It seems in keeping with the peculiarly learned shepherds of Prima Pastorum that this play contains the potential for experimentation with spiritual harmony that echo this dramatist’s keen interest in the interweaving of localized humanity with the variety of the world.

Though the Christian nature of the English peasantry might seem to allow this group some escape from the bestiality often attributed to Jews (and indeed Muslims), a perceived lack of religion was often conflated with their rustic status to denigrate them further and align them with groups of religious others. For example, Helen M. Jewell draws attention to late medieval tensions between northern and southern England, revealing that a late fifteenth-century chronicle described northerners travelling south ‘spoiling abbeys and houses of religion and churches … as if they had been pagans or Saracens and not Christians’. While not obviously discussing

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528 This could be a further attempt to differentiate these rural plays from the cycle of York and civic roles in attacks on, and expulsions of, Jewish communities.

529 On the Wakefield Master’s mixing of religious subversion and orthodoxy see, for example, Happé, The Towneley Cycle, p. 227.

530 Little, Transforming Work, p. 17.

531 On these points, see Meredith, ‘The Towneley Pageants’, (pp. 169-75).

532 Helen M. Jewell, The North-South Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 46. While the north was much divided, and a ‘true’ north difficult to discern objectively, Jewell highlights widespread fear of northerners in the south of England, especially during the Wars of the Roses when northern troops fought battles in the south, as in the example cited, pp. 45-7. Jewell cites pre and post Reformation texts that document the perception of ignorance and superstition in northern England, some claiming that ‘the hallmark of the north was not Catholicism but lack of enthusiasm for any religion’, p. 177.
people from the peasant classes, such testimony adds to the notion that the natural wildness of rural northerners discussed in ‘Watergate’ and ‘Colliergate’ included consideration of their lack of Christianity, which enabled their occasional parcelling with non-Christian groups.

Both pigs and dogs provided protean symbolism that was deployed in negative and positive ways towards Christians and Jews. Throughout the medieval period and beyond, the pig was reviled and celebrated, and was alarmingly imbricated with the forms of life which betokened civility. According to Karl Steel, the *porcus/corpus* pun was commonplace in the late medieval period, particularly in intellectual environments, thus allowing the pig to paradoxically signify sameness and otherness, intimacy and segregation. The paradoxical pig’s negative symbolism was taken to its most extreme in the intensely anti-Semitic *Judensau* imagery and, as Jamie Kreiner puts it, ‘the twinning of Jews and pigs as leprous, bloody, castrated, odorous, and anti-Christian’. Yet, as Kreiner further remarks, ‘in the high Middle Ages, the figural pig was as positively Christian as it was anti-Christian’. The paradoxical image of the pig enabled late medieval thinkers to reconsider their relationships with complex Christian theological texts, and ‘to furnish the very stuff of ethical action’. It may be the case that the paradoxical, proverbial greedy pigs of *Prima Pastorum* act ethically to protest against

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533 See, for example, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) where Stallybrass and White give an account of the historic, transgressive potential of the ambivalent symbolism inhered in the pig, especially in the section entitled ‘Thinking With Pigs’ where they raise the question of whether the image of the pig was stable between town and country environments, pp. 44-59.


the dehumanization inherent in the *Judensau* imagery, as well as against their own denigration.

Any ethical potential of the greedy pig trope does not need to have been intentional or consciously acted; the very paradoxicality of the trope makes this a possibility.\(^{538}\)

It may equally be the case that the protean image of the dog was a bold attempt to conjoin images that also joined Christians and Jews. In ways very similar to the pig, the dog was also a threshold creature that was equally imbricated with high and low culture. As David Gordon White explains, since classical antiquity in the Western world, and from the early centuries of the Asian world, the dog was considered to be:

The alter ego of man himself, a reflection of both human culture and human savagery. Symbolically, the dog is the animal pivot of the human universe, lurking at the threshold between wildness and domestication and all of the valences that these two ideal poles of experience hold ... the dog dwells on the boundary between domestication and savagery, so foreign or barbarian races [and those perceived to belong to either] have inhabited a space, in the human imagination, between the exotic and therefore fascinating, and the horrifying.\(^{539}\)

White points to a geographic convergence on the ambivalent symbolism attached to ancient and medieval symbolism allied to the dog proving that there is more than one beast with which...

