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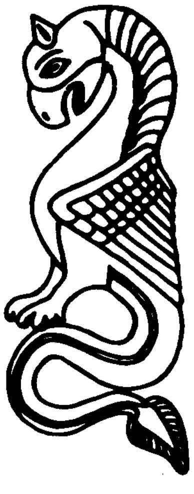

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The Chester Play of *Noah* and the Presentation of Reality

Peter Meredith

> And firste in some high place — or in the clowdes, if it may bee — God speaketh unto Noe standinge without the arke with all his familye.
>
> (*Noah*, stage direction before l. 1)

Many years ago, the Centre for Medieval Studies at Leeds organized a production of the complete Chester Cycle under the overall direction of Jane Oakshott, on wagons, in the university precinct.[1] A group from the Brotherton Library at Leeds, inspired and directed by Oliver Pickering, had undertaken the Noah pageant. In the course of conversation, their search for a 'hackstock' came up.

> SEMES WYFE
> Here is a good hackestocke;
> one this you may hewe and knocke.
> (*Noah*, ll. 69–70)[2]

A little while before, I had put together a sawing-horse which I now offered for the production, liking the idea of the connection between a functioning present and imaginative past use of the same object. It did not occur to me at the time, though no doubt it did to many perceptive viewers of the plays, that a 'hackstock' is nothing like a sawing-horse. I do not know how Semes Wyfe felt about handing Sem a feeble construction that would have been reduced to matchwood in a matter of minutes had he started hewing and knocking on it with his sharp axe, but it was used and there was a satisfaction (for me at least) in seeing that time shift — a reality of the present transformed into a reality of the past. In a reverse way, it was like the actual words of the Chester pageants being heard again in the modern (yet ancient) streets of Chester, when a number of the productions, including *Noah*, moved there some weeks after the performances in Leeds. As will be obvious, however, my sawing-horse was not reality in any true sense and it is ironic that the Noah play from Chester is one that forces consideration of what it means to show reality.

In this paper, I am not attempting to look at reality as a philosophical concept or to examine the meaning of the word in the Middle Ages or early Renaissance, but rather, through texts, images, and my own experience of plays in performance, to try and find out what kinds of reality are apparent in the way that medieval or early Renaissance playwrights or directors dealt with the demands of the stories they were presenting — in this case the story of Noah and the ark. Theatrical reality may be truth to the everyday world; a speech, for example, is effective because of the naturalness of the delivery, its likeness to everyday intonation and speech patterns. In the realm of scene-setting, a neat box-set for a drawing-room comedy convinces (and pleases) by its precise period detail. But what is convincingly real for a work such as *Oedipus Rex*? Theatrical reality may be, on occasion must be, truth to some other principle. In a recent production of *As You Like It* done by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford in 2009 there was not a tree in sight; instead a large semi-reflective silver screen was background to the court and the Forest of Arden. Truth to the much talked-about cold? Or the coldness of men's hearts? Certainly not everyday reality. Theatrical performance, like all the arts, cannot *be* the everyday world but must simply be different ways of conveying it.

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[1] There are reviews and photographs of the 1983 Chester Cycle at Leeds and Chester in *Medieval English Theatre*, 5 (1983), 2, 28–44 and 49, and in *The University of Leeds Review*, 26 (1983), front cover and 137–45. Earlier in 1983, in preparation for the production, there was a series of lectures on the plays, published as *Staging the Chester Cycle*, ed. by David Mills, Leeds Texts and Monographs, n.s. 9 (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, 1985).

[2] All quotations from the Chester Plays are from *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David

In the Noah story, playwrights and directors are immediately faced with a major problem of not-so-everyday reality, staging the Flood. Truth to the physical realities of the Flood would be one approach; its extreme opposite would be to ignore the physical realities altogether. That some playwrights or directors were prepared to tackle the first approach is clear from the stage directions and records of a play such as that performed at Mons in July 1501.[3] The play at Mons was performed in a fixed location in the main square of the town, the *Grand Markiet*. The stage backed relatively closely onto the buildings on the eastern side of the square, facing the audience, seated and standing opposite, over an open space, the *parc*. The accounts which survive for the putting-on of the play show that considerable expense went into the providing of large barrels and lead pipework in or on the roofs of the surrounding houses for the Flood. Also paid for was the feeding of numerous animals, some certainly for Noah. We have no idea how the audience reacted to this manner of presentation, but it does demonstrate a desire on the part of the directors to replicate the experience of a real shower of rain, even though falling far short of the forty-days-and-forty-nights' worth of Genesis. Where does Chester stand in the range of possibility from imitating reality to ignoring it?

