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OLSON, BARBARA. English Shepherds' Carols and the Medieval Arts. (1974)
Directed by: Dr. James I. Wimsatt. Pp. 114.

The English Shepherds' Carols are herein viewed through illumination by the other arts of the medieval age. Links exist between the visual arts, the performing arts, and the literature of the Middle Ages through a common nourishing soil: the Catholic Church and the rich medieval courts. Subjects, themes, techniques, and aims of each art overlap one another, with artists and poets borrowing from and giving to, influencing and spurring on their fellow craftsmen.

Emphasis upon the medieval perspective on religion, shepherds, and carols, and a delving into the background of the craftsmen and the history of their arts creates a firm foundation upon which can be built a theory of the interlacing of the medieval arts. Textual analysis of the carols further strengthens the base so that the actual links to the visual arts and to the performing arts are properly viewed.

The group of figures interspersed in Chapter V, drawn from the illuminated manuscripts, stained glass windows, frescoes, and sculpted panels of the age, are illustrative of the carols' links to the visual arts. An Appendix containing copies of the Shepherds' Carols also proves helpful in the study of the songs and their relationship with the other arts, especially drama.

The study places the Shepherds' Carols in perspective, so that they may be read, as they were written, in the mainstream of medieval creative energy.

ENGLISH SHEPHERDS' CAROLS AND
" THE MEDIEVAL ARTS

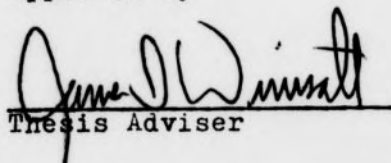
by

Barbara Olson

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Finally, to the three people without whom the study would stand meaningless, this work is dedicated: to Eric Olson, to Jean Collins Sloan, and to William Earl Sloan.

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FIGURE CREDITS

All the figures are taken from photographs or reproductions of the works found in modern editions of The Holkham Bible Picture Book, the Très Riches Heures, and The Visconti Hours, and in art books including H. W. Janson's History of Art, Hans H. Hoffstätter's Art of the Late Middle Ages, and Herbert Read's English Stained Glass. Publishing information for these volumes may be found in the Bibliography at the end of this work. All drawings are done by the author.

CHAPTER I

THE PROLOGUE: A THEORY OF ART INTERRELATION

Throughout the Middle Ages, all of the arts served in the fusing of the spiritual symbolism of the Christian faith with the dynamic realism of everyday life to illuminate religious history for medieval folk. As the arts had the same base, identical aims, and similar traditions, so also did they utilize analogous themes, techniques, and forms of expression. Their multi-faceted parallelism, added to the presumed close-knit relationship between the various craftsmen of the different arts, led to more overlapping and interaction between the arts during the Middle Ages than in most other ages of history. Thus, for full understanding and appreciation of any one portion of medieval art, such as the Shepherds' Carols, a central matter is determining its links with the other forms of artistic expression in the age.

Often modern scholarship neglects the realm of literary criticism in which a piece of literature is oriented and elucidated by its relation to arts of design, music, and theatre. Both Helmut Hatzfeld and Sir Herbert Read, critics of literature and art respectively, have, with a few other theorists, noted the fact that little progress has been made in this field, and both have somewhat successfully

attempted the practice of it.¹ M. D. Anderson, in her very enlightening book on this subject, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches, has made notable conclusions which are particularly appropriate for this study of the Shepherds' Carols. She remarks:

Faced with the almost unimaginable accumulations of modern learning, most scholars have become specialists who restrict their professional researches within comparatively narrow fields. This method of strip-cultivation has produced bountiful harvests of knowledge, but it is not without danger when rigidly applied to such subjects as English medieval literature and church imagery. These arts were developed as closely integrated parts of medieval culture, and if they are studied separately there is a grave risk that problems may remain unsolved in one or the other field of expertise because the answers to them lie on the further side of the professional fence.²

Literary scholars and art critics, then, must begin to consider such links carefully, must establish, as well as possible, the amount of interaction in specific instances, and must discern just what this means. John Speirs, in agreement with Hatzfeld and Anderson, has remarked: "Little has been done to correlate the imagery and symbolism of

¹See especially: Helmut A. Hatzfeld, "Literary Criticism through Art and Art Criticism through Literature," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 6 (1947), 1-21; Helmut A. Hatzfeld, Literature through Art: A New Approach to French Literature, 2nd ed. (1952; rpt. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969); and Herbert Read, In Defense of Shelley and Other Essays (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1936).

²M. D. Anderson, Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1963), p. 1.

medieval art with those of the poetry and drama, though there is clearly the closest, most intimate relation between them. A great deal that is obscure in the literature might be made less so if literary students were to pay more attention to the arts."³ Not only were the medieval arts parallel in development but were, in fact, so closely related that allusions to poems are sometimes found in carvings, borrowings from cycle dramas are discovered in stained glass windows, and images from manuscript illuminations appear suddenly in romances. The Annunciation, the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Doom--all the great medieval religious subjects are found to be integral to all the arts of the age, visual arts, poetry, and drama alike. Thus it was that religion touched every aspect of medieval art; and, since all the arts were composed to instruct, while entertaining, a diverse, largely unlettered, but intelligent audience, they were inextricably intermeshed.

Parallels exist between the visual arts, the performing arts, and literature through what Wellek and Warren call a similar "social and cultural background," or the sharing of a common local and temporal "nourishing soil." As they explain, when interpretations are based generally on an assertion of analogous philosophies or

³John Speirs, Medieval English Poetry: The Non-Chaucerian Tradition (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 379.

explanations concerning a time spirit, they are somewhat faulty. But, especially in the medieval period, genuine affinities between the arts are discovered through determination of identical or equivalent social and intellectual heritage. Such research can determine, according to Wellek and Warren, how "all the arts in a given time or setting expand over the objects of 'nature,' or how the norms of art are tied to specific social classes and thus subject to uniform changes, or how aesthetic values change with social revolutions."⁴ Such study also emphasizes how at times, like the medieval era, a common base, like the Church, exerts so powerful an influence that it fosters typical artistic quirks, in style and technique, in all the various arts.

This particular evaluation of the Shepherds' Carols and their links to other artistic forms investigates the medieval evolution of the various arts, describing the basis of their common social and cultural background. Beyond this, however, many pages have been devoted to a close textual analysis of the carols themselves with an emphasis upon those structures, themes, and techniques of the carols which closely correspond to the visual and performing arts. Naturally, this has been executed with more affinity towards the Horatian formula ut pictura poesis than Lessing's

⁴René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, 3rd ed. (1942; rpt. New York: Harcourt, 1956), p. 129.

Laoköon; however, there is no willful confusion of the genres. Full knowledge of the extensive differences in the materials used to form the arts--words, stone, pigments, glass--and realization of those complexities peculiar to each art that lie outside the area of affinity, do not necessarily preclude an emphasis on the parallels between the compositions and constructions of the arts. Since each art has its own peculiar nature, one art must necessarily vary from all the others. But at the same time, the arts are also quite strongly related and the ways are endless in which their similarities may be scrutinized.

Wellek and Warren have pointed out that at most times, literature lags behind the visual arts, with music sporadically appearing before or after it.⁵ However, in the Middle Ages, as the arts developed, they began overlapping, influencing one another, spurring one another on, borrowing, giving, using great chunks or subtle points of their sister arts. Though each art usually has its own development, tempo of growth, and internal elemental structure, in the medieval period these corresponded rather closely among the arts, causing a constant growing relationship, with each art, in some way, determining the evolution of the others. Though little conclusive, documented evidence is found to substantiate this supposition of close interrelation in the medieval arts, much proof is intrinsic to the poetry, visual

⁵Wellek and Warren, pp. 133-134.

and performing arts, leading to a convincing probability of their kinship. Much of the evidence speaks for itself and what follows is simply an attempt to organize the instances in the visual and performing arts which seem to relate specifically to the Shepherds' Carols and to discern the importance of the parallels between the arts.

CHAPTER II
MEDIEVAL PERSPECTIVE: RELIGION,
SHEPHERDS, AND CAROLS

During the Middle Ages, all of the joys of Mary and the events of Christ's life were devoutly observed; but the Nativity was, by far, the most popular and the most extensively celebrated festivity. Each of the arts constantly returned to the portrayal of this one happy event which, except for the Resurrection, was to medieval folk the most momentous occasion of Christ's life on earth, being His entrance into the world to save their souls. Visual arts brightly depicted the Virgin Mother having just delivered her Blessed Child and showing Him to the world; and dramas developed, reënacting the historical episode for everyone to see and understand. Song writers delighted in capturing the Yule-tide celebration in verse, and though their carols usually effuse religious devotion, Rosemary Woolf notes that Christmas carols differ from the liturgical lyrics on the other joys of the Virgin, in that they are rarely dogmatic exposition, but are, rather, spirited narratives, full of wonder and gaiety. These Christmas songs, more than any other carols, are popular, not only because they were written for the masses--both aristocrats and peasants--but also because they reflect a pervasive taste. Too, they emphasize

popular thought and relate their material in an immediate way.⁶ Among these Nativity songs, the Shepherds' Carols form a distinct group,⁷ skilfully executed and infused with a wondrously dual quality: a mixture of earthly joy and spiritual awe, which sparks a bright response in an audience. Their lovely rounded form juxtaposed with the rather coarse texture of such lyrics as the "Tyrle, Tyrlo" carol or the song of "Jolly Wat" must, to a tremendous extent, have been generated by the interplay of these poems with other forms of imaginative expression in the Middle Ages.

The Church touched every phase of medieval man's existence, and was nowhere more influential than in the composition and popularity of the carols and the other arts, for the Church acted as the nourishing soil for the growth of artistic endeavors. Medieval religion was popular, as well as pervasive, and men approached it in a natural, uninhibited, though sincere, fashion. An article in the New Catholic Encyclopedia records the idea that there was a great stress on such things as simplistic hagiography, which directly appealed to a generally highly developed imagination of the men and women of the age. When the Bible failed to expound upon the details which the medieval folk thought necessary

⁶Rosemary Woolf, The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), p. 302.

⁷For a reading of the Shepherds' Carols, see the Appendix.

for proper understanding, people turned to the Apocrypha. If this gave no further satisfaction, as it did not in the story of the Shepherds, popular and often totally imaginative ideas supplied embellishments. Medieval concepts of biblical history were filled with extraneous elements in this way--elements which took root in the actual Bible stories, but evolved through folk elements, with medieval imaginations adding what was obviously lacking. These additions corresponded directly to what R.E. McNally in the New Catholic Encyclopedia calls the "symbolic-allegorical mind that was typical of this age, to that propensity to discover under the most obvious sense of things deeper, hidden meaning."⁸ Just as the tendency of churchmen and artists was to set Bible history in the Middle Ages and to infuse it with every worldly detail that would make it real to the masses, their own lofty Christian symbols and intricate allegories were the common language of popular thought. Religion and art in close relation thus became the common meeting ground for folk realism and spiritual abstraction, the outcome being that religion and art gained color and life while the people learned the intended spiritual essences garbed in the clothes of the common life. This realism and its interwoven symbolism formed most medieval literature and art; thus

⁸R. E. McNally, "Middle Ages," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, p. 820.

artistic endeavor seems both more in tune with heaven and more strongly anchored to earth than in any works of the following ages.

Naturally, it was the sacraments in the Middle Ages that were believed to have the ability to direct man's course to heaven. However, as V. A. Kolve points out, the worth of the sacraments heavily depended on the individual's understanding of their meaning. Instruction was essential, and the Church drew upon artistic enterprises to relate religious truths. The sacraments were not based in philosophical abstractions, but in the actual events of Christ's life or in specific happenings which occurred at some point in time, or would occur later. Thus, most of the art and literature concentrated on events of Biblical history, elaborations of stories of Christ's life or of the Old Testament, which men believed to be a mirror of Christ's life. Franciscan teaching became very important in the connection of art and religion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Kolve further explains that the friars emphasized the notion that the best understanding of the Godhead would come when man should learn to feel, to experience grief, love, and compassion for Christ and His Mother "in their human roles." Contemplation of the human tragedy and the joy of the drama of Christ's life would allow man to share in its spiritual victory. Thus, the smallest details had to be registered and acknowledged. For this, art and literature became invaluable.

Through painted images and poetical metaphors, the events could be visualized and felt, as well as understood, by all, both the simple, unlettered peasants and the more sophisticated, learned men.⁹

A number of scholars have noted a close connection between the Franciscans and the development of the arts, especially the Christmas carols.¹⁰ In fact, celebrating Christmas with joyous music and Godly rejoicing was a Franciscan institution. The feast of Christ's birth particularly fascinated St. Francis himself, and there was a well-loved, though not well-founded, legend throughout the Middle Ages that it was this saint who first observed the tradition of fixing a Christmas crib for the altar. Francis and his followers greatly popularized, as a holy day, the birth of the Christ Child, emphasizing that humility and poverty of the Divine Infant which is so characteristic of medieval paintings and carols. The Franciscans, noting the popularity of the bright secular dance-songs, took over the carol form, substituting their own religious subject matter for the frivolous. Christmas carols experienced a very definite

⁹See: V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 3-5.

¹⁰Especially note: Richard Leighton Greene, The Early English Carols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935), p. cxxxi; Rossell Hope Robbins, "The Earliest Carols and the Franciscans," Modern Language Notes, 53 (1938), 239-245; and Boris Ford, ed., The Age of Chaucer: A Guide to English Literature (London: Cassel, 1961), p. 153.

and striking growth under Franciscan hands. Of course, there was a special reason for such development in connection with the Christmas celebration, for mid-winter was the season when lingering pagan customs were strongest. The abolishment of wassail, boar's head feasts, and holly and ivy customs was impossible, so the Franciscans attempted to Christianize the festivities, depending to a large extent on the popular carol form for their preaching. This attempt was rather successful; but, by the fifteenth century, religious adaptations of the carol grew to be so well-loved that their propagandistic nature, aimed at softening pagan customs, was completely dissolved, and the songs came to be quite as vulgarly popular as those secular lyrics they had supposedly replaced.¹¹

It was, then, through the Franciscans and especially through the formal Church itself, that the Shepherds' Carols and the other medieval arts had their inception, their birth, and their vast and rapid growth. For much of its teaching and for its colossal task of relating the whole spectrum of religious history to the people, the Church heavily depended upon visual, poetic, and dramatic representation. This meant that in subject, all the arts interwove resembling threads of meaning; in feeling, all embraced the same holy center; and in structure, all combined connatural symbolism.

¹¹Robbins especially emphasizes this point.

