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On Unstable Ground: Trans-Civic, Trans Gender Fluidity in Chester's 'Play of the Flood'

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This article explores potential audience reception of the character Uxor in the Chester 'Play of the Flood' in relation to the notion of gendered place in medieval Chester. After discussing the implications for divergent readings of Uxor according to cis-centric understandings of place of performance, I interrogate the possibilities of trans places and people in medieval Chester in order to trouble the historically cis approach to Uxor's performance and potential reception. Ultimately, I posit that Uxor inhabits a trans identity that in a necessarily contingent and temporary way allows trans-Uxor to secure spiritual, if not physical, salvation for those denied access to the ark.

The traditionally truculent character of Noah's wife (henceforth Uxor) in medieval English religious drama often polarizes scholarly opinion and, according to some, reflects the divergent pulls of the Eva/Ave tradition.[1] Filling in the gap created by her absence in Genesis allowed medieval dramatists to cast her either in a unsympathetic tradition that aligned her with Eve, the biblical temptress and instigator of the fall, or a sympathetic one, allied with Mary (Ave), the virtuous and pious mother of Christ. The Chester Uxor arguably epitomizes this binary more so than other flood dramas as here she proactively helps to construct the ark, but then steadfastly refuses to board until she has had a last drink with her friends. Perhaps fittingly in a drama of the flood, however, there is a distinct fluidity written into the Chester Uxor that sees this character capable, at a key point in the drama — the drinking episode — of transcending the cis-centric Eva/Ave binary. This fluidity works especially well with late-medieval drag drama to reveal a transgender Uxor who muddies the waters of fixed and binary gender traditions in the Middle Ages.[2]

Before offering my reading of Uxor I present some clarifications of terms that will be employed throughout this article. Transgender is, as M.W. Bychowski

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notes, a modern term that may be used by someone 'who identifies with a gender other than the one society has assigned', and it can also be used as 'a critical term that opens up gender beyond two static binary categories'.[3] I adopt the latter broad critical understanding of transgender (or trans) in order to address the plurality, diversity, contingency and fluidity of gender.[4] Where I use the descriptors male and female, they connote only points on a spectrum that is neither hierarchical nor presumptive nor binary. Terminology is important here, and scholars like Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt offer a language guide providing an overview of appropriate vocabulary, though they still admit that terms discussing trans issues are slippery and can be 'understood and applied differently by different people'.[5] Where they offer distinct definitions to draw out the nuances between terms such as cross-dressing, drag, and transvestite, I take the slipperiness of terminology as a key starting place, using these terms interchangeably in order to write inclusively to any and all authentic iterations of identities that all of these terms include.

As has already been noted, any 'meaning' for drama, even religious drama, cannot be prescribed or proscribed, and audiences bring their own predilections, experiences, and expectations to their understandings of any dramatic experience.[6] Therefore, we cannot discount the notion that, as the pageant wagons rolled through the streets of late-medieval Chester, the character of Uxor could destabilize traditional gender binaries, at least for some audience members. Ruth Evans notes that in the later medieval period hierarchical and patriarchal gender constructions and distinctions were actively maintained in order to control the otherwise 'dangerously liberating notion of the subject' who might embody mutable subjective, even radical, potentialities.[7] To what degree such attempts were successful has to be tempered by the observation that 'non-normative gender expressions, identities, and embodiments were, in the medieval period, very often imbricated with religion'.[8] Given that the norm was for female characters to be played by men in medieval religious drama, audience reception of the Uxor character could change depending on whether the audience heard/saw a male actor in drag, recognized (and prioritized) the projection of a female character, or identified a trans subjectivity in Uxor's performance.