There are first of all many named props: axe, hatchet, hammer and nail ('pynne'), timber, hackstock, wood-chips for a fire, and so on. Perhaps some in the sixteenth-century Chester audience responded to these familiar objects as I did to my sawing-horse. The thrill of modern reality transformed into biblical. There is no reason at all to suppose that these tools were not actually present; indeed, it is unlikely that Sem is *not* going to hold up his axe, Cam his hatchet, and Jafett 'this' hammer and nail, by a theatrical gesture physically demonstrating to the audience their readiness to assist Noe in the task of the building of the ark. And Semes Wyfe does actually say '*Here* is a good hackestocke'. The reality is one of solid physical objects.

Mills, 2 vols, EETS s.s. 3 and 9 (1974 and 1986).

[3] Still the best introduction to the wealth of material from Mons is Gustave Cohen, *Le Livre de Conduite du Régisseur et le Compte des Dépenses pour le Mystère de la Passion joué à Mons en 1501*, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, 23 (Strasbourg: Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, 1922). References to the Ark and the Flood are scattered through the accounts. For the abbreviated text of the episode, with its numerous informative stage directions, see pp. 23–30. Translations of some extracts from Mons relating to the Flood are included in *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*, ed. by Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby, EDAM Monograph Series, 4 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1983), pp. 99–100, 117–18.

Oddly, it is also one which implies a non-realistic mode of address — non-realistic because they are most likely directing their speeches to the audience though actually addressing Noe.[4]

But the play's approach to reality shifts, when what is physically present to the audience and what is not is faced head-on in the stage directions:

> Then Noe beginneth to buyld the arke.
> (stage direction after l. 80)
>
> Then Noe with all his familye shall make a signe as though the wrought upon the shippe with divers instruements [. . .].
> (stage direction after l. 112)

It is not just the stage directions that insist that we think about modes of presenting reality; Noe's speeches detail the parts of the ark which he is constructing: 'These bordes I pynne here together (l. 85):

> 'Of this tree will I make a maste
> tyed with gables that will laste,
> with a seale-yerd for eych baste,
> and yche thinge in there kynde.
> With topcastle and bowespreete,
> bothe cordes and roopes I have all meete
> to sayle forthe at the nexte weete —
> this shippe is at an ende.'
> (ll. 89–96)

It is this insistence on the presence, 'this, these', of objects that should make it impossible to skate over the question of how the ark is constructed. Is this as real as the tools? Apparently it is in the course of the stanza that the construction takes place — 'will I make' becomes 'is at an ende'. 'Tree', of course, need not be a standing, living tree but can as well, and much more likely, be a piece of timber, and the rest of the details are not to be made, but are simply described. Nevertheless, there is clearly no time to build an ark, even a pre-constructed one, and if time were made, the stanza would be considerably extended. All this seems to be solved by the stage direction after l. 112 — the action is clearly mimed. But the stage direction, describing the work on the ark, comes several lines *after* Noe has pronounced the ark complete. Indeed Noe has already invited his wife to come aboard. Does this make a nonsense of it as a serious guide to production?[5]

The stage directions I have so far quoted come only from San Marino, Huntington Library, MS 2 (Hm), that Lumiansky and Mills made their base text. But there are others in other manuscripts of the plays, often, but not always, related to the Hm ones and not always in the same place in the play.[6] London, British Library, MS Harley 2124 (Harley), for example, after l. 80, appropriately has:

> Tunc faciunt signa quasi laborarent cum diversis instrumentis

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[4] David Mills looks at direct address as part of his discussion of dialogue in 'The "Behold and See" Convention in Medieval Drama', *Medieval English Theatre*, 7 (1985), 4–12.

[5] Lumiansky and Mills discuss this problem in their note on *Noah*, l. 96; *Chester Mystery Cycle*, II, 37.