Traditions, celebrations, and festivities evolved through religion and were abundantly portrayed by craftsmen and poets alike. The chief period of festivity throughout the year was the Twelve Days of Christmas and, as E. K. Chambers and Edmondstone Duncan record, the medieval folk filled the nights from the Nativity to Epiphany with a succession of jubilant events. There were banquets, the Boy Bishop arrived at court, New Years presents were bestowed, jousts and tournaments were splendidly managed, and a Lord of Misrule was chosen to keep everyone happy. Artists and poets, especially the carol writers, delighted in portraying these merriments of Christmas. On Christmas Eve, feasters and carollers spent half the night in the great banquet hall, striking up old melodies which showed the duality of the feast itself, as their verses rang out the joys of the heavenly birth and the excitement of the earthly festivity, with impartial mixture.¹²

Of all the stories connected to the first Christmas, none was so beloved in the Middle Ages as that of the angel's annunciation to the shepherds and the resulting adoration of the Christ Child. Thus, the rustic shepherds became the popular subject of all the arts, with the carols

¹²E. K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1925), I, 391; and Edmondstone Duncan, The Story of the Carol (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Company, Ltd., 1911), p. 183.

and plays involving especially boisterous and realistic elaborations of the event. Sometimes exquisite in their essence, often quite coarse in the rustic presentation, the songs and plays are always charming, and most critics agree that both the refined society and the common peasants of the Middle Ages entered earnestly into the performance and enjoyment of them. The mingling of simplicity and majesty in the best medieval art is, in truth, only an exaggeration of the actual duality of the event. Thus, poets and artists exulted not only the glorious message, but also the humble receivers. Duncan, in discussing the carols, emphasizes both the realism and wonder when he remarks that "Shepherds piped on the hills for the very pleasure of life. Their measures were governed by the pulsation of light tripping feet in dances. . . . The event which is the source of all carolry, as we understand the term--namely, the Nativity, itself had been enough to have unlocked the throats and pipes of every shepherd on the hillsides through all the world."¹³ Two co-authors of a somewhat popular carol anthology underline the majestic:

Far out over the clear starlit night floated a marvelous song. Celestial music echoed and re-echoed across the hillside over Bethlehem, as the angelic choir sang the first Christmas carol: "Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth, Peace, Good-will to Men." Filled with wonder, the shepherds of Judea, who were watching their flocks on that most marvelous

¹³Duncan, p. 142.

of nights, were so moved by the beauty of the song that they deserted their charges and followed the singing angelic hosts to the manger in the stable.¹⁴

The humble shepherds, at once awed by and yet drawn toward the wondrous angels, form the very epitome of the plain and simple congregation whom Christ was born to save. In fact, as V. A. Kolve observes, the Church believed it especially fitting that the Savior's coming was first told to these rustic keepers of the flocks. He quotes the the twelfth century homily which states:

ure louerd ihesu crist...that is alre herdene herde. and alre lechene leche. the com to helen the wundes. the the deuel hadde on mancun broht.

"He was the Shepherd of shepherds."¹⁵ But Luke's description of the shepherds' part in the Nativity, though serenely beautiful and angelically joyful, provides few details demanded by an artist's fanciful brush or a writer's pen. The dark and silent manger scene, with the shepherds grouped around it, begs for visual representation and dramatic development. Artists and poets thus found it both necessary and desirable to take the well-known story and shape it into a lively picture, a vivid lyric, or an inventive dialogue.

¹⁴Marx and Anne Oberndorfer, Nöels: A New Collection of Old Carols (Chicago: H. T. FitzSimons Company, 1952), p. 7. This is a semi-popular collection of carols, rather than a scholarly critical study; but as this is one of the few books specifically concerning carols, it is useful for the few insights it offers into the nature of carolry.

¹⁵Kolve, p. 155.

As Kolve and other critics have emphasized, there were virtually no theological treatises concerning the first Christmas herdsmen, though there were many commentaries on the Nativity; so, the creative geniuses of the Middle Ages transformed what little detail there was, along with their knowledge of medieval shepherds, into meaningful works with bright characters who could comment significantly on the Birth and bring its meaning to the audience. It is, as Douglas Gray has said, that "Their rough faces and simple clothes mark them as representatives of the ordinary people. They embody not only the devotion and wonder of the onlookers, but their fears and anxieties as well."¹⁶ The shepherds, comically and totally involved with their worldly affairs, are typical of human nature; and yet, they find their very lives transformed and heightened to a kind of divinity by the events they witness. Kolve states, "They are not pale watchers waiting for this night of nights, but when the announcement comes they are able to recognize its importance."¹⁷ Thus it is that the best of the carol writers, as well as the artists, sculptors, and dramatists of the age, included both the rough realism and the beautiful spirituality of the shepherds of that first Christmas in their verses, pictures, and dramatic dialogues.

¹⁶Douglas Gray, Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 115.

¹⁷Kolve, p. 240.

CHAPTER III
BACKGROUND: THE CRAFTSMEN AND
SOME HISTORY OF THEIR ARTS

The constant blending of realism and spirituality in the art of the Middle Ages was a direct result of the pervading influence of the Church. Since religion penetrated every aspect of life, the Church became closely linked to the court life of medieval kings and noblemen.¹⁸ Every palace had its chapel, and every cathedral its wealthy patron. It was primarily in the courts that the arts flourished; but with the firm-set coalition between Church and court, art evolved with a quality at once holy and profane; holy not in the ascetic vein of the devout mystics but in the missionary sense of the rich and cosmopolitan cathedrals. So it was, to some extent, because of the patronage of these courts that the arts became as interrelated as they were in the Middle Ages.

As Johan Huizinga writes,

¹⁸This summary of the medieval courts and their craftsmen is composed through the use of: Peter Dronke, The Medieval Lyric (New York: Harper, 1968), pp. 19-23; G. G. Coulton, Art and the Reformation (1928; rpt. New York: Archon, 1969), pp. 73-94; Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1949), pp. 222-242; and Virginia Wylie Egbert, The Mediaeval Artist at Work (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967).

The intellectual and moral life of the fifteenth century seems to us to be divided into two clearly separated spheres. On the one hand, the civilization of the court, the nobility and the rich middle class: ambitious, proud and grasping, passionate and luxurious. On the other, the tranquil sphere of the "devotio moderna," of the Imitation of Christ, of Ruysbroeck and of Saint Colette. . . . Devout circles were hardly in touch with the great art that flourished at this time. . . . [And so, the arts] developed in the chapels of the courts.¹⁹

Exercising terrific power and attraction, the nobility, including both spiritual and temporal leaders, fostered the arts. Princes and bishops employed master craftsmen who raised illumination, sculpting, and tapestry and stained glass work to an artistic refinement close to perfection. Within courts, "workshops" grew up, evolving masters, such as the Limbourg Brothers of France, to oversee the endeavors of artisans and apprentices. It was toward such art-encrusted courts that the wandering minstrels--the poet musicians--gravitated. Not all the poets of the Middle Ages travelled to find audiences; but many did, and they were totally dependent upon patronage for their food and shelter. And even the other "bourgeois" poets--those well-established in a town, such as Chaucer and later Shakespeare, as the tradition carried over into the Renaissance--were obliged to dedicate their works to wealthy noblemen in order to gain recognition and thus earn their livelihood.

¹⁹Huizinga, p. 238.

So, in these cultural courts, palatial and religious, the painters, sculptors, poets and musicians of the day gathered and shared a way of life. They were rewarded for their efforts but were paid rather poorly and were, in fact, guildsmen relegated to the same social level as spicers, grooms, meat carvers, and the other manual workmen. Huizinga and the other historians note that there was often very little distinction between the master artists and their apprentice craftsmen. The great painters were called upon to stain banners, decorate fleets, and color sculpted chairs besides directing and painting the manuscript illuminations, triptychs, and wall murals. Likewise, composers of the lovely carols, ballads, and love-lyrics were expected not only to sing the words they had written, but also to accompany themselves on harps, lutes, and viols. And as drama developed, playwrights usually acted in the scenes that they created.

It was through drama, itself in all ages an amalgam of the arts, that much interaction took place between the forms of expression. Though the cycles were more closely connected to towns than courts, all society participated in them, with wealthy noblemen sometimes being required by canonical and secular law to contribute support to the yearly productions. As Anderson notes, once the drama cycles started, it was very natural for its "producers" to borrow costume ideas from stained windows and painted walls of the local churches. By this method, the audience, fully acquainted since birth

with the images in their chapels, would quickly recognize character types. On the other hand, as the cycles evolved, it also became very easy for artists to draw upon the plays for their images. Anderson writes:

If, after seeing a majestic theme such as the Creation, the Flood, or the Last Judgment, presented upon the small stage of a pageant cart, the carver of an alabaster panel or a roof boss was called upon to depict it within an even more restricted space, he would naturally have tended to reproduce the tableau which he remembered. By doing so he saved himself the labour of eliminating inessential details and achieved a design which his own experience had proved to be impressive. If we accept the probability that medieval craftsmen were thus inspired by the plays, it is certainly likely that what they show us is some sort of a record of what they had seen on stage.²⁰

And so it was, as Speirs believes, that

Itinerant craftsmen and artists had more than a mode of life in common with itinerant minstrels and makers. They had minds stored with the same images, and they were certainly aware of each other's work. The audiences for the poems and Miracle Plays must also have been taught to see and, by way of symbolism, to think and feel largely by means of the paintings and sculptures in the churches. These images in colour, stone, and wood were an essential part of their visible and imaginative world...²¹

Carols, illuminations, statues, and plays, fostered by the Church-guided courts and rich townships, all combined holy themes and images with worldly ones, and continually overlapped one another to form very cohesive links.

²⁰Anderson, p. 5.

²¹Speirs, Medieval English Poetry, p. 380.

The carol form was particularly well-suited for the medieval combination of earth and spirit. Although there is some vagueness in modern carol definition, during the Middle Ages, and up until Elizabeth's reign, this song type was so distinct that it is quite necessary to explore the medieval meaning to best understand the Shepherds' poems. Though most dictionaries now connect "carol" with religious events, especially Christmas, this merely reflects popular usage. Richard Greene, in his standard collection of Early English Carols, explains that for medieval writers and singers, carols were distinguished from the other lyric types by form and not at all by subject matter.²² So although the carol was often connected to Christmas, especially after the thirteenth century, it was not exclusively a religious Nativity song.

Of the 475 songs which Greene has compiled in his book --which is all the known, extant English carols--about 155, or one-third, of them are in some way linked to the Nativity and the Christmas festivities. Five of these are specifically Shepherds' Carols, and though several others mention these rustic creatures, it is this group which is of primary concern in this study. In the remaining two-thirds of the carols, the only other large group contains the 90 songs written to or about the Virgin and her joys. Forty others involve Christ, His life, His pleading, and His Passion; and thirty

²²Greene, Early English Carols, p. xx.

songs concern the Trinity. All the rest of the carols portray, more or less equally, the common motifs of Middle English lyrics: songs to the saints, religious and moral counsel, threats of mortality and Doomsday, political satire, jibes at women, the happy picaresque, convivial and humorous themes, and, of course, the love lyrics.

As most critics since Greene have agreed, the English carol, as a genre, is popular, but is not without aristocratic associations. It is found in a niche between traditional folk songs and ballads, on one side, and courtly lyrics and scholarly Latin poems, on the other. In such a position, and at its best, the carol form was greatly loved by all classes. The tremendous popularity of the carols evolved not only through their ability to entertain and delight everyone, regardless of class or education, but also through their power to perpetuate, as Peter Dronke observes, the "beliefs and fantasies of the people which are older than, and essentially independent of, clerical and aristocratic traditions."²³ Carols were not composed by uncultivated writers, but they do possess a melodic and poetic simplicity which endows them with that dynamic energy and appeal very suitable for the interclass medieval festivities and dances. Ultimately, the origins of the carol are found in dance traditions--in the pagan spring and winter festival

²³Dronke, p. 194.

ring-dances. The work "carol" is more than likely derived from the Greek choros, meaning dance. Naturally, it is not to be supposed that all of the high medieval lyrics were written to be specifically danced to; but they do take their structure from a form evolved through those songs sung in accompaniment to the early dances expressing festival joy. And possibly carols did remain attached to dancing at least up through the 1400's, for the poet of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, though looking back on an earlier age, connects the songs with dance in three specific places: in portraying King Arthur's Christmas banquet as including carol-dancing (l. 43), and in depicting Sir Gawain's host, Bercilak de Hautdesert, and his guests on the next Christmas Eve as moving to the measures of many blithe carols (l. 1026), and again, after the boar hunt, as sporting with carol-dancing and Christmas songs (l. 1655).

Most of the carols are religious expressions of popular and naive feelings of devotion; yet, the songs were originally intended to be sung outside, rather than within church walls. As the medieval Church rather disliked the dance-song tradition behind the carol, some of its clerks tried to suppress the lyrics. The carols were probably only moderately used to accompany dance in England; and yet, the Church, opposed to any competition which might possibly lead to immoral conduct, disapproved of the pagan echoes. Many of the old airs and words retained the glee

and playfulness of human nature following its natural instincts of pagan joy--even in the celebration of the most sacred Christian mysteries. Current scholarship assumes that since the carol could never be obliterated, the Church, with its never-ceasing tendency to integrate, began to foster more than oppress the carol growth. Thus the clergy adopted it for processional usage, so that both outside the Church and within it, the carol came to be associated with bodily movement and communal participation. Carols grew into popular litanies and became increasingly used, as John Stevens notes, for ecclesiastical purposes to adorn the religious ceremony and to act as an ornament to the drama of the mass.²⁴

In both modes of use, as the secular dance-songs and as religious processional accompaniment, the sharp division of the carol into stanza and burden was extremely important; hence, this scission becomes the characteristic formal distinction of this song type.²⁵ The various stanzas were sung

²⁴John Stevens, ed., Medieval Carols, vol. IV of Musica Britannica: A National Collection of Music (London: Stainer and Bell, Ltd., 1952), p. xiv. For carols as processional music, see: Catherine Keyes Miller, "The Early English Carol," Renaissance News, 3 (1950), 61-64; and Rossell Hope Robbins, "Middle English Carols as Processional Hymns," Studies in Philology, 56 (1959), 559-582.

²⁵For a scholarly investigation of the musical technicalities of carols, see: Manfred F. Bukofzer, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music (New York: Norton, 1950), pp. 148-169. The study is illuminating in the area of structure and stylistic features of the carol, especially involving the intricacies of musicology in this seemingly simple song form.

by the leader of the dance, or a priest, and the single burden by a chorus, or the congregation. The former, then, constantly changes content, while the latter begins the song and is further repeated after each strophe without change. Erik Routley explains the origin of the words "burden" and "stanza" which directly link the carol to the dance tradition, or even to the religious procession. "Burden" originally denoted a theme or song, and "stanza" grew from Latin stare, "to stand," and stantes, "people standing"; this latter referring "to the halting, or the marking time, of the dance-pattern" or processional movement. During the burden, people gaily danced or solemnly moved forward in their procession, singing the familiar words; but during the stanza, they stopped still to listen to the unfolding story of the verses.²⁶

Many critics have noted the unwonted difficulty of assessing the carols as literature; for, when simply read, the songs evince a defective variance between style and content that only disappears when they are sung, as they were written to be. Since carol writers depended on music for much of their emotional effect, this melodic aspect colored the author's intention and his attitude toward the subject. Too, the carols were often born of a functional nature which is obvious when we remember the article by Rossell Hope Robbins, quoted by Raymond Oliver, in which he says that

²⁶Erik Routley, The English Carol (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1958), p. 28.

carols actually "were written or otherwise used in various public places; they were 'embroidered into tapestries, used in sotelties for elaborate dishes of food, tables to be exhibited in churches as aids for religious or political orientation, tituli for stained glass windows, poesies for rings, and of course inscriptions for monumental brasses and tombs."²⁷ Most of the carols were designed for singing by large groups of people, in communal activity, so were reduced to the lowest common denominator. Thus, there is a necessary absence of deep individual feeling, with the subject matter receiving a simple, external treatment. Carols are, then, typically short, ceremonial expressions of a group feeling; carollers sing as members of the human race whose curse is banished at the Crucifixion, whose life is sanctified by the Nativity. The songs are lively and vital, and, as Greene remarks, though they were never specifically written, after the 1400's, to accompany the dancing ring, "they preserve. . . , and it is the secret of much of their charm, the atmosphere of general participation. . . . The companionship of the dance remained associated with the form of verse which had the dance-song for its pattern, even when the singers no longer stepped 'hand by hand.'²⁸

²⁷Raymond Oliver, Poems Without Names (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), p. 13.

²⁸Greene, Early English Carols, p. lix.

