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A STUDY OF THE THEMATIC IMPORTANCE OF NINE
FEMALE CHARACTERS OF THE ENGLISH MYSTERY PLAYS

BY

LINDA LEE BOYD

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Arts, Major in
English, South Dakota
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1971

A STUDY OF THE THEMATIC IMPORTANCE OF NINE
FEMALE CHARACTERS OF THE ENGLISH MYSTERY PLAYS

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

~~_____~~ Thesis Adviser Date /

~~_____~~ Head, English Department Date

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Through the centuries there has been continuous controversy over the role of woman in society and in literature. This dispute can be traced as far back as fifth century Athens at which time there were great exponents of woman's worth as Plato and Euripides and great opponents of woman's worth as Aristotle who felt women especially inferior to men.¹ The controversy was still strong during the Middle English period when there was "the simultaneous view that women are merciless and full of pity,--that they bring a man to honor and bring him to his doom, that they should be revered and reviled."² Although much was said and written on both sides of the woman question in the Middle Ages,³ the ideas about the fallen nature of woman are presented more vividly in the Corpus Christi plays than in other literary forms of the time; therefore, this thesis is limited to a discussion of nine female

¹Frances Lee Utley, The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index of the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568 (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1944), p. 8.

²Utley, p. 33.

³For more information on woman's life in the Medieval Age see: D. Chadwick's "Medieval Women," Social Life in the Days of Piers Plowman, ed. G. G. Coulton, Univ. of Cambridge Stud. in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge: The Univ. Press, 1922), pp. 100-105; G. G. Coulton, comp., "Women's Life," Social Life in Britain From the Conquest to the Reformation (1918; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), pp. 433-465; Eileen Power, "The Menagier's Wife, A Paris Housewife in the Fourteenth Century," Medieval People ("Pelican Books"; Hammondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1937), pp. 92-115; and L. F. Salzman, "Women," English Life in the Middle Ages (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1945), pp. 249-265.

dramatic characters. However, because nearly six centuries stand between us and the original audiences of the English Corpus Christi cycles, a certain amount of information concerning the conditions of medieval English life, the importance of the medieval English Church, and the doctrines and ordering processes which grew out of the Church of that time is necessary to the understanding of this thesis. First let us look at the time.

Modern man often has difficulty in relating to a time that has passed. As Percival Hunt states in Fifteenth Century England:

He cannot gain its intimacy; cannot accept it without effort. The look of fields and streets five hundred years ago, food on the tables, clothing, the sound of the constant church bells--all the colors and lights and shades of usual, outward life are immeasurably far away. Its talk takes strange turns of phrase and very strange pronouncing, and is muffled by distance. People stand as shadows, or waver like over-bright figures in a tapestry. The time seems an insubstantial pageant.⁴

Not only the time, but as Hunt mentions the people of that time also seem far away or remote. "There is a general tendency to think of medieval men and women as if they were such saints or devils as we see on churches, carved in stone; but the more we study them the more we realize that they were flesh and blood most remarkably like us."⁵ They worked, played, told jokes, sang, danced, acted, slept, ate and dressed as the century prescribed, made war, traded, taught their children, farmed, governed the

⁴Percival Hunt, Fifteenth Century England (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), p. 153.

⁵Salzman, p. 21.

kingdom, built their towns, founded their guilds, attended plays, wrestled, enjoyed watching water sports, loved, laughed, cried, and believed and disbelieved very much in accepted ways. "Human nature was very much the same in the Middle Ages as it is now."⁶

But even though human nature was much the same, the conditions of life were very different.⁷ If we are to understand these people and their time we must try to look at the facts of their lives from their own points of view; we must "try to clear our lenses of their obscuring fogs: our religious environment,... our personal experience, or our membership in a middle-class world."⁸

Because the medieval time was an era of disease, misery and death it was not unnatural that town-folk and country-folk, noble-men and peasantry, crippled and diseased looked to religion for comfort--all were united "within the universality of the Church. It held the one faith. It was the guide into eternity and the way to happiness on earth. Life was to be controlled by it. That

⁶Salzman, p. 22.

⁷For more specific information on the conditions of life in England during the Middle Ages the reader is referred to: E. H. Carter and R. A. F. Mears, A History of Britain, 3rd ed. (1937; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), p. 211; and Salzman, pp. 21-108.

⁸Utley, p. 3.

was a truth reverently and universally accepted."⁹ The medieval English people lived in a small world and knew very little of its place in the universe. The conception of a globe revolving in space in relationship to other bodies had not dawned upon them, and:

Since so much of the world about them was unknown the invisibility of the next world did not trouble them. It was as real to them as remote lands today are real to the untravelled. They were equally assured of its existence. For this reason there was no questioning of the articles of the Christian belief, nor was their acceptance the result of a deliberate and considered act of faith. Heaven, purgatory, or hell ranked equally with the world around them as the unavoidable experience of man.¹⁰

This complete acceptance of the inevitability of the after-life, together with the literal interpretation of Christ's promise of pardon to the repentant sinner, no matter how many times he had fallen back again into sin, and the idea of the one faith, account for much in the medieval attitude to the Church and religion that is alien to modern thought.

The power of the Church was visible everywhere, but nowhere was it more visible than in the educating its people.

⁹Hunt, p. 3. For specific details on the ways that the Church controlled life see: Charles Sears Baldwin, Three Medieval Centuries of Literature in England, 1100-1400 (1932; rpt. N. Y.: Phaeton Press, 1968), p. 5; Hunt, Fifteenth Century England, p. 8.; Salzman, English Life in the Middle Ages, pp. 56-57; Brian Stone, trans., Medieval English Verse (1964; rpt. "Penguin Books"; Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 14-16; and George M. Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe, 1368-1520 (1899; rpt. "Harper Torchbooks"; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 104.

¹⁰Doris Mary Stenton, English Society in the Early Middle Ages, 1066-1307, 3rd ed. (1951; rpt. "Pelican Books," No. 3; Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 203.

The Church "was the centre of learning and provided a focus for all knowledge. Its approach was fundamentally incurious, and was dictated by authority whether ancient, as Aristotle, and the Bible, or modern, as the Saints and Rome itself."¹¹ Since few laymen could read or write, the Church held the "monopoly both of learning and teaching."¹² In the early years the monasteries were centers not just of ordinary schooling (book-learning) but the monks taught publishing, illumination of manuscripts, and verse as well as sculpture, architecture, or painting; the universities of the Friars and cathedral schools later increased the range of study. Not only was the Church responsible for the afore-mentioned areas of study but even more important was the duty to teach its people religious thought and doctrine which would lead ultimately to Salvation.

During the early fourteenth century much of this religious instruction came from various types of vernacular literature, the bulk of which dealt explicitly or implicitly with the problem of sin or redemption and the heaven or hell to come after this life's pilgrimage. The medieval citizen was "not familiar with the Bible in translation,"¹³ but "many narratives of biblical materials were

¹¹Stone, p. 14.

¹²Carter and Sears, p. 159.

¹³Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-Evaluation, Stanford Stud. in Lang. and Lit., No. 23 (rpt. Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 39.

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available to the laity either in manuscripts or through the preaching of friars or the parish priest."¹⁴ W. A. Pantin states in The English Church in the Fourteenth Century that there were three types of written religious materials available: manuals of instruction for parish priests, vernacular religious and moral treatises "intended both for the laity and for unlearned priests," and writings of the mystics and other religious lyrics.¹⁵

For those medieval persons who found the reading of the many instructional treatises, manuals, sermons and lyrics dull, or for those who were illiterate, the medieval English Church had two other media of instruction: oral sermons and wall-paintings. "For every person who took the trouble or had the education to read one of the treatises or poems there must have been hundreds of thousands who listened to sermons or looked at the painted walls of their churches."¹⁶ From the thirteenth century onward almost every aspect of life was either preached or painted about.

One of the most distorted aspects of medieval life as preached about by the pulpit was that of the ills of womanhood. The English pulpit which was "to the vast mass of the middle orders... their one oracle of learning and refinement, presented a picture

¹⁴Prosser, p. 40.

¹⁵W. A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century (1955; rpt. Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1962), p. 221. For more complete information on the various types of religious writings of the period see Pantin, pp. 189-262.

¹⁶Pantin, p. 235.

of womanhood, ill-balanced, indeed."¹⁷ G. R. Owst in Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England points out that when medieval English preachers spoke of women they spoke not of the "positive doctrines of sexual happiness," but rather "of sin and temptation of forbidden pleasures and lusts, of needful fears and repressions, haunted by the same old shadow of Original Sin."¹⁸ The English clergy could never get out of their heads the part that Eve had played in the unfortunate incident of the apple in the Garden of Eden; they, therefore, regarded medieval English woman also as an "accomplice of the devil."¹⁹ The clergy assumed that as the first woman had brought Sin into the world by tempting Adam, so all women were sinners and temptresses, and they did not hesitate to say so. One of the sermons in W. O. Ross's book of Middle English sermons contains this statement: "For sicurly it was a comon re-pref to all women that by on of hem all mankynd was lost and non of hem mygthe helpe to restore it ageyn."²⁰

¹⁷G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 377.

¹⁸Owst, p. 377.

¹⁹Chadwick, p. 100.

²⁰Woodburn O. Ross, ed., Middle English Sermons (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), EETS, XLII, p. 256. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text in the shortened form--Ross followed by p. for page or pp. for pages and then the number(s). The Middle English characters: *þ* (thorn), *ȝ* (yogh), *ȝ* (wyn) have been modernized to their English equivalents in this passage and throughout the thesis; English spellings were not changed.

Still another form of religious instruction for the people was the English religious drama. It was the most important of all to the middle class of England; it had much in common with the visual instruction of the wall paintings both in the churches and domestic buildings, with the oral instruction of the sermons and with the written instruction of manuals, treatises and poems. W. A. Pantin stresses the importance of this religious drama saying it: "undoubtedly...must have been important as a vehicle of religious instruction, reaching a wider public than the religious poems or treatises or even the sermons."²¹ The plays which brought to life the stories and characters of the sermons and wall paintings were presented to amuse as well as to instruct. These plays were sometimes known as "'quicke bookis' for the unlearned,"²² says V. A. Kolve in The Play Called Corpus Christi; they act as "living books that speak, move, and can imitate whole sequences of events and interactions. They image more vividly and unforgettably than any other art form of their time."²³ One of the things that they imaged most successfully was the fallen nature of mankind; this fallen nature can be studied in woman's role as seen in the plays.

²¹Pantin, p. 243.

²²V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 25.

²³Kolve, p. 5.

To understand the thematic importance of the female characters in showing man's nature as fallen as was presented in these "quicke bookis," one must understand the implied thought and doctrine which existed within the drama. It is difficult for us to realize the influence which the English Church exercised over men's minds in that "Age of Faith" since "modern man is simply not Christian in the way that medieval man was."²⁴ D. W. Robertson in A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives states that just as modern man often thinks "in terms of opposites" so did medieval man often have a tendency to think "in terms of symmetrical patterns, characteristically arranged with reference to an abstract hierarchy."²⁵ Why did medieval man think in such terms?

Characteristically, medieval man was not a dreamer not a spiritual adventurer; he was an organizer, a codifier, a man of system. His ideal could be not unfairly summed up in the old housewifely maxim 'A place for everything, and everything in its (right) place'.²⁶

To the medieval "organizer" or "codifier" a symmetrical order was most important.²⁷

²⁴Prosser, p. 12.

²⁵D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 6. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text in the shortened form--Robertson followed by p. for page or pp. for pages and the number(s).

²⁶C. S. Lewis, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature, collected by Walter Hooper (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966), p. 44.

²⁷D. W. Robertson in his Preface to Chaucer, p. 6, states that "the relevance of order as a fundamental principle of iconography was pointed out long ago by Emile Mâle," in L'Art religieux de xiii^e siècle (Paris, 1923), pp. 7-9.

"By the second half of the twelfth century," says Robertson, "it was possible to think of rather obvious hierarchies arranged in accordance with systematic degrees in almost all phases of life and thought" (Robertson, p. 8). A religious hierarchy was present in the Church where the Pope was head and all the other bishops and clerics were subservient to him. A governmental hierarchy was seen in the feudal system and also in the commonwealth where all were subject to the nobles, the nobles to the prince, and the prince to the King. Creation itself was seen as a combination of celestial and earthly hierarchies with God the Creator over all. The order of Creation as seen by the Parson in Chaucer's "The Parson's Tale,"

is sooth that God, and resoun, and sensualitee, and the body of man been so ordeyned that everich of thise foure thynges shold have lordshipe over that oother;/ as thus: God sholde have lordshipe over resoun and resoun over sensualitee, and sensualitee over the body of man./²⁸

Thus within man himself was a moral hierarchy with reason over sensuality. Still another hierarchy was seen between man and wife. This latter relationship in medieval times was often likened to that between Christ and the church as recorded in Ephesians:

Wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

²⁸Citations from Chaucer's "Parson's Tale" in this text are to The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Fred N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside, 1961)--hereafter cited as PT for "Parson's Tale" with the line number or numbers following.

He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ the church, because we are members of his body.²⁹

If this (or any of the other hierarchies mentioned) existed within its proper order it was seen in medieval terms as a "marriage" (Robertson, p. 375). But if the man-wife or other hierarchies were disturbed and there was "rebelliousness within the hierarchical ideal" (Robertson, p. 11), the "manere of ordre or ordinaunce" was "turned up-so-down" (PT 259), and the condition became termed "adultery" (Robertson, p. 11).

The first example of "adultery" or "rebelliousness within the hierarchical ideal" was that of Adam and Eve. Because the following chapter deals with the role of Eve in the Garden, the Fall is touched upon only briefly at this time. Eve (flesh), who was tempted by Satan, sinned and fell from a perfect state of Grace. In her falling she took along Adam (reason) who should have been her hierarchical ruler. The Parson in Chaucer's "Parson's Tale" explains sins, in this case the Fall, as having three steps:

first, suggestion of the feend, as sheweth heere by the naddre; and afterward, the delit of the flessh, as sheweth heere by Eve, and after that the consentynge of resoun, as sheweth heere by Adam. (330)

But he explains that without completion of all three steps the sin or Fall is not "actueel":

For trust wel, though so were that the feend tempted Eve, that

²⁹Ephesians V. 23-30 (Revised Standard Version).

is to seyn, the flessch, and flessch hadde delit in the beautee of the fruyt defended, yet certes, til that resoun, that is to seyn, Adam consented to the etynge of the fruyt, yet stood he in the estaat of innocence. (331)

Just as man was not obedient to God, his lord, "therefore is flessch to hym disobeissant thurgh concupiscence, which yet is cleped nor-rissyng of synne and occasioun of synne" (PT 337). Since obedience was no longer the binding force and since stability was no longer the proper condition within the progression of the original hierarchy, sin and chaos now prevailed; things were "up-so-doun"; "adultery" in the medieval sense had taken place.