[6] The extremely complicated interrelationship between the five main Chester manuscripts is caused by their being made late (after the last performance of the plays), sometimes carelessly, and for a variety of purposes — antiquarian, personal interest, craft or civic record. The control that would have been exerted by their still being in performance was therefore lacking. The manuscripts and their relationships are dealt with by Lumiansky and Mills, to some extent in the introduction to their EETS edition, *Chester Cycle*, pp. ix–xxvii, and more fully in

a more elaborate version of the stage direction which Hm puts in that position, and related to Hm's later stage direction after l. 112. Harley places another version of this stage direction after l. 96:

> Tunc Noe iterum cum tota familia faciunt signa laborandi cum diversis instrumentis

This may come after Noe has pronounced the ark complete, but its proximity is such as to make its intention clear. I labour this particular point to demonstrate that though Hm may have ridiculously misplaced the stage direction (as do three of the other main manuscripts), the information in it needs to be taken seriously.

Is there significance in Hm's singular 'signe', as opposed to Harley's plural 'signa', beyond the implication of miming? Is it implied that a single sign from all the players should create the ark? It is possible, but 'as though the wrought upon the shippe with divers instruements' seems a bit elaborate for a single sign. Is the miming an indication of a later dissatisfaction with an earlier method of a more practical kind? Or is it that the reality of the ark never lay in the constructing of it, but in its appearance. Of all the possible shapes that the ark might have taken in Chester, it is, and as far as one can see always was, a contemporary ship. The trade guild that brought forth the Noah play was not the Shipwrights, as in York, but the Waterleaders and Drawers of Dee.[7] Not, therefore, by trade makers of ships, but not a hundred miles away from them either. But in a port such as Chester, no-one was. The reality, then, is probably a reality of appearance, something that everyone would recognize, not of construction; as the very first stage direction, before l. 1, would suggest — 'Noe standinge without the arke with all his familye'. The signs, oddly coming together with the *real* tools, are simply the easiest way to bring the ark to life and to centre stage, by miming its construction. The 'reality' of the miming will inevitably depend on the skill of the actors. The 'reality' of the ark will, like the drawing-room comedy set, depend on the audience's satisfaction with and delight in the detail and the skill of its making.

In a way, the gathering of the animals is like the making of the ark, but this time the reality is a pictured one. Without Benjamin Britten's need to involve a whole community, it seems extremely unlikely that there were any living beings, human or animal, to represent the 'beastes and fowles'.[8] Again, the stage direction is revealing:

> Then Noe shall goe into the arke with all his familye, his wyffe excepte, and the arke muste bee borded rownde aboute. And one the bordes all the beastes and fowles hereafter reahersed muste bee paynted, that ther wordes may agree with the pictures.
> (Hm, stage direction after l. 160)

The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents (Chapel Hill and London: The University of Carolina Press, 1983), pp. 5–86.

[7] The approach of the York playwright is quite different from Chester's. The episode is divided in two parts, the first of which is devoted entirely to the building of the Ark and is replete with technical instruction. The reality of construction here is of paramount importance, but unfortunately there is no evidence for the staging. For a discussion of the York pageant, see Richard Beadle, 'The Shipwrights' Craft', in *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. by Paula Neuss (Cambridge: Brewer; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1983), pp. 50–61. The 'symple' Waterleaders and Drawers of Dee are instructed in the Late Banns of Chester to 'see that in all poyntes your arke be prepared' which could, but does not necessarily, imply a pre-fabricated one; see *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents*, ed. by Lumiansky and Mills, p. 288.

[8] Benjamin Britten's very popular operatic version of the Chester play, *Noyes Fludde*, completed in 1957, has had a considerable effect on the general view of the play. It was written specifically to be performed by children, a large number of whom are required to play the animals, who have an extended ceremonial entrance. It was first performed at the 1958 Aldeburgh Festival in Orford Parish Church and there have been innumerable productions since then.

The Harley manuscript gives a slightly different version which in one way at least matches likely stage action more satisfactorily:

> Tunc Noe introibit archam, et familia sua dabit et recitabit nomina animalium depicta in cartis et, postquam unusquisque suam locutus est partem, ibit in archa, uxore Noe excepta, et animalia depicta cum verbis concordare debent
> (Harley, stage direction after l. 160)

