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THE LOST COVENTRY DRAPERS' PLAY OF DOOMSDAY AND ITS ICONOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

By CLIFFORD DAVIDSON

As part of the reassessment of the quality of the medieval civic religious drama that has been undertaken by scholars in recent years, two critical principles stand out: first, the plays are not independent or self-contained artistic achievements which, like modern theatrical pieces, may happen to reflect public values, but are rather an expression of civic pride and devotion that helped to bind together the various units of the community in a valuable common effort; secondly, the plays, if they are to be fully understood, require to be seen not merely as texts but also as *visual* experiences not unrelated to the visual arts.¹ Hence the extant Middle English play texts are not to be viewed simply as literary exercises, but are also to be examined in terms of their visual and devotional functions.²

Indeed, the plays, which in many cities were performed at the time of a religious festival such as Corpus Christi or Whitsun week, thus require analysis from the standpoint of a quite different methodology from that appropriate for non-dramatic literary texts or, say, the later drama of the Elizabethan or Jacobean dramatists who wrote for a secular and commercial theatre. Because matters of iconography are of such importance in the context of the medieval drama, it even makes very good sense to augment our knowledge of this aspect of the medieval stage through systematic critical attention to lost plays such as those which made up the famous but largely non-extant cycle from Coventry.³ Hence by turning to the documents and other evidence that illuminate the lost Coventry Drapers' play of Doomsday, which staged the end of the world, we are able to provide an analysis useful in assisting us to recover something of the play's spectacle.

I

The first reference to the Doomsday play as the concluding segment of the Coventry Corpus Christi cycle appears in the Coventry *Leet Book* in 1457:

On Corporis Christi yeven at nyght then next
suyng came the quene from Kelyngworth to Coventre;
at which tyme she wold not be met, but came
preuely to se the play there on the morowe; and
she sygh then alle the Pagentes pleyde save

Domes-day, which myght not be pleyde for lak of day.⁴

Though she watched the cycle being played at the first station from the vantage point of the house of Richard Wode, a grocer, whose residence was in Earl Street,⁵ Queen Margaret saw the pageants of the cycle only up through the Mercers' *Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*.⁶ The Doomsday play that she failed to see, for which the Drapers were presumably already responsible since the play is assigned to them in all later dramatic records, was very likely superseded by a revised text in 1519 - ironically a year of imminent economic collapse for the city⁷ - when the cycle is reported to have been made new. According to the annals (no longer extant) cited by Thomas Sharp there were this year "New Plays at Corpus Christi tyde which were greatly commended".⁸ Further evidence is available to suggest that the concluding play in the Coventry cycle was again replaced by a revised and much more elaborate version of the Doomsday play during Queen Mary's reign (1553-9) which was also apparently a time of returning prosperity for the Drapers' Company.⁹ Lacking an extant text, the Drapers' play hence can be known only through the study of the available sixteenth-century dramatic records, some of which are accessible only in antiquarian transcriptions such as Sharp's,¹⁰ through examination of the information which can be gleaned from the study of analogous texts, and through close attention to iconography, mainly by means of the systematic survey of relevant parallels (giving particular priority to local examples and those from approximately the same date) in the visual arts. Such an approach cannot, of course, recover the play text, but we can nevertheless deduce something of the theatrical spectacle that must have provided a spectacular closure for the Coventry cycle, which itself was regarded as one of the most impressive dramatic displays England had to offer at the end of the Middle Ages. As R.W. Ingram has noted, "The rulers of the [Coventry] cycle were well aware that it was a national and not merely a local event, that it was a sacred entertainment which drew people from all over England".¹¹ The Coventry plays must, therefore, be regarded as theatrical presentations of a different and higher order than the incompetent production of *Pyramus and Thisbe* offered before the court of Athens in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, though Shakespeare's amateur actors are still widely (and perhaps not inaccurately) regarded as burlesquing such craftsmen-actors as those who took to the stage at Corpus Christi time in Coventry.¹² The Coventry plays had, after all, been seen by Henry VII and his queen in 1493, and, according to extant city annals in the Bodleian Library, they "gaue yem great commendacions".¹³

The Drapers were one of the two most affluent guilds in Coventry in the late Middle Ages, second in wealth only to the Mercers. Hence in the Corpus Christi procession, as we learn from the list dated 1445 in the Coventry *Leet Book*,¹⁴ the place of greatest honour at the end of the procession was taken by the guild of the Mercers, with the Drapers immediately preceding them. Along with the Mercers, the Drapers in effect dominated the city Corporation in Coventry.¹⁵ Within the city their houses were generally located

in the highly desirable area of Gosford Street and Earl Street,¹⁶ while their pageant house was at first located in Little Park Street and then more conveniently in Jordan Well, which was an extension of Gosford Street leading to Earl Street.¹⁷ The Drapers' Chapel, dedicated to Our Lady, was located in the nearby Church of St Michael (later Coventry Cathedral, destroyed by bombs during World War II) where until 1940 the tomb of the affluent sixteenth-century draper Julian Nethermyl and his wife Johanna stood with its relief portraiture of the rich citizen in a long gown, his wife in a gown with square-cut neck over a kirtle, and their five sons and five daughters, all kneeling.¹⁸ Nethermyl, whose tomb may be dated 1539, was mayor of the city in 1523-4.¹⁹ His arms appeared on his tomb along with the arms of the Drapers, "*azure three clouds proper radiated in base, or, each surmounted with a triple crown or, caps gules*".²⁰ The Drapers' arms also appeared on their pageant, as their accounts for 1567 indicate: "Itm for . . . Crest ffor the boxxe of the padgen".²¹ Later members of the Nethermyl family are reported to have stored an organ utilized by the guild and reported in dramatic records.²²

The Drapers' Chapel requires further notice since it has been observed to have had a direct connection through its iconography with the play presented by the Drapers' Company at Corpus Christi; Mary Dormer Harris in her edition of the *Leet Book* thus notes: "Domesday is the subject of one of the miserere seats in the drapers' chapel in S. Michael's".²³ This misericord was in existence until 1940 when it was destroyed in the War. Part of a set dated c.1465 (i.e., nearly contemporary with the production of the Drapers' Domesday play which Queen Margaret had failed to see only a few years previously) it illustrated Christ with his feet on a representation of the world and seated on a rainbow that was supported by clouds. Two angels, which appeared to be balanced in the air, blew trumpets. On the supporters on each side of the misericord, resurrected figures were rising from their graves or emerging from coffins (see Plate II (a)).²⁴

