

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

THE ORTHODOXY OF THE 'N-TOWN' PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

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This discussion of the religious and other teaching in the 'N-Town' plays is supported by close examination of the complex manuscript. I show that the scribe who wrote most of the plays worked in three stages:- first the text from the start of the Passion to the Last Words, then the rest of the plays, and finally substantial revision of this initial recension; some decades later a reviser amended sections of text, apparently for performance.

Catechetical teaching and exceptional Marian devotion feature in all stages of compilation and recension. After considering the state of the codex before the present binding, I argue that it comprised several subsidiary booklets until the later 17th century.

The writers of individual plays are shown to have used a number of orthodox sources, two of which have not been identified before. The Ten Commandments follow a late 14th century summa called Cibus Anime and the Passion uses an extended (rather than the original) version of the Northern Passion. The importance of Peter Comestor's Historia Scholastica is greater than previously noted, and anti-heretical features of Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ may be specially significant. All the identified sources are discussed in general terms (including their respective availability), and I examine how in adapting them the compilers avoided material with no scriptural provenance. Considered as a whole the sources imply that those who worked on the plays were regular clerics.

Features of the catechetical and other teaching are considered separately, i.e. the Trinity, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Decalogue, the Seven Sacraments (both as a theological concept, and individually in the case of Baptism, Confession, Matrimony, and Eucharist), Mercy, and lay obligations. The teaching is reinforced by the treatment of obedience which, although present in all but two of the plays, is treated differently in the Passion episodes which take a theological view of the authority to which obedience is due.

In order to contextualise the findings evidence for location is reviewed. Whilst the results of dialect analysis are broadly consistent with the generally acknowledged scribal origins in southern Norfolk, previously unnoticed textual evidence links two sections of interpolated material with Norwich, where I suggest the Carmelite priory as a possible place of origin. After reviewing Lollardy in the region I conclude that the plays respond to known heretic positions only as part of a wider address to the lay community as a whole.

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Abbreviations

Briquet	C. M. Briquet, <i>Les Filigranes: Dictionnaire Historique des Marques du Papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600</i> , 2ème. edn., 4 vols. (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1923)
D. N. B.	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (London: Oxford University Press, 1921 -)
E.E.T.S.	Early English Text Society
<i>Facsimile</i>	Peter Meredith and Stanley J. Kahrl, <i>The N-Town Plays: A Facsimile of British Library MS Cotton Vespasian D VIII</i> (Leeds: University of Leeds School of English, 1977)
L.A.L.M.E.	Angus McIntosh, M.L. Samuels, and Michael Benskin, <i>Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English</i> , 4 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987)
<i>Ludus Coventriae</i>	<i>Ludus Coventriae, or The Plaie called Corpus Christi</i> , ed. by K.S. Block, E.E.T.S. e.s. 120 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922)
<i>Mary Play</i>	<i>The Mary Play from the N. town Manuscript</i> , ed. by Peter Meredith (London: Longman, 1987)
M.E.D.	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. by Hans Kurath & Sherman M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954 -)
<i>N-Town Play</i>	<i>The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D. 8</i> , ed. by Stephen Spector, 2 vols., E.E.T.S. s.s. 11 & 12 (London: Oxford University Press, 1991)
O.D.C.C.	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> , ed. by F. W. Cross and E. A. Livingston, 3rd. edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1997)

<i>Passion Play</i>	<i>The Passion Play from the N. town Manuscript</i> , ed. by Peter Meredith (London: Longman, 1990)
<i>P.L.</i>	<i>Patrologiae Latinae</i> , ed. by J-P. Migne, 221 vols., continuing (Paris: Garnier, 1878 -)
<i>R.E.E.D.</i>	Records of Early English Drama
<i>S.A.T.F.</i>	Société des Anciens Textes Français
<i>V. C. H.</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>

Conventions

Except in Appendix A, where space is at a premium, the four principal scribes are normally referred to according to their respective contributions to the manuscript, thus:-

- ‘the main scribe’
- ‘Play 41 scribe’
- ‘Reviser 1 (*Facsimile* - A; Spector’s scribe B)’
- ‘Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector’s scribe C)’

Describing the two Revisers in this way, though cumbersome, is intended to avoid the confusion that might otherwise arise from the different designations respectively used by Meredith and Kahrl in the *Facsimile* and Spector in *N-Town Play*.

Unless the contrary is indicated quotations are taken from Spector’s *N-Town Play*, with references to the play and line number given in the body of the text, e.g.

Sacramentys per xul be vij
Wonnyn þo[r]we þat childys wounde. (16/5-6)

The page of the manuscript is also given in the few instances where Spector’s reading seems questionable.

Play titles are given in quotation marks using Spector’s editorial name and the number, e.g. ‘Jesse Root’ (Play 7), ‘The Purification’ (Play 19). Where Spector gives a composite title, only the section under discussion is cited, e.g. ‘The Parliament of Hell’ (Play 23, start), ‘The Trial Before Annas and Cayphas’ (Play 29, end).

Quotations from the three English cycles are taken in each case from the most recent edition:-

The Chester Mystery Cycle, ed. by R. M. Luminansky and David Mills, Vol. I, E.E.T.S. s.s. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974)

The Towneley Plays, ed. by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, Vol. I, E.E.T.S., s.s. 13 (London: Oxford University Press, 1994)

The York Plays, ed. by Richard Beadle (London: Arnold, 1982)

Play numbers, where appropriate, appear in the typographic style of the edition concerned, e.g.:

John, for manny prophete - wit þou wele -
Take I þis baptyme certaynely. (*York*, XXI/155-6)

Bibliographic details for all other primary texts appear in footnotes.

