Marking the Boundaries:
Explorations of Meaning and Identity in the York Corpus Christi Cycle

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the implications of the relationships between building trade guilds and the pageants they produced in York, and examines this relationship over the two-hundred-year production of the *York Cycle*. Because this relationship and the reception of any dramatic performance is heavily influenced by context, we need to look closer at the social, political, and economic environment of late medieval York in order to better understand the range of interpretations available to the *Cycle*'s original audience. Doing so also allows us to witness the issues of identity and community that are negotiated throughout these plays. Chapter 1 examines the guilds responsible for most day-to-day construction (the plasters, tilers, and carpenters) and explores the interpretations that the conjunction of guild casting, play text, and historical context invites. The Plasterers' "Creation" deals with issues of labour and political power, economic fluctuations influence representations of family and community in the Tilers' "Nativity," and the Carpenters' "Resurrection" explores issues of integrity and urban corruption, while also representing a struggle for social authority. Chapter Two considers the participation of groups outside of civic jurisdiction, most particularly the Masons, and investigates the ways in which the *York Cycle* may have cut across boundaries (or united "separate" groups) instead of, or as well as, reinforcing them. Finally, the changing contexts that in turn changed (or re-focused) the meanings of these texts reveal the boundaries over and through which concepts of identity and community were negotiated.

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To Melanie,
who kept me sane,
and Scott,
who understands how much this means.

Marking the Boundaries:
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York Corpus Christi Cycle[1]

In "The Culture of the Spectator," Claire Sponsler suggests that "the phenomenon at

work [in urban drama] could... be described as the tendency of all activities, events, and

performances to escape the bounds of their intended effects and local contexts, sometimes with

unexpected consequences."[2] She also points out that the range of responses – and thus of

available readings – is not infinite, but is rather contained by the limits of the performance itself

and the cultural and social context of the audience: "the actualities of daily urban life narrowed

the scope of possible reactions to performances, but also made possible a wider variety of

response than is usually taken into account."[3] In acknowledging both diversity and limitation,

Sponsler highlights an important aspect of the *York Cycle* that has received little attention despite

our current focus on archival research – that is, that the plays exist within time and space.[4] All

texts, and particularly dramatic texts, are altered by their contexts. Despite the fact that archival

projects like REED are seen as a reaction against the unifying tendencies of formalist and

functionalist studies, these archives have mostly been used to write the history of urban

performances as a social activity, rather than informing the readings foregrounded or made

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[1] There is no standard terminology for referring to the *Cycle* and its component parts. I use *York Cycle* or *Cycle* to refer to the entire text/performance, and play(s) or pageant(s) to refer to the individual texts. These are most often referred to as the Corpus Christi Play and pageant(s), respectively, in York's records.

[2] Claire Sponsler , "The Culture of the Spectator: Conformity and Resistance to Medieval Performances," *Theatre Journal* 44 (1992) 20.

[3] Sponsler, 29.

[4] V. A. Kolve's famous study, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford; London : Stanford UP, E. Arnold, 1966), first articulated the concept of "medieval time and English space," although he himself felt that York was particularly lacking in contextual reference (101-123). Kolve's work perhaps represents a turning point that drew focus away from the plays themselves and into their contexts. More recent studies tend to be concerned with the physical aspects of staging (playing time, stage structure, play route) and the socio-political implications of the plays and their participants (studies on the body politic, on guild and civic politics, on the context of the *Cycle's* inception and suppression). This study continues with some of these concerns, considering staging and political contexts, but in an attempt to bring these issues back to a reading of the plays, to localize these issues with regards to performance and reception.

possible at different points in that history.[5] Another common modern approach to medieval

drama, historical reproduction, does raise questions of the lived experience and audience

response, but most scholarship behind these productions focuses on the technical aspects of

performance and performability.[6] More studies are needed which combine archival and

performance research with a close study of the texts themselves. To read or study the plays – or

worse to study *around* the plays – as if they were static texts is to miss the meaning entirely, for

almost certainly the copy we have in the Register was never the version seen on the street. The

difference between reading and viewing alone demonstrates this fact.[7] Each performance, at

each station, in each year – with the attendant circumstances of local and national events, current

politics, and even the social standing of the actors – was unique, and was received uniquely by

different members of the audience. Clearly, "localized investigations… would be well worth

undertaking" if we wish to gain a better understanding of what the plays could, and likely did,

mean to their audiences.[8]

These localized investigations need to include a more thorough consideration of the

guilds responsible for particular plays. Anne Higgins, for example, has shown that plays were

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[5] For discussions of the problems inherent in the REED project, see Theresa Coletti, "Reading REED: History and the Records of Early English Drama," *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson (California: University of California Press, 1990) 248-284; and Patricia Badir, "Playing Space: History, the Body, and Records of Early English Drama," Exemplaria 9:2 (1997 Fall): 255-79. Coletti specifically addresses REED's claims to a-historicity, and Badir demonstrates how REED's lack of context can make the published records misleading. My survey of recent scholarship has, of necessity, been restricted to material on York, although I have read complaints of a-historicity more generally. For York, more historic studies include Ruth Nissé's article on civic rhetoric and Lollard politics, and Anne Higgin's forthcoming study of plague and the York plays.

[6] On technical aspects of staging and performance, see *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds., Marianne Briscoe and John Coldeway (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1989) and *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. Paula Neuss (Cambridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, Barnes & Noble, 1983).

[7] Consider the fact that the myth of "rustic" medieval drama remained among medievalists until the plays began to be performed again in their entirety. What seems stilted and over-stylized on the page becomes larger than life on the stage, demanding the audience's attention. Articles discussing modern revivals include: Alexandra Johnston, "Four *York* Pageants Performed in the Streets of York: July 9, 1988," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 31 (1992):101-4; Sheila Lindenbaum, "The York Cycle at Toronto – Staging and Performance Style," *Medieval English Drama: A Casebook*, ed. Peter Happé (London: MacMillan, 1984): 200-11; John Marshall, "Modern Productions of Medieval English Plays," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 290-311; John Velz, "The York Cycle of Mystery Plays," (Review of the Toronto, 1997 production) *Cahiers Elisabethains* 13 (1978): 49-52.

[8] Sponsler, 29.

rarely assigned randomly, and this guild casting says much about the plays and the performers.[9]

York craftsmen have received more attention in recent years, in terms of both politics and

performance. Charles Pythian-Adams and Mervyn James have both written about the communal

aspect of medieval drama, and, although Sarah Beckwith and Miri Rubin challenge this myth of

community, Beckwith, at least, acknowledges that the ruling body of the town had a vested

interest in maintaining such a myth, and containing the artisans within it.[10] Heather Swanson,

who has conducted a detailed study of the city's artisans, demonstrates the way in which the

guild system – and related activities like the Corpus Christi play – were designed to burden and

control craftsmen, supporting the power structure of a mercantile oligarchy.[11] R. B. Dobson

demonstrates that the city Freedom, a requirement for most business and trade, did the same.[12]

Despite potential (and often existent) tension, however, the guilds also had a vested interest in

the plays. Beyond a true religious feeling, which we should not discount, participant guilds

stood to gain as much prestige as the city from the production. A greater understanding of the

guilds, their goals, and their political histories, adds a dimension to the interpretation of the

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[9] Anne Higgins, "Work and Plays: Guild Casting in the Corpus Christi Drama," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism, and Reviews* 7 (USA: Associated University Presses, 1995) 76-97. Other studies exploring the connections between guilds and their plays include Alan D. Justice, "Trade Symbolism in the York Cycle," *Theatre Journal* 31 (1979): 47-58; Donald S. McClure, "Commercialism in the York Mystery Cycle," *Studies in the Humanities* 2.1 (1971): 32-34; and Stevens, 17-34. Justice provides brief explanations for twenty-nine play assignments, while McClure specifically explores the commercial impact of Dyers' and Shipwrights' plays.

[10] Charles Pythian-Adams, "Ceremony and the Citizen: The Communal Year at Coventry 1450-1550," *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700: Essays in Urban History*, eds. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1972) 57-85. Mervyn James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town," *Past and Present* 98 (1983): 3-29. Sarah Beckwith, "Making the World in York and the York Cycle," *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994) 254-276. Miri Rubin, "Small Groups: Identity and Solidarity in the Late Middle Ages," *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Jennifer Kermode (United Kingdom: Alan Sutton, 1991) 132-150.

[11] Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) and "The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns," *Past and Present* 121 (1988): 29-48. Swanson argues that "craft guilds can be seen as a deliberate artificial construct of the medieval urban authorities," and that rules regarding searchers (guild members who checked for quality and collected fines) and penalties (half of all fines went to the city) were more for the city's benefit than the guilds'. For another discussion of civic governments, see Jennifer Kermode, "Obvious Observations on the Formation of Oligarchies in Late Medieval English Towns," *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1998) 87-106.

[12] R. B. Dobson, "Admissions to the Freedom of the City of York in the Later Middle Ages," *The Economic History Review* 26 (1973): 1-22.

plays. Again, the range of intention and reception is perhaps wider than often perceived, and deserves a more thorough study.

This thesis explores the implications of the relationships between particular guilds – specifically those of the building trades – and the pageants they produced in York, and examines this relationship over the two-hundred-year production of the *Cycle*. I have chosen to focus on building trades for two reasons. First, the building industry is one of the first to react to economic changes, and so we might expect to witness more dynamic in the guilds' relationships to the financial burden of play production than with other, richer trades. Second, an interesting spatial dynamic is created by the fact that the building trades built the city which was such a politically contested space. I begin by examining the guilds responsible for most day-to-day construction – the plasters, tilers, and carpenters – and by exploring the range of interpretations that the conjunction of guild casting, play text, and political/social events invites. Chapter Two considers one spatial aspect of the *Cycle* more directly. Historical studies have tended to stress the distinction between church liberties, state lands, and civic jurisdiction, and critical analysis of the play route tends to support this distinction, positing the plays as an outward presentation of civic identity. This approach, however, does not account for the participation of artisans and institutions, like the Masons, largely outside of civic control. In examining the Masons' participation in the *Cycle*, I investigate the ways in which the *York Cycle* may have cut across boundaries (or united "separate" groups) instead of, or as well as, reinforcing them.

Appropriately, the study that follows, which begins as an exploration of contexts, of the "tendency of all activities, events, and performances to escape the bounds of their intended effects," ends up in a recognition of contested boundaries, boundaries over and through which participants in the *York Cycle* defined themselves, their guilds, and their city.[13] In the troubled and troublesome readings that arise out of theological, political, economic, social, and spatial

contexts, we can witness conceptions of identity being formed, validated, attacked, defended, undermined, and re-asserted, sometimes all at once. As Miri Rubin has noted, "identity can never be constituted through a single or overarching affinity… but rather at the intersection and the changing dynamic negotiation of these… positions in the world."[14] Changing contexts that in turn change (or re-focus) the meanings of these texts highlight the boundaries which defined the limits of these "dynamic negotiations." Sometimes the boundaries were quietly re-drawn, and sometimes they became stronger than ever. Several scholars have acknowledged that the *York Cycle* represents a competition of identities; what follows demonstrates that there is no "single or overarching" identity at stake, but rather that each play offers its own range of negotiations specific to the contexts of guild, text, and audience, a polyvocal struggle to define identity.[15]

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[13] Sponsler, 20.

[14] Rubin, 141.

[15] For the discussions on the *York Cycle* and identity, see in particular Beckwith, "Making the World," and Anne Higgins, "Streets and Markets," *A New History of Early English Drama*, eds. John Cox and David Scott Kasten (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 77-92.

Chapter 1: Contextual Resonances in the Plays of the Building Trades

Context is an essential part of performance, directly affecting the interpretations and experiences available to an audience, but some aspects of context are easier to reclaim than others. Individual factors that influence audience and actors – what one had for dinner, the success or failure of current projects, the personal relationships between audience members and their fellow citizens on stage, the state of the weather – are almost impossible to trace, especially since there are no first-hand accounts of the *York Cycle* on which to base such conjecture. However, we can make educated guesses about the effect of more communally experienced factors, such as the social standing and general perception of a performing guild. We can also consider how contemporary political and economic events may have resonated with the themes and action of the pageants. By looking at these communal factors, we can better understand the range of readings in which the audience may have participated.

The identity of the actor/sponsors is a an important part of the performance context. Consider the effect of seeing a favorite (or despised) actor in a new movie – one's reception is coloured by one's past knowledge of and experience with that actor.[16] A medieval equivalent would be the general feeling towards butchers. These tradesmen were often segregated and ostracized, in part because of the filth and smell involved in their work, and in part because of a general distaste for trades that worked in blood.[17] Butchers were also both self-sufficient and essential, putting them in a position of power that threatened civic authority.[18] Appropriately, then, they were responsible for the "Death of Christ" – an important play, but also one that cast

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[16] Take, for example, Tom Cruise's recent performance as a sleazy seduction instructor in the film *Magnolia*. His history of playing "good boy" characters makes his presentation even more reprehensible.

[17] Anne Higgins, "Work and Plays," 90.

[18] Higgins, "Work and Plays," 96 n59. See also Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 14-17, and 118 for a discussion of civic attempts to control the butchers. Swanson states that strict regulation "was only relevant if it prevented the creation of threatening monopolies," and that the problem with the butchers was that they "not only ...[had] easy access to raw materials, but ... also supplied other crafts" (118).

the Butchers as Christ's murderers.[19] The audience's discomfort with the guild would transfer to

the play, and visa versa, strengthening the play's themes and, incidentally, the city's desire to

repress the guild.[20] While we do not have the records needed in order to judge the effect of

individual actors on an audience, we can make educated guesses about the effect of casting at the

guild level by considering the guild's social standing, political history, and specialized skills.[21]

In "Work and Plays: Guild Casting in the Corpus Christi Drama," Anne Higgins discusses the

practical, commercial, and interpretive impulses that connected the guilds with their particular

plays, and these categories are useful for understanding the impact of the guild on a play's

reception.[22] First, "a craft had to be large enough, wealthy enough, and powerful enough to

claim, create, maintain, and produce annually its pageant or episode."[23] Practical considerations

involved a guild's material ability to produce a play, either in terms of supplying particular props

(blood in the Butchers' "Death of Christ," gold in the Goldsmiths' "Magi") or in terms of

meeting the general financial burden.[24] The guild also had to meet the casting requirements;

smaller guilds tended to produce plays with only two or three characters, whereas larger guilds

supported larger casts.[25] Commercial motivations involved specific references to trade or

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[19] "The Death of Christ," ed. Richard Beadle, *The York Play* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982) 323-333. All references to the play texts will be from this edition.

[20] Higgins discusses the impact of negative guild casting in "Work and Plays," 86-91, and considers the butchers in particular (86-87, 90-91). She also raises the question of why a guild would wish to perform a play which cast them in negative roles. She notes the way these negative plays stress work and objects of trade symbolism, a kind of advertising, but she also places this negative commercialism in "a world of performance and meaning which is nothing like we know," and I would disagree. One of the greatest difficulties in producing medieval drama is that devils are always more interesting than saints, and this was equally true for medieval audiences as it is now. The scatological morality play *Mankind* (Peter Meredith, ed. [Leeds: Alumnus, 1977]), for example, contains a scripted pause in the action during which the Vices insist on receiving money before they present the devil, a version of passing the hat that sensibly collects money from the audience while their interest is peaked. In other words, the guilds may have appreciated negative association as a more effective mode of advertising than positive association.

[21] Unfortunately, most of the York records are from the city, not the guilds, so we rarely know the names of those who performed the plays. While not in the scope of this study, it would be worthwhile to trace the names which we do have to see if any generalizations can be made about the status of these actors in the community.

[22] Higgins considers the impulses behind initial casting, although her categories carry weight in looking at the long term effects of that casting.

[23] Higgins, "Work and Plays," 82.

[24] "The Magi," Beadle, *The York Play*, 134-148.

[25] Since we have no record of how the *Cycle* was first created, we cannot know whether any of these casting influences came to bear before or after the texts were written. Higgins makes a similar point about guilds' religious affiliations ("Work and Plays," 81).

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product in the play. The Shipwrights' play, "Building of the Ark," for example, demonstrates and elevates their craft as, literally, God-given.[26] Higgins's final category, interpretive, points to "the figural relation" between the guild and play, particularly on a thematic level; thus the Tilers, who helped build houses, produced the "Nativity," a play about homelessness.[27] While Higgins often draws only one level of connection between each play and guild, all levels were likely evident in the relationship, regardless of which one formed the impetus for initial casting.[28] A guild would logically make use of its own skills and materials in a production, and the play would reflect, whether directly or indirectly, on the guild commercially. Interpretive connections, while not always evident, sometimes developed in relation to particular historical contexts.

The relationship between guild and play when viewed over time draws attention to other factors which would have affected a play's reception: the political and economic contexts of those times. National and civic politics, as well as general economic trends, affected both performing guilds and audience members and, logically, the plays would have resonated differently depending on these contexts. Each of the plays explored in this chapter take on more complex, even troubled, readings during times of political or economic turmoil.

It is important to keep in mind – indeed, it is the motivation behind this chapter – that these plays changed over time. Our only written copy, the Register, dates from the late fifteenth century, approximately the middle of the run, and changes are evident before and after the Register was compiled.[29] The guilds also changed, as did the city in which the plays were

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[26] "The Building of Noah's Ark," Beadle, *The York Play*, 78-82. Beadle has also written an article which explores the technical shipbuilding terminology in the play and demonstrates how the play celebrates both God and the guild. See "The Shipwrights' Craft" in *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. Paula Neuss (Cambridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, Barnes & Noble, 1983), 50-61.

[27] Higgins, "Work and Plays," 85.

[28] Higgins is demonstrating how these categories apply, not exhausting the possibilities.

[29] The dates of the Register and of the *Cycle*'s various alterations have been a matter of contention. I follow Richard Beadle's assertion that the Register was compiled between 1463 and 1477 (*The York Plays*, 11). Margaret Rogerson proposed a later date in "External Evidence for the Dating of the York Register" (*Records of Early English Drama, Newsletter* [*REED-N*], 2 [1976]: 4-5), and Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith argued against her findings in

performed. We need to consider in detail what these plays may have meant, and how that meaning may have changed, in order to understand the scope of the text a "medieval audience" might have received.