The Drapers' accounts tell us nothing about their play prior to the sixteenth century, and the most extensive records are for the play as presented after the revision and expansion of its spectacle in the 1550's. However, the play that emerged from the 1519 revision clearly already included the following: angels sitting on seats and playing trumpets, three white (i.e., good) and three black souls dressed in body garments made of white leather or coloured canvas, devils who wore masks, and a hell mouth that frequently needed replacing or at least painting. Four angels were noted, and these required wings which were painted. A windlass with a long attached rope was utilized, perhaps for lowering and raising the Christ who returns in majesty at the Judgment.²⁵ It also seems safe to assume that the scene in the drama was derived on the whole from the popular account of the Last Judgment in Chapter 25 of St Matthew's Gospel rather than from the Apocalypse, and hence its iconography may be expected to be similar to that of the four extant Domesday plays in other late medieval cycles for Corpus Christi or Whitsun week in England, all of which also draw on the Gospel account rather than the Apocalypse.²⁶

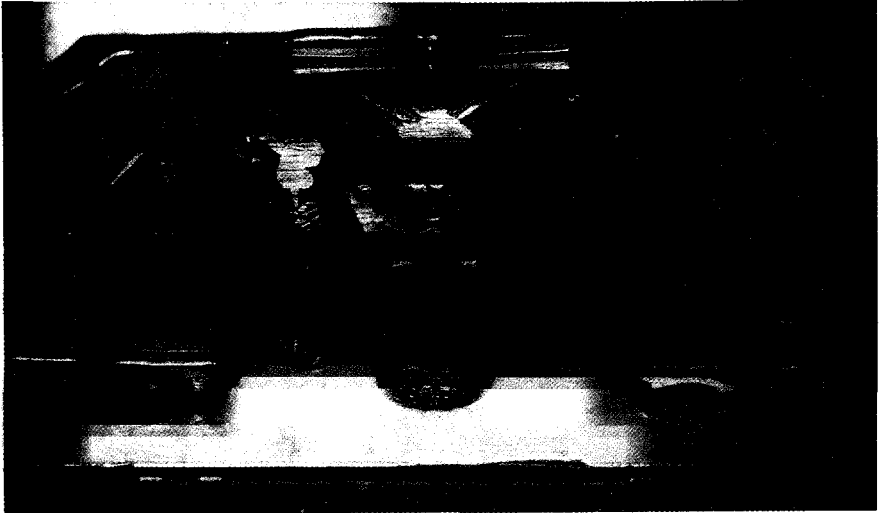


Plate II (a). The Last Judgment with Christ as judge (centre) and the dead arising from the grave (on the supporters). From a misericord (destroyed in St Michael's Cathedral, Coventry). (*National Monuments Record.*)

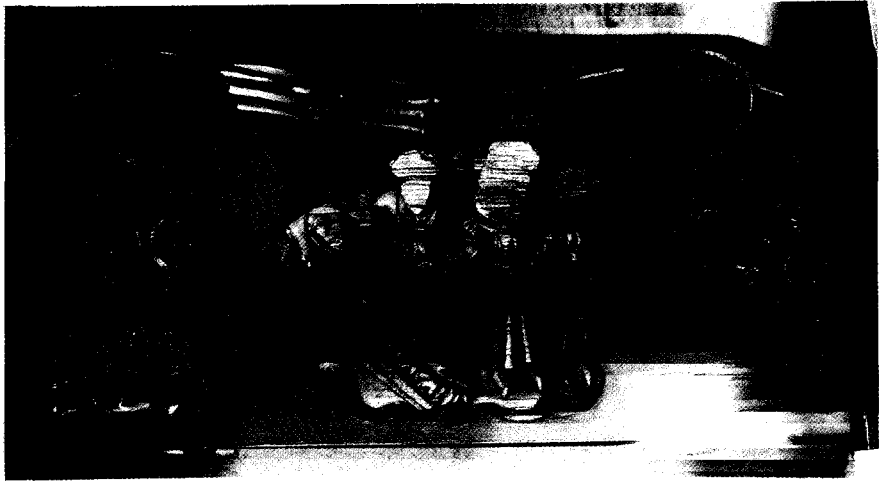


Plate II (b). Corporal Acts of Mercy: Visiting the Sick, with the Dance of Death on the supporters. From a misericord (destroyed) in St Michael's Cathedral, Coventry. (*National Monuments Record.*)

It should be noted, however, that the misericord of the Doom in St Michael's to which reference has been made above was actually part of a larger series that included the Dance of Death and the Corporal Acts of Mercy. The Dance of Death, which is perhaps best known in the famous series of woodcuts by Hans Holbein, focuses the attention of the viewer on man's end which must inevitably come to him whether he be pope, prince, or pauper. In the series under discussion, three misericords had supporters with the personification of Death coming to various men ranging from a pope and possibly an emperor to laymen.²⁷ The purpose of this motif is clear: it would hold up the mirror to onlookers to make them consider their life's terminus. But the consideration of one's earthly end was closely linked with thinking about the end of history when one would indeed need to make account of one's life before the bar of eternity. This aspect of thinking about the end is then further reflected in the principal scenes shown in these same misericords - scenes which illustrate the Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy derived from the account of the end of history in St Matthew's Gospel with the addition of the burial of the dead from Tobit i 17-18.²⁸