When man fell, his "reason was corrupted and his will was misdirected" (Robertson, p. 27). The "knowing of God" and the being able to "share in that way the bliss of Heaven" was lost; it became the responsibility of the Church to instruct man in what he had received before the Fall "without obstruction."³⁰ Because death was inevitable for all of Adam and Eve's descendants, the medieval English Church taught that "death is seen not as an affliction but rather as the culmination of a long journey--the release from all the shortcomings attendant upon man in his mortal state."³¹ The Church also taught that earthly life was but a "school which prepared man for the life everlasting."³²

³⁰Kolve, p. 3.

³¹David M. Zesmer, Guide to English Literature From Beowulf through Chaucer and Medieval Drama (1961; rpt. N. Y.: Barnes and Noble, 1965), p. 90.

³²Zesmer, p. 89.

Because the "imminence of death could not be overlooked in the pestilences of the fourteenth century or the anarchical conditions of the fifteenth,"³³ man had to always be ready for death. Because "vor al thet lyf of ane manne/ thag he leuede a thousand year: thet ne ssolde by? bote onlepy prikke,"³⁴ the Church stressed that "not life, not how to live but how to be ready for death"³⁵ was important. The key to being ready for death in a world that still believed man "culpable for sin" was repentance. By repentance any or all of the proper hierarchies could be restored.

Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyt, a Middle English moral allegory, uses an interesting analogy to explain the reason for penance. He states that as a fish goes willingly into the net so does a man go willingly into sin; but even though they go in willingly neither: "Ac out ne may he nagt guo: wyth-oute our lhordes helpe."³⁶ The Lord's help in fighting sin comes through penance. Chaucer's Parson explains that "Penitence" is "the pleynyng of man for the guilt that he hath doon, and namoore to do anythyng for which hym oghte to pleyne" (PT 183). The

³³E. K. Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages (1945; rpt. N. Y. Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 52.

³⁴Pamela Gordon, ed., Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyt, EETS, O.S. 23 (1866; reissue, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), I, p. 71. Subsequent references to this addition will appear in the shortened form Ayenbite--followed by p. for page and pp. for pages and then the number(s).

³⁵Hunt, p. 38.

³⁶Gordon, pp. 170-171.

Church taught that "penitence" was possible even to those medieval persons who sinned again and again but repented before death and sin overtook them:

Even death-bed repentance could snatch a soul from immediate peril of hell and in purgatory souls not yet fit for perpetual bliss could spend a time of waiting which earnest supplication offered for them on earth might shorten or end.³⁷

But even though death-bed repentance was possible, the imminence of death during the Middle Ages caused Chaucer's Parson and the Corpus Christi dramatists to stress Augustine's doctrine that "Penitence of goode and humble folk is the penitence of every day," (PT 100); repentance of tomorrow may be too late.

Just as Chaucer's Parson had written about repentance that, "For oure book seith, 'al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine,' and that is my entente" (PT 1083), so too, must the Corpus Christi dramatists have written their "quicke bookis" with the idea that the female dramatic characters within had thematic importance which was "writen" for the doctrine of the medieval audience in showing man's and especially woman's nature as fallen. Since the middle class English medieval woman "was unaffected by chivalrous ideals, and probably seldom contemplated the possibility of attaining heaven's greatest reward"³⁸ for which repentance is necessary, the Corpus Christi plays enabled her to see that that possibility did exist. By

³⁷Stenton, p. 203.

³⁸Chadwick, p. 101.

seeing the example of the first woman sinner Eve, woman (and all mankind) saw man's nature as fallen. As a result of this fallen nature all men were inclined to sin as is exemplified by the women characters studied in this thesis. Even though salvation in Christ came through a woman, Mary, man's nature was still a fallen one because of the first woman sinner Eve; however, man now had the possibility to reorder his world and realize his hope for eternal life. One could reorder his "up-so-doun" world only by being sorry for his sins, by giving up his "imperfect life,"³⁹ and by accepting God which could be done by accepting baptism, or by accepting the Church, or by asking forgiveness of all sins.⁴⁰ In this thesis medieval English female characters are presented who have thematic importance in doing the afore-mentioned things; these characters are Noah's wife, the Woman Adulterer, Mary Magdalene, and the Saved Queen. However, female characters who did not reorder their world were just as important thematically as the above characters. Significant examples of this type of woman are Gyll, Pilate's wife, the Ale-Wife, and the Damned Queen. The thematic importance of each of these non-repentant women forced medieval woman (and mankind) to see that they must not continue

³⁹Kolve, p. 239.

⁴⁰For similar views on ways of receiving forgiveness see Prosser, pp. 9-13 and Ross, p. 141.

in their sinful ways, for if their earthly world remained disordered and chaotic their everlasting world would be one of fire and damnation in hell.⁴¹

⁴¹ For details on Chaucer's and the medieval view of hell see George P. Pace, "Adam's Hell," PMLA, LXXVIII, No. 1 (March 1963), 25-35. For a description of the torments of the damned in hell, see W. O. Ross, Middle English Sermons, p. 174.

CHAPTER II: EVE

Throughout the Christian year the English townsfolk had more of the Church, of religious instruction, of ritual and of scriptural narrative than modern man can imagine possible, but "when the pageants were acted they listened with a simple credulity, no doubt to the sacred history, and with a reverence our age of illumination can neither emulate nor understand."¹ The pageants were for them "a confirmation--through the media of speech, action, song and spectacle--of the living faith."² The drama which presented this sacred history had its formal ordering process just as other aspects of medieval life. The order that this drama "sought to create, was not only aesthetic but historically true: it sought to pattern human experience, to give to the history of men an order that would reveal its meaning."³ In this patterning of human experience there was a very definite progression from the fall of Lucifer and the fall of man to the triumph of Christ and Doomsday. As the world "unrolled in episodes...each a hint or sign or sample, a type or antitype of the scheme of salvation...characters, institutions, and events...had their 'raison d'être.'"⁴

¹Charles Mills Gayley, ed., Representative English Comedies: From the Beginnings to Shakespeare, V (1903; rpt. N. Y.: The Macmillan Co., 1930), xxxv.

²George R. Thomas, ed., Ten Miracle Plays (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1966), p. 12.

³Kolve, p. 20.

⁴Gayley, p. xxxi.

Since the plays began with the first events, it is natural that this study of nine medieval female dramatic characters, all sinners, should also begin with the "raison d'être" and thematic importance of Eve, the original woman sinner as seen in the plays of the four extant cycles: Towneley, York, Ludas Coventriae and Chester.⁵

Christian doctrine was often revealed through "illusion"⁶ and, therefore, Medieval English audiences could imagine knowing both good and evil by seeing the first episodes about Adam and Eve as presented in the Corpus Christi plays. "For only by evil do men know the good: how could we know white if all things were black, or else know virtuous man unless there were also some scoundrels?"⁷ An evil medieval world "must be driven to contemplate the stark realities of current life and the ominous hereafter--sin, disaster, death, and hell pains,"⁸ as resulting from the Original Sin and man's fallen nature. Only by imagining the original perfection of Creation did medieval man see how perfect he once was and

⁵For more information on the history of the Adam-Eve plays see A. C. Cawley, ed., Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays (1956; rpt. Dutton, N. Y.: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1965), p. 11. See also Owst, p. 540 for information on the Adam and Eve plays as a possible outgrowth of medieval homilies.

⁶Kolve, p. 30.

⁷William Langland, Piers The Ploughman, trans. and rev. J. F. Goodridge (1959; rpt. "Penguin Books"; Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 125. The standard edition of W. W. Skeat published for the EETS was used in preparing this translation.

⁸Owst, p. 54.

could be still if it were not for the Original Sin. By seeing the perfection of the world as it was before the Fall, an evil medieval world would wish to once again attain that perfection (everlasting life or salvation) possible to it by earthly acceptance of God or repentance. Eve was involved in making repentance necessary, so by understanding the thematic role of Eve in the Garden, medieval man could also better understand his own "raison d'être"; he could better understand his fallen nature and realize what he could do to restore order. A study of the cycle plays will show Eve's thematic importance in these concepts. Each play will not be studied individually, and only the most significant and vivid passages about the fall and Eve's role in it will be given, since the creation and fall is basically the same in all cycles.

After God creates the heavens, earth, and the creatures he realizes:

But yitte can I here no beste see
 That accordes by kyndly skylle,
 And for my werke myghte worshippe me.⁹
 (York III.14-16)

And so, God decides to create man. Because God wishes to "a-hate"

⁹Lucy Toulmin Smith, ed., York Mystery Plays (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885). Subsequent references to the creation-fall plays as seen in this chapter will appear in the text in the shortened form--York followed by the number of the play as given in this edition in Roman numerals and the line number(s) given in arabic numbers. Play III is entitled God creates Adam and Eve, Play IV--God puts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Play V--Man's Disobedience and Fall from Eden, and Play VI--Adam and Eve driven from Eden.

man's "haut and cheere" (York III.27) as found in Lucifer and the other fallen angels, God creates man "of the symplest part of erthe that is here" (York III.25). This lowly origin of clay is to remind man that he shall become as feeble as dust again when he dies. In speeches like the following the audience is instructed as to the purpose of man's being:

To keepe this worlde bothe more and lesse
 A skyfull beeste than will y make,
 Aftir my shappe and my liknesse,
 The whilke shalle wirshippe to me take.
 (York III.21-24)

After God creates man, he sees as in the Chester play:

Hit is not good man onely to be;
 helpe to him now make wee.¹⁰
 (Chester 129-130)

Eve's first "raison d'être" is not only as Adam's "helpe," but also as "feere" (Chester 136), "make" (Towneley¹¹ 187 and Ludas Coventriae¹² 101) and "faithfull freende and sibbe" (York III.40). That she is created from "bone...and fleshe also with hart free"

¹⁰Hermann Deimling, ed., The Creation, in The Chester Plays, EETS, E.S. 62 (1892; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), I, 20-47. Subsequent references to this play as seen in this chapter will appear in the text in the shortened form--Chester followed by the line number(s) given in arabic numbers.

¹¹Alfred W. Pollard, ed., The Creation, in The Towneley Plays, EETS, E.S. 71 (1897; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 1-9. There will be no subsequent references to this play as the last twelve leaves of the manuscript on the temptation and fall are missing.

¹²K. S. Block, ed., The Creation of the World and Man, and The Fall of Man, in Ludas Coventriae or The Plaie called Corpus Christi, EETS, E.S. 120 (1922; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 19-29. Subsequent references to this play as seen in this chapter will appear in the text in the shortened form--LC for Ludas Coventriae, followed by the line number(s).

as in Chester 135, and more particularly from Adam's "rib" as in the Towneley and York plays has significance in that she

was not taken from Adam's head, because/ she was not intended to be his ruler, not from his feet either because she was not intended to be his slave, but from his side, precisely because she was intended to be his companion.¹³

As companions in Paradise they are, according to the Chester Adam, "twoo in one fleshe, as thou can make,/ ether other for to glade" (Chester 159-160). Without Eve, Adam would have been lonely; but with Eve, Adam, whose name in Hebrew means man,¹⁴ becomes a living man who knows not only loneliness but also joy and bliss.

Although they were companions, there was still a hierarchy in their relationship as the Chester dramatist emphasizes in having Adam name Eve:

Virago, nothing amisse,
for out of man taken she is,
and to man shall she draw.
(Chester 150-152)

Thus the first "marriage" was seen by medieval people as established by God himself with the two mates as companions within the hierarchical relationship with man as head over woman. This relationship of man over woman had to exist for the medieval person or his world

¹³Power, pp. 114-115. For information on the Creation of Eve as depicted in art see M. D. Anderson's Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 141-142. If interested in the typology of the Creation of Eve as taken from Adam's side, as the Church was taken from the wounded side of Christ, see Anderson, p. 25.

¹⁴Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (1916; rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1961), p. 1177.

became disordered; likewise, the relationship of spirit over flesh must also be kept in that order or the hierarchy of creation was turned "up-so-down."

After Adam and Eve praise God for making them in his likeness and thus according them dignity, Adam asks God what they shall do and where they shall dwell. God replies:

Lovis me for-thy and loues me aye
For my makyng, I aske no more.
(York III.67-68)

God explains that just as he rules over them so shall they have "Lordshippe in erthe.../Alle thyng to serue the that is wrought" (York III.75). They shall "same wonne" (York III.73)--dwell together--in Paradise where "ille and good bothe" shall they know (York III.75). Note the important foreshadowing of the dramatist in the latter line. Adam and Eve both promise to love, praise, and worship God for the great dignity he has given them. Then God says his creation is ended with man:

Alle likes me wele, but this the beste.
My blissyng haue they euer and ay.
(York III.88-89)

Adam and Eve are given advice about living in Paradise; they are warned that all things are theirs but the Tree of Good and Evil which they promise to go not "negh" (York IV.73) for fear of dying. At this particular moment all hierarchies are ordered: God the Creator is over the Angels, over man, and over all Creation; man is over his wife; and they together are over all creatures.

Satan is puzzled by God's decision to make man out of clay in the likeness of God rather than in the image of the Angels who are so

"faire and bright" (York V.8). As he thinks aloud Satan begins to show his envy of the blissful pair:

should such a caytiff, made of claye
 have such blisse? Nay, be my laye!
 (Chester 177-178)

Satan wants to destroy this bliss and decides to get to Adam through this "make":

For I shall teache his wife a playe,
 and I maye have a while.
 For her deceave, I hope, I maye
 and through her bring them both awaye.
 (Chester 179-182)

If Satan can get the fair Eve to sin, he is sure Eve will be able to convince Adam to sin also. This exemplifies a commonly held medieval belief that man was often lured into sin because of woman, "for man, being made of flesh, is bound at times to follow the flesh."¹⁵ Because of his deep envy of man and his scorn of God's love for man, Satan also desires Adam and Eve's offspring:

They shall fare bothe, as did I,
 be banished bouth of that vallye
 and their offspring for aye.
 (Chester 202-204)

Note the key foreshadowing by the Chester dramatist in the last line which warns the medieval audience that even though Christ (the new Adam) was born of Mary (the new Eve) and brought salvation, man is still fallen and will have to continue to wage the battle against sin--the battle to keep reason and flesh and other hierarchies in proper order. Satan's choice to work through Eve reflects this battle:

¹⁵Langland, p. 139.

for she will doe as I her saye;
her hope I to beguile.

That woman is forbyd to doe,
for anythinge therto will shooe;
therefore that tree shall shee come to
and assaye which it is.

