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“Lyst ye saynt?”
Saints in *The Second Shepherds’ Play*
Karen Sawyer Marsalek

It is difficult to overestimate the pervasive presence of saints in medieval English culture. Saints’ festivals partitioned the year, their likenesses gazed out at worshipers in rural chapels and urban cathedrals, and their legends provided material for plays and pageants.¹ Through allusions and invocations their influence extended into other literary genres as well. Drawing on a wide range of literature, Jan Ziolkowski has outlined a repertoire of effects created through invocations of and oaths by saints, while other scholars have analyzed saints’ names in the works of Chaucer and the Gawain-poet.² However, the importance of the six saints named in *The Second Shepherds’ Play* appears largely to have escaped scholarly attention. The very presence

¹ Clifford Davidson discusses evidence of saint plays in medieval England in “The Middle English Saint Play and Its Iconography,” *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe*, ed. Clifford Davidson, Early Drama, Art, and Music, Monograph Ser. 8 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), 31–122. See also his list, “Saint Plays and Pageants of Medieval Britain.” Lawrence Clopper has argued that saint “plays” were rarely scripted dramas or even theatrical representations of a saint’s *vita*, but rather games or visual images carried in procession; see *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001), 127–36. However, such ludic events would still indicate popular interest in the saints thus celebrated.

² Jan Ziolkowski, “Saints in Invocations and Oaths in Medieval Literature,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 87 (1988): 179–92. For recent scholarship on Chaucer’s use of saints, see the essays by Sherry Reames and Laurel Broughton in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. Helen Phillips (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010); earlier important works on the subject are E. Catherine Dunn, “The Saint’s Legend as History and as Poetry: An Appeal to Chaucer,” *American Benedictine Review* 27 (1976): 357–78; and Ann S. Haskell, *Essays on Chaucer’s Saints* (The Hague: Mouton 1976). See also Robert J. Blanch, “The Game of Invoking Saints in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *American Benedictine Review* 31 (1980): 237–62; and Ronald Tamplin, “The Saints in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Speculum* 44 (1969): 403–20.

of these references is notable; in both number and variety they set the play apart from others in the Towneley manuscript, including those commonly attributed to the “Wakefield Master.” Only two other pageants in the collection feature similar oaths by saints, and those appear on a much smaller scale.³ The multiple invocations are thus a distinctive feature of *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, much like the famous double plot that unites its comic and sacred action.⁴ A closer examination of these references to “Sant Nycholas” (171), “Sant Iame” (547), “Sant Stevyn” (553), “Mary and Iohn” (641) and “Sant Thomas of Kent” (661) reveals their key relationships to the setting and subject matter of this well-known play.

Ziolkowski’s article provides a useful starting point for my study, for he establishes two major categories for invocations and oaths by saints. The first type of reference does not require knowledge of a saint’s *vita* for its effect, but rather capitalizes on the sound of a saint’s name, or on his or her connection to a date or place. The second type draws parallels between the saint’s life and some aspect of the literary work. Each of the six invocations in *The Second Shepherds’ Play* can create several of the effects outlined in Ziolkowski’s taxonomy.

Auditory effects emerge most obviously from the saints’ names. The play’s complex stanza form, generally credited to the anonymous Wakefield Master, is particularly demanding, requiring four “a” rhymes, four “b” rhymes, two “c” rhymes and three “d” rhymes for each

³ In Play 3, Noah and his wife swear by Mary and Peter (302, 320, 327), while in *Pilgrims (Peregrini)*, Cleophas swears by “Sant Gyle.” (27.284); see Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, 2 vols., EETS, s.s. 13–14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). All quotations from *The Second Shepherds’ Play* (Play 13) and other Towneley plays are cited from this edition.