Rulers and Citizens: The Plasterers' Play and Power Hierarchies

The Plasterers' "Creation" play is one of the more straightforward examples of the ways in which context informs the text. The pageant helps to establish a theme of work which is prevalent throughout the *Cycle*, and which draws attention to the skills of the sponsoring guild.[30] The play raises some potentially dangerous theological issues by equating the Plasterers' skills with God's creation, but in this way the guild's daily labour becomes a work of worship. The play also establishes ideal power structures in reference to the previous play and through God's relationship to creation, and this representation of proper rule becomes significant in times of political unrest, particularly during the War of the Roses. "Creation" highlights the authority of a legitimate ruler, but the staging also acknowledges a balance of power that must exist between rulers and their people in order to achieve peaceful rule. The daily life of labour and politics become inseparably entwined with the play's ostensibly biblical themes.

"Creation" is the second play of the *Cycle*, and the text seems to have remained stable from at least 1415 to the end of the *Cycle*.[31] The 1415 pageant list (*Ordo*) describes the play as follows:

"Further External Evidence for Dating the York Register (BL Additional MS 35290)" (*Leeds Studies in England* 11[1980]: 51-58).

[30] Several scholars have addressed the York Cycle's textual focus on work and workers. See Beadle "Shipwrights' Craft" for work in the "Building of Noah's Ark" and Higgins "Work and Plays" for work in the "Crucifixion." See also Sarah Beckwith, "Making the World" and Martin Stevens, "The York Cycle: City as Stage," *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987, 17-87, but particularly 29-30). I have not been able to obtain Francis Sheeran's "The Work Ethic and the York Cycle" (10th conference on medieval studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 5 May 1975).

[31] Records suggest some form of Cycle was in existence by 1376 (*Records of Early English Drama, York* [*York*], eds. Alexandra Johnston and Margaret Rogerson [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979] 3), and that guilds were involved by 1386-7 (*York*, 4-5), but there is no record as to what specifically occurred before 1415, when the *Ordo Paginarum*, literally a list of the pageants in order of presentation, was recorded in the city's Memorandum book (*York*, 16-26). I personally suspect the *Ordo* represents a new version of the *York Cycle*, one which included

	Deus pat*er* in sua substancia creans
Plasterers	te*r*ram & om*n*ia que in ea sunt p*er*
	spaciu*m* v dier*um*

[God the Father in his (own) substance creating the earth
and all things which are in it in the space of five days] [32]

The existing play from the Register fulfills this description. God is the only

acknowledged character, and he commands the firmament, land and sea, plants, sun and moon,

fish and birds, and land animals into existence on their appropriate 'days' over the course of the

play. The diction, however, signals a departure from the traditional biblical story in that God's

act of creation becomes work. God begins creation by saying, "Furth well I publysch my

power:/ Noght by my strenkyth, but by my steuyn" (l. 30-1), and ends it saying, "I with my

worde hase wrothe" (l. 160).[33] In the 14 stanzas (172 lines) of the play, he uses "byd(e)" five

times, and "will" three times, along with several other "speech" words that emphasize this

method of creation. In contrast, however, God also describes his activity as 'work' four times,

and his creation as 'works' three times. Other words for describing creation include "doyingys",

"dedis", and "materis", but none of these is used as often. This is potentially dangerous ground,

because it implies that God needs to work, and also introduces work before the fall.[34] The

distinction is, perhaps, that this is a form of work that brings pleasure, not hardship. God himself

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more pageants and involved more guilds. It was not until after 1415 that guilds became particularly concerned with defining their membership and insisting on payments from other trades doing similar work. This attention to funding sources implies that funds for the play had suddenly become more scarce. York's economy did not begin a serious decline until the mid-fifteenth century, but a larger production would account for this increased financial concern. The creation of the *Ordo* also seems incongruous if the text had remained unchanged. Instead, it may signal the sudden difficulty of dealing with a larger and more complex script, one requiring that the billets be recorded in a standard form. My suggestion that the "Creation" play remained relatively stable until the end of the cycle is based on the fact that there are very few emendations in the *Ordo* entry or the registered copy. See Stevens, 48-9, for an even later proposed date of the *Cycle*'s inception.

[32] *York*, 17; translation, 703. The words "terram," "ea," and "v dierum" are written over erasure, which may indicate an alteration in the text. The hand of these alterations is very similar to the original hand, although slightly less neatly written. The facsimile of the *Ordo* shows more space than is necessary for the "ea," which may indicate a change of pronoun to match the added "terram" (*The York Play: A Facsimile of British Library MS Additional 35290, Together With a Facsimile of the* Ordo Paginarum *Section of the A/Y Memorandum Book*, Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith, ed., [York: University of Leeds, Moxon Press, 1983]). See Appendix A for a photocopy of the Facsimile.

[33] "The Creation," Beadle, *The York Play*, 54-58.

[34] Sarah Beckwith discusses the incongruity of pre-lapsarian work in "Making the World," 255-9.

says, "Þis werke well lykys me" (l. 124), whereas Adam and Eve are cursed with "swete and swynke" (l. 161), sweat and toil.[35]

This focus on work in the "Creation," and throughout the *Cycle* as a whole, draws attention to the guilds responsible for these productions. The primary reason for assigning the play to the Plasterers, a small and relatively young guild, was most likely practical.[36] The play requires only one actor and perhaps two stagehands, and provides an excellent opportunity for demonstrating the Plasterers' skills. Most likely the various creations were made with the guild's stock and trade – plaster. Plaster fishes would swim in the sea, and plaster birds would fly through the air – possibly drawn out on a string or pulley at God's command.[37] God speaks directly to the sun and moon at one point, suggesting that they could be "played" as non-speaking roles – much like characters in a school pageant – and their masks, too, could be made

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[35] "The Fall of Man," Beadle, *The York Play*, 64-69.

[36] The Plasterers first registered their ordinances in 1390 (*York Memorandum Book* [*Y.M.B*], Vols I-II, ed. Maud Sellers, Vol III, ed. Joyce T. Percy [York, London: Surtees Society CXX, CXXV, CLXXXVI, 1912, 1915, 1973] Vol I, 115-6), although Heather Swanson suggests that the distinction between Tilers and Plasterers was non-existent ("Building Craftsmen in Late Medieval York," *Borthwick Papers* 63 [1983], 18-20; also in *Medieval Artisans*, 87-89). Certainly by 1475 the two guilds were considered as one (*York Civic Records* [*Y.C.R.*], Vols I-VII, ed. Angelo Raine [The Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, XCVIII, CIII, CVI, CVIII, CX, CXII, CXV, 1939-1953] Vol 3, 179-80), and even earlier were ordered to combine their resources in producing the pageants assigned to them (*York*, 39). The connection between the guilds lay in the fact that craftsmen were usually trained to do both jobs, but the skill-sets were nevertheless distinct. Plastering meant finishing walls, chimneys, windowsills, and so on with plaster of paris, a skill which lent itself to decorative arts. Tiling, on the other hand, involved laying roof tiles and building brick structures. Swanson notes that the building boom of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century led to the rise of Plasterers as a distinct craft because the economy could support such specialization. As York's economy declined, however, the separation was no longer justified, and the two groups became one. I believe the distinction of skills was still recognized with the continued use of "plasterers and tilers" in official records, and in the continued support of two separate plays; one to showcase each skill. "Creation" was also an ideal play for a small guild that might or might not survive in troubled economic times. Several of the small, early plays of the *Cycle* begin with a short summary of the previous action. While Clifford Davidson (*From Creation to Doom* [New York: AMS Press, 1984]) sees this "clumsy recapitulation" as proof of "inferiority" in these shorter texts (35-7), I suspect they indicate the fluidity of the *Cycle*. If a guild presenting one of these plays disappeared, or simply could not afford the year's performance, the *Cycle* as a whole would not suffer. While, for the Plasterers, representing God was certainly an important responsibility, the content of the play is not essential to the narrative or typology of Christ's Passion. Thus the city was able to include the young guild without risking the *Cycle*'s unity should the guild fail to survive.

[37] Davidson, *Creation to Doom*, notes evidence of this technique in continental plays (67). See Appendix B, Figures 1-2 for photos showing this technique in the University of Birmingham's "Creation" in Toronto, 1998.

of plaster.[38] One is hard pressed to imagine the plasterers passing up an opportunity to display

the range of their talents and the creative applications of plaster.

This initial practical impetus contributes another potentially troubling theological issue:

the Plasterers' skill is equated to God's. In practice, however, the play does draw attention to the

distinction. God describes the method by which plants increase (dropping seeds and spreading

roots) and gives the traditional command that all living things "wax furth fayre plenté/ And

grathly growes.../ So multiply e sall" (l. 167-9). The creations on stage, however, are inert –

inorganic plaster – and so cannot grow. Their appearance is only a stage trick. Through a

theological slight of hand, the Plasterers honour God by demonstrating their inferiority and by

identifying their craft as an attempt to follow his example. Their best work is only an imitation

of God's, and though they are good and honest workers, God is the better worker by far.

Incidentally, the association serves a commercial purpose, reflecting well on a guild whose daily

labour is "god-like." The connection between the spoken word and work may also have been a

positive association for the guild. Much of the Plasterers' hire was wage labour (not contract

work), and so was contracted verbally.[39] To equate a spoken command with a job well-done,

and the beginning of a contract with its immediate completion, might serve to assert guild-

members' skill and efficiency, regardless of whether these members could live up to their

advertising.

In addition to presenting the guild in a positive light, the Plasterers' play also lends itself

to political interpretations influenced by historical context. God begins the play by summarizing

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[38] Whether actors were assigned these roles or not may have depended on availability. If guild members wanted to be on stage, they could be given masks; if not, then plaster figures could easily replace them.

[39] Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 89. Unfortunately, we do not know how these verbal contracts were worded (if any formal wording applied at all), so it is difficult to know whether the language of the play makes reference to this method of contracting. God does switch from third person to first person when he commands the sun and moon in their duties (l. 113-22), and the "curses clere" (l. 115) which he assigns them can mean custom or legal procedure as well as heavenly orbit, perhaps referencing a formal agreement. God also comments that his work is to his "pay" (l. 49), punning on a double meaning of satisfaction and money. This is admittedly scarce proof out of 172 lines, but perhaps further research in contractual language will reveal a stronger connection. For samples of formal

the action of the previous pageant, reminding the audience of the usurping angels who "with syn

of pride/ Vp for to trine" God's throne, and who are now "be fallyn" (1. 8-10). These words take

on ominous connotations in light of the War of the Roses, particularly during the reigns of

Richard III and Henry VII.[40] Richard III appears to have favoured York, and visa versa.[41] He

settled civic conflicts, reconciled his brother the king with the city when factions disturbed the

peace, and, as king himself, relieved the city of tolls "withowt eny peticion or askyng of any

thyng by the said Mair."[42] In return, the city presented the Duke with regular gifts and supported

his bid for power after his brother's death.[43] Richard's actions with regard to the kingship,

however, have always been considered somewhat suspect (albeit most often viewed through the

lens of Shakespeare's plays), and affection for him in York was not universal. Angelo Raine,

editor of the *York Civic Records*, draws attention to civic disturbances that occurred when

Richard was in York as Duke, and when he interfered with common property as king. There are

also records that attest to some citizens' dislike of Richard, and Raine concludes that, while the

city council loved Richard for what he could do for them, the commonality distrusted him.[44]

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contractual wording, see L. F. Salzman, *Building in England: Down to 1540, A Documentary History* (Oxford: OUP, 1967), 413-602.

[40] See *A History of Yorkshire: The City of York*, P. M. Tillott, ed., a volume of *The Victoria History of the Counties of England* (London: OUP, 1961), for an excellent summary of York's history. For information on the War of the Roses, see in particular E. Miller's section on "York, Richard of Gloucester, and Henry VII," 61-5.

[41] The Duke and Duchess exchanged letters regularly with the city, as is evidenced in city records from 1475 on. See Robert Davies's *Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York During the Reigns of Edward IV, Edward V, and Richard III* (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1843), for the most complete copy of these records. Several records, those specifically taken from the York House Books, are reprinted in *Y.C.R.*, Vol 1. *Y.C.R.* allows a better sense of context, but is less comprehensive. Page references following are from Davies. In 1475 the Duchess wrote to the city (40-3) and the city wrote to the Duke (44-5) on unknown matters, and in 1477 the Duke and city communicated regularly over the matter of Fishgarths (80-91). (Davies dates these latter records to 1478, but Miller and Raine both say 1477.) In addition to this correspondence, the Duke and Duchess became members of the city's Corpus Christi Guild in 1477 (246 n).

[42] *Y.C.R.*, Vol 1, 82. In 1475-6, the Duke helped the city in the matter of a corrupt Civic Recorder, and the city repaid him with a gift of swan and pike (Davies, *Extracts*, 52-55). The matter of Richard's intervention in civic factions is mentioned in Tillot, *City of York*, 61.

[43] Tillot, *City of York*, 62.

[44] *Y.C.R.*, Vol 1, vi-viii. Raine writes, "Whilst [Richard III] managed to keep the City Council on his side, it is plain that he was distrusted and disliked by many of the Commons" (vi). The first record of Richard III's request for the common lands at St. Leonard's Hospital is dated March 17, 1484 (89), and repercussions of the riots were still in front of the council in October of that year (104-5). Slander against Richard included an accusation in 1491, nearly six years after his death, that he was "an ypocryte, a croche bake, and beried in a dike like a dogge" (*Y.C.R*, Vol 2, 71-3).

While the city's affections likely cannot be so easily divided by class, these negative views reveal that at least some citizens did not approve of the king. The "Creation" pageant's reference to usurpation, while potentially readable as support for Richard as the "proper" king, is more easily read as a critique of Richard's dubious practice in gaining the throne. It is unfortunate that we do not have better records of which plays were performed in which years, since the exclusion of the summary, or the play as whole, would confirm that the content was politically dangerous.[45] We also do not know whether Richard ever saw the plays.[46] It is worth noting, however, that the city presented the Creed play, and not a version of Corpus Christi, for Richard's one official visit as king in September, 1483.[47] In any case, if the pageant was performed, it is likely that some members of the audience would have recognized the opening speech as a subtle critique of Richard's rule.[48]

In stark contrast would be the performance of the plays before Henry VII in 1487, two years after Richard's defeat. The citizens and council of York were clearly aware of their uncomfortable position under the new king. Raine asserts that "documents which might have implicated them too deeply on the side of Richard were omitted from the official register" (vii). Perhaps more telling are the recorded letters to the Earl of Northumberland asking for his advice

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[45] We do know that not all plays were performed every year. The Marian plays, for example, were repressed in the Anglican climate of the sixteenth century (*York*, 293, 297). Some records suggest financial reasons, whereas others are unclear, as when the Linenweavers paid 5s as a forfeit (*York*, 143). The practice of delivering billets to the guilds before Corpus Christi also suggests that performance was selective. As well, in the years that pageant money was collected for other purposes (e.g. to support members of parliament [*York*, 256-9]), not all guilds who owned plays contributed, again implying that only some guilds had been preparing to present their plays. See also 118-9 in Richard Beadle, "The York Cycle: Texts, Performances, and the Bases for Critical Enquiry," *Medieval Literature: Texts and Interpretation*, Tim Machan, ed. (USA: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991, Vol 79 of the Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies).

[46] Davies (*Extracts*, 48-49) notes that the Duke of Gloucester's favorite residence was the castle of Middleham, "not more than a day's journey" from York, and he suggests the Duke and Duchess would have visited often.

[47] *York*, 130-133 details preparations for Richard's royal visit. While Richard's visit was later than the usual *York Cycle* performance, the city made no attempt to delay the play or re-mount pageants as it did in later years. The performance was delayed for Henry VII's visit in August 1487 (*York*, 153-6), for example (although admittedly it was first delayed that year due to war). For records mentioning pageants used for other performances, see *York*, 145, 272.

[48] That such a reading was available is evident in the fact that it can be seen 500 years after the event. However, we might expect a charge of slander or seditious behaviour if such a reading were intended or received. The lack of any comment may mean that the allusion was not recognized, the play was not performed, or that the play's status as a traditional text protected it against temporary contextual interpretations.

as to the city's best course of action, and the delegation of council members who went to request that the king be a "good and gracious Lord unto this Citie as othyr his noble Progenitours hath ben to fore."[49] Perhaps in an attempt to assure Henry VII of their affection and loyalty, the city also prepared a royal welcome in 1486 that was much more elaborate than Richard's had been. Henry was greeted in turn by Ebrauk, the city's legendary founder, Solomon, King David, and the Virgin Mary, each of whom gave the king symbols of his power over the city.[50] The city's focus on Henry VII as the "proper" ruler, in silent contrast to Richard III, would have made the opening speech of the "Creation" immediately applicable to the city's situation, particularly when Henry himself was in the audience the year after his first visit. Under these circumstances, a victorious Henry VII parallels the play's identification of God as a ruler who has overthrown the usurpers, and the text serves as admonishment to "foles" who "assent with syn of pride" (l. 8-9) to rebellion against the king. God himself reminds the audience what happens to trouble makers, like Lucifer, who dare to challenge royal authority.

At the same time as the play foregrounds rightful leadership, the stage mechanics contain a subtle reminder that those in power are dependent on those who work below them. The connection between speech and creation in the play draws attention to a particularly tricky, and ideologically important, bit of stage business. God's word brings each part of the world into being as he says it, not before and not after. Missed cues and malfunctioning machinery might be amusing in other circumstances, but when God is on stage, they become blasphemous. The 1998 Toronto production solved this problem by giving God two angelic assistants, whose responsibility it was to enact God's command.[51] Whether the assistants are on stage or off (i.e.

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[49] *Y.C.R.*, Vol. 1, 118-122. A bill of petitions presented in December of 1485 begins by describing ways in which York supported the Lancastrians at the beginning of the war. As both Raine (vi) and Miller (63) point out, the city's submission was not absolute, but they were eager to be on the new king's good side.

[50] *York*, 137-52. Anne Higgins discusses this royal entry in terms of physical location in "Streets and Markets," 77-92, and Gordon Kipling explores the iconography of the event in "Wonderful Spectacles: Theater and Civic Culture" (153-171 in the same volume).

[51] See Appendix 2, Figures 1-2.

behind-the-scenes stage technicians), they to some degree undermine God's power, since he no longer *creates*, but only commands. This presents an interesting, if unintentional symbol – that power and the powerful do not operate by themselves; the "little people" are essential. The simple fact that God must command each creation in its duty also raises the possibility that creation can disobey. These implications may have become more evident at times of national and civic unrest. Shortly after Henry VII took the throne, for example, York intercepted and reported to the king evidence of a rebellion brewing in the North.[52] The king's subsequent viewing of the "Creation" might have served as a visual reminder of the unspoken contract between subject and ruler.[53]

A similarly delicate balance of power was regularly demonstrated at the yearly mayoral elections, and, again, the parties involved might have seen their power relationship in the uneasy representation of God and his necessary servants. Because elections were the one time the commons might have a voice, the commonality often refused to allow the election to take place until their concerns on other issues were addressed.[54] Denial on some occasions led to riots, but just as often the council made some effort to deal with these concerns before continuing with the election. This practice demonstrates a recognition that the commons did have a sort of collective power on which the city's oligarchic rule was dependant, and the "Creation" play enacted that relationship, giving it validity.