(Chester 183-188)

Eve is further related to the flesh by a later speech of Satan:

and of that tree of Paradice
she shall eate through my coyntice
for women are full liccoris
that she will not forsake.
And eate she of it full witterly.

(Chester 197-201)

It is significant that the Chester Satan here speaks anachronistically of Eve by giving her a characteristic that all medieval women were related to--lechery. When woman's delight in the flesh overcomes man (or reason), the proper hierarchy is disordered. The dramatist shows this here by his choice of words and images relating to Eve.

Because medieval women were more trusting of their gossips (women friends) than of any man, the Chester Satan appears before Eve as an adder with a "maydens' face" (Chester 195). There is significance in the fact that just as Eve will be temptress of Adam through flesh, so too will Satan be the temptress of Eve. This association of woman and serpent is commonly seen in medieval art. It could be publicly seen, for example, in the representation of a reptile with a woman's face in Salisbury Cathedral,¹⁶ and as

¹⁶Langland, p. 308.

the "human-headed serpent who holds out the apple in its mouth" and "wears a peaked headdress" (one of the favorite costumes of medieval ladies) in the window of Malvern Priory.¹⁷

The wily "maydyn" Serpent tempts Eve by suggestion in the areas in which medieval women were the weakest. Eve is first softened up by the Serpent's flattery: "Heyl Ffayr Wyff and comely dame" (LC 169). After she is flattered she is told "in counselle" by Satan (as the medieval women would be told things in secret by their gossips) that she will be as God "in al degre" (LC 185). In the Chester play Satan turns her against God and towards himself by promising her Godly power:

God is coynt and wyse of wytt,
And wottes well, when you eate hit,
then your eyes shalbe unknit,
like goddes you shall be,
And knowe both good and evill also,
therefore he warned yow therfro:
you may well wyt he was your foe,
therefore dose after me.
(Chester 225-232)

When Eve questions who is telling her this tale the serpent says, "A worme that wotith wele how/ that yhe may wirshipped be" (York V.54-55). Eve again questions him and says that they already have "maistrie" (York V.58) over all things; besides she says "to do is us full lothe,/ that shuld oure god mispaye" (York V.64). Satan promises her that:

Ete it safely ye maye.
For perille ryght there none in lyes
But worshippe and a greate wynnynge
(York V.67-69)

¹⁷Anderson, p. 56.

Ay! goddis shalle ye be
Of ille and gode to have knowyng,
For to be als wise as he!
(York V.71-73)

But Eve still asks "Is this soth that thou sais?" (York V.74).

Satan, this time angered, again answers with lies:

Yhe! why trowes thou nogt me?
I wolde be no-kynnes wayes
telle noght but trouthe to the.
(York V.75-77)

Once Satan has gained her confidence through suggestion by guile, flattery, and by promises of things to come, he tempts her further with the suggestion that the fruit is good:

This ffrute to Ete I the counselle
take this appyl and ete this ssame
This frute is best as I the telle.
(LC 172-174)

Eve "delights" in what she sees:

Ah! lord, this tree is fayre and bright,
greene and semelye in my sighte,
the fruyte swete and much of mighte,
that goddes it may us make.
(Chester 241-244)

And when Satan continues, he gives an indication of his intentions:

Byte on boldly, be nought a-basshed
And bere Adam to amend his mode,
And eke his blisse,...
(York V.80-82)

Now two stages of the Original Sin are completed. There has been suggestion by the serpent, and delight by the flesh, but reason has not given into the flesh yet--this hierarchy is still ordered. Eve has broken one hierarchy in the marriage relationship, however, by

doing as the worm suggested without first "drawing" to Adam or reason for advice. Love, the bond of all order and especially of spirit and flesh has been "misdirected" by "erring human will" at the persuasion of Satan (Robertson, p. 31). When Satan suggests that Eve will be as God, she accepts that idea and loves it more than either her husband or her God. The medieval people believed that "all materials are inferior to their fabricator" God (Robertson, p. 75), who is the one "proper object of love" (Robertson, p. 65). Therefore, the bond of order is misdirected when Eve loves the idea of being as God better than anything else.

Not only does Eve take and eat of the apple as was seen above, but she plans to get her husband to taste of the same. Fleshly Eve, because of her womanly ways has little difficulty in convincing Adam to eat of the apple:

Adam, husband, life and deere,
 eate some of this apple here;
 it is fayre, my leeif fere,
 it may thou not forsake.
 (Chester 249-252)

Adam delights so in the appearance of Eve and in the apple that he takes Eve's (and Satan's) suggestion without questioning:

That is sooth, Eve, without weere,
 the fruite is sweete and fayre in feere,
 therefore I will doe thy prayer,
 one morseil I will take.
 (Chester 253-256)

Adam as seen in the other two versions is not so willing

to eat so quickly!¹⁸ Adam at first cries out:

Alas! woman, why toke thou this?
Owre lorde commaunded us bothe
to tente the tree of his.

Alas! thou hast don amys.
(York V.84-86, 88)

Eve tells him to

greve the nought at it,
And I shal saie the reasonne why,
We shalle be as goddis, thou and I.
(York V.89-90, 92)

It is ironic that Eve (flesh) attempts to justify to reason why they should do "amys" when it is he, the higher order of the hierarchy, that should be justifying to her why they should not do "amys." When Adam finally gives in to her "reed" and the devil's wishes, reason is overcome by a lower order in the hierarchy--flesh. When Adam (reason) consents to Eve, the fleshly temptress, the sin becomes "actueel,"

Once the Sin is "actueel" Adam and Eve understand what they have done. Just as God had hinted earlier, they now know both good and evil. Their first reaction is one of shame: they see their "fals dede" (LC 247) and their nakedness (Chester 258). Their next reaction is to put the blame elsewhere; Adam considers

¹⁸Adam's debating over whether or not to eat the apple "proffered by Eve" as seen in these plays had significance for the medieval audience. If Adam (reason) had not consented to the wishes of Eve (flesh) there would never have been an Original Sin. Without the Original Sin man's nature would not have fallen; therefore, man's world and hierarchies would not be disordered. For an illustration of this debate see Queen Mary's Psalter, Pl. 5.

Creation is disturbed. Instead of taking care of the Garden of Paradise, Adam and Eve have to "swete and syvnke,/ and trauayle for...fode" on "erthe" (York V.161-162). Because his reason has been overcome by the flesh Adam is punished for believing Eve's tale:

Adam, for thou trowyd hir take
 He sendis the worde and sais thou shalle
 lyffe ay in sorrow,
 Abide and be in bitter bale,
 tille he the borowe.
 (York VI.36-40)

The latter line looks forward momentarily to Christ, the new Adam, who will save mankind. Then Eve is chastized. Because she had acted as an instrument of Satan in tempting her husband, and because "delight" has entered through her person she is told that:

thy mischiefe I shall multeply:
 with pennaunce, sorrow, and great anoye
 thy children shalt thou beare.

and for thou hast done so to daye,
 the man shall mayster thee alwaye,
 and under his power thou shalt be aye
 thee for to drive and deere.
 (York VI.314-320)

She is told that she shall be "in daungere and in deth dredynge/ in to thi lyvys ende" (LC 339-340). It is pertinent to note that once the sin is "actuell" the world is no longer a place of joy and bliss, but also a place of sorrow, misery and death. In this now disordered world there is also disharmony in the marriage relationship. Adam dislikes the fact that the world is fallen and that because of their sin,

Alle this worlde is wroth with mee,
 This wote I wele,
 (York VI.115-116)

He argues with Eve saying, "Allas! what womans witte was light!" (York VI.133). Eve counters that since woman's wit was light, "Man's maistrie shulde have bene more/ agayns the gilte" (York VI.137-138); man should have "turnyd" her thought (York VI.133). The argument continues with Adam bewailing his fate as the result of trusting a woman:

Now all my kinde by me is kent,
 to flee womans intisement;
 whoe trustes them in anye intente,
 truly he is decayved.
 (Chester 349-352)

Here Adam anachronistically emphasizes the medieval viewpoint that woman as the lower order in the marriage hierarchy should never be trusted for she often overcomes man in his weaker moments. Adam blames her fleshy "intisement" saying:

My licourous wife hath bene my foe,
 the devilles envye shent me also,
 they twayne together weill may goe,
 the sister and the brother!
 (Chester 353-356)

The association of Eve with Satan (her brother) is again a reminder to medieval man that where woman is present, other dangers are present. Adam, who has learned from experience that the lower orders can overcome reason, warns the audience once more that,

god let never man trust them twoo,
 the one more than the other!
 (Chester 359-360)

Eventually Adam (reason) does try to comfort his flesh.
He tells Eve that,

I wyl not sle ffleschly of my fflesch
Ffor of my fflesh . thi fflesh was wrought
Our hap was hard . oure wytt was nesch.
(LC 393-395)

By admitting that their "wytt was nesch" Adam indicates that he realizes that a hierarchy existed which they had broken. Their reaction now is one of sorrow as is exemplified by Eve's wretched state:

I wende as wrecch in welsom way
in blake busshys must my bowre xal be.
.....
my husbond in lost be-cause of me
leve spouse now thou fonde
Now stumble we on stalk and ston
my wyt a-wey is fro me gon.
(LC 380-381, 385-388)

Adam says that the only way out of this wretched state of stumbling through life is to reorder their marriage and world. They also must start looking more to their new life. As they go forth together, he must labor to find food and she must spin to clothe and keep them warm. Their woe, as compared to the bliss which they once knew, will continue says Adam:

Tyll sum comforth of godys sonde
with grace releve oure careful mynde
Now come go we hens wyff.
(LC 410-413)

Even though Eve is reminded that God's son will come, she still feels wretched, and admits the sin and its effects:

Alas that ever we wrought this synne
 our bodely sustenauns for to wynne
 ye must delve and I xal spynne
 in care to ledyn our lyff.

(LC 413-416)

Thus, the creation-fall plays in the cycles end with Adam and Eve looking ahead to a life of toil and "care"--the kind of life the medieval audience knew well.

In summary, Eve's thematic importance in the Garden scenes of the Corpus Christi plays is that of a unifying character showing man's fallen nature as the result of Original Sin. Eve is first created as Adam's mate and companion. Without her, his life would be lonely and Creation would not be perfect; with her, Creation is perfected; but because of her it is later marred; and just as Adam is made happy, so too is he made sad. Eve is spiritually "blynde," "defe," and "dombe" in the Garden. Eve is "blynde" because she "sawe the edder and consentid to is entizement," for this adder was as the fiend who had come to beguile her. She is spiritually "defe" because she "harde hym and than brake the commaundement of God." And she is spiritually "dombe" because she "spake to the eddur and left Goddes wordes" (Ross, p. 146). Because of these qualities, and because of her own foolish pride, she takes the fiend's suggestion and eats of the apple, thereby, disobeying God and destroying the proper order of Creation.

Pride, the "sin of rebellion against God," the "sin of exaggerated individualism" was thought of as one of the most "heinous" sins in the Middle Ages, for

a civilization in which order and balance were the chief ideals

could not look upon the vice of pride lightly: it struck at the roots of society both human and divine....Pride meant rebellion, dangerous independent thinking, setting up one's interests as supreme; meant disobedience, upsetting the divinely appointed order....So it was that to medieval order and discipline, pride appeared as the worst of all the sins and root of all evil.¹⁹

"Pride's special blindness,"²⁰ in Eve's case is blindness to her nature and limits. Because her desires lead her to rebel against her God and against her husband, Eve appears as the worst of all sinners in the medieval English Corpus Christi plays. She has a "longing for knowledge and understanding" which does not belong to her, for "it is against Nature and contrary to all Reason that anyone but Christ should know all things."²¹ Eve rebels against her husband in not asking reason's advice before eating of the apple; in medieval terms flesh operated wrongly without the "guidance of spirit" (Robertson, p. 303). She exerts her individualism to a point beyond the realms of the marriage hierarchy when she tempts Adam, thus turning the marriage hierarchy "up-so-doun." The woe that Eve suffers as the result of her "marriage of inversion" (Robertson, p. 330) serves to remind all medieval women that they should be good wives who have the qualities of "submission, obedience, and constant attention"²² to their husbands and to God.

¹⁹Morton W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins, Stud. in Lang. and Lit., XIV (East Lansing, Michigan: State College Press, 1952), 75.

²⁰Rosemond Tuve, Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and Their Posterity (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), p. 121.

²¹Langland, p. 180.

²²Power, p. 99.

Not only is Eve's sin a reminder to women, but even more important it is a reminder to all mankind that as the result of the Original Sin all men have fallen natures. None may live in this world "wyth-oute zenne" (Ayenbite, p. 74); none may live without constantly fighting sin and temptation. The devil constantly tempts a man to commit the sins to which that man is most inclined:

and to that synne he will evermore nyght and day tempte hym ther-to. For the dewell, as seynt Gregore Sayth, hase the condicions of a theeffe. For what tyme that a theeffe will breke an hous or a wall, where the hous is febulleste and the wall lowest, ther will he sonest breke in. (Ross, p. 218)

Because the devil tempts man where he is weakest (as he tempted Eve in pride), it is difficult for any man to keep his hierarchies right side up (Robertson, p. 503). According to the medieval mystic Dame Julian of Norwich, man is "fickle in this life, and by his frailty and ignorance falls into sin. He is essentially weak and foolish, and his will can be overborne...he is blind to God."²³ Even the worthiest and strongest of men as Solomon, Samson, and David were overcome by sin, especially sin of the flesh in their moments of weakness:

And yef thou wylt habbe uorbisnes: thench that non ne wes stronger thanne samson fortin. ne wiser thanne salomon. ne more milder thanne dauid. and alway uillen be wyfmen. (Ayenbite, p. 204)

One may ask why God permitted man's will to be overborne, why he permitted man to be blind to God, why he permitted Eve and all Christian men to sin when he knew their nature was weak. The

²³Clifton Wolters, trans. Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love ("Penguin books"; Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 134.

medieval answer as stated in an English medieval sermon is:

...for to shewe is/ lordeshippe and that he ys lorde of all the worlde. Than in that, that he is lord...than it longeth to hym to be ryghtwisse; that is to/ sey to zelde goode men good thinges, and to evyll men evyll. (Ross, p. 29)

God also permitted sin because:

He moste also/ suffre men to done yll to shew ys mercy, the wiche is/ chefe of ys verkes, as David seyth; for giffe men tres-/ pased not, thei needed not to haske mercy. So then for/ryght and for mercy and fore oure best he suffres us to/ don evyll/ for and we amend, than owre joye shall be/ encresed. (Ross, p. 29)

Not until Eve sins does she really understand God's lordship nor does she have need to ask mercy. Once God has permitted sin, the first good thing that he does is to bring the sinner to his senses so he can see his wrongs as was exemplified by Eve in the Corpus Christi plays. By "the yefhe/ of connyng" man sees "huet he is and ine huet peril he is. and huannes he comth. and huyder he geth. and thet he deth" (Ayenbite, p. 115). Only after Eve sins does she realize that as one of God's children she should not have tried to be as God for only He knows all things. She sees the wrong that she has done in letting the serpent deceive her, and in tempting Adam. Because Eve sees her faults she can be considered "blessed." The Ayenbite (p. 160) states that Christ does not say "blessed be they who sin not," but "'yblissed byeth tho that wepeth/ uor hy ssole by conforted.' That is to zigge: tho byeth yblissed: thet zzyeth (seeth) and onderstondeth and knoweth wel hire defautes."

