

Leeds Studies in English

Article:

David Mills, "'Some Precise Cittizins": Puritan Objections to Chester's Plays', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 29 (1998), 219-33

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=124887&silos_library=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

'Some Precise Cittizins': Puritan Objections to Chester's Plays

David Mills

On 15 May 1572, Edmund Grindal, Archbishop of York, wrote to the Mayor of Chester, John Hanky, saying that 'we understand that you intend and purpose shortly to set forth a play commonly called the usuall plays of Chester wherein as we are credibly informed are contained sundry absurd & gross errours & heresies joyned with profanation & great abuse of god's holy word'.¹ Grindal's purpose in writing was to stop the performance of Chester's Whitsun Plays, intended for that year. But his letter had no effect. The Plays were performed.

Grindal's letter is one of several relating to Chester's Plays that have been copied into a book of the letters sent to or by Christopher Goodman, a leading figure in the Reformation, who had been born in Chester and returned to his native Cheshire in the late 1560s or early 1570s, as we shall see. The volume of his letters is now among the Plas Power manuscripts in the Denbighshire County Record Office at Ruthin. My purpose in this paper is to look at a subsequent letter in that collection that Christopher Goodman, Robert Rogerson and John Lane sent to Grindal by a certain 'R. L.' in 1572 after the production of the Plays, setting out in more detail the 'errours and heresies' to which Grindal refers. The letter indicates the nature of the objections to the Plays by their Protestant opponents, and reveals some differences between the text that the correspondents scrutinized in 1572 and our extant texts.

It is, however, important first to place the Plays and the letters in their contemporary context.

The Background

The diocese of Chester 'ranked as one of "the dark corners of the land" . . . with the constant and alarming threat of Catholicism on the one hand and of irreligion on

the other'.² Ministers who would not have been welcomed in the south for their extreme views were appointed as a matter of policy to livings within the diocese in order to improve the quality of the ministry and to combat the perceived threat of recusancy and idolatry. The main strongholds of Catholicism within the large diocese lay within Lancashire, and specifically north of the Ribble. There were few recusants in Cheshire, and such as there were were concentrated within the county, in the south-western parishes of Bunbury and Malpas, and most significantly within the city of Chester itself.³ Conversely, evidence for Puritan ministers and laity is strongest for the east of the county, in the area closest to Manchester, which became a centre for Puritan assembly.⁴

Such evidence is, however, difficult to interpret. Wark states firmly that 'Recusancy lacked a clear lead from the families whose influence was predominant in the county.'⁵ But the lack of clear evidence does not preclude suspicion, which may perhaps have been either groundless or justified. Thus, a list, compiled in c. 1579-80, of county leaders suspected of recusant leanings includes major figures such as William Brereton of Brereton and his father-in-law, Sir John Savage.⁶ Savage had sent his son abroad to be educated, which was usually taken as a sign of Catholic sympathy. A document at Hatfield House, a report to Lord Burleigh, shows that the Earl of Derby, then Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, was suspected of wishing to abet the escape of Mary Queen of Scots.⁷ Although the career of neither man suffered as a result of these suspicions, the national authorities were keeping a close watch on those in local positions of responsibility and, in an area where recusancy was a potential threat, incautious acts such as the promotion of 'popish plays' would attract considerable attention. The Earl was alleged by Goodman to have given Hanky some support in his wish to have the Plays performed in 1572,⁸ while it was in Savage's mayoralty, in 1575, that the Plays were performed for the last time.

