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## *Chester's Linguistic Signs*

John J. McGavin

No culture, including our own post-Saussurean one, has cast its heuristic system so thoroughly in terms of sign as did the western societies of the Middle Ages. When men read, they read signs; when they preached, prayed, or recited their articles of faith, they were communicating by signs; when they looked at the world around them, and at each other, with the eyes of faith, they could see signs; when they worshipped and participated in sacraments, their action was signficatory; when they beheld the images of saints and the 'quik' books of the drama, they were engaged in sensible and spiritual cooperation with signs.<sup>1</sup> All these signs functioned by directing the mind of the perceiver or user beyond the signs themselves to that which they signified:<sup>2</sup> the Creator; the spiritual condition of the user; the events of Christian history, and so on.<sup>3</sup> Since all these signs were vehicles for communicating meaning, they were all either literally or figuratively linguistic<sup>4</sup> – literally, if they comprised words, oral or written; figuratively, when other things, such as the faculties of a man's mind, or the clothing of a priest, or sacramental actions, or holy images, were significant. It will be evident from this that the critic who seeks to characterise the relevance of sign to a medieval didactic work has more of a duty to exclude than include, and must reveal in particular the distinctions between different kinds of sign within the generally linguistic character which they are considered to have.

Most noticeably absent in *Chester*, as in the other cycles, is the 'exemplarist' strain in sign theology. Based on the belief that Man was made in God's image and that the visible creation can reveal the invisible attributes of God,<sup>5</sup> this tradition saw the created universe, both in the human microcosm and in the macrocosm, as signifying truths about the divine. But, despite its biblical foundation, and its prominence in western theology,<sup>6</sup> this tradition receives little, if any, attention from *Chester*.<sup>7</sup> A work given over to representing historical events could hardly find much place for extra-historical, or contemporary, signification of the divine. The

attributes of *Chester's* God are discernible in his interventions in history rather than in the shape of present things, and thus the cycle prefers a contractual signification, as in the symbolic rainbow<sup>8</sup> or the Ten Commandments or the Creed, to an ontological one.<sup>9</sup> But the *Chester* authors may also have found exemplarism unsuitable because, resting as it does on human interpretation of generally known and already existing externals, it offered less opportunity to dramatise the whole process of signification from the divine provision of a sign to its reception by men and women, and their responses to it.

The editors of the *Chester* cycle have claimed that it 'encompasses a debate on the meaning of words and their relationship to deeds'.<sup>10</sup> The reason that this debate develops is that *Chester* is committed to a programme of revealing Godhead so as to demand the faith of the audience.<sup>11</sup> This theophany is repeatedly arrived at through signs of various kinds which some characters believe and others reject. Contrastive response to the signs provided is fundamental to the didactic scheme of the cycle, and is brought most clearly to our attention by the cycle's narrow lexical range for material of evidential or revelatory value, and its frequently explicit reference to sign. If a particular term is used for this material, it is almost exclusively 'sign' or 'token' or their derivatives.<sup>12</sup> While such lexical neatness valuably points up the patently sign-centred action, it is less helpful when we try to discover whether linguistic phenomena are treated, in an analogous way, as signs. Since *Chester's* New Testament plays are firmly based on the Gospel of John, and that Gospel is the most explicit about the importance of Christ's deeds as signs of his Godhead, it is not surprising that the plays are correspondingly clear about the signifying role of non-linguistic phenomena such as Christ's miracles. The theological tradition would have seen these as figuratively linguistic – communication not involving words. It is more difficult to decide how far *Chester* uses speeches, words, and texts as signs, and to a large degree this has to be done by critical judgement of how they work in the cycle rather than by following the hints provided by explicit sign vocabulary. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, explicit sign vocabulary is found far more frequently with non-linguistic signs such as, for example, Christ's miracles, the Nativity star, the Magi's gifts, or Christ's actions after the Resurrection. Nevertheless, it does occur, usually with prophetic texts which require interpretation. The Expositor of play V (MS H version), referring to the prefigurative period Jonah spent in the whale, says, 'Lordinges, what this may signifie / Christ expoundes apertelie' (lines 353-54).<sup>13</sup> In play XXIII Antichrist urges the kings, 'token your people what I saye' (line 226), and Enock says that he 'hard tokeninge' (line 273) of Antichrist's coming. In play