Only when Eve knows her own faults and sees her "imperfections" (Ayenbite, p. 115) and her "unworthiness" (Ayenbite, p. 130)

is she ready to accept God and to ask for mercy. In accepting God Eve is sorry for her sins and the hierarchical relationship between God and man is restored to its natural order. The "order of mercy is part of the natural order of the created world" (Robertson, p. 125). When flesh obeys reason, the man-wife hierarchy is also restored. By these examples medieval man is shown that even though his own nature is fallen he can reorder his world of "up-so-doun" hierarchies. The way to reorder this sinful world as seen in the creation-fall plays of the Corpus Christi cycles is for man to try to keep his reason in control of his flesh and to ask forgiveness whenever he sins.

CHAPTER III: REPENTANT WOMEN

A. Noah's Wife

The "grand design" of the Corpus Christi plays begins at a "fixed point and would end at Doomsday."¹ Within this design is a "patterning of human experience" which sees "humankind" as a "single estate, defined by the instincts and limitations of a fallen nature."² As a result of the Original Sin, even good men and women have fallen natures. Even though these men may sin in the beginning, once they accept God and ask for forgiveness of their sins they become God's children:

The ultimate mystery of how it is possible for a fallen man to do good is never posed by this drama in abstract terms. It more simply and usefully imitates historical actions that had pleased God and shows their origin in a common human nature. The ultimate virtue of the good is obedience, and later charity; whatever their initial instinct, in the end they bind themselves to God's will, and though they remain categorically separate from Him, they become His good and chosen servants.³

In the drama one of the main historical actions after the Fall of Man which shows man's nature as first fallen and his world as disordered, but then shows man's nature as obedient and his world as re-ordered, is the Flood as experienced by Noah's wife. A study of the Towneley play Noah and the Ark⁴ will show how one woman reorders her relationship with her husband and her God.

¹Thomas, p. 14.

²Kolve, p. 264.

³Kolve, p. 264.

⁴Alfred W. Pollard, ed., Noah and the Ark, in The Towneley Plays, EETS, E.S. 71 (1897; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 23-40. Subsequent references to this play will appear in the text in the shortened form--Noah--followed by the line number(s) given in arabic numbers.

Because the medieval audience knew their natures to be fallen and were therefore interested in restoring the proper hierarchies, they listened with a "simple credulity" and "with a reverence" to the pageants, from which they could take example. As they listened, they awaited with "keenest expectation...the invented episodes where tradition conformed itself to daily life."⁵ Such an invented episode involves Noah's wife as seen in the Towneley play of the Flood. From the "bare scriptural fact" that Noah had a wife, a wife sometimes seen as the "Old Testament prototype of Mary,"⁶ was born "a comic character and a dramatic tradition...so familiar and loved in the English Middle Ages that she became a kind of paradigm of human character: she was the root form of the shrewish wife, and her relationship with Noah became the archetype of everyday marital infelicity."⁷ The fact that Noah's wife was disobedient, like the first woman Eve, and "thus shared with us all the ordinary human weaknesses" made her a "popular character."⁸

⁵Gayley, p. xxxv. For the English tradition of the legend of Noah's wife see Anderson, p. 108; Anna Jean Mill, "Noah's Wife Again," PMLA, LXV (September 1941), 613-620; and Alan H. Nelson, "'Sacred' and 'Secular' Currents in the Towneley Play of Noah," Drama Survey (Winter 1964).

⁶Mill, p. 615.

⁷Kolve, p. 146. Noah's wife is often "compared with Chaucer's Wife of Bath as a specimen of the aggressively self-willed spouse," say F. Hopper and Gerald B. Lahey, eds., Medieval Mysteries, Moralities, and Interludes (Great Neck, N. Y.: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1962), p. 35. She is also seen as an offspring of Proverbs and of the native pulpit; see Owst, p. 492.

⁸Thomas, p. 13.

Although it has been stated by such an authority as Pollard that popular characters like Noah's wife "are obviously introduced for the sake of relief,"⁹ these comic characters have purposes far more important. Even though there is "boisterous horse-play occasioned by Noah's wife"¹⁰ there is also the seriousness which looks back to Eve, the first disobedient wife. Not only does the character of Noah's wife look back to Eve but she also represents anachronistically all disobedient wives in the Middle Ages. She serves as an example to the medieval audience of how they might reorder their "up-so-down" hierarchies: she does so by obeying her husband and by accepting her God.

The Towneley play of Noah and the Ark begins with Noah recapitulating events from the Creation to the time of this play. Noah mentions Adam and Eve who were placed in Paradise to multiply "without discord" (Noah 31). There is thematic foreshadowing in the latter words for just as Adam and Eve found much discord in their own marriage and world, so too will Noah and his wife find discord in their marriage and world when flesh tries to overcome reason as will be shown later in this study. Because the fiend "entysed man to glotony,/ styrd him to syn in pride" (Noah 37), God put man out of Paradise. But because of his love for man, God made mercy

⁹ Alfred W. Pollard, English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes: Specimens and Extracts, 5th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. xli.

¹⁰ Martial Rose, ed., The Wakefield Mystery Plays (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books--Doubleday and Co., 1962), p. 161.

possible to all those who would believe in him as Noah says:

Oyle of mercy he hus hight,/ as I have
 hard red,
 To eury lifyng wight/ that wold luf hym
 and dred.

There is thematic prefiguring also in the above passage as Noah's wife will in the end accept and praise God, thus receiving his mercy.

As a result of man's Original Sin and fallen nature, the descendants of Adam and Eve sin greatly. Noah sees this sin all around him and says:

Bot now before his sight/ every liffyng
 leyde
 Most party day and nyght/ syn in word
 and dede
 Full bold,--
 Som in pride, ire, and envy,
 Som in covetyse and glotyny,
 Som in sloth and lechery
 And other wise many-fold.
 (Noah 48-54)

Noah is worried; he dreads the vengeance which is sure to come to this chaotic world, "For syn is now alod without any repentance" (Noah 156). This warns an evil medieval world that they should repent now. Noah is one of the few souls, who, in his "sex hundreth yeris and od" (Noah 57) has lived in harmony with God; Noah is much disappointed in his fellow man and he prays that even though sin is all around him he may continue to live without sin.

God, too, is disappointed with man whom he created to be "all angels abuf, like to the Trynyte" (Noah 83). God says man was to "luf me paramoure/ By reson, and repent" (Noah 80-81). Man was

to be obedient, but instead:

...full low ligis
 he,
 In erth hymself to stuf/ with syn that dis-
 please me
 Most of all.

(Noah 84-86)

God decides to flood "medill-erd" (Noah 100) because "ffor me no man is ferd" (Noah 102). All will be destroyed:

Sayf Noe and his wife,
 For thay wold neuer stryfe
 With me ne me offend.

* * * * *
 All shall I fordo
 With floodis that shall floo;
 Wirk shall I thaym wo,
 That will not repent.

(Noah 106-108, 114-117)

However, although Noah and his wife had "neuer stryfe" with God, they have a struggle with each other as flesh tries to overcome reason. But because the woman later reorders the hierarchies by accepting God when she obeys her husband and enters the ark, she is saved when the other sinners are drowned. It is significant that just as the waters flooded the earth during the time of Noah and drowned the sinners, so shall another flood come on the Day of Doom to consume sinners with fire and brimstone.

God gives Noah instructions on how to build the ark. Then God tells him that while he is building the ark "with the shal no man fyght/ nor do the no kyn wrake" (Noah 138). However, it is ironic that even though no man will give him trouble during the building of the ark, his wife will give him much trouble after the ark is

completed. When Noah has finished his work he is to take his wife, his sons, and their wives into the ark along with two of each kind of beast, male and female, and food enough for them all. After he has heard God's instructions, Noah says he will hurry home to tell his wife the news; but at the same time he ponders what she will say and do since she is often:

...ful tethee,
 For litill oft angre;
 If any-thing wrang be,
 Soyne is she wroth.
 (Noah 186-189)

The first real hint of the wife's true character has been given before she ever appears on stage.

The disharmony between Noah and his wife is shown in Noah lines 190-248. Noah's wife is set up as the antagonistic female immediately. In reply to Noah's question of how she fares, she says "the wars I thee see!" (Noah 191). She complains that while she works Noah plays. The audience, knowing that Noah is soon to be hard at work on the ark, can now have no doubt as to why Noah had earlier worried about his wife's testiness. Noah tells her that he has tidings of bad news, but the wife threatens to beat him for always being "adred,/ be it fals or trew" (Noah 201); their marriage roles are reversed as she should not be threatening him but rather he should be threatening her. Noah's wife then addresses the audience in an aside typical of the way that medieval women might talk to their gossips: "We women may wary/ all ill husbandis" (Noah 208). Noah's

anger starts to rise and continues when she adds: "I have oone, bi Mary/ that lowsyed me of my bandis!" (Noah 209). She goes on to explain that she must appear with countenance "full sory" (Noah 211), and that she must wring her hands for "drede" (Noah 212) because that is the thing for her to do. Noah's anger increases with these words and he tells his wife to quit talking or he will make her be quiet. She swears mildly, saying if he strikes her she will strike back. We soon find out that she keeps her word when she throws a thong at Noah after he has struck at her. When he strikes again she swears that she will now strike three times for two but he promises to "qwyte" her anyway (Noah 228). Finally Noah prevails in the fighting; he tells her that she is noisy both in her whining and in her striking. Noah then speaks to the audience of her noisiness and disobedience saying that she shrieks even after she has already struck. He says that there are none others like her on middle-earth. This is ironic because there are many like her on middle-earth including all of those who are later drowned and some of those in the audience. Noah's wife's noisiness and disorder can be said to be representative of those who will be destroyed by the Flood and of those in the audience who will be destroyed by the future flood of fire on the Day of Doom. At the end of this funny scene where the husband comes out victorious, Noah goes off to work on the ark as his wife sits down to spin. Noah's wife's spinning is a reminder to the medieval woman that she is related to Eve iconographically. As if to emphasize the point that flesh continuously tries to overcome reason, the playwright has Noah, upon his

departure, ask his wife to pray for him. She refuses to do so.

After the ark is completed, Noah goes hastily to get his wife and family to come aboard. When he approaches his wife, she demands to know what ails her husband since he is in such a hurry; she also demands to know the details of what is to happen. Because she demands to know these things, the medieval audience would see that the hierarchy of reason-flesh is not in its proper order; reason should not have to justify anything to flesh. Noah tells her of the approaching flood and how all will be drowned except them and their children. Noah's wife is afraid of the tale but says she will help carry the supplies aboard only "for drede of a skelp" (Noah 323) like those Noah has used on her before.

When the ark is filled with supplies, Noah (reason) begins to try to persuade his wife (flesh) to come aboard:

...as it is skil, here must vs
abide grace;
Therfor, wife, with good will/ com into
this place.

(Noah 334-335)

Because the ark was seen iconographically by the medieval audience as the Church,¹¹ it is significant that in the latter line Noah says that she must with "good will" come into the ark. Likewise, all sinners must accept God with good will by coming into the Church if they desire mercy. However, Noah's wife is interested only in herself

¹¹Emile Mâle, The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century, trans. from 3rd ed. by Dora Nussey (1913; rpt. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), p. 154.

and her daily task of spinning. Her not wanting to take the advice of her husband is symbolic of those sinners more interested in the pleasures of daily life than in their God or the life to come. She is also symbolic of those persons who have no desire to reorder their "up-so-doun" hierarchy of reason and flesh. As she seats herself to spin she tells Noah that if the advice of any man should hinder her she will hit him; she seems to forget that after the Fall, God said that woman was to be under man and was to take his advice always. Likewise, the world of sinners about her has forgotten that man's purpose on earth is to love and praise God; therefore theirs is a world of "up-so-doun" hierarchies and discord; harmony in the medieval sense does not exist.

Noah appeals to her, pointing out how the world around them is disordered:

Behold to the heuen;/ the cat-
ractes all,
That are open full even,/ grete and small,
And the planettis seven/ left has thare
stall,
Thise thoners and levyn/ downe gar fall
full stout,
Both halles and bowers,
Castels and towres;
Full sharp ar thise showers
that renys aboute.

(Noah 343-351)

The fact that the planets have left their places is a prophecy to the medieval people that their world, too, is upside down and will someday be flooded again, but with fire instead of rain. The disordered state of the world and of the marriage reflect one another, as Kolve says:

God's great world is turned upside down just as is man's little world, and for the same reason: proper maistrye has been destroyed. Just as fallen man is rebellious to his master, God, so too is the wife rebellious to her husband, and only when the proper human relationship is re-established does the universal order begin to reconstruct itself.¹²

Noah pleads once more for order, but the wife is still more interested in carrying out earthly tasks and orders Noah to go mend his shoes. That the wife is more concerned with the trivial and fleeting aspects of life than with the more important and lasting things of salvation and grace again emphasizes the "up-so-doun" condition of her state.

Noah's children plead with their mother to come into the ark, but she says that they carp in vain (Noah 360). When Noah complains of his wife's tarrying, she says his words mean nought to her. He threatens to beat her, but she tells him to go ahead for she will not cry mercy. It is significant that like the rest of the sinners (in the play and in the audience) who have not asked for mercy, she will not be able to ask, either, if she stays out of the ark or away from the Church and the forgiveness of God much longer.

Noah's wife again addresses the audience, this time not just telling women to beware "ill" husbands but wishing the ultimate evil that her own husband were dead so she will not have to have anyone over her. The fact that the wife (flesh) wishes to rid herself of her husband (reason) again points up her "up-so-doun" state of disobedience. Noah, hearing his wife's wish, advises the young men in the audience to chastise their wives while they are young if they

¹² Kolve, p. 150.

love their lives; he will set an example for them by punishing his own wife (Noah 401-402). The presence of the humorous fighting scene between reason and flesh "sweetens the moral pill"¹³ of the impending flood and the fact that all the other sinners shall be washed away. The humiliation of Noah's wife by her husband's coming out victorious in their fight helps bring her back to human size--¹⁴she suddenly is adread since the waves are getting so wide, and she rushes into the ark (Church). The waves can be seen as a prefiguring of baptism which also washes away sin. The wife suddenly believes that there is indeed someone most powerful who can bring her to death; because of her belief she cries out, "This is a perlous case./ Help, God, when we call!" (Noah 431-432). This call for God's help emphasizes the need for all sinners to ask for God's forgiveness.