⁴ Homer A. Watt first proposed this interpretation of the comic and religious plots in his influential essay, “The Dramatic Unity of the ‘Secunda Pastorum’,” in *Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown* (New York: New York University Press, 1940), 158–66.

stanza.⁵ All but one of the play's invocations and oaths satisfy a rhyme requirement. This rhyming function can lead readers to dismiss the saint names as mere nonce-words, determined only by the exigencies of the verse. A listening audience, however, might be more likely to enjoy these unexpected contributions to the intricacies of the rhyme scheme. Perhaps we should let ourselves delight in these auditory effects as we do in when a lyric by Stephen Sondheim, Cole Porter, or W. S. Gilbert wittily negotiates a difficult rhyme.⁶

Of course, part of the appeal of such lyrics is that the rhymes are intellectually appropriate as well as aurally creative. The same is true of the saints invoked in *The Second Shepherds' Play*, for each one is associated with either the Advent or the Christmas season. The seasonal significance of the Virgin Mary is clear; in addition, Nicholas, Stephen, John the Evangelist, and Thomas Becket figure prominently in these seasons through their feasts, which fall on December 6, 26, 27, and 29, respectively. Furthermore, the order in which characters invoke these four saints corresponds to their order in the liturgical calendar. Similar collocations of Christmas saints appear in a number of early carols. One fifteenth-century example includes the verse:

Wolcum be ye, Stefne and Jon,
W[o]lcum, Innocentes euerychon,

⁵ While most editors have presented the Wakefield stanza in nine lines, Stevens transcribes it as a thirteener. See Stevens and Cawley, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, 1:xxviii-xxx, and Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 130-56. In either interpretation of the scribe's layout habits, the rhyme requirements are the same.

⁶ Peter Meredith also calls attention to the ingenuity of the Wakefield Master's rhymes and his exuberant verbal technique; see "The Towneley Pageants," in Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Drama*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 169-73.

Wolcum, Thomas, marter on;
Wolcum, Yol.⁷

Other carols devote whole stanzas to each saint whose feast falls during the Christmas season. Like these songs, *The Second Shepherds' Play* uses saints' names to take us through the chronology of festivals that surround Christ's birth.

The reference at line 547 to St. James, coming after a prayer to Nicholas and just before an oath by Stephen, seems to interrupt the play's sequence of Advent and Christmas saints. Of the several saints in the calendar with this name, it is most likely that the one invoked is James the Great, whose burial place at Compostela was a popular pilgrimage destination. Although his feast falls on July 25, James was linked to the birth of Christ through a tradition that associates each apostle with a prophet and an article of the Creed.⁸ Among the many visual expressions of this tradition is the Creed window at Great Malvern Priory in Worcester, where, notes M. D. Anderson, "the best-preserved fragment . . . shows St James Major with the text: *qui conceptus est de spiritu sancto natus ex maria virgine* on one side of a picture of the Nativity, and on the other Isaiah, prophecying [sic] *Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium*."⁹ The iconographic association was familiar in Yorkshire as well, as seen in windows in York Minster and in the

⁷ Richard Greene, ed., *The Early English Carols*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 4 (no. 7B). Greene records three distinct carols, nos. 7, 8, and 9, that catalogue Christmas saints.

⁸ For an overview of this tradition, which was current from the twelfth to the mid-sixteenth century, see James D. Gordon, "The Articles of the Creed and the Apostles," *Speculum* 40 (1965): 634–40; and Curt F. Bühler, "The Apostles and the Creed," *Speculum* 28 (1953): 335–39.

⁹ M. D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 39.

West Riding church of St. Mary's, Tickhill.¹⁰ In surviving civic drama, it emerged in the Chester Pentecost play, which dramatizes the composition of the Creed, with each apostle providing a clause. Third in the sequence, James declares:

I beleeeve, without bost,
in Jesus Christe of mightes most,
conceyved through the Holy Ghooste
and borne was of Marye. (21.319–22)¹¹

It is likely that the lost York Creed Play incorporated this association between apostles and articles on an even greater scale, perhaps devoting an entire pageant to the relevant episode for each clause.¹² Indeed, William Revetour, who bequeathed the book of the Creed Play to the guild of Corpus Christi, also left a shorter play of St. James to the St. Christopher's guild, which may