Short quotations other than those in modern or Middle English are translated in footnotes. Translations of longer passages such as the extract from *Quellen*, and Chapter XXVIII of *Historia Scholastica* in Appendix D appear in the body of the text. The translations are my own, except for the Greek tag on f. 164^r taken from *Facsimile*, the memorandum to Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* which is that of the work's most recent editor, and *Legenda Aurea* which are from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Preface

British Library MS Cotton, Vespasian D. VIII was copied and revised in East Anglia in the second half of the fifteenth century, with further revisions made in the second quarter of the sixteenth.¹ The manuscript contains a prefatory banns which is conventionally called the Proclamation, followed by forty-one dramatic episodes, of which the last now lacks its ending. These episodes are usually called ‘plays’, even though their average length is just under two hundred and sixty lines of verse. In all they use approximately two dozen distinct stanza forms. Whilst most of the subject matter is similar to the Christian history from the Creation to the Last Judgement known from the York and Chester mystery cycles, some episodes based on apocryphal rather than biblical sources are unique to *N-Town* and others are known only from continental Europe.

The plays’ heterogeneity presents taxonomic difficulties. To refer repeatedly to the contents of the manuscript would be pedantic, and many of the alternatives that have been tried are not wholly satisfactory. Some commentators have referred to ‘*Ludus Coventriæ*’ following the inaccurate description on the flyleaf:

Elenchus contentorum in hoc codice

1. (sic) *Contenta novi testamenti scenicè expressa . et actitata olim per monachos
sive Frates mendicantes . vulgo dicitur hic liber Ludus Coventriæ . sive ludus
corporis Christi*²

Written by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton’s librarian, Richard James, about a century after the last alterations were made to the text, almost every detail of this description is incorrect.

Although the description starts with the numeral ‘1’ the codex comprises just the one article. The contents include Old as well as New Testament plays. There is no evidence that all were ever acted (and I shall argue that at least two of them were incapable of performance as recorded). There is no ascertainable connection with either Coventry or the feast of Corpus Christi.³ Other critics have referred to ‘the Hegge Plays’ after the manuscript’s first identified owner, using a method analogous to the application of the family name Towneley to the plays recorded in Huntington MS HM1. The designation ‘*N-Town*’, which was first suggested by Greg in 1913⁴ and is now in general use, is taken from the end of the Proclamation, in which three Vexillatores (i.e. banner bearers) speaking alternate stanzas drum up an audience:

¹ The evidence for place and date is considered in Appendices B and C respectively (pp. 143-161).

² = List of contents in this book. Contents: New Testament scenes set forth and formerly acted by monks or mendicant friars. This book is commonly called the play of Coventry or the play of Corpus Christi.

³ The inscription ‘The plaie called Corpus Christi’ at the top of f. 1^r is not in James’s writing and must also be disregarded.

⁴ W. W. Greg, ‘Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Miracle Cycles’, *The Library*, 3rd series, 5 (1914), 367.

A Sunday next, yf þat we may
 At vj of the belle we gynne oure play
 In N. town wherefore we pray
 That god now be 3oure spedē (f. 10^v)

‘N’ probably stands for the non-specific *nomen* rather than the name of a town or village.

However, reference to ‘*N-Town*’ says nothing about the nature of the contents. A satisfactory designation should comprehend not only the plays but also the Proclamation. The two are only indirectly related, and might be considered wholly separate if it were not for the fact that the Proclamation and the first three plays were copied into a single quire by the same scribe apparently during a continuous stint of work. The received wisdom is that the ‘pagent’ described by the Vexillatores were an earlier dramatic text from which some – but by no means all – the extant plays developed. In order to connote a sense of origin and comparative age I shall refer to this earlier text as ‘the *urcycle*’.⁵

The manuscript records sections of text taken from the *urcycle* combined with whole new plays dealing with episodes in the life of the Virgin and other added material. The *urcycle* Passion was replaced with an unfinished two-part version to be played in consecutive years which the main scribe had copied at a different time from the rest of the manuscript. I shall distinguish this unfinished Passion, which comprises the text from immediately prior to the Conspiracy and the Entry into Jerusalem to the Last Words (i.e. 26/1-32/183) as ‘the initial Passion sequence’. This is not the same as the widely-used division into Passion Play I and Passion Play II authorised by references to material acted ‘þe last 3ere’ (29/6, 9).

Furthermore, not all the plays were intended to be staged in the same way. Detailed stage directions in the Passion specify polyscenic staging for that section of text, and an interpolated play dealing with the Assumption of the Virgin calls for its own unique *mise en scène*. Neither of these methods of staging could be applied effectively to all the other plays.

It is difficult to find a satisfactory generic noun to describe this eclectic compilation. Spector’s solution of calling his edition ‘the *N-Town Play*’ presents two problems. The singular noun suggests a dramatic homogeneity which the text does not support, and ‘play’ does not sufficiently distinguish the indirectly related Proclamation. The alternative usage ‘cycle’ is also unsatisfactory since it might be read to imply a spurious coherence in both structure and performance.

In view of these difficulties I shall call the dramatic text (i.e. the plays as recorded, but divorced from the Proclamation) ‘the *N-Town plays*’ as a compromise that will not contradict my reading. When talking about the entire contents including the Proclamation I

⁵ ‘Pagent’ is used throughout the Proclamation, but rarely in the Plays. See Proc./14, 27, 66-7, &c.

shall refer to 'the *N-Town* manuscript' (or codex). '*N-Town*', *tout court*, will serve as a non-specific alternative to both.

The arguments presented depend in part on the identification and availability of texts used by those who wrote the plays. The limitations inherent in this aspect of my research should be borne in mind from the outset. My aim has been to create an overall impression of the learning of the plays' writers and compilers, rather than an exact, comprehensive study of the textual origins of all the plays (which is, in any event, probably unachievable).