In the misericords at St Michael's, the Corporal Acts that had survived until 1940 were Clothing the Naked, Visiting the Sick, and Burying the Dead.²⁹ To be sure, these and the other Corporal Acts (Giving Drink to the Thirsty, Feeding the Hungry, Visiting Prisoners, Giving Shelter to the Homeless) are not visualized in any extant play of the Doom, nor, of course, would we expect them to have been staged in Coventry. Nevertheless, such Acts are rehearsed by Christ in the extant Doomsday plays from the English cycles as a test of the worthiness (or unworthiness) of all who are being judged on the fateful day.³⁰ The Corporal Acts are further of very great significance for guilds such as the Drapers' Company during this period, since charity was indeed regarded as a necessary expression of love that would serve to help one achieve salvation; conversely, a man or woman lacking in charity would inevitably be doomed at the Last Day. Thus, those who have not done the Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy must inevitably have been guilty of the Seven Deadly Sins, which are regarded as precisely opposed to these works of goodness. Hence at Trotton, Sussex, an interesting wall painting in the parish church illustrates the Doom with the good man encircled by the Corporal Acts and, in contrast, the bad man surrounded by the Deadly Sins.³¹ A more local example illustrating how submission to the Seven Deadly Sins will lead one along the path to eternal suffering rather than to eternal bliss may be found on a carved screen, probably from the early sixteenth century and now in the chapel at the Warwickshire estate of Compton Wynyates; here souls under such demonic influence are riding appropriate animals off toward the mouth of hell.³²

The connection between the Last Judgment and the Corporal Acts of Mercy is further underlined in another Warwickshire example. At Coughton, the will of Sir Robert Throckmorton in 1518 made arrangements for the insertion of a painted glass window of the Last Judgment, of which a few fragments remain, in the East Window of the church, as well as a representation of the "seven acts of Mercy" in the east window of the south aisle.³³ The Corporal Acts

were thus indeed regarded as crucial for any person who must face the Judgment with its separation of souls into two categories, which are established in all Last Judgment depictions based on Matthew 25. At St Martin's, Bull Ring, Birmingham, a fragment of a wall painting of the Last Judgment on a beam reported at the time of the nineteenth-century restoration of the church illustrated the upper portion of a Last Judgment scene with the head of Christ, his hands, and angels at each side. Scrolls at Christ's right and left contained the words "Venite benedicti patris m[ei]" and "Ite maledicti in ignem et[ernam]" - the words of the Judge to the good and evil souls arranged on one side or the other of the Saviour according to the account in St Matthew's Gospel.³⁴ There is no good reason to suppose that the disposition of the good and bad souls in the Coventry Doomsday play would have been any different from this.

Hence when we consider the religious background and the local and regional iconographic evidence which supports it, we may deduce that, as in the Mercers' Doomsday play in the York cycle,³⁵ the Drapers' Christ at Coventry probably would likewise have invoked the Corporal Acts at the time when the good souls were divided from the bad - the white from the black, according to the obvious (and locally documented) way of colour-coding them for immediate audience recognition.³⁶ Such an action would naturally have followed the rising of the saved and the damned from their graves, since there is no evidence here or elsewhere in the English medieval drama for the weighing of souls - an iconographic form that sometimes appears in the visual arts.³⁷

As noted above, the most complete information contained in the dramatic records of the Coventry Drapers' Company is available for the period after the revisions of Queen Mary's time, especially from the accounts after 1561 which are far more complete than for the earlier part of the century. The changes that occurred in the 1550's and that involved production costs approximately a hundred percent higher than in the previous decade also seem to have encouraged careful record-keeping at least for a time. Hence instead of merely noting charges of twenty-two shillings and eightpence as the "ordenary Chargys of the pagan", as in c.1536,³⁸ the accounts for 1561-73 give a usefully full accounting with a carefully itemized list of expenditures. For example, the accounts for 1561 provide a full list of characters, including God, two devils, the "iij whyte Sowles and iij blank [sic] Sowles", four angels, "wormes of Conscience" (probably two), three patriarchs, and a prologue which is here identified as "the protestacyon". Additionally, music was provided by "Syngyng men", a "trompeter", and a musician who played the regals.³⁹ Payments were also made for a tech crew to man the windlass and hell mouth ("for kepyng of the wynd and of hell mowthe xvj d") as well as for the usual expenses of getting the wagon out of storage and outfitting it. Separate payments were made for "blankyng [sic] of the Sowles facys" and for expenses associated with the three rehearsals, perhaps including payment for "the players Sowper" on one of these occasions. Finally, the accounts list payment of three shillings and eightpence "for iij worldes" that had been made by "Robert Bro", probably an error for the Robert Croo or

Crow whose name appears prominently in the dramatic records during this period.⁴⁰

The Drapers' accounts for 1561-73 also reveal why three worlds were required and how these devices were utilized to create a spectacular effect. They were each set on fire, as the 1565 accounts are the first to indicate ("Itm Settyng the worldes on fyre iij d"), presumably one at each of three stations where the play was being presented in the city, though information concerning the location of the Coventry sites is incomplete.⁴¹ Further, in this year there was also payment for "a lynke to Sette the worldes on fyre" for which the amount of sixpence was paid.⁴² The "worldes" were thus apparently items of disposable stage property, needed at each station where the play was to be produced. In each case the "world" utilized must have been the world upon which Christ's feet rest as his footstool during the Last Judgment - an iconographic detail also present in the misericord formerly in St Michael's. A similar world also appeared beneath the Judge's feet in another Coventry representation of Doom, the wall painting, now almost entirely blackened, over the chancel arch of Holy Trinity Church.⁴³ A drawing made from this wall painting in the nineteenth century shows the world which is Christ's footstool as a small globe between his feet, while above it he is seated as if on a rainbow (though none is visible in the drawing) and with his hands raised to show the wounds in them (see Plate III).⁴⁴ Such display of Christ's wounds, of course, is consistent with the emphasis on the Corporal Acts of Mercy, for the wounds are emblems of Christ's mercy extended to those who believe and who do the deeds of love. But the Drapers' play is a dramatization of the moment when the time for such deeds of love has been brought to a close and when the world itself will conclude its history. The burning of the "world", presumably at the end of each of three performances on the feast of Corpus Christi, would therefore reflect an understanding of the end of time that includes the idea of the total destruction of this earthly sphere by fire - an understanding that is expressed in 2 Peter iii 10ff:

But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence, and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the earth and the works that are in it, shall be burnt up. (Douay translation)