¹⁰ For a description of the York Minster window series see Clifford Davidson, *Drama and Art: An Introduction to the Use of Evidence from the Visual Arts for the Study of Early Drama*, Early Drama, Art, and Music, Monograph Ser. 1 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1977), 119–21. A comparison of the Minster windows with other examples of Creed iconography, including windows at Durham and Beverley, both of which are “historically and geographically linked to the York diocese,” shows that the pairing of James Major with the third clause of the Creed is one of only three consistent apostle/clause associations; see Nicole Mezey, “Creed and Prophets Series in the Visual Arts, with a Note on Examples in York,” *Early Drama, Art, and Music Newsletter* 2 (Nov. 1979): 8, Table I. In addition to the Creed window at Tickhill where the word “natus” still survives next to the image of James the Great, the association may have been part of Creed glass at St. Thomas Becket, Heptonstall, St. Mary's, Kirk Bramwith, and St. Bartholomew's, Ripponden; see Barbara Palmer, *The Early Art of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, Early Art, Drama, and Music, Reference Ser. 6 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), 164–65.

¹¹ R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 2 vols., EETS, s.s. 3–4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

¹² See Alexandra F. Johnston, “The Plays of the Religious Guilds of York: The Creed Play and the Pater Noster Play,” *Speculum* 50 (1975): 55–70, and Clifford Davidson's more recent analysis of the evidence in *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate 2007), 92–105.

have been a copy of the “Nativity” portion of the Creed play.¹³ The iconographic and dramatic currency of James’s Creed association lends seasonal aptness to the invocation in *The Second Shepherds’ Play*. Moreover, in the play’s sequence of saint invocations, James appropriately bridges the gap between the Advent saint, Nicholas, and the Christmas saints, Stephen, John, and Thomas Becket. As they recall the liturgical calendar and the annual celebration of the Nativity represented in the play, the invocations complement the shepherds’ complaints about “cold” and “spytus” weather (1, 83), “wyndes” and “frostys” (84–85), and function as hagiographical shorthand for the play’s temporal setting.

The effect of an invocation could also be amplified if the saint were a local favorite. Though many scholars now believe the Towneley manuscript is a Lancashire/West Riding compilation of material from different sources,¹⁴ *The Second Shepherds’ Play* is one of several pageants in the manuscript that contain geographic details of the town of Wakefield or its

¹³ In the words of the codicil, “Et gilde sancti christophori quemdam ludum de sancto Iacobo Apostolo in sex paginis compilatum”; Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, eds., *Records of Early English Drama: York*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 1:68. Other items in the will include the banners of the Creed play, as well as costume pieces for a Corpus Christi pageant. For an edition of the complete will, see Alexandra F. Johnston, “William Revetour, Chaplain and Clerk of York, Testator,” *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 29 (1998): 153–71.

¹⁴ For an overview of this shift in scholarship, see Meredith, “The Towneley Pageants,” 152–53 and 160–64. Key considerations of the manuscript’s date, provenance, and purpose include Barbara Palmer, “‘Towneley Plays’ or ‘Wakefield Cycle’ Revisited,” *Comparative Drama* 21 (1987–88): 335–41; “Recycling ‘The Wakefield Cycle’: The Records,” *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 41 (2002): 88–130; and Garrett P. J. Epp, “The Towneley Plays and the Hazards of Cycling,” *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 32 (1993): 121–50. Peter Happé examines the evidence for coherence in what is, admittedly, a compilation of plays from diverse sources and authors in *The Towneley Cycle: Unity and Diversity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

vicinity.¹⁵ Of course the appeal of the six saints under discussion was not limited to Wakefield; they were widely venerated, and Barbara Palmer's valuable survey of the early art of the West Riding documents their representations throughout the region.¹⁶ However, this fact should not lead us to dismiss their popularity in and around Wakefield. Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley suggest that the play's multiple invocations are a "reminder" of Wakefield parish church's dedication to All Saints.¹⁷ The names might also recollect familiar representations of the saints found in that church and in Wakefield's Bridge Chapel of St. Mary, in the adjacent parish of Dewsbury (also dedicated to All Saints), and in the impressive group of windows at St. Michael's, Thornhill.¹⁸