This play, I suggest, works creatively both with and against inherited traditions relating to both gender and religion in order specifically to court what Theresa Coletti terms an 'ambiguity of perception' which is ideally suited to this religious, yet diverse, place.[9] Diversity appears to be a fundamental preoccupation of the Chester cycle; Coletti further remarks that the emerging critical consensus seems to be that 'the cycle's religious ideology is as mobile as its sixteenth-century pageant wagons'.[10] Such mobility of meaning is also evident in a fluidity of interpretation

that relies on the slipperiness of drag performances so that, as the wagons proceed, the reception of gender (via performed transvestitism) becomes flexible according to the place of performance. Rather than shoring up gender binaries, the transvestite performance of Uxor creates possibilities that can reinforce, and subsequently defy, traditional mobilizations of gender norms, hierarchies, and patriarchal religious privilege. Medieval transvestite drama illustrates Judith Butler's notion of the social performativity of gender *avant la lettre*, and fluidity is entirely the point here as different audiences, in differently gendered places, could respond differently to the available genders of the transvestite Uxor — a notion that can also 'drag' present readers back to the possible futures of medieval drama not only for academic purposes, but also to stand in solidarity with those who endure the pernicious transphobia evident everywhere and every day.[11]

Setting the Scene

Scholars have suggested that some places in medieval Chester were gendered in traditional, binary ways. With specific regard to places along the pageant route, Robert W. Barrett Jr identifies the High Cross and Abbey Gate as male-identified sites for performance. Naturally, there could be crossovers and intrusions into any site, but Barrett recalls the language of the 1533 and 1556 ordinances of Chester's corn market, situated in the space outside Abbey Gate, to argue that the distinction made there 'between *person* as male citizen and *wife* as female subordinate establishes the degree to which the corn market was ideologically marked as a male space'.[12] The same applies, Barrett argues, in 'the explicit targeting of the first-station performance toward the all-male audience of the clergy, monastic or otherwise, and for the second station's orientation toward the city fathers, the elite among Chester's overwhelmingly male franchise'.[13] According to Mary Wack, the Pentice was another male-oriented play station.[14] Equally, some places in medieval Chester had an overwhelmingly female population. Places such as Bridge Street and the area around Watergate Street, among others, were home to many female prostitutes and brothel-keepers.[15] This area does seem to have held a degree of significant appeal to a broader female population, as the example of Anne Webster, the widow of Chester mayor John Webster, suggests. In 1568 she wanted to rent the same room in Bridge Street as she had done, along with 'other the tenuntes' on two previous occasions, to watch the plays from.[16] This sustained attachment on Webster's behalf to a particular place adds to the notion of female-oriented places in medieval Chester and may have had particular pertinence to 'The Play of the Flood' as this play came under the sponsorship of the Waterleaders and Drawers

of Dee and, 'The Waterleaders' company is unusual among Chester guilds in having a relatively large number of women enrolled as members'.[17] Because of this, and the fact that many women were employed as water-drawers or carriers of sand and water, 'Chester spectators, especially women, might view sympathetically Mrs. Noah's assignment of heavy labor and her concern with her friends' salvation rather than that of only herself and her family'.[18]

Might we also, then, speculate that some places in medieval Chester may have been trans gendered? Again, I understand the modernity of this term, but excluding this possibility plays into the narrative that trans is 'an aberrant product of twenty-first century culture', and excludes those identities often absent from historical records.[19] John J. McGavin and Greg Walker make a strong case for the importance of speculation and imagination in order to fully address the range of potential meanings and understandings possible for early drama, especially in the absence of documentary records for production and audience response, remarking that:

> in the absence of copious documentary records of audience responses, speculation and the imagination are necessary analytical tools. If we take the cue from this approach, we can move, productively, from attempting to uncover a single historically 'correct' reading of a given play's reception to the identification of the range of potential meanings that it offered to spectators in different social, sociological, and physical positions, each with its own aesthetic and cultural implications.[20]

Even if the notion of trans gendered spaces is too speculative to admit, a trans reading of Uxor might, in the so-called drinking episode, recognize a specific form of 'Trans sanctity' at work that is vital for the salvation of Uxor's gossips' souls.[21]