In the fourteenth-century *Holkham Bible Picture Book*, the burning of the world in a fiery holocaust is shown immediately prior to the return of the divine Judge, but in this manuscript this episode is the final sign in the Fifteen Signs of Doomsday series⁴⁵ of which there is no evidence in the lost Drapers' Doomsday play at Coventry.⁴⁶ However, a more local example which does not seem to have formed part of such a series was once to be seen in a wall painting in the nave of the Guild Chapel at Stratford-upon-Avon; here was illustrated the Whore of Babylon from the Apocalypse and also, below, the earth on fire with red flames rising from it.⁴⁷

The unique iconography of the end of the physical world in flames may have received additional embellishment by an effect

recorded in the Drapers' accounts after 1556. Sharp reports that in this year the "representation of an Earthquake was first introduced".⁴⁸ In 1565 and in the later undated Drapers' accounts, the "Earth quake" is regularly noted and is an effect worked by a device that utilized a barrel.⁴⁹ In the absence of any evidence to suggest that the earthquake was one of the Fifteen Signs of Doomsday,⁵⁰ it seems reasonable to associate this with the final spectacle of the play. No extant cycle play has such a fiery and presumably noisy conclusion, which unquestionably, if my conjecture is correct, would have provided a spectacular closure to an already lively production. We may further conjecture that, when the fire and the noise subsided, the scene would have dissolved into harmony, symbolized by music sung by the singing men retained for the play with the accompaniment of the regals.

II

When we further examine the evidence of the Drapers' accounts in conjunction with other available evidence for their play and its iconography, we are able to piece together its probable structure in spite of the loose ends which must remain because of the loss of the play text. At the beginning of the play, at least by 1561, a Prologue⁵¹ opened the action, perhaps (but not inevitably) announcing the motifs to be treated in the play and calling the audience's attention to aspects of the production. The three patriarchs which appear in the accounts consistently from 1563 to 1572 (there are only two in 1573) may have had a role in the next segment of the play immediately following the Prologue, though there is simply not enough evidence to suggest their actual function. But most likely the main portion of the drama opened with God appearing above in his firmament, presumably on the top of the pageant wagon, for which payment of three shillings and fourpence was made ("to god ffor his welke") in 1563.⁵² He was presumably represented by the second, rather than the first, person of the Trinity. Played by Robert Croo (or Crow) in 1562 and 1566 and by Lowtts in 1567, he wore a "Cooate" (over a leather body suit?) and gloves⁵³ and, in 1565, was provided with a new cloak made of "Redde Sendall".⁵⁴ The manner in which in all likelihood the cloak would have been draped over Christ in order to expose the wound in his side may be observed in the drawing of the damaged wall painting of the Last Judgment in Holy Trinity Church, Coventry, where the garment is fastened at the neck and draped modestly over the lower part of the body (see Plate III).⁵⁵

The descent of God to sit in judgment on the world may have utilized the windlass and rope (three fathoms in length in 1538) which are duly recorded in the dramatic records.⁵⁶ Upon his descent, God's gestures very likely were the conventional ones, i.e., hands raised to show his wounds, again once to be seen in the wall painting over the chancel arch of Holy Trinity, Coventry (see Plate III).⁵⁷ The showing of the wounds was further, of course, an important element in both the extant drama and late medieval art. At Chester, the Judgment play contains a stage direction at line 355 which describes the descent of Christ,

quasi in nube, si fieri poterit, quia, secundum doctoris opiniones, in aere prope terram iudicabit Filius Dei.

[as if on a cloud, if it can be done, since, according to the opinions of the learned, the Son of God shall judge in the air close to the earth.]⁵⁸

Another stage direction in the same play, following Christ's speech announcing "see my blood freshe owt flee/ that I bleede on roode-tree/ for your salvatyon" (426-8) reads: "Tunc emittet sanguinem de latere eius" ["Then let him emit blood from his side"]. The effect is reminiscent perhaps of the late medieval crucifixions that illustrate bleeding from the wounds⁵⁹ - images that so repulsed many iconoclastic Protestants in the earlier sixteenth century - but Christ with bleeding wounds also frequently appeared in Doomsday scenes in the visual arts, as in the Bolton Hours illuminated at York c.1420.⁶⁰ In the *Holkham Bible Picture Book* Christ as Judge turns the bleeding palm of his left hand to the bad souls, rejecting them, while with his bleeding right hand he gestures with friendship to the good souls.⁶¹ Such gestures would, of course, have been appropriate in the Coventry play.

Before the souls can arise from their graves, the angel trumpets must be blown. The Coventry Drapers' accounts call for three or (usually) four angels, at least one of whom in all probability would hold a trumpet and pretend to play it. Angels' trumpets were reported as mended in an undated Drapers list,⁶² but the actual trumpet-playing would have been done by a professional trumpeter, who appears regularly listed as being paid for his services⁶³ and who logically would have been also outfitted as an angel. The angel trumpeters were probably placed in the "pullpytts for angells" noted in the Drapers' accounts in 1565.⁶⁴

One or more of the remaining angels appear to have held signs of the Passion since the undated Drapers' accounts note the making and painting of a cross.⁶⁵ In the wall painting representing the Doom of c.1531-45 in the Stratford Guild Chapel, as in the Chester Doomsday play,⁶⁶ the angels held the implements of the Passion above. It is, of course, unfortunate that there is extant no inventory of the stage properties owned by the Drapers' Company which might have listed all the instruments of the Passion held by the angels in the Coventry Judgment play, since other implements would also have been very appropriate for display in such a scene. In any case, the angels at Coventry had gold skins, probably painted to look like feathers, and painted wings.⁶⁷ Quite possibly the four surplices that are listed in 1572 were for the angels to wear (though their more usual garment in pre-Reformation England was the alb), and the "iiij dyadynnes" listed c.1567 were certainly for the angels.⁶⁸