A further factor in the appointment of 'precise' ministers to the Diocese was the lack of trust placed in Elizabeth's former tutor, William Downham, Bishop of Chester from 1561-77. Rebuked by Elizabeth in 1568 for his slackness, and again in 1574 after adverse reports from the Privy Council, Downham was seen locally as lax. His diocese was, of course, large and diverse, divided between the archdeaconries of Chester and Richmond, and hard to control, but it was only after the warning of 1574 that he conducted a visitation of the whole diocese.⁹ Significantly, the Ecclesiastical Commission which reported adversely on him to the Privy Council in 1567 had included Christopher Goodman. When the Plays were performed in Chester in 1572, the cathedral accounts record payments for cloth 'for ye mansyon ouer ye gates' and a

barrel of beer for the players, signalling support for the production from within the Bishop's own church.¹⁰

The three men who signed the post-Whitsun letter were all prominent reformers. John Lane was prebendary of the cathedral and one to whom recusants within the diocese were referred for instruction 'for ther better resolucion in matters of religion wherewith they ar intangled'.¹¹

It seems certain that 'Robert Rogerson' was in fact the same man who subsequently became Archdeacon of Chester, Robert Rogers. Robert appears in some court records as 'Robertus Rogers alias Rogerson'.¹² No other cleric called 'Rogerson' served a Cheshire church at that date. Archdeacon Rogers is best known through the various compilations made from his antiquarian notes by his son David between 1609 to c. 1636-37 as a memorial to Robert; the work in its various forms is known as 'A Breviary of Chester History'. Robert was born in Chester and was probably the same Robert Rogers who attended the King's School, Chester, from 1544 to 1549 before going up to Christchurch, Oxford, where he gained his MA in 1551. By 1565 he was rector of the Cheshire parish of Gawsworth, and in 1580 he became Archdeacon of Chester, a position that he held until his death in 1595. His will (27 June 1580, proved 22 January 1595), is Puritan in tenor, requesting simple burial and a sermon of admonition.¹³

The fourth chapter of the Breviary, on the 'lawdable exersises' of the city of Chester, contains the well-known description of the Whitsun Plays.¹⁴ The amount of detail that it provides indicates that Robert had spent a considerable amount of time going through the documentary evidence for the plays, supplemented perhaps by informants and by his own experience. Perhaps, paradoxically, he was fascinated with them as a 'lawdable exersise' of the city, since he includes them under that heading among other, entirely secular, civic customs. But his researches may also indicate his determination to mount a plausible scholarly case against them on the grounds of purpose, content and expense. The closing words to that section in the 1609 Breviary reflect his basic objection, that the Plays 'defiled' the Bible by adulterating its text:

And we haue all cause to power out our prayers before god that
neither wee. nor oure posterities after us. maye neuar see the like
Abomination of Desolation, with suche a Clowde of Ignorance to
defile with so highe a hand the moste sacred scriptures of god.

But the latest version of the Breviary, c. 1636-37, which perhaps owes more to David than to Robert in its sentiments, tones down this outspoken condemnation:

These playes weare the worke of one Rondoll. higen a monke in Chester Abbaye, whoe, in a good deuotion transeled the bible, in to seuerall partes, and playes soe as the Comon. people mighte, heare the same, by their playenge, and also by action, in their sighte [. . .] we muste Iudge this monke, had noe euill Intension. but secrett deuotion there in. soe also the Cittizens that did acte and practize the same. to. their gret. coste.

In this entry the plays have become rehabilitated as a laudable communal act of instruction and worship. We can only assume that by the later 1630s the threat to the Reformation movement had receded sufficiently for the Plays to be viewed as their Post-Reformation Banns had presented them to the later sixteenth century, a Protestant impulse to bring the Bible to the people rather than a Catholic act of defiance.