Performance and Gender-Oriented Place in Chester

The 'unruly' figure of Uxor has received much critical attention; Katie Normington posits that in the drinking scene, this character 'is significantly undermined by the debauchery of her drinking and gossiping', and Christina Fitzgerald singles her out as 'the one disruptive force that threatens the harmony of Noah's fantasy guild-family'.[22] More recently, Fitzgerald characterizes Uxor and her female company as 'rude', 'boisterous', and 'carousing Gossips'.[23] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen seeks to amplify Uxor's voice and agency in the Chester play, but for Cohen, she remains a 'boozy' gossip who 'chooses her drinking companions over immurement in the

family ship'.[24] More positive readings of Chester's Uxor come from, for example, Lawrence Besserman who reads her as 'both a reprise of Eve, the mother of all living things, and a forerunner of Mary, the Queen of Heaven and source of grace and salvation for all who seek it'.[25] Given the 'unruly' character of Uxor, the transvestite nature of medieval drama, and the gender-oriented places in Chester, any and all of these interpretations may have held and been inflected by the place of performance.

When viewed by what Barrett terms 'the all-male audience of the clergy' outside Abbey Gate, or by 'the city fathers, the elite among Chester's overwhelmingly male franchise' at the High Cross, or watched from the male-oriented Pentice — all performance sites that were 'ideologically marked as male space[s]' — Uxor may well have been received unsympathetically.[26] At such sites, a cisgender audience (or at least some of them) may have been more ready to witness a traditionally truculent Uxor who is rude, boisterous, and boozy as an Eva, rather than an Ave figure: such reception would have bolstered their sense of patriarchal superiority and helped to solidify male identity, privilege, and misogyny. At female-oriented sites, by contrast, some cisgender audience members may have been more inclined to read Uxor as a positive, Ave figure. If we then take into account the fact that this was transvestite drama, and that not all audiences were cis, we have the added question of whether audiences saw and heard a male actor in drag, or whether they saw through the drag to the voice and heart of a holy woman.

Such complexities of performance and ranges of meaning destabilize, rather than solidify, any interpretation of Noah's wife and any concrete and discreet gender binaries and distinctions. Rather than merely a subversive or divisive figure, the transvestite Chester performance of Uxor points to the socially constructed nature of gender and its reception. As Butler writes, if one thinks one sees a man dressed as a woman, then the simile in that perception (as a woman) bespeaks a lack of reality that relates the illusory nature of that appearance.[27] As they explain:

> The moment in which one's staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with surety read the body that one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman …. When such categories come into question, the *reality* of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be 'real,' what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality.[28]

It may be the case too, therefore, that an unstable gender determination in the transvestite character of Chester's Uxor could have had the effect of destabilizing, rather than solidifying traditional gender norms. This Uxor could, perhaps, transition and transgress gender binaries and borders, as fluidly as the pageant wagons transversed medieval Chester.

Uxor's Gender Unbound

It may have been the case that this 'unruly', 'uncategorizable' character was designed specifically to address gender-oriented places in medieval Chester, and to perform a role that no other character could have done in any other place. Nicole Nolan Sidhu explores interpretations of Uxor which, she argues, rely on static appropriations of a misogynistic tradition, pointing out that these traditions do not necessarily perform an identical function in every cultural iteration. Many factors can alter misogynistic interpretations of a character, and Sidhu highlights the possibilities for the unruly figure to act as a medium 'through whom authors can articulate ideas that would otherwise be taboo … [or] to air risky ideas in safety'.[29] One of those taboo ideas was the notion of a female priest, a thing unthinkable in the medieval period, but one that the unruly figure of Uxor might be seen to perform during the drinking episode with her gossips. A trans reading of Uxor at this point in the play is attentive to the transitions in language here. If, as many scholars of gender contend, pronouns and gendered identifiers are deeply significant in order to allow people 'to live authentically as their varied trans selves' in the present day,[30] then we might productively examine where these signifiers change, and question why they change, in the literature of the past.