I have therefore not attempted to define what I mean by 'source'. By using the term loosely, it is possible to include Latin works, which, by definition, contributed only indirectly, as well as vernacular texts which were sometimes copied more or less *verbatim*, leaving an unmistakable lexical imprint. Other texts probably contributed no more than a reminder of detail that might be included in the treatment of a particular scriptural episode, whilst most cases will be shown to fall between these extremes.

The val make h̄ to wyrte t̄ w̄ go up on a ledges t̄ settis
tālē abōvē ȳself h̄d t̄ ȳr capphas val make h̄ to w̄ down t̄ settis
a. **S**oy ȳself h̄s mor veylyth of w̄.
ȳ so h̄ w̄ ȳt̄ h̄ to be kyng of jollwōt
a. **S**oy h̄s boldo ȳ so ȳself h̄ w̄t̄ ȳw̄
ȳ h̄ named h̄ self kyng of jollwōt
a. **S**oy h̄ w̄t̄ h̄t̄. h̄t̄ w̄t̄ it is
t̄ so it val be far mo ȳ w̄t̄
a. **T** & so forþ all ȳr val gon a dor to ȳ Baffaldy **T**hus val app̄.
T h̄lōy. h̄lōy. lāmazabatthāy!
m̄ fād̄z in h̄lōy on h̄z. **W**hy dost ȳ mo for salo
the fād̄z of my māntōdo
w̄ syōngo ȳrē ȳt̄ & ȳm̄t̄ to pērōdo / t̄ lotō doth my fād̄z fād̄z
hād̄z fād̄z han mo in mondo **W**īd̄z jūdēo
T m̄ th̄p̄ublyth h̄ tho doth callo h̄ly
lotō no go noj t̄ assy **W**īd̄z jūdēo
t̄ lotō ȳf̄ h̄ come pīcīly **W**īd̄z jūdēo
Do ḡet a th̄yf̄ dōde no mān take
as h̄ han dān nōl̄s for ȳ salo **W**īd̄z jūdēo
for th̄yf̄ a sundyz my h̄ly & ḡy gālo **W**īd̄z jūdēo
T so th̄yf̄ soy h̄bōd̄ for to salo
eȳl̄ & gallo h̄y, ȳ take **W**īd̄z jūdēo
what mo th̄p̄ublyth a mōlō so mālō
to app̄ for dāp̄nto so h̄d̄ ḡet h̄st̄
t̄ mōlō it sem̄yit it is but lēst̄ **W**īd̄z jūdēo
is not ȳr app̄ of good tāst̄ **W**īd̄z jūdēo
T on lōfe soy h̄bōd̄ nōl̄ so h̄ be fōt̄ **W**īd̄z jūdēo
t̄ e ḡet o 3 leal on ȳ nōl̄ be ḡet t̄ mālō on 3 amōlō **W**īd̄z jūdēo
t̄ e ḡet o 3 leal t̄ a scōn t̄ p̄y 3 botho dāy & māy
take good oyd̄ to any coyn t̄ chāy also ȳ gallo **W**īd̄z jūdēo

Chapter 1

Introduction

a) Aims and method

My thesis addresses *N-Town's* religious and other teaching by considering the complex manuscript and the textual sources used by the writers of the plays which it records. Although several reliable commentators have discussed the eclectic codicology, there has been no comprehensive attempt to relate changes in the plays' content to the sequence by which the manuscript attained the form in which it exists today. By plotting the stages in which the text was copied, compiled, and amended I shall challenge some of the theories that have been put forward to explain the basis on which the contents were selected. The priorities of those responsible for the text will be shown to have included various aspects of doctrinal orthodoxy, and exceptional veneration of the Virgin Mary. I shall build on these manuscript-based, empirical findings by identifying the plays' textual sources which have not, so far as I am aware, been studied comprehensively for nearly a century.⁶ Considered as a whole, the sources imply with a high degree of probability that the plays were written and compiled by regular clergy engaged in a collaborative enterprise, undertaken over a period of several decades.

By combining the information available from these two lines of enquiry with a close reading of the text, I shall demonstrate a detailed concern for religious and spiritual well-being which goes beyond mere biblical instruction. The Marian emphasis of this rigorous orthodoxy offers important clues as to the general identity of those responsible. Although several of the plays address doctrinal shortcomings prevalent in the Norwich diocese (where the manuscript originated), I shall argue that the compilers' main objective was the edification of the lay community as a whole.

b) Criticism and critical editions

I have treated *N-Town* as a literary artefact with no known analogues, unlike Kolve, Stevens, and to a lesser extent Woolf, all of whom deal with these plays in association with the York, Chester, and Towneley cycles.⁷ Although each of these critics mentions

⁶ The only study exclusively devoted to sources was Ernst Falke, 'Die Quellen des sogenannten *Ludus Coventriæ*', Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde (Leipzig: Hoffman, 1908) (= 'The sources of the so-called *Ludus Coventriæ*').

⁷ V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (London: Edward Arnold, 1966); Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

ways in which *N-Town* differs from the guild-sponsored mystery cycles, none seems to me to explore the full extent of the differences. By failing to do so and juxtaposing the four they create a tacit presumption of underlying similarity between texts that are in fact radically dissimilar. The mutual resemblances can be justified in the case of the northern cycles, and it might be possible to extend them to *N-Town's* *urcycle* text, so far as it is capable of being established. However, I shall show that the successive revisions of the *urcycle* recorded in the manuscript resulted in a text which is different in both nature and purpose from the other English cycles.

Critics who acknowledge the complexity of the codex are as a rule more convincing than those who work on single plays or groups of plays. Meredith has written extensively about the manuscript, and his introduction to the *Facsimile* on which he collaborated with Kahrl has been an invaluable research tool.⁸ Palaeographic detail informs his critical editions, the *Mary Play* and the *Passion Play*. Although both contain only part of the text, compiled perhaps with half an eye on making their contents available for modern production, they do not contradict the larger picture of a heterogeneous compilation.