VII Joseph says of Gabriel's vindication of Mary, 'when I hard that tokeninge, / from her durst I noe waye twynne' (lines 534-35). But if the first caveat for the critic looking for linguistic signs in *Chester* is the relative infrequency of explicit terminology in this area, the second must be that explicitness does not of itself reveal anything of the dramatic function of the phenomena which it accompanies. To say that a speech or text signifies is simply to say, literally, that it 'means'. Speech is a signifying medium and the sacred text a field of signs requiring interpretation of various kinds. The terminology of sign appears more dramatically pointed because of its use in a cycle where visible signifiers are so frequent. *Chester's* relatively, though not completely, homogeneous vocabulary of sign may involve a degree of idiomatic coincidence.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the effect of such lexical overlap as exists between linguistic and non-linguistic signification, together with the clear emphasis on the importance of the latter in the action, is that we become strongly aware of these different phenomena offering similar heuristic and fideistic challenges. Whatever the reason for the explicit vocabulary being shared, the process of understanding and believing is analogous, and it is correspondingly hard to separate words or texts which challenge in this way from other signs. When the cycle foregrounds the interpretative response made by characters to speech, text, or word, these things are clearly receiving special emphasis as linguistic signs.

With the exception of Christ's speeches, the most extensive sections of linguistic signification are the prophetic texts, which may have been quoted in Latin, and are given in English version and then interpreted.<sup>15</sup> They are verbal signs in the common sense that they communicate, but also in the more weighty sense that, being scriptural, they carry for anyone who reveres the scriptures an evidential force. They do not simply 'tell' (as any scriptural or non-scriptural text will do); they 'bear witness' to further truths. *Chester* accentuates this evidential significance, and turns the texts into dramatic signs by the way it uses them in the action.

The prophetic texts tend to be placed within the action which fulfills them, or closely adjacent to it, and consequently they function more as probative signs than predictions.<sup>16</sup> This is true even of the H version of play V which looks more like the traditional *processus prophetarum* located historically in the Old Testament. Balaak is brought to a sense of God's might: 'Now see I well no man on lyve / gaynes with him for to shryve [error for 'stryve']' (V. 437-38). It is the prophetic evidence which elicits this response. Herod has the prophecies of Christ's birth searched because he has accepted the scriptures' evidential force (as Balaak, with less historical likelihood, was forced to do), but *Chester's* particular interest is in

extending this testimony to the point of Herod's violent and evil response to sign: 'Have donne! Those bookes were rent and torne' (VIII. 351). It is characteristic of the cycle's preference for dramatic contrasts of belief in relation to sign that the Magi are present on stage as believers in these signs while Herod rants against them. It is not always the case that the status of texts as signs is so clearly pointed up by the action in which they appear: the prophecies of Antichrist are not used to generate contrastive responses. But it is arguable that this is the very feature which makes play XXII seem so structurally anomalous in the cycle. Furthermore, although the prophecies are given an isolated position by having their own play, they do come immediately before their fulfilment and provide a perspective for the audience in the subsequent play of belief and disbelief inspired by Antichrist's false signs: the prophecy of Daniel (XXII. 139-56) bears witness to Antichrist as God's great enemy, but also ensures that the audience sees him as a sign of God's imminent arrival to judge (lines 157-58). The prophetic text turns an event into a sign. Similarly in the Herod play just mentioned, the prophetic texts did not just function as dramatic signs providing a focus for contrasting belief and disbelief; they also turned the Magi themselves into signs for Herod since they are present on stage to hear the text which prophesies them. Herod's Doctor tactlessly points this out (VIII. 318-24).

The many declarations of belief inspired by Christ's non-linguistic signs, especially the miracles, tend to give prominence to this means of theophany at the expense of his verbal assertions.<sup>17</sup> It is also true that the latter are unattended by explicit references to sign from believers and often do not generate the contrast of response which accompanies the miracles. Yet their deployment in the cycle makes it hard for us to regard them as other than linguistic signs to be viewed as analogous to the non-linguistic ones (with certain differences which I will set out later). This is especially true of the central plays of Christ's ministry, plays XIII and XIV.