The political context of York and England was one in which the council and commons, rulers and citizens, were constantly renegotiating their roles and authority. The Plasterers' "Creation" pageant was one venue for exploring and expressing the balance of power, and for

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[52] *Y.C.R.*, Vol 2, 3-7. This is the Lambert Symnel rebellion of 1487. The city sent word of suspicious activity to the king, refused Symnel entry to the city, and withstood an attack at Bootham Bar. These altercations were part of the reason the *Cycle* was delayed that year.

[53] This is not to imply that the contract went unchallenged. Henry frequently attempted to limit the traditional freedoms of this relatively independent city, as when he tried to put his own men into office in York (and was denied) (Tillot, *City of York*, 63).

[54] See the section on "The City Government and the Commonality" in Tillot, *City of York*, 80-84, which describes increasing dissent among the commonality after the middle of the fifteenth century.

attempting to define ideal concepts of rulership. At the same time, the play was an expression of identity for the young Plasterers' guild, one that validated the guild's existence by translating their labour into the work of homage. Because the text itself was relatively stable, this expression of identity, and even of the ideal operation of power, likely remained fairly consistent over the run of the *York Cycle*, although particular historical contexts may have drawn focus to some themes more than others. More dynamic texts, like the Tilers' "Nativity," demonstrate how changing historical contexts may have influenced the text itself, in turn reflecting alteration in conceptions of identity and ideals of community.

1.2 Housing and Immigration in the Tilers' "Nativity"

The plays which were the responsibility of common building trades all, perhaps not surprisingly, touch in some way on housing or sheltering. The Plasterers' "Creation" results in the world that will 'house' humanity. The Shipwrights' "Building of the Ark" creates the ship that will shelter the future of the world from the flood, while the Carpenters had the dubious honour of housing Christ's body in the tomb of the "Resurrection."[55] The most direct reference to housing, however, occurs in the Tilers' play, which draws attention to the homelessness of the holy family. Rather than emphasizing the positive association of the Tilers putting a roof over this family's head, the play draws attention to the family's isolation and lack of shelter.[56] This approach increases the emotional effectiveness of the play, on the one hand by eliciting pity from established citizens, and on the other by drawing on the empathy of York's largely immigrant

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[55] Shipwrights are included here because the distinction between shipwright and carpenter depended more on demand than skill. See Appendix C for an image of the "Building of the Ark" in which the Ark looks like a house. Christina Fitzgerald discussed the use of this image to represent medieval carpentry in her presentation of "A Guild Afloat: Domestic and Social Ideology in Chester's Noah's Flood," at the Medieval Association of the Pacific, February 26, 2000. The image is also used in the guide book to Barley Hall York (Charles Knightly; UK: Barley Hall Trust, 1999), and is described as, "Carpenters assembling a fifteenth century timber-framed building" (33). "Resurrection," Beadle, *The York Play*, 344-355.

[56] There is a potential for commercial exploitation through a grand display of tile on the barn roof, but a shrewd guild would more likely have emphasized the dilapidated state of the building, making it the *absence* of good building that comes to mind. The audience wants to house the holy family – and in the same thought wants to

population. This representation, while effective during York's prosperity and expansion in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, becomes problematic in the poor economic circumstances and depopulation of later years. The concept of housing also symbolically represents the family, and the guild as family, through which the play educates its audience in ideals of urban life. The text underwent at least two significant changes over the run of the play, and, while the theme of homelessness remains, each revision responds to changes in economic climate by adapting the conception of the family and its connection to the community.

The registered play begins with Mary and Joseph searching through the town, which is at once York and Bethlehem, for a place to stay.[57] Joseph laments their lack of shelter, and concludes that they will have to make do with the barn whose walls are "doune on ilke a side" and whose roof is "rayued" (l. 17-18). Mary reassures him that the shelter is sufficient and intimates that her time is near, at which Joseph goes out to find light and fuel. After he leaves, Mary miraculously gives birth without pain; the Christ child appears between one line and the next in the middle of a stanza while Mary experiences "grete joie" and is "cladded in comforte clere" (l. 50-1). Joseph, meanwhile, again bemoans their homelessness, praying God to "helpe þam þat is alde/ And namely þam þat is vnwelde" (l. 73-4). Theologically, the shelter and light he seeks appear in the form of the baby Jesus, but Joseph's genuine distress allows the audience to empathize with the isolation and suffering of this very human family.[58] The audience can recognize the irony on a theological level, while, at the same time, empathizing with the characters on stage, a contrast which increases the value of the shelter that the Christ child

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ensure that they themselves are safely housed. See Appendix B, Figures 3-4, for pictures of LeMoyne College's "Nativity" production at Toronto, 1998.

[57] Stevens discusses the way this play blurs the illusion between York and Bethlehem, and creates empathy with tourists coming to York to see the play ("City as Stage," 68-9, 73).

[58] J. W. Robinson discusses the irony of Joseph's light in "The York Play of the Nativity," *Studies in Fifteenth Century Stagecraft* (Early Art, Drama, and Music Monograph Series, 14, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1991), 68-70. Robinson analyzes the "Nativity" with respect to other literature and the visual arts in this chapter.

provides. The rest of the play is taken up with formal praises and references to fulfilled prophecies which re-anchor this event in terms of biblical time.[59]

Mary and Joseph's isolation in the new setting of a large town may also have had particular resonance for York's extensive immigrant population, and the play in turn provides a role model for the ideal family, one best suited for urban survival. York's population was not self-sustaining; regular epidemics and generally poor hygiene and sanitation meant that the death rate was higher than the birth rate in most late medieval urban settings.[60] As a result, a large portion of York's population was made up of recent immigrants from the local countryside.[61] New arrivals to York would have empathized with the holy family's isolation in a new setting, and, as a result, the family's interaction would have served as a role model for urban survival.

At least in the registered text, Mary and Joseph have a surprisingly equal and mutually supportive relationship, and both demonstrate that they are educated. The recorded play juxtaposes the themes of homelessness and isolation with the presentation of a family unit which provides its own shelter and overcomes isolation internally. In the first four stanzas of the play, we learn that the little family has searched everywhere for shelter, and their exhaustion and despair come clearly through the lines. The verse form uses a seven line stanza, $abab_4c_2b_4c_2$, and the shorter lines of Joseph's opening speech emphasize the family's isolation and helplessness: "Ourself allone...Within þis wone.... Þer is silke prees... But belde vs with þere bestes.... Als haue I roo... How sall we doo?" (l. 5-21). Joseph ends his lament by praying that God "Wisse vs

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[59] Kolve, 20.

[60] Medieval York was worst hit by plague in the late fourteenth century (which was conversely the time of York's greatest population) and the early sixteenth century (the time of York's lowest population). There were other epidemics periodically throughout the fifteenth century, most often vaguely described as the "sweat." York was also known to be one of the filthiest cities, which didn't help matters. The council repeatedly attempted to have the streets kept clean, pigs stabled, and filth removed in a sanitary manner, but the frequency of their complaints is testament to the fact that these orders had little impact. For reference to these problems in the records see *YCR*, Vol 1, 116-8 (an epidemic in 1485); Vol 3, 95 (disposal of refuse); Vol 4, (plague in 1538); Vol 5, 29-34, 36-40, 49 (severe plague from 1549-51), 71, 74 (precautions against infection), 68 (sweating sickness), etc. See D. M. Palliser, "Epidemics in Tudor York," *Northern History* 8 (1973): 45-63, and Tillot, *City of York*, 84-87.

[61] For a discussion of immigration, see D. M. Palliser, "A Regional Capital as Magnet: Immigrants to York, 1477-1566, *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 57 (1985): 111-123, and Tillot, *City of York*, 40-1, 86.

þe best" (l. 28), but he clearly doubts that such guidance will be forthcoming. In response, Mary rebukes her husband with his own words: "God will vs wisse, full wele witt e,/ Þer fore Joseph be of gud chere" (l. 29-30). Mary has a great deal of power in this relationship; Joseph accepts her rebuke and her decision that they will stay in the barn. When he sees a bright light coming from the barn later in the play, he states his intention to ask Mary about it, and he later accepts her answers without question. Mary also demonstrates her education, referencing Old Testament prophecies of the birth four stanzas before Joseph does, and confirming Joseph's own references. It would be easy to see Joseph as unnecessary, but he makes himself useful by fetching fuel for a fire, and he, too, demonstrates his education in references to scripture. The balanced nature of their relationship is reflected in the way the couple shares stanzas whenever they are in dialogue, breaking the isolation of the stanza form.[62] The Tilers' "Nativity" presents the ideal (because holy) family as one in which both members work together to achieve their goals. They provide mutual support, as opposed to depicting Mary as someone who needs protection, or Joseph as an old man incapable of accomplishing his own tasks.

The relationship provided as a model in the play reflects the family structure revealed by recent economic investigations of late medieval York. Heather Swanson has challenged the illusion of single trade assignations, in part because she sees the family as the base economic unit, and families usually engaged in a range of economic ventures.[63] Jeremy Goldberg has also drawn attention to the variety of activities in which women took part.[64] Women worked alongside their husbands in all trades, and often continued in those trades after their husbands' deaths. Other women worked in trades independent of their husbands, from smithing to

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[62] This relationship is quite different than that found in other English "Nativity" plays; the Chester Mary is relatively passive, and always deferent to Joseph, while in the N-Town "Nativity," Joseph repeatedly expresses frustration and annoyance with his wife's apparent frivolity. The N-Town Nativity contains the episode with the cherry tree, in which Joseph is too old to reach the cherries and tells Mary to ask the father of her child for them (which she does, and, of course, she receives them). Joseph also rebukes his wife for laughing when he enters with the midwives, and she must explain that she has already given birth.

[63] Swanson, "Illusion," 33.

trading.[65] Many households also maintained side interests in brewing and hostelling.[66] In other words, the successful urban family required that both husband and wife take an active, intelligent, and often independent role in supporting the family, an approach suggested by the equable family unit presented in the York "Nativity." At the same time, this "family" can be read as the guild. As Miri Rubin has demonstrated, guild ties were sometimes stronger than family ties.[67] The play's representation of "family" members as equal and mutually supportive, and the family unit as isolated and independent, speaks to conceptions of guild community as much as to ideals of the basic family unit. In both cases, ideals of urban existence are presented to the audience as role models.

The existing "Nativity" play also suggests a troubling conjunction of family structure and isolation, implying that the family is most 'ideal' when it is isolated and self-sufficient. This definition of "ideal," however, may point to conflicting motivations in the *York Cycle* as a whole. Both Anne Higgins and Sarah Beckwith have suggested that the *York Cycle* served to educate city members in urban identity. Beckwith argues that:

> ...the pageants reveal and help to articulate an artisanal ideology which placed importance on manufacture, or on making, rather than on the control of exchange mechanisms through the manipulation of networks of supply and distribution. The very public ceremonial designed to figure forth the body of the city as the wish-fulfillment of its most illustrious members is therefore undercut by an emergent structure of feeling which will precisely emphasise manufacture as central.[68]

In other words, the plays served as a tool for the majority of citizens to define and validate the city through their own labour, undercutting the mercantile oligarchy's attempts to contain those

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[64] P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520* (Oxford: Oxford UP, Clarendon Press, 1992).

[65] Swanson gives the example of a female vintner whose husband successfully excused himself of her debts because she contracted them as an independent business woman (*Medieval Artisans*, 6-7).

[66] Swanson, "Illusion," 34-5.

[67] Rubin, "Small Groups," 140-141. She makes a distinction between "real kin" and "ritual kin," and notes that, "put simply, fraternities did quite a few things that families did too," often supplanting the family. Rubin is speaking primarily of religious affiliations, but I suspect that her argument carries over to craft guilds, particularly in as much as those guilds supported their own fraternities.

citizens through artificial guild distinction and the burden of play production. My understanding

of the "Nativity," influenced by Higgins's forthcoming study of plague and the *York Cycle*, may

complicate Beckwith's argument.[69] Higgins combines a recognition of the fact that plague

increased the city's immigration rate with her theory that the plays were performed 'outwards' as

an expression of identity, to posit that the *Cycle* served to symbolically educate new-comers in

urban identity.[70] The "Nativity," particularly in its registered version, urges a degree of self-

sufficiency upon the holy family, suggesting that isolation from the community is part of urban

life. The oligarchy would have had more interest in encouraging this isolation and self-

sufficiency than the guilds; the civic body would likely have preferred to discourage the

formation of strong communities independent of civic control, while guild fraternities (as

opposed to the crafts or mysteries) existed to do just that.[71] The play's evolution implies that this

emphasis on isolation was a matter of contention, and the final version appears to place the

"ideal" family within the community, as opposed to including isolation as a measure of the ideal.

In addition, the contrast between theological hope and human despair is most effective when the

majority of the audience is not in any real danger of experiencing Joseph's troubles. For

example, the play invites both pity and fear at the thought of being "stormed in þis steede" (l. 16)

and left without shelter when "þe wedir is colde" (l. 71), but the play is performed at the height

of summer; it is more effective for the audience to imagine hardship than experience it, since the

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[68] Beckwith, "Making the World," 265.

[69] I had the opportunity of hearing Higgins present a part of this study at the Green College Medieval and Renaissance lecture series, Vancouver, January 20, 2000.

[70] Higgins explores the symbolic implications of the play route in "Streets and Markets," and I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 2.

[71] The craft and fraternity of a guild were 'two sides of the same coin,' but York guilds rarely registered the rules of their fraternity along with their other ordinances. One significant exception is the 1485 Carpenters' Ordinances (*Y.M.B.*, Vol 2, 277-83), which describe mutual obligations among fraternity members, such as hiring unemployed brethren before non-members, attending special masses, etc. In actuality, the line between "civic" and "guild" is hard to draw, and guild members probably encouraged self-sufficiency as much as the council. This issue is further complicated by the systems in place for taking care of the poor. Those who did not achieve ideal self-sufficiency, became the responsibility of either parish (and so were a burden on fellow parishioners) or council. In the sixteenth century, for example, the city was obliged to organize the beggars and build poor houses (Tillot, *City of York*, 132-135), which must have eventually cost all citizens. I have not been able to fully explore the implications of these systems on ideal representations of community for this thesis.

latter distracts or detracts from the theological message. If the majority of the audience experienced the degree of isolation and poverty presented on stage, the play would run the risk of emphasizing the difference between the holy family and the audience, reinforcing despair, rather than hope. Alterations to the text, then, may have been partially motivated by a conjunction of ideological and dramaturgical concerns, although purely practical considerations of finance and performance were also likely a factor. With these motivations in mind, I wish next to look in detail at the "Nativity" play's evolution, and consider how periods of alteration might have connected to the city's changing economy.

Unlike the "Creation," the Tilers' "Nativity" seems to have undergone significant transformation during its lifetime. The 1415 list describes the play as:

	Maria [cum <... ....>] Ioseph . obstetrix / puer natus ·iacans in presepio· inter bouen & azinum & angelus loquens ·pastoribus· & ludentibus in pagina sequente /
Tylers	

[Mary [with <... ....>] Joseph, the midwife, the newborn boy ·lying in a manger· between the cow and ass, the angel speaking ·to the shepherds· and the players in the following pageant] [72]

As Richard Beadle notes, this description bears only partial resemblance to the play in the Register. [73] The registered version features only Mary, Joseph, and the baby, whereas the version described in the *Ordo* adds a midwife and an angel, and somehow involves the actors in the following "Shepherds" play.. Beadle concludes that the play was, "wholly or partially revised after 1477 to include a part for an angel whose words were audible to the actors in the *Shepherds* on the next pageant wagon, the angel of the latter being, presumably, one and the same character,

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[72] *York*, 18; translation, 704. I have used REED's notation here. Material in square brackets ([...]) has been crossed out, and material between angle brackets (<...>) is illegible. The material between punctus (·....·) is written in at a later date.
[73] Beadle, *The York Play*, 425-7.

in spite of the intervening dialogue exclusive to the shepherds."[74] He supports his hypothesis with reference to notes in the Register at the end of the "Nativity" which read, "Br.th.r. with haste," "hic caret pastoribus," and "sequitur postea."[75] All three comments suggest some overlap with the following play. I would add that the words "to the shepherds" in the 1415 *Ordo* description are written over erasure, and the last line must be a late addition. It is inserted at the end of the description, and therefore leaves no betraying signs of erasure, but it is crowded into the space usually left between entries.[76] Beadle notes, further, that John Clerke requested the "lattr part" of the Tilers' pageant in his attempts the fill gaps in the Register, suggesting again that something significant had changed and needed to be rewritten.[77]

While the play did undoubtedly undergo significant transformation after being registered, it also changed after the 1415 record but before the Register. Beadle does not account for the inconsistencies between the original record – that is, the parts not written over erasure – and the recorded play.[78] The unaltered portions of the record read: "Mary … Joseph, the midwife, the newborn boy … between the cow and ass, the angel speaking…."[79] As stated above, however, there is no midwife in the registered version, and no call for a silent character; Mary is clearly alone. Nor is there an angel recorded in the text, and certainly not one speaking. These details suggest that the play underwent at least two major changes: the play was first trimmed down to the minimum number of characters sometime in the fifty years between the *Ordo* and Register, and the angel was then re-instated, and the end of the play re-written to include the shepherds, sometime after the Register was compiled.

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[74] Beadle, *The York Play*, 426.
[75] Beadle, *The York Play*, 427.
[76] See Appendix A.
[77] Beadle, *The York Play*, 427
[78] In fact, Beadle states that the entire original entry of the *Ordo* has been lost to erasure, but this does not appear to be the case, at least according to the REED transcription.
[79] The line "lying in a manger" is in the middle of the original entry and written over erasure, but I cannot explain what might have been under it. The erasure may simply have been an error, so that the previous words were re-written, but the uncertainty remains, as it does with the crossed out words between "Mary" and "Joseph." I have not found these problems acknowledged in scholarship.

The primary hand of the alterations in the *Ordo* entry suggests that the first revision, which reduced the play to its minimum size, occurred within twenty years of the original entry.[80] This first revision may have been part of more general trend; as Beadle notes in the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, several plays were amalgamated in the 1420s, likely in response to delays in the production. In 1422, for example, the Pinners' and Painters' plays were united into a single "Crucifixion" play when the *Cycle* was "impeded more than usual because of the multitude of pageants."[81] The "Nativity" play may also have first changed in response to the city's 1422 command that the Plasterers and Tilers combine their resources for their productions.[82] The records which address this joint production seem concerned with a fair division of resources; tradesmen working in both crafts were to support both plays, while those working in only one craft were to support the appropriate play. The initial reduction of the four-hander "Nativity" to a two-hander puts it on a more equal footing in terms of necessary resources with the Plasterers' small "Creation" play. Perhaps these alterations were meant to make each guild's financial burden equivalent, as much as they were intended to tighten the *Cycle* as a whole.