References to Nicholas and Mary also appear to coincide with local patterns of

¹⁵ Allusions to landmarks in Wakefield and its vicinity occur within dramatic dialogue in *The Murder of Abel* (*Mactacio Abel*) (2.369), *The First Shepherds' Play* (12.352), *The Second Shepherds' Play* (13.58, 657), and *Judgment* (*Iudicium*) (30.186). "Wakefeld" also follows both the invocation preceding the *Creation* and the title of *Noah and his Sons* (*Noe cum filiis*); Stevens and Cawley, eds., *Towneley Plays*, 1:xix–xx. Alexandra F. Johnston considers a possible relationship between the York plays, the Leeds, Wakefield, Thornhill district, and the plays ascribed to the Wakefield Master, in "Fifteenth Century Yorkshire Drama: An Hypothesis," in John Haines and Randal Rosenfeld, eds., *Music and Medieval Manuscripts* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2004), 263–79.

¹⁶ Palmer notes that the "sheer extent" of portrayals of Mary "throughout the Riding is impressive in bringing one to a fuller comprehension of what the cult of the Virgin Mary meant between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries" (*Early Art*, 8); for entries featuring the Virgin, see 55–89, 124–34, and 145–49; for James, Nicholas, John the Evangelist, Stephen, and Thomas Becket, see 171–73, 219–20, 173–76, and 228–30.

¹⁷ Stevens and Cawley, eds., *Towneley Plays*, 2:498.

¹⁸ Palmer (*Early Art*, 293–301) devotes Appendix viii to discussion of Thornhill's windows, which contained representations of Mary, John the Evangelist, James, and Nicholas; she also notes (171–72, 229) painted glass and images of James and John at Wakefield, and painted glass of Thomas Becket at All Saints, Dewsbury.

reverence. Both were honored with images in All Saints, Wakefield, and in 1516 one Richard Peck left money in his will for a new image of St. Nicholas to be made, specifying that the old image should be given to the local chapel of St. John the Baptist.¹⁹ Late-fifteenth and early sixteenth-century wills stipulate burial in the “Quire of Saint Nicholas” or “afore our Lady.”²⁰ Devotion to the Virgin is further supported by fourteenth-century records of her supposed girdle, a relic in the possession of All Saints, and by Wakefield’s Bridge Chapel, built c.1350 and dedicated to Mary.²¹ Like the play’s allusions to “Horbery” (657), a village approximately three miles from Wakefield, and to the “crokyd thorne” nearby (581), invocations of these saints link the dramatic and the local landscape.

The effects discussed above require no knowledge of the six saints’ *vitae*, but allusions to five of the saints carry additional meaning for viewers or readers familiar with their legends. In this respect, the play’s references to Nicholas, Mary, John, James, and Steven fall into Ziolkowski’s second category. These invocations or oaths draw parallels between the saint’s legend and the literary work. As Ziolkowski notes, they are “comparable to quotations, in that they can express a quantity of information disproportionate to their own seemingly insignificant

¹⁹ Palmer, *Early Art*, 69, 220. These and many other details of early art in Wakefield derive from the potentially unreliable antiquarian accounts of J. W. Walker. I have followed Palmer rather than Walker’s own publications, for of his records she includes only those “which either have independent confirmation or else specifically cite an image” (302).

²⁰ K. S. Bartlett, ed., *The Will of Horbury* (Wakefield: City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, 1979), 2, 4, 10; Palmer, *Early Art*, 69.

²¹ Palmer, *Early Art*, 268; Nikolaus Pevsner, *Yorkshire: The West Riding*, rev. Enid Radcliffe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 530.

length.”²² In *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, the allusions fill out character, hint at plot developments, and reinforce themes of the play.