Surprisingly, the Breviary makes no mention of something that recurs in Goodman's letters, the attacks on the Plays from the city's pulpits. This is particularly odd, since the Breviary indicates that 'the watchmen of our soules or Deuines' had spoken out against the abuses in the city's Midsummer Show, the great parade of carnival figures that was staged on St John's Eve as an alternative to the Plays. In the margin David instances: the devil in feathers presented by the Butchers; the alewife and attendants presented by the Innkeepers; and 'Christe in stringes' – all characters who appear in the Plays as well as the Show. Possibly Robert did not mention attacks from the pulpit in his notes about either Plays or Show. And David Rogers seems to speak from his own later knowledge, since he writes approvingly of the reform of the Show by the Puritan Mayor Henry Hardware junior in 1600, which he could have observed. David seems to have objected to the appearance of the figures of the Devil and Christ within an otherwise popular and carnivalesque entertainment involving dragons, giants, hobby horses, naked boys and the like. In addition, he objected to the alewife because it involved a man wearing woman's clothing. In his 1618-19 version of the Breviary David praises the Show as having been reformed and claims that 'for the decensie of it now, it is moste Comendable, rich, and beautifull'.

The first signatory of the letter and the principal opponent of the Plays, Christopher Goodman, was a man of international reputation as a Reformer. Our knowledge of Goodman's career and contacts is significantly extended by the material in the letter-book and other documents in the Plas Power collection. He tells us that his parents were Cestrians and that he himself was born and brought up 'for the most part' in the city. He seems to have been educated at the King's School in Chester. He

attended Brasenose College Oxford from 1538, gaining BA in 1541, and MA in 1544. When Henry VIII reformed the fellowships and awards, his funding was transferred to Christchurch College Oxford and, as he tells us, considerably enhanced. He must have been there at the same time as Robert Rogers. He gained his BD in 1551. Shortly after Mary's accession, following advice from John Knox, whom he had recently met, he fled to Strasburg and thence to Frankfurt, where he joined the schismatics among the Protestant community and subsequently withdrew to Geneva. There he and John Knox were chosen as pastors to the English community in 1555.

Goodman's book, *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed*, in which he claimed that women should not hold power and that rulers who did not support the true faith could be killed, was published in 1558, as Elizabeth ascended the English throne. In consequence he was not at first welcome in his native country and instead joined Knox in Scotland where, in 1559, he was appointed minister at Ayr and the following year moved to a position at St Andrews. In January 1566 he accompanied Sir Henry Sidney, Lord Deputy, to Ireland as his chaplain. By 1570 Goodman was back in Cheshire as vicar of Aldford. Thereafter, he was constantly crossing swords with the ecclesiastical authorities, resisting Archbishop Parker's vestment ordinances and the introduction of the new Prayer Book. Although deprived of his living, he regained it through the good offices of the Earl of Warwick and continued his outspoken and theologically informed criticisms of the Elizabethan settlement. He died in Chester on 4 June 1603.

Goodman's stubborn defiance of the ecclesiastical authorities was balanced by his exemplary life of good works. In 1586 he was commissioned by the city council to try to raise money towards the £100 asked by a Mr Trew to bring water to the conduit at the High Cross. The order describes him as 'a furtherer of all kinde and sorte of good Accions'.¹⁵ He, too, was the man entrusted to make the anonymous offer of £100 for poor relief 'on condition that the numbers of ale- and beer-brewers be limited, no citizen to resort to an ale-house, no ale or beer to be sold above 1/2d per quart, and poor to be provided for and not go abroad on pain of expulsion from the city'.¹⁶ He was one of those charged with raising money in Cheshire for the relief of the citizens of Nantwich after the town was destroyed in a great fire on 10 December 1583. And his will contains provision 'to sett the pore of St brydes one worke' and 'to by come for the provision of the poore at an easier Rate when it shall growe deare for the vse of the Cittie'.¹⁷

Goodman was by nature a leader and activist, one of those who gained the support of the Privy Council for the introduction of monthly preaching exercises in every deanery in the Chester diocese. These exercises provided a focus for the Puritan

movement and caused the Bishop considerable disquiet, as some of the letters to Goodman and his fellow ministers indicate. Inevitably, such a man polarised opinions. His sermons were often controversial and were sometimes interrupted by members of the congregation.¹⁸ The Bishop wrote to the Archbishop complaining that Goodman had conducted a service in the 'Genevian' manner which had attracted some fifty people in from the surrounding parishes in Chester. Significantly, when his wife expressed concern that he would again lose his living by his resistance to the Church authorities, Goodman confidently affirmed that he had the support of many of the gentry throughout the county, and when he complained to his accusers that he was being kept waiting in London, at considerable expense to himself, for a decision, they responded that he had wealthy enough friends back in Cheshire. Although the authorities might threaten, Goodman knew that the Bishop of Chester was effectively powerless against him because the diocese was dominated by Puritan clergy.