The shift toward fewer characters, and hence greater isolation, in the first revision (i.e. the registered copy) emphasizes the interpretive connections in a time of relative economic prosperity. Cloth export was just beginning to suffer under the influence of increased production in the West Riding, but York as a whole was still prosperous, and so self-sufficiency was still nominally attainable. The Tilers in particular benefited from a demand for fire-proof roofs and enclosed chimneys. The use of bricks (considered tiles at the time) for building also became

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[80] Most of the alterations in the *Ordo* entry appear to be in the same hand as the original entry, that of Roger Burton. Burton died in 1436, so the initial revision must have occurred before then. The only exception is the addition, "& ludentib*us* in pagina sequente," which is in a different hand, and so may support my supposition that the connection to the "Shepherds" play occurs much later. (See in particular the "d" and "s", but also "t" and "l", Appendix A.)
[81] *York*, 37-8. This period of revision, particularly in response to a Cycle that was running too long, also suggests that the *Ordo* represents a new version of the Cycle. See note 31 above.
[82] *York*, 39.

more common as the century went on. In light of this economic prosperity, the Tilers could afford to promote an ideal guild/family model which emphasized independence from other trades and affiliations. The increased emphasis on homelessness would also have added to the play's emotional, and therefore commercial, impact, particularly for audience members who benefited from the city's prosperity and who had money to spend on housing improvements.[83] In other words, the registered version represents the independence and self-confidence of a successful guild. The play's connection between 'ideal' and 'independent' also communicates more general civic expectations of new residents, a visual representation of the more modern 'Protestant work ethic.' New immigrants were shown that they could survive hardship and achieve prosperity in the city if they, like Mary and Joseph, operated from within an independent family unit, one not dependent on the larger community.

The second major change to the text occurred sometime after the Register was compiled (which Beadle dates between 1463 and 1477), but likely before 1501, which is when we first hear of a clerk attending at the first station.[84] With someone assigned to watch for divergence from the text, we could expect to see some record of the change, either of a fine or of a request to alter the play, unless the altered version was already considered commonplace. Moreover, there was sufficient time for note of the alteration to be made, erased, and made again by different clerks before John Clerke became responsible for the Register. The most likely date that suggests itself would be sometime around 1476 or 1477, shortly after the Register was completed. On April 3, 1476, the council made provision for four professional actors to ensure that those "insufficiant … in Connyng voice or personne" would not perform in the Corpus

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[83] I have not come across accounts of over-crowding or lack of housing in the fifteenth century, but I would be surprised if at least the former of these problems did not occur, particularly among the lowest classes. In the sixteenth century, the city provided housing for the beggars who threatened to overrun the city.

[84] *York*, 187. Admittedly, this record simply identifies the first station as that of the common clerk. It is not until 1538 that another entry expands on this description, stating that the clerk kept the Register there (*York*, 263).

Christi play.[85] Beadle suggests the Register and references to quality may have been part of a move toward a civic (rather than religious) event.[86] Margaret Rogerson also notes that "by 1476 the play had been fixed on the feast day and the procession on the Friday after."[87] The "Nativity" play's second alteration, then, may have been part of a trend for improving the quality of the *Cycle* in order to better represent civic identity. Despite the very realistic nature of the relationship between Mary and Joseph, the end of the "Nativity" is somewhat stilted. Both characters praise the baby Jesus in highly formal language that is at odds with their otherwise naturalistic speech. In her first stanza after the birth, Mary repeats the word "hayle" seven times, and uses six formal epithets. Joseph also speaks metaphorically to the child, addressing him as "foode" and "floure fairest of hewe," before beginning his own series of hayles. The holy family takes on an echo of its iconic status, but in doing so risks losing the audience's empathy. The stylistic greetings also slow the play down, and reveal a dramaturgical weakness in the text: the baby is born eight stanzas into the play, but the lines continue for another fourteen stanzas during which little happens. John Clerke's request for the "lattr part" of the text suggests that this flaw was addressed in the re-writing that combined the "Nativity" with the following "Shepherds" play. The existing "Shepherds" play from the Register contains the same charming realism that characterizes the relationship between Mary and Joseph and, while John Clerke notes missing material from this latter play, the style appears to have remained the same. Potentially, then, the version that came into existence after the Register maintained, and possibly improved upon, the realism of the holy family, while adding in the more interesting dramatic interaction with the shepherds.

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[85] *York*, 109.

[86] Richard Beadle, "The York Cycle," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 90.

[87] Margaret Rogerson, née Dorrell, "Two Studies of the York Corpus Christi Play," *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972), 76. This shift likely occurred earlier. As Rogerson points out, the council agreed to move the play, and not the procession, in 1426, but the play was still being performed on Corpus Christi day several years later.

This second shift downplays the isolation evident in the Registered text by having the community, as represented by the shepherds, welcome the family with gifts immediately, rather than keeping the episodes separate. This representation of integration and community may reflect an underlying anxiety about these concepts, both for the Tilers' guild and in general. York's economy began a serious decline in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Civic records complaining of depopulation and poverty became more frequent and more desperate as the century went on, such that king officially recognized the city's poverty in 1492.[88] In this state of decline, the Tilers did comparatively well. The growing preference for cheaper brick building, as opposed to labour intensive stone or increasingly expensive wood, kept the number of Tilers relatively stable while the number of other building tradesmen was falling rapidly.[89] The Tilers' prosperity sparked open resentment from the Masons, who vandalized an important building project in the 1490s.[90] As noted above, a greater emphasis on homelessness and isolation served as an indirect advertisement for the Tilers. In the era of declining prosperity, however, such an emphasis would draw attention to the trade's success, and could foster further resentment. The shift in the text would have allowed the guild to take a slightly lower profile. At the same time, the emphasis on community, even a poor one, may have been an attempt to overcome the isolation caused by increasing poverty. The city was no longer in a position to dictate the ideal family because the city itself was no longer ideal.

Isolation and homelessness remained in the text, however, and these appear particularly poignant in the economic climate of the sixteenth century. Severe epidemics and plague between

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[88] *Y.C.R.*, Vol 2, 81-2.

[89] On the increasing popularity of brick for building, see Swanson, "Building Craftsmen," 20-21, and *"Medieval Artisans,"* 88-89. On the increasing scarcity of wood, see *Y.C.R.*, Vol 5, 23; and Swanson, "Building Craftsmen," 14. I have also made extensive use of Swanson's work with the Freemen's Register in "Building Craftsmen," particularly her tables of trade enrollments over time (39-41) which I have reproduced in Appendix D.

[90] Swanson notes increased tension between Tilers and Masons, particularly in the latter half of the fifteenth century ("Building Craftsmen," 20; *"Medieval Artisans,"* 88-89). The Tilers contract for the Red Tower in the 1490s led Masons to vandalize the worksite, and the tension culminated in an accusation against the Minster's master mason when one of the Tilers was murdered (*Y.C.R.*, Vol 2, 60-1, 77).

1500 and 1560 reduced the population to at least half of its former size.[91] The dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s and 1540s, and poverty in general left many abandoned and derelict buildings in the city.[92] In this context, the "Nativity" only serves to reinforce the very real isolation and general ruin of the city. The building Joseph describes, with its walls "doune on ilke a side," likely reflected a common sight for the citizens who watched the play. Even when the economy and population began a slow recovery after 1560, the echo of York's darker days would have remained for some in the yearly production of the "Nativity."

York's reflection in the play's environment of poverty and isolation, even de-emphasized in the final revision, significantly diminishes the play's ability to communicate hope and ideals of community. If the play did indeed become as dark as it appears, we must ask what motivated its continued production. Perhaps the audience's increased empathy with the holy family served to enhance the symbolic value of the Christ child, even as the gathering audience might provide reassuring evidence of community. What is clear, however, is that the definition of the ideal family – or guild – as independent and isolated no longer functioned in the repressed economy of the sixteenth century. Adaptations to the text served to re-orient conceptions of smaller groups, such as the family or guild, towards a more interactive, broader sense of community.

1.3 Resurrections and Insurrections: The Carpenters' Play

The material connection between the "Resurrection" and the Carpenters' guild is more tenuous than the other play/guild relationships considered in this chapter. While there is an obvious reason for assigning the Carpenters the "Resurrection" play, that is to say the guild's religious affiliation with the Fraternity of the Resurrection, the motivation behind this initial

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[91] Palliser, "Epidemics." He notes plague between 1500-1510, 1520-1522, 1538-1541, 1550-1552, and finally in 1558. These plagues became increasingly disruptive. There were no new members of the Corpus Christi guild in 1538 (implying that potential immigrants were avoiding the city), and Palliser estimates that this outbreak decimated half of the population. Even the records falter in 1558, implying that this last outbreak was worse than the ones before it.

connection is not clear.[93] The play focuses on themes of truth and witnessing, demonstrating

particularly urban forms of corruption and deceit, and there may be a basic interpretive

connection that further study of the archives and the art of medieval Carpentry can reveal. The

craft, for example, had its own strict grammar, and worked with concepts of ideal forms and

proportions.[94] The connection with the play, then, may link through the idea of personal and

physical integrity, but, as yet, I have found little evidence in the guild's history or the play's

allusions to suggest this connection.

One answer which presents itself in a study of the Carpenters' history is that their

involvement was a matter of authority and prestige. The "Resurrection" is an important play in

the *Cycle*, reflecting the Carpenters' essential role in the city's physical construction. The

guild's prestige is evident in their inclusion in the Corpus Christi procession (in which no other

building trade explicitly took part).[95] Throughout the fifteenth century, however, the guild

suffered from fragmentation as a result of specialization during the population and economic

boom. Again, it is a stretch to see these events in the existing play, although some performance

choices may have made them more evident. Nevertheless, participation in the play at all may

have been used as a measure of prestige that allowed the Carpenters to maintain authority over

their sub-guilds.[96] In other words, the Carpenters had a vested interest in the play as a validation

of their status, suggesting that participation in the *Cycle* had become integral to the guild's

identity.

The other answer may simply be that the guild's interest in the play was wholly religious,

and not commercial. At least by 1482, the date of the registered Carpenters' Ordinances, there

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[92] This physical decay began in the fifteenth century, but the dissolution aggravated the problem (Tillot, *City of York*, 85, 117; D. M. Palliser, "The Reformation in York 1534-1553," *Borthwick Papers* 40 [1971], 14-18).
[93] The rules of the fraternity are outlined in the 1482 Carpenters' Ordinances (*Y.M.B.*, Vol 2, 277-283).
[94] Richard Harris, "The Grammar of Carpentry," *Vernacular Architecture* 20 (1989): 1-8.
[95] *York*, 24.
[96] The lack of a clear connection is even more confusing since the play appears to have been entirely re-written in the first half of the fifteenth century, and we might expect the new version to reflect contemporary issues, or at least to give some clue as to the motivation behind the re-writing.

was a distinction between the fraternity and the craft, which may mean that the play was

intended to be (even if it did not succeed) entirely a-political. If so, this guild, like others I will

mention in the next chapter, blurs our sense of the *York Cycle* as a civic/guild production. The

casting still influences performance context, but a wider definition of involvement changes our

understanding of the term "civic" and may well adapt our perception of York's self-definition as

a community.

The entry for the "Resurrection" in the *Ordo* describes the play as it exists in the

Register:

	·Cent*u*rio declara*ns* Pilato Cayphe & Anne .^{cum alijs Iudeis}. signa
Carpenters	apparencia i*n* morte*m* Iesu ·Iesus
·Iuno*u*rs Cartwrights	resurgens de sepulcro quator milites
Caruours Sawers·	armati [<..>] & tres marie lamentant*es* Pilatus Cayphas & Anna ·Iuuenis sedens ad sepulcr*um* indutus alb*o* loquens mu*l*ierib*us*·

[·The centurion testifying to Pilate, Caiaphas and Annas· ^{with other}
^{Jews,} ·the signs accompanying the death _{of Jesus}· Jesus rising from the
tomb, four armed soldiers [<..>] and the three Marys sorrowing,
Pilate, Caiaphas and Annas, ·a youth clad in white sitting at the
tomb, talking to the women·] [97]

This play explores lying and corruption, particularly as they relate to urban life. The play begins

with a scene in Pilate's court, and the language alludes to civic and legal proceedings. Pilate

calls the court to order in a way reminiscent of civic council meetings: he summons the

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[97] *York*, 22, translation 708. This description was altered twice before the Register was created, but it is not clear
whether the text was completely re-written, or simply adapted. The first altering hand adds the scene with the
Centurion at the beginning of the play, and notes the inclusion of an angel at the tomb. To me, the angel suggests
that the play was entirely re-written, since it creates a contradiction with the following, more stable play of "Christ's
Appearance to Mary Magdalene." In the registered "Resurrection," Mary states that she will not leave the garden
until she sees the risen Christ, but in the following play she asks Christ (assuming he is a gardener), "yf þou hym
bare awaye,/ Saie me sothe and thedir me leede/ Where þou hym didde" (l. 38-40). In other words, she is still
looking for a body, not the living Christ. The second alteration to the *Ordo* – primarily an interlineation of "with
other Jews" – seems simply to recognize the use of extras. It is also worth noting that the Towneley cycle contains a
close copy of the registered play. It appears to be copied from York, but Peter Meredith suggests that it was copied
before the play was registered ("The Towneley Cycle," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*,
ed. Richard Beadle [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994]: 134-162). The altering hands in the *Ordo* do not appear to
be Roger Burton's, which implies the play was re-written after 1436, and before 1463-77. Unfortunately, I have not
found any specific event or trend which might have inspired the re-writing.

"lordingis" to give their "counsaill kende," and refers to them as "domesman chiffe in þis contré" (l. 1-4). 'This country' is as easily York as it is Jerusalem, and the council did act as judge in many civic matters. Even the use of the French "contré" alludes to the city council, as many of their records were in French and Latin, not English. Pilate also reminds his council that they ought to give him their attention and respect, bringing to mind the honour which was supposed to be attendant on the position of mayor, and which was often difficult to achieve.[98]

The scene draws attention to justice and proper legal proceedings by demonstrating an absence of them. Pilate summons his council because he thinks they have made the wrong decision with respect to Christ.[99] Both Caiaphas and Annas reassure him by stressing that they acted according to proper law and procedure ("By lawe it was done.... All was rewlid by rightis rede" [l. 14, 23]). Caiaphas also states that the Centurion, whom they left at the scene, will arrest any troublemakers for "þe nexte assise" (l. 35), directly referencing contemporary English courts. Even before the Centurion arrives, however, it is clear that these 'chief judges' twist the truth to their own ends. On the one hand they argue that the people supported Pilate's judgement, and on the other they make provision for quelling rebellion. When the Centurion does arrive, and openly states that he feels Pilate has "done wrang/ And wondir ill" (l.59-60), this council explains away the events surrounding Christ's death as science (eclipses) and sorcery (necromancy). The legal context is further emphasized by Pilate's appeal to the Centurion as "a

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[98] The civic body seemed to invest a great deal in the mayoralty. The mayor was expected to give large feasts, and to be accompanied everywhere he went with a contingent of mace and sword bearers. It was considered a great hardship when general poverty restricted the number of these attendants to four (*Y.C.R.*, Vol 3, 105). Not everyone gave this respect to the mayor, however, and there are many records of the council punishing citizens for insulting the mayor and his aldermen. (*Y.C.R.*, Vol 3, 14, 109; Vol 4, 7, 31, 70, 96; Vol 5, 55, 115; Vol 6, 31, etc.).

[99] The Pilate of the *York Cycle* is an oddly human character, one who at some times invites sympathy, and at others deserves condemnation. In this pageant his initial doubt and his concern with the Centurion's words contrast with the Pharisees thorough corruption. Pilate occasionally seems to be a man searching for the right answers, but with the wrong counselors, and current public feeling towards the mayor and alderman in any given year may have influenced the way Pilate was portrayed and the degree of sympathy an audience was willing to give the character. Despite the way in which he is easily manipulated by the other two characters, Pilate's final lines – in the play and in the cycle – address the ease with which truth is bought and sold, suggesting his own bitter experience with the world, and an awareness of the reprehensibility of his own actions. A sensitive performance of this character which avoids easily performed extremes can invoke a certain empathy with the audience, inviting them to consider how easily good intentions become corrupted.

lered man in þe lawe" who should serve as "witnes" to excuse Pilate's actions, if necessary (l. 68-9). The Centurion confirms his status as a witness, but redefines it, reminding both Pilate and the audience that witnessing means "To mayntayne trouthe" (l. 73).

The Pharisees attempt to dismiss the Centurion's story by attributing it to fear, but they are clearly the ones afraid. When the Centurion departs, Caiaphas states they should "neven þis noote no more," but immediately after raises the issue of Christ's promised resurrection as something "more to drede" (l. 125, 140). Annas quickly modifies this statement by explaining that Christ would not actually rise from the dead, but rather that his friends would steal the body. Again, court references abound: Caiaphas refers to the council as a Jury, and Annas is concerned that they should take action to prevent a "fraye," a breach of the peace (l. 150). The opening scene demonstrates the way in which these counselors abuse their knowledge of civic rule and legal proceedings to protect their own interests.

On the Pharisees' advice, Pilate sends four soldiers to guard the tomb. These guards are referred to as "Sir knyghtis… chiffe of cheualrye" (l. 163-4), which is more in keeping with the traditional treatment of Pilate as a local ruler, but they also contain echoes of the city's bailiffs, sent by the mayor to keep the peace. In them, we see the working person's equivalent of the deceit practiced by the council and court.[100] Rather than behaving like noble knights, they exhibit ordinary, everyday responses. They boast about their ability to guard the tomb, but the minute they arrive, they sit down and fall asleep. They not only miss the Resurrection, but also the visit of the three Maries. When they do awake, their first response is to create a lie that will protect them from Pilate's anger. The first soldier counteracts this, cryptically adding that "if he vs sloo/ We dye but onys" (l. 337-8). He, at least, has understood the significance of the Resurrection. Good intentions fall away under pressure, however. The first soldier never

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[100] For an audience which has seen the entire cycle, and which is used to seeing many actors play the same role, these four soldiers may be the same four soldiers responsible for the "Crucifixion." In this earlier play the soldiers'

actually lies – he tells Pilate straight out that they have failed – but the word he uses to describe

their guard-duty, "wakyng" (l. 357), reminds the audience that the soldiers failed because they

were asleep. In other words, he lies through omission. His compatriots, less meticulous than the

first soldier, spin a tale of wondrous music and an earthquake that accompanied the rising and

prevented them from stopping Christ.[101] When Pilate then offers to pay them to spread his

version of the story, they are more than happy to comply; even the first soldier abandons his

morals when faced with a choice between money and an uncertain fate. In her production of the

"Resurrection" play, Meg Twycross found that in the soldiers, "the audience [was] laughing at

themselves, as they might have behaved in a situation that [was] just too big for them."[102] This

laughter is possible because these characters are recognizable as common people reacting in

predictable ways.[103]

The staging requirements of the "Resurrection" reinforce its themes through dramatic

irony, and potentially illustrate an interpretive connection between the guild and play. The play

demands two distinct settings – the court and the garden – but most likely was played on a

single wagon. In other words, the staging requires that Pilate's court and Christ's sarcophagus

occupy the same space, and that the sarcophagus containing the actor playing Christ is on stage

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actions are equated with everyday work, which may carry over to this play and reinforce a sense of the soldiers representing common people.