Within its spectacle which reached from the heavenly angels to the fires of hell, the Drapers' play in its central tableau presented a scene in which all humans would eventually participate, i.e., the scene of the resurrection of all members of the race, both worthy and unworthy, at the last day. The Drapers' pageant may

therefore have included some kind of representation of the tombs from which the good and bad souls rose, though there is nothing as explicit as the indication in the York dramatic records, which call for a separate pageant "for ye sallys to ryse owtof" in 1463.⁶⁹ Tombs were, however, very visible in both the wall painting in Holy Trinity Church in Coventry and the misericord in the Drapers' chapel in St Michael's. With regard to the latter, Harris reported that "some [of the figures rising from the dead] even push up the lids of their coffins with their heads".⁷⁰ In the case of the Holy Trinity wall painting, two souls at Christ's right (and hence presumably among the saved) join their hands in prayer as they kneel in their tombs.⁷¹ Similar gestures are to be seen in the extant fragments of a Doom in painted glass from St Michael's, where one nude soul also crosses his arms over his chest, while another (presumably one of the damned) is shouting as he rises from his tomb.⁷²

Notice has already been taken in this paper of the differentiation between the good and bad souls by means of colour, with such differentiation probably representing a long tradition in Coventry.⁷³ This might at first appear to be a local theatrical innovation, but we have evidence that similar colour coding was not unknown elsewhere in Europe, as, for example, in the Majorca *Last Judgment* in which the saved wore albs covered by capes of a light colour and the damned wore "black cassocks (*sotanes*)".⁷⁴ White is here a symbol of nudity and hence of purity. The three souls in each of the good and bad groups in the Coventry play wore a body garment, either, as noted above, of leather or of painted canvas or buckram. Hence, in an undated account of c.1567 payments are made for "yellow" canvas and "canvas made blake".⁷⁵ And, as we have seen, even the faces of the souls were painted.

In contrast to the good souls, who will be received into heaven - probably into the same structure on the pageant from which Christ first appeared in the play - the bad souls are doomed to enter hell, to which access is by a hell mouth. This stage property, which remained in theatrical use even in the professional theatres through the sixteenth century,⁷⁶ appears prominently in the dramatic records of the Drapers' Company in Coventry. The Coventry hell mouth (sometimes referred to as "hell hede") was frequently repaired, repainted and re-made, suggesting that its fabric construction, presumably over a wood frame,⁷⁷ was not intended to be very permanent. Such construction would, however, have been quite practical, since the mouth could thus be easily made to open and close at appropriate times. The design of the hell mouth in the play would very likely have been similar to that illustrated in the wall painting formerly in Holy Trinity Church in Coventry, or in the extant wall painting over the chancel arch in the Guild Chapel at Stratford-upon-Avon, where flames are seen both in the mouth and behind it.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the effect of the hell mouth in the Coventry play was clearly made more sensational than any example in the visual arts, since an actual fire with flames and smoke was kept at it, as Drapers' accounts for 1556, 1557, 1561, and 1566 indicate.⁷⁹ The hell mouth is traditionally located at Christ's left, and in wall paintings and other examples in the visual arts is in the lower

portion of the illustration. The various precincts of hell could further, as in the Stratford wall painting, be elaborately portrayed behind the hell mouth. However, the Coventry records bear witness only to the presence of a fire.⁸⁰

There is no ambiguity, however, about the presence of devils in the play. Masks for the devils ("the demones heed", "a demons face", etc.) are reported by Sharp in accounts which are no longer extant from as early as 1536,⁸¹ and frequent mention is made in the records of coats and hose for them. The most interesting of the latter references is the notice in 1572 of payment "for mendyng ye demens cotts & hose . . ." and "for ij pound of heare for ye Same".⁸² Traditionally, as in the Stratford wall painting of the Doom and in yet another misericord in St Michael's which was destroyed in World War II,⁸³ devils had hair over their entire bodies. Additionally, of course, they had hideous faces or masks as well as further ugly masks frequently attached to lower parts of their bodies. It was the grotesque, combining the comic and the feared, that was clearly most often stressed. A fragment of painted glass that was extant in the Church of St John Bablake, Coventry, prior to World War II contained a devil with a large head and a long nose as well as short legs.⁸⁴ Further, devils would carry either clubs or flesh-hooks, which they would use upon the evil souls, all of whom would of course come into their grasp. Such is the case at the Stratford-upon-Avon Guild Chapel, where the devils in the wall painting of the Doom also blow horns, presumably in an unmusical manner or even involving noise with appropriately scatological implications.⁸⁵ The devil's club from another Coventry play, the Cappers' pageant, was very likely, according to Sharp, "made of buckram, painted, and probably stuffed with wool, as Pilate's mall or club was".⁸⁶ In any case, the devils of the Drapers' pageant and of the Coventry cycle generally must have been popular figures both far and near, for they stand behind a reference in John Heywood's *The Play called the Foure PP*: "For, as good happe wolde haue it chaunce", remarks the devil welcoming the Pardoner at hell mouth,

Thys deuyll and I were of olde acqueyntaunce,
For oft in the play of Corpus Cristi
He had played the deuyll at Couentry. (ll.829-32)⁸⁷

The above account of the iconography of the lost Doomsday play at Coventry, of course, leaves out certain details about which there is a complete lack of evidence. No payments were made in the Drapers' accounts, for example, for the playing of the Virgin Mary or for John the Baptist, who appeared prominently in the wall paintings at Holy Trinity, Coventry, and the Guild Chapel, Stratford. There is also a question about whether one of the angels might have represented St Michael, who was indeed an important figure in the judgment of souls even though the psychostasis was unlikely to have been dramatized.⁸⁸ And what indeed was the role of the two "wormes of Conscience" introduced as characters after the revisions of the early 1560's? Without the texts used for the Drapers' play, these are questions which cannot ever be answered concerning early productions. If such lacks in our knowledge create great gaps in our

understanding of the play as it was presented by the Drapers' Company, we nevertheless need to be grateful that we can in fact deduce as much as we may about the visual structuring of this drama, which provided the culminating pageant in the important Corpus Christi cycle at Coventry prior to its suppression in 1579.

In the jestbook *A Hundred Merry Tales* (1526) a connection between the Creed and the Coventry cycle was facetiously made by reference to a preacher's challenge:

these articles ye be bound to believe, for they be true and of authority. And if you believe not me then for a more sure and sufficient authority, go your way to Coventry and there ye shall see them all played in Corpus Christi play.⁸⁹

This statement is, of course, humorously off the mark, and yet with regard to the final play of the cycle the Credal insistence on belief in "the resurrection of the dead" seems indeed relevant, for the Drapers' play actually does illustrate that important doctrine of the medieval (and also the Reformation) Church.⁹⁰ The Coventry cycle, since it possessed a national reputation prior to its suppression, was surely of sufficient significance to demand our scholarly attention now, and of the plays in the cycle it is appropriate that we should give very close attention to the final drama, which was also a drama of the closure of history.