The Document

The post-Whitsun letter of 1572 was evidently written in response to a request from Grindal. Despite his earlier assurance that he had been 'credibly informed' of the absurdities in the Plays, the Archbishop must have asked for specific evidence of their 'superstitious' natures before proceeding further. So Goodman and Rogers wrote to him:

to that effect We have according to your *Grace's* request sent herewithall the notes of such absur-dities as are truly collected out of their old originall, by the which your wisdoms may easily [understand *deleted*] judge of the rest

and appended a list of absurdities which can be compared with our the extant text. The 'old originall' referred to here is clearly the master text for the Plays. The existence of such a text is indicated in the earliest reference to a civic play in Chester, a Corpus Christi Play, in a document of 20 April 1422 which refers the companies concerned to their responsibilities 'secundum Originale'.¹⁹ Company accounts record payments for copying the company's text from the 'Regenall'. It was evidently readily available for consultation.

The document reads as follows (for the sake of clarity, I have changed the alignment so that each play is on its own line, and I have put in square brackets the play- and line-references from the EETS edition²⁰):

Notes of the absurdities &c in the Chester plays.

Pag. 4. Abraham ex merito should receive a son. [4/145-60, esp 147-48]

5. The Ark called a Shrine [5/61-64; Appendix IB, 85-88]

7 Ioseph chargeth his wife with open words, contrary to the Scriptures. [No equivalent]

Also he reprehendeth marriage betwixt a young person & an old. [6/125-52]

8 Sybill is brought in so superstitious a manner as is not commendable. [6/337-48]

Ioseph grudgeth against tribute paying.[6/389-416]

Two midwives to Christ Tibill & Salome.[6/469ff]

The miracle of drying up of Salomes hands & the restoring of the same [6/525-63],

And feigned miracles of Frier Bartholomew, of the temple by necromancy.[6/564-635]

Of 3 Suns appearing.[6/636-39]

Of the ox & the ass honouring of Christ [640-43]

Sybill & Octavian talking together [6/644-82]

Octavian saw a maid with a child in her arms in a starr with a bright X in his head.[6/651-54]

Octavian honoured him with <gap> & sensed the starr. [6/655-60]

9 The unreverent speaking of the shepherds who by the Scriptures seem to be honest men [Play 7 - no passage specifically]

The foolish descanting of the Shepherds upon Gloria in excelsis [7/376-435]

The angels suspected of the Shepherds to be sheep-stealers.[7/394-99] with a lewd merry song.[[7/444-47+SD]

Their kissing of the cratch & clothes.[7/490-1]

Their vain offerings to move laughter & to maintain Superstition.[7/552-96]

They forsake their vocation, not mentioned in Scripture [7/657-676]

Some of the shepherds to have been an Anchorate or Eremite &c. [7/667, 669]

10 The kings honour the virgin in place of Christ, & yet no mention of kings [No equivalent]

The souldiers of Herod use terms of neighbour princes not not <gap> [No equivalent]

11 Simeon to doubt of a virgin's birth & to put out the name of a maid twice out of his book writing in place thereof a good woman.[11/1-118]

Ioseph offereth a taper of wax.[11/143-46]