Christ's verbal revelation of himself to the disciples and others alternates with his miracles as a different form of theophany. They are coupled by him explicitly as proofs which the Jews should believe:

That I spake to you openlye  
and workes that I doe verelye  
in my Fathers name almightie  
beareth wytnes of mee. (XIII. 239-42)<sup>18</sup>

They are implicitly equal in having revealed the Godhead and God's will to the

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disciples (XV. 273-78). Christ's words are symbolically and thematically united with his deeds in play XIII where the healing of Caecus exemplifies the declaration 'Ego sum lux mundi' and the claim 'I am risyng and life verey' is then supported by the raising of Lazarus. When proof by sign is sinfully demanded by Herod, not only is miracle withheld, but 'Jesus nihil respondebit' (play XVI, following line 178). Furthermore, while one of Lazarus's sisters reaches belief as a result of miraculous sign (XIII. 476-77), the other shows belief before the miracle in response to Christ's linguistic self-revelation (XIII. 385-95). When the merchants ask Christ for a sign, it is an assertion not an action which he provides (however miraculous its literal or figurative reference may be):

#### SECUNDUS MERCATOR

What signes nowe shewest thou here  
that preeves such power  
to shend our ware in such manere,  
maisterlye through thy mayne?

#### JESUS

This temple here I maye destroye,  
and through my might and my maistrye  
in dayes three hit edifie  
and buyld yt up agayne. (XIV. 249-56)

The Jews themselves couple Christ's words and deeds – his 'janglinge' and his 'postie' (XIV. 350, 365-68; XVI. 9-10) – and this serves to keep these parallel means of revelation together in our minds even when, in the Trial, his miracles no longer complement his words. Christ's reply to Cayphas (XVI. 46-50) is in the manner of his earlier theophanous declarations, and its dramatic effect comes partly from our memory of previous occasions when words have seemed like signs by analogy with the deeds or have been clearly foregrounded as signs which engender problems of response:

I am Goddes Sonne almightye,  
and here I tell thee truelye  
that me yet shall thou see  
sytt on Goddes right hand him bye,  
mankynd in clowdes to justefye.<sup>19</sup>

Although only Christ's enemies are present, Cayphas's response reminds us of Herod's reaction to the signs of Christ's incarnation provided by the prophetic texts:

'Justifie!' Marye, fye, fye on thee, fye!  
Wytnes of all this compenye  
that falsely lyes hee! (XVI. 51-53)

There may be no explicit contrast of belief dramatised on stage but the paradigm of words the evidential force of which is being rejected is still present.

To summarise, although associating words and signs in *Chester* may seem too unsupported by terminology to be convincing, and conceptually too fundamental to be of critical value, it seems evident that some linguistic phenomena are given a special status as signs within the dramatic action of the cycle. They have this by virtue of the interpretative process which they, like non-linguistic signs, receive, and also by virtue of the fideistic challenge which they offer to their recipients – a challenge analogous to that posed by the miraculous signs on which the cycle concentrates. The drama's methods of incorporating words, texts, and speeches frequently accentuate the analogy between linguistic and non-linguistic signification. Nevertheless, there are areas of ambiguity where it is hard to judge whether or not the cycle is indeed foregrounding word as sign. This is especially true of the plays of Christ's early life, where only an impression that words are functioning as special dramatic signs can be argued for.

Strictly considered, the signs offered in plays XI and XII are miraculous: the changes effected in the biblical text which Simeon tampered with (XI. 37-87), Christ's miraculous knowledge shown before the Doctors (XI. 255-56), and before the Woman taken in adultery, who says 'godhead full in thee I see / that knowes worke that doe wee' (XII. 277-78). However, the effect of these scenes in performance would be to blur the distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic matters. The audience would recognize that in each case the miracle is situated in language: the scriptural words reinstated by the angel, the miraculously mature speech of a child, and the writing on the sand through which Christ reveals his knowledge of the pharisees' sin. The theophany of these plays emerges from a combination of miraculous action or knowledge with the linguistic medium in which it is expressed – an association which certainly anticipates that in the Ministry plays but is less distinct.