[101] Meg Twycross's production ("Playing 'The Resurrection'," *Medieval Studies for J.A.W. Bennett*, ed P.L. Heyworth [Claredon Press: Oxford, 1981]) included both the earthquake and song, and such may well have been part of the original productions. It does not change the fact, however, that the soldiers were not awake to witness these things. They may inadvertently tell the truth, which attests to God's power, but they believe that they are lying. There is a tradition of the soldiers being awake and paralyzed, and the production in Toronto (1998) played on this theme, but the soldiers themselves say they were sleeping.

[102] Twycross, "Resurrection," 295. The same can be said, to a degree, for the court scene, although the characters are less laughable and more pitiable. The mayor and his alderman were part of the audience as well, and may have recognized the way in which difficult political decisions sometimes result in making the wrong choices.

[103] This is also a point at which individual context, so hard to trace through the records, may have tied the audience's experience with carpenters to their experience of the play. For example, the image of workers asleep on the job, and their lies explaining their failure to complete that job, might have had specific resonance for city residents who had made unfortunate contracting choices. Such resonances might also have been intentional, in a tongue and cheek sort of way. The Carpenters' ordinances fined incompetence more than disobedience (*Y. M.B*, Vol 2, xxxiv), demonstrating their concern with the quality of their work and its reflection on the guild. The Centurion, perhaps, provides a contrast to the soldiers. His dedication to speaking and upholding truth brings to mind the many references to people standing surety for the good work of their fellow craftsmen.

from the beginning of the play. Figuratively, then, the lie of the court conceals the truth of the garden from the start, and attempts to cover it back up in the final scene. Toronto's 1998 staging of this play further emphasized the irony – Pilate's throne sat on the sarcophagus. Witnessing the triumphant Christ emerging from what had only moments before been a dais served as a reminder that things are not always what they seem.[104] Incidentally, this potential staging also creates a tenuous link with the guild that performed it. On one level, the sarcophagus "houses" the body of Christ, and that house remains what it is regardless of whether or not the audience recognizes it. The play as a whole demonstrates how lies can be built up, but never really disguise the truth beneath them. In a similar fashion, the buildings of the city, and even the wagons of the *Cycle*, remained products of the Carpenters' trade, regardless of how they were used and what they were called.[105]

Part of the difficulty in exploring the connection between the guild and play is that the Carpenters' guild itself is hard to define. When the *Cycle* first began, the Carpenters appear to have been a strong, unified guild. Their well-established status makes sense, as much of the city was built and maintained by Carpenters; they provided an essential service, and, unlike butchers or unskilled labourers, had positive associations with their craft (e.g. Joseph was a carpenter, wood-working was an art as well as an act of labour). The guild took part in religious activities from at least the late 13th century, and the 1482 Ordinances suggest a long standing identification with the Fraternity of the Resurrection.[106] What may have motivated this initial connection

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[104] See Appendix B, Figures 5-8 for pictures of the 1998, Toronto production. Being able to recognize truth is part of witnessing in the play. When the Centurion leaves the court he ironically ask that God grant them grace to "knawe/ Þe soth alway" (l. 119-20). Pilate, too, tells the audience to "ay in youre hartis e hol de/ Þis counsaile clene" (l. 451-2). He appears to be expounding on the ease with which truth is bought and sold, but because the audience has been witness to his lies as well as the truth, "Þis counsaile clene" becomes the entire play. Again, the audience is encouraged to see things for what they are.

[105] For example, see *York*, 5, 9, 116, 156, etc.

[106] *Y.M.B.*, Vol 3, 84-5, shows the record of an annual grant of 6s. from "Ralph le Furbur, citizen of York, to all the carpenters of York" for maintaining "the candle of St. William the Confessor." The record is undated, but Swanson also notes it and dates it in the late 13th century ("Building Craftsmen," 35 n83). The grant was still in effect in 1427, when the council had to remind Henry Preston of his duty to pay it. The Carpenters' Ordinances state that the fraternity dates from "old tyme" (*Y.M.B.*, Vol 2, 278), but unfortunately, gives no clue as to how long ago that might

between the guild and fraternity is unclear, but the fraternity was likely responsible for the assignation of the "Resurrection" play to the Carpenters.

Despite this original unification around religious and practical concerns, the Carpenters suffered from fragmentation as their numbers grew in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. According to L. F. Salzman's formative study of building in medieval England, "every type of woodcraft, from felling timber to making tile-pins, was done by the carpenter."[107] While this statement may have been true in early medieval York, a study of the York Freeman's Register shows an increasing amount of specialization in the wood-working trades after the mid-fourteenth century.[108] This specialization is almost certainly a result of an increasing population and an improved economic climate which could support larger groups of specialized workers. Between 1301 and 1350, for example, 35 men registered in the wood-working trades, and 23 of these identified as Carpenters.[109] The remaining 12 were: Cartwrights (2), a Joiner, Sawers (2), Shipwrights (3), and Turners (4).[110] Self-designated Carpenters still out-numbered these trades

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have been. The fraternity was definitely in existence in 1462, because in that year the council recorded that all carpenters "not beyng of þe fraternite" had to support the pageant "as other wrightes doo that be of the same fraternite" (*York*, 92-3; *Y.M.B.*, Vol 2, 193-4). This might either indicate that the fraternity was a new development, or that the recent specialization had raised argument about who had to pay dues to a long-standing institution. I suspect the latter. The emphasis of this and later records is that, whether or not a craftsman wished to be a member of the fraternity, he had to contribute funds for the pageant to it. In other words, he could opt out of the fraternity's other activities, but not the pageant. It seems slightly odd (although admittedly not impossible) that the guild would form a new fraternity and then transfer responsibility for the pageant to it, particularly if membership in the fraternity was going to be optional. Another, rather circular, argument for the long-standing nature of the fraternity is the assignation of the "Resurrection" play. Further research may reveal other connections, but at the moment there seems to be no other reason for the Carpenters to have done this play than the existence of their particular fraternity.

[107] Salzman, 32.

[108] The Freeman's Register (Francis Collins, ed., *Register of the Freemen of the City of York*, Vols I-II, [London: Surtees Society, 1897, 1900]) as a measure of population and trade distinction is fraught with a number of difficulties. Trade designations were not always recorded in the early years of the Register, and freedom through patrimony did not begin to be recorded until the mid-fifteenth century. The Register also rarely records women and almost never poorer or unskilled laborers. For discussion on the problems inherent in using the Freemen's Register as a measure of populations and industries, see Swanson's "Building Craftsmen," 5, "Illusion," and Dobson's "Admissions." The other difficulty with these figures was the fluidity of trade distinction. Swanson's study of the building trades demonstrates the way in which an artisan's identified trade changed from record to record, especially among the wood-working trades. Sawers were the one exception to this fluidity. Swanson notes that men described as sawers in the Freemen's Register, have the same designation when they appear in other records ("Building Trades," 11).

[109] These figures come from Swanson's study of the Freemen's Register, reproduced in Appendix D.

[110] Turners made wooden products on lathes, such as "bolles disshes wheeles chayers or such lyke stuff" (*York*, 312). There were occasional clashes between the Turners and Carpenters because the latter used lathes for other

over the next two centuries (accounting for about ½ of registered wood-workers), but the numbers overall were higher. 206 men were registered between 1351 and 1400, and of these there were 109 carpenters, 18 cartwrights, 4 carvers, 17 joiners, 25 sawers, 10 shipwrights, and 23 turners.

Increased specialization resulted in a desire for recognition and representation among these sub-groups. The Joiners registered their own ordinances in 1412, and a record from 1500 makes it clear that the Cartwrights considered themselves separate from the Carpenters.[111] Shipwrights had their own Corpus Christi pageant, and so likely some form of organization in order to raise funds and prepare the performance.[112] Each group also had its own searchers, who ensured that standards of quality were maintained.[113] Despite this appearance of increasing independence, the Carpenters' Ordinances, registered with the council in 1482, explicitly included the "occupacions of wryghtes, sawers, carvers, yonours [and] cartwryghtes."[114] Moreover, the fines of these groups went to the main organization in order to support the Corpus Christi pageant and Procession.

Even with the potential effects of fragmentation, the guild maintained some degree of power in the fifteenth century. Carpenters took part in the Corpus Christi procession and helped settle disputes for the council.[115] The city tended to decide in the guild's favour when disputes arose with the sub-groups and other crafts, although there is some evidence that the guild was somewhat heavy handed, and this may eventually have worked against them. When the council

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purposes, but the turners are not mentioned in the Carpenters' Ordinances, and so were not likely seen as a sub-set of the Carpenters' craft (*York*, 129, 311, 312).

[111] *York*, 182-4.

[112] Swanson points out how unusual this is ("Building Trades," 17-18). York was not a port town, and thus ship-building was a fairly minor trade. The number of shipwrights made free was relatively low throughout the period of economic prosperity, and even lower after 1500. Swanson's tables detailing these admissions are not always accurate, however. She says there were 5 Shipwrights registered between 1491 and 1500, but one of these is actually in 1501. She also says that there were no shipwrights registered between 1501 and 1534, but there were at least two, one in 1526, and one in 1534. Nonetheless, the numbers were low, and the absence of Shipwrights in the *REED York* records suggests that the Shipwrights may not have produced their play every year.

[113] *Y.M.B.*, Vol 2, 282.

[114] *Y.M.B.*, Vol 2, 282.

supported the Carpenters' jurisdiction in a dispute with the Tilers, both groups were ordered to exchange the kiss of peace, and the Carpenters were also commanded to return "all distraints upon the Tilers."[116] A decision which confirmed the Cartwrights' financial obligation to the Carpenters also warned the Carpenters not to "vex trouble ne distreyn" the smaller guild for further payment.[117] A clause in the 1482 Ordinances allows for the continuance of the fraternity, provided the members are not "compellid ne boundyn to be of the said ffraternite ne brodirhod ne noyn to be thar of bot such as will of thar ffree will," and another suggests that some members of the sub-groups had been charged more pageant silver than others in the past.[118] These civic warnings and corrections suggest that the central guild was insistent about its privileges, and was, justifiably, concerned about losing its monopoly.[119]

Under these circumstances, participation for prestige alone may have been the motivation for the Carpenters' role in the *York Cycle*. If I am correct in attributing the organizational drive for the play to the fraternity, then the play may have represented the members of that fraternity as opposed to the other guilds. Swanson explains the distinction between the Carpenters and the sub-groups as "giving the master carpenters an organization to reinforce their status vis-à-vis the servants."[120] The play might also have been a way for the Carpenters to distinguish themselves from the newer groups by asserting their identity as a "true" traditional guild.[121]

These circumstances may have also resulted in another, much less flattering, reading of the play, one that depends on the audience's condemnation of Pilate and his advisors. Despite

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[115] *Y.C.R.*, Vol 1, 7-8.
[116] *York*, 727 (translation). In 1425, Tilers installing the new-style louvers (smoke vents for open hearths) were commanded to pay the Carpenters one penny a year (Salzman, 221).
[117] *York*, 182-184. The Cartwrights were to pay a certain amount for every master and apprentice every year, and repair or replace the wheels on the pageant wagon.
[118] *York*, 127; *Y.M.B.*, Vol 2, 278.
[119] Such awareness of prestige may also explain why the guild joined with the Cordwainers, a particularly touchy guild, in attacking the Skinners during the 1419 Corpus Christi procession (*York*, 32-3).
[120] Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 86.
[121] In *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages* (trans. Arthur Goldhammer [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980], 68), Jaques Le Goff asserts that guilds adopted patron saints in order to "put an end to a contempt which became unseemly with regard to an activity which could boast such powerful and venerable representatives."

"set in a stancon with a lappe, mayk a bede, a shelffe, a forme, a stole, nail a burde, a dore, a yate, a wyndowe," the council confirmed the labourers' right to do these jobs without paying fees to the Carpenters, so long as they made "no newe mortre."[124] In 1506, the council made the Carpenters and Cartwrights promise not to work each others' craft, and the wording suggests that it was the Carpenters' actions which had inspired the ruling.[125] A record from 1530 alludes to "discension travers & debate" between the Carpenters and the Joiners and Carvers (the latter group having joined at an earlier point), and the Carpenters clearly still saw themselves as superior to the other groups.[126] The council settled one of the arguments, concerning the order of the two guilds in the Corpus Christi procession, by having them walk side by side. The other complaint was that the Carpenters "wold not calle the forsaid*es* Ioyno*u*rs & Carvers to thayre accomptes & reknyng*es*." The council's solution must have been a drastic blow to the Carpenters' sense of importance: the Mayor ordered that the two groups thenceforth "be as oone occupacion & ... bere like Charg*es*." The re-unification did not go smoothly, for the two groups continued to quarrel for most of the century, but another event further reduced the Carpenters' claim to exclusivity: the dissolution of the Monasteries also dissolved religious guilds.[127] Finally, the general economic decline and severe period of plague that afflicted the city in the sixteenth century must also have depressed the guild, both financially and in terms of the general feeling towards Carpenters. For the most part, the only new constructions during this time were the plague houses for quarantine, and Carpenters likely built coffins for those dying of plague.[128]

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[124] *Y.C.R.*, Vol 3, 15.

[125] *York*, 204-5. The searchers of the Carpenters were present to bind themselves and their guild to the agreement, but no Cartwrights are mentioned. The Cartwrights' portion of the agreement, introduced with the words "And in lykewise," comes after the Carpenters' portion, giving the impression of an afterthought.

[126] *York*, 252-3.

[127] For records on the quarrels between the Carpenters and the Carvers and Joiners, see *Y.C.R.*, Vol 5, 99-100. Acts for the dissolution were issued in 1536, 1539, and 1547 (C.H. Williams, ed, *English Historical Documents* Vol 5, 1485-1558 [London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967], 770-7). Religious fraternities officially dissolved with the 1547 act, and it is worth noting that the Carpenters and Joiners finally registered joint ordinances eight years later, in January, 1555 (*Y.C.R.*, Vol 5, 112).

[128] *Y.C.R.*, Vol 5, 30.

If so, Christ's sepulchre on stage must have been an ironic and bitter symbol for those who survived to see it.

These latter potential resonances are particularly troublesome. Connections between the guild's known history and the themes of the play are tenuous, and it is hard to believe that the guild would present a play which reflected poorly on its members. In the end, the guild's motivation and intent may simply have been a strong religious feeling. The episode presents an important symbolic moment for Christian society – Christ's ability to rise from the dead – and the play's themes of truth and urban corruption encourage the audience to examine themselves and their motives more carefully, emotionally committing them to truth and honest witnessing. In other words, the Carpenters may well have produced this play foremost "in honour and reverence of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the glory and benefit of the same city," rather than for political or commercial reasons.[129] If so, we need to reconsider definitions of the *Cycle* which consider participants only in terms of their craft skills, and which restrict "civic" drama to a consideration of these labour groups. An assumption of this work-centered definition has perhaps led us to define the city's social boundaries too narrowly, a problem I will consider in the next chapter.

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[129] *York*, 697 (translation). Such dramatic phrases have been justifiably challenged by those who argue against the plays creating a sense of undivided community, but I think we must still remember that, for some participants at least, this may have been the goal.

Chapter 2: Beyond the City Limits? The Masons and the *York Cycle*

The *York Cycle* is commonly referred to as civic drama, in contrast to religious drama,

and studies of motivations behind the play and the play route have combined with a traditional

historical understanding of the city's jurisdiction to present us with a very narrow definition of

what actually constitutes "civic."[130] We have come to see the *York Cycle* as an expression of a

limited identity, one which forwards the myth of community on the part of an exclusionary few.

The history of participation in the plays themselves, however, belies a firm "us and them"

distinction, and some historical records imply that, while the boundaries between civic franchise

and religious liberties did exist, they were not so impermeable as we tend to think. There were

certainly times and circumstances under which tensions were high, but it was not until the early

sixteenth century that *Cycle* participation from within the religious liberties can be said to

disappear altogether.[131] In particular, the evidence suggests that the Masons' participation in the

York Cycle was organized largely outside of civic control. This cross-jurisdiction involvement

may indicate an attempt to overcome artificial administrative boundaries rather than to assert the

city's identity against "outside" liberties. In the end, however, the Masons' experience with the

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[130] For a discussion of the 'types' of medieval drama and the relationship between liturgical and civic drama see William Tydeman "An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, Richard Beadle ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 1-36.

[131] See Tillot, *City of York*, 38-40, 68-9, for a history of relations between the franchise and liberties. Palliser lists the following areas as outside of the city's jurisdiction in the early Tudor period: "the royal castle, the jurisdiction of the cathedral dean and chapter, nine religious houses, and the anachronistic Davy Hall, the former mansion of the larderers of nearby royal forest" ("The Trade Gilds of Tudor York," *Crises and Order in English Towns 1500-1700: Essays in Urban History* [Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1972] 88). There were three major religious liberties to contend with: St. Peter's (the Minster), St. Mary's, and St. Leonard's. After the 13th century, St. Peter's had its own mint, hugsable (property tax), 1/3 of tolls at Foss bridge, a yearly fair, the right to fines and amercements of its citizens, the right to hear pleas at the Minster door, and its own coroners. St. Mary's and St. Leonard's aspired to the same liberties, although many of these were disputed, particularly when St. Mary's obtained its own market in 1318. The city regained partial control over Bootham Bar, the St. Mary's Liberty, in 1354, which reduced the outright fighting significantly, although squabbles, especially over common lands, did continue. The York Civic Records for the last two decades of the fifteenth century, for example, attest to frequent clashes over common land with the Vicars of the Minster which ended up affecting other interactions (*Y.C.R.*, Vol 2). That liberty involvement in the *Cycle* ceased in the sixteenth century is remarkably coincidental to the dissolution of the monasteries and the Church's general loss of power during the Reformation. I have not been able to determine how the dissolution affected the Minster's liberty, since it did remain an important religious centre, but St. Mary's and St. Leonard's liberties would have disappeared with these institutions.