\(^{538}\) The paradoxicality of the pig may have been particularly pertinent to Yorkshire audiences as the boar (often conflated with the pig in medieval literature) figured in the royal House of York’s heraldry to exemplify bravery. On this, see Sarah Phillips, ‘The Pig in Medieval Iconography’, in *Pigs and Humans, 10,000 years of Interaction*, ed. by Umberto Albarella, Keith Dobney, Anton Erynnck, and Peter Rowley-Conwy (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 373-87, where Phillips also draws attention to medieval images of pigs as musicians and singers in a number of ecclesiastical contexts, just like the musically able shepherd/pigs of the pastoral plays, (pp. 380-4). Phillips locates the origins of Yorkist porcine symbolism in the Anglo-Saxon name for York as “ʻEoforwic”, or “boar farm”, ibid. On the conflation of the pig and the boar, see Steele, *How to Make a Human*, p. 183. Pigs and wild boars are readily conflated in medieval bestiaries. See for example, evidence available at: [http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast197.htm](http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast197.htm) [accessed 20 December 2019]. Equally, Isidore of Seville elides divisions between swine, pigs, wild boar, and wild pigs, describing each entry in terms relating to filth and strength – though according to Isidore the wild boar (*aper*), an animal which Isidore equates with the wild pig, stands for ‘everything that is untamed and fierce we wrongly call agrestis, wild or rustic’. See *Isidore of Seville’s Etymologies: The Complete English Translation of Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologarum sive Originum, Libri XX, Volume Two. Books XI-XX*, trans. by Priscilla Throop (Charlotte: Medieval MS, 2005), XII.1.22.

humans defined their civilized ‘selves’ with and uncivilized ‘others’ against. The dog, or dog-like tailed creature, was a long-standing attribute afforded to images of the English, for example by the French in *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, and in derogatory insults directed towards Margery Kempe in 1433 when travelling in Germany.\(^{540}\) Perhaps texts such as these provided cultural dog-whistles for an exploration of domestic human/canine hybridity.\(^{541}\)

Yet canine attributes could also be ambivalent when applied to humans. In medieval religious polemics, Irven M. Resnick points out that the dog, like the pig, carried competing positive and negative connotations that could both compliment and denigrate Christians and Jews.\(^{542}\) According to Resnick, various negative attributes were assigned to dogs such as uncleanness, gluttony, and unrestrained sexual appetites – attributes which were also attached to medieval peasants, and these competed with claims originating from sources such as Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* which categorized the dog as intelligent and “the most sagacious animal”.\(^{543}\) Such competing associations of the imagery of the dog meant that western Christian texts used it to stigmatize Jews (and Muslims), while Jews developed strategies ‘to reflect the negative canine imagery back upon Christians, and [there developed] a willingness to embrace the identification of the Jew and the dog as a positively, divinely ordained relationship’.\(^{544}\)

Resnick’s points can offer a model of how the identification both with and against canine

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\(^{541}\) The Egerton version of *Mandeville’s Travels* contains a curious similarity to where I suggested that some texts could have implied that northern peasants sounded like pigs. In the description of the lands of Prester John, *Mandeville’s Travels* recounts a journey to the wilderness where the wild men have horned heads and ‘þai dwelle in wodes as beste: and speke noȝt, bot gruntils as swyne duse’, p. 135. Text available at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/acd9576> [accessed 03 January 2022].

\(^{542}\) Resnick, ‘Good Dog/Bad Dog’, (p. 84). See also Laura Gelfand, ed., *Our Dogs, Our Selves: Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature, and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). As Resnick points out, the dog was also used to denigrate Muslims.

\(^{543}\) Ibid., (p. 79). Here, Resnick also cites the ancient *auctoritas* of Plato and Socrates who attested to the rationality of the dog and considered it to be a philosophical animal.

\(^{544}\) Ibid., (p. 84).
imagery works in the shepherd’s plays – the animal mask, whether canine or porcine, extols their shared humanity.