Prior to the drinking episode, gendered relations and identifiers abound in this play. Uxor is repeatedly voiced as female in the addresses of 'Wyffe' (193, 219) by Noah, 'Mother' (213) by Shem, and 'hir' (221) by Ham in the immediate prelude to the drinking episode.[31] Once we get to the drinking episode, however, gendered forms of address disappear. Only the gender neutral pronouns of 'I', 'us', and 'wee' are deployed throughout this key moment as Uxor joins their gossips in defiance of Noah.[32] The word 'gossippe' derives from 'god-sib(be)', and its primary meaning has neutrally-gendered religious significance as it referred to 'one's sponsor at a baptism or confirmation, a god parent' rather than merely a friend or companion.[33] As Susan E. Phillips explains, 'In Middle English, "gossip" refers not to speech but to a pastoral office, connoting not triviality but spiritual responsibility. A gossip was a godparent, a baptismal sponsor bound in spiritual kinship to both the godchild and its parents'.[34] This close relationship between Uxor and

the gossips would account for her apparent eagerness to save their lives and permit them on board the ark, as Uxor's words to Noah seem to imply when she delays her own boarding:

> Uxor But I have my gossips everyechone,
> one foote further I will not gone.
> They shall not drowne, by sayncte John,
> and I may save there life.
> The loved me full well, by Christe.
> But thou wilte lett them into thy chiste,
> ells roweforthe, Noe, when thy liste
> and gett thee a newewyfe.[35] (201–8)

Uxor clearly articulates her claims (or hopes) that the gossips will not drown, and Noah will let them onto the ark or else he can find himself a new wife. Yet the language here reveals another, more spiritual level of meaning which adds complexity to her apparently straightforward claims. Most scholars agree, either directly in their translations or indirectly in their interpretations of this passage, that the 'chiste' Uxor references here relates to the ark.[36] Yet this is the only time in the play where the word 'chiste' is used in this sense.

With the exceptions of Noah's boat/'boote' wordplay (245), and his reference to 'this vessell' (97), each time God, Noah, the narrator, Japheth, and his wife refer directly to the ark, they all use a form of either 'shippe' or 'ark'. Moreover, an impersonal 'the' precedes each of these examples, giving 'the shippe', or 'the ark', rather than the personal 'thy chiste' (206) used here by Uxor. In addition to meaning the ark, 'chiste' can also refer to a person's chest, or heart, as the repository of the soul.[37] On a spiritual level, then, Uxor asks Noah to open up his heart, or soul, to the gossips — to let them 'into [his] chiste' (206), into his heart — so that they shall not drown. In addition to recalling the physical act of drowning, 'drowne' (203) can also convey the spiritual sense of plunging into damnation.[38] Given that Noah foreshadows Christ in plays of the flood, it is surely more than coincidental that this spiritual understanding of 'chiste' as heart or soul comes in the line directly after Uxor's invocation of 'Christe' (205). Linking thematically Christ and the half-rhyming 'chiste', Uxor is making an anachronistic, yet heartfelt, plea to Christ (here in the form of Noah) to save her gossips' souls as they face inevitable drowning — hence her subsequent (and again anachronistic) appeal to 'sayncte John' (203), a saint whose importance in the Middle Ages was in the transition from life to death.[39] Noah's wife is disruptive, and she does, at least for the time being, refuse Noah's request to board the ark, but she is also

keen to ensure her gossips are taken into Christ's heart as they are about to die. At this critical moment, Noah dismisses Uxor's request, claiming that 'thy mother is wraowe' (209), at the same time as he hints towards her exceptionalism: 'by God, such another I do not knowe' (210). At this point in this drama both husband and wife are at odds and cisgendered traditional roles reveal acrimony, defiance, and refusal. As a wife Uxor cannot persuade Noah to take the gossips into his heart as a Christ figure to prepare them, in the tradition of the *artes moriendi*, to die a good death.[40]