12 The Jews swear by Mahound.[No equivalent]

13. God made the Mass.[No equivalent]

14. The sacrament made a stage play.[15/65-104+SD)

16 A fable of Seth begging oyl in paradise to anoint Adam when he was sick.[17/73-88]

The deliverance of Adam &c out of hell [17/204+SD-12] & bringing these words to affirm his purpose Attollite portas.[17/192+SD]

Enoch & Elias living in paradise in the flesh & the abiding there for a time. [17/228+SD-52]

Michael bringing the fathers out of hell [?17/204+SD;17/276+SD] with the cross hanging upon the thief's back.[17/269-72]

17 The words. And therto a full ryche messe, in bred myn one bodie, & that bred I you gyve, your wyked lyffe to amend, becomen is my fleshe, through wordes 5 betwyxt the prestes handes.[No direct equivalent; cf.18/174-77]

18 Thomas sweareth by god omnipotent.[19/219]

19 Christ promiseth blyss for good works.[20/142-43]

20 Peter onely is said to create Matthias an Apostle [21/49-60]

The angell bringeth the Holy ghost to the Apostles [21/247]

The Creed made in 12 Articles by 12 Apostles every one their portion.[21/303-58]

Matthews words these. And I believe through godes grace soche beleffe as holy church has that godes bodie granted us was & to use in forme of bred. [21/343-46].

Simons words. And I beleve with devotion, of syn to have remission, through penance & contrition, & heven whan I am dead.[21/347-50]

21 The exposition of Malachy's prophecy concerning Enoch & Elias approving a religious life.[No equivalent]

Also the exposition of Iohn's revelation that Enoch & Elias are in paradise in the flesh.[22/172+SH-212]

The coming of Antichrist with turning of trees upwards.[23/81-88]

The 15 signs of the last day [22/260+Latin-340]

22 Antichrist to die & rise again [23/121-68]

Enoch & Elias talk with Antichrist [23/252+SD-588], & Elias blessing bread with the sign of the Cross.[23/565-76]

Michael killeth Antichrist.[23/624+SH-644+SD]

23 Purgatory affirmed [24/69-80, et passim], preaching of merits of man.[24/133-40, 149-58]

The divell speaking Latin [24/538-40+Latin, 557-564+Latin, 579-580+Latin], & setteth forth invocation of Saints.[?24/613-17]

The Goodman-Rogerson Text

Perhaps the most obvious feature of the list is the failure of the Goodman-

Rogerson play-numbers to correspond to those in the extant manuscripts. Since the comments on Play 7 relate to our Play 6, 'The Nativity', either a different division obtained in 1572, or there was another play between the Old and New Testament sequences that has been lost. The Sybil, and Joseph's complaint against taxes, also in our Play 6, are attributed to a Play 8, suggesting that our long 'Nativity' Play may have been reconstructed from a number of separate plays. The dislocation of numbers continues in the reference to Play 10, which combines the adoration of the Magi [Play 9] with the killing of the Innocents [Play 10].

By Play 11 the numbering is again in line with that of our extant text, but it becomes once more dislocated from Play 12 to the end. The dislocation is indicated by the reference to the sacrament as the subject of Play 14; in our extant text the Bakers' Play of 'The Last Supper' is Play 15. The intervening plays are the Butchers' Play of 'The Temptation, and the Woman Taken in Adultery' (12); the Glovers' Play of 'The Healing of the Blind Man and the Raising of Lazarus' (13); and the Corvisors' Play of 'Jesus at the House of Simon the Leper; Christ and the Money-lenders; Judas's Plot' (14). The objections to details in Plays 12 and 13 here are not sufficiently precise to enable the subjects to be identified, but neither is applicable to any of the three plays in the sequence. This suggests that there has been a reshaping of the material, something that had been suspected from the stanza-forms at the start of 13 and the use of the Expositor in play 12. As a result, Goodman-Rogerson describe a cycle of only 23 Plays, whereas all extant records and manuscripts describe one of 24 or 25 plays.