Once Noah's wife has come aboard the ark, the world and all the hierarchies within it begin to be reordered. When Noah (reason) asks his wife to take the tiller, she (flesh) immediately obeys; the husband-wife relationship is again in its proper order. Other signs of order are seen in the world around them when Noah discovers that the waters are waning and that, "Now are the weders cest/ and cateractes knyht,/ Both the most and the leest" (Noah 451-452). The wife's belief in the Creator is strengthened when she sees the sun shine again in the "eest" (Noah 453), and when the sea "wanys" (Noah 459) enough

¹³Thomas, p. 13.

¹⁴Kolve, p. 215.

that Noah can touch the ground with his hand. When she is told that they have landed on the hills of Armenia she not only believes in God but shows her belief openly by blessing him, "That thus for us ordand!" (Noah 468). She has reordered the hierarchies of her world by submitting to the rule of her husband and by accepting her God in coming aboard the ark. Because the other sinners do not reorder their chaotic worlds by accepting God or by putting flesh under reason, they are drowned as is seen by Noah's family when they leave the ark.

Noah explains that "all is away" (Noah 537) except for themselves. Pride, fleshly sin, and worldly pleasures caused the downfall of all the rest of the world. Just as Adam and Eve had at first been blind to their true natures, so too were all of the drowned sinners. However, unlike Adam and Eve and Noah's wife, the drowned had not reordered their world; they remained blind. As the play draws to a close, the relationship between Noah's wife, her husband, and her God is once again in a proper hierarchical order. Noah's wife's final concern over the lost souls is a warning to the audience that they should follow her example in accepting God by submitting flesh to reason--by reordering their sinful worlds before it is too late.

B. The Adulterous Woman

Another female character who first sins against God and order but who later is sorry for her sins, accepts God, and asks for mercy is the Ludas Coventriae Woman Adulterer. Like Noah's wife who is disobedient to her husband (reason), the Woman Adulterer is disobedient to her God (the ultimate reason). In

their disobedience both women commit adultery in the medieval sense, but because of their repentance both women also reorder their marriages. Although there is no indication that the Woman Adulterer repents in the biblical account John VIII.3-11, the Corpus Christi dramatists suggest that the Woman Adulterer is important as a repentant sinner. This is emphasized in the Ludas Coventriae play The Woman taken in Adultery.¹⁵ Through her character the audience can see that to repent is to reorder one's earthly and everlasting life.

The play begins with Jesus speaking directly to the audience saying:

Man for thi synne take repentaunce:
If thou amende that is amys,
Thou hevyn xal, be thin herytaunce.
(Woman 1-3)

The playwright states his theme of repentance in the opening speech, and continues to repeat this doctrinal point again and again:

Yett mercy to haske loke thou be hold;
(Woman 5)

Tho that you synnys be nevyr so grett
For hem be sad and aske mercy;
(Woman 8-9)

Thow thous mys-happe and synne ful sore
Yit turne Agen and mercy crave;
· · · · ·
haske thou mercy and thou shalt have.
(Woman 20-21, 23)

¹⁵K. S. Block, ed., The Woman taken in Adultery, in Ludas Coventriae or The Plaie called Corpus Christi, EETS, E.S. 120 (1922; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 200-209. Subsequent references to this play will appear in the text in the shortened form--Woman--followed by the line number(s).

Jesus's statement that, "Iff thou aske mercy, I sey nevyr nay" (Woman 16), prepares the audience for an "'everyman' drama--not history, but a personal experiencing of the mystery of Redemption."¹⁶ In this personal experiencing, both the Woman Adulterer and the members of the audience are able to reorder their sinful lives.

The Ludas Coventriae playwright has Jesus also state the secondary theme of the play, the theme which is primary in the Biblical account:

Uppon thy neybore be not vengabyl,
 Ageyn the lawe if he offende;
 Lyke as he is, thou art unstabyl--
 Thyn owyn frelte evyr thou attende.
 Ever-more thi neybore helpe to Amende
 Evyn as thou woldyst he xulde the;
 Ageyn hym wrath if thou accende
 The same/ in happ wyll falle on the.
 (Woman 25-31)

Just as Christ has mercy on man, man must have a mercy on his fellow man. However, so that the audience will not consider the above to be the main theme, the playwright has the real message stated once again before the action begins:

Who so Aske mercy, he xal have grace--
 Lett no man dowte for his mysdede
 But evyr Aske mercy whyl he hath space.
 (Woman 38-40)

Because of the imminence of death in medieval England, the English people were constantly told that the mercy of tomorrow might be too late. Therefore, through the example of the Woman Adulterer, man could see that he would receive mercy by reordering his world of

¹⁶Prosser, p. 105.

adultery by repentance now. In the medieval sense the adulterer who repented, reordered the hierarchy of reason and flesh.

The action begins with a Pharisee and Scribe plotting what they can do against Jesus whom they see as a hypocrite. The Banns of the *Ludas Coventriae* cycle had earlier "whet the interest of the spectators," says Cawley in Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays "by describing the horns of the dilemma prepared for Christ"¹⁷ by the Pharisee and the scribe:

they conseyveyd this sotylte
yf cryst this woman dede dampne trewly
A-geyn his prechyng than dede he
Which was of pece and of mercy
And yf he ded here save
than were he A-gens moyses lawe
that byddyth with stonys she xulde be slawe
thus they towth undyr ther Awe
Cryst jhesu for to haue.

(Woman 286-294)

The two evil men decide that they will use "a fals qwarel" like this to "puttyn" him "in blame" (Woman 56). Then, an informer suddenly comes to the two men to tell them of "a ryght good sporte" (Woman 66). He has just seen "a tall man" (Woman 71) and a "fayre yonge qwene" (Woman 66) go together "in to hyre chawmere" (Woman 72), and he thinks it would be good fun to "take them both to-gedyr/ Whyll that thei do that synful dede" (Woman 75-76). The scribe replies, "We shall hem take, evyn in here synne,/ Here owyn trespas shall them indite" (Woman 123-124). This is significant for when they indite the adulterers, they also indite themselves.

¹⁷Cawley, p. 131.

The comic scene which follows begins when the three men try to break down the door of the house in which the couple are having relations. The young man within, not wishing to be caught in his sin rushes out of the house in a state of undress, carrying his breeches in his hands. Words are exchanged between the three men and the youth, but the youth escapes without much difficulty. It is significant that the three men let the youth escape when he has sinned just as much as the woman. Although some critics "approve the scene as sensationalism qua sensationalism...breaking the general pall of tedium,"¹⁸ the scene according to Miss Eileen Prosser does much more than that. First, it stresses the woman's guilt as real by showing the guilt of her partner in sex. Second, it reveals the woman's character by revealing the character of her bed partner who allows her to take the blame alone. Third, it reveals the character of the Jews who appear as cowards in watching the youth escape without really trying to stop him. And fourth, the comic scene provides contrast for the scene of the woman asking mercy which follows.¹⁹ Because "laughter was a part of life," and not just entertainment, it "could teach";²⁰ the funny scene of the youth struggling with his britches, cursing the Jews, and finally escaping makes the doctrines of repentance and mercy as seen by the woman's reordering

¹⁸Prosser, p. 106.

¹⁹Prosser, p. 106.

²⁰Kolve, pp. 127, 129.

her life much more memorable.

In answer to the calls of "thou stotte," thou hore and styn-
kyng bych clowte," (Woman 145, 147) the woman cries from within:

A mercy, mercy, serys, I yow pray,
Ffor Goddys love, have mercy on me,
of mys-levyng me not be wray,
have mercy on me, for charyte.

(Woman 153-156)

The pleas of the supposed "bych" are immediately set in contrast to the cursing and devil-like ways of the Jews, who reply, "Aske us no mercy, it xal not be" (Woman 158). The refusal of the Jews would be puzzling to the medieval audience: still fresh in their minds would be the words of Jesus that "eche man to othyr be mercyable" (Woman 32). In response to the woman's promise of gold and silver to each of them if they keep her name clean, the scribe says:

To save suche stottys, it xal not be
We xal bryng the to such a game
that all advowtererys xul lern be the.

(Woman 166-168)

This is ironic, for all adulterers--people who live in a sinful and disordered world--shall indeed learn from the woman's example; she shows medieval man how to reorder all lower orders in the hierarchy. The woman even pleads for death rather than being "sclaundyrd opynly" (Woman 173) when she says "to all my frendys it xul be shame: I pray yow, kyllle me prevyly/ lete not the pepyl know my defame" (Woman 176). The fact that the woman worries about what her friends will think, and the shame that she might cause them shows the woman's partial move towards goodness; unlike the youth who runs away leaving

her to face the guilt alone, she cares for others and not just herself and what might happen to her.

The Pharisee, in answer to the woman's plea for death says: "Ffy on the scowte the devyl the qwelle" (Woman 177). He discloses their plans of taking her before the prophet where:

thou shalt haue lawe
lyke as moyse doth charge ut tyll
With grett stonys thou xalt be slawe.
(Woman 182-184)

The informer seizes the woman and threatens to give her a "clowte" if she goes not forth; the scribe reiterates the informer's threats as the four of them cross the stage to the prophet. Their movement across the stage and their vocal comments emphasize the disorder of their world. When they reach the prophet, the Pharisee acts as spokesman for the group:

...we all yow pray
to gyff trewe dom and just sentence
Upon this woman which this same day
In synfull advowtery hath don offense.
(Woman 193-196)

It is ironic that as he asks Jesus to give the woman a just sentence because of her sinful actions, he and his friends are being judged for their sinful deeds. Because the three men's sole purpose is to try to prove Jesus a hypocrite, and because they have not shown mercy to the woman, these men sin. It is very ironic that they have all physically come across the stage in a state of disorder, and they have all reached God. However, the Woman Adulterer (who has been forced to go there) submits herself to the ultimate reason--God,

while the men continue in their disordered life of rejection.

The informer and scribe are anxious for a verdict; they continue to argue for punishment, respectively:

What deth to hyre ye thynke most mete.
(Woman 200)

Shall we lete here go qwyte agayn,
or to hire deth xal she be brought.
(Woman 207-208)

Jesus does not reply to the indictments by the men, but rather writes on the ground with his finger. The woman, in a manner characteristic of a medieval repentant, confesses openly before her Christ:

Now, holy prophete, be mercyable.
Upon me, wrecch, take no vengeaunce.
For my synnys abhomynable
In hert I have grett repentaunce.
(Woman 209-212)

Even though she feels herself "wurdy to have my myschaunce--Both bodyly deth and worldly shame" (Woman 213-214), she does not feel her sins too great that she can not pray and ask for mercy in "Goddys name" (Woman 216). The Pharisee, not believing that mercy is given to all who sincerely ask for it, tells the woman that because "ageyn the lawe [she] dedyst offens," she should "of grace speke...no more" (Woman 218). The informer and scribe are troubled by the prophet's silence, but they are even more troubled when they hear his reply to them:

Loke, which of yow that nevyr synne wrought,
But is of lyff clenner than she,
Cast at here stonys and spare here nowgyt--
Clene out of synne, if that ye be.
(Woman 229-232)

The audience, however, would realize that no man is without sin as a

result of Original Sin; they would be stimulated to think of their own sins now and not just the woman's. The contrast between the three men and the woman is striking. Each man is ashamed of his sins which have been "unhyd" (Woman 251); each can not stand to remain "be-for his face" (Woman 255); and each leaves by a different exit. The woman calmly remains before Christ even after she has confessed her sins.

By this contrast the audience is reminded that immediate repentance is the best way to reorder all hierarchies. The calmness of the repentant woman when she again asks for mercy lends an element of peace to the scene which moments before had been so chaotic. Her disordered world is reordered when she submits to Christ, the ultimate reason. When she admits her "synnys unresonable" (Woman 263), she admits that her fleshly ways had dragged the spirit down--her bodily wits had been like a horse without a bridle (Ayenbite, p. 204). She then promises that "all my lewde lyff I xal doun lete" (Woman 283). The men who had set out to bring her downfall remain in a much worse state for their world is still disordered.

When Jesus speaks to the woman and to the audience, he asks why the men have gone; the woman replies, as should the audience, "by-cawse they cowde nat hemsel f excuse" (Woman 267). Jesus replies that "For to synnys that thou hast wrought/ Hath any man condempnyd the?" (Woman 273-274). Since her condemners are gone she answers no; she then places herself in God's grace to do with as he pleases. Jesus acknowledges her request and says that:

...thou shalt not condempnyd be.
 go home A-geyn and walk at large
 loke that thou leve in honeste
 and wyl no more to synne I the charge.
 (Woman 277-280)

With these words the Woman Adulterer is freed from her sins. She promises to live the rest of her life as "goddys trewe servaunt" (Woman 284). The play concludes as it opened with a speech on repentance being available to all men for the asking; and the final words include a prayer for all repentant people. Thus we see another woman, this one totally associated with flesh (and adultery), putting herself under the ultimate reason, Christ. We can contrast the confusion of the men with the peace of the woman who has reordered all "up-so-doun" hierarchies. Through a play such as this, all mankind can see that they can achieve peace through order, and that order comes through repentance.

C. Mary Magdalene and Regina Saluata

A third example of a female character whose life is disordered because of fleshly pleasures but who finally turns to God is the Ludas Coventriae Mary Magdalene.²¹ She asks for mercy for her sins so that she might reorder her world. Like Noah's wife who is disobedient to her higher order, reason, Mary Magdalene is also disobedient to her higher order, God (reason). And like the Woman Adulterer who is first obedient to her flesh Mary Magdalene sins with her flesh,

²¹K. S. Block, ed., The Last Supper in Ludas Coventriae or the Plaie called Corpus Christi, EETS, E.S. 120 (1922; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 247-248. Subsequent references to this play as seen in this chapter will appear in the text in the shortened form--LC followed by the line number(s).

thus creating "up-so-down" hierarchies. However, an excellent discussion has already been written on Mary Magdalene as the repentant sinner by the notable critic Miss Eileen Prosser in Drama and Religion in the Middle Ages.²² Therefore, only a few lines are quoted here from her actual repentance speeches.