The most apparent difference between the theophanous power of a miracle and that of a speech is that a miracle is self-authenticating because of its intrinsic nature:

only God could perform it.<sup>20</sup> This difference is, however, more apparent than real in *Chester*. At no time does the cycle propose that Christ's words are authenticated by his deeds, although they are closely associated. The author of play XIII does suggest that the assertions of Christ are authenticated by prophetic scripture (XIII. 3-5, 20, 25), and the Jews, like Herod in VIII, are culpable for rejecting signs which rest on known scriptural authority (XIII. 226). But the cycle subsequently avoids this criterion for judging the Jews. Martha does not allude to the prophecies when explaining her belief in Christ's revelation that he is 'risynge and life verey' (XIII. 385-401), and the Jews are not rebuked by Christ for ignoring the prophecies. Although Centurio does link Christ's last cry to prophecy (XVIA. 364-67), and Cayphas's objection is thus demonstrably wrong in terms of scriptures which he should accept, the cycle actually concentrates on presenting Christ as a prophet bearing witness to truth (XVI. 279-80) rather than on authenticating his linguistic signs by earlier prophetic authority.<sup>21</sup> Within the action, Christ's linguistic signs are presented as if they are self-authenticating. Biblical in source and doctrinally central, they have the primary evidential force which the prophetic texts had. Although the cycle spends so much of its time appearing to prove the grounds for Christian belief, it is actually affirming, combining some probative demonstration to the characters with an assumption of the terms of belief it is purporting to give evidence for. This overt but inconsistent self-justification suggests a work of late-medieval orthodoxy which does not feel a doctrinal need to prove but recognises the strategic advantage of doing so.<sup>22</sup> *Chester* treats its signs as if they could create belief, and when characters fail to respond appropriately, it is the rejection of belief that matters, not whether the characters possessed the knowledge which would have enabled them to identify the sign as one. *Chester* thus sidesteps the theological problem that one could not recognize something as a sign unless one already knew that of which it was a sign.<sup>23</sup> Thus also the Jews can be damned for their rejection of miracles as magic, and their rejection of Christ's claims as merely assertions: theirs is a failure of belief which the cycle pretends is a failure to accept the evidence of their own eyes and ears – something which other, better souls are able to do, however initially hesitant they might have been. (Salome and Simeon are obvious examples of this.)

Evil characters constantly abuse signification, either by misunderstanding and rejecting true signs or by offering false signs to seduce others to false belief. In Matthew 24. 24, Christ predicts this of the end of time referring to the pretended Messiahs who will offer 'signa magna, et prodigia, ita ut in errorem inducantur (si fieri potest) etiam electi' but *Chester* does not restrict this process to the false



miracles in its uniquely long Eschaton.<sup>24</sup> This activity occurs throughout the cycle and includes a whole range of abuses of linguistic signification from the simple matter of providing false interpretations to parody of the special status of sign which some words receive from their dramatic presentation.

The self-revelatory signs offered by Lucifer, Herod, and Antichrist lack the authenticity of scripture or doctrine, and are subverted by the sources which the characters employ to support them: Lucifer, trying to usurp God, borrows God's words;<sup>25</sup> Herod uses prophecy but has just rejected the probative force of such texts; Antichrist mimics Christ's speech and, by using prophecy, uses the very signifying form which has just spoken against him in play XXII. (Both misapply the prophecies they cite.) All three assume that signs can change their meaning and retain their evidential force, despite being misappropriated from the system of belief within which they properly signify. No characters are more earnest students of the signifying process than the evil ones – in their desire that proper meanings be elicited and in their anxiety to authenticate their signs.<sup>26</sup> Further, both Herod and Antichrist attempt to use the evidential reciprocity which we have seen can hold between text and event: Herod by employing Jeremiah 6. 11 ('Effundam super parvulum . . .', play VIII, following line 324) to predict his Massacre of the Innocents and thus make it fulfil a prophecy, and Antichrist by using Zephaniah 3. 8 ('Expecta me in die resurrectionis mea . . .', play XXIII, following line 120) to impart the same power to his false resurrection.<sup>27</sup> The weakness of evil is revealed in its anxiety about signification; its self-defeating search for authenticity; its misapplication of text, and its thrust towards proof which confuses signs of different kinds. For, while Christ's speeches of self-revelation had an independent authority unreliant upon non-linguistic sign, evil characters hope that every sign backs up the others, and words can draw upon signs of action or appearance for their force. Thus Lucifer, in the midst of a powerful speech declaring his regality, unwisely seeks to support his claim with physical details which cannot but remind the spectator of the true God, the Saviour: 'Behoulde my bodye, handes and head – / the mighte of God is marked in mee' (I. 188-89).