The animals are already aboard but the sons and daughters, and Noah's wife, remain outside until each has finished a stanza of description, then he or she (Noah's wife excepted) goes onto the ark. The stated reality this time consists of the names matching the pictures — truth to images. But is that all there is to it? Is there significance in the different words used, the 'bordes' of Hm and the 'cartis' of Harley? 'Carta', a document on paper or parchment, or possibly a piece of card, is an unlikely word to use of the boards of a ship and it is quite clear from what the Hm writer puts that he is thinking of the paintings as being an integral part of the ship. The Harley writer, on the other hand, seems to have in mind paintings of animals on cards perhaps carried by the players and quite separate from the ship. This would allow for a much more precise identification of the animals, if such were the desired effect, and perhaps make them much more visible to the audience. The cards and the boards are both possible ways of treating the incident, but Hm's stage direction, in this case, suggests a more interesting way of presenting it. Chester's ark is a contemporary ship with bowsprit, mast, yards, sails, and therefore very probably scuppers and gunports. The sons and daughters are outside the ark and most likely each steps up to the appropriate board to list the animals painted there. As the animals are on board, what would be more natural than that the boards with the pictures of the animals should be shown behind the gunports or scuppers, inside the ark looking out, and that the actor, when he has finished his speech, should let down the shutter over the opening, thus covering the picture?[9] Movement towards a satisfying touch of reality; whether it occurred to a Chester director, or whether he would have been interested in pursuing it if it had, we shall never know.

There is no direction for the main effect of the play, the Flood. Is there possibly a slight movement from all the cast just before Noe says: 'Ah, chyldren, meethinke my boote remeeves' (l. 229)? Or is that an unnecessary modern reading? This is not *The Tempest*; there is no evidence for howling wind-machine, no rattling thundersheets, and, perhaps, no movement. What the stage directions do require is music and/or silence. In the case of Hm, there are two separate directions, first: 'Then the singe, and Noe shall speake agayne' (after l. 252) — as the ark floats for the first time, Noe and his family sing. Unfortunately the stage direction does not say what. After the singing comes a speech by Noe expressing his trust in God and his intention to shut himself in his cabin until the Flood has abated, and then the second stage direction:

> Then shall Noe shutt the windowe of the arke, and for a little space within the bordes hee shalbe scylent; [...]. (after l. 260)

Harley has a single stage direction:

> Tunc Noe claudet fenestram archae et per modicum spatium infra tectum cantent psalmum 'Save mee, O God' [...].
> (after l. 260)

So the duration of the Flood is represented by stillness in the one case, and song in the other. How do these two methods compare? There is, unfortunately, an obscurity with the

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[9] A suggestion made earlier in *Staging the Chester Cycle*, ed. by Mills, pp. 65–66.

Hm reading. Whereas in Harley it is clear that all the family, Noe included, is out of sight inside the ark, in Hm it seems as though it is only Noe. Where is his family? If they are still on deck, there are any number of positions they can take up and any number of emotions they can display. Is Noe's stillness likely to be enhanced or lessened by this? Whatever the family does, its presence is going to affect the absoluteness of the stillness. If they are inside the ark, then their presence is not going to upset the effect, but is it, anyway, foolhardy to imagine that the stillness is going to be effective in the middle of a busy street? It seems to me that for stillness to be effective, it must be absolute. How long was this silence intended to last, and would anyone have appreciated its significance? The stillness of Hm seems to me problematic in a number of ways. Harley's psalm-singing, on the other hand, is an ingenious device, ingeniously, if simply, handled. Noe, as in Hm, closes the window but in this case all the family is inside. Then from the deserted stage of the ark comes the sound of the singing of 'Save me, O God'. Richard Rastall has commented on this stage effect:

> […] a family, caught in a flood that has destroyed the world they knew, sing a psalm for deliverance […] We need not doubt the essential reality of the singing of Noah's family […] Metrical psalms were much used for domestic and public devotion in the later sixteenth century […] and the context for psalm-singing is not a surprising one.[10]

The reality of the Flood, then, is not a reality of turbulence, which has appeared in the domestic stress of strained marital relations, but the reality of domestic worship and an expression of trust in God's saving grace. Not that this turns the ark into the Church. One reality that the playwright seems not concerned with is the typological one. The singing of the psalm, as Rastall suggests, is an expression of household devotion, not of a liturgical service. In any case, Chester unlike Mons chooses to ignore the physical realities of the Flood.