Beyond the animal mask, there are suggestions of a positive, rural Jewish presence early in *Prima Pastorum*, individualized in the character of the first shepherd.\(^{545}\) The first shepherd is depicted going the wrong way – he is heading for town in his gown, rather than towards the pasture. There seems little reason for the dramatist to include this detail as it ostensibly adds nothing to the ‘plot’ of the play. Yet if the theory of Jewish presence is accepted, then the shepherd might be read as an archetype of the Wandering Jew. Bale traces this legend to Matthew Paris’ thirteenth-century *Chronica Majora*, and notes the wandering Jews in Gower’s fourteenth-century *Confessio Amantis*, and the Jew in the late-medieval *Northern Passion* (a virulently anti-Semitic text) who ‘is condemned to stand in the snow and rain until the Second Coming, in punishment for touching Jesus with his hand’.\(^{546}\) In contrast particularly to the example of the lone Jew of the *Northern Passion*, the first shepherd of *Prima Pastorum* is brought back into the pastoral community. Although ostensibly on his way to town to buy sheep, he is called back by the second shepherd and subsequently joins him, wondering out loud: ‘Who am I?’ (l.104). His solitary wandering is highlighted and arrested and, taking his place alongside the other shepherd, this then leads him to question his own identity. The ‘partial’ presence of the Wandering Jew is simultaneously acknowledged and altered in order to reorder this social group differently, rather than simply to reassemble a familiar anti-social. This potentially Wandering Jew is included, rather than excluded, and his subsequent self-doubt potentially serves to reflect the change to the usual trope.

\(^{545}\) This point differs then from the observations made by Adam in ‘The Egregious Feast’, who considers all of the shepherds in *Prima Pastorum* as representatives of the Synagogue prior to their conversion at the Adoration.

Admittedly, the shepherds bicker and almost come to blows, but this is followed by reconciliation and amity as the first shepherd invites the others to join him in a drink: ‘Sytt we downe all thre, and drynk shall we then’ (l. 191). Again, arguments and insults are exchanged, but then harmony is restored by the first shepherd who suggests that they all go ‘to mete!’ (l. 203) and desist from their arguing. The third shepherd responds positively to his request as he addresses the first as a brother: ‘ye ar euen my broder’ (l. 207), and the first shepherd replies similarly, extending the familial (or equal) relationship to all of the shepherds: ‘Do gladly, syrs, now, my breder’ (l. 218). Thus moments of unity and equality are interspersed among arguments and insults, and all of the shepherds join together in their charitable donation of the (imaginary) food to the poor before the ensuing Annunciation and Adoration scenes. As the shepherds debate who is to enter the stable first, the second shepherd says to the first: ‘Ye are of the old store; | It semys you, iwys’ (l. 456-7). Cawley suggests that here old store implies that the first shepherd is an older man and should therefore enter first. Another reading could suggest that being of the old store might imply that this shepherd is a ‘virtual’ Jew, and as such is respectfully allowed to enter first. Potentially, then, these northern, rural, characters who (not unproblematically) themselves elide neat divisions between animal and human status are also being deployed in order to destabilize, rather than uphold, traditional religious divides.

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547 See s. v. ‘brother (n.)’, MED Online [accessed 03 January 2022].
549 The term ‘virtual’ Jew is from Tomasch, ‘Postcolonial Chaucer’, (p. 253).
550 There are numerous texts that speak of the virulent anti-Semitism of late medieval England, but my reading of Prima Pastorum corresponds to that of, for example, Elisa Narin van Court, in ‘Socially Marginal, Culturally Central: Representing Jews in Late Medieval English Literature’, Exemplaria, 12:2 (2000), 293-326, where van Court argues against ‘the convenient rubric of a univocal and monolithic anti-Judaism’, and endorses a more complex understanding of historical ambivalence surrounding Jews, (p. 293). See also Miri Rubin, Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), where Rubin draws attention to the ‘diversity, disagreement and strife within medieval communities and regions [that] also produced a plurality of attitudes’, pp. 3-4.
It is this same first shepherd who, upon arrival at the stable, immediately greets the infant Jesus: ‘Hayll, kyng I the call! Hayll, most of myght!’ (l. 458). Though the shepherd subsequently addresses Jesus as, respectively, duke, knight and, lastly, Lord, his first greeting recognizes him as a king. The first shepherd’s first greeting is one which acknowledges Jesus as the king of the Jews, thus the Jewish presence does not totally disappear at the birth of Christ. Yet neither is the address totally a Jewish one. The first shepherd’s final greeting of the Christ child as ‘Lorde’ (l. 494) instantiates a Christian address to Jesus as the Lord. The earlier Jewish attributes of the first shepherd are eventually subsumed by Christian ones as the orthodoxy returns and reveals the limits of the Jewish presence in *Prima Pastorum*.