A study of *Chester's* linguistic signs puts into relief this comic dimension of the cycle, but it also clarifies the spiritual role of Man. Men are not just the objects of communication through sign; they can declare their spiritual allegiance by similar means. The signs with which they do this have a quasi-sacramental function in signifying grace within the user.<sup>28</sup> They obviously differ from sacramental signs in that they do not actually cause the grace which they signify,<sup>29</sup> and for the period of the Old Testament they are not sacramentally imbued with grace anyway.

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Nevertheless, the cycle makes it clear (often explicitly) that a range of significant actions throughout history have borne witness to the spiritual condition of the user, and can continue to do so. Among these are sacrificing to God; accepting circumcision; living according to the Ten Commandments (Old Testament) or Christ's word (New Testament); loving each other; anointing Christ's feet, as the Magdalene does, and performing miraculous signs, which is a power promised to the believer at XX. 81-93.<sup>30</sup> Foremost among these signs is the linguistic sign given when the Creed is uttered. *Chester* dramatizes this at length, and we can view the Creed within the pattern of sign in the cycle in three ways: firstly, it falls within that general category of texts which require and receive interpretation for their significance to emerge. Secondly, the Creed functions within the action of its play rather as the biblical text did in the play of Simeon, or the writing on the sand in the episode of the Woman Taken in Adultery: it is the linguistic medium through which a miraculous, probative sign is provided. Amazed by the fact that the disciples are uttering the Creed in foreign tongues, the two 'alienigene' go off praising God (XXI. 388). Lastly, the Creed is a quasi-sacramental sign which declares the speaker to be a believer. In this respect it creates a link between Christ's historical disciples and those in the audience as both groups share a common verbal sign.

*Chester* dignifies Man by choosing as its central action the significatory process which links Man to God; by dramatizing that whole process from source to response; by giving him the spiritual responsibility of interpreting signs correctly (though threat is also implicit in this responsibility), and by attending throughout to signs of their spiritual allegiance which men and women can offer – signs which may be ceremonial, or consist in moral living, but which may also be miraculous as Christ's were, or as in the Creed, linguistic utterance which offers a human self-revelation to compare with Christ's speeches during the Ministry.

Much that is used as sign in *Chester* is visual in one way or another, from the miracles to Christ's risen body; from the animal skins with which Adam and Eve are indued to the *arma christi*. This article has argued, however, that it is this very concentration on sign which serves to draw our attention also to the verbal as a signifying medium, and which prevents us from disregarding this conceptual and theological commonplace, encouraging us instead to see the close parallels created for these two forms of sign in the action of the cycle. But if non-linguistic sign leads our attention to linguistic sign, it also falls behind, for the cycle's final commitment is to text. It is drama particularly close to the Bible, and it recalls us to that source by the speeches of the Gospel writers which, uniquely among the cycles, conclude *Chester*. In this respect, it would seem a less democratic medium for

communication than its visible signs would suggest.<sup>31</sup> Such an impression is enforced by the frequent allusions to Latin texts, or quotations from them, and by the provision of material the full ironic effect of which is only understandable by 'clarkes', such as the misapplied prophecies or Herod's reference to Athaliah (VIII. 333).<sup>32</sup> Certainly, the technique of exposing evil characters by their partial citation of the Bible is not special to *Chester*. But when Conscience in *Piers Plowman* rebukes Lady Meed for only quoting that part of the text which supports her interests, we can all enjoy the joke. This is not the case in *Chester*. Nevertheless, the cycle treats linguistic sign less exclusively than this suggests. Like the Bible, as Augustine saw it, there is nothing obscure in one part of the cycle which is not revealed by other things: the subtle textual ironies may be lost on some, but the evil pretence to signification, of which they are a part, cannot be.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, *Chester* addresses itself to the problem that linguistic signs may be opaque to many, and offers a dramatically enjoyable, if unconvincing, answer to it in the Painters' play of the Shepherds (VII).