As the time of their death by drowning approaches, Uxor joins the gossips yet makes no mention of the possibility of them boarding the ark, and the gossips make no such plea. Rather, Uxor appears to have come equipped with enough wine for them perhaps to drown their sorrows, or at least to allay their very real fears which the opening of the full 'drinking episode' alludes to:

> The Gossips The fludd comes fleetinge in full faste,
> one everye side that spredeth full farre.
> For fere of drowninge I am agaste;
> good gossippe, lett us drawe nere.
> And let us drinke or wee departe,
> for oftetymes wee have done soe.
> For at one draught thou drinke a quarte,
> and soe will I doe or I goe.
> Here is a pottell full of malnesaye good and stronge;
> yt will rejoyse both hart and tonge.
> Though Noe thinke us never soe longe,
> yett wee wyll drinke atyte. (225–36)

The opening line of this episode injects an element of urgency to the proceedings, as one of the gossips remarks that the flood is rushing in, on every side, 'full faste' (225) and admits their 'fere of drowning' (227). While the gossip appears to refer here to an understandable fear of drowning, the additional notion of plunging into damnation for dying without receiving communion, or giving their last confession, can also be inferred — recalling Uxor's earlier use of the dual meaning of 'drowne'. Dying a sudden death (as they seem to fear here given the speed of the flood) was universally dreaded in the medieval period as it denied a person the chance to confess their sins, condemning the unfortunate soul to dying in sin.[41] Immediately following the gossips' admission of their fears, a collective call invites them to 'lett us drinke or wee departe, | for oftetymes wee have done soe' (229–30). Here, 'depart' can refer to their imminent death as much as their departure

from the play, and the subsequent admission that they have often joined together to drink implies that they have often partaken communally in, specifically, 'malnesaye' (233), malmsey wine.[42] This is important because the wine used during the late medieval period for that most fundamental, religious, collective drinking ceremony of Holy Communion 'was usually claret, or *malmsey*'.[43] This particular wine 'will rejoyse both harte and tonge' (234), and a spiritual understanding of the word 'rejoyse' meaning to exult, or to take pride in martyrdom, or to rejoice in the divine presence, could indicate that Uxor joins the gossips to take communion in order that they might take God to their hearts, via their tongues, as the gossips prepare for death.[44]

Reading Uxor as delivering, even handling, the communion wine, raises the possibility of interpreting her as a trans priest. Such a suggestion might not be as unexpected as one might assume. As Matthew Milner notes:

> Medieval worshippers knew that women were barred from clerical orders and from places near the altar where God was handled; they knew that one justification for such prohibition was the gender of the human body born of Mary. Increasingly from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, they saw woman as quintessential recipient, man as quintessential celebrant, maker and controller of the body of God. Yet they occasionally saw the New Testament account of the Presentation in the Temple as a moment at which Mary, the vessel that bore God's body, was priest.[45]

As a priest figure, Uxor (admittedly fleetingly and contingently) illustrates 'how gender norms could be, and were, manipulated in the Middle Ages', and they arise at this point where gender norms fail to save the gossips' souls.[46] This episode bears none of the cisgender discord found between husband and wife. It bespeaks community, allyship, and joy as they 'rejoyse' (234), indicative perhaps of a 'Transgender euphoria' that resonates with the spiritually salvific connotations I suggest that this episode holds.[47] As previously noted this passage contains only gender-neutral terms as the character of Uxor and the gossips partake communally and joyously in a last drink. As a priest figure, Uxor (again, admittedly fleetingly and contingently) aligns themselves with Christ and this alignment moves the 'drinking episode' towards a more spiritual understanding, where excessive drinking can be read figuratively in terms of a shared spirituality, or as a confession of sin — a last confession made to Uxor-as-priest as the good gossips prepare to meet their death. Uxor's insistence that they delay boarding the ark until they have shared a final communion with her gossips brings them the taste and promise of ultimate salvation rather than mere destruction under the rising

waters. In this city-as-ark, both the lives of those who will survive the flood, and the souls of those who will not, are joined, fleetingly and spiritually — a feat only made possible by Uxor's trans-priest-performance. After this performance, gendered pronouns and addresses re-emerge and Noah refers to Uxor now as 'marye' (257). Perhaps that address hints at some acknowledgement of Uxor's spiritual role or, more likely, it appears as a corrective to Uxor's trans sanctity as Noah reasserts, with patriarchal authority, a cisgender identity for Uxor.