‘Nothyng is Impossybyll’ in *Prima Pastoum*

The protean pig and double dog animal masks of the Catholic, northern, rural, late-medieval peasant classes could have been understood as a protest against persecution on the grounds of class, religion, or race, in an ill-defined, yet creative, admittedly brief and imaginative, even illusory alliance with Jewish (and Muslim) derogatory stereotypes. Why a rural late-medieval drama might want to achieve this lies perhaps in consideration of its uncertain medieval moment of composition and compilation. If the manuscript was composed during the Marian restoration of Catholicism, then that also came with religious persecution for Protestants; if before or after, then those periods equally brought religious persecution to the Catholics. Given that late-medieval religious drama often dealt with religious doubt, along with the opening up to the laity

551 This reflects the biblical account in Matthew 2. 2 where the wise men ask ‘[w]here is he that is born king of the Jews’, prompting critical questioning over these dramatic characters’ true identities as wise men, rather than the shepherds they appear not really to be. Biblical quotation taken from [http://drbo.org/](http://drbo.org/) [accessed 27 November 2019]. There are no shepherds in this account of the nativity, only wise men from the east. I admitted from the outset that the Jewish presence is limited, and it does fade at the birth of Christ, thus addressing the child as king first could now be an acknowledgement that Judaism precedes (historically and eschatologically) Christianity and that ‘good’ Jews accepted Christ as the Messiah, while ‘bad’ Jews insisted on the ‘old’ law.
of religious debate made possible in *Prima Pastorum*, then a dramatist whose evident concern with ‘the interweaving of past and present’ may invite a humanitarian (rather than a purely Christian typological) understanding of the play.\(^552\) Accepting a humanitarian reading might then also allow for a consideration of the faint Jewish presence to figure as an admittedly temporary, regional, rural rebuke to the historic abuses of Jews that occurred in civic centres such as York and that moments in *Prima Pastorum* represent a distancing from, and moral judgement upon, such episodes.

Barrie Dobson captures the horrors of the 1190 massacre of Jews at York, describing it as ‘the supreme example on English soil of the evils of anti-semitism and of the need for reconciliation between Christians and Jews’.\(^553\) Despite the early date of this atrocity, it must surely have lingered long in local cultural memory, and reverberated beyond the city walls of York, allowing *Prima Pastorum* perhaps to function as a reminder of the horror of the massacre.\(^554\) William of Newburgh’s account of the massacre is, according to Dobson, ‘the voice of an intelligent and compassionate Christian clerk who is genuinely confused and distressed at his society’s treatment of the Jews’.\(^555\)

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\(^{552}\) The citation here is from Meredith, ‘The Towneley Pageants’, (p. 178). Here, Meredith asserts that the work of the Wakefield Master does not always conform to typological readings, and that his work ‘deliberately eschews the “shepherds are pastors”… kind of equation’, (p. 173). On doubt in religious drama, see, for example, Theresa Coletti, ‘Reading REED: History and the Records of Early English Drama’, in Patterson, ed., *Literary Practice and Social Change*, pp. 248-84, where Coletti recognizes drama’s ability to capture ‘discomfort with authorial authority, and its suspicion of hermeneutic certainty’, (p. 283).

\(^{553}\) Barrie Dobson, ‘The Medieval York Jewry Reconsidered’, *Jewish Culture and History*, 3:2 (2000), 7-20 (p. 7). As horrific as this episode was, it did not mark an end to the slaughter of Jews in York. Dobson relates various later instances of Jews being hanged in York, prior to their expulsion in 1290.

\(^{554}\) In Lisa Lampert, ‘The Once and Future Jew: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Little Robert of Bury and Historical Memory’, *Jewish History*, 15 (2001), 235-55, Lampert discusses the 1181 ritual murder accusation surrounding Little Robert of Bury which was commemorated in a variety of forms in Bury well into the fifteenth century. Though Lampert maintains that the Croxton play upholds the threat of the Jew, both on a local and global scale, the example of drama functioning over hundreds of years as a vehicle for cultural memory of local events beyond the immediate biblical context is a pertinent one.