When Noe sends out the two birds, one after another, to discover whether the Flood has abated, there is another cluster of stage directions, but only in Harley because Hm omits the whole episode:

> Tunc dimittet corvum, et capiens columbam in manibus, dicat.
> (Appendix IA, after l. 8)

> Tunc emittet columbam; et erit in nave aliam columbam ferens olivam in ore, quam dimittet aliquis ex malo per funem in manibus Noe; et postea dicat Noe.
> (Appendix IA, after l. 15)

Where before we had subtlety and suggestion, we now seem to have a crude mixture of realism and artifice. But what is the nature of raven or dove? I can see no reason why the birds when they are sent out should not be real.[11] Nothing special is made of this sending out in the stage directions, they are simply released; it is only when we come to the difficulty of a returning bird, and a returning bird with an olive branch in its beak, that artifice enters.[12] Whether this artifice is effective or not depends on how it is done. There is no reason why the crude words of the stage direction, which conjure up an image of the descending bird as an inert lump on the end of a string, should not be transformed into effective stage action. The years of presenting the Holy Spirit as a dove in church and other dramas may well have left a legacy of understanding. Craftsmen were not incapable of creating moving, lifelike images and the effectiveness of such a device is often caused by delight in the skill of its handling and the beauty of its making.[13] The audience is not expected to be deceived into thinking the dove is real. The effect will work if the prop is beautifully constructed and its execution is managed without any clumsiness. As to where it comes from, this may be the purpose of the topcastle. It is not the reality of the ordinary world but a reality of its own making.

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[10] Rastall, 'Music in the Cycle', in *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents*, ed. by Lumiansky and Mills, p. 119. In later discussion of the *Noah* music, Rastall draws back from realism as a reason for the use of the metrical psalm; see Richard Rastall, *The Heavens Singing: Music in Early English Religious Drama* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 215–16. It seems likely, nevertheless, that the impression left with the audience by the singing of the metrical psalm might well have been one of family prayers.

[11] The use of live birds and animals is common elsewhere in medieval and early Renaissance plays. See, for example, the extracts translated in *Staging of Religious Drama*, ed. by Meredith and Tailby, pp. 117–22.

[12] The elaborate stage directions from Mons for the dove are revealing. The crow and the first dove are released and fly away. The second dove is released but pulled back again by a cord round its leg. Then it is released again (it is presumably the same dove) and an artificial one ('*ung futif*') with an olive branch is sent down from Paradise.

The play ends, in both versions, with a sacrifice by Noah and his family in God's honour, and God's promise, signified by the rainbow, that there will never be another Flood. Hm has no further stage directions. Noe opens the window and apparently from within the ark, says:

> Lord God in majestye
> that such grace hast granted mee
> wher all was borne, salfe to bee!
> Therfore nowe I am boune —
> my wyffe, my children, and my menye —
> with sacryfice to honour thee
> of beastes, fowles, as thou mayest see,
> and full devotyon.
> (*Noah*, ll. 261–68)

'As thou mayest see' presumably means that the sacrifice is visible, and implies that Noe and his family have left the ark, though this is never stated. God replies that he finds the sacrifice acceptable. In Harley, Noe, having discovered that the Flood has abated, praises God and promises a sacrifice. God instructs him to lead his family out of the ark. Noe again praises God, and promises sacrifice in the following words:

> I will doe the honoure
> and to thee offer sacrifice.
> Therefore comes in all wise,
> for of these beastes that bene hise,
> offer I will this stower.
> (*Noah*, Appendix IA, ll. 43–48)

Then follows a stage direction:

> Tunc egrediens archam cum tota familia sua, accipiet animalia sua et volucres et offeret ea et mactabit.

After the stage direction comes the stanza quoted above from Hm. The animals and birds mentioned in the stage direction are clearly not those pictured on the boards/cards. Animals and birds obviously exist, and they are presumably carried out of the ark, but how and where they are sacrificed is not specified. Presumably in the street, and presumably not a burnt offering. There is no information beyond the bald statement in the stage direction and the words of the text. What would a late sixteenth-century Chester audience have expected? This

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This is kept in the ark, and Noah finally releases a white dove, which does not return; see, Cohen, *Mystère de la Passion joué à Mons*, pp. 28–29.

[13] There is an interesting order for a mechanical dove from Barcelona in 1453. It is required to appear from the

could be reality of the most extreme kind. With the Hm text one might just get away with no enacted sacrifice; but the Harley one seems to demand it. It is a crude case of suit the action to the word. At Mons, Noah certainly sacrificed and burnt something, but what precise form 'un agniel et d'oiseaux' took is not made specific. The lamb sacrificed by Abel at Mons seems almost certainly to have been live, and a stage direction indicates that careful preparations were made for the fire to be ready for burning it.[14]