Cycle, and even the play route, shows that this project ultimately fails. The Masons'

participation defines "civic" by representing that which civic is not.

Much of the tension which did exist between city and liberties was based on problems of

market control.[132] The city's fairly rigid structure of craft guilds and searchers existed in part to

control quality and prices. Anyone who wanted to trade or work free of tolls was ostensibly

required to take out the freedom and join a craft guild. All others, even if they were permanent

residents of the city, were "foreigners." They had to pay tolls on their products, and obey certain

trading restrictions.[133] This system, in theory, worked equably – those who bought the freedom

traded freely, while those who did not paid tolls, and the funds went generally to support the

city's administration and pay the king's fee-farm. In practice, however, the existence of several

religious liberties within the same general geographical location as the city's franchise disrupted

the system. The Minster had its own yearly fair and craftsmen living in the liberties were beyond

the city's correction. Because those craftsmen had fewer financial obligations (e.g. to the guilds)

they could afford to charge lower rates. Moreover, because the city had no jurisdiction in church

lands, they also did not have the right to search the products of craftsmen living there.[134] In

1482, for example, the Cappers banned their members from hiring out work to craftsmen

"dwellyng in Seynt Mary gate, ne in Seint Leonardes, ne odyr placez ne santuaries within this

cite, wher we have no power to correk tham," and the Glovers followed suit.[135] In initial

altercations between the city and these liberties, the council appealed to the crown for either the

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[132] While the term "city" is problematic, potentially meaning all of York, for the sake of convenience I will use "city" and "civic" to refer to the jurisdiction of the franchise, and "liberty" to refer to other administrative jurisdictions. The other important issue over which the franchise and liberties regularly clashed was the enclosure of common land. While this issue clearly affects spatial interactions with the *Cycle*, I have not been able to fully explore the implications, and so do not include it in this discussion.
[133] Foreigners could only trade in the open market, for example, not in a shop, and anything "foreign bought and foreign sold" (i.e. bought and then re-sold) in the city could be confiscated (*Y.C.R.*, Vol 3, vi). Freemen, on the other hand, could not sell in the open market, but had to maintain shops for their wares, so there was some incentive for both sides. The most damaging punishment a freeman could receive from the city was an order to close his shop window. Not all craftsmen found the freedom worthwhile; it was expensive, and for those who only sold a small amount in a year, or whose "product" was their labour, the freedom imparted little advantage.
[134] Palliser, "Trade Gilds," 88.

right to search and charge these foreign craftsmen, or a reduction of the city's fee-farm in light of unfair competition.[136]

Despite these problems, relations between residents of the franchise and liberties were often equable, even interdependent. The weavers guild, for example, requested and received a yearly sum from their fellow craftsmen in the Minster and St. Mary's liberties.[137] The Girdlers, too, achieved a victory when they gained the right to collect pageant money from "eu*ere persone* as well men of the Churche as oth*re* inhabiting from hensfurth w*ith*in the Cite," who worked their trade.[138] Of particular significance is the fact that men who acted as searchers of masonry in the city were as often as not also Minster masons.[139] To a degree, the sense of hostility that emerges from the records likely comes from the fact that disputes tended to be recorded more often than positive interactions. In a letter to the Archbishop in 1503, the mayor requests redress for an altercation that arose with a man from the church liberties because the Carpenters "accordyng to the auncient custome of theyr Craft toke of hym iij d to pagiaunt money."[140] In the same letter, however, the mayor also reminds the Archbishop of a woman from the liberties who was to be punished for selling underweight bread in the city, but whom the mayor let off lightly "for pitie & neghbourhed." A motion considered (but rejected) at the height of the conflict between the liberties and the franchise at the end of the fifteenth century suggests that the Aldermen, Sheriffs, and other civic representatives "forbere of goyng to the sermons and processions at the Mynster, and that ilkon of theyme for like consideracons shall forbere of goyng to dyner at the place or mancions of any of the said residenciare of the said Mynster."[141]

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[135] *Y.M.B*, Vol 2, 285.
[136] See Tillot, *City of York*, 69.
[137] Palliser, "Trade Gilds," 88.
[138] *York*, 136-7.
[139] Swanson makes this point in "Building Crafts," 8, although she does not think it incongruous. I discuss the significance in more detail below.
[140] *York*, 190-1.
[141] *Y.C.R.*, Vol 2, 116.

That such a motion could be raised implies that these visits were a regular part of civic life, at least for the wealthier and well-connected citizens.

Many scholars, influenced by the historical emphasis on the separation between jurisdictions, have seen the *York Cycle* as an exclusively civic production in which the citizens play out conflicting conceptions of civic identity.[142] Explorations of the play route in particular lend themselves to the discussion of the relationship between the city and the liberties.[143] Sarah Beckwith's study of social space in relation to the *Cycle* specifically identifies the station near the Minster as being at the edge of a liberty, and thus representing "an area where the city's authority could not extend."[144] She sees the play route as a "marking of territory in the same way in which boundaries were 'ridden'."[145] Anne Higgins reaches similar conclusions in her essay which considers the symbolic implications of the pageant route and orientation.[146] Higgins draws attention to the way in which the play route diverges from standard religious and royal processions by turning right at the Minster, into the center of the city, rather than left, into the liberties. In conjunction with the theory that audiences sat on the left-hand side of the street, Higgins suggests that the *Cycle* presented a symbolic outward expression of civic identity.[147] She also notes that civic drama tended to develop in places where conflicts between competing jurisdictions were strongest. The association of the *Cycle* with the beating of the bounds, and the vested interest of all participants in conceptions of civic identity are beyond question.[148] However, such studies have not addressed the fact that, for example, the "Purification of the

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[142] For example, Beckwith, "Making the World."

[143] See Appendix E for a reproduction of the map of York in Higgins, "Streets and Markets," 78.

[144] Sarah Beckwith, "Ritual, Theater, and Social Space in the York Corpus Christi Cycle," *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, eds, Medieval Cultures Vol 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 73.

[145] Beckwith, "Ritual, Theater, and Social Space," 74.

[146] Higgins, "Streets and Markets."

[147] Meg Twycross and Eileen White have both conducted extensive research on the location and orientation of the play stations. Meg Twycross first noted that play stations rented for citizens to erect scaffolding tended to be on the left-hand side of the street. See Meg Twycross, "'Places to Hear the Play:' Pageant Stations at York, 1398-1572," *REED-N* (1978): 10-27; Eileen White, "People and Places: The Social and Topographical Context for Drama in York, 1554 to 1609," Diss. Leeds, 456f.

Virgin" was performed by St. Leonard's Hospital, a church liberty and therefore not within the civic franchise or, one would assume, the civic identity.[149] Albert Chambers's study of the Tilemakers' play records also suggests significant patronage from the Vicar's Choral, and the Girdlers mentioned above provide another example of a play which represented both liberty and civic residents.[150] Seeing the *Cycle* as an expression of civic identity in conflict with the liberties is perhaps only one side of the story.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Higgins's forthcoming study of plague and the *York Cycle* adds an educational function to her theory of the outward representation of identity; those new to the franchise were presented with an expression of civic identity that they had to assimilate in order to become citizens themselves. Higgins's argument parallels Beckwith's discussion of the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, in which Beckwith says the play works to "convert all its outsiders to insiders, to construct a world so totally incorporated and encompassed by the body of Christ that to be outside is no longer conceivable."[151] It is in the conjunction of these arguments that we can find an explanation for cross-jurisdictional participation. Perhaps, rather than being a dividing line, the play route was intended as a bridge. Beckwith herself unknowingly alludes to this when she defines the Minster station as "at once an enclosure of mayoral jurisdiction and a breach into the jurisdiction of the Minster."[152] In other words, the plays were perhaps intended to disseminate a broader conception of "civic" identity, one that included the liberties as well as the franchise, and to make the "outside" part of the "inside." At least from the perspective of the city council, this wider definition of the city would symbolically serve to extend civic authority. Perhaps external groups such as the Masons and St.

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[148] The beating or riding of the bounds were ceremonial processions that marked the boundaries of parishes, common lands, etc. See Higgins, "Streets and Markets," 82-3.
[149] *York*, 19.
[150] Alfred Chambers, "The Vicars Choral of York Minster and the Tilemakers' Corpus Christi Pageant," *REED-N* (1977): 2-9.
[151] Sarah Beckwith, "Ritual, Church and Theatre: Medieval Dramas of the Sacramental Body," *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (England: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 65.

Leonard's Hospital may also have seen some value in being recognized as a part of that civic identity.

The flaw of this project of incorporation, however, is inherent in its conception. Because the city was already "inside," the other participants were, by their nature, always already defined as "outside" or other, and the city would not be able to maintain its status as "in" without an "outside" to define itself against. The *Cycle*'s performance orientation clearly suggested which side was "in," and the divergence of the play route into the city centre symbolically undermined any sense of equality which cross-jurisdictional involvement may have been meant to create. The historical records and the role of non-franchise participants indicate an understanding that the separation between jurisdictions was an imaginative conception. While the *Cycle* possibly demonstrates an attempt to erase those borders, to represent the lived experience of a larger community that moved freely across jurisdictions, such imaginative boundaries are far more difficult to overcome than physical borders. Rather than extending a sense of civic community, the participation of these outside groups, such as the Masons, served instead to define what that civic community was not.

I have thus far avoided considering the evidence for the Masons because they do not fit neatly into the categories of city and liberty. St. Leonard's involvement could be seen as the exception which proves the "civic" rule, while other sponsorship could be glossed over as mere financial support that did not in practice affect conceptions of civic identity. The Masons, however, are unusual among the trades participating in the *York Cycle* because, while the evidence is scant in either direction, it seems as likely as not that the Masons were centered in one of the liberties. To begin with, there is no evidence of a Masons' guild in York. Despite the existence of craft searchers and participation in the *York Cycle*, there are no Masons' ordinances

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[152] Beckwith, "Ritual, Theater, and Social Space," 73.

and comparatively few references to Masons among the relatively complete York records.[153]

This absence is unusual given the number of references to other guilds, but does not come as a

surprise in terms of traditional Masons' operations. Masons were notoriously itinerant,

following their craft wherever major building projects led. York was uncommon because it had

many stone buildings, along with major building projects such as the Minster and the Guildhall,

which could support a large number of permanent workers.[154] Because of their itinerant nature,

however, most masons did not join guilds; rather the Masons' lodge at the worksite provided

structure and organization for the craftsmen. The lodge was a physical building which housed

the masons' tools and in which Masons did fine-work, but it was also a meeting place, a place to

eat lunch, the master mason's headquarters, and so on.[155] The 1370 York Minster Masons'

Ordinances attest to the existence of such a lodge in their yard, and it had probably been around

since the beginning of the re-building project in 1291.[156] Swanson acknowledges the existence

of the lodge, and the lack of evidence for a guild, but she inexplicably concludes that some other

form of organization must have existed to account for the city's searchers and the Masons'

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[153] As Douglas Knoop and G.P. Jones state in *The Medieval Mason: An Economic History of English Stone Building in the Later Middle Ages and Early Modern Times* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1967), participation in a Corpus Christi production "points to some kind of organization, but not necessarily to a craft guild" (142). Heather Swanson also acknowledges this evidence of organization, but she raises and inexplicably discards a known source of such administration in favour of an illusive civic guild whose evidence has yet to appear ("Building Trades," 10). I must agree with Knoop and Jones when they admit they, "cannot see any reason why masons' ordinances should have been lost whilst others have been preserved" (142). For a brief introduction to medieval masonry see Nicola Coldstream, *Masons and Sculptors* (London: British Museum Press, 1991).

[154] Swanson, "Building Craftsmen," 5-10. In addition to the Masons required for building projects, a certain number of skilled men were needed to maintain the fabric of these buildings on a permanent basis. The shortage of Masons which occurred in the second half of the sixteenth century attests to the necessity of these permanent masons – Ouse bridge fell down, and the city had to hire a mason from another town to make the repairs (D. M. Palliser, *Tudor York* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979], 76). Swanson notes 216 masons names recorded in the fabric rolls. Only 48 of these took out the Freedom, but this number includes all of the Master Masons. The freedom was unnecessary for men whose work was entirely on Church lands, and suggests that these men saw some value in becoming permanent residents of the city. Swanson also notes that the city sometime employed unfree masons, which further implies the unnecessary nature of the freedom for this craft. For many, the advantage may have been in sidelines of trading and hostelling. One thing that is not clear from Swanson's study, is the identity of the other Masons who took out the Freedom. They may have come from lodges on the other liberties, but a thorough search of the records is advised. If a number of these men did not come from the liberties, we might expect greater pressure to form a civic organization.

[155] Swanson suggests that the Lodge at York was also a residence ("Building Craftsmen," 6-7), although more generally Knoop and Jones do not find evidence that Lodges were regularly used in this way.

[156] Knoop and Jones, 223-4.

participation in the *York Cycle*.[157] There are a few details which lead me to disagree with her. First, as Swanson says herself, many masons who took out the Freedom worked on the Minster for several years prior to becoming citizens. Most of these men continued to work on the Minster, and it is unlikely that those who did not would all abandon ties to their former working community. In other words, they would be more likely to look to an established and familiar organization than to form a new one under civic jurisdiction. Second, most of the examples of searchers that Swanson lists were also Minster masons, sometimes even the Master Mason. One record in particular names "Johannes Porter, magister lathamus ecclesie Cathedralis beati Petri Eboracensis, Robertus Couper, magister lathamus civitatis Ebor'...," the Minster's Master Mason, and the city's.[158] The participation of these high-ranking men as searchers draws as much on the Masonic practice of holding "Expertise," a consultation with outside masters on a project, as it does on the city's practice of ensuring that building standards were met. Perhaps identifying these men as searchers was a way of allowing two administrative cultures to work together. Finally, changes in the Masons' participation in the *York Cycle* were remarkably coincidental with the status of building on the Minster. The Masons began with a play called "Fergus" which they exchanged for one better fitting their dignity, the "Herod/Magi" play, in 1431-2, at the height of the Minster building project.[159] 1400-50 saw the highest number of masons regularly employed by the Minster (between eighteen and thirty-three at any given time).[160] In contrast, the Masons' assumption of the "Purification" play in 1477, a potentially less demanding production, came five years after main construction on the Minster was completed.[161] By this time, the number of full-time masons employed had dropped to no more

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[157] Swanson, "Building Craftsmen," 10.
[158] *Y.M.B.*, Vol 2, 219.
[159] *York*, 19, 23, 47-8. "Fergus," Beadle, *The York Play*, 391. "Herod/Magi," Beadle, *The York Play*, 134-148. For a survey of the Minster's history, see G. E. Aylmer and Reginald Cant, *A History of York Minster* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
[160] Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 92.
[161] *York*, 19, 112-3. "Purification," Beadle, *The York Play*, 149-160.

than six at a time.[162] Another connection between the liberties and the Masons lies in the identity of their final play. The "Purification" was originally performed by St. Leonard's Hospital. We do not know when the Hospital stopped performing the play, but we do know that St. Leonard's also had a Masons' yard.[163] Possibly, as numbers at the Minster Lodge fell, the Lodge at St. Leonard's took on the responsibility of organizing pageant production, and, logically, desired to continue its parent institution's pageant.   Moreover, the Masons began to disappear altogether after the dissolution of the monasteries. No new masons were enrolled as freemen after 1536-7, and the "late Masons" Herod play was re-assigned in 1561.[164]

While the weight of evidence, or more appropriately lack of evidence, points towards some sort of liberty-based organization, there are also a few details which are incongruous. One of the city's few records involving conflict with the masons and other trades commands:

> Vniuersi Tegularij et plasterarij huius ciuitatis Ebor' operantes muros lapideos vel lapidea fundamenta domorum vel aliquod aliud opus arti cementariorum pertinens / ex tunc pro operibus illis essent contributorij arti cementariorum huius ciuitatis sicut ante ab antiquo esse solebant

> [all Tilers and Plasterers of this city of York who build stone walls or stone foundations of houses or any other work pertaining to the craft of Masons would be contributors for those works to the craft of Masons of this city, from then on, just as they used to be of old.] [165]

While the distinction of "craft" given to the Masons may hint that there is a perceived difference between the "craft" of Masons and the "guilds" of Tilers and Plasterers, the words "of this city" imply that both groups are in the same jurisdiction, and it is not clear whether the council

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[162] Admittedly, Masons' numbers in the Freemen's Register follow a similar pattern. There were 52 enrolled between 1401 and 1450, and only 23 between 1451 and 1490, with none at all enrolled in the final decade of the sixteenth century. More detailed research is required to determine the relationship of these freemen with the liberties.

[163] Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 91.

[164] Palliser, *Tudor York*, 172; *York*, 334, 338. I'm aware that the dissolution was not the only cause of the Masons demise in York. For one thing, cheaper brick building had long been eroding the Masons market base, and York's generally poor economy during the early sixteenth century would not have encouraged new Masons to come to York, or old Masons to stay.

[165] *York*, 718-9.

considers that jurisdiction to extend beyond the franchise.[166] In addition, the Masons had two

seats on the council of the 41, created in 1517, which was the representation attributed to large or

important craft guilds.[167] It is hard to fathom the city agreeing to the inclusion of liberty-based

craftsmen in the civic government. The evidence must, then, remain inconclusive. It seems

possible that the city chose to work with the existing and relatively stable organization of the

Lodges rather than attempting to create a purely civic guild out of those few Masons who could

make a living in secular stone building, but we cannot be certain. One thing does seem clear;

whether the Masons were organized in the liberties or not, they tended for the most part to serve

those liberties, and take up the freedom only as an extension of their work outside of the city's

franchise.[168] For them, the division between franchise and liberty must have been non-existent,

familiar as they were with following the work available. They were, then, a craft which defied

the firm distinction of franchise and liberty. Their itinerant habits, their work in the liberties, and

potentially their unique organizational structure may have served to cast them as being "outside"

of the franchise. As a closer look at their role in the *York Cycle* shows, no amount of

participation could bring them "in."

The Masons' relationship to the *York Cycle* is as unusual and difficult to comprehend as

their relationship to the city. They almost invariably took part in performances which reflected

badly on their craft. They were initially assigned to play "Fergus," an apocryphal story about the

funeral of the Virgin, during which Jews attempt to defame the bier and are miraculously

punished.[169] While the names change, the general story is that the Fergus's hands stick to the

bier, possibly coming off in a manner similar to the action in the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament.*

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[166] Certainly they wished it to. The council repeatedly attempted to gain a wider area of jurisdiction. A further study of the records is required, however, to determine how the Council itself defined "city."