Although it is not explained how the Shepherds come to understand Gabriel's Latin message, 'Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis', the fact is that they do respond appropriately to its key terms. The episode is unusually long (seventy-seven lines to the ten of *N-town*)<sup>34</sup> and the whole of Gabriel's message is addressed by the Shepherds, not just the 'Gloria', as in *N-town*. The improvement in their recognition of the Latin has been noted by William F. Munson.<sup>35</sup> Its gradualness, however, is less important here than the fact that, from line 400, they begin to get the words right, and to declare the feelings consequently aroused in them. This part of the episode removes them from the world of burlesque, as they first recognize Gabriel as the singer and establish 'gloria', and after some lack of success,<sup>36</sup> correctly arrive at 'pax' (line 416), 'hominibus' (line 420), and 'bonae voluntatis' (line 426), with Garcus rounding off the success with the three words expressing the essence of the Incarnation: 'Deo', 'terra', and 'pax' (VII. 430-34).

Even if the words of Gabriel's message were not evident visually by being painted on scroll or wagon,<sup>37</sup> they obviously form the quintessential linguistic sign in *Chester*: conveying information which requires interpretation, bearing witness, and demanding a fideistic response from those who perceive it. In their struggle with this sign, the Shepherds may not arrive at literal meanings, but they achieve mysteriously apt responses which constitute emotional renderings of the words' spiritual significance. They thus become, within their limitations, Expositors, one might even say more persuasive expositors than those who interpret the prophecies.

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It is suitable that Primus Pastor, recognizing that Gabriel 'gloryd', should say that he could not be sorry when he heard this (line 402); also that the singing of 'pax' should particularly delight him as no other voice has done (lines 418-19). When Secundus Pastor quakes with awe at the word 'hominibus', he reminds us by this that God's intentions for men are truly awesome. It is also easy to see that 'bonae voluntatis' is a 'cropp that passeth all other' (line 427) since it is upon having good will that Man's peace from God ultimately depends.

Clearly, *Chester* is not going to elevate the Shepherds into knowledgeable glossators. Indeed, it returns them to the popular culture of 'troy, loly, loly, loo' which they sing presumably in chorus with the audience. But as part of its communal nativity celebration, the cycle suggests that no man is excluded from interpreting God's linguistic signs.<sup>38</sup> It does not say what permits the lowly to do this but it wants to say that they can. It is important for us to recognize this extension of linguistic signification to all because, together with the cycle's constant attention to the sign process, it serves to balance the hieratic severity of a work which presents God in terms of power.<sup>39</sup> *Chester's* Christ may have worn a gilded face throughout his Ministry, but the words which issued from his mouth were signs which joined men to Him, and they were part of an extensive pattern of signification the essence of which was the dialogue between God and Man. If we attend to this as well as to the nominalist emphasis on the power of God, we can locate the *Chester* cycle more convincingly within that moderate Ockhamism which was the form nominalism took in late-medieval England.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, if the ideas in this specifically literary article are acceptable, they seem to offer a good framework within which to investigate *Chester's* relationship to early reformist pressures in the areas of images, biblical interpretation, and the spiritual power and responsibility of the individual.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See G-H. Allard, 'L'articulation du sens et du signe dans le *De doctrina christiana* de s. Augustin', *Studia Patristica*, 14 (1976), 377-88 (p. 384). A bibliography of writings on the medieval understanding of sign would be impossible to give here, but the following work by Marcia L. Colish remains seminal: *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge*, second edition (Lincoln, Nebr., 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Saint Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, edited by Joseph Martin, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 32 (Turnholt, 1962), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> I am excepting from the present discussion the specialised use of sign in the formation of logical propositions.