Many of the objections can be substantiated from the extant text and are readily understandable. In Play 11 the 'book-miracle' is one of the episodes taken over by the playwright from 'A Stanzaic Life of Christ'; no other source has been found. The 'taper' (it is not specified as such in the text) is a feature of the ceremony of Candlemass which was abolished at the Reformation. Play 15, 'The Last Supper', is objected to in its entirety as a subject unsuitable for dramatisation, though the objection presumably focuses upon the distribution of bread and wine at 65-104+SD. In Play 18 (Goodman-Rogerson 17), the claim that Michael brings the patriarchs out of Hell probably relates to the stage-direction after line 276, 'Tunc eant omnes, et incipiat Michael "Te Deum laudamus"', rather than the mixed stage-direction after 204, 'Hic extrahuntur patriarchi (Here must God take owt Adam).' The latest manuscript, H, omits the English after line 204 and reads simply 'Tunc Jesus accipiet Adam per manum'. The items to which Goodman and Rogerson object are apocryphal material; they do not object to the play in its entirety, although the Post-Reformation Banns defend the Play against such objections.

Goodman-Rogerson object in Play 19 to the blasphemous swearing, and to the prioritizing of good works over grace. Most of their objections for Play 20 are similarly verifiable – the special authority granted to St Peter, suggesting the apostolic succession of the papacy; the unscriptural delivery of the Holy Ghost by the Second Angel; and the traditional, but unscriptural, construction of the Apostles' Creed by the twelve apostles under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit. Matthew's speech seems to reflect directly once more the doctrine of Transubstantiation. Not surprisingly the exposition of St John's prophecy from Apocalypse 11. 3 and the Fifteen Signs of the end of the world, traditionally attributed to St Jerome, are among the objections.

The objections to Play 23, 'Antichrist' (Goodman 22) can all be substantiated from our extant text. Goodman and Rogerson evidently objected to the parodic nature of Antichrist's death and resurrection, and to the comically indecorous nature of the flying between the two prophets and Antichrist which characterizes their theological dispute. The blessing of bread with the sign of the cross can be inferred from the text, though there is no such direction. The 'signing' with the cross as an act of consecration was firmly rejected by the more puritanical Reformers as popish and superstitious, and the refusal to 'sign' a child at baptism was a constant source of dispute between Puritan clerics and the Church establishment. The fact that the bread here is endowed with a strange light, visible only to the devils, suggests again the 'Real Presence', a further source of objection.

The repeated references to Purgatory in Play 24, the Weavers' Play of 'The Last Judgement' (Goodman 23) inevitably made the play unacceptable to Goodman and Rogerson. The objection to the devil speaking Latin is more obscure. The Reformers do not object to the citation of the Vulgate Bible elsewhere in the cycle. There seems to be no reason to object to the devil's words merely on linguistic grounds. It seems most probable, therefore, that the objection is to putting the Scriptures into the mouths of the devils. The devils also do not refer to intercession, but that objection may represent a minor error on the Reformers' part or an elliptical wording in the list. It is, in fact, Jesus who makes this reference, responding to the words of the devils.

But perhaps the most interesting objections are those which have no counterpart in our text today. A cluster occurs in the 'Nativity' series, where, as we have noted, there seems to have been some textual rearrangement between our plays and the version seen by Goodman-Rogerson. In our text Joseph does not accuse his wife; his first speech (6/123-60) appears to be a soliloquy. But it comes abruptly after Elizabeth's direct address to him (6/121-22). A confrontation between Joseph and Mary has possibly been removed. Equally, in our text the Magi do not honour the Virgin

Mary. The Magi mention her in describing the Holy Family (9/128); and she and Joseph address the Magi at 184-203. Our manuscripts AR, both by the same scribe and copied in 1592 and 1600 respectively, contain a stanza found in no other manuscript in which 'God' welcomes the kings 'unto my mother and to me' (183+2). Could the sudden transition from Joseph's speech to the warning of the Angel at 224 represent the removal of the kings' obeisance to the Virgin? We have no mention of neighbouring kings in the boasts of the soldiers in Play 10, apart from a reference to 'the kinge of Scottes and all his hoste' (218).