Mary Magdalene is like the Woman Adulterer in that she first speaks to the audience of her misdeeds:

As a cursyd creature closyd all in care
and as a wyckyd wrecche all wrappyd in wo
Of blysse was nevyr no berde so bare
as I my-sylf that here now go

.....
Mary mavdelyn is my name

Now wyl I go to cryst jhesu
ffor he is lord of all vertu
and for sum grace I thynke to sew
ffor of my-self I have grett shame.
(LC 462-465, 470-474)

Then, as did the Woman Adulterer, Magdalene speaks openly to Christ of her fleshly sins:

A mercy lord and salve my synne
Maydenys fflowre thou wasir me fre
Ther was nevyr woman of mannys kynne
so ful of synne in no countre
I have be ffowlyd be fryth and ffete.

and sowght synne in manyd cete
but thow me borwe lord I xal brenne
with blake ffendys Ay bowne to be
where fore kyng of grace
With this oynement that is so sote
lete me A-noynte thin holy fote
and for my balys thus wyn sum bote
and mercy lord for my trepace.
(LC 475-487)

²²See Prosser, pp. 110-146. For another lengthy discussion of Mary Magdalene see the unpubl. diss. (Catholic Univ., 1951) by John Chauvin, "The Role of Mary Magdalene in Medieval Drama."

to make a reconinge of the right;
 now to that Dome I will me dight,
 that Dead shall duly dreed.

(Chester 10-12)

The angels who will go with God say:

Take we our Beames, and fast Blow;
 all mankynd shall them know,
 good accomptes that now can show,
 soone it shall beseene.

That haue done well in their lvyng
 they shall haue joy without endinge;
 that evill hath done without amendinge,
 shall euer haue sorrow and teene.

(Chester 33-40)

When the Heavenly band arrive at the place of judgment, the repentant sinners speak of their earthly sins. The Saved Queen admits her love for indulgences of the world:

Whyle I in earthe rich can goe,
 in softe Sandal and Silk alsoe,
 velvet also that wrought me use,
 and all such other weedes.

(Chester 149-152)

She also admits her love for the fleshly vice that these indulgences promoted:

All that might excyte Lechery,
 Pearles and precious Penye,
 agaynst thy biddinge use I,
 and other wicked dedes.

(Chester 153-156)

Thus we see that she committed similar sins; she is symbolically related to the other women in this chapter in that she shows the flesh-reason inversion. Like these other women, she also restores the proper hierarchy by repentance. However, the theme is emphasized here by having her at the Last Judgment. Although the Saved Queen admits

she "neither prayed...ne fast;/ save Almes deeds, if any past" (Chester 157-158), she receives "grace" (Chester 160) because of her "great Repentance at the last" (Chester 159). She and all repentants are saved on the Day of Judgment because of the reordering of their "up-so-doun" worlds; on this final day they are "raysed./...from fyre to rest and roe" (Chester 143-144) where they shall have "joy without pyne,/ that never shall ended be" (Chester 507-508).

In summary, it might be said that all four of the women mentioned in this chapter have thematic importance in showing that man's nature is fallen because of the Original Sin. They also show that good men eventually come to a proper reordering of their lives by penance and obedience to God's will. The fact that all four women are typical of the audience--the fifteenth century sinners who indulge in worldly pleasures and fleshly vices, emphasizes the theme that the audience too can find these "examples relevant" in their own "imperfect lives."²⁵ Since these women all repent, they show in a positive way that man must reorder his "up-so-doun" hierarchies so that reason is over flesh and God is over man. Man must reorder his world in this manner for fear of the Judgment Day when those who are like the women of this chapter will go to an orderly and peaceful heaven with God, and the rest will go to a disorderly hell "with blake ffendys."

²⁵Kolve, p. 239.

CHAPTER IV: NON-REPENTANT WOMEN

A. Gyll

If the medieval Corpus Christi audience was to imagine the world as it was after the Original Sin, it must imagine more than the episodes of people reordering their chaotic worlds. The audience must also be able to imagine through "illusion" what living was like for people like the sinners who drowned in the flood because they did not repent and reorder their hierarchies. The Corpus Christi plays must not only present an "affirmation" of life as exemplified by the women in the last chapter but a "criticism"¹ of life as is shown by the women in this chapter. The reason that medieval man must be able to imagine both the good and the bad episodes is that just as the "Divine Order includes the sinner as well as the saint" (Robertson, p. 27), so too does everyday life include the sinner and saint. Because the design of the plays was to image all of life, they must focus on the damned as well as the saved. One of the plays which does this most vividly is the Towneley Second Shepherd's Play.²

This play is "generally regarded," says J. Q. Adams, "as the finest example of comedy in the early religious drama."³ Other

¹Kolve, p. 272.

²Alfred W. Pollard, ed., Second Shepherd's Play, in The Towneley Plays, EETS, E.S. 71 (1897; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 116-140. Subsequent references to this play will be in the shortened form--SSP for Second Shepherd's Play, followed by the line number(s).

³Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (1924; Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside, 1952), p. 145.

critics say that the characters of Mak and Gyll are present only for "dramatic relief,"⁴ and that the scenes in which they take part serve only "as leaven for a mass of rather heavy dramatic dough."⁵ However, these statements do not do justice to the play for the story of Mak and Gyll does much more than provide comic relief. The Mak story parallels the serious action of the play; it shows how man should not live in contrast to how man should live. It is functionally related to what precedes it in that it reinforces the ideas of the opening scene (the shepherds' ills). It is also functionally related to what follows it in that it "anticipates negatively...by the contrasting mood of farciality, points prominent in the final scene"⁶ of the play--the stealing of the sheep, the search of the home, the suspense during the attempted concealment, and the final exposure of Mak and the Lamb.

As the play begins three shepherds are tending their flocks in different parts of the open fields. The first shepherd is disgusted with the world; he tells of their being poor, and of their "payne/ Anger, and wo" (SSP 40). The second shepherd tells of their woe because of unruly landlords, and of their discomfort in the horrible winter weather (SSP 55-63). The second shepherd's thoughts eventually center on the woe of wedded men. He addresses the audi-

⁴Pollard, English Miracle Plays, p. xli.

⁵B. J. Whiting et al., eds., The College Survey of English Literature, I (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1942), 239.

⁶Hopper, p. 42.

ence (as did Noah) and tells the young men: "Be well war of wedyng/
and thynk in youre thoght" (SSP 92) for "I haue oone to my fere/ As
sharp as a thystyll/ as rough as a brere" (SSP 100-101). The third
shepherd, a young boy, complains of the disorder of the world in words
reminiscent of the Noah play:

This world fowre neuer so,
With meruels mo and mo,
Now in weyll, now, in wo,
And all thyng wrythys

Was neuer syn Noe floode/ sich floodys seyn;
Wyndys and ranyes so rude/ and stormes so keyn;
Som stamerd, som stod/ in dowte, as I weyn;
Now god turne all to good.
(SSP 123-130)

The last line significantly foreshadows that this disordered world
of "up-so-down" hierarchies will soon be reordered for all of those
who accept the Christ Child. When the three men come together, they
discuss their totally "depressed and inferior status,"⁷ a condition
of most of humanity then. In their wish for better pay and working
conditions they are expressing a universal woe brought about by the
desolation of a fallen world. In order to try to forget their worldly
miseries temporarily, the three shepherds begin to sing a song.

This song can be contrasted with the one which the shepherds
will hear in a few hours. Their own song brings them temporary peace
and relief from woe; the song of the angel will tell of the possibility
of everlasting peace and the relief from all woe through Mary and the
birth of the Christ Child.

⁷Hopper, p. 40.

While the shepherds sing, Mak enters wearing a cloak; he pretends to be someone else. He says, "ich be a yoman/ I tell you, of the king" (SSP 200) but the shepherds know better. The true character of Mak is revealed as the shepherds speak:

- I. Pastor. Why make ye it so quaynt? / mak, ye
do wrang.
II. Pastor. Bot, mak, lyst ye saynt? / I trow that ye
lang.
III. Pastor. I trow the shrew can paynt, / the dewyll
myght hym hang!
(SSP 208-210)

Mak says that he should flog the men for such words, but the second shepherd says it is a "shrew, Iape!/ Thus late as thou goys,/ what wyll men suppose?" (SSP 221-223). After all, continues the shepherd, "thou has an yll noys/ of stelyng of shepe" (SSP 224-225). Although the shady Mak says that he is true as steel, the men know just the opposite to be true. Mak pleads with them, saying that he has "ete not an nedyll/ Thyse moneth and more" (SSP 233-234); but the shepherds, not taking Mak's hunger any more seriously than his disguise, ask him about his wife, Gyll.

Mak's reply gives the audience a hint as to what Gyll's real character is like before she ever appears on stage. He says that she:

Lyys waltering, by the roode,/ by the fyere, lo!
And a howse full of brude/ she drynkys well to;
yll spede othere good/ that she wyll do!
Bot so
Etys as fast as she can,
And ilk yere that comys to man
She bryngys furth a lakan,
And som yeres two.

Bot were I not more gracyus/ and rychere befor,

I were eten outt of howse/ and of harbar;
 Yit is she a fowll dowse/ if ye come nar:
 There is none that trowse/ nor knowys a war,
 Then ken I.

(SSP 236-248)

Since Mak thinks of Gyll only as a lazy drunkard and glutton who has too many children, he would just as soon see her funeral (SSP 249-252). That Mak has such a lowly opinion of Gyll that he wishes for her funeral re-emphasizes his own "up-so-doun" state. As ordered reason, Mak, in the medieval sense, should love his wife as much as his own flesh; but as corrupted reason, Mak is unable to love his flesh (Gyll), and therefore wishes her dead.

It is late; the three shepherds all "forwakyd" must lie down to "slepe," but agree to do so only if Mak sleeps between them. Mak readily agrees so "then myght I lett you, bedend,/ of that ye wold rowne" (SSP 262-263). The shepherds, all exhausted from a hard day, quickly fall asleep; Mak then rises up to do his "wyrk" (SSP 271). Pretending to be a magician, he puts a spell on the shepherds so that they will "lyg stone styll/ to that I haue doyne" (SSP 280). Although Mak has never been a "shephard," he says that he will "lere" (SSP 288). As he spies a fat sheep he croons:

A good flese dar I lay,
 Eft-whyte when I may,
 Bot this will I borow.
 (SSP 293-295)

As Mak crosses to his home, the audience is assured that his intention is not just to borrow the sheep.

Even though Mak's wife, Gyll, has not been on stage yet, one

knows what to expect by Mak's earlier description of her. When he calls to Gyll, she complains that "sich dyn/ this tyme of the nyght" (SSP 297) interrupts her spinning. This relates her iconographically to Eve and Original Sin. When Gyll does open the latch and sees her "swetyng" (SSP 306) with the sheep she comments: "By the nakyd nek/ art thou lyke for to hang" (SSP 308). Mak is proud of his work and says that "in a strate can I gett/ More than thay that swynke and swette/ All the long day" (SSP 311-313). Mak goes on to say, "it fell to my lott/ gyll, I had sich grace" (SSP 314). It is ironic that he, the evil shepherd, speaks of "grace" with regard to his stealing from the good shepherds, when the real "grace" for the good shepherds and poor people everywhere is just a few hours away.

Mak is in a hurry to kill the lamb so that he may have a feast, and he wants Gyll's immediate help. In this marriage there is corrupted reason (Mak) asking for help from the flesh (Gyll). Therefore, it is easy for Gyll (flesh) to give advice now and to be the leader in the scheme later. She reminds Mak that if they try to kill the sheep it may "blete" (SSP 325) and cause the shepherds to come running. The possibility of his being caught makes Mak tremble; he asks Gyll to bar the door immediately. Until this particular moment the thematic importance of Gyll has been minimal, but with her thinking of a "good bowrde...syn thou can none" (SSP 332) her place in the story is strengthened. The playwright uses her suggestion of not killing the sheep and her plan to foil the

shepherds to show a "pseudo-nativity,"⁸ with Gyll as the false Mary.

Gyll says that as part of her plan she will swaddle the lamb in clothes and put him in a "credyll" (SSP 334); then she will "lyg besyde/ in chylbed, and grone" (SSP 335). Gyll is proud of her "good gyse/ and a far cast," (SSP 341) and that "yit a woman avyse/ helpys at the last!" (SSP 343). It is ironic that Gyll says this because in a short time another woman, Mary, will truly help all men by giving birth to her son Christ. Gyll is more than a temptress here; she gives advice which Mak praises. Then, to emphasize that when the reason is corrupted the flesh rules, she orders Mak to "go thou fast" (SSP 343) to where the shepherds are sleeping. This is in contrast to Mary's advice to the shepherds to hurry away from the stable in Bethlehem to tell all the world about the Christ Child who brings peace.

When the shepherds awake, the third one is anxious to know if they are still "fowre" (SSP 363) since he had a dream where Mak "was lapt/ in a wolfe skyn" (SSP 368). The third shepherd thinks that while they slept "a fatt shepe he trapt/ bot he mayde no dyn" (SSP 371); the other two shepherds tell him to be "styll" for his "dreme makys" him "woode" (SSP 372-373). They awaken Mak who pretends he has a sore neck from sleeping wrong. He, too, says he had a dream:

I thought gyll began to crok/ and trauell full sad,
welner at the fyrst cok/ of a yong lad.
(SSP 386-387)

⁸Cawley, p. 79.

This dream about Gyll bearing another child is in reality Mak's thoughts about the lamb he has stolen. Mak's worry about the woe that this lamb-child will bring him is shown when he says "wo is hym has many barnes" (SSP 393). In contrast to this false dream, the shepherds will later have a dream about the true Lamb of God who will end all woe. So the shepherds will not suspect anything, Mak says that he must now go home to see if his dream is true. But first he wishes them to examine his "selfe/ that I stelyll nocht:/ I am loth you to greffe/ or from you take oght? (SSP 395-396). As Mak leaves, the third shepherd is still not sure that his dream about Mak in the wolf-skin is false; he suggests that they check their flock for missing sheep.

When Mak arrives at home he comments that his wife is lazy; she retorts in a manner typical of Noah's wife:

Why, who wanders, who wakys/ who commys,
 who gose?
 who brewys, who bakys?/ what makys me thus hose?
 And than,
 It is rewthe to beholde,
 Not in hote, now in colde,
 ffull wofull is the householde
 That wantys a woman.
 (SSP 415-421)

And then she questions, "Bot what ende has thou mayde/ with the hyrdys, Mak?" (SSP 422). Mak has to admit that the last word that the shepherds said was that they would check their flocks for missing sheep; he gets Gyll to promise to do what she has planned. Gyll's importance to her own household is diametrically parallel with the importance of Mary to the rest of the world; without Mary's consent

Christ would not have been born of a woman, and without Gyll's consent Mak could not have hidden the sheep disguised as a child as long as he did.