<sup>4</sup> Colish, p. 48 and *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis I. 26; Romans I. 20.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Saint Augustine, *Sermo 141*, in *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J-P. Migne and others, 221 vols (Paris, 1844-64), XXXVIII, cols 776-77; *De Trinitate*, edited by W. J. Mountain with Fr Glorie, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 50 and 50A (Turnholt, 1968), XI. 1. 1-9 (p. 333) and XV. 3. 71-75 (pp. 465-66); G. S. M. Walker, 'Erigena's Conception of the Sacraments', *Studies in Church History*, 3 (1966), 150-58 (p. 154); Saint Bonaventure, *Itinéraire de l'esprit vers Dieu*, Texte de Quaracchi, Introduction, traduction et notes par H. Duméry, Bibliothèque des Textes Philosophiques (Paris, 1960), p. 58; Colish, pp. 211-12.

<sup>7</sup> This is true even of the Creation plays. MS R has God declare his supremacy to be proved by his 'perpetuall provydençe' (I. 22-3), but MS H and one of the Group (B) read 'prudence'. This is, in either case, more of an allusion to God's plan than an instance of exemplarism.

<sup>8</sup> Discussed in Peter W. Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 101-03.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence M. Clopper, 'The Principle of Selection of the Chester Old Testament Plays', *Chaucer Review*, 13 (1979), 272-83. The nominalistic background which gives point to this was established by Kathleen M. Ashley, 'Divine Power in Chester Cycle and Late Medieval Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39 (1978), 387-404.

<sup>10</sup> R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents, with an essay 'Music in the Cycle' by Richard Rastall* (Chapel Hill, 1983), p. 103.

<sup>11</sup> David Mills, ' "None Had the Like nor the Like Darste Set Out": The City of Chester and its Mystery Cycle' in *Staging the Chester Cycle*, edited by David Mills, Leeds Texts and Monographs, 9 (Leeds, 1986), pp. 1-16; John J. McGavin, 'Sign and Transition: The Purification Play in Chester', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 11 (1980), 90-104; Travis, *Dramatic Design*, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> See Jean D. Pfliegerer and Michael J. Preston, *A Complete Concordance to The Chester*

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*Mystery Plays* (London, 1981), pp. 354 and 446, and for a *catalogue raisonné*, John J. McGavin, 'Sign and Related Didactic Techniques in the Chester Cycle of Mystery Plays' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1982), Appendix 1.

<sup>13</sup> Other explicit examples can be found at MS H, V. 389-90, and MS Hm, XXII. 27, 85, 107, 114.

<sup>14</sup> The vocabulary is not wholly consistent: play XXII uses a range of words and phrases, not just 'sign' or 'token', for its passages of signification; MS Hm, XVI. 172 reads 'vertue' where MS H reads 'signe', and there is one application of 'sign' in a context supported by theological tradition, though not by the cycle's general usage, namely, the statement by Christ at the Last Supper (XV. 70) that signs, clearly prefigurative, are now to be replaced by reality. The limited extent of this lexical variety is, of course, more remarkable than its existence in a cycle of plays.

<sup>15</sup> Latin was sometimes quoted (XXIII. 117-20) but Lumiansky and Mills consider that oral delivery for all Latin in the MSS cannot be proved, *Essays and Documents*, p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> See R. A. Brawer, 'The Form and Function of the Prophetic Procession in the Middle English Cycle Play', *Annuaire Medievale*, 13 (1972), 88-124.

<sup>17</sup> Salome, the Woman taken in adultery, Mary, and the Janitor and Citizens, together with the reports of the unbelieving Jews, all contribute to this.

<sup>18</sup> One notes here, and in MSS B and H following play XIII, line 270, the association with linguistic phenomena of the adverbs 'openly' or 'apartelie' which might as appropriately be used of Christ's deeds. The phraseology suggests that Christ's words have a revelatory force like that of his actions.

<sup>19</sup> See also Pilate's lengthy struggle with Christ's words in the interrogation.