Although the visual arts have many links with the carols, they have a history of their own which is not particularly pertinent to the meaning of the Shepherds' Carols. Music and drama, on the other hand, as performing arts, have backgrounds which overlap the dance-song tradition and which call for amplification in a study of this sort. Carols were written to be definitely sung, if not always danced to; and all the Shepherds' songs resound with allusions to music. In Greene's carol #77, the shepherds hear the "angelles makyng melodye," and in the two versions of lyric #79, the refrains or burdens echo with:

They sang terli, terlow,
So mereli the sheppards ther pipes can blow.

Within the stanzas, music is continually mentioned in reference to the glorious night: the herdsmen "about they fyld thei pyped full right," "off angels ther came a company/With mery songs and milody," and "'Gloria in excelsis,' the angels song." Even the audience is exhorted: "I pray you all that be here/Fore to syng and mak good cheer." The burden of "Jolly Wat" is joyously repeated throughout the entire song with "Can I not syng but hoy,/Whan the joly shepherd made so mych joy." Wat himself has a "flagat," or a flageolet, a small wind instrument, and also the "pype" with which "he made so mych joy." As in the "Tyrle, Tyrlo" carol, the angels descend to sing their "Gloria in excelsis" "on hight," and Wat, in the last stanza, proclaims he may

"well both hope and syng," having seen the Christ Child at His birth. Thus, the Shepherds' Carols are connected not only externally to music, by their being written to be sung, but also internally to music, by their repeated allusions to it.

And such pointed references in the carols reflect a general interest of the age. Besides the entertainment it provided in court life, music was an extremely vital element in medieval religion, and even court musicians were generally in service of the Church. Within this institution, music was elevated to important heights, not only because its measures accompanied the daily rounds of liturgical practices, but also because its words played a tremendous role in the educational system of the day. Albert Seay explains that as musica practica, it was essential in each service throughout the day, and that even from the inchoate stages of organized Christian worship, music was used for embellishment. When the ceremonies evolved into more elaborate celebrations, composers and performers found themselves pulled into lending their skills to fill out the ever-growing liturgy. This tremendous dependence on the musician should not be interpreted solely on the basis that his talents pleasantly reinforced the mood of the service, however, or that music was the simple outcome of centuries of tradition and custom. Seay explains:

Far more important for a realization of music's high position is the understanding of its other branch so important to the Middle Ages, musica speculativa, that area of music serving as a part of the long process of education needed for the philosopher and theologian. Here, the function of music was not one derived from its use as a sounding art, but from its metaphysical possibilities, wherein it could act as a speculum or "mirror" of the universe, a means whereby one might comprehend the harmony of God's creations.²⁹

Like the lyrics, the stained glass, the illuminations, and the sculpture, music was employed to relate the religious history of the world to a medieval audience, unlettered, but bright and ready to learn. And like these other creative endeavors, music was formed on the art of analogy. The writers of Man and His Music explain that the medieval craftsmen and composers alike found neither incongruity nor irreverence in blending secular objects with sacred themes. In fact, such association was the foundation of all the arts, and was even a running theme in the main scholarly works of such a brilliant and saintly writer as Thomas Aquinas. Medieval writers, artists, and musicians thus developed an art "in which the experiences and wonder of this world were used to help understand and partially reflect the glory of God."³⁰

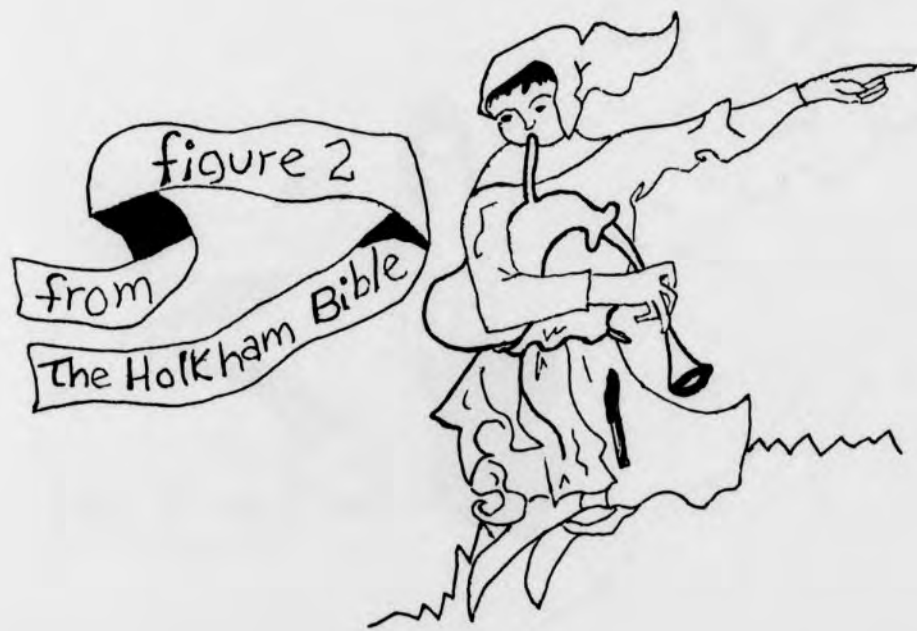
²⁹Albert Seay, Music in the Medieval World (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 2-3.

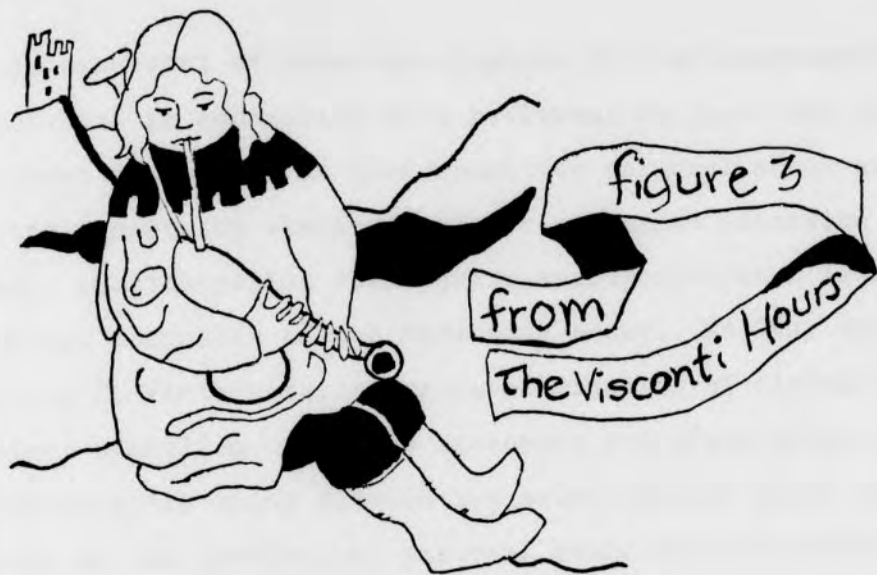
³⁰Alec Harman, Anthony Milner, and Wilfred Mellers, Man and His Music: The Story of Musical Experience in the West (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 110.

Throughout the Middle Ages, shepherds were customarily regarded as musicians. Kolve notes that as late as 1555, it was typical for herdsmen to entertain wedding feasts with their music.³¹ Rosemary Woolf writes, "The idea of the shepherd-musician, originally of Eastern origin, was almost invariably adopted: in the De Lisle Psalter and Queen Mary's Psalter--some decades before the extant English plays--a shepherd is playing his pipe when the angels appear, and in the Holkham Bible Picture Book the shepherds already ignorantly stumble as they try to repeat the Latin of the angels' song."³² Also in the Holkham Bible is the scene in which one of the shepherds is playing his pipe when the angel appears with the news of the wondrous birth. The Visconti Hours display a fat little shepherd playing upon his pipes, and the Très Riches Heures depict the herdsmen enthralled in the angels' chorus (see Figures 1-4, pages 31 and 32). Five of the six Shepherds' Plays include, with great emphasis, at least one episode of song and music. Pipes were especially linked to the shepherds, probably echoing the early Greek and Roman ages, as both Theocritus and Vergil tell of the sweet music which the shepherds piped and sang. In practically every European

³¹Kolve, p. 170.

³²Woolf, English Religious Lyric, pp. 302-303.





land, some sort of primitive bagpipe or reed instrument is discovered in connection with herdsmen; in fact, old pipes are even now played as background for pastoral songs and rustic dances, by shepherds themselves or in imitation of them. And the piping seems quite appropriate when linked with the shepherds of the Christmas story. As Gray remarks, quoting E. Winternitz, there is a "mingling of visual and musical symbolism with the shepherds and their music --'the characteristic union between the sound of reed pipes and the creche in the stable...of pastoral music with its characteristic drone and Christmas, pervades more than five hundred years of music up to the Christmas Oratorio of Johann Sebastian Bach and to Handel's Messiah and still further.'"³³

Along with the importance of shepherds' music in the carols is found a close connection to drama. The "Tyrle, Tyrlo" song was, in one of its forms, played and sung in the Coventry "Taylors and Shearemens Pagant." Too, almost every critic who discusses "Jolly Wat" sees the carol as strikingly similar in conception and tone to the old mystery plays, which were full of quaint legends about the shepherds. It may be helpful to briefly review the development of the Shepherds' Plays to understand how the realism and earthiness of "Jolly Wat" and the other carols and dramas grew from the joyous, but solemn account in Saint Luke's

³³Gray, p. 265.

gospel. Sandro Sticca has emphasized the idea that, like the Church which engendered it, the theatre of the Middle Ages was catholic; and throughout its long history inside and outside the Church, drama's function is very clear. Sticca says that the plays constituted "a powerful dramatic statement on the Christian faith at its richest and most complex. The aim of medieval drama is that which motivated the medieval Church as a whole: to express in visible, dramatic terms the facts and values of the accepted body of Scripture and theological belief. Christian art, particularly dramatic art, is more than a pleasing ornament; it is actually woven into the fabric of Christian thought."³⁴

In his introduction to English Nativity Plays, Samuel Hemingway explains that modern drama finds its origin in the medieval Church services for Christmas and Easter. As Christmas is especially "a day full of vital human interest," the realism and simplicity of the Nativity scenes made this festival more adaptable, even than the Easter story, to dramatic ends. Thus from the fourth to eighth centuries, a sort of dramatic Christmas service began to develop.³⁵ Karl Young adds to this by indicating how, as the tropes began to be fit into the liturgy between the reading of

³⁴Sandro Sticca, ed., The Medieval Drama (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1972), p. xi.

³⁵Samuel B. Hemingway, English Nativity Plays (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964), p. vii.

the Epistle and Gospel, the shepherds became favorites in the Nativity service. At Christmas, the priests and altar boys would sometimes personify these rustics during the liturgy, as the choir sang Gloria in excelsis Deo. Even in these early dramatic services, the impersonated characters extended past the actual story of Luke, so that the "shepherds" took a ceremonial and dramatic part in the official liturgy, uniquely energizing the Christ-Mass.³⁶ Though there is known to be a ninth century Christmas trope which, for some reason, did not survive, the earliest extant manuscript of a Shepherds' Play dates from the eleventh century. To this century O. B. Hardison finds that twenty Christmas plays may be assigned, half of which concern the Shepherds' Adoration. All of these dramatic pieces are simple, and are connected to the Introit of the Christmas service, with dialogue modeled on the Quem quaeritis.³⁷ It is not until the thirteenth century that a long Christmas drama was recorded: the Officium Pastorum.³⁸ Still

³⁶Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), II, 1-28.

³⁷O. B. Hardison, Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1965), p. 223.

³⁸For an English translation of the Latin Pastores as performed in Rouen, see: Joseph Quincy Adams, Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (Boston: Houghton, 1924), p. 25. The text was discovered in two different manuscripts (Rouen MSS. y.110 and y.108) of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries respectively. Though it is probably quite similar to the early dramas existing in England, there are no extant texts from that century.

connected to the Church, but tending toward a conglomeration and elaboration of the earlier texts into a more complex form, it employed dialogue much amplified, but still delivered by priests and acolytes. Apparently a very impressive ceremony, this was performed in such great cathedrals as the one of Rouen, dimly lit with candles, and amply cast with choir boys as the angelic hosts and the shepherds.³⁹

Outside the confines of the Church, certain medieval towns began to foster the more secular mystery plays in England and on the continent, with an important change from liturgical drama: the division of the Christmas story into two parts, the Nativity Play and the Shepherds' Play. In order to do this, new material had to be introduced, the source of which, in the Shepherds' Plays, consisted of realistic descriptions of the shepherds on the hills. As Young explains, Saint Luke's account of the shepherds' part in the Nativity, though quietly beautiful, provided few details

³⁹For an examination of the texts of the Shepherds' Plays beginning with the *Officium Pastorum*, see: Paul Edward Kretzmann, The Liturgical Element in the Earliest Forms of the Medieval Drama (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1916), pp. 42-51. Kretzmann notes liturgical influences, direct and indirect, on all the plays. It is not an exhaustive study, but is helpful as a brief, intense review of the liturgical element in the Shepherds' Plays. His conclusion (pp. 50-51) is: "The Latin liturgical Pastores plays were based entirely upon the liturgy, the tropes being composed at the suggestion of the responses, often with the text of the services. The construction of the vernacular and cycle plays shows the prominence of the ancient liturgical outline, which not even extraneous subject-matter has obliterated."

needed by the dramatist. From the Gospel, the manger scene seems silent, with the shepherds awed by the revelation; and so naturally, when creating drama, dialogue and action had to be supplied by the imagination of the writers.⁴⁰ The new material introduced into the plays, and later into the carols, is interesting, mainly for its shift of emphasis. No longer do the manger and adoration scenes hold center stage. Instead, it is the life, games, quarrels, jokes, and hardships of the shepherds before the angel appears to them. Of course, the scene in the stable is preserved, and is often beautiful in itself, but it is generally diminished, if not in importance, at least in length. So it is with "Jolly Wat." Of its ten stanzas, only three are concerned with the manger scene, and even then, much of the emphasis is on the shepherd himself.

The precise date, or even the exact century, in which the cyclic Corpus Christi plays were first performed is unknown. Carleton Brown finds links in several sermons which connect the preachings not only with lyrics and carols, suggesting that they were designed specifically for popular audiences, but also with the cyclic dramas. As the sermons appear in the 1300's, Brown concludes that the Corpus Christi plays are thus to be dated much earlier than the existing manuscripts show. The "terseness and vigor" of the sermons'

⁴⁰Young, The Drama, II, 4.

lines seem definitely to come from the plays, and it is absurd to think that these lines served as sources for the drama.⁴¹

Though earlier scholarship assumed, largely through the writings of E. K. Chambers, Karl Young, and Hardin Craig, that the Corpus Christi cycles evolved within the Church and were thrown into the streets when they grew to be too large and too secular for the confines of the cathedrals, more recent studies show such theories to be false and misleading. Edward M. Clark, V. A. Kolve, O. B. Hardison, and Rosemary Woolf all agree that to believe the cyclic plays grew directly from liturgical drama within the Church is to neglect the more than adequate evidence that indicates a separate evolution. Church dramas were local and uneven in development, and so possibly beyond the reach of a writer; but Church liturgy itself was ever available to anyone. It seems, then, that the Shepherds' Plays were written by lay dramatists who themselves turned to the liturgy, the actual feasts, the Bible; they were familiar with the historical stories connected with Christ, and they knew the generally received theological explanations of the story. Thus it is that Kolve writes, "Whatever can be 'invented' once can be invented again and again. The influence of the liturgy on the cycle-drama was direct--akin to that of the Vulgate

⁴¹Carleton Brown, "Sermons and Miracle Plays," Modern Language Notes, 49 (1934), 396.

and the vernacular religious poems--but it is unlikely that the Latin drama of the Church was often midwife at its birth. Liturgical plays in Latin probably had a few direct descendants in English, but they were not the Corpus Christi cycles. Generation is within kind."⁴²

Kolve and other scholars now believe that liturgical drama reached full development by the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and found fruition there. The Church needed it only to deepen the meaning of the feasts, to ornament the Church calendar. Within the Church, drama was neither restless, nor generally inclining toward cyclical form. Relying upon the Church services for contextual completeness, the Latin plays developed slowly, remaining attached to their proper days, in "occasional" usage. There was no need for Church drama to seek fulfillment or completion, so it remained at rest. Outside the Church, a more secular drama developed, but still, like the other arts, closely involved in relating the religious history of the world to its audience. The plays very naturally grew up around the feast of Corpus Christi. The feast day could be anytime from May 23 to June 24, a time when weather might well be suitable for outdoor festivals. Thus, someone, at some place in the medieval world, decided to celebrate the joyous instituting of the Eucharist with a play. Kolve explains that

⁴²Kolve, pp. 41-42.

in doing so, rather than focusing on the "Sacrament's temporal power to work miracles, to convince, and convert," the dramatists instead concentrated on the Sacrament's

eternal power to alter the destiny of the human race. The Eucharist serves to recall both the Last Supper and the flesh and blood of Christ offered on the cross--events about which it is possible to rejoice only when they are related to man's fall, Christ's Resurrection, and the Last Judgment. . . . To play the whole story, then, is in the deepest sense to celebrate the Corpus Christi sacrament, to explain its necessity and power, and to show how that power will be made manifest at the end of the world.⁴³

An interesting sidelight to this newly accepted theory is John Speirs' conception of the cycle dramas not as devised by clerks merely to instruct the ignorant (though they did grow from liturgy, and did reveal religious history), but as attributable to makers or poets who had strong connections with the minstrels of the poetry tradition. He believes that the plays are too dramatic in character to see them created otherwise. Minstrels had developed acting abilities through recitations before audiences, and it is anything but misleading to see the last minstrels as the first Tudor actors, with even the Elizabethan playwrights through Shakespeare in direct descent from the minstrels makers of earliest medieval times.⁴⁴

⁴³Kolve, pp. 46-48.