The objections to our Play 22 (Goodman 21), the Clothworkers' Play of 'Antichrist's Prophets', also indicate differences from the extant text. There is no prophecy by Malachi in the sequence. The reference to Antichrist turning trees upside down occurs not in this play but in the Dyers' Play of 'Antichrist' which follows, 23/81-83. At that point in Play 23 Antichrist has just announced that he will raise the dead ('soone shall you see', 78), but instead of proceeding to do so, he abruptly announces:

Nowe wyl I turne, all through my might,
trees downe, the rootes upright –
that ys marveyll to your sight –
and fruyt groinge upon.
So shall they growe and multiplye. (81-85)

and only then fulfils his earlier promise. Goodman and Rogerson may have simply included this item to reinforce the superstitious nature of the coming of Antichrist in the cycle. At the same time, the positioning of the reference, coming as it does before the Fifteen Signs in the listing, might suggest that some more explicit reference to the coming and works of Antichrist appeared in the Original's text but has not been transferred to our own.

Perhaps the most interesting divergencies are two instances where the words quoted by Goodman-Rogerson differ from those in our text, indicating a theological change. In Play 21 Simon's speech, which seems to refer to the sacrament of penance, has been changed from 'through penance & contrition' to 'through Christes blood and Passion' to accord with the Protestant theology of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for the remission of sins.

But the note to our Play 18, (Goodman-Rogerson 17), the Skinners' Play of 'The Resurrection', represents the most striking change of all. The lines quoted from the Original attest the doctrine of Transubstantiation and the power of the priesthood:

And therto a full ryche messe,
in bred myn one bodie,
& that bred I you gyve,
your wyked lyffe to amend,
becomen is my fleshe, throgh wordes 5
betwyxt the prestes handes.

They correspond to some of the lines spoken by Christ as he leaves the tomb, which in our extant text read:

I am verey prynce of peace
and kinge of free mercye.
Whoe wyll of synnes have release,
one me the call and crye;
and yf they will of synnes sease,
I grant them peace trulye
and therto a full rych messe
in bread, my owne bodye

I am verey bread of liffe.
From heaven I light and am send.
Whoe eateth that bread, man or wiffe,
shall lyve with me without end.
And that bread that I you give,
your wicked life to amend,
becomes my fleshe through your beleeffe
and doth release your synfull band. (162-77)

It is clear that the extant lines, while removing the explicit reference to the consecration of the Host by the priest, would not meet with the approval of Goodman and Rogerson. The reference to the 'messe' was evidently taken in the restricted sense of 'Mass' by the reformers, and the identification of the bread as 'my owne bodye' could be seen as at least tendentious here. The idea that the 'Real Presence' is constituted by the belief of the recipient is equally unacceptable to any who believed that the Eucharist was a commemoration. But there is certainly an attempt to compromise here from a positive Catholic position, which suggests that Goodman

and Rogerson's objections to the Mass under their Play 13 were not without foundation. It is perhaps worth noting that the abababab stanza of Christ's words was in the 1572 Original.

Finally, there are in our text some passages to which one might imagine exception would have been taken. One might have expected, for example, that exception would be taken to the non-Biblical 'Fall of the Angels', Play 1, performed by the Tanners. That is the only play without the eight-line Chester stanza, and since the events of the first day of Creation are recapitulated in Play 2, possibly that Play was not performed in 1572. No reference is made to the Ale-wife whose appearance concludes the play in the four earliest manuscripts (17/276+SH-336). It is unlikely that this figure, to whose presence in the Midsummer Show David Rogers objected, could have featured in the play-text without comment. One can only assume either that 'she' had been removed before 1572 or that she was added for the 1575 performance held at Midsummer. Above all, the objections throughout are couched in terms of theological and scriptural accuracy; the playing of biblical events is not in itself condemned, and the request is merely that the play-text should be scrutinized by the appropriate authorities.