[167] Palliser, "Trade Guilds," 108-9.

[168] The masons were not the only trade whose primary labour drew them to the liberties. The Scriveners and Glaziers also worked primarily for the church.

[169] There is no extant copy of this text for York. See Beadle, *The York Play*, 460, and Lucy Toulmin-Smith, *York Plays: The Plays Performed by the Crafts or Mysteries of York on the Day of Corpus Christi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), xxvii.

An angel then descends to heal the repentant and converting Jews. Unfortunately, this is the one play that was never registered. It is described in the *Ordo*, but it was abandoned well before the Register was compiled, and not reinstated until 1476, after the Register was complete. The play's connection with the guild is thus more difficult to determine, but perhaps the Masons' skill was showcased in an elaborately carved sarcophagus. Certainly one is called for in the following play when Thomas's fellow apostles check for Mary's body.[170] The unusual inclusion of a miracle play in the *Cycle* may also speak to a religious affiliation, and certainly a play about the Virgin's funeral would be expected to be a solemn and devotional performance, one reflecting well on the performing guild. Regardless of the initial motivations, however, the one record we have in relation to the Masons and this play makes it clear that the play failed to live up to both the audience's and the Masons' expectations. Apparently, the audience objected to the apocryphal content of the play, and found the staging of the miracle amusing. Nor were they loath to express their opinion on either account. The Masons complained that "Fergus was beaten because the subject of this pageant is not contained in the sacred scripture and used to produce more noise and laughter than devotion."[171] Understandably, these responses led to further "quarrels, disagreements, and fights" among spectators and performers. A parodic image in the Minster's stained glass may even be a direct reference to the craft's awkward situation.[172] It depicts a mock funeral, attended by monkeys, with one monkey hanging off the bier. If this was the general opinion of the Masons' performance, it is not surprising they had "been accustomed to murmur among themselves about their pageant" and that they wanted a new play.

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[170] "The Assumption of the Virgin," Beadle, *The York Play*, 392-99. Thomas witnesses the Virgin's assumption into Heaven, and the other apostles refuse to believe him. They check the sarcophagus and find her body missing.
[171] *York*, 47-8.
[172] See Davidson, *Creation to Doom*, 170-3, and Plate 8. I have reproduced this image in Appendix F.

In 1431-2, when the Goldsmiths begged to be relieved of part of their burden in the Herod and Magi story, the council assigned the "Herod" half of the play to the Masons.[173] The record makes it clear that the Masons had been agitating for a new play for a while, and most particularly one which was "in harmony with sacred scripture" and which they would "be able to produce and play in daylight." The city granted this request in part so that the play could be performed "in the more lavish manner which is seemly for the praise of the city." That the Masons would desire a play better suiting their dignity, and which they could afford to perform in a "more lavish manner" makes sense in light of the Masons' large numbers and the prominence of building in the Minster at this time. The new Minster was almost structurally complete; one hundred and thirty years of work had constructed the nave and eastern arm of the church, and all that remained were the church's grand towers.[174] This impressive structure must have made an impact on the citizens of York, especially when the Masons performed in front of it.[175] Its builders would have been justifiably proud, and would have wanted a play that suited their status in the city. Their second concern, that they might perform in daylight, is slightly less comprehensible. "Fergus" did come late in the Cycle, and, if the highlight of "Fergus" was a carved object on stage, low lighting would have detracted from this showcase of skill. Unfortunately, the "Herod/Magi" play, while it would have played much earlier in the day, suggests less opportunity for such showcasing, save, perhaps, as set dressing. In fact, the "Herod" section seems only slightly less insulting an assignment. Whereas all other guilds could claim to represent at least one positive character (even the Butchers have a Christ) as a balance to negative associations, the characters in "Herod" are all thoroughly evil (albeit more dramatically interesting). The Goldsmiths presented the noble and virtuous Magi, while the Masons enacted

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[173] I can no find no connection between the Goldsmiths and Masons, save perhaps for gilding that occurred in the Minster. *York*, 47-8.
[174] Alymer and Cant, *York Minster*, 149-175.

Herod, his son, the sycophantic soldiers, and the manipulative counselors. The opening scene, added for the Masons' benefit when the play was split, introduces Herod as the most reprehensible character of the *Cycle*.[176] His opening words, "The clowdes clapped in clerenes þat þer clematis inclosis" (l. 1) are full of "bombastic" alliteration, and his claims are entertainingly hubristic.[177] Herod declares power over the weather and the Gods, calling even Saturn his "subgett" (l. 5), and his repeated narcissism invites disdain. He states that everyone loves him because he is "fairer of face and fressher on folde /.../ Þan glorius gulles þat gayer is þan golde/ In price" (l. 17-20) and he flatters himself that he is "worthy, witty, and wyse" (l. 21). Both Herod and his son expound contradictions. Herod tells the soldiers that his kingdom is "ruled her be rest" (l. 32), and commands them to beat up any offenders. His own son blithely confirms that Herod should strike down those who disobey him, paradoxically because he never gives them any reason to disobey. This Herod's ability to rule himself, never mind his kingdom, is very much in doubt. When the Magi are on their way to see Herod, the king attempts to beat the messenger that comes before them, and one of his own soldiers must remind him that "messengeres shulde no man wyte," at the very least because the message might be to Herod's "awne renoune" (l. 134-5). When the three kings say they are searching for a new-born child, Herod mocks them for making such an effort to "laite a ladde," and then flies into a rage when the Magi say this child will be "kynge/ Of Jewes and of Judé" (l. 167, 175-6). Again, his counselors do the thinking for him, suggesting that he dupe the Magi into revealing their purpose and the location of the babe, which he does. It seems almost unthinkable that the Magi would be fooled by this petulant, unreasoned, and inconsistent behaviour, but they are, if only for the sake of the story. It is equally hard to understand why the Masons, who wanted a more respectable

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[175] There were playing stations near the Guildhall and Minster, both significant stone buildings in York. I have not been able to explore the impact of performance at specific stations, but it would certainly provide an interesting avenue for further research.

[176] Beadle, *The York Play*, 429-433.

play, would have settled for this one. Herod's outrageous behaviour is the sort that invites the audience to play along, booing and hissing their favorite bad guys.[178] Perhaps the distinction is that such a response is appropriate to this play, whereas with "Fergus" it was not. The play would also allow for a lavish show in the court setting and costumes, and perhaps the appeal of playing the memorable bad guys was sufficient reward. It does not, however, satisfy the Masons' stated concern with devotion, and their shift to yet another play in 1477 raises the possibility that they were not completely satisfied with their role in "Herod."

The next alteration of the Masons' relationship with the *Cycle* was their participation in the "Purification" play.[179] Unfortunately, while the play associates the guild with more positive characters, the interpretive connection is, again, only a slight improvement over their past associations. The play describes Mary's visit to the temple for purification after childbirth, a practice required by the old law. While this purification is unnecessary in Mary's case, she insists on obeying God's laws. The play also depicts the events described in Luke 2:25-38, where an extremely old Simeon and the ancient prophetess Anna are rewarded for their devotion with the sight of the Christ child. These characters provided the original interpretive connection with the play's previous owners, St. Leonard's Hospital, in that the hospital cared for the sick and elderly. St. Leonard's presentation of the play can also be seen in terms of outside defining

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[177] Garrett Epp discusses the *York Cycle*'s use of alliteration, including Herod's 'bombastic' style, in "Passion, Pomp, and Parody," *Medieval English Theatre* 11 (1989): 150-61.

[178] In the 1998 Toronto production, an eager Herod encouraged his timid twentieth century audience by ad libbing, "This is the point when most people boo and hiss," for which he received his full allotment. See Appendix B, Figure 9, for a picture of this production

[179] Despite Beadle's statement to the contrary, it is not a given that the Masons gave up their part in the "Herod" play, although the burden on dwindling resources makes it likely (*The York Play*, 433). No note is made of the Goldsmiths regaining the full play, and it is not until 1561 that another guild, the Minstrels, are assigned to the part, and that record still attributes "Herod" to the "late masons" (*York*, 334, 338). Potentially, then, the Masons continued to play "Herod" while also sponsoring the following "Purification." Such a relationship would allow them to keep their memorable dramatic production while also providing them with a more devotional production. It would also explain why their name was not removed from the entry for "Herod" in the *Ordo*, while it was carefully erased and overwritten with another guild in the entry for "Fergus." Admittedly, this argument is difficult to maintain in light of the Masons' financial situation. Their numbers were dropping rapidly, and main construction on the Minster was complete. However, this situation may also have meant that the remaining masons had a relatively steady income; maintenance of the Minster fabric and other stone construction required full-time masons, and those without work would likely have moved on.

inside, although the relationship is more positive. The play stresses Jewish custom and reminds

the audience repeatedly that Simeon and Anna are Jews. Both character speak of waiting for

"the redempcyon of Israell" (l. 64, 126) and Simeon rehearses the prophecies of the Old

Testament. The young Mary and the baby Christ provide a contrast to these older characters, an

affirmation of the new law and the Christian world.[180] St. Leonard's mundane connection with

the 'elderly' places it symbolically in the old world of the play, and so on the 'outside' of the

Christian city franchise. The transfer of this play to the Masons also draws attention to their

craft, and Mary's needless purification plays on what Le Goff has identified as the final taboo of

medieval work: manual labour.[181] While all work was essentially fallen, a consequence of

humanity's disobedience in the garden, some kinds of work were worse than others. Trades

involving blood or impurity were most disreputable, while forms of mental and creative labour

achieved a degree of acceptability, even admirability, by the late middle ages. Work with one's

hands, however, and particularly labour intensive, grimy work, remained contemptible, and it is

this aspect of the Masons' labour that the "Purification" underscored. The Masons were assigned

the play in conjunction with the labourers, and both "crafts" involved hard, dirty work. The

unspoken statement is that, while Mary may not need purification, these base workers do.

In addition to raising this negative connotation of the Masons' daily labour, the play may

have reflected badly on the guild because the text suffers from poor writing. As Beadle notes,

the "Purification" was registered near the end of the *Cycle*'s life, and the registered copy

represents a severely corrupted version of the text.[182] Several details have changed from the

Ordo, and the play was clearly re-written or significantly revised, likely more than once. The

versification fluctuates wildly, and includes a painful opening speech by the priest in abab

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[180] See Appendix B, Figure 10 for a picture showing this contrast in the 1998, Toronto production.
[181] Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture*, 58-70.
[182] Beadle, *The York Play*, 434-437.

quatrains which unnecessarily explains the history behind the purification rite.[183] However, it is in this opening speech that we find the only possible acknowledgement of the Mason's involvement; the priest mentions the stone "tabyls" that Moses brought down from the mount, as well as the punishment for breaking the laws therein: "To stone all theme that kepis it nott/ Vtterly to death" (1. 10, 18-19). Again, the association, if such it is, is uncomfortable and unpleasant. While the Masons may have recognized the interpretive connection and intended a symbolic purification through performance as a sort of ironic penance, the tediousness of the play combined with the outright negative association of stoning does not reflect well on the craft.

It seems difficult to understand why the Masons would consistently take part in productions which did not reflect well on them. Perhaps the Masons' relative permanence in York led them to desire membership in a civic community, or recognition that they identified with "this city of York" as well as with their Lodges, and they were willing to accept the negative aspects of their roles as the price for nominal inclusion. Their concern with devotion, their seeming absence from the civic jurisdiction, and the large number of Masons who took out the Freedom may imply that their interest centered around concepts of community, of being involved in the community's ritual expression of identity and devotion. From the city's perspective, including the Masons may have made them symbolically, if not actually, part of the city, and so under the city's nominal control.

Despite this integrative impulse, the Masons' more significant role may have been to strengthen a concept of community in which they were on the outside. Mervyn James has argued for an understanding of Corpus Christi Cycles as ritual productions in which unifying symbols and combined effort overcame the fragmentation and conflict of the participants.[184] While other scholars have argued that this unity is never truly achieved, that there is never a moment in which identities are not being negotiated, rituals do forward a myth of community,

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[183] This information is provided again, and more subtly, as part of the play's action.

one which is ambiguous and full of oppositions, against which participants measure or define themselves.[185] That myth is strongest, and identification with "community" more essential, when the ritual defines an outside or other, a scapegoat on which all negative associations can be placed. For whatever reason – their connection to the liberties, their itinerant habits, their 'manual' labour – the Masons appear to have been cast as that scapegoat. In particular, the Masons' experiences seem to speak to a civic concern with devotion and sophistication. When the Masons performed "Fergus," they were attacked on the one hand as sacrilegious, presenting a play not in harmony with scripture, and on the other as unsophisticated, presenting a show that was laughable, not inspiring. The Masons' Herod in the "Herod/Magi" play demonstrates proper leadership and Christianity through his lack of either attribute and in contrast to the Goldsmiths' Magi. The "Purification" casts the craft on the wrong side of biblical history and denigrates their labour as artless. An identification of the Masons as 'outside' the city seems to have been a necessary part of this representation. The Linenweavers, for example, did not seem to have the same problems with "Fergus" when they picked it up in 1477.[186] The city's casting of the Masons as sacrilegious and unsophisticated validates a self-image of piety and artistry, and may even point to an anxiety about the compatibility of these two qualities.

Despite a sense of division that we have gained concerning the play route and the civic nature of the *York Cycle*, it seems equally possible that the city, or some of its members, was also trying to overcome these barriers by incorporating "outside" groups in its conception of identity. The play route may have worked to symbolically connect all parts of York, and the participation of liberty residents may have helped to form a sense of York as a community that extended beyond the franchise. However, because the play route simultaneously acted as both bridge and

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[184] James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body."
[185] Beckwith, "Ritual, Theater, and Social Space;" Rubin, "Small Groups."
[186] *York*, 110, 123.

dividing line, attempts at inclusion could never be entirely successful. The Masons became part

of the community only in as much as they defined what the community was not.

Conclusion

To participate in the *York Cycle* in late medieval York, as actor or audience, was to join

in a struggle for self-definition, a debate over boundaries and identities. The guild which

presented a biblical episode also presented itself, and the audience recognized that guild in a

context which extended beyond the world of the play. Thus the Plasterers validated their young

craft in a comparison to God's creation, the Tilers defined themselves as the ideal 'family,' and

the Carpenters affirmed their status in a silent demonstration of superiority over newer guilds.

The identities constructed for performance became part of an understanding of these guilds, even

if members of the audience rejected these constructions. The *Cycle* also reflected audience

members back to themselves, sometimes stretched and distorted like fun-house mirrors, and

sometimes likely too close to the truth. They saw their politics played out in the "Creation," and

their family structures debated in the "Nativity." They also saw the extent of their own

corruption in the "Resurrection," but could at least be reassured that they were not so bad as the

Masons' King Herod. These polyvocal conceptions of identity became remarkably unified in the

face of the other, the outsider. In the Masons, or at least in the identity constructed for them in

the plays they presented, the citizens saw confirmation of what they were not, an other against

which to define identity, and a scapegoat to relieve the city of the tension of its own anxieties. In

particular, the Masons' history with the play suggests that the city was preoccupied with

representations of piety and sophistication, which, in turn, suggests anxieties about urban

existence.

It is important for us to understand the complexity of these debates over identity,

particularly as they changed over time. Because the texts we study are play texts, they demand

that we study them in performance. Performance studies in the past have been richly rewarding. We have gained a better sense of medieval drama's effective theatricality, despite popular opinion to the contrary, and begun to understand the physical aspects of performance that dominated the city for at least one day in the year. What our modern performances lack, however, is an understanding and acknowledgment of context, of the ways which context both informs and undermines identity. Too often our productions either ignore context, or attempt to "recreate" a medieval environment unrelated to the struggles and debates which were so much a part of the original performances. Modern performances which attempt to place their audiences in a medieval context, or to re-create the 'medieval experience' are doomed from the outset because we are not, and can never be, a medieval audience. We do not, as yet, have the same vested interest in defining our identities through and around the performances in front of us.

A better understanding of the *Cycle*'s original context and of its role in defining identity(s) suggests a new approach to studying these texts in performance. Perhaps, like the city and citizens of York, we need to consider the identities, the conflicts, goals, and motivations, of the individuals and groups who perform these plays. Perhaps, too, we can consider these factors when planning performance studies and inviting participation. We cannot recreate a medieval experience, but we can focus on parallel contexts and conceptions of identity in order to better understand how the original audiences and performers interacted with these texts and each other.

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Appendix A: Ordo Paginarum

from *The York Play: A Facsimile of British Library MS Additional 35290, Together With a Facsimile of the* Ordo Paginarum *Section of the A/Y Memorandum Book*, Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith, ed., (York: University of Leeds, Moxon Press, 1983).

Tylers — Maria cum puero ... Joseph obberens ... nato guardiā ...
... domum a ... cū virga ... loquens pastoribz ... viden-
tibz in ... sequente /

Chaundelers — Pastores loquentes adinuicem stellam orientē /
Angelus nuncians ... pastoribz grandem ... nato

Offeners — ... Tres reges venientes ab oriente / Herodes
Goldbeters — ... eos ... pñd ... / ... ancillam ... nuncia...
Monemakers — ... Maria cum puero ... stella desup ... tres reges
offerentes ... mund ...

... Maria cum puero Joseph Anna obberens cum pueris
Sanctus Symeon ... leouarde — columbas ... domne
sam masons — ... suos ... suos fili...

Maryshals — ... Maria cum pue...
Angelo ...

Girdelers ... — ... Herodes ...
Naylers ... — ... pueros ...

Vyntners — ...
Ferrours — ...

Chappe

ihc extensus in ea crux tram uñ Judei flagellant et
trahunt eum cum funib et postea exaltantes eum de
corpus ihu cruci conclavatum super montem
calvarie

Crux duo latrones cruciati Jesus suspensus in cruce in cruce eius
maria mater Jesu Johes maria pceñ et salome longene
longene cum lancea diuo cum sponga Pilatus dux
Cayphas Centurio Joseph et nichodemus deponentes eum et
ponentes eum in sepulcro

ihc spoliatus inseptu ihm xpo bene et eum valiq
centio delatus portato Cayphe et anne signa apparucia in mort

ihc Jhesono de cru
... maria ...

ihc ...

ihc anima ... hylbus in foveis ...

Cloppes
Colvaffe
wafne
eemone
liberes
Quafle
Dibla

hulderere

Deness us
wolleg
...