While Uxor and her good gossips, her 'flocke' (71), raise the possibility of gender-fluid religious agency and human compassion, that same gender fluidity held in medieval transvestite drama could easily mean that any cis-centric audience member might simply see and hear male actor(s) affirming a fraternal bond through drinking, or parodying boozy, boisterous women. A trans reading of Uxor, however, suggests that Uxor never fully occupies one gender. Trans Uxor does not cancel out cis Uxor — there is room for all. While admittedly contextually contingent and temporary, a trans reading of the drinking episode in this play invites fleeting glimpses of trans compassion, community, and joy.

Notes

1 See Lawrence Besserman, 'Lay Piety and Impiety: The Role of Noah's Wife in the Chester Play of Noah's Flood', in *Enacting the Bible in Medieval and Early Modern Drama*, ed. Eva von Contzen and Chanita Goodblatt (Manchester, 2020), 13–27, https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526131607.00007. For the role of Noah's wife across medieval drama, see Jane Tolmie, 'Mrs. Noah and Didactic Abuses', *Early Theatre* 5.1 (2002), 11–35, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.5.1.623.

2 Meg Twycross, in '"Transvestism" in the Mystery Plays', *Medieval English Theatre* 5.2 (1983), 123–80, shows that it was the norm for men to play the roles of female characters in English mystery plays. Nicole Nolan Sidhu, *Indecent Exposure: Gender, Politics, and Obscene Comedy in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia, 2016), 208, https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812292688, emphasizes the fact that male actors often borrowed women's clothing.

3 M.W. Bychowski, 'The Necropolitics of Narcissus: Confessions of Transgender Suicide in the Middle Ages', *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55.1 (2019), 207–48, 214, https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2188.

4 See also M.W. Bychowski and Dorothy Kim, 'Visions of a Medieval Transfeminism: An Introduction', *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55.1 (2019), 6–41, https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2185, for discussion of terminology and its importance.

5 Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt, 'Appendix: Trans and Genderqueer Studies Terminology, Language, and Usage Guide', in *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, ed. Spencer-Hall and Gutt (Amsterdam, 2021), 281–330, 283, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ks0cj4 .

6 John J. McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage*, (Oxford, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198768616.001.0001. See also Claire Sponsler, 'The Culture of the Spectator: Conformity and Resistance to Medieval Performances', *Theatre Journal* 44.1 (1992), 15–29, https://doi.org/10.2307/3208513.

7 Ruth Evans, 'Feminist Re-enactments: Gender and the Towneley *Uxor Noe*', in *A Wyf There Was*, ed. Juliette Dor (Liege, 1992), 141–54.

8 Spencer-Hall and Gutt, 'Introduction', in *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, 12.

9 Theresa Coletti, 'The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Religious Culture', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37.3 (2007), 531–47, 539, https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-2007-012.

10 Ibid, 535.

11 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203824979.

12 Robert W. Barrett, Jr, *Against All England: Regional Identity and Cheshire Writing, 1195–1656* (Notre Dame, 2009), 77. Barrett also lists the stations and changes over time of the pageant routes here.

13 Ibid, 77–8.

14 Mary Wack, 'Woman, Work, and Plays in an English Medieval Town', in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (New York, 1999), 33–51, 39, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195117349.003.0003.

15 Jane Laughton, *Life in a Late-Medieval City: Chester 1275–1520* (Oxford, 2008), 160.

16 Barrett, *Against All England*, 75.

17 Nicole R. Rice and Margaret Aziza Pappano, *The Civic Cycles: Artisan Drama and Identity in Premodern England* (Notre Dame, 2015), 177.