This last fact may explain why a production was mounted in 1575 with the condition imposed upon the Mayor, Sir John Savage, that

they shall be sett furth in the best fayssion with such reformation
as mr maior with his advice shall think meet & convenient²¹

But the clerical lobby was still active:

The whitson playes played in this Cittye. not withstanding an
Inhibition bein<.>e *procured*. by some precise Cittizins from the
bishopp of yorke to stave them²²

and this time no reformation of the text would suffice. Thanks to Goodman's letter-book we now know not only the identity of those 'precise Cittizins', but also the nature of their theological objections.

NOTES

¹ Denbigh County Record Office Plas Power MSS. DD/PP/839, p. 119. I am grateful to the Denbigh County Archivist, Mr Matthias, for permission to quote from this document.

² R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972). p. 17.

³ K. E. Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*. Chetham Society, 3rd series, 19, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), pp. 130-32.

⁴ Richardson, pp. 8-9.

⁵ Wark, p. 135.

⁶ Wark, pp. 51-52.

⁷ Hatfield House, MS CP 159, fols 15r-17v. I am grateful to the Marquis of Salisbury for permission to cite this document.

⁸ Denbigh County Record Office, DD/PP/839, p. 120 (Letter from Christopher Goodman to the Archbishop of York, 11 June 1572, concerning Hanky's wilfulness): 'But still he proceedeth in his determinate purpose minding to assay all his friends for performance of the same, & to that effect (as it is reported) hath directed his letters & sent to some of the council above & one to my Lord of Derby chief of her Majesties commission for Cheshire & Lancashire, whereof also his Worship is one, & by vertue of the same freed from your Grace's Commission, so as without contempt he is persuaded by his counsel that he may lawfully disobey the same.'

⁹ Joan Beck, *Tudor Cheshire* (Chester: Cheshire Community Council Publications Trust Ltd., 1969), p. 89; Wark, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰ L. M. Clopper, *REED: Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 96.

¹¹ Wark, p. 18.

¹² cf. Chester City Archives, SBC/24, fol. 224 (1577-78): 'Robertus Rogerson theologie professor'; SBC/36, fol. 33 (1591-92): 'Robertus Rogers alias Rogerson sacrae theologiae Bacchalaureus Rector Ecclesie perochialis de Goseworth.'

¹³ For a transcript of Robert's will, see Steven E. Hart and Margaret M. Knapp, *The Aunchant and Famous Cittie': David Rogers and the Chester Mystery Plays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 211-14. The original is in the Cheshire County Record Office.

¹⁴ Quotations and references are from the transcripts of the various versions of the Breviary in Clopper: pp. 232-54 (1609); 320-26 (1618-19); 351-55 (1622-23); 433-36 (1636-37).

¹⁵ Chester City Archives, AB/1 (14 January 1586), fol. 200v, also quoted in Rupert Morris, *Chester in Plantagenet and Tudor Times* (Chester: privately printed, n.d.), p. 285.

¹⁶ Morris, p. 365.

¹⁷ Chester City Archives, CR/469/542, fol. 35r. The annals in which this account occurs were compiled by William Aldersey, Goodman's nephew.

¹⁸ cf. Chester City Archives, ML/5/34 and 35; Morris, p. 173; Albert Peel, 'A Sermon of Christopher Goodman's in 1583', *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England*, 9 (1949), p. 90.

¹⁹ REED: *Chester*, p. 7.

²⁰ *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, 2 vols, EETS, ss 3, 9 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974, 1986). The text of the cycle is in Volume I.

²¹ Chester City Archives, AF/3, fol. 25 (30 May).

²² Chester City Archives, CR/60/83, fol. 13r (1574-75).