Spector developed his edition (*N-Town Play*) from early research into versification. He also expanded this limited study, which was based on his critical edition of five of the plays, into a detailed examination of the prosody as a whole.⁹ I have found his articles on the provenance of the codex and its paper specially important, since they complement the information given in Meredith and Kahrl's introduction to the *Facsimile*.¹⁰ Spector's notes to Vol. II of the E.E.T.S. edition, which bring together much previous scholarship, including suggestions about textual sources, agree with Meredith in most respects.

Fletcher has written about the plays both as a whole and in part. In the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* he responds to the complex nature of the text by approaching it from several angles. He writes separately about context, codicological issues, and the possibility of an ~~an~~ overarching biblically-based scheme, before looking at the *compilatio* of *Passion Play I* in some detail, and assessing the whole as practical drama.¹¹ Elsewhere he has examined the revision of the plays dealing with the early life of the Virgin, and he has researched several aspects of the whole manuscript.¹² Despite the

1987).

⁸ See e.g. Peter Meredith, 'A reconsideration of some textual problems in the N-Town manuscript (BL MS Cotton Vespasian D VIII)', *Leeds Studies in English*, 9 (1977), 35-50; 'Manuscript, scribe, and performance: further looks at the N. Town manuscript', in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. by Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 109-128.

⁹ Stephen Spector, *The Genesis of the N-Town Cycle* (New York: Garland, 1988).

¹⁰ Stephen Spector, 'The Composition and Development of an Eclectic Manuscript: Cotton Vespasian D. VIII', *Leeds Studies in English*, 9 (1977), 62-83; 'The Provenance of the N-Town Codex', *The Library*, 6th ser., 1 (1979), 25-33.

¹¹ Alan J. Fletcher, 'The N-Town Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 163-189.

¹² Alan J. Fletcher, 'Marginal Glosses in the N-Town Manuscript', British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian

thoroughness of his approach, my reading of palaeographic detail will question his account of the manuscript origins of the Passion.

Perhaps because the eclectic compilation can be read as producing sets of thematically-based material, several critics have paid attention to single plays or groups of plays. The text dealing with the early life of the Virgin and the two-part Passion Play are examples of this sort of division. Studies which follow this sort of approach often fail to paint a complete picture. Scherb, for example, examines the eucharistic content of Passion Play I without considering references to Transubstantiation and the wider issue of sacramental theology. Both features are present in non-Passion plays and I shall argue that they formed an important part of the compilers' wider purpose.¹³ Ashley and Sheingorn extrapolate from the early Marian plays 'a concern, verging on obsession, with purity and holiness' as the theme that binds the *N-Town* plays together.¹⁴ The eclecticism of the compilation and the many revisions made to the original recension question the validity of this sort of judgement.

The only study entirely devoted to the sources to which I have had access is Falke's pre- First World War doctoral thesis.¹⁵ Whilst he did not reflect the eclectic nature of the manuscript and some of his identifications were incorrect, his work has provided a starting point for anyone addressing this aspect. Block is typical of many early critics who accepted Falke's findings more or less uncritically. Although some of her introduction to *Ludus Coventriæ* remains valid and her printed text corresponds more closely than Spector's with the *mise-en-page* of the manuscript, her remarks about sources must be treated with caution.¹⁶ Foster, who knew of Falke's work but had not read it, discussed the principal source used for the Passion in her edition of the *Northern Passion*, which she considered also contributed to the York and Towneley cycles.¹⁷ Since the only *N-Town* text available to her was Halliwell's inadequate nineteenth-century edition I have re-examined her findings, arriving at significantly different conclusions.¹⁸ More recent commentators have stepped out of Falke's shadow. Meredith discusses the textual sources used for both the *Contemplacio* plays and the Passion. Woolf who usefully contrasts the treatment of

D. VIII', *Manuscripta*, 25 (1981), 113-117; 'Layers of Revision in the N-Town Marian Cycle', *Neophilologus* 66 (1982), pp. 469-478.

¹³ Victor I. Scherb, 'Liturgy and community in *N-Town* Passion Play I', *Comparative Drama* 29 (1996), 478-492.

¹⁴ Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: St. Anne in Late Medieval Society* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), p. 116.

¹⁵ Falke, *Quellen*.

¹⁶ *Mary Play*, pp. 14-19; *Passion Play*, pp. 19-23.

¹⁷ *The Northern Passion*, ed. by Frances A. Foster, Vol. II, E.E.T.S. o.s. 147 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1916), pp. 89-101.

¹⁸ *Ludus Coventriæ: A Collection of Mysteries formerly represented at Coventry on the Feast Of Corpus Christi*, ed. by James Orchard Halliwell (London: The Shakespeare Society, 1841).

individual episodes in dramatic analogues sometimes mentions sources in passing, as does Muir in her work on European drama.¹⁹

Several commentators have speculated about the basis on which episodes were selected for inclusion, advancing different theories for what Kolve called the 'impetus toward cycle form'.²⁰ Mills's description of 'an overall thematic concern, the grace of God available to penitent man' added impetus to my exploration of the doctrinal prerequisites which the plays present as necessary to the attainment of this state.²¹ On the other hand my reading will specifically reject Stevens's theory that typology was the determining factor.²² Other thematic links have been suggested. Fry, for example, writing from a carefully argued theological standpoint, claimed that the plays' overall unity was determined by the patristic abuse-of-power theory, which:

... supposes that when Adam and Eve fell into original sin, Satan was permitted to inflict death upon them and all mankind and hold them captive in hell. Christ born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, was not subject to that law of death. Satan was deceived by the human nature of Christ, and, in bringing about His death, abused his power, and lost the souls in hell.²³

Gauvin was one of a number of critics influenced by this argument.²⁴ However, although Marx has recently shown that Fry applied the abuse-of-power theory incorrectly, he has not established an alternative explanation.²⁵ Fewer's claim that compilation was influenced by an overarching social vision, in which 'the plays represent as figural the relationship between the mercantile society of the old (i.e. Old Testament) law and the Christian society of the new' seems questionable.²⁶ The stages by which the manuscript and its contents evolved challenge his reading of 'mede' as the underlying compositional factor. Sugano who, like Frewer, reads *N-Town* as an expression of lay piety, has claimed that the codex was made up of 'playbooks' commissioned by a pious lay confraternity.²⁷ Whilst I am in

¹⁹ Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*; Lynette R. Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁰ Kolve, *Play Called Corpus Christi*, p. 33 (chapter heading).