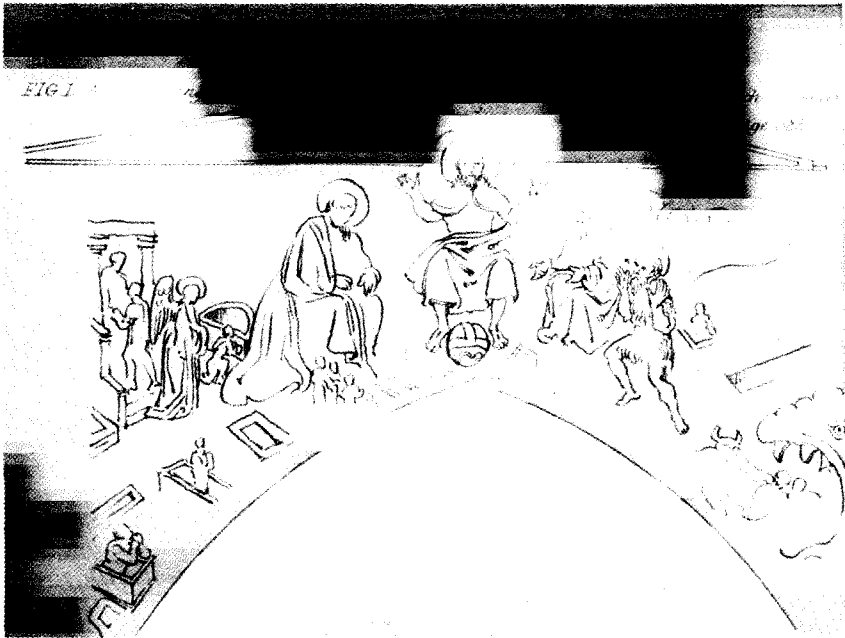


Plate III. The Last Judgment. From a wall painting (no longer visible) in Holy Trinity Church, Coventry. (Line drawing published in *Archaeologia* 36 (1855) Plate XXXII.)

NOTES

- 1 See Clifford Davidson, *Drama and Art* (Kalamazoo, 1977), "The Visual Arts and Drama, with Special Emphasis on the Lazarus Plays", in *Le Théâtre au Moyen Âge*, ed. Gari Muller (Montreal, 1981) pp.45-59, and *From Creation to Doom: The York Cycle of Mystery Plays* (New York, 1984) pp.1-19; Pamela Sheingorn, "On Using Medieval Art in the Study of Medieval Drama: An Introduction to Methodology", *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 22 (1979) pp.101-9; and Gail McMurray Gibson, "Long Melford Church, Suffolk: Some Suggestions for the Study of Visual Artifacts and Medieval Drama", *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 21 (1978) pp.103-15. It is no longer possible to understand the drama as important simply because it allegedly influenced the visual arts, but for such older methodology see W.L. Hildburgh, "English Alabaster Carvings as Records of the Medieval Religious Drama", *Archaeologia* 93 (1949) pp.51-101, and M.D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge, 1963).
- 2 See Clifford Davidson, "The Concept of Purpose and Early Drama", *EDAM* [Early Drama, Art and Music] *Newsletter* 2, No. 2 (April 1980) pp.9-16.
- 3 For the two extant plays of the Weavers and the Shearmen and Taylors as well as a discussion of the cycle, see *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Hardin Craig, EETS ES 87 (2nd ed., London, 1957).
- 4 *The Coventry Leet Book*, ed. Mary Dormer Harris, EETS OS 134-5, 138, 146 (London, 1907-13) p.300; see also *Coventry*, ed. R.W. Ingram, *Records of Early English Drama* (Toronto, 1981) p.37.
- 5 *Coventry Leet Book*, p.300; see also *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.549.
- 6 On the assignment of this play to the Mercers, see *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, p.xvi.
- 7 See Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979) pp.51-67.
- 8 *A Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries Anciently Performed at Coventry* (Coventry, 1825) p.11.
- 9 For discussion of revisions at this time and possible subsequent revision of the Drapers' play, see especially R.W. Ingram, "'To find the players and all that longeth therto': Notes on the Production of Medieval Drama in Coventry", in *The Elizabethan Theatre V*, ed. G.R. Hibbard (Ontario, 1975) p.33. The re-writing of the playbook in Queen Elizabeth's time would tend to suggest some Protestantizing of the production during this period. For further discussion of the Coventry Drapers' play, see also R.W. Ingram, "'Pleyng geire accustomed belongyng & necessarie': Guild Records and Pageant Production at Coventry", in *Proceedings of the First Colloquium*, ed. JoAnna Dutka, *Records of Early English Drama* (Toronto, 1979) pp.74-80.
- 10 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.455-81; Sharp, *Dissertation*, pp.66-77.
- 11 *Coventry*, p.xvii.
- 12 See *A Midsommer Nights Dreame*, ed. H.H. Furness (6th ed., Philadelphia, 1895) p.311ff.; and Clifford Davidson, "What hempen homespuns have we swagg'ring here", *Shakespeare Studies*, forthcoming.