\(^{555}\) Dobson, ‘The Medieval York Jewry Reconsidered’, (p. 10). William’s testimony is perhaps all the more remarkable when taken in tandem with Dobson’s observation that William’s own antisemitism would have led him to blaming the Jews themselves if he could have done.
both keen to emphasise the involvement of the aristocracy and high-ranking ecclesiasts in the massacre. Dobson describes the massacre as a result of ‘the actions of a political conspiracy on a grand scale, directed by “certain persons of higher rank who owed large sums to ... the Jews”’, and points to the ‘plausible’ involvement of a group of Yorkshire barons and Bishop Hugh du Puiset of Durham.\footnote{Elisa Narin van Court discusses English chronicles which condemn violence against Jews, ranging from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Arguing against ‘the convenient rubric of a univocal and monolithic anti-Judaism’, van Court endorses a more complex understanding of historical ambivalence surrounding Jews.}\footnote{Ibid. (p. 9). In contrast, see J. J. Cohen, ‘The Future of the Jews at York’, in Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts, ed. by Sarah Rees Jones and Sethina Watson (York: York Medieval Press, 2013), pp. 278-93, where Cohen suggests that William was galled by the affluence and opulence enjoyed by some Jews and thus William promotes backwards-looking stereotypes of Jews as perfidious, usurious blasphemers. In Cohen’s view, although William highlights the economic interests which instigated the massacre, he nevertheless shares anti-Judaic sentiments which preclude any potential for proto-philo-Semitism.}

Scholarship continues to pursue the role of the aristocracy in medieval antisemitism and problematic assumptions of universal anti-Semitism in England. Bale, for example, argues that medieval antisemitism was ‘more likely spread from the “top” downwards’, and warns against assuming medieval universalisms with regard to any single image or meaning contained within the figure of the Jew which could represent ‘a variety of local intersections in which the “Jew” is appropriated for different meanings’.\footnote{van Court, ‘Socially Marginal, Culturally Central’. Here, van Court acknowledges William’s disdain for Jews, yet argues that ‘the chronicler’s almost automatic anti-Judaism collapses as he recognizes the practical consequences of an inhumane ideology’, (p. 311).} It is feasible, therefore, that Prima Pastorum briefly appropriates a ‘virtual’ Jew both as a barbed rejoinder to its civic neighbours’ treatment of Jews, and also as a fleeting glimpse of a medieval moment of shared humanity that joins peasants and Jews in an ethical argument against dehumanizing tropes deployed against both groups – one in which we might glimpse an admittedly limited version of possible shared futures. This possible
future is one that holds precarious categories in constant balance – not only the categories of human and animal, but also those of potentially disparate religious identities. Further research will enable more thorough investigations into these final claims for the not-shepherds-but-wise-men of *Prima Pastorum*, whose moments of interfaith hope reverberate beyond their eventual orthodox Christianity.
Appendix

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Afterword .......................................................................................................................... 193
Throughout this thesis English medieval religious drama emerges as a powerful medium which compels consideration of the interconnectedness of place, people, and identity with a broad spectrum of ecological phenomena such as floods, coal, and animals. That it is such a fruitful genre through which to further the field of medieval ecocriticism and ecomaterialist studies should, perhaps, come as no surprise. After all, where performed, they were performed outdoors, and therefore the actors, audience members (human and/or animal in both categories), props and attendant equipment were all equally vulnerable to the vagaries of the British weather.

Foregrounding the twin influences of place and ecology has allowed me to focus on the value of the local to these dramas, and to explore how previously overlooked, and particularly situated, networks and their agencies can account for the same-but-different dramas of, for example, the Flood narrative. In conjunction with considering the Flood as an actant in the Latourian sense, ‘Watergate’ drew upon the agency of historical flooding, local topography, civic allegiances, regional tensions, and the notion of gendered places in order to propose reconsideration of three English dramas of the Flood from an ecocritical perspective. Situating the dramas as counter-texts, I argued that each interpretation of the Flood story is shaped in unique ways that has peculiarly local purchase and relevance as they make the universal particular, and the particular universal. In so doing, each dramatic re-working of the biblical narrative appeals to its local community as each offers a message of hope for that community to survive a flood, either physically or spiritually. In the urgency of our current climate emergency an ecocritical reading of these dramas highlights their polytemporal relevance, whilst also making a firm claim for medieval drama’s place in the environmental humanities movement.
Building on the peculiarities of the local, ‘Colliergate’ argued for an understanding of the implications of the dialect word for coal in an ecomaterialist reading of *Mactatio Abel*. Tracing the agency of coal, ‘Colliergate’ disturbs any tidy narrative of coal as a singularly polluting substance in the Middle Ages – a substance that is usually considered co-morbid with death and disease and, in medieval drama, was often used to blacken skin in order to connote sin in ways that correspond to what in modern terminology would be called racist stereotyping. Yet, while *Mactatio Abel* seems at first to participate in a facile twinning of blackness with Garcio’s spiritually degenerate character, his ‘blackness’ points to his potential for moral reformation. Coal here is used as an ethical tool where the material works in tandem with the body to exhibit spiritual change and moral purgation. This notion of change, or the potential for change, is shown to be of the utmost importance in *Mactatio Abel* not only to the characters in the play, as we witness only Garcio’s capacity for change, but also to historical interpretations of what scholarship has, so far, assumed is happening in key moments in the play. An ecomaterialist approach allows me to understand this play differently than has previously been conceived, and to offer some significant and perhaps provocative insights, that again serve to demonstrate the fecundity and importance of medieval drama in future ecocritical scholarship. Only by addressing coal’s *full* materiality, even its untidy and vibrancy – what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen might term its ‘messy intricacy’ – can we understand its role in *Mactatio Abel* as one that effects spiritual purgation, elemental salvation, and ethical change.560