<sup>20</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, edited by Thomas Gilbey and Fathers of the Dominican Province, 60 vols (London, 1964-76), XLV (1970), p. 143. *Chester* is careful in its use of the term 'miracle'. Helias objects to Antichrist's use of it for his own false signs (XXIII. 410).

<sup>21</sup> See also XIII. 140, XIV. 61, 170, XVIa. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Lumiansky and Mills suggest 'a date in the general period c. 1500-1550 when the Exemplar took material shape', *Essays and Documents*, p. 48. See also p. 194, and David Mills, "'In This Storye Consistethe Oure Chefe Faithe": the Problems of Chester's Play(s) of the Passion', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 16 (1985), 326-36 (p. 334).

<sup>23</sup> Colish, pp. 39-41.

<sup>24</sup> Ashley views the Eschaton as a 'necessary structural counter thrust' to divine power (p. 391). I would recast this in terms of a general parodic perversion of sign in the cycle.

<sup>25</sup> For example, I. 184 and 11; 187 and 31; 188-89 and 116-17; 192 and 123; 193 and 20-21. Since Play I was the last play to enter the cycle, this suggests an author alert to the established pattern of signification in the work. See Lawrence M. Clopper, 'The History and Development of

the Chester Cycle', *Modern Philology*, 75 (1978), 219-46 (pp. 228 and 243).

<sup>26</sup> For example, I. 180-81; VIII. 209-10; XXIII. 89-91.

<sup>27</sup> In both cases the full text actually prophesies the fury of the Lord. Jeremiah has threatened the Jews with it because they do not delight in the word of the Lord. The parallel with Herod is obvious. In the Zephaniah passage God is rising to judge the nations. As with Antichrist himself, this textual sign signifies the imminence of the Last Judgement.

<sup>28</sup> 'Sacrificium ergo inuisibile inuisibilis sacrificii sacramentum, id est, sacrum signum est'. Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, edited by Bernard Dombart and Alphonse Kalb, *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, 47 and 48 (Turnholt, 1955), vol. 47, p. 277.

<sup>29</sup> Aquinas, vol. XXIX (1969), p. 126, and vol. LVI (1975), p.8.

<sup>30</sup> Chester uses Mark 16. 15-18, by no means its favoured Gospel, to include Christ's promise of this power to men.

<sup>31</sup> V. A. Kolve early recognized this learned dimension of the cycle in *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, 1966), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> The story of Athaliah appears in II Kings 9. 1, and II Chronicles 22. 10-12. It contains various dramatic and typological ironies when compared to the history of Herod in Chester. These are discussed by Ruth M. Keane, 'The Theme of Kingship in the Chester Cycle' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1977), p. 167, and by John Paul Pival, Jr, 'Staging as Projection of Imitated Action in the Chester Cycle', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Wisconsin, 1973), pp. 167-68.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, CCSL, 32, p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> The N-Town cycle is closest to the spirit of Chester in that its shepherds do not sing in *imitation* of Gabriel, an action which Chester would find out of place because imitation of sign tends to reveal evil intent.

<sup>35</sup> William F. Munson, 'Audience and Meaning in Two Medieval Dramatic Realisms', *Comparative Drama*, 9 (1975), 44-67, (p. 51).

<sup>36</sup> All Tertius Pastor can do is remove from the reckoning 'sar', 'cis', and 'pax merye Mawd . . .'. Garcius gets 'terra' mixed up with 'tarre' (except in MSS A and R) but his response has an appropriateness to the correct word nevertheless.

<sup>37</sup> There are no entries in the Records to suggest that they were, but this possibly reflects the ease with which the Painters' Guild could supply such a property. See *Chester*, edited by Lawrence M. Clopper, *Records of Early English Drama* (Manchester, 1979).

<sup>38</sup> Communal and celebratory aspects are discussed in Munson, pp. 53-54, and Travis, Chapter 4.

<sup>39</sup> Both Ashley and Travis, Chapter 5, develop this aspect.

<sup>40</sup> William J. Courtenay, 'Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion', in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, edited by Charles Trinkaus with Heiko Oberman, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, 10 (Leiden, 1974), 26-59 (pp. 54-55).