While Mak and Gyll talk of preparations for hiding the lamb, the shepherds have come together to discuss the loss of one of their best "fat" lambs. The third shepherd immediately suspects the sheep-stealer Mak or his wife Gyll. The second shepherd tells him to be still for "thou sklanders him yll" (SSP 461). However, the shepherds soon decide that they will go to Mak's house to check on his innocence or guilt. As they approach the house, the groaning and bawling coming from within the walls is anything but harmonious; this noisiness is symbolic of the chaos and disharmony of the world and also of the upside down order of the lives of those within the house. The noisiness can also be contrasted with the harmony of the angel's song to the shepherds when the Christ Child comes. As the shepherds enter, Mak warns them that they must be silent for his wife has had a hard night in child labor; the fact that she has supposedly had a hard labor is in great contrast to the miraculous Virgin birth soon to take place. Mak offers them food and drink which they refuse because of their great woe. In the forthcoming Nativity scene they are also offered food and drink, that of the spirit, which they accept. Mak suggests that they search the house for they will find nothing; in the later Nativity scene they need not search for the Lamb of God, for he is not hidden as the lamb is here. Gyll calls the men "thefys" (SSP 526) and orders them to leave her home. In Gyll's

ordering the three men to leave her home we see that her world is still in an "up-so-down" state. Because flesh tries to overcome all reason as she has overcome corrupted reason (Mak), her world will continue in a disordered state. Mak reproaches the other man for disturbing his wife--corrupted reason defends deceitful flesh. Since the three men have not found their sheep they take their leave as "frendys...ffor we ar all ocne" (SSP 566).

Mak's happiness at their leaving is nothing as compared to his sadness when they return to observe the medieval custom of giving gifts to the newborn. Mak tells them that the child is sleeping, but the shepherds wish to see him anyway. When the third shepherd uncovers the babe to give him a kiss, he discovers what he thinks to be a deformed child but later discovers is the lamb. Both Mak and Gyll try to convince the men that the lamb is their child; that it had its nose broken; and that it had been bewitched by elves, but to no avail, for the shepherds have already seen the "eeremarke" (SSP 611). This ugly lamb-child can be contrasted with the Lamb of God who will be born to Mary later. Because the shepherds have found Mak and Gyll guilty, they punish Mak by tossing him in a blanket. The frantic motion of his body in the blanket is symbolic of the world of Gyll and Mak which is in a constant state of upheaval and disorder with the lower orders of the hierarchy continuously overcoming the higher. The fact that the "pseudo-nativity" ends with the scene of the bounding blanket suggests that their lives will not change because of this one small incident; neither will it change with the major incident of Christ's birth, soon to take place.

After recovering their sheep and punishing Mak, the weary

herds return to their fields where they lie down and fall asleep. An angel comes to them singing in a voice most beautiful of the birth of a babe:

That shall take from the feynd/ that adam had lorne:
 That warloo to sheynd/ this nyght is he borne.
 God is made youre freynd/ now at this morne.
 (SSP 639-641)

The angel's singing provides a striking contrast to the earlier groaning and bawling of Gyll and Mak; and the angel's song of God's friendship also provides a striking contrast to the false friendship of Mak and Gyll. The shepherds recall the prophecy that:

...in a vyrgyn
 Shuld he lyght and ly,/ to slokyn oure syn
 And slake it,
 Oure kynde from wo^{....}
 (SSP 676-679)

However, they are still surprised that the message was declared first to them "so poore as we are" (SSP 701), rather than to the patriarchs and prophets who would have liked to have been the first to see the Child. It is significant that even though Gyll and Mak are at the time but a short distance away, the angel does not appear to them for they will continue to live their lives of sin and disorder.

The shepherds now make another journey--this time to a stable where they find the Lamb of God. Mary, in great contrast to Gyll, tells them of God; she says that her son will protect them "from wo" (SSP 742) as they go out again into the world. The image of the Virgin Mother praying for the shepherds as they leave provides striking contrast to the lying Gyll who had earlier told the shepherds to get out

of her home. The shepherds leave the stable singing, knowing that "grace we haue fun" (SSP 751) and "now ar we won" (SSP 752).

The world of the play which began in sorrow and pining and loud lament has been transformed into a world of song and rejoicing for the three shepherds who have accepted God. However, the world of Mak and Gyll remains unchanged; they are still thieves and liars. They show that unruly flesh results from weak or corrupted reason. The audience sees that they must not follow this example of Mak and Gyll but must follow the shepherds to find Mary, the new Eve, who represents complete submission to God.

B. Pilate's Wife

Another woman who lives a life of "up-so-doun" hierarchies is Pilate's wife as seen in the York Cycle.⁹ As the play begins Pilate threatens brawlers and traitors and then says that he is "proued a prince of grete pride" (PW 19), who can "justifie and juge all Iewes" (PW 24). The entrance of Dame Percula (Pilate's wife) into the courtroom is marked in Pilate's speech by his words of flattery:

A! luffe! her lady! no lesse,
Lo! sirs my worthely wiffe, that sche is!
So semely, loo! certayne scho schewys.
(PW 25-27)

Pilate's wife salutes her lord and says:

I am dame precious Percula, pryne the prise,

⁹Lucy Toulmin Smithe, ed., The Dream of Pilate's Wife: Jesus Before Pilate, in York Mystery Plays (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), pp. 270-291. Subsequent references to this play as seen in this chapter will appear in the shortened form--PW for Pilate's Wife, followed by the line number(s).

Wiffe to Sir Pilate here prince with-uten pere,
 All wele of all womanhede I am, wittie and wise,
 Consayue nowe my countenaunce so comly and clere,
 The colowre of my corse if full clere,
 An in richesse of robis I am rayed,
 Ther is no lorde in this lande as I lere,
 In faith that hath a frendlyar feere,
 Than yhe my lorde,
 My-selffe yof I saye itt.

(PW 37-45)

Not only does she praise herself (her riches, wit, and wisdom), but she also praises her husband. Her pride and her love of worldly things more than God indicate that the hierarchy between man and God is out of order. The hierarchical relationship between man and wife is also out of order. The emphasis in their relationship is on the flesh for when Pilate wishes to kiss his wife, she is more than willing "to fulfulle youre forward, my fayre lorde, in faith I am fayne" (PW 49). In the wife's words, "all ladise we covейte than/ Bothe to be kyssed and clappid" (PW 54). In her actions, the medieval man could see the dangers of the flesh.

The Court Beadle enters while the kissing is going on, and objects vehemently to such behavior in court. The fact that the actions of Pilate and his wife are reproved by the Beadle would be intensely amusing to the spectators; this reproof would also be instructive. The Beadle's reproof is not amusing to the lady. She is angry at his interference and encourages Pilate not to listen. In Percola's attempt to get Pilate not to listen to the Beadle, flesh again tries to overcome reason. However, Pilate at this time shuns

¹⁰Pollard, English Miracle Plays, p. xli.

his wife's suggestion saying that the Beadle "knawis/ All oure custome" (PW 72). The Beadle, after observing the setting sun, reminds Pilate of another custom. He tells Pilate that he:

muste sitte,...this same nyght of lyfe and of lyme;
 Itt is nogt leeffull for my lady,
 By the lawe of this lande,
 In dome for to dwelle
 Fro the day waxe ought dymme;

.....
 Late hir take hir leve whill that light is.

(PW 82-84, 86)

Pilate again takes the advice of the Beadle; but before he sends his wife away he offers her a drink saying: "nowe drynke (ye) madame! to deth all this dynne!" (PW 101). Percula refuses the drink giving it instead to her maid. Her refusal to temporarily quiet this "dynne" by drinking is like her continuous refusal to receive everlasting peace and bliss by reordering her up-so-doun hierarchies. Percula bids Pilate farewell and he in turn bids farewell to her, the "fayrest figure that euer did fode feede" (PW 110). Pilate's mention of his wife's fair figure shows the state of reason which is at this time tempted by flesh. When she leaves, Pilate sends his son along as messenger boy; if anything should happen to his mother, he is to run to Pilate with the details.

That night, while Percula is asleep, Satan comes to her in a dream as he had to Eve in the garden.¹¹ Although modern readers of the Bible say that the dream came from God to prevent the

¹¹For a discussion of the appearance of the devil to Pilate's wife as derived through analogy to the Eve story see Mill, p. 613.

fixion,¹² the York playwright interpreted the scene otherwise. Satan is afraid of losing the realm which he has taken by guile so he speaks to her in a dream in hopes that he might "prevent man's redemption."¹³ He begins: "O woman! be wise and ware, and wonne in thi witte" (PW 168). Percula had earlier spoken of herself as "wittie and wise" (PW 39), so now Satan flatters her where she is weakest; he flatters her pride just as he had earlier flattered Eve's pride. He warns of their fate if Jesus is doomed to die:

Ther schall a gentilman Jesu, un-justely be judged
 Byfor thy husband in haste, and with harlottis by hytte.
 And that doughty to-day to deth thus be dyghted,
 Sir Pilate, for his prechyng, and thou,
 With nede schalle ye namely be noyed,
 Your striffe and youre strenghe schal be stroyed,
 Youre richesse schal be refte you that is rude,
 With vengeance, and that dare I auowe.
 (PW 169-176)

It is ironic that she and her husband will lose all of their power and riches even if they do listen to Satan. Because they never willingly give up their worldly pleasures in an attempt to reorder their world, they will have to suffer everlasting pain and woe. At Satan's suggestion of the possibility of their losing all wealth, Percula awakes with a start. She wants the boy to run to Pilate, but he says that it is so early that it is disagreeable to him. She persists:

Go bette, boy, I bidde no lenger thou byde,
 And saie to my sourereyne, this same is soth that I send hym,
 All naked this nyght as I napped,
 With tene and with trayne was I trapped
 With a sweuene, that swiftly me swapped,

¹²Kolve, p. 228.

¹³Kolve, p. 229.

Of one Jesu, the juste man the Iewes will undo;
 She prayes tente to that trewe man, with tyne be nogt
 trapped,
 But als a domes man dewly to be dressand,
 And Ielye delyuere that lede.
 (PW 185-193)

The boy naps and then goes to Pilate.

Meanwhile, the priests Annas and Caiphus agree to take Jesus before Pilate so that "this faitour for his falsed to flay hym,/ For fro we saie hym the soth" (PW 204-205). The soldiers bind Jesus and with Annas and Caiphus make their way from the Palace of Caiphus to Pilate's judgment hall. There is much noise as the group arrives at Pilate's hall. As usual, noisiness emphasizes the disorder of this world. The Court Beadle first reproaches the men for their noisiness while Pilate is sleeping, but when the Beadle hears their reason for coming he quickly awakens Pilate who bids them enter. When the group is seated, Pilate's son enters with the news of his mother's dream and her fear of the "vengeaunce" (PW 289) to come if Christ is condemned to die.

Pilate listens to the pleas of Caiphus and Annas who say that Percula's dream is of Jesus's witch-craft; but because Pilate feels that these two priests harbor evil feelings for Jesus, he decides to judge the man for himself. Jesus is brought into the courtroom where he is taunted by the soldiers and accused of various sins by the priests; only Pilate pities Jesus saying:

His liff for to lose thare longes no lawe;
 Nor no cause can I kyndely contryve
 That why he schuld lose thus his liffe.
 (PW 433-435)

The prelates say that Jesus has caused strife by healing the sick and raising the dead. He has also gotten the people to follow him. Pilate says there is no law for condemning a man because he has done well; but when Caiphus suggests that Pilate's kingdom would some day be taken over by Jesus, Pilate agrees that then Christ would deserve death. The prelates argue for the death sentence of Jesus for if he continues to live, he will bring them much harm. It is significant that while Pilate's wife is afraid of the harm to come to her in the loss of clothes and riches if Christ is doomed, the prelates are afraid of the harm that will come to them in loss of followers if Christ is not doomed.

Pilate "meruellis" at the "malyngne" (PW 506) of the prelates and soldiers who "of cursideness convik no cause can...kawe" (PW 505). Because he finds no cause for Jesus's death, because he wishes to free himself of the matter, and because he submits himself to his wife's desires, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod for the ruling of life and death. In so doing, Pilate and his wife admit that they love their "up-so-doun" world of lechery, pride, wealth, and power. Unless they desire to reorder their hierarchies (by accepting God, by submitting flesh to reason, or by giving up their worldly power and riches) they will be sentenced to eternal damnation on the Day of Doom.

C. The Ale-Wife

The ale-wife scene in the Chester Christ's Descent into Hell¹⁴ has met with adverse critical opinion. J. Q. Adams has stated that the "lamentation of an unsaved ale-woman, and her welcome to hell by Satan and two devils, one of whom offers to wed her...seems to be an addition to the play itself, and ...is not of any special merit."¹⁵ A. C. Cawley has written that "the final scene of the offending ale-wife, funny though it is, has nothing whatever to do with the rest of the pageant and may well be a later addition."¹⁶ However, a study of this play will show that this scene is an integral part of a play which is both an "affirmation" and a "criticism" of medieval life--a play which emphatically shows that the fallen nature of man needs repentance in this life.

As Christ's Descent into Hell begins, a great light shines in hell's interior. Adam, Isaiah, Simon the Just, John the Baptist, Seth, and King David all advance to the light, praising God and expressing their thanks for mercy. Because it has been many years "sith mankynd first came heare" (CD 88), there is much happiness on the part of those who will now get to leave hell. The prophecy of eternal bliss is soon to be fulfilled. This scene of joy is much in contrast with the horrible scene of Satan surrounded by his "Hell hownds" (CD 89) which follows. Satan tells the other devils that they must make ready

¹⁴Dr. Matthews, ed., Christ's Descent into Hell, in The Chester Plays, EETS, E.S. 115 (1916; rpt. London; Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), II, pp. 318-331. Subsequent references to this play will appear in the shortened form--CD for Christ's Descent followed by the line number(s).

¹⁵Adams, p. 190 (footnote 8).

¹⁶Cawley, p. 157.

"with Bost and Bere" (CD 90) for Jesus, God's Son--the terrible fellow whom they must now battle.

The Second Demon questions the power of such a man that should "pryve" Satan of his "posty" (CD 106). He asks how dare such a man "doe agaynst thee" (CD 107) and then he decides that:

gretter then thou he semes to be
for Degraded of thy Degree
thou must be soone, well I see,
and pryved of thy pray.
(CD 109-112)

Satan admits somewhat reluctantly, "Yea, this is he that wil conspyre/ anone to reave us all" (CD 131-132). There is significance in the latter line in that Jesus will come not to rob them of anything, but only to take back what belongs to him--the repentant sinners that Satan had earlier taken by guile. Jesus will not take back the non-repentant people; they belong to Satan.