- ¹³ MS. Top. Warwickshire d. 4; see also William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2nd ed., p.149; both as quoted in *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.77.
- ¹⁴ P.220; see also *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.16-17.
- ¹⁵ Pythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, p.100; *Coventry Leet Book*, p.xlii.
- ¹⁶ *A History of the County of Warwick*, ed. W.B. Stephens (London, 1969) VIII, p.154.
- ¹⁷ *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.3, 301, 506.
- ¹⁸ Philip B. Chatwin, "Monumental Effigies in the County of Warwick", *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society* 48 (1925) pp.148-9, Pl. XXI. On the Drapers' Chapel, see Thomas Sharp, *Illustrations of the History and Antiquities of St. Michael's Church, Coventry* (Coventry, 1818) pp.20-3.
- ¹⁹ Chatwin, "Monumental Effigies", pp.148-9; *Coventry Leet Book*, p.684; see also Pythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, pp.265-6.
- ²⁰ Chatwin, "Monumental Effigies", p.148.
- ²¹ *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.242.
- ²² See *ibid.*, pp.599-600. The reference to the "mending of our Lady orgaynes" in the undated Drapers' accounts quoted in *ibid.*, p.465, would, however, appear to refer to an organ in the Drapers' Chapel rather than to an instrument used for the play.
- ²³ P.300; quoted in *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.549; see also Mary Dormer Harris, *The History of the Drapers Company* (n.p., n.d.) pp.14-15.
- ²⁴ Mary Dormer Harris, "The Misericords of Coventry", *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 52 (1927) p.264, Pl. XXXII; Clifford Davidson and Jennifer Alexander, *Early Art of Coventry, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick, and Lesser Sites in Warwickshire*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Reference Ser., 4 (Kalamazoo, 1985) p.36, fig. 12.
- ²⁵ *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.465-9; Sharp, *Dissertation*, pp.69-71.
- ²⁶ See the discussion in Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London, 1972) pp.297-8; and Clifford Davidson, "The End of the World in Medieval Art and Drama", *Michigan Academician* 5 (1972) pp.261-3.
- ²⁷ Harris, "The Misericords of Coventry", p.262, Pl. XXXI; Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, p.52, fig. 19.
- ²⁸ Harris, "The Misericords of Coventry", pp.262-3, Pl. XXXII; Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, p.37, figs. 13-14.
- ²⁹ Harris, "The Misericords of Coventry", pp.262-3.
- ³⁰ See Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*, pp.297-8.

- 31 Davidson, "The End of the World", p.262.
- 32 Arthur H. Bolton, "Compton Wynyates", *Country Life*, 6 Nov. 1915, p.620. Since Compton Wynyates is now closed to the public, I am grateful to Lord Northampton for the opportunity to examine this carved screen. See also Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, p.138.
- 33 William Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656) p.560.
- 34 "Come, ye blessed of my father" and "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matt. xxvi 34, 41; Douay translation). See further, J.R. Holliday, "St. Martin's Church, and the Discoveries Made During Its Restoration", *Birmingham and Midland Institute* 5 (1874) pp.56-7.
- 35 See Davidson, *From Creation to Doom*, pp.179-81.
- 36 See, for example, *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.217, 221, 237, 465.
- 37 See Mary Phillips Perry, "On the Psychostasis in Christian Art", *Burlington Magazine* 22 (1912-13) pp.94-105, 208-18, and Pamela Sheingorn, "'For God is such a doomsman': Origins and Development of the Theme of Last Judgment", in *Homo, Memento Finis: The Iconography of Just Judgment in Medieval Art and Drama*, ed. David Bevington (Kalamazoo, 1985) pp.15-58.
- 38 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.471.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p.217. Ingram, "'To find the players and all that longeth therto'", p.33, implies, if I understand him correctly, that the "wormes of Conscience" were added in 1561, which would make them possibly Protestantizing additions to the play.
- 40 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.217. On Robert Cro or Crow, see Ingram, "'To find the players and all that longeth therto'", pp.25-9.
- 41 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.230.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p.230.
- 43 Benjamin Poole, *The History of Coventry* (Coventry, 1852) pp.76-7.
- 44 George Scharf, Jr., "Observations on a Picture in Gloucester Cathedral and Some Other Representations of the Last Judgment", *Archaeologia* 36 (1855) Pl. XXXII. There is an early photograph (c.1884) of this wall painting in the Local Studies Centre at Coventry, but unfortunately the painting had already deteriorated to such an extent that the details are not able to be clearly shown. An early description of this wall painting is quoted in Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, p.37.
- 45 W.O. Hassall, *Holkham Bible Picture Book* (London, 1954) fol. 42. See also William W. Heist, *The Fifteen Signs before Doomsday* (East Lansing [Michigan], 1952) *passim*.
- 46 The Fifteen Signs are reported in the Chester cycle; see Davidson, "The End of the World", pp.258-61. For a suggestion that the Towneley dramatist had one of the Fifteen Signs in mind at one point in the final Judgment play, see Clifford Davidson, "An Interpretation of the Wakefield *Judicium*", *Annuaire Mediaevale* 10 (1969) pp.113-14.

- 47 John G. Nichols and Thomas Fisher, *Ancient Allegorical, Historical, and Legendary Paintings in Fresco, Discovered in the Summer of 1804, on the Walls of the Chapel of the Trinity, belonging to the Gilde of the Holy Cross, at Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire* (London, 1838) Pl. XVIII.
- 48 *Dissertation*, p.73.
- 49 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.230, 474; Sharp, *Dissertation*, p.73.
- 50 Cf. *Holkham Bible Picture Book*, fol. 41. See also Rev. xi 13.
- 51 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.217; cf. Sharp, *Dissertation*, p.72 for the suggestion that the Prologue may be dated from the 1556 (or 1557) revision.
- 52 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.224.
- 53 Sharp, *Dissertation*, p.69; *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.224, 474.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p.230.
- 55 Scharf, "Observations", Pl. XXXII. If God wore a gilded mask in the Drapers' play as in the Coventry Weavers' play (*Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.226) there is no evidence for it in any of the records. See Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, "Masks in Medieval English Theatre: The Mystery Plays", *Medieval English Theatre* 3 (1981) pp.7-8.
- 56 Sharp, *Dissertation*, p.72.
- 57 See Clifford Davidson, "Gesture in Medieval Drama with Special Reference to the Doomsday Plays in the Middle English Cycles", *EDAM Newsletter* 6 (1983) pp.10-11.
- 58 *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, EETS SS 3 (London, 1974) p.450. (This and the following translation are the editor's.)
- 59 See the wall painting in the Charterhouse at Coventry: Pierre Turpin, "Ancient Wall Paintings in the Charterhouse", *Burlington Magazine* 35 (1919) Pl. facing p.252.
- 60 Clifford Davidson and David E. O'Connor, *York Art, Early Drama, Art, and Music Reference Ser.*, 1 (Kalamazoo, 1978) p.116, fig. 33.
- 61 Fol. 42v; see also Davidson, "Gesture", p.11.
- 62 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.466. A few fragments of painted glass from the surrounding county also contain representations of angel trumpeters; see especially the examples at Austrey and Wolverton. For a description of the latter, see Peter Newton, "Schools of Glass Painting in the Midlands", unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Univ. of London, 1961) III, p.956; cf. Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, p.178.
- 63 See, for example, *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.217, 220, 224. See also Ingram, "'Pleyng geire'", p.77. Trumpet-playing was a jealously guarded skill, as the *Coventry Leet Book* implies (p.189).
- 64 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.229-30, 466.