Appendix B: 1998 *York Cycle* Production, Toronto

Photographs from the production. All photos, except for Figure 3, are from Steve Wright, York Cycle of Mystery Plays: Toronto 1998, Department of English, The Catholic University of America, accessed May 14, 2000, <http://arts-sciences.cua.edu/engl/toronto/york98.htm>. Figure 3 is from LeMoyne College, accessed May 14, 2000, <http://www.lemoyne.edu/academic_affairs/department/theater/medieval.htm>.
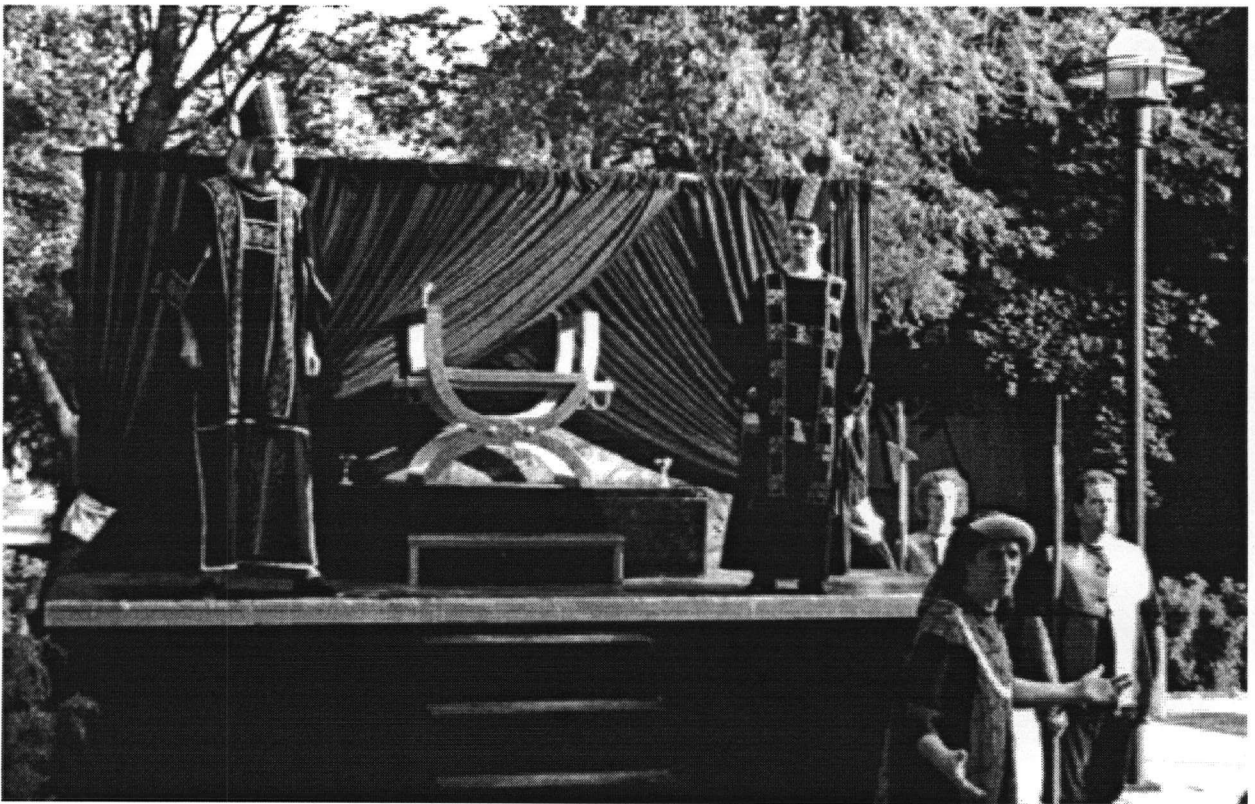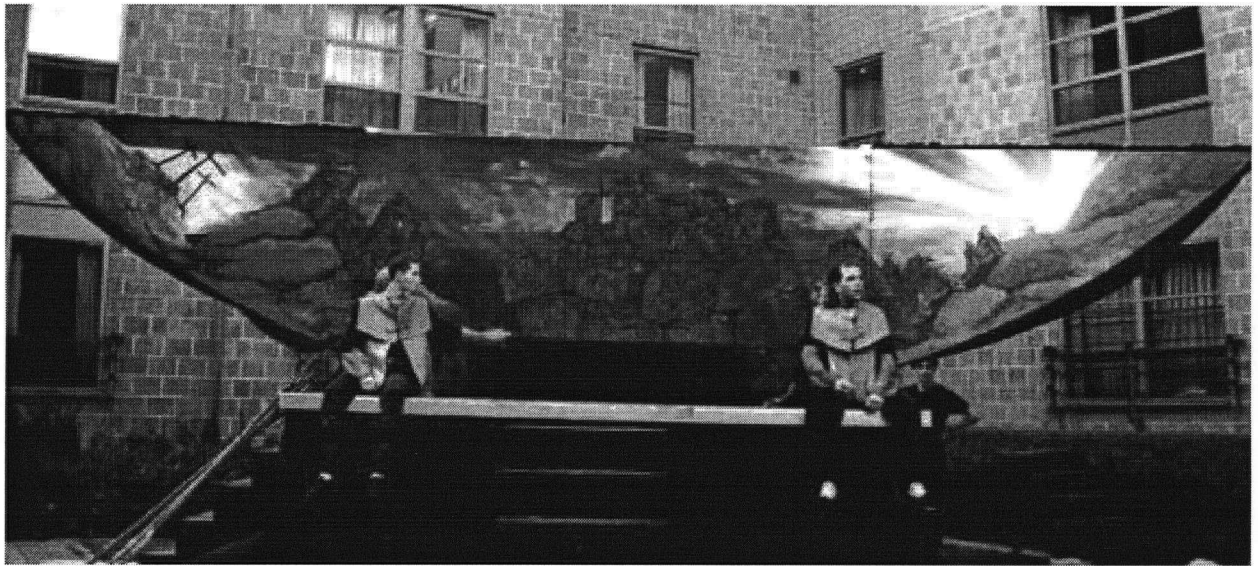
Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6
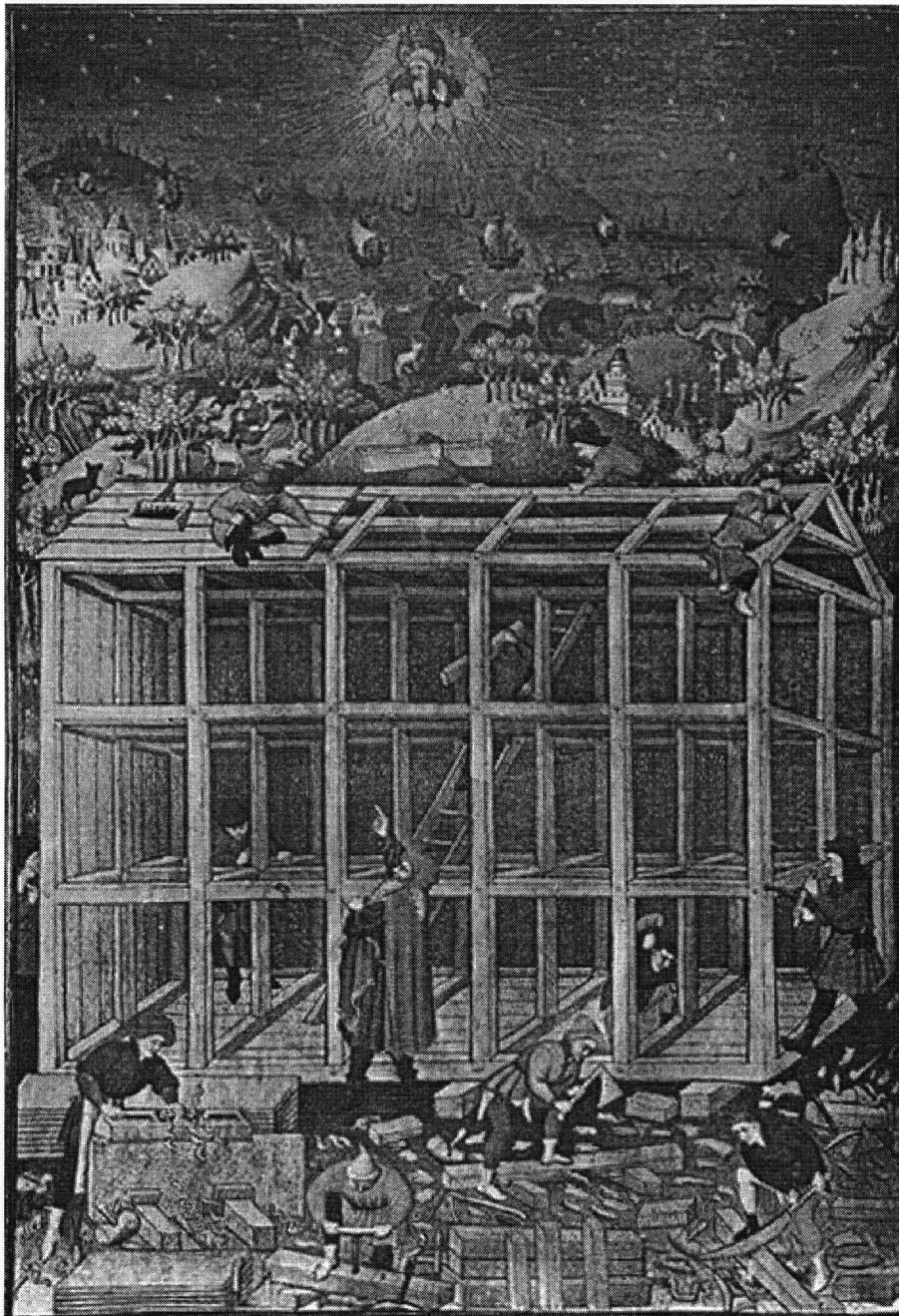
Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

Appendix C: Noah's Ark

from L.F. Salzman, *Building in England: Down to 1540, A Documentary History*, (Oxford: OUP, 1967), 208. This image is also used in the *Barley Hall York* guide book.

Appendix D: Admissions to Freedom of the City of Building Craftsmen

from Heather Swanson, "Building Craftsmen in Late Medieval York," *Borthwick Papers* 63 (1983), 39-41.
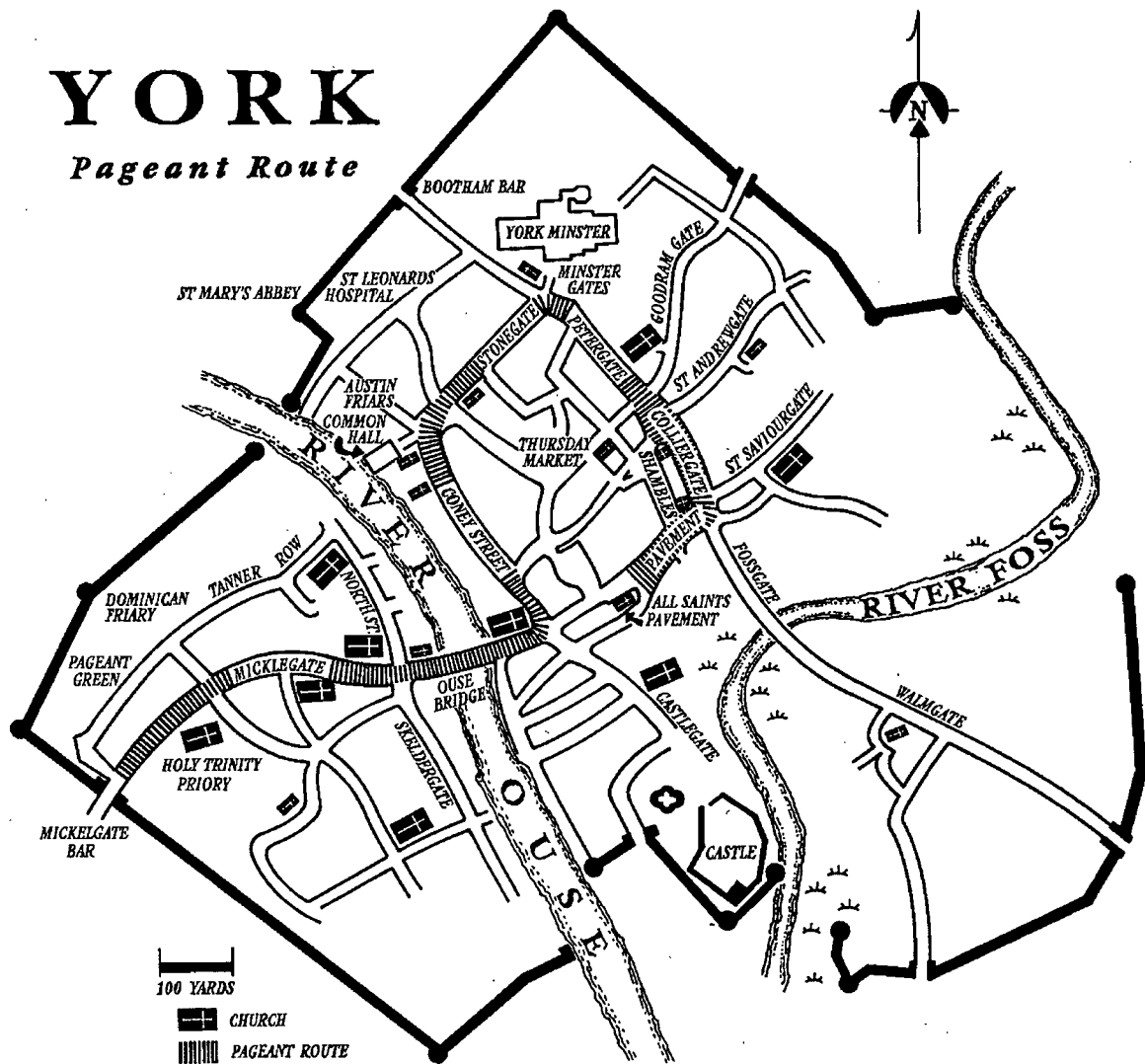
	-1290	1291-1300	-1300 No.
Carpenters	1		1
Cartwrights			
Carvers			
Joiners			3
Sawers		1	1
Shipwrights			
Turners		1	1
Glaziers			
Masons		2	2
Pavers			
Plasterers			
Tilers			
Tilemakers			
Plumbers			
Labourers			
Others			
Total	1	4	5

	1301-1310	1311-1320	1321-1330	1331-1340	1341-1350	1301-1350 No.
Carpenters	1	3	8	4	7	23
Cartwrights				2		2
Carvers						
Joiners					1	1
Sawers	1				1	2
Shipwrights	1		1		1	3
Turners				4		4
Glaziers		1	2			3
Masons	5	2	2	4	7	20
Pavers						
Plasterers		1		1		2
Tilers	1			1	2	4
Tilemakers						
Plumbers			2	1		3
Labourers						
Others	1					1
Total	10	7	15	17	19	68

Table 1 (1351–1400)

	1351-1360	1361-1370	1371-1380	1381-1390	1391-1400	1351-1400 No.
Carpenters	10	21	18	26	34	109
Cartwrights	1	3	4	8	2	18
Carvers			2	1	1	4
Joiners	1	5	5	3	3	17
Sawers		3	8	6	8	25
Shipwrights		2	3		5	10
Turners	9	5	1	1	7	23
Glaziers	4	3	4	3	2	16
Masons	2	13	13	13	10	51
Pavers				2	2	4
Plasterers		3	3	3	7	16
Tilers	3	6	8	12	11	40
Tilemakers	2	2		1	1	6
Plumbers	4	3		5	2	14
Labourers	1		1	2	3	7
Others	1			3	4	8
Total	38	69	70	89	102	368

(1351-1400 No.: Carpenters–Turners bracketed } 206; Plasterers–Tilers bracketed } 56)

Table 2 (1401–1450)

	1401-1410	1411-1420	1421-1430	1431-1440	1441-1450	1401-1450 No.
Carpenters	11	34	33	21	16	115
Cartwrights	3	10	2	4	2	11
Carvers	2	7	4	1	2	19
Joiners	7	7	3	8	3	20
Sawers	5	7	9	1	9	38
Shipwrights	3	3	4	1	1	12
Turners	1		1	1	2	5
Glaziers	7	5	3	3	4	22
Masons	7	16	15	8	6	52
Pavers		3	2		2	7
Plasterers	5	10	6	5	2	28
Tilers	6	10	3	14	10	43
Tilemakers	3	3	2	4	1	13
Plumbers	5		5		7	21
Labourers	1		5	3	16	29
Others	2					2
Total	68	115	97	74	83	437

(1401-1450 No.: Carpenters–Turners bracketed } 220; Plasterers–Tilers bracketed } 71)

Table 3 (1451–1500)

	1451-1460	1461-1470	1471-1480	1481-1490	1491-1500	1451-1500 No.
Carpenters	13	10	21	11	10	65
Cartwrights	1	2	2	2	5	11
Carvers	1	3		4	4	12
Joiners	1	1				2
Sawers	2	7	5	9	6	28
Shipwrights	1	1	2	3	5	13
Turners	1	2	2	1		6
Glaziers	5	4	4	5	4	22
Masons	7	7	5	4		23
Pavers	1	3	5	4		13
Plasterers	4		1			5
Tilers	7	9	9	9	6	40
Tilemakers		3	2	1	2	8
Plumbers	1	4	4	1	3	13
Labourers	1	4	3	12	7	27
Others				1		1
Total	45	60	65	67	52	289

(1451-1500 No.: Carpenters–Turners bracketed } 137; Plasterers–Tilers bracketed } 45)

Table 4 (1501–1534)

	1501-1510	1511-1520	1521-1530	1531-1534	1501-1534 No.	c.1300-1534 No.
Carpenters	8	10	22	2	42	355
Cartwrights	1	3	1	2	7	49
Carvers		4	8	3	15	50
Joiners		2	1		3	43
Sawers	6		2	3	11	105
Shipwrights						38
Turners	1		1	1	3	42
Glaziers	5	6	4	1	16	79
Masons	2	1	4	1	8	156
Pavers						24
Plasterers	1	2	4	1	8	59
Tilers	10	6	7	5	28	155
Tilemakers		1		3	4	31
Plumbers	3	1	1	3	8	59
Labourers	3	4	6	3	16	79
Others		1			1	13
Total	40	41	61	28	170	1337

(1501-1534 No.: Carpenters–Turners bracketed } 81; Plasterers–Tilers bracketed } 36. c.1300-1534 No.: Carpenters–Turners bracketed } 682; Plasterers–Tilers bracketed } 214)

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Appendix E: Map of York

Appendix F: Parody of the Funeral of the Virgin

from Clifford Davidson, *From Creation to Doom* (New York: AMS Press, 1984).