²¹ David Mills, 'Religious drama and civic ceremonial', in *The Revels History of Drama in English: I, Medieval Drama*, ed. by A.C. Cawley, Marion Jones, Peter F. McDonald, and David Mills (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 197.

²² Stevens, *Four Mystery Cycles*, pp. 181-257. Although Stevens claims that his approach is manuscript-led he fails to deal with this all-important feature in depth.

²³ Timothy Fry, 'The Unity of the 'Ludus Coventriæ'', *Studies in Philology*, 48 (1951), 527-70 (p. 529).

²⁴ Claude Gauvin, *Un Cycle du Théâtre Religieux Anglais du Moyen Âge: le jeu de la ville de 'N'* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1973), pp. 214-231.

²⁵ C. W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), p. 114 *et seq.*

²⁶ Colin Fewer, 'The 'Fygure' of the Market: The N-Town Cycle and East Anglian Lay Piety', *Philological Quarterly* 77 (1998), 133-4.

²⁷ Douglas Sugano, 'This game wel pleyd in good a-ray': The N-Town Playbooks and East Anglian Games', *Comparative Drama*, 28 (1994-5), 221-234.

broad agreement with the findings of his codicologically-based approach, the sources used by the writers and the plays' doctrinal rigour suggest clerical rather than lay auspices.

Attempts to establish *N-Town* as a civic cycle analogous to those known from York and Chester are now usually dismissed as irrelevant, yet curiosity persists about where the plays originated. The most fully developed theory is that of Gibson who has tried to establish a link with the powerful, royally-favoured abbey at Bury St. Edmunds.²⁸ This does not agree with dialect studies, such as Beadle's doctoral thesis and the comments in Spector's introduction, which indicate scribal origins in southern Norfolk.²⁹ *L.A.L.M.E.* locates the main scribe in the East Harling region but, since the printed data are not representative of the whole text, I have prepared a more extensive linguistic profile for the main scribe and complete profiles for each of the other three. These supplementary lists, which are set out in full in Appendix B (i) on pp. 143-151, broadly support the findings of the *L.A.L.M.E.* editors. But it has to be borne in mind that where a scribe learned to write was not necessarily where he later practised his craft. Appendix B (ii) on pp. 152-160, which forms an integral part of my arguments, reviews at length the textual and other evidence for location.³⁰ The results show that one of the main scribe's revisions of his original recension can be securely associated with the city of Norwich and text which he added on an interpolated leaf located there with reasonable certainty.

²⁸ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

²⁹ Richard Beadle, 'The Medieval Drama of East Anglia: Studies in Dialect, Documentary Records and Stagecraft', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1977); *N-Town Play*, pp. xxix-xxxviii.

³⁰ Any discussion in the other Appendices is repeated in the main part of the text.

Chapter 2

The evolution of the manuscript and its contents

[N.B. Some of the arguments in this chapter can be followed in the collation diagram in Appendix A (ii) on pp. 142-144 which lists the contents of each quire on a play-by-play basis. Other details may be verified in the *Facsimile*.¹]

In this chapter I shall review the physical characteristics of the manuscript and examine the work of the four contributing scribes to suggest a chronology for compilation. In addition to showing the sequence in which the plays were written out, I shall indicate which sections of text were revised and, where possible, whether this occurred before, during, or after initial recension. The provision of a full and complete life of the Virgin and expansion of the doctrinal content, especially sacramental theology, will be noted as important features of all stages of compilation.

Cotton Vespasian D. VIII comprises two-hundred and twenty-five leaves of paper arranged in twenty-one unequal gatherings. Appendix A on pp. 141-143 gives details of collation, quiring, and watermarks of the seven types of paper used for the body of the text.² The manuscript was written by four scribes, the first two of whom predate the others by several decades. Forty of the forty-one plays were written in the second half of the fifteenth century by the main scribe. Since opinions as to date vary I have brought together the views of various authorities with other relevant factors in Appendix C on p. 161. In addition to his normal cursive Anglicana book hand the main scribe wrote parts of the manuscript in Textura Quadrata, which was usually reserved for devotional material. Sections of the *N-Town* text distinguished by use of this script include two Old Testament genealogies and some Marian material.³ This scribe's extensive contribution can be divided into three main periods of activity, two stages of initial recension and later revisions and additions. The Play 41 scribe (Spector's scribe D), who was contemporary with the main scribe, copied the independent 'Assumption of Mary' (Play 41). During the third or fourth decades of the sixteenth century two others worked on sections of text.⁴ Reviser 1 (*Facsimile* - A; Spector's scribe B) copied a single page which is prosodically and thematically consistent with the text in which it is set and may replace lost or damaged

¹ Even where no specific acknowledgement is given, this chapter is indebted to, and seeks to build on Meredith and Kahrl's Introduction to the *Facsimile*, and Spector's Introduction and Notes to *N-Town Play*.

² The flyleaf, which is on paper not used for the plays, was added in the seventeenth century.

³ The genealogies are on ff. 16^V-18^r and 21^r-22^V; the Marian material includes the Gradual Psalms in 'The Presentation of Mary in the Temple' (Play 9) between ff. 44^r-45^r and the Magnificat in 'The Visit to Elizabeth' (Play 13) on ff. 72^V-73^V.