⁴⁴John Speirs, "The Mystery Cycles: Some Towneley Cycle Plays," Scrutiny, 18 (1951-1952), pp. 88-89.

Rosemary Woolf, agreeing with the beliefs of Kolve and Hardison, begins her English Mystery Plays with the following:

The influence of Latin liturgical drama upon the mystery plays is paradoxically both important and negligible: important in that vernacular religious drama would have been inconceivable as a form had not the liturgical offices of Easter and Christmas come to include passages of drama; negligible in that it is only in trivial instances that the mystery plays draw upon liturgical drama as a direct source. The relationship between the two is therefore much finer and more elusive than was supposed by early scholars, who held the theory that the mystery plays were in origin liturgical drama, which, having outgrown the confines of the physical structure of the church and religious framework of the liturgy, was transferred to the marketplace and performed in England.⁴⁵

Though cyclical drama had a heritage based in religion, then, it was not actually fathered by the liturgical plays, and later made an orphan in the streets because of its growing buffoonery or its interference with Church services. It developed outside the Church itself, fulfilling the apparent need and desire of the people of the Middle Ages for entertainment. Otherwise, the folk would have been content with the liturgical plays in their occasional usage in the Church. This is not to say, of course, that the plays were not still religious and educational. Drama, in the Corpus Christi cycles, still related religious history to the audience. It went beyond mere didacticism, however, moving toward the pure entertainment of the Renaissance plays.

⁴⁵Rosemary Woolf, The English Mystery Plays (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1972), p. 3.

The background of all the medieval arts is very similar. With the Church overseeing their early development, the arts evolved as concrete aids which would teach to an illiterate, but willing, and diverse, audience their religious history. Knowledge of this history would then make the sacraments, the life of Christ, the saints, and Church institutions real to the medieval folk, and would thus assure them of the map to the Heavenly Gates, although it would not actually open the doors. Musicians, artists, and poets were craftsmen, like other laborers of the common guilds, who throughout the stages of the development of the arts, were drawn to the rich court life and were paid to entertain nobility, to beautify the feudal castles and town palaces, and were also employed by the Church to embellish its services. But although they were poorly paid artisans, the makers, minstrels, and painters of the Middle Ages were also artists of superior quality. Not only did their arts have the common background of religion as subject matter and of enlightenment as aim, but the craftsmen of each art also shared the tools of their trade (the themes, structures, and techniques which they used to create their own particular art) with the other masters and performers of the courts in which they toiled, painted, and sang. With this situation, overlapping in the arts of the Middle Ages was inevitable, extensive, and very natural: a movement back and forth across those boundaries which often keep the arts locked within their distinctive categories.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHEPHERDS' CAROLS: AN ANALYSIS

Before examining the overlapping techniques and the linking motifs of the medieval arts in relation to the Shepherds' Carols, it is important first to isolate these Christmas poems and examine them closely. Of the many songs from the medieval era which fall into the typical carol form, most develop the usual artistic themes of religious history. Among those of the most refreshing and the most delightful sincerity are these Shepherds' Carols. The best of them have an engaging pastoral character, suited to the simplicity of their words and befitting the first shepherds, who must have uttered such joyous and simple songs as they set forth on their journey to the manger. The bucolic surroundings and humble circumstances of the shepherds and of the actual Nativity scene, as related in the carols and the other arts, effectively underline the very sublimity of the event. This mingling of simplicity and majesty in the best of the Shepherds' songs becomes real with the remembrance that it was to those rustic shepherds that the glorious messengers first brought tidings of the new Christ Child, and, as Saint Luke records (2: 13-14):

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude
of heavenly hosts praising God, and saying,
GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH
PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN.

The carols of the Christmas Shepherds series (Greene #75-#79) all have that duality needed artistically and effectively to portray the Birth; with emphasis on the realistic simplicity of the shepherds, the glory of the message becomes lively and inspiring. Each carol reveals the shepherds aghast at the wondrous sight, and all give the reader the impression that the Nativity was a real event to the poet, rather than an old story copied from the Scriptures.

James Ryman, one of the few carol writers whose name is known today, wrote the carols numbered 75 and 76 in Greene's collection. Though R. T. Davies,⁴⁶ E. K. Chambers,⁴⁷ and other critics agree that Ryman was not the most inspired of all medieval writers, they admit that he did contribute some lovely works to the body of Middle English lyrics, especially to the Christmas carol group. Ryman was a Franciscan, and so, like some of his brother friars, he was actively involved in creating carols for devotional purposes. St. Francis had envisioned his disciples as joculatores Dei, or God's minstrels, and this conception prompted much of Ryman's work. Not only did he rewrite many secular poems for use in preaching and public worship, but he also translated

⁴⁶R. T. Davies, ed., Medieval English Lyrics: A Critical Anthology (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), p. 353.

⁴⁷E. K. Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon, 1945), p. 97. The rest of the paragraph is based on Chambers' ideas of Ryman.

Latin hymns, displaying some skill in interweaving Latin with English in both strophe and burden. No carol writer is known to have surpassed Ryman in actual output, for his contribution to the corpus of early carols is 119 songs, or close to one-third of the extant whole.⁴⁸ His carols seemingly found some general circulation, despite his lack of any overwhelming poetical talent. Though occasionally the friar exhorted his audience to merriment, he usually simply approached verse with a desire to relate the Bible history, which he often transcribed from Latin lines. Some of his experiments with variational procedures within the carol form are rather intriguing, but all too often his work lacks the informality and spark of life which are vital to a carol's success.

A glance at Ryman's *Shepherds' Carols* will reveal the worth of his work. Both the macaronic carol (Greene #75) and the song written wholly in English (Greene #76) seem to be just a little more than literal transcriptions from the Bible, or perhaps translations from a scripturally based Latin song. But there is some characterization of the simple shepherds to enliven the scene, and a hint of their rusticity and wonder at the marvelous happening. The highest

⁴⁸Richard Leighton Greene, in A Selection of English Carols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p. 47, notes that these 119 carols, with 40-odd other lyrics, are found in a carefully transcribed manuscript, dated 1492, Cambridge University Library, MS. Ee. I. 12.

achievement of personal interpretation of the Biblical account is, in the first poem, Ryman's telling that "The shepherds ran to Bedleme than." Here he gives some imagistic description of their travel, though it is somewhat weak. Ryman repeatedly shies away from free inventiveness. In fact, in both poems Ryman feels impelled to prove that he has not sacreligiously tampered with the original story by saying "Scripture seith thus," giving proper foundation for his content. And, as always, he rather overworks the often repeated epithets "King of Bliss," "aungell bright," "good Joseph," and "Mary milde," so that they almost become trite phrases used merely to distend his lines. In the first poem, Latin is blended rather well with English, so that, when sung or read aloud, the lyric achieves a beauty of sound. Otherwise, the carols are so close to the Nativity account in Luke that it seems as if the story made no bold impression on the writer. There is little feeling of personal excitement or awe, on the part of poet or shepherd; thus, the reader receives only a small sensation himself.

There is quite a difference, however, in the other carols of the series. In poem #77, the anonymous writer uses the popular chanson d'aventure approach, in which he himself witnesses the event:

As I cam by the way,
 I sawe a sight semly to see:
 Thre sheperdes rangyng in aray,
 Vpon the felde keypyng ther fee.

A sterre, they said, they dide espie
 Kastyng the bemes owt of the est,
 And angelles makyng melodye:
 'Veritas de terra orta est.'

The shepherds come alive, as they are "agast" at the marvelous occurrence, and as they jump off the page, they speak:

Sayinge thes wordes as I say the:
 'To Bedlem shortly lett vs hast,
 And ther we shall the trewth see.'

The heavenly angel is much more vivid than Ryman's, as he soothes and cheers the frightened shepherds with his "Consolamini, and mery be." The poet of this carol, like Ryman, enforces the truth of his words with "Scripture doth say"; but he interprets the Biblical story, giving emphasis where he believes it due. The shepherds untiringly search for the stable: "Tyll they cam ther they wold not rest." Even the star becomes a character in the little story, as the shepherds follow its beam:

That was so bright affore ther face;
 Hit browght them streight vnto Bethlem.
 So bright it shon over all the realme.

Poem #79, both in its fragmented variation B, and in its whole form A, is an even livelier representation of the shepherds' story. The B version also begins as a chanson d'aventure:

As I out rode this enderes night,
 Of thre joli sheppardes I saw a sight.

It then moves into an atmosphere of wondrous joy, both earthly and heavenly, a tone found in both forms. This is given emphasis in lyric A with the echoing burden:

Tyrle, tyrlo,
So merylye the shepperdes began to blowe.

The burden of the B version is lacking, but was probably very similar. The "tyrle, tyrlo" is, of course, the onomatopoeic representation of the jolly sound made by the shepherds' pipes. And amidst this common rustic piping about the field, in the dark of night, comes a great and glorious company of singing angels. The host bids those of "the faith" to hasten to Bethlehem, and the herdsmen thus "heyed them" to the holy manger, "To se that blyssid sons beme," that "mek chyld" enveloped by "that glorious streme." Herein is a feeling of spiritual wonder, set off against the foil of the merry, rustic singing and piping. Even the angels in this song come "Doune from heaven, from heaven so hie," with a medley of "mirthe and joy and great solimnitye." Such mixture gives the carol a much greater range and richer texture than the lyrics by Ryman possess. And this is carried, as is common with so many medieval feast carols, into an ending which involves an exhortation to the audience:

I pray yow all that be here
Fore to syng and mak good chere
In the worschip off God thys yere.
Tyrle, tirlo.

Religious laud and honor were thereby expressed by the communal singing which extolled earthly joy and festivity.

As the story of a single shepherd on the night of the Nativity, "Jolly Wat" (Greene #78) is unsurpassed among the

medieval Shepherds' Carols, and deserves the closest attention. The poem is a very natural, joyous picture of a medieval herdsman, revealing the scene of the Nativity even more vividly than the other songs, through a bright, lyrical sketch. "The carol of Wat," Richard Greene proclaims, "is justly famous for its gaity and realism."⁴⁹ And these are the motifs which color the entire poem. The gaity is caught in the refrain that is written into the end of every verse, and is enforced by the echo of the burden:

Vith hoy!
 For in his pype he made so mych joy.
 Can I not syng but hoy,
 Whan the joly sheperd made so mych joy.

Although there is some sense of awe in "Jolly Wat," John Speirs remarks that this carol contains "less of the wonder and reverence which, in the Shepherds' Carols and Shepherds' Plays, to some extent restrain the boisterous farcical element; but it expresses, as the Plays do, the jollity of the folk on a festive occasion and it has also their homely realistic character."⁵⁰

With "Jolly Wat," even more than the other two carols, there is a dramatic quality which translates the abstractions of James Ryman's work into living symbols. The carol presents both the Annunciation and Adoration in a dramatic

⁴⁹Greene, Early English Carols, p. 366.

⁵⁰Speirs, Medieval English Poetry, p. 75.

form, full of bright visual details. Painted in his realistic activity, the shepherd of the poem becomes a living creature, moving before the eyes of the reader. He is jovial and happy, "for in hys pype he made so mych joy"; thus gaining for himself the favorable epithet "Joly, Joly Wat" or "the joly sheperd." Very humanly, the shepherd falls asleep with his "doge to hys gurdyll . . . tayd." But despite his slumber, Wat is apparently an excellent tender of his flock, for he is said to be a "gud herdes boy," and even Mary calls him "myne own herdesman Wat," which, by implication, discloses him as favored by the Holy Virgin. Wat treats his sheep as fellow creatures, as he says goodbye to them individually: "Now farwell Mall, and also Will."⁵¹ Wat also speaks personally to his dog, warning him to "kepe well my shep fro the corn." A most realistic touch is the shepherd's growing hot from his run: "Whan Wat to Bedlem cum was,/He swet; he had gon faster than a pace." The familiarity of Wat towards the Holy Family is less inhibited than usual:

⁵¹ Apparently "Mall" was commonly the name of any favorite ewe. In Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale" (ll. 7-12), the pilgrim tells a story of a widow who
 In pacience ladde a ful symple lyf,
 For litel was hir catel and hir rente.
 By housbondrie of swich as God hire sente
 She foond hirself and eek hir doghtren two.
 Thre large sowes hadde she, and namo,
 Thre keen, and eek a sheep that highte Malle.
The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (1933; rpt. Houghton, 1961), p. 199. Greene, Early English Carols, p. 366, notes this fact.

"Ye, for God, lady, even so I hat.
Lull well Jhesu in thy lape,
And farewell, Joseph, wyth thy rownd cape."

This especially increases the earthiness and rural character of the shepherd and of the poem. Rosemary Woolf says that all this naturalness--the contemporary names for the animals, the simple realism of the shepherd who charges his dog to watch his flock, who sweats in his haste to see the "farly syght" in Bethlehem, and who advises the Virgin on how to lull her Child--is a very accomplished example of a type of lyric common in France at the time.⁵² It is, indeed, a brighter, clearer picture of a joyous, yet somewhat awe-filled, pastoral character than is found in most of the other English Shepherds' Carols.

⁵²Woolf, English Religious Lyrics, p. 303.

CHAPTER V

THE VISUAL ARTS: LINKS TO THE CAROLS

For the richest appreciation of "Jolly Wat" and the other Shepherds' Carols, it is imperative to juxtapose them with other arts of the medieval times--to discover those links with the many different forms of expression, of which the carol writers themselves were most keenly aware. With "Jolly Wat" this is particularly revealing, for the carol is written as if the poet had an illumination before his eyes or a scene from a drama in his mind as he wrote. As earlier established, the medieval Church embraced all the intellectual and artistic endeavors of the time, thereby nourishing the higher aspirations of men. It was, as Karl Mantzius remarks, "the focus at which all artistic, literary, and scientific efforts met, and in the service of which they worked. Architects exerted themselves to the utmost to raise the finest buildings, painters and sculptors to adorn these buildings more magnificently than the most beautiful palaces, musicians exercised their highest skill to render divine service as impressive as possible and the people formed an enthusiastic public enjoying all these impressions as a mighty emanation of the wonderful power of the Church."⁵³

⁵³Karl Mantzius, A History of Theatrical Art: In Ancient and Modern Times (London: Duckworth and Co., 1903), II, 3.