Following ‘Colliergate’, ‘Manygates’ continues the thesis’ emphasis on the pastoral plays by the Wakefield Master in order to champion the study of rural space in medieval drama –

something that is still generally overlooked in scholarship where a civic focus remains the norm. Paying close attention to the identity formations of rural, northern peasants, this section illustrates how and why human and animal crossovers occur in the Towneley shepherd plays. I argue that these rare instances of rural, northern voices mimic pigs and dogs in an attempt to write back to texts such as John Gower’s *Vox Clamantis* that typecast northern, rural peasants as animals. As they do so, the shepherd plays also champion the northern dialect derided by some in the later Middle Ages. The specific pig and dog imagery is, I argue, deployed in order to provocatively, yet creatively, and admittedly temporarily, illustrate and defuse the pejorative stereotyping that northern, rural peasants shared with Jews. The shepherd plays, particularly *Prima Pastorum*, thereby dramatize the Judaic tradition to which Christianity owes much, at the same time as they raise the question of whether anti-Judaic sentiments were felt universally in the later medieval period, or perhaps felt more acutely in civic centres. Moments of amity amidst moments of (quickly resolved) enmity offer glimpses of interfaith and interspecies alliances that portray others as brothers.

There are, of course, difficulties which cannot be overlooked when arguing for the importance of more-than-human agencies, perhaps especially so in medieval drama, where all of the networks that I identify in this thesis are voiced by human characters. Yet, as Kate Rigby argues, such voices amplify, rather than monopolize, ‘the polyphonic song of our nonhuman earth others’.561 Following (and critiquing) Heidegger’s notion of dwelling within a fourfold system, Rigby acknowledges the ever-present risk of weak anthropocentrism in ecocritical textual studies, yet articulates a strong claim for the continued study of ethical ecocriticism in

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order to more fully understand the natural world and human imbrications within it, and work
towards ‘a more socially just and ecologically sustainable economic system’.
By drawing attention to the ways in which the medieval dramas studied in this thesis foreground the complex
interweaving of more-than-human actants in particular ways, I end on a note of cautious
optimism that scholarship might become more attentive to the potential interventions into the
field of the environmental humanities that this genre holds. I also extend that optimism to the
notions of hope, and hope for change, in our current climate emergency that ethical ecocritical
studies embody. As Teresa Shewry notes, hope is unstable – more complex than naïve optimism,
hope inheres insecurity, ambivalence, and the possibility that things might not change for the
better. Hope demands ethical action in order to succeed as change, and the ecocritical and
ecomaterialist readings offered throughout this thesis illustrate an ethics of reading that is
attentive to the plural and local ecologies of medieval drama in the hope that future scholarship
recognizes the myriad entanglements and powerful agencies of the more-than-human worlds this
compelling genre reveals.

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562 Ibid, (p. 440). As Rigby explains, the fourfold comprises earth, understood as the land itself with its particular
topography, waterways, and biotic community; sky, including the alternation of night and day, the rhythm of the
seasons, and the vagaries of the weather; divinities, those emissaries or traces that yet remain of an absent God; and,
last but not least, mortals, fellow humans, those who, in Heidegger's (questionable) view, alone know that they will
die. To dwell in the fourfold is to create and preserve things and places, which in themselves disclose the
interweaving, or "gathering," of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals (p. 430).
Duckert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 455-68.
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