⁴ *N-Town Play*, p. xxiii, nn. 1 & 2.

material on a like-for-like basis.⁵ The more extensive alterations made by Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector's scribe C) include the interpolation of new text-bearing pages, amendments to short phrases and single words, and the addition of marginalia which were apparently connected with performance. Although he was responsible for much less material than the main scribe, his revisions are informative and will be discussed under a separate heading on pp. 33-36.

The contents of the codex originated in several earlier texts, none of which is known to have survived. The main components, some of which were already composites, were:

i) The collection of plays which I refer to as the 'urcycle'. In their entirety these covered approximately the same range of Creation to Doomsday material - including prototypes of some of the early life of the Virgin and the Passion - as the extant plays. Greg suggested that the Proclamation was written to describe this earliest layer of composition using its characteristic thirteen-line stanza for the purpose.⁶ Spector has reduced the speculative element in this suggestion by calling for findings based on prosodic difference to be corroborated by verbal or thematic correspondences. Whilst Spector's refinement cannot be proved conclusively, it adds rigour to Greg's hypothesis since the 'Proclamation thirteener' rhyming *abababab₄c₃ddd₄c₃* was by no means confined to *N-Town*.⁷ Treated with caution, this method provides points of reference against which development of the plays can be measured. A *prima facie* case can be made that, whenever the Proclamation corresponds closely with plays which are all or partly written in this stanza, we are dealing with this layer of text.⁸ Some *urcycle* 'pagents' were copied more or less in their entirety, whereas others contributed only a few stanzas.

ii) A different version of the early life of the Virgin which Meredith has usefully called 'the Mary play'.⁹ The five Marian plays which include a chorus-type expositor, *Contemplacio*, have been collectively referred to as 'the *Contemplacio* group'.¹⁰

⁵ Reviser 1 (*Facsimile* - A; Spector's scribe B) wrote Quire E in which only f. 51^r contains text (10/155-174).

⁶ Greg, 'Bibliographical and Textual Problems', p. 397.

⁷ The stanza is 'a well-known northern pattern, being that of a whole body of Scottish stanzaic alliterative verse...' (Spector, *Genesis*, p. 9) which also occurs throughout *The Castle of Perseverance* and was used in a variant form by the Wakefield Master in the *Towneley* cycle. *N-Town* itself has some thirteen-line stanzas with the same rhyme scheme but longer lines, as well as alliterative versions. Alliterative thirteeners are normally spoken by Herod (see e.g. 18/69-94, 20/9-21). Long-line thirteeners can be found at e.g. Proc./40-52 (cf. 27-39) and also describing the Crucifixion, Harrowing of Hell I, Interment &c. The discrete 'Assumption of the Virgin' (Play 41) uniquely uses a similar stanza concatenated by singles and couplets.

⁸ Spector, *Genesis*, p. 20.

⁹ Meredith, *Mary Play*, pp. 2-4.

¹⁰ *Contemplacio* appears in 'Joachim and Anna' (Play 8), 'The Presentation of Mary in the Temple' (Play 9) which he links with the 'Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10), 'The Parliament of Heaven; The Salutation and Conception' (Play 11), and 'The Visit to Elizabeth' (Play 13).

iii) 'The Purification' (Play 19). It has been suggested that the date 1468 written immediately after the last line, apparently by the main scribe, is specially connected with this play rather than the compilation as a whole.¹¹ Since the play was a late addition to the compilation, the other plays must have been composed earlier.

iv) A different version of the Passion which includes several episodes not described in the Proclamation. Although the content of any Passion play draws ultimately on the Bible, variation was inevitable because the gospels do not agree on events or the order in which they took place.

v) 'The Ascension; The Selection of Matthias' (Play 39) and 'Pentecost' (Play 40) neither of which can be considered to be a fully worked dramatic piece. These 'plays' are the only ones written in a thirteener rhyming *ababbcbc₄d₃eee_{2/4}d₃* (cf the Proclamation stanza which rhymes *abababab₄c₃ddd₄c₃*).¹²

vi) 'The Assumption of the Virgin' (Play 41) which, like the Purification and some Passion material, is not mentioned in the Proclamation. This was written out in a separate booklet by a different scribe who probably functioned merely as a copyist.

Approximately two dozen stanza forms can be identified.¹³ Apart from the various thirteeners noted in footnote 7 above, the commonest forms are octaves rhyming *ababbcbc* with four stresses per line, alternately-rhyming quatrains, and tail-rhyme stanzas (both eight- and six-line forms). Whilst some plays use a single stanza throughout, others have as many as six, often in no immediately discernible pattern. Prosodic change for no apparent reason, linguistic peculiarities, and the revision of the texts by the addition of new material before copying all imply that each of the textual elements listed above was probably composed by a different person or persons. Since heterogeneous new material was added to some plays before all were written out and revised, and four scribes were involved, the manuscript and its contents probably represent the cumulative efforts of about a dozen persons working over a period of more than half a century. Chapter 4, which examines *inter alia* intellectual and physical access to the sources whose influence can be identified, will argue that all those who worked on the plays before recension were professed religious. Similarly the scribal method of the main scribe and linguistic changes made to reinforce sacramentalism by Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector's scribe C) both suggest monastic or fraternal background. In view of this preponderance of clerical involvement it is very likely that the Play 41 scribe and Reviser 1 (*Facsimile* - Reviser A; Spector's scribe B) were also professed.

¹¹ Block, *Ludus Coventriae*, p. xv.

¹² A stanza with the same rhyme scheme occurs at 8/149-249, but the *e*-lines are much longer, sometimes with as many as six stressed syllables.