If the thank-offering is a necessary part of the action of the play, what of the rainbow? One important point to make is that though God describes the rainbow, nothing he says demands its physical presence. It is a tempting special effect which few directors would reject, and one which links the transcendental past with the ordinary present. But is there any evidence that it had a physical existence? The answer seems to be 'no'. God never refers to 'this' bow as if it were present. 'That ylke bowe' of line 318 could be accompanied by a gesture, but there is no necessity for it. It is a promise for the future. Under normal circumstances, of course, the rainbow would have appeared during the rain, not long after it had ceased. God, however, is not constrained by nature, and it could be argued that some dramatic feature is necessary in what is otherwise a long, expository speech. God's speech is a summing-up of the reconciliation between himself and mankind according to Genesis and perhaps seen through Protestant eyes. The stanzas on the rainbow, coming at the end of that speech as they do, are perhaps sufficient in themselves imaginatively to lift the end of the play.[15]

Where is God during the course of the action? I quoted at the beginning of the paper the opening stage direction of the play:

> And firste in some high place — or in the clowdes, if it may bee — God speaketh unto Noe standinge without the arke with all his familye.
>
> (*Noah*, stage direction before l. 1)

Unlike in many of the English plays, God appears to keep his distance from the action throughout. Is this a theological statement or is it to do with staging possibilities? Both are served by this distancing of God from human affairs, but perhaps reality of a different kind plays a part. When the plays were performed in Chester in 1983, they were performed first at the original second station. This was in front of St Peter's Church, the site of the old Pentice or City Council chamber. Opposite were the Rows, raised walkways transformed in the Victorian period but nevertheless dating back in some form to the Middle Ages. It was an opportunity to experiment with 'some high place'. In 1983, there were some interesting chance effects, as always when performing in a public space — God's high place, for instance, was crowded with Chester citizens doing duty, not ineffectively, for the citizens of heaven. It was apparent however, that if the Rows were used for Heaven, there was a difficulty of covering the distance between that 'high place' and the playing space, and also a difficulty of disentangling God from the citizens of Heaven. Could this have been a reason for the distancing of God from the action?[16] It is just possible as a contributory cause, but impossible to prove.

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mouth of God the father, glide down to Mary with wings extended, and fly back to God flapping its wings. It is also required to emit rays of light or fire; see *Staging of Religious Drama*, ed. by Meredith and Tailby, p. 119.

[14] Cohen, *Mystère de la Passion joué à Mons*, pp. LVI, 14, 564. There are payments 'Pour II aigneaux vif [...] *pour les Sacrifices de Aubel et be Abrahan*' (Cohen, *Mystère de la Passion joué à Mons*, p. 564).

[15] In the second of the York Noah pageants, Noah, quoting Genesis, refers to the rainbow but there is no suggestion that it appears: see *The York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle, EETS s.s. 23 (2009), p. 53. In Towneley and N-Town, it is not mentioned.

[16] At Mons, long-distance walks were not uncommon, particularly for God. Any gaps in the action were covered by

Chester's staging, like that of York and Coventry, is constrained by its reliance on moving wagons and multiple playing places. One might call it the ultimate unreality. What cannot be carried round or fitted on a wagon, or perhaps two, cannot be used. For the Shoemakers, the Painters and their related crafts, the Smiths and the Coopers from Chester, we know something of how they coped with this: what they carried around or wore, how they were organized and rehearsed, who their players were and what they were paid, because records survive.[17] For their plays, a wealth of possibilities is provided by the existence of these records.[18] This is a crucial level of reality, lacking for anyone trying to understand the staging of the Waterleaders and Drawers' play.

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music, a '*silete*' or '*pose*'; see Cohen, *Mystère de la Passion joué à Mons*, pp. XCV–XCVI. The singing of 'Save mee, O God' by Noah and his family has the effect of a '*silete*', while also carrying a significance for the action.

[17] The most recent edition of the records of the Chester Craft Guilds is in Records of Early English Drama, *Cheshire including Chester*, ed. by Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence Clopper, and David Mills, 2 vols (London and Toronto: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2007).

[18] For some speculations, see Peter Meredith, '"item for a grone – iijd" — Records and Performance', in *Records of Early English Drama*: *Proceedings of the First Colloquium*, ed. by Joanna Dutka (Toronto: Records of Early English Drama, 1979), pp. 26–60, '"Make the asse to speake" or Staging the Chester Plays', in *Staging the Chester Cycle*, ed. by Mills, pp. 49–76, and John Marshall, '"Walking in the Air": The Chester Shepherds on Stilts', *Medieval English Theatre*, 29 (2007), 27–41.