A loud clamor is heard as Jesus nears; he tells the devils to lift up the gates and doors so that the King of Glory might come in. The Third Demon tells Jesus to leave for he is a boaster and a menace. Ironically the demon boasts of "sory grace" (CD 150) to come to Jesus if he does not leave, when it is he and his fellow demons who will have "sory grace" because of their boasting and beguiling. Jesus brings not only "sory grace" for the demons and non-repentant people, but also "actuell" grace for those who have reordered their hierarchies. Satan is disturbed by "so much blisse" (CD 154) in hell--the bliss of Adam and the others to be saved. He is also worried about his "maisterdome" (CD 157) because of "yonder...stubborn fellow" (CD 158). The Third Demon, having already tried boasting, tells Satan it is his turn to

"feight for thy degree/ or ells our prince shall thou not be" (CD 165-166). He and the other devils hurl Satan from his seat; Satan bemoans his real fate and the reason for it:

my might fayles verament
 this Princ that is now present
 will spoyle from me my pray.

Adam, by my Intycement,
 and all his bloud through me were blent;
 now hence they shall all be hent
 and I in hell for aye.
 (CD 170-176)

When Jesus gains entry he grants peace and bliss to Adam and all of his offspring who had reordered their "up-so-doun" hierarchies. Satan moans that "never sith God made the first day,/ were we so fowle of right" (CD 211-212) for "now goeth away/ my Prisoners and all my pray!/ and I might not stirr one Stray,/ I am so streightly dight" (CD 205-208). As Adam and the others go out of hell they glorify God in song. Adam speaks for the happiness of all of them when he says:

Goe we to blisse, then, owld and younge,
 and worship god, alway weldinge,
 and Afterward, I read, we singe
 with great solemnity.
 (CD 257-260)

This bliss is also shared by the repentant people on the Day of Judgment as was exemplified by Regina Saluata in the last chapter. Contrasted to this bliss is the woe of the damned ale-wife who dominates the rest of the play; she is a non-repentant sinner who must remain behind for eternity with Satan and his demons. Although Satan bemoans the fact that his prisoners (those he had beguiled) have been taken

away, he can be comforted by the fact that all of the non-repentant sinners still remain in hell. One of these is the ale-wife.

As the scene opens, the barmaid or ale-wife expresses her woe at being left in hell to dwell eternally with Satan:

woful am I, with thee to dwell,
sir, sathanas, sergante of hell!
endles paines and sorowe cruell
I suffer in this place.

sometyme I was a tavernere,
a gentill gossipe and a tapstere,
of wyne and ale a trustie brewer,
which wo hath me wroughte.

(CD 265-272)

Not only does she warn the medieval people of the pains and sorrow she must suffer because of her misdeeds, but she also tells them exactly what she did wrong so that they might avoid doing the same:

of cannes I kepte no trewe mesuer,
my cuppes I shulde at my pleasuer,
deceavinge manye a creature,
tho my ale were naughte.

(CD 273-276)

It is significant that like the deceiver Satan, she too made a practice of deceiving others (CD 275 above). Like hundreds of other tradesmen in the period she tried many ways to earn a "dishonest penny":¹⁷

And when I was a brewer longe,
with hoopes I made my ale stronge,
ashes and Erbes I blende amonge,
and marred so good maulte.

(CD 277-280)

¹⁷See Salzman, pp. 75-78, for a discussion of the tricks used by brewers and bakers to make a "dishonest penny"; see also pp. 228-229 of Salzman for a discussion of the punishments for such offenses.

The ale-wife goes on to describe her present sorrow because of her past deeds: "Sorrowfull maie I sicke and singe,/ that ever I so dealed" (CD 283-284). However, her sorrow for past sins is too late; she should have been sorrowful and repentant while still living.

The woe of this damned woman, in contrast to the joy of the saved, becomes a learning experience for the audience:

Taverners, tapsters of this cittie
shalbe promoted heare by me
for breakinge statues of this cuntrey,
hurtinge the common welth.
(CD 285-288)

For "ylle-doeres" (CD 294) like those mentioned in the above passage hell is the "ordeyned" (CD 293) place:

Here shall the have there Ioye and blesse,
exsaulted by the neck;

with my mayster, mightye mahownde.
(CD 295-297)

Because hell is such an unpleasant place, she concludes her soliloquy by warning all those like her:

this I betake you, more and lesse,
to my sweete mayster, sir sathanas,
to dwell with hym in this place
when it shall you please.
(CD 305-308)

Others like her will end up in hell with Satan if they continue sinning and do nothing to reorder their chaotic world. Then they will dwell with Satan and his fiends from the Day of Judgment to the end of time.

At this point, as if to reinforce the horribleness of hell, Satan himself officially welcomes the ale-wife to his domain. He

tells her, "welckome, deare darlinge, to vs all three" (CD 309). It is significant that the non-repentant sinners are left to abide in hell with this trinity--Satan and his two demons--just as the repentant sinners were taken to Heaven to abide with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Second Demon also welcomes the ale-wife to hell as he expresses his desire to wed her:

for manye a heaue and droncken head,
cause of thy ale, were broughte to bed,
farre worse then anye beaste.
(CD 314-316)

The contrast of this marriage in hell with the medieval concept of marriage makes the ale-wife scene extremely significant. She can be related to Eve, since, as Eve was related to the sin of intemperance, so was the ale-wife in medieval literature.¹⁸ The structure of the play then becomes very significant, for Christ has already gone to heaven with the good souls. This ending, in contrast to the opening, shows that this Eve figure will never be "married" to the new Adam, Christ, but to the no doubt hideously displayed second demon. Thus, the play concludes with a sinful woman (and it has already been shown how woman represents the sinful nature of man) about to be married to a devil. This ultimate inversion of the hierarchy, together with the ale-wife's and the demons' admissions that they will be in hell forever, emphatically states what the final end of sin is--eternal marriage to the devil.

¹⁸For this relationship see Speculum Sacerdotale, ed. Edward H. Weatherly, EETS, E.S. 200 (1936; London: Oxford Univ. Press), p. 60.

D. The Damned Queen

Just as the ale-wife had much sorrow and woe in hell after Christ's descent into hell to release the saved, so too do those who must remain in hell after Christ's second descent on the Last Judgment Day have much sorrow and woe. Although there are examples of several damned persons in the Chester The Last Judgment,¹⁹ the Damned Queen will be the only one referred to here since she is the only damned (non-repentant) woman present. The Damned Queen is symbolically related to other women in this chapter in that she shows both flesh-reason and man-God inversions. Like the other women in this chapter she does not restore the proper hierarchies. However, the theme is emphasized by having her at the Last Judgment.

On the arrival of the Heavenly band in hell, the non-repentant sinners, as exemplified here by the Damned Queen, are wrought with fear:²⁰

Alas! Alas! now am I lorne!
 Alas! with teene I am to be torne!
 Alas! that euer I was woman borne,
 this bytter bale to byde!
 (LJ 261-264)

The Queen is afraid to have to face God on this day because of her

¹⁹Dr. Matthews, ed., The Last Judgment, in The Chester Plays, EETS, E.S. 115 (1916); rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), II, pp. 427-453. Subsequent references to this play as seen in this chapter will appear in the shortened form--LJ for Last Judgment play, followed by the line number(s).

²⁰For a description of the terror of this occasion see The Pricke of Conscience, ed. Richard Morris in The Philological Society's Early English Volume, 1862-1864 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1865), pp. 144-147 and pp. 190-200.

many sins. She cannot understand why God made her "to worch agy(n)st his will" (LJ 272). She forgets that God permitted all men to sin so that they would see his lordship and therefore ask his mercy. Unlike the Woman Adulterer and Mary Magdalene, the Damned Queen never submitted flesh to reason:

Of Lechery I neuer roght,
but ever to that sinne I sought
and of that filth in deed and thought
yett hadd I never my fill.
(LJ 273-276)

The fact that she never had her fill of lechery in "deed" or "thought" explains why she never had time to think of God's lordship.

Because of the hell pains which she must now suffer, the Damned Queen speaks for the race of "worldly womanhood"²¹ as she curses those worldly things that had "harrown" (LJ 280) her to hell:

fye on Pearles! fye on pryde!
fye on gowne! fye on gnyde!
fye on hewe! fye on hyde!²²
(LJ 277-279)

Like Eve who cursed the worm, the Damned Queen curses all the things which have brought her downfall. These are the kinds of things which Pilate's wife loved. The Saved Queen was also dragged down by these same things but she repented, and therefore did not have this "bitter

²¹Owst, p. 519.

²²Middle English verse also warned of the harm such frills could bring as is shown in the following example taken from p. 109 Stones's *Medieval English Verse*: "The cost these frills shall claim when harlots so coquette it! In hell/ With devils they shall dwell." This translation was taken from *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932), p. 133.

Bale" to "abyde" (LJ 282). The Damned Queen questions, as did Eve in the Garden, "where is my Blee that was so bright?" (LJ 286). Then Jesus explains that after the Original Sin God sent his son to suffer and die for all men. Man could receive mercy and bliss if he thought on God's suffering, and reordered his world, as did the Saved Queen and others. If man does not reorder his world, then he will suffer as the Damned Queen now has to. Her bliss is gone; instead she:

must have great sorrow in sight of this,
that lost that joy that was his,
that him on Rood bought.

(LJ 410-412)

Jesus at this time asks each man to step forward to "recon his,/ for righteousness must doe" (LJ 435-436). The Saved Queen and others step forward to be blessed for their goodness on earth--helping the poor, the sick, the naked, the thirsty, the hungry, and the prisoners. These persons are granted everlasting bliss because they have reordered their hierarchies. Because the non-repentant people like the Damned Queen have no good deeds to show, the demons step forward to tell of their many wicked deeds on earth. The demons, happy that the damned will soon be their own, gloat because such evil men and women shall be put "into great Torment,/ wher Reeminge, Grininge were fervent" (LJ 577-578) and where "baked all shall they be,/ in Bitter Bale to brenne" (LJ 587-588). The head demon is elated because the Damned Queen has lost her chance for heavenly bliss; he repeats her sins to Jesus:

...whyle she was lyvinge here,
 spared neuer synne in no manere,
 and all that might, by Mahound so dere,
 excite her Lecherye,

She used man hart to sturr,
 and therto fully ordayned her.
 (LJ 597-602)

In her rebelliousness against the hierarchical ideal, the Damned Queen (flesh) acted as accomplice of the Devil in tempting man (reason) to fall; she turned the hierarchy "up-so-down."

Although the Queen would like to flee now, Jesus tells her what was prophesized many times before:

righteous Dome may you not fleene,
 for grace is putt away.
 (LJ 607-608)

Because she loved worldly pleasures and fleshly vice, Jesus says:

when tyme of grace was enduringe
 to seeke it you had no lykinge.
 (LJ 609-610)

Not unlike the sinners who were drowned by the flood, she enjoyed the pleasures of the flesh until it was too late; she never thought of the dangers which these pleasures might bring. She was blind to the limits of her own nature; and now, even though she may want mercy, nothing can be done for "all it were (now) to late" (LJ 616).

Jesus tells the Damned Queen (and other damned people) of the many times they refused to help their fellow man; because of this they must now "goe to the fyre" (LJ 644). The First Demon is gleeful over Jesus' punishment for the damned; he tells them:

Goe we forth to hell in hye;
 With out ende ther shall you lye;
 for you have lost, right as dyd I
 the Blisse that lasteth euer.

(LJ 653-656)

The damned are tormented still more by his repeating:

one thinge I tell you truly:
 Deliuered bene you never.

(LJ 659-660)

These last haunting words of the devil echo in the minds of the damned as they hear the final speeches of four prophets who tell of their previous warnings of doom for those who "dyd amisse" (LJ 699) and did not reorder their hierarchies. Because the damned had been warned earlier by prophecy, "excusation none there is" (LJ 698) now to get them out of hell; "this Dome it goeth aright" (LJ 700). The Last Judgment play comes to its conclusion with the prophets reminding the Damned Queen and her partners in sin that they had been forewarned. The audience, too, is forced to face the reality that they too have been forewarned of the Judgment Day to come.

In summary, all four of the women in this chapter show that man's nature is a fallen one because of the Original Sin. They also show that sinners who indulge in worldly pleasures and fleshly vice without ever a thought of reordering their lives under reason must ultimately go to the disorderly hell of Satan. These women show in a negative way that man must reorder his "up-so-doun" hierarchies so that reason is over flesh and God is over man. If man does not reorder his world, as the women in this chapter did not, he will have to suffer the eternal pain and woe of Damnation. The one thing

which especially needs to be controlled in this reordering process is man's flesh--flesh which has been once more exemplified by the women in this chapter.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

In medieval times there was much speculation about women being related to Eve. This affinity was often associated with marriage as seen in certain hierarchical relationships with God over man, man over wife, and reason over flesh. Inversion of any of these relationships was considered to be sin. Such sin demanded a proper reordering of the hierarchy by repentance, by acceptance of God, and by submission of flesh to reason. If one reordered his sinful world he would go to an orderly and peaceful heaven with God. If one did not reorder his world, he would be sentenced to a disorderly hell "with blake ffendys."

This thesis has analyzed the thematic importance of women in the Corpus Christi cycle plays by studying nine significant and developed female characters. Chapter One gives some background and develops the general ideas about the hierarchical relationships stated above. Chapter Two begins with Eve, and shows that from a medieval viewpoint the first woman was the basis for Original Sin--the original breaker of the hierarchical relationships. Chapter Three discusses women sinners who repent, and thus restore order to their chaotic worlds. Like Eve, these repentant women are related to the flesh. Noah's wife, the Woman Adulterer, Mary Magdalene, and Regina Saluata show the audience in a positive manner that the flesh can be controlled and order restored. Chapter Four investigates significant non-repentant women. These women are also thematically related to Eve and to the flesh. Unlike the women of the third chapter,

these women do not reorder their "up-so-down" worlds. These women, especially the ale-wife and the Damned Queen who are in hell, emphatically show the audience how not to live. They show the results of not controlling the flesh.

The use of all of these significant women is consistent with the medieval concept of hierarchies. All of the women are linked to Eve, the original breaker of the God-man, man-wife, and reason-flesh relationships. They all emphasize the medieval tradition that man's fallen nature (desire for fleshly and worldly pleasures) is related first of all to woman. Therefore, the women who submit to husbands (reason) or to God (ultimate reason) show a proper ordering of reason and flesh. Those who do not show man the dangers of his fallen nature and the necessity of controlling his flesh. The ultimate fate of all these women also emphasizes the efficacy of repentance to a medieval audience which was concerned with the rewards or punishments of the life after death.

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