¹³ *N-Town Play*, pp. xli-xliii.

a) Main scribe

As well as writing out all but one of the plays the main scribe was responsible for rubrication, several revisions and additions, and catchwords.¹⁴ In all probability he also numbered the plays (from 1 to 42, with 17 omitted).¹⁵ Whilst he copied some more or less *verbatim*, in the early Marian plays he accomplished the difficult task of combining material from more than one exemplar. In the latter episodes of Passion Play II, where he seems to have made a conscious effort to blend old and new material, he may also have composed some of the verses. It is not always accurate to speak of him as having 'copied' text and he has, with good reason, been described as a 'scribe/compiler'.¹⁶ The following sub-headings reflect the three main stages by which he wrote out and revised his material rather than the numerical order of the plays.

i) The initial Passion sequence

The initial Passion sequence is the text from the start of Play 26 up to and including the Words on the Cross, 'Heloy, Heloy, lamazabathany?' (32/181) apart from codicological interpolations. It comprises Quires N (except for f. 143), P, Q, R, S, and the first four leaves of T. Whilst critics generally agree that the scribe wrote this at a different time from the rest, opinions differ as to whether he did so before or after. Block spoke categorically of 'copies already made' but Spector takes the opposite position in a footnote to his article on composition and development appended to the *N-Town Play*. Arguing mainly from prosodic and paper evidence, he claims with uncharacteristic vagueness that the scribe 'clearly had before him existing constituents of the cycle written in other metres on different paper stock'.¹⁷ One of the flaws in this reasoning is that the components which the scribe had before him need not necessarily have been those in the manuscript. Fletcher correctly notes that the scribe 'had already copied' Passion Play I 'into a separate booklet on some previous occasion' but reads the whole of Passion Play II as 'copied . . . from the outset with a view to its amalgamation'.¹⁸ Meredith and Kahrl state that Passion Play I was

¹⁴ Catchwords link Quires B-C, N-P (cancelled), and N-O, S-T-V, i.e. parts of 'Joachim and Anna' (Play 8), 'The Last Supper' (Play 27) as revised after initial copying, 'The Procession to Calvary' (Play 32), and 'The Guarding of the Sepulchre' (Play 34, end).

¹⁵ Spector touches on a possible reason for the omission of number 17 in *N-Town Play*, II, p. 473, but his comments do not affect my reading. Note also that *Facsimile* normalises the numbering after Play 16.

¹⁶ Fletcher in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, p. 164.

¹⁷ Block, *Ludus Coventriæ*, p. xxxi; Spector, *N-Town Play*, Vol. II, p. 541, n. 1. It seems to me that Spector has partially misread Block's position.

¹⁸ Fletcher in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, p. 170.

incorporated in its entirety, implying that it must have been copied earlier, without dealing with the particulars of Passion Play II.¹⁹

My reading provides incontrovertible evidence that the main scribe copied the whole of the initial Passion sequence before he started work on the contents of Quires A to M. This section of the text has different scribal characteristics and spelling, and the writing in two sections of interpolated text (f. 143 and ff. 149-151 (Quire O) added respectively to the Entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper) matches what he wrote both before the start of the Passion and when he resumed work on the text after the Last Words at 32/183. Though recognisably that of the same person, his hand in the initial Passion sequence has been described as 'more angular and less shapely' than elsewhere²⁰, and he wrote fewer lines on each page. Ignoring incomplete pages and interpolations, I have calculated that the average for quires A-M is 28.179 lines per page. For Passion Play I the figure is 26.55, for the rest of the initial Passion sequence 25.54, and 27.667 after he resumed work at 32/ 184.

The writing, spacing, and spelling in quires A to M (containing the Proclamation and Plays 1 to 25) and the interpolated f. 143 is like that in the plays after the initial Passion sequence. In Quire O (the last side of which is blank) his writing, though unevenly spaced, is otherwise similar to that of f. 143 and Quires A - M. Whilst none of this on its own proves the point beyond doubt, the layout of the page where the writing changes (reproduced in colour between pp. 6 and 7) allows only one conclusion. The initial Passion sequence ends ten lines from the top of f. 183^v. These ten lines are set out evenly and there is no sense of the text having been compressed to fit limited available space, unlike the stanza at the bottom of the page which had to be written two verses to the line.

The double form *virgula suspensiva* written in red after 'Heloy! Heloy lamazabathany?' (32/183) is further proof. According to Parkes's study of medieval punctuation this mark could be used as both 'a direction for a paraph' and 'a final pause'.²¹ Since it occurs in the middle of a speech it cannot be the former. The final pause is the only possibility, and there would have been no need for such if the text at the top of the page had been added after the verses at the bottom.

The spelling on f. 143 and Quire O also matches that of the beginning and end of the manuscript. The perceptible orthographic differences in 'The Crucifixion' (Play 32) are specially significant because the play includes both the end of the initial Passion sequence and the start of the stint which completed the scribe's original recension of the whole. Before the words on the Cross the scribe wrote *ryth* (32/6, 72, 89), *nowth* (32/9, 37), *sowth* (32/11), *browth* (32/39) whereas after the break he preferred *syght* (32/257, 260), *lyght* (32/261), and *dyghte* and *pyghte* (32/267-8). The contrast in the 'Entry into Jerusalem'

¹⁹ *Facsimile*, p. vii.

²⁰ *Ludus Coventriæ*, p. xv.

²¹ M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), p. 307.

(Play 26, end) is particularly marked. In order to integrate the interpolated f. 143, he had to cancel a stage direction and six lines of a speech by Peter at the bottom of f. 142^v. The penultimate word of the third line of this cancellation is ‘*nowth*’.²² When he copied the same stanza for the second time on the verso of the interpolated leaf he preferred ‘*nought*’ (26/388) to the earlier spelling. Quire O (ff. 149) shows a similar pattern, including ‘*sowght*’ (27/159), ‘*brought*’ (27/184, 190), ‘*thought*’ (27/191), and ‘*ryght*’ (27/253, 259).