Carols, in their relation to all the arts, form an especially viable bond with the sculpture of the age. The Church's great repertory of carved images was used to give visual form to the spirituality of the religion. Medieval statuary, like the songs, was both symbolic and realistic; stonecarvers, like the poets, interpreted the events of religious history, giving the subjects an allegorical quality with a realistic flavor. This they did in preference to the rendering either of a simple representation of reality, or of an intricate and total abstraction of the Scriptures. Such blending of symbolic spiritual values and life-like secular detail moves both carols and sculpture with that lovely duality, that roundness of form and richness of texture so delightful in the medieval art. In carved figures, such as the Gothic pietas (see Figure 5, page 54), this blending is apparent through the lovely transcendent, though grief-stricken, expression on Mary's face and the contrasting grotesque thinness and the blood-encrusted wounds of the Christ draped across her lap. In such songs as the Shepherds' Carols, the mixture accounts for the magnificent angelic hosts singing their glorious message, while the rustic herdsmen blow upon their primitive pipes. There is a wonderful dynamism and a quick sense of movement in the sculpture, not unlike the lively pace and flowing rhythm of the carols. The eye glides as swiftly across the flowing relief surfaces as the tongue moves in the singing of the spirited Christmas song.



Gothic Pietà

In this blending of spiritual symbolism and worldly realism, Gothic cathedrals which housed most of the statuary, became not only metaphorical images of Paradise, but also embodiments of medieval-life reality. A church thus grew into what Hans H. Hofstätter calls "a Scholastic encyclopedia."⁵⁴ The philosophers of Scholasticism taught the idea that intellectual activity is servant to the holy obligations of Faith and that the goal of clear thinking is to comprehend the God-given truths which already exist and to record them in theorems and conclusions. "Thus," says Hofstätter:

everything man can think and know was depicted in the cathedral, as a visual reminder to the unlettered laity of what they had been told in the sermon, but also, and above all, as a positive demonstration of the reality of God, since everything which can be depicted must exist, otherwise it would defy depiction. And so, here, along with the sacred personages of both Testaments, the legends of the martyrs, the personifications of Virtues, Vices, and the Works of Mercy, there are also the sciences, the arts, the activities of men appropriate to each season, the entire cosmogony of the medieval world-picture.⁵⁵

Sculpture, like the carols, then, became a single vessel into which both spiritual symbolism and mundane realism were poured to become fused into an image.

Two Nativity panels (see Figures 6 and 7, pages 56 and 57) from Pisa furnish unique, though certainly not entirely

⁵⁴Hans H. Hofstätter, Art of the Late Middle Ages (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1968), p. 30.

⁵⁵Ibid.



The Nativity
Pisa
Marble Pulpit



isolated, examples of strong comparison between the carols and the sculpture.⁵⁶ In both panels, there are the intense expression, the unbridled and imaginative fantasy, and the nervous agility of the Shepherds' Carols. The same Gothic quality of human feeling pervades the narrative relief scenes as fills the Christmas songs. Solid, convex figures crowd the shallow boxes almost to the bursting point, much as Jolly Wat's carol is overflowing with visual detail: fields, sheep, herdsmen, dogs, shepherds' instruments, angels, the Holy Family--all these things are juxtaposed and intricately interwoven in both the panels and the carol. The shepherds of the Marble Pulpit of the Pisa Cathedral gaze attentively at the angel, with their sheep grazing about their feet, in a manner similar to verse three of "Jolly Wat":

The sheperd on a hill he stode;
Rownd about hym his shepe they yode

The characters of both panels are brightly realized, reflecting the usual desire of medieval sculptors to endow the traditional historical themes with great emotional appeal. Like most carols, the carved figures served as religious imagery accompanying and embellishing the public devotion.

And not only are the pictorial quality and symbolic message of the panels much like the carols, but also are the atmosphere and spatial depths similar. The relief panels

⁵⁶For a historical discussion of these panels, see: H. W. Janson, History of Art, rev. ed. (1962; rpt. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 261.

relay a feeling of spiritual devotion and communal wonder, along with a sense of earthiness and human individuality. Too, just as in "Jolly Wat" and "Tyrle, Tyrlo," the shepherds are seemingly on their hill one minute and at the stable the next--relaying a sense of timelessness and ubiquity--the herdsmen of the Nativity panels are simultaneously on their hill and at the Christ Child's manger. Thus, as the Christmas songs, the sculpture of the medieval age is dependent upon the tangible and the transcendent at the same time. The carved figures relate meaning through symbolism and iconography, and while they are, by no means identical, in their forms of expression, to the carols, there are enough instances of similarities to infer their close-knit relation and to realize their creators' overlapping influences.

Even more than sculpture, medieval wall painting is closely related to the Shepherds' Carols and other Middle English lyrics and literature. In fact, the poetry of the age drew much of its color, its bright images, its jewel-like clarity from the paintings of the age. Poets, marveling over the elegant hues, the dainty figures, and the elaborate details of the frescoes naturally, as John Speirs and other scholars believe, poured such visual drama into their lyrics. On the other hand, many wall images were illustrations of the romances and poems which were so well-known to medieval folk--the Arthur legends, the Tristram and Iseult tale, Piers Plowman, and others. Illuminated books,

tapestries, embroideries, and ivories all depicted characters from the popular tales, so that artists wrote literature into their surfaces, just as poets painted crowd-scenes and hillsides, figures and castles into their songs. In this way, the visual and literary arts often exchanged themes and techniques back and forth throughout the medieval centuries. Thus, the range of subject matter in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' paintings grew by increasingly large numbers, as more legends and lyrical moralities were progressively drawn upon,⁵⁷ and these poems and romances drew color and life from the paint of the large frescoes and wall panels.

Arranged around the huge banquet rooms of a castle, or the vestibule and nave of a cathedral, the wall paintings were separated by consoles and canopies (see Figure 8, page 61), giving a series of narrative compositions, running much like the separate and descriptive stanzas of a carols. Throughout the rooms, the "stories" of the pictures, like the visions within the lyrics, were told with great verve

⁵⁷Tancred Borenius and E. W. Tristram in English Medieval Painting (New York: Harcourt, 1926), p. 29, explain how Piers Plowman especially affected wall paintings. After William Langland wrote the poem (concerning a vision of Christ as Piers Plowman, a laborer working and suffering amongst his fellows), many fourteenth and fifteenth century paintings portrayed the nude figure of Christ, displaying His wounds and surrounded by tools of labor which formed a halo about his head or body. The following paragraph on wall paintings is partially based on further discussions in this book, pp. 29-35.

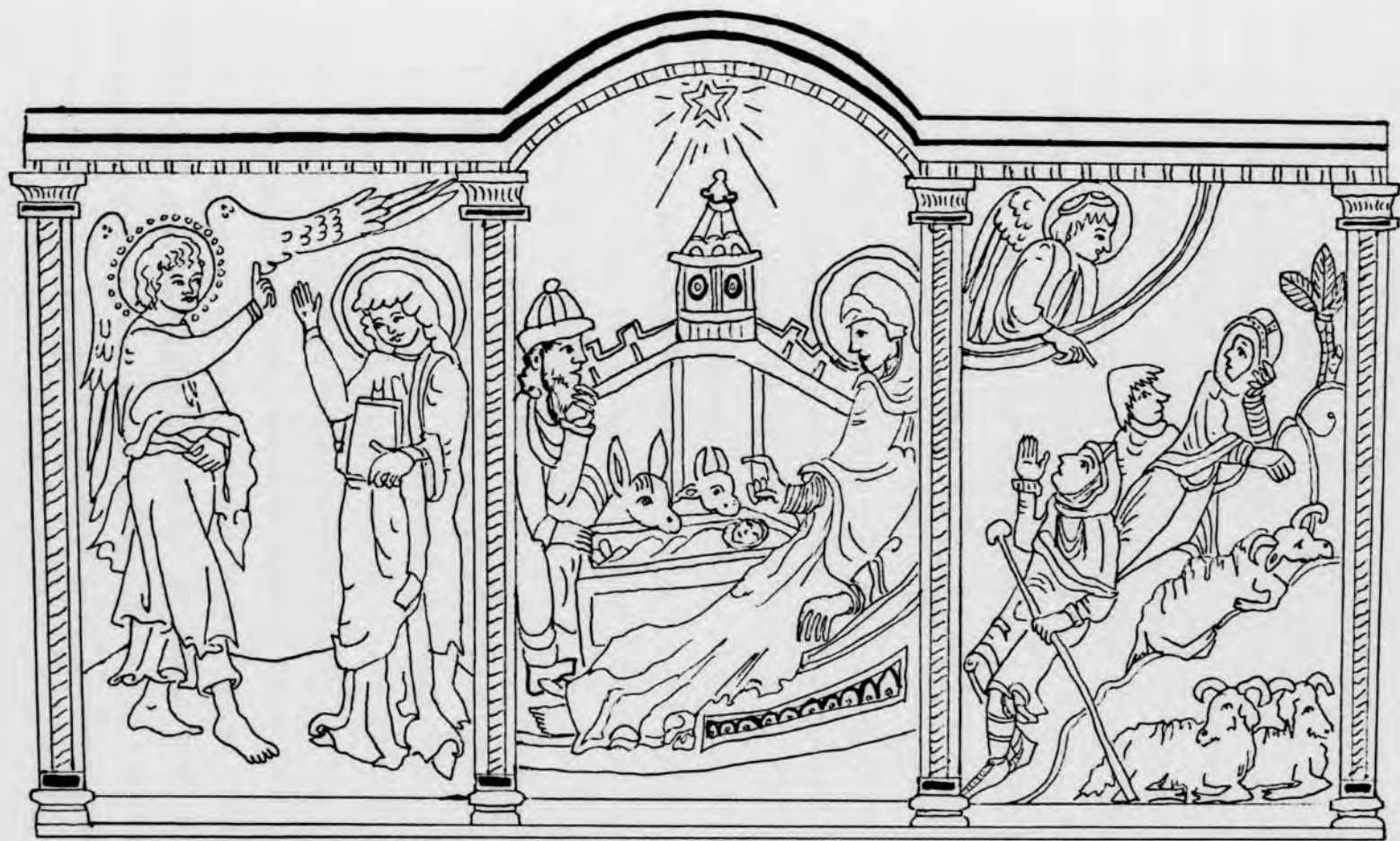


figure 8 separated wall paintings

and vivacity. Just as Wat is brightly portrayed, the figures of the wall series are wonderfully realized as individuals, while they yet embody the qualities of the ideal Virgin, saint, or shepherd. Though their expressions seem to communicate ethereal messages, their costumes and the scenery surrounding them simply and beautifully reflect contemporary English life. So, with the paintings, too, is that dual quality of grandness and simplicity, of artless composition and intricate detail. There is abstraction and symbolism, but the emphasis is on the subtle illusion of three-dimensional life. In Nativity scenes, the Christ Child has an appealing naturalness and humility set off by His glorious halo, and the other members of the Holy Family are ever an admixture of humble nobility and quiet holiness (see Figure 9, page 63). Thus it is that the delightful carols correspond to the equally enchanting frescoes. Both forms of artistic expression use a type of selective exaggeration and contrasting scaling to emphasize the most important elements in the composition. It is with this technique that, throughout the Middle Ages, the Virgin and Child are painted sometimes twice as large as their surrounding worshippers (see Figure 10, page 64); and, somewhat reminiscent of this procedure, Jolly Wat, the major figure of the carol, looms taller than even the Holy Family in his song. Naturally, the aims of artists who enlarge Mary and Christ are not the same as those of the "Jolly Wat" poet; however, the



figure 9 Mary & Christ, majestic but humble

from Master of Moullins



figure 10

Giotto's Madonna Enthroned

effects are quite similar. With this method, the painter or poet may symbolically, and very dramatically, pull the audience's attention to his major area of focus, whatever that may be within each work. Across the frescoes throughout Europe and within the carols there are beautiful lyrical accounts of the age--of the scenes which filled the daily existences of the people of the age, and of the imagined details which these people developed to embellish Biblical history and to ornament their daily recurring religious services. Both the wall paintings and the carols integrated homely realism with spiritual awe to evolve a multitude of panoramas concerning human and divine life in medieval times.

Like the cyclic dramas, the religious carols, and the other medieval arts, the stained glass windows of great cathedrals and priory churches of the Middle Ages portrayed subjects which, as Gordon McNeil Rushforth remarks, "belong to a large and consistent scheme which embraces the religious history of the world from its beginnings to the end of all things."⁵⁸ The gorgeous windows, through which continuous light flooded the church interiors as if from mysterious, spiritual regions, portrayed scenes from the Old Testament, and from Christ's life; and just as the poetry and drama instructed by delight, so did the stained

⁵⁸Gordon McNeil Rushforth, Medieval Christian Imagery as Illustrated by the Painted Windows of Great Malvern Priory Church, Worcestershire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), p. 4.

glass. Both abstraction and realism filled the window designs, the former derived partly from devotional literature, and the latter from religious drama. Contemporary costumes, worn by such Biblical characters as the shepherds pictured in cathedral windows (see Figure 11, page 67), reflect the actual dress of the medieval era.⁵⁹ The angels who relay the glorious message are always dressed much as they are in manuscript paintings: in white gowns, with bright hair and golden circlets. And like the angels of the illuminations, they are usually given the formal function of playing musical instruments to express the joy of assisting at the divine event. In the stained glass, the shepherds enact the scene of adoration, with one herdsman playing upon his pipe, the instrument so often connected to the shepherds in both the carols and plays:

With hoy!
 For in hys pype he made so mych joy.
 Can I not syng but hoy,
 Whan the joly sheperd made so mych joy.

Thus, in spirit, subject, and character function, the bright windows corresponded to the colorful carols of the age.

⁵⁹Rushforth, p. 26, notes that there is a striking difference between the costumes of characters from the Old and New Testaments. "Old Testament persons . . . have more or less fanciful costumes which were probably derived from the stage. Thus Noah and Abraham wear a kind of dalmatic, the open sides of which are fastened by jewelled clasps, and hats of peculiar shape. This type was probably invented for the prophets who appeared in the liturgical drama and miracle plays." Thus, there was great interaction between the performing and the visual arts.



figure 11

14th century stained glass window

from the victoria and
Albert Museum

In technique, the workers in stained glass had to build up their total design with tiny pieces of colored glass, much like the carol writers who had to form their compositions with single words and phrases. The window artist actually painted with his glass, assembling his design with the various fragments of color, and adding the finer details with a brush after the pattern had its intended shape. It is not an exaggeration to claim that the carol writer worked similarly--piecing out his total narrative, with different ideas and images, and with various stanzas and burdens; then overlaying the whole with a woven style, or, rather, integrating the parts to reach a mosaic harmony. Hence, both window artists and carol bards transform bits of colored glass and chunks of bright word pictures into a monumental whole, which informs their audience of some segment of religious history, and which fits into the tremendous scheme of spiritual education of the Middle Ages.