- 65 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.465, 479. There are further listings for a ladder and a pillar, but these seem to have had other uses than as instruments of the Passion; see *ibid.*, pp.237, 474. The pillar may have been used as a support on which to place the worlds.
- 66 Nichols and Fisher, Pl. XIX; *Chester Mystery Cycle*, p.439. See also the 1433 indenture from York which describes the Mercers' pageant of Doomsday in that city, where the angels displaying the Passion were listed prominently: "vij grete Aungels halding þe passion of god Ane of þame has a fane of laton & a crosse of Iren in his hede giltid iiii smaller Aungels gilted holding þe passion" (*York*, ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, *Records of Early English Drama* [Toronto, 1979] I, p.55).
- 67 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.474; Sharp, *Dissertation*, p.71.
- 68 *Coventry*, pp.259, 474.
- 69 *York*, ed. Johnson and Rogerson, I, p.95.
- 70 "Misericords of Coventry", p.264, Pl. XXXII.
- 71 Scharf, "Observations", Pl. XXXII.
- 72 Philip B. Chatwin, "Medieval Stained Glass from the Cathedral, Coventry", *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society* 66 (1950) Pls. VI-VII. For additional examples, see Davidson, "Gesture", pp.12-14. In fourteenth-century painted glass at Mancetter, Warwickshire, a fragment from a Doom also shows a nude woman with an arm raised; see Newton, "Schools of Glass Painting", III, p.892; and Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, p.139.
- 73 Evidence from the 1530's is published by Sharp, *Dissertation*, p.70, and Ingram (ed.), *Coventry*, p.465.
- 74 *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Meredith and John Tailby, *Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Ser.*, 4 (Kalamazoo, 1983) p.144.
- 75 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, p.474; cf. *ibid.*, p.241.
- 76 See Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II, Pt. 1 (London, 1963) pp.310, 314.
- 77 *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.242, 259, 465, 472; Sharp, *Dissertation*, p.71.
- 78 Sharp, *Dissertation*, Pl. 6; cf. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery*, pp.128-9. An English alabaster of the Harrowing now at Carcassonne also not untypically shows flames within the doorway set within the hell mouth; see *ibid.*, p.127, Pl. 6c.
- 79 Sharp, *Dissertation*, pp.61, 73; *Coventry*, ed. Ingram, pp.217, 237.
- 80 Cf. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery*, p.128.
- 81 *Dissertation*, p.69. Devil masks are discussed by Twycross and Carpenter, "Masks in Medieval English Theatre: The Mystery Plays 2", *Medieval English Theatre* 3 (1981) pp.71-90.

- ⁸² Coventry, ed. Ingram, p.259.
- ⁸³ Harris, "Misericords of Coventry", Pl. XXXII.
- ⁸⁴ Mary Dormer Harris et al., *A Romance of Two Hundred Years* (Coventry, 1930) p.14.
- ⁸⁵ Sharp, *Dissertation*, Pl. 6; Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, fig. 71. On relevant scatological elements in medieval art, cf. Karl Wentersdorf, "The Symbolic Significance of *Figurae Scatologicae* in Gothic Manuscripts", in *Word, Picture, and Spectacle*, ed. Clifford Davidson, *Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Ser.*, 6 (Kalamazoo, 1984) pp.1-19. For commentary on the non-musical nature of devils, see Reinhold Hammerstein, *Diabolus in Musica* (Berne, 1974) p.17 and passim. For a twelfth-century example of a non-singing devil in a music-drama, see Audrey Ekdahl Davidson, "The Music and Staging of Hildegard of Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum*", in *Atti del IV Colloquio della Società Internazionale pour l'Etude du Théâtre Médiéval*, ed. M. Chiabò, F. Doglio, and M. Maymone (Viterbo, 1985) p.500; see also Hildegard von Bingen, *Ordo Virtutum*, ed. Audrey Ekdahl Davidson (Kalamazoo, 1985) pp.7, 9, 12, 29, 32.
- ⁸⁶ *Dissertation*, p.60; see also the illustration showing Pilate's club, *ibid.*, Pl. 9.
- ⁸⁷ See *Specimens of the Pre-Shakspearean Drama*, ed. John M. Manly (1897; rpt. New York, 1967) I, p.509.
- ⁸⁸ Cf. Davidson, *From Creation to Doom*, pp.186-7, and "An Interpretation of the Wakefield *Judicium*", pp.114-15. The only extant depiction of St Michael in the visual arts at Coventry is a woodcarving from a reredos, probably originally from the Whitefriars and until recently on the decorated ceiling of the Council Chamber of St Mary's Hall. Carved in the first half of the fifteenth century, the figure of St Michael stands and plunges his spear into the mouth of the dragon below. The archangel, who is wearing a short tunic and a kerchief at his neck, is now in the Herbert Art Museum, Coventry (see Davidson and Alexander, *Early Art*, p.39, fig. 15). A former early sixteenth-century wall painting possibly showing St Michael in the Guild Chapel at Stratford is illustrated by Fisher (see Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Lyric* [London, 1972] Pl. 9) and there is a fourteenth-century representation of St Michael with scales on a font at Tysoe. The indication is that St Michael was extremely popular in medieval Coventry.
- ⁸⁹ *A Hundred Merry Tales and Other Jestbooks of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. P.M. Zall (Lincoln [Nebraska], 1963) p.116.
- ⁹⁰ For a discussion of the possible credal arrangement of the Chester cycle, see Peter W. Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (Chicago, 1983) pp.192-222.

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