Since even limited consistency in spelling develops only gradually, there must have been a break between the time when the scribe suspended work at the Last Words and when he started the rest. Although the point cannot be proved, I think that at least some months and perhaps as much as a year or more may have elapsed between these two main spells of scribal activity. Lucas’s recent study of the Norfolk-born John Capgrave (d. 1464), half-a-dozen of whose works have survived in holograph, argues that it took anything up to ten years for him consistently to replace spellings such as *skole* and *skin* with *scole* and *scin*, and for g- to be preferred to ȝ- in words such as *gyue*.²³ However, the parallel is not exact since Capgrave’s spelling changes were wholly consistent whereas those of the main *N-Town* scribe were not. Lucas also suggests that Capgrave may have been motivated by an externally imposed desire for consistency. In spite of the discrepancies the comparison supports my suggestion that the main *N-Town* scribe would have taken some time habitually to change from -*th* to -*ght* and -*wt* to -*th*.

The extant Passion was, from an early stage, divided into two parts written for performance in consecutive years. Passion Play I ends with an affecting speech in which the Virgin Mary looks forward to the redemption of humankind:

Why wolt þu, gracyous Fadyr, þat it xal be so?
 May man not ellys be savyd be non other kende?
 ȝet, Lord Fadyr, þan þat xal comforde myn wo
 Whan man is savyd be my chylde and browth to a good ende.
 Now, dere son, syn þu hast evyr be so ful of mercy
 þat wylt not spare þiself for þe love þu hast to man,
 On all mankind now have þu pety -
 And also thynk on þi modyr, þat hevy woman. (28/185-end)²⁴

The reference to the Redemption implies that the playwright envisaged that subsequent biblical events including Christ’s death on the Cross and the Harrowing of Hell would be performed, and shared features suggest that he may well have composed the relevant episodes. Both Passion Plays initially explore the same topic, the authority to

²² *N-Town Play*, Vol. I, p. 259 fn.

²³ Peter J. Lucas, *From Author to Audience: John Capgrave and Medieval Publication* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1997), pp. 246-8.

²⁴ When the scribe completed this speech the last three pages of Quire R (ff. 162^v and 163) were blank; the Procession of Saints on f. 163 was added later.

which absolute obedience is due, which I shall discuss in Chapter 5. They were also to be performed in a similar, if not the same, playing area. The remarkably detailed vernacular stage directions throughout the initial Passion sequence (except the Prologues at the start of Passion Play I) stipulate a principal scaffold, probably used for the Last Supper and the Crucifixion in alternate years, set among a number of subsidiary scaffolds, and make clever use of the 'place' or 'mydplace'. Also contrasting different notions of obedience, Passion Play II opens with the Trial before Annas and Cayphas, has the Crucifixion as its central episode, and ends with the appearance of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene. Each of these Passion Plays was written out as continuous text without gaps.²⁵ Both existed as separate booklets before they became part of the *N-Town* text, with Passion Play I in Quires N, P-R and Quires S-T⁴ containing Passion Play II up to the Words on the Cross.

The evidence of the paper (as to which see Appendix A (i) on p. 141) suggests that the two Passion Plays may not have been written out in immediate succession as part of a single scribal stint. The original recension of Passion Play I in Quires N, P, Q, and R is on Bull's Head paper, which was manufactured either in the Champagne region or Besançon.²⁶ Quires S-T which contain Passion Play II from 29/1-32/183 is on Crossed Keys paper which, like that used for most of the rest of the manuscript, came from Piedmont. Since paper stocks from different regions may not have been supplied by the same factor at the same time, it cannot be securely established that the Cross Keys paper was started merely because the Bull's Head supply was all used up. On the other hand, the consistent spelling throughout the initial Passion sequence suggests that any break in scribal activity was much shorter than the period that elapsed between the initial Passion sequence and the rest of the plays. It is therefore legitimate to consider it as a single scribal unit.

The manuscript records a fuller treatment of the Passion than the version described in the Proclamation, in which the 'xxij^{ti} pagent' dealt with Palm Sunday and the following 'pagent' included the Last Supper and anticipated the Betrayal. The Betrayal itself was covered in the 'xxv^{ti} pagent'. There is no trace of the Prologues of Satan and John the Baptist or the Magdalen's plea for mercy, all of which are prominent episodes in the extant plays, and the Conspiracy is not adequately described. The Proclamation also lacks several episodes in Passion Play II. There is no initial appearance by Herod, the two Trials before Pilate are not distinguished, the Flagellation is conflated with the Scourging and Mocking, the Procession to Calvary is omitted, Pilate's encounter with the Soldiers is not mentioned, nothing is said about the *Descensus ad Inferos*, and the actual Harrowing is dealt with only cursorily. Unlike these omissions, Secundus Vexillator's account of the Death of Judas as

²⁵ The gaps printed in *N-Town Play* are Spector's editorial imposition. *Ludus Coventriæ* is closer to the manuscript, in which Play 27 starts seven lines from the top of f. 146^r, Play 28 starts seventeen lines from the top of f. 158^r, Play 30 starts nine lines from the bottom of f. 169^v, &c.

²⁶ Briquet, IV, pp. 715-6.

an entire ‘pagent’ (Proc./360-372) is actually longer than the relevant play’s eight lines of text and two stage directions (30/24 + s.d. - 32 + s.d.). Pilate’s wife is accorded a prominence (Proc./373-385) not paralleled in the corresponding play, in which Satan is the more important (31/1-37, 42-56). This substitution of one version of the Passion by the initial Passion sequence was the most extensive of all the revisions made to the *urcycle*.

ii) The *urcycle* text, Mary play, and other elements.

When the scribe started work on the rest of the text