For all the significant connections of the carols with sculpture, wall painting, and stained glass, a tighter link seems to be found between the songs and the manuscript illuminations.⁶⁰ For a fuller appreciation of the richness

⁶⁰For an interesting discussion of literature and the visual arts, see: Elizabeth Salter, "Medieval Poetry and the Visual Arts," Essays and Studies Collected for the English Association, vol. 22 (London: Humanities Press, Inc., 1969), 16-32.

of the carols, a closer examination of the text of "Jolly Wat" with the medieval illustrations is essential. With such an analogy, both the subject--character and setting--and the structure of the poem may be enlightened. Of course, the manuscripts, just as the other arts, cannot act as infallible proof of interlinking, for they were often not direct influences upon poetry; however, the miniature paintings can function both more suggestively and more evocatively in the explication of the carols than any of the other visual arts. Using as illustration Figures 12-14, pages 70-72, taken from "The Annunciation to the Shepherds" in Les Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duc de Berry,⁶¹ "The Nativity" of The Visconti Hours,⁶² and "Shepherds with Their Flocks" of the Holkham Bible Picture Book,⁶³ a reader may better understand the technique, the tradition, and the realism of "Jolly Wat." Wat is at once the conventional shepherd and a unique, naturalistic character, similar to those rustics depicted in the Très Riches Heures, the Holkham Bible, and Visconti Hours; he is treated with the same enthusiasm, and by the same method, as those shepherds of the illuminations. In both paintings

⁶¹Jean Longnon, ed., The "Très Riches Heures" of Jean, Duke of Berry (New York: Braziller, 1969), plate 44.

⁶²Millard Meiss and Edith Kirsch, eds., The Visconti Hours (New York: Braziller, 1972), plate LF 11.

⁶³W. O. Hassal, ed., The Holkham Bible Picture Book (London: Dropmore Press, 1959), fol. 13.



Annunciation to the
Shepherds

from
figure 12
Très Riches Heures

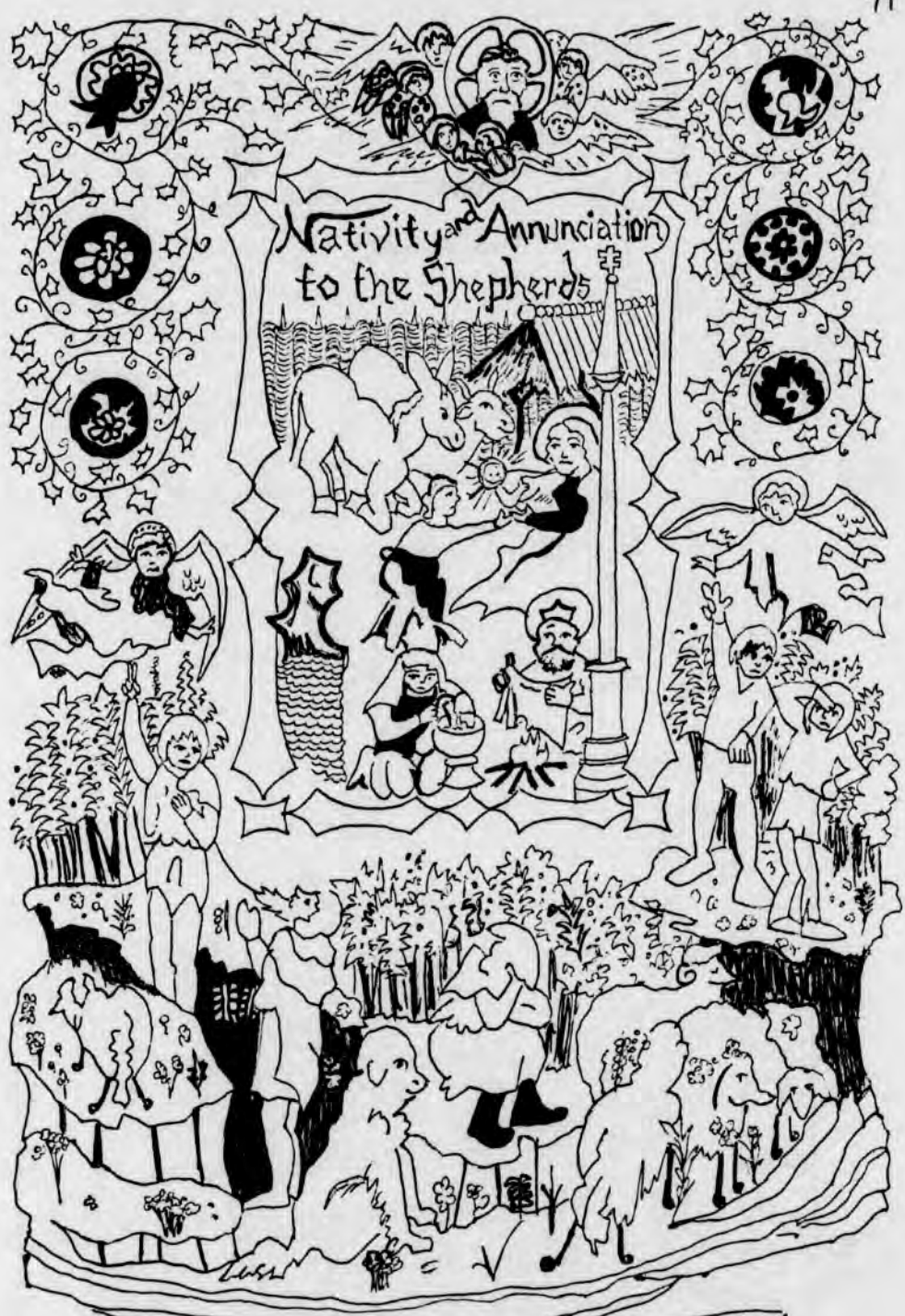


figure 13 from The Visconti Hours



figure 14

from The Holkham Bible

and poem, there is a curious joining of homeliness and awe: the pastoral characters of the manuscripts gaze fixedly at the luminous angels in the bright sky, just as the bucolic Wat (in stanza 3) stands solemnly on the hill with "hys hond vnder hys hode," watching the star "as rede as blod." This pose is apparently a characteristic gesture, for a shepherd of the Holkham Bible, of the Visconti Hours, and of the Duke of Berry's manuscript, as well as in the stained glass illustration, with his hand shading his eyes from the glory of the star's and angel's beams, stands with "hys hond vnder hys hode."

Just as striking in both the art and the poem is the actual scene, or setting: that of a hillside upon which is placed the shepherd, an earthly character, yet one devoted to a majestic and holy Child, an image at once naive and touching. In the paintings, this effect is emphasized by the crude pointing and gesturing of the shepherds to the heavenly hosts, and in their humble pose in the presence of the Magi (see Figure 15, page 74). In the carol, this feeling is developed in the three stanzas where Wat very humanly cries farewell to his dog and sheep, and hurries off, faithfully to see the divine Christ Child.

There is a strong affinity in structure between the manuscript paintings and the carol "Jolly Wat." The technique of both is at the same time scenic and iconographic. Various scenes depicting the shepherds appear in several of



Adoration of the Magi
with Shepherds

figure 15


from

Très Riches Heures

the window pages of the books of hours and the Holkham Bible, just as separate images of Wat are contained within the various stanzas. Thus, there is a remarkable resemblance in the break-up of the total design, or story, into separate, though related, units of composition. For instance, in the Duke of Berry's manuscript, the shepherds appear on their hill (Figure 12, page 70), with the Magi (Figure 15, page 74), and at the Manger (Figure 16, page 76), in three very vivid illustrations. With the carol, Wat is pictured in ten bright miniatures: stanzas built on groups of clear, descriptive visual detail. In the first strophe, the shepherd sits upon the hill clothed in his tabard (or, according to the OED, his loose sleeveless outer garment). With him is the conventional tarbox, pipe, and flageolet. Incidentally, the same costumes and shepherd-instruments are seen upon the illuminated pages of all the manuscripts.

Within the second stanza, Wat is imagined in a different pose: reclining on the hill, asleep, with his dog tied to his girdle. Here the angel appears to him, as the poet uses a type of metonymy. Not actually mentioning the heavenly figure, but simply substituting that proclamation most usually associated with the Christmas angel, the writer explains that Wat had "slept but a lytill broyd/But 'Gloria in excelsis' was to hym sayd." In the manuscripts, the angels appear to the shepherds with the customary singing and music. In the Très Riches Heures Annunciation, two angels




 t the Manger
 with Shepherds

from
 Très Riches Heures
 figure 16

on the right play a trumpet and viol, two on the left make music with a drum and a lute, and five in the center sing from a scroll upon which appear intricately painted staves, notes, and letters. Wat becomes fully awake in the third stanza-image, as he gazes at the marvelous and mystical red star. And, as in the illuminations, this wondrous, ethereal occurrence is accompanied by the reality of the sheep wandering near the shepherd: "Rownd about hym his shepe they yode." The remaining images in the poem are all set in verses, and all correspond in some way to the manuscript depictions. In the fourth strophe, Wat is seen telling his sheep goodbye; in the fifth, he is shown advising his dog and helper: "Dog, kepe well my shep fro the corn,/And warn well, warroke, when I blow my horn." The sixth verse projects an image of Wat setting out to see the strange sight of which "the an-gell syngith on hight,/And the star that shynyth so bryght." In the seventh, the shepherd arrives at the simple stable where Jesus is found "Betwen an ox and an asse," both animals of which are found in the Nativity illuminations of the manuscripts. The eighth stanza portrays Wat bestowing his gifts; the ninth illustrates his farewell to the Holy Family; and the last reflects him in his rejoicing at having "bene a Crystes beryng." Not only are all these images and their form very similar to the miniature paintings, but also the frames are alike. Where the illuminations are all surrounded by framing borders of burnished gold or hair-spray flowers,

the carol is divided by the repetition of the joyous burden after each verse. In both, this deliberately gives an intensity of focus to the central image of the little scene. Thus, the poles of these Shepherds' Carols and the art are the same, and they have the same center: the vivid interpretation and illustration of the religious history of the world. Both the carols and the arts have qualities of symbolism mixed with their characteristic realism, both have a quickness of movement and brightness of color, both portray the shepherds in their homeliness and awe, with a feeling of earthly rusticality and spiritual devotion. Together they relay an important aspect of medieval life.

CHAPTER VI

THE PERFORMING ARTS: LINKS TO THE CAROLS

Though the visual arts have much in common with the Shepherds' lyrics, the performing arts--theatre and music--seem to be much more closely related to the poems, with music, an ingredient of both dramas and carols, sealing the strongest bond between the two other forms of artistic expression. Carols are now read simply as lyric poetry; but, it must be remembered that when they were written, they, too, were composed for performance. Drama was a perfect outlet for such jolly songs as those of Wat and the other Christmas shepherds. The cycle plays were performed with a wondrous gusto. Much elaboration was involved in the processions, tableaux, dances, choral songs, solos, buffoonery, and acting which formed the entertainment of the drama, an entertainment so popular, scholars now believe, that the wholly secular Renaissance theatre found it difficult to oust the Corpus Christi plays.

The mystery plays were filled with music,⁶⁴ and, just as Wat pipes upon his instrument and sings, the shepherds of the cycles seem to have been traditionally depended upon

⁶⁴Nan Cooke Carpenter in "Music in the Chester Plays," Papers on English Language and Literature, 1 (1965), 196, reports that in the Chester cycle, out of its 25 scenes, 16 specifically call for music, with more than 30 cues in all, both vocal and instrumental.

for a song. The "Tyrle, Tyrlo" carol is found within the text of the Coventry cycle. And in the Wakefield "Second Shepherds' Play," the first pastor proclaims that he can sing like the angel, "ffor to syng vs emong right as he knakt it/I can."⁶⁵ The first shepherd in the York play actually does sing, after announcing:

I can singe itt alls wele as hee
 And on a-saie itt sall be sone
 proued or we passe,
 Yf ye well helpe; halde on! late see!
 for thus it was.

Et tunc cantant.⁶⁶

In the Chester cycle, the shepherd, Garcius exclaims:

Singe we now--lett see--
 some song will I assaye;
 all men now singes after mee,
 for musicke of mee learne ye may.

Tunc cantabunt, et postea dicat terti(us)
pastor: (here singe twoly, loly, loly, lo.)⁶⁷

Thus, the Shepherds' Plays were regularly accompanied by music and singing. R. W. Ingram feels that the herdsmen's story probably came closer to the onlookers than practically any of the other scenes, and the music helped mark the strong contrast between "heavenly wonder and contemporary society." Believing that the Chester Banns "go some way toward explaining the consistent decoration of this scene in the cycle

⁶⁵Hemingway, p. 211.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 149.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 56.

with music and comedy," he records them thus:

The Appearing Angell and starr upon Christes beirth
to shepheardes poore, of base and lowe degree,
you painters and glasiors, decke out with all meirth,
and see that "Gloria in excelsis" be songe merelye.
fewe wordes in that pageante makes meirth truely,
for all that the Authour had to stande uppon,
was "glorye to god one heigh" and "peace one
Earth to man."⁶⁸

In other words, all the dramatist had for raw material was the majestic song of the angels, as recorded in Luke's gospel. For the rustic, boisterous character of the shepherds, for the mirth and merriment needed for the joyous event, and for the contrast between the realism of the herdsmen and the spirituality of the angelic hosts, the playwright and the performers depended upon music. Thus, tunes were used to set the mood of the Shepherds' Plays. While an angelic choir sang the religious "Gloria in excelsis," the shepherds mimicked it with secular tunes, probably of the individual actor's own choosing since the names, or even the general content, of the songs are rarely specified in the scripts, an exception being the fore-mentioned Chester play.

The brief stage directions within the plays were naturally open to simple or elaborate renditions according to the abilities and desires of the musicians and actors. Nan Cooke Carpenter believes that the music was employed to symbolize God's glory and power, and even His presence or the

⁶⁸R. W. Ingram, "The Use of Music in English Miracle Plays," Anglia, 75 (1957), 56-57.

appearance of heavenly messengers. Thus, especially instrumentation represented the intervention of the Divine in human affairs. Music was very fitting in this role, for it was believed, in line with the Greek philosophy perpetuated in medieval music treatises, to have, as Carpenter says, a "powerful effect upon man's emotions, a strong healing effect that causes a definite response in the listener."⁶⁹ In every cycle, the Shepherds' Play includes the heavenly recital by the angelic hosts, accompanied by the rustics' earthly attempts to mimic the "Gloria." Also in each play is an enthusiastic musical discussion of the angels' song by the shepherds. According to music historians, these critical remarks reveal, especially in the Wakefield Secunda Pastorum, that the shepherds believe in the angels' message because the quality of the music moves them to wonder and admiration through its rhythmic complexity. Carpenter explains that "the shepherds are overwhelmed by the angel's music because it represents a type of artistic, learned music more *recherché* than the simple polyphony in discant style which probably constituted their own performances."⁷⁰

"Jolly Wat" and the other Shepherds' Carols are closely connected through music to the mystery plays. Carols were

⁶⁹Carpenter, "Music in the Chester Plays," pp. 214-215.

⁷⁰Nan Cooke Carpenter, "Music in the Secunda Pastorum," Speculum, 26 (October, 1951), 698.

always a part of these cycles, first sung, as William Phillips notes, merely as Intermezzi between scenes in the dramas. Interlude carols became so popular with the audience, however, that rivalry grew between the actors and singers until the music was finally incorporated into the plays themselves. A musician with a portable organ led a procession of "shepherds" across the stage, followed by the singers. Often the audience grew so enthusiastic that the actors marched into the street, and, joined by the onlookers, paraded up and down the road singing carols.⁷¹ "Jolly Wat" itself was probably either an interlude carol or was directly evolved from a non-extant Shepherds' Play. Richard Greene posits an origin for the poem, which links it strongly with drama. "The occurrence of the Northern word 'warroke,'" he says, which refers to Wat's young helper, "and the payment of twopence to actors playing 'Joly Wat and Malkyn' at York in 1447, suggest that the original home of the carol may have been Yorkshire."⁷² Wat's song, thereby, is almost certainly linked to the Corpus Christi drama, and was probably one of the very tunes that the audiences clamored to hear.