The first invocation comes from the Third Shepherd as he enters, seeking his two older companions. His prayer, “Crystys crosse me spede, / And Sant Nycholas!” (170–71), immediately signals his youth through both the saint’s name and the phrase that precedes it. Versions of “Christ Cross be my speed” were spoken before one began to learn or recite the ABC, so that the phrase became associated with schoolboys.²³ This effect is amplified by the reference to Nicholas, whose patronage also extended to this group, as A. C. Cawley observed.²⁴ Mirk’s *Festial* offers one rationale for this patronage. Because “Nicholas” is a diminutive of “Nichol,” “al hys lyf-dayes, he hadde þe name of a chyld and þe vertues wyth, þat ys to say mekenes, sympulnes, and wythout malys. . . . And for he hulde forþ þese vyrtues all hys lyfe wyth his chyldes name, zet chyldren doth hym worschyp specyaly byfore any opur seynt.”²⁵ In addition to his childlike virtues, Nicholas was celebrated for his beneficence. One of the more familiar episodes in his legend is that of the Three Destitute Maidens, whose father was on the brink of selling them into prostitution. Nicholas threw three purses into the window of the house, and thus provided dowries for the daughters. In visual representations of the saint these purses

²² Ziolkowski, “Saints in Invocations and Oaths,” 186.

²³ Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 253–54.

²⁴ A. C. Cawley, ed., *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), 106.

²⁵ John Mirk, *Festial*, ed. Susan Powell, 2 vols., EETS, o.s. 96–35 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1:12.

often appear as three golden spheres.²⁶ The saint and his story cast new light on Daw's generosity in the play: it is he who returns to give Mak's child a gift, and his own offering to the Christ child is a ball (827–37, 1059).²⁷ Later Daw also swears by St. Thomas, so the young shepherd's association with Nicholas is not exclusive, but it does heighten the youthful, charitable aspects of his character.

Paradoxically, Nicholas was associated not only with gifts, but also with theft. As Adrianus de Groot remarks, Nicholas "returned lost or stolen goods, and protected the possessions of those who possessed. On the other hand, thieves and poachers supposedly considered him their patron, too—apparently in the interest of anticipated possessions."²⁸ The saint's status as the "unofficial patron saint of thieves" is reflected in a fifteenth-century carol:

Another he dede sekerly:
He sauyd a thef that was ful sly,
That stal a swyn out of his sty;

²⁶ For the most popular medieval version of this episode see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:21–22; for the three balls or discs, see the mention in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1148.

²⁷ For other interpretations of the symbolism of the shepherds' gifts, see Jeffrey Helterman, *Symbolic Action in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1981), 114; Lawrence J. Ross, "Symbol and Structure in the *Secunda Pastorum*," in *Medieval English Drama, Essays Critical and Contextual*, ed. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 185; and Joseph A. Longo, "Symmetry and Symbolism in the *Secunda Pastorum*," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 13 (1969): 83–84.

²⁸ Adrianus Dingeman de Groot, *Saint Nicholas: A Psychoanalytic Study of His History and Myth*, *Studies in the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (The Hague: Mouton; New York: Basic Books, n.d. [c.1965]), 163.

His lyf *thann* sauyd he.²⁹

This incident does not appear in any accounts of the saint's life, but another episode found in legends and liturgical dramas also associates Nicholas with theft. In this narrative, a Jew (or barbarian, in some versions) charges an image of St. Nicholas to protect his possessions. When thieves steal his goods, the Jew beats the image and promises similar daily treatment until the merchandise is returned. St. Nicholas appears to the thieves, bearing the marks of the beating, and chastises them. Terrified and repentant, the thieves return their plunder to the Jew, who is converted.³⁰ Legends like these probably prompted the patronage, which persevered into Shakespeare's day. In *I Henry IV*, discussion of two well-moneyed travelers leads Gadshill and the Chamberlain into banter about Nicholas' light-fingered devotees:

Gadshill: Sirrah, if they meet not with Saint Nicholas' clerks, I'll give thee this neck.