18 Ibid, 178.

19 Spencer-Hall and Gutt, 'Introduction', in *Transgender and Queer Subjects*, 19.

20 McGavin and Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship*, 42.

21 Spencer-Hall and Gutt, 'Introduction', in *Transgender and Queer Subjects*, 14.

22 Katie Normington, *Gender and Medieval Drama* (Cambridge, 2004), 127, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781846154706; Christina M. Fitzgerald, 'Manning

the Ark in York and Chester', *Exemplaria* 15.2 (2003), 351–84, 364, https://doi.org/10.1179/104125703790501915.

23 Christina M. Fitzgerald, *The Drama of Masculinity and Medieval English Guild Culture* (New York, 2007), 61–2, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230604995.

24 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Anarky', in *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menley and Jesse Oak Taylor (University Park, 2017), 25–42, 36, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271080390-002.

25 Besserman, 'Lay Piety and Impiety', 23.

26 Barrett, *Against all England*, 77.

27 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiii.

28 Ibid, xxiv.

29 Sidhu, *Indecent Exposure*, 218.

30 M.W. Bychowski, 'The Authentic Lives of Transgender Saints', in *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, ed. Spencer-Hall and Gutt, 245-65, 262, https://doi.org/10.5117/9789462988248_ch10.

31 'The Thirde Pageante of Noyes Fludd', in *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. R.M. Lumianski and David Mills, Early English Text Society s. s. 3 (London, 1974), 42–56. All further references by line number and in parentheses are from this edition.

32 The change in pronoun for Uxor reflects the gender neutral terminology used here in the play and is deliberate.

33 *Middle English Dictionary Online* (*MED Online),* s.v. 'god-sib(be) (n. 1)'.

34 Susan E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park, 2007), 6, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271034843. Rice and Pappano discount the relevance of this understanding of the word gossip, as they argue that 'at this point "gossip" still carried the primary meaning of a "familiar acquaintance"' (*Civic Cycles*, 181). However, given the longevity of the cycle's production, it is unclear to which point in time they refer, and all extant manuscripts of the text are based on inherited texts that therefore carry vocabulary which might have more archaic or traditional meanings attached.

35 I have reverted to the female pronouns here as this is prior to the drinking episode and Uxor indirectly refers to herself as a wife.

36 See, for example, Besserman's own translation of 'chiste' used here as ark in 'Lay Piety and Impiety'. Throughout 'Manning the Ark in York and Chester', Fitzgerald works with the assumption that Mrs Noah only means ark here when she says 'chiste'.

37 *MED Online,* s.v. 'chest(e) (n. 3)'.

38 *MED Online,* s.v. 'drounen (v.1c)'.

39 Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Stroud, 2004), 13.

40 On the medieval tradition of the *artes moriendi* which pointed the way to a good death see, for example, Thomas M. Izbicki, *The Eucharist in Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge, 2015), 178–220, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316408148.

41 Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*, 2nd edn (New Haven, 2005), 310, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2jn91ts.

42 Norman Simms, 'Mrs Noah's Secret: A Psychohistorical Reading of the Chester Cycle Third Pageant', *Parergon* 14.2 (1997), 15–28, https://doi.org/10.1353/pgn.1997.0038. Simms also notes the detail of the malmsey wine and its links to communion wine as an affirmation of faith. Simms, too, identifies Mrs Noah as 'a container for guilt and an icon of saintliness' (16). Where I differ from Simms is in my suggestion that Uxor never intended for the gossips to board the ark: she makes no secret of her mission to save their souls with the drinking of communion wine — her intentions are registered in the double meanings of her language.

43 Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Abingdon, 2016), 316, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315553016. Italics are mine and added for emphasis.

44 *MED Online,* s.v. 'rejoisen (v.)'.

45 Milner, *The Senses*, 278.

46 Mathilde Van Dijk, 'Epilogue', in *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, ed. Spencer-Hall and Gutt, 268–79, 276.

47 Spencer-Hall and Gutt, 'Introduction', in *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, 15.