⁷¹William J. Phillips, Carols: Their Origin, Music, and Connection with the Mystery-Plays (London: Geo. Routledge and Sons, Ltd., n. d.), pp. 24-25. R. W. Ingram questions Phillips' sources, yet he himself agrees that carols were somehow worked into the cycles between the scenes, as well as during them.

⁷²Greene, Selections, p. 196.

Music performs a structural duty within the plays, much like the frames of the manuscript illuminations and the burden divisions of the carols. In the Second Shepherd's Play, the rustics sing a three-part tune which emphasizes the cut between the first section of the drama, in which the shepherds are introduced, and the farce involving Mak. This comical interlude is then later separated from the story of the Nativity by the "Gloria in excelsis" of the angelic host. The end of the play, too, is marked by the singing of the shepherds as they set forth from the manger after the adoration.⁷³ Such musical divisions, like the golden manuscript frames and joyous carol burdens, break up the total design of the story into separate, though integrated, units of composition, deliberately narrowing the focus to the main action of the little scene.

The Corpus Christi cycles were not simply insignificant plays produced for entertainment and teaching. With their music and dancing, their scenery and pageantry, they demanded participation and support from Church, village, government, and townspeople. The deepest convictions of the medieval heart, mind, and imagination were contained within the scripts. Much like the Greek theatre, medieval mysteries were lyrical dramas springing from deep religious sources, with actors devoted to revealing the magnificent

⁷³Carpenter, in "Music in the Secunda Pastorum," pp. 696-697, goes into more detail on this same matter.

message of the plays, and with an entire community witnessing and upholding the traditional performances. The aim of the medieval plays was to celebrate, to enlighten, to delight, and to involve everyone--aristocrat and peasant, priest and layman--in its serious content.

George Taylor, in 1907, rightly noted a connection between the Corpus Christi drama and Middle English lyrics. In the introduction to his essay in Modern Philology, Taylor states that before his study, little work had been done linking the medieval forms of drama and poetry; and little scholarship since 1907 has furthered Taylor's conclusions. Only a few notes here and there even indicate that scholars and critics are aware of the close links between these two types of medieval literature. Most of Taylor's article argues that lyrics influenced great parts of the drama. He does admit, however, that in at least one instance--the Shepherds' songs--the opposite is true. The body of Middle English lyrics holds a tremendous amount of Christmas songs, leading one to believe that they exerted great influence upon the Nativity plays. Indeed, the dramas are filled with fragments of lyrics and instances which demand singing. The "Tyrle, Tyrlo" carol is appended to the Coventry play and "Jolly Wat" unmistakably resembles many portions of the Shepherds' Plays. On the other hand, the Shepherds' Carols are extremely dramatic in nature, relating their story as if they were miniature mysteries. "In this case. . .,"

Taylor remarks, "it is the lyric which has been influenced by the miracle plays, rather than the reverse."⁷⁴

It is quite intriguing to discover the different parallels in theme and treatment which seem to suggest that the carols and plays are but two branches of that single tendency toward artistic explanation of religious history. Not only were the carols sung on stage, but also, this song genre, traditionally being dramatic, contains vivid and realistic details strongly suggestive of cyclic scenes. Exactly like the Corpus Christi plays, the carols appealed to an assembly which included, in one mass together, clergy, burgesses, noblemen, and peasants. Thus, the carols, like the plays, owe their variety, power, and delight to their obligation of appealing to a widely varied audience.

Two shepherd motifs--the important signal from the star, and the tender bestowing of homely gifts--are found both in drama and carol traditions. For a while, it was generally believed that in some unknown way these two symbols crept into the plays, and from there to the carols, as simple imitations of the Magi story. Because the Wise Men were led by a star, scholars believed that medieval writers borrowed the idea for the shepherds, simply to attain such imagistic lines as "A sterre, they said, they dide espie/

⁷⁴George C. Taylor, "The Relation of the English Corpus Christi Play to the Middle English Religious Lyric," Modern Philology, 5 (July, 1907), 1; 7.

Kastyng the bemes owt of the est" (Greene #77), or "Of thre joli sheppardes I saw a sight,/And all abowte there fold a star shone bright" (Tyrle, Tyrlo" B version), or Jolly Wat "put hys hond vnder hys hode;/He saw a star as rede as blod." Millicent Carey discards the theory that such symbols were merely pulled, through some unknown pathway, from the Magi story. She shows them, rather, to be closely connected to the shepherds throughout the Middle Ages. Especially through the evolution of the Officium Stellae at Epiphany, which paralleled the Pastores, is there an early dramatic representation involving the star and the gifts. Of course, it is at first only the Wise Men who appear in the plays; but, shortly there develops a scene in all the dramas in which the Magi meet the shepherds coming from the manger. In one rather long version, the kings walk some way talking to the shepherds, mentioning the star twice just as the rustics leave the scene, and giving the gifts to the Holy Child just after their conversation with the herdsmen.⁷⁵ With both sets of characters so tightly involved together in a story, the star and gifts became thus associated with one group as closely as with the other. The shepherds from thence were linked with the two symbols, just as vividly as the Magi were.

⁷⁵Millicent Carey, The Wakefield Group in the Towneley Cycle (Göttingen: Dandehoed and Ruprecht, 1930), pp. 116-117.

Although the other Shepherds' Carols neglect the shepherds' gifts to the Christ Child, "Jolly Wat" employs the idea with comic sweetness:

"Jhesu, I offer to the here my pype,
My skyrte, my tarbox, and my scrype,
Home to my fellowes now will I skype,
And also loke unto my shepe."

Like the gifts offered by the shepherds in the plays,⁷⁶ Wat's offerings belong to the iconographical system employed to instruct the faithful. They are a part of that corpus of symbolism evolved from the very beginnings of Christianity--that tendency to link a visible sign with the invisible truth. As Rosemary Woolf says, whereas the Magi offer gifts which, in this iconographic system, "reflect their riches and Christ's divinity, the shepherds offer presents that reflect their poverty and Christ's humanity."⁷⁷ Thus the star and gift symbols serve as an almost positive proof that the Shepherds' Plays dramatically influenced the carols, their images and themes.

⁷⁶Gifts presented by the shepherds in the cyclic and noncyclic plays include a brooch with a tin bell, a horn-spoon, two cobnuts on a ribbon, a boxwood rattle, a carved wooden calendar, a bottle with a stopper, a hood, a bell, a spruce coffer, a ball, a gourd-flask, a bob of cherries, a bird, a nut hook, a shepherd's pipe, a lamb, and a crook. For an interesting discussion of the symbolic meanings behind the shepherds' presents, see: Eugene B. Cantelupe and Richard Griffith, "The Gifts of the Shepherds in the Wakefield 'Secunda Pastorum': An Iconographical Interpretation," Medieval Studies, 28 (1966), 328-335.

⁷⁷Woolf, English Mystery Plays, pp. 183-184.

Another aspect of both the plays and the carols, which developed through symbolism and early drama, merged into the huge iconographic heritage, and then flowed back into the later literature, is the role of the Holy Parents. Martial Rose gives an excellent theory explaining the laconic parts which Mary and Joseph play in the later mysteries and carols, parts which often result in nothing more than a simple hint that the pair are even present at the manger:

"Now, farewell, myne own herdesman Wat."
 "Ye, for God, lady, even so I hat.
 Lull well Jhesu in thy lape,
 And farewell, Joseph, wyth thy rownd cape."

This carol of Jolly Wat contains only this rather brief mention of the Virgin and her husband; and yet, in it Mary does verbally acknowledge the shepherd, and Joseph himself is addressed. In the "Tyrle, Tyrlo" carol, the Virgin is simply recognized as Christ's "mother that is so myld/The wich was never defyled," and Joseph is completely ignored. And the two holy figures fare no better in the mystery plays of the Shepherds. Rose traces this tendency far back into the early liturgical dramas, in which Mary and Joseph were traditionally represented by artificial figures, too sacred for actual dramatic impersonation. This left the main action of the story to be conducted by the Midwives and Shepherds. Thus, in the Corpus Christi plays and in the Shepherds' Carols, the Holy Mother talks only briefly, if at all, to the herdsmen, and Joseph rarely, if ever, even speaks in the plays, and, Rose thinks, possibly should not appear at all. Some medieval

paintings omit him from the scene entirely, or depict him as asleep by Mary's side.⁷⁸ Joseph is significant sometimes, however, in linking the shepherds and commoners to the Virgin and Child, as Wat's familiar address to him confirms. Thus, in the sculpted panels at Pisá (see Figures 6 and 7, pages 56 and 57), Joseph appears, like the shepherds, as a small border figure. He is outside the actual scope of the panels' focus and emphasis upon Mary, but is still of some importance. There is, hereby, a tradition which grew from practical aspects of early drama and then flowed into the mainstream of themes later to be picked up by the carols and even the visual arts. Here, then, is one of the few cases in which the liturgical drama of the Church did actually influence the secular cycle plays; but it seems to have become a custom for all the arts and not just a direct borrowing from the religious drama, as source for the Corpus Christi plays.

Up to this point, most of the discussed connections between the carols and the performing arts have been related to the actual use of carols and music in the drama, or to shared traditions between the two arts. Perhaps the most exciting similarities between the carols and the drama, however, occur in several analogical instances of their duality--in their various levels of realistic and spiritual

⁷⁸Martial Rose, ed., The Wakefield Mystery Plays (London: Evans Brothers, Limited, 1961), p. 253.

meaning.⁷⁹ Not only is mood affected by this dual nature, but also is the outlook on time and place influenced. The overall atmosphere and intent of the songs, as well as the plays, were such that game and seriousness were mixed. Both carols and dramas were written to entertain, yet were pervaded with an air of devout seriousness, with the desire to relate something of real importance and meaning to the world. Within the stories of the shepherds appear very carefully drawn systems of analogies, written with a blending of bucolic and humorous realism, set off by imaginative and intellectual sophistication. Such blending gives an impressive range of human emotion, uniting secular and sacred elements, pagan and Christian traditions, popular and religious beliefs. The Shepherds' Plays, and thus the related carols, are examples, as Raymond Williams remarks, of the rather newly introduced elements of realism in English literature. Scenes are drawn from the everyday life of the medieval world, and are "combined with the celebration of known religious scenes."⁸⁰ The Biblical shepherds are humanized by

⁷⁹For a discussion of the Second Shepherd's Play's levels of meaning, see: Francis J. Thompson, "Unity in the Second Shepherd's Tale," Modern Language Notes, 64 (May, 1949), 302-306. Thompson discusses how medieval writing and thought involved the theory "that a given text might have several senses at one and the same time." These meanings are quoted from the General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible as: "literal, allegorik, moral, and anagogik."

⁸⁰Raymond Williams, Drama in Performance (Chester Springs: Dufour, 1954), p. 45.

the playwright through the lively adaptation of colloquial dialogue and folk tales, thereby enlivening the entire Nativity story by the bold rehandling of scriptural and liturgical traditions.

As recorded in Luke, the Nativity story, though silent and mystical, does suggest that realism which so engaged the imagination of the Late Middle Ages. A holy babe, born in a stable, wrapped in simple cloth and laid in a manger, visited by rural shepherds from the nearby fields, all form the elemental core of a plain and rustic retelling of the tale. Thus, the carols and the plays depict the Christ Child lying between ox and ass, "in a sympyll place," often with descriptions of the cold weather and poor surroundings. The shepherds appear as humble, bucolic souls, awed by the majesty of the glorious messengers and Holy Child. Roger Loomis and Henry Wells remark that "these rough-spoken, rough-handed English peasants, with their shrewd comments on wages and graft, give a solid reality to the story of the Holy Night. They take nothing from its holiness as they jostle their way into the stable and kneel with humble gifts, with the reverence of poor and simple-hearted folk, before the miracle of the Divine Childhood."⁸¹ The shepherds' bucolic naturalness provides an effective foil for the glorious Birth of

⁸¹Roger Sherman Loomis and Henry W. Wells, Representative Medieval and Tudor Plays (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), p. 22.

the Holy Infant; the farcical, comical element which runs through both carol and plays serves as a counterpoint to the high and solemn. As Margery M. Morgan has written, "If their laughter at the farce did not prepare the onlookers to be the more deeply affected by the sacred climax, the dramatist had failed in his task despite all his ingenuity."⁸²

From this blending of contemporary realism with scriptural history comes a duality of time and place within the carols and plays. Religious events--the Nativity and the Annunciation to the shepherds--emerge from eternity and become involved with scenes of the familiar, the world of here and now. Past is presented in the image of Present. Drama and song hold a mirror to the times as they act out the structure of eternity. V. A. Kolve explains, "By means of a pervasive anachronism and anglicization it [the drama, or the body of carols] furnished a critical image of moral and social life as lived in the later Middle Ages."⁸³ From their night-watch in medieval England, the shepherds travel to the Bethlehem of history--a journey from human time into the eternal world. The quick change from contemporary problems to divine revelation constitutes a mystical experience relayed through dramatic action--one which allows the audience also to experience the travel through time.

⁸²Margery M. Morgan, "'High Fraud': Paradox and Double-Plot in the English Shepherds' Plays," Speculum, 39 (1964), 676.

⁸³Kolve, p. 104.

Just as the plays and carols communicate a duality of time, they move in a duality of place. Time is revealed as medieval, yet eternal; geography is found to be in England, yet in Bethlehem. In the shepherds' dramas and songs, the rustics are always tending their flocks in English fields; Jolly Wat's hill is typical, with a dog to keep the sheep from the corn, with a tabard, tarbox, pipe, and hat, and with sheep called "Mall" and "Will." The First Shepherd in the Chester cycle boasts:

From Comelie⁸⁴ Conway unto Clyde
under Tildes them to hyde.
a better Shepherd on no side
no earthlie man may haue.⁸⁴

So, the Angel descends onto the English countryside to deliver his message. Later, the shepherds travel from this contemporary scene to the historic stable in Bethlehem. The actors in the Corpus Christi plays probably crossed a plateau, simulating a lengthy journey. Jolly Wat's travels supposedly took a half a day each way: "Now must I go ther Cryst was born;/Farewell, I cum agayn tomorn"; and the journey had to be accomplished with great speed: "Whan Wat to Bedlem cum was,/He swet; he had gon faster than a pace." By such duality of time and place, the audience's sympathetic participation is powerfully and totally engaged. The shepherds' movement through history and across the world carries the audience by an evolution of feeling. Margery Morgan astutely

⁸⁴Kolve, p. 111.

observes that as the rustics on stage, or within the carols, "discovered the truth that Christ was newly born for them," so the audience found a fresh perspective on the Nativity. The play and carol characters revealed natural experiences which were as close to the people as the actors on stage or the tunes on their own lips. What Morgan says about the plays is also relevant to the carols:

The ambiguity of the theatrical performance-- here and not here, now and out of time--was exploited to the full. And it was thus brought home to those looking on at the annually enacted play that the Biblical event was, in no mere metaphor, eternally recurrent and inherent in the drama of their own lives. By enlarging the religious drama to include its own opposite . . . the playwrights were able to satisfy the animal spirits and natural irreverence of their audience through farcical action, before these things could interfere with the mood of pure devotion wanted for the final scene. . . . Natural laughter was a stage in the progress toward purified joy, and animal crudity was to be converted into spiritual awareness. . . . By bringing together the secular and the sacred, pointing out the analogies within the differences, a unity was established that depended on the idea and was not comprehensible apart from it.⁸⁵

Not only were the carols linked to the medieval cycles through their actual musical accompaniment of the drama, but also the songs shared analogical thematic treatment with the plays. In both carols and dramas is found the common artistic blending of secular and sacred elements, out of which grows the stylistically similar motif of temporal and spatial duality. Music in the plays divides the drama into

⁸⁵Morgan, p. 688.

intense scenes resembling the bright burden-images of the carols and the clear manuscript illuminations. Too, through a common artistic background, probably spurred by the close interaction of the various craftsmen of the arts, the Shepherds' Songs and Plays shared such details as musical instruments related to the Shepherd tradition, the signal from the star, the homely gifts, and the role of the Holy Parents. Such relationships are vital in gaining a true perspective on the Shepherds' Carols, for they move the lyrics from a place of simplicity and isolation to the mainstream of medieval artistic action.

CHAPTER VII

THE EPILOGUE: A BRIEF CRITICAL REVIEW

The Middle Ages saw a parallelism and blending of the visual and performing arts and literature which has rarely, if ever, been so pervasive or so strong. Successive ages have experienced the natural interaction of the arts, but perhaps never as consciously as the medieval folk. Most of the interrelationships grew out of their common temporal and local nourishing soil--out of their common social and cultural root: the rich medieval courts and the Catholic Church. This is not to say, however, that the arts of the medieval age formed a close kinship only through their issuance from the same womb or because of their shared aim of enlightening the masses concerning the religious history of both Testaments and the saints' lives. It is essential here, then, to crystallize their interrelations by reviewing the comparisons made between the arts, and by also hinting at their necessary differences.

The English Shepherds' Carols, written to be performed, belonged to the arts of unisensory presentation⁸⁶ as they addressed only the auditory sense. But, like the visual

⁸⁶The rest of this epilogue is based on the outlines given for studying the links between the arts in: Thomas Munro, The Arts and Their Interrelations (Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve Univ., 1967), pp. 530-536.

arts, which appealed mainly to the perception of the eyes, the carols attempted to achieve the bisensory, or even multisensory, touch of the drama cycles with their music, staging, and dialogue. Thus, as the illumination personae, carved figures, and stained-glass characters attempted to act out involved, almost audible dramas, the carols painted bright, almost visually detectable scenes of English pastures and rustic shepherds.

In their modes of transmission, the arts concurred in the emphasis they placed on vivid presentation, integrating an attempt at mimetic realism with a strong suggestion of symbolism and religious abstraction. Though this combination is apparently contradictory--and in later arts is more often strictly divided into imitation and abstraction--it was this blending of worldly realism and spiritual symbolism which gave medieval arts their simple charm, their lovely roundness, and their openness of expression. It was a very appropriate admixture for most medieval subjects; for, as in the case of the Shepherds' Carols, the majestic ethereality of the Nativity and of the descent of the heavenly hosts is underlined and emphasized only by the foil of the bucolic and mundane quality of the shepherds.

All arts of the Middle Ages, as those of most periods of history, attempted a break from their confining factors of spatial or temporal presentation to at least a suggestion of a spatio-temporal combination. The theatre cycles, of

course, already by their nature, involved three-dimensional action of space and in time, and it was toward dramatic spatio-temporal presentations that the carols and visual arts moved. The Shepherds' Songs and the illuminations, frescoes, and stained-glass of the era suggested both three-dimensional spatial development and sequences of progressions in time. And, not only was this the common attempt of painting to give an illusion of three-dimensional space and movement, or of literature to portray a living scene and evoke a feeling of passing time; it was also a conscious effort to depict a duality of time and space--of past religious events emerging from eternity to be enacted in the medieval present and of scriptural Southern European and Mid-Eastern actions appearing on English country-sides. Past became present, eternity became medieval, Chester and Wakefield became Bethlehem.

In the modes of composition--representation, utility, thematic design, and exposition--the arts of the Middle Ages were almost equal in their involvement with all four. Paintings, sculpture, songs, and drama portrayed religious scenes which were highly representative of life, revealing the events of Christ's earthly existence and of Biblical characters in a realistic, though somewhat stylized and symbolic, manner. Also, the arts were intrinsically involved with a demand for utility and service: they were required to illustrate Christian religious history for the enlightenment

of the medieval audience. This would enable all people to understand and to accept the Sacraments and thus be considered for entrance through the Gates of Heaven. Such emphasis on the utilitarian aspect of the arts did not by any means limit their thematic design. The patterns of line, color, and form in the visual arts; of words, rhythm, and figures in literature; of acting, scenery, and movement in drama were not sacrificed, but were rather enhanced by the desire to present the religious history of Christianity. For acceptance by the masses, the arts had to be pleasing--visually, emotionally, auditorily, even intellectually. And so, the themes, motifs, and designs of the various forms of expression were developed to a high degree, involving both repetition and variation, contrast and integration in their composition. Lastly, the medieval arts displayed a high degree of involvement with exposition, arranging details so as to establish general religious relationships--abstract meanings, pervasive qualities, and underlying principles. Theological, metaphysical, and moral truths were conveyed with explicit meaning through the visual, musical, dramatic, and literary images of the day. Christian belief was expressed through a realism girded by symbolism.

Of course, though medieval artists, poets, and minstrels were interested in media and artistic processes, society, on the whole, was most concerned with the products: the paintings, carols, tunes, and dramas which contained the essence

of the religion of their Church. Such products were composed of a diversity of detail and tended toward a combination of what are now termed classical and romantic styles: orderly, regular balance blended with imaginative, organic spontaneity. But the high place which the arts held in the later medieval world came not so much through the variance of the media or the skill with which materials were used, or even through the complicated processes which the craftsmen had to develop and perfect to make their arts find full fruition. It was the end result, the actual being, the final product of the artists' labors and aptitudes which was important to medieval folk--peasant, nobleman, and bishop alike.

Recognition of all the links, blendings, and interrelations of the medieval arts is vital to the study of the English Shepherds' Carols. Not only does it throw light upon the source, aim, and traditions of the Nativity Songs, but it also clarifies the realistic images, symbolism, structural motifs, and religious themes of them. Only through understanding such close links between the carols and the visual and performing arts can appreciation of the little Christmas songs reach maturity. To see the numerous techniques, traditions, and goals which connected the arts is to intensify the interest of the carols; and, such estimation allows the songs to be studied, as they were written, in the mainstream of that medieval artistic energy which was channeled into revealing the spiritual, religious history of the world to the masses through realistic, worldly portrayals.

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APPENDIX

Carol #75 from Greene, Early English Carols, p. 47.
 Cambridge University Library. MS. Ee. I. 12. By James Ryman.
 f. 33 r. c. 1492

Angelus inquit pastoribus,
 'Nunc natus est Altissimus.'

(1)

Vpon a nyght an aungell bright
 Pastoribus apparuit,
 And anone right thurgh Goddes myght
 Lux magna illis claruit.
 For loue of vs (Scripture seith thus)
 Nunc natus est Altissimus.

(2)

And of that light that was so bright
 Hii valde timuerunt;
 A signe of blis to vs it is,
 Hec lux quam hii viderunt.
 For loue of vs (Scripture seith thus)
 Nunc natus est Altissimus.

(3)

'Drede ye nothing; grete joy I bringe,
 Quod erit omni populo;
 For why to you Criste is borne nowe, f. 33 v.
 Testante euangelio.'
 For loue of vs (Scripture seith thus)
 Nunc natus est Altissimus.

(4)

'With good Joseph and Mary myelde
 Positum in presepio
 Ye shall fynde that hevenly childe,
 Qui celi preest solio.'
 For loue of vs (Scripture seith thus)
 Nunc natus est Altissimus.

(5)

The aungell songe thoo with many moo,
 'Gloria in altissimis!
 In erthe be peas to man also,
 Et gaudium sit angelis.'
 For loue of vs (Scripture seith thus)
 Nunc natus est Altissimus.

(6)

The shepherdes ran to Bedleme than
 Et inuenerunt puerum,

The whiche is perfecte God and man
 Atque Saluator omnium.
 For loue of vs (Scripture seith thus)
 Nunc natus est Altissimus.

(7)

When in suche wise founde hym they had,
 Vt dictum est per angelum, f. 34 r.
 Ayene they came, beyng full glad,
 Magnificantes Dominum.
 For loue of vs (Scripture seith thus)
 Nunc natus est Altissimus.

(8)

Nowe lete vs singe with angelis,
 'Gloria in altissimis,'
 That we may come vnto that blis
 Vbi partus est virginis.
 For loue of vs (Scripture seith thus)
 Nunc natus est Altissimus.

Carol #76 from Greene, Early English Carols, pp. 47-48.
 Cambridge University Library. MS. Ee. I. 12. By James Ryman.
 f. 34 r. c. 1492

Gloria in altissimis,
 For nowe is borne the King of Blis.

(1)

Whenne Criste was borne, an aungell bright
 To shepeherdes keping shepe that nyght
 Came and seyde with heuenly light,
 'Now Crist is borne, [the King of Blis.']

(2)

They dred gretely of that same light
 That shone so bright that tyme of nyght
 Thurgh the vertu, the grace, and myght
 Of Goddes Son, [the King of Blis.]

(3)

The aungell seyde, 'Drede ye nothing;
 Beholde, to you grete joye I bringe, f. 34 v.
 And vnto alle that be lyving,
 For now is born the King of Blis.

(4)

'Go to Bedleme, and there ye shall
 With Marie myelde in an oxe stall
 Fynde an infante that men shall call
 The Son of God and King [of Blis.]

(5)

They went furth to Bethelē that stoude,
 And, as he tolde, a childe they founde
 In an oxe stalle in ragges wounde,
 The Son [of God and King of Blis.]

(6)

The sheperdes tho went home ageyn,
 Magnifying God, in certayne,
 In alle that they had hard and seyne
 Of Goddes Sonne, [the King of Blis.]

(7)

On New Yeres Day (Scripture seith thus)
 Circumcided for loue of vs,
 The name tho was called Jhesus
 Of Goddes Sonne, [the King of Blis.]

(8)

On Twelfth Daye came kinges three
 With golde, encense, and myrre so free,
 Vnto Bedlem to seke and see
 The Sonne of God and King of Blis.

Carol #77 from Greene, Early English Carols, p. 48.
 Balliol College, Oxford. MS. 354.

f. 231 v.

XVI cent.

Man, meve thy mynd, and joy this fest:
 Verytas de terra orta est.

(1)

As I cam by the way,
 I sawe a sight semly to see:
 Thre sheperdes rangyng in aray,
 Vpon the felde kepyng ther fee.
 A sterre, they said, they did espie
 Kastyng the bemes owt of the est,
 And angelles makyng melodye:
 'Veritas de terra orta est.'

(2)

Vpon that sight they were agast,
 Sayinge thes wordes as I say the:
 'To Bedlem shortly lett vs hast,
And ther we shall the trewth see.'
 The angell said vnto them all iii
 To ther comfort or euer he seste,
 'Consolamini, and mery be;
 Veritas de terra orta est.

(3)

'From hevyn owt of the highest see
 Rightwisnes hath taken the way,

With mercy medled plentuowsly,
 And so conseyved in a may.
 Miranda res this is, in fay,
 So seith the prophet in his gest;
 Now is he born, Scripture doth say:
 Veritas de terra orta est.'

(4)

Than passed the sheperdes from the place
 And folowed by the sterres beme
 That was so bright affore ther face;
 Hit brought them streight vnto Bethlem.
 So bright it shon over all the realme
 Tyll they cam ther they wold not rest,
 To Jury and Jerusalem;
 Veritas de terra orta est.

Carol #78 from Greene, Early English Carols, p. 49.
 Balliol College, Oxford. MS. 354.
 f. 224 r. XVI cent.

Can I not syng but hoy,
 Whan the joly sheperd made so mych joy.

(1)

The sheperd vpon a hill he satt;
 He had on hym his tabard and his hat,
 Hys tarbox, hys pype, and his flagat;
 Hys name was called Joly, Joly Wat,
 For he was a gud herdes boy.
 Vith hoy!
 For in hys pype he made so mych joy.

(2)

The sheperd vpon a hill was layd;
 Hys doge to hys gyrdyll was tayd;
 He had not slept but a lytill broyd
 But 'Gloria in excelcis' was to hym sayd.
 Vith hoy!
 For in his pipe he mad so myche joy.

(3)

The sheperd on a hill he stode;
 Rownd about hym his shepe they yode;
 He put hys hond vnder hys hode;
 He sawe a star as rede as blod.
 Vith hoy!
 For in his pipe he mad so myche joy.

(4)

Now farwell Mall, and also Will;
 For my love go ye all styll

Vnto I cum agayn you till,
 And euermore, Will, ryng well they bell.
 Vith hoy!
 For in his pipe he mad so mych joy.

(5)

Now must I go ther Cryst was borne;
 Farewell, I cum agayn tomorn;
 Dog, kepe well my shep fro the corn,
 And warn well, warroke, when I blow my horn.
 Vith hoy!
 For in hys pype he made so mych joy.

(6)

The sheperd sayd anon ryght,
 'I will go se yon farly syght,
 Wheras the angell syngith on hight,
 And the star that shynyth so bryght.'
 Vith hoy!
 For in [his] pipe he made so mych joy.

(7)

Whan Wat to Bedlem cum was,
 He swet; he had gon faster than a pace.
 He fownd Jhesu in a sympyll place
 Betwen an ox and an asse.
 Vith hoy!
 For in his pipe he mad so mych joy.

(8)

'Jhesu, I offer to the here my pype,
 My skyrte, my tarbox, and my scrype;
 Home to my felowes now will I skype,
 And also loke vnto my shepe.'
 Vith hoy!
 For in his pipe he mad so mych joy.

(9)

'Now, farewell, myne own herdesman Wat.'
 'Ye, for God, lady, even so I hat.
 Lull well Jhesu in the lape,
 And farewell, Joseph, wyth thy rownd cape.'
 Vith hoy!
 For in hys pipe he mad so myche joy.

f. 224 v.

(10)

'Now may I well both hope and syng,
 For I haue bene a Crystes beryng.
 Home to my felowes now wyll I flyng.
 Cryst of hevyn to his blis vs bryng!'
 Vith hoy!
 For in his pipe he mad so myche joy.

Carol #79 from Greene, Early English Carols, p. 50.
 Bodleian Library. MS. Eng. poet. e. I.
 f. 60 r.

XV cent.

Aa Version

Tyrle, tyrlo,
 So merylye the shepperdes began to blowe.

(1)

About the fyld thei pyped full right,
 Even about the middes off the nyght;
 Adown frome heven thei saw cum a lyght.
 Tyrle, tirlo.

(2)

Off angels ther came a company
 With mery songes and melody;
 The shepperdes annonne gane them aspy.
 Tyrle, tyrlo.

(3)

'Gloria in excelsis,' the angels song,
 And said who peace was present among
 To euery man that to the faith wold long.
 Tyrle, tyrlo.

(4)

The shepperdes heyed them to Bethleme
 To se that blyssid sons beme,
 And ther they found that glorious streme.
 Tyrle, tyrlo.

(5)

Now preye we to that mek chyld,
 And to his mother that is so myld.
 The wich was neuer defylyd.
 Tyrle, tyrlo.

(6)

That we may cum vnto his blysse
 Where joy shall neuer mysse;
 Than may we syng in paradice,
 'Tyrle, tirlo.'

(7)

I pray yow all that be here
 Fore to syng and mak good chere
 In the worschip off God thys yere.
 Tyrle, tirlo.

B Version

MS. destroyed. Text from Craig. 1534
(Burden lacking)

Song I

As I out rode this enderes night,
Of thre joli sheppardes I saw a sight,
And all abowte there fold a star shone bright;
They sange terli, terlow,
So mereli the sheppardes ther pipes can blow.

Song III

Doune from heaven, from heaven so hie
Of angeles ther came a great companie
With mirthe and joy and great solemnitye;
The[y] sange terly, terlow,
So mereli the sheppardes ther pipes can blow.

The accompanying note in the MS. reads: These songes/
belonge to/the Taylors and Shearemens Pagant./ The first
and the laste the shepheards singe/and the second or mid-
dlemost [Greene #112, Mary's Lullaby] the women singe.