Chamberlain: No, I'll none of it. I pray thee, keep that for the hangman, for I know thou worshipest Saint Nicholas as truly as a man of falsehood may.

(2.1.62–66)³¹

This rather disreputable aspect of Nicholas's multifaceted patronage makes him an apt choice for invocation in a play that revolves around sheep-stealing.

Mak and Gyll's strategy for concealing the stolen sheep inspires two further invocations:

²⁹ Greene, *Early English Carols*, 193, no. 316.

³⁰ For the legend itself, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 1:25–26, and Mirk, *Festial*, 15–16. Davidson discusses the liturgical plays and other ludic celebrations of St. Nicholas Day in *Festivals and Plays*, 5–8.

³¹ *I Henry IV*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington. 4th ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992). All quotations from Shakespeare's plays will be taken from this edition.

Gyll plans to “grone” in mock labor pains “And cry outt by the wall / On mary and Iohn, / ffor sore” (639–42). Like Daw’s invocation of St. Nicholas, Gyll’s words recall a particular sphere of saintly influence. Frequently paired in representations of the Passion and in carols celebrating their steadfast support of Christ in his agony,³² the Virgin and John the Evangelist were also thought to assist women in the throes of childbirth. Keith Thomas notes that women often called on the Virgin to ease their pangs, and used relics of “the girdle of our lady” as birthing aids.³³ As mentioned above, All Saints, Wakefield possessed such a relic, which may have been used for this purpose. J. W. Walker reports that one Margery Pynder, “who had had recourse to this assistance, and failed to contribute her due, acknowledged that she owed 2s. 7d. for the service of the Blessed Mary.”³⁴ Readings of the gospels were also thought to protect both mother and infant during childbirth in medieval England, and popular belief especially supported the Prologue to the Gospel of John as a strong preservative against all kinds of evil.³⁵ Gyll’s reference to both Mary and John thus lends a touch of authenticity in her performance of postpartum discomfort. In the larger context of the play, of course, her behavior is more than a ruse to fool the shepherds; it is part of a burlesque version of the Nativity, and Gyll’s childbed groans parody the

³² Palmer catalogues more than twenty West Riding representations of the Virgin and St. John at the foot of the Cross, including a Thornhill window; see Palmer, *Early Art*, 124–30. For carols linking the two saints, see Greene, *Early English Carols*, 102–07.

³³ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 28.

³⁴ J. W. Walker, *Wakefield: Its History and People*, 2nd ed. (Wakefield, 1939), 182.

³⁵ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 384–85; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 28, 31.

Virgin's own painless delivery. Simultaneously realistic and performative, pious and parodic, her richly multivalent invocation of Mary and John adds another layer to the double plot of *The Second Shepherd's Play*.

As Gyll busies herself with the four-footed "child," Mak returns to the sleeping shepherds and "awakes" with oaths by James and Stephen. Both oaths add to his mocking mimicry of the shepherds, and recall legends appropriate to the dramatic context. In his first oath, Mak seems to be unable to move due to his sore neck:

Now Christys holy name
Be vs emang!
What is this? For Sant Iame,
I may not well gang!
I trow I be the same.
A! my nek has lygen wrang
Enoghe. (545–51)

He is surely imitating the first shepherd, who earlier awoke and complained that his foot was still asleep "by Iesus" (508). But Mak goes the shepherd one better, with a more appropriate oath. His physical incapacitation evokes an episode in the life of St. James the Great, as told by Jacobus de Voragine. In this legend, the magician Hermogenes sends his follower Philetus to challenge James and to discredit his preaching, but Philetus returns to Hermogenes converted, which enrages the sorcerer. Through his "magical skills," he paralyzes Philetus. When James hears of the new convert's plight, he sends his kerchief, with the instructions "Have him hold this cloth and say, 'The Lord upholds all who are falling; he sets the prisoners free'." The touch of this kerchief then frees Philetus from his "invisible bonds."³⁶ Like Philetus, Mak dabbles in magic;

³⁶Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 2:4.

before stealing the sheep he casts a spell on the shepherds so that they will not awake in the midst of his thievery (400–10). There is no textual indication that the shepherds use a kerchief to help Mak, but his words “Mekill thank!” imply that they assist him in some way out of his feigned paralysis (552). Whatever the accompanying stage business might be, Mak’s inert form, and his recent magical activity establish him as a good candidate for the help of St. James.

The oath by St. James leads into Mak’s announcement of a birth, and here he burlesques the herald angel that we expect from a shepherds’ play. However, Mak’s subsequent oath by St. Stephen may also subtly remind audiences of the birth of Christ. Imitating the third shepherd, who woke from a disturbing dream, Mak swears: “Now, by Sant Stevyn, / I was flayd with a swevyn— / My hart out of sloghe!” (553–55). While the third shepherd’s nightmare is dismissed as a “fantom” or false illusion (540), Mak calls his own dream a “swevyn,” or potentially a visionary dream.³⁷ Once again he appropriates the complaint of another shepherd, but invests it with a different significance.

I thoght Gyll began to crok
And trauell full sad,
Wel-ner at the fyrst cok,
Of a yong lad
For to mend oure flock. (556–60)

The time of Gyll’s delivery, “at the fyrst cok,” equates this birth with the Nativity. Folk belief held that cocks crowed throughout the night on Christmas Eve because Christ was born at cock-crow.³⁸ Yet another Christmas legend concerning cock-crowing appears in a ballad for St.

³⁷ Stevens and Cawley, eds., *Towneley Plays*, 2:504, but the *OED* is more skeptical about this distinction.

³⁸ Shakespeare alludes to the tradition in *Hamlet* 1.1.164–70.

Stephen's Day. In this fifteenth-century lyric, Stephen sees the star over Bethlehem while serving King Herod at a feast:

Steuy*n* out of kechone *cam*, wyth boris hed on honde;
He saw a sterre was fayr *and* bryzt ouer Bedlem stonde.
He kyst adoun þe boris hed *and* went into þe halle:
“I forsak þe kyng Herowdes, *and* þi werkes alle;

. . .

þer is a chyld in Bedlem born is beter þan we alle.”

Herod responds scornfully:

“Þat is al so soþ, Steuy*n*, al so soþ, iwys,
As þis capoun crowe xal þat lyþ here in myn dysh.”
Þat word was not so sone seyð, þat word in þat halle,
þe capoun crew *Cristus* natus est! among þe lordes alle.³⁹

Like St. Stephen in the ballad, Mak bears witness to a birth, or so he would have the shepherds think. A miracle bears out the truth of Stephen's news, so perhaps Mak's references to the saint, cockcrow, and a child born “for to mend our flock” are meant to inspire belief in his “swevyn.” Considered in light of the ballad, Mak's invocation creates an ironic contrast between his own duplicity and Stephen's honesty, and heightens the parallels between Mak's supposed son and the Christ child.

It should not surprise us that Mak manipulates saints' legends to serve his own needs; Gyb at least seems to recognize this game from the moment the thief enters and claims to be a “yoman, / . . . of the king” (291–92). Gyb's sarcastic response, “Bot, Mak, lyst ye saynt?” (302)

³⁹ F. J. Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (1882; reprint, New York: Dover, 1965), 1: 241–42.

might be glossed “Do you wish to play the saint?”⁴⁰ As this study shows, playing saints and playing *with* saints through impersonation and invocation are games that engage not only Mak, but Gyll, Daw, and of course, the unknown author of *The Second Shepherds’ Play*. In their diverse effects, the invocations invite audience members, “lerner” and “lewed,” to join in these games as well. By recovering some of the resonances that these saint names once held, we can appreciate another element in the play’s dramaturgical complexity.

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⁴⁰ For this sense of the verb “saynt,” see the gloss in Stevens and Cawley, eds., *Towneley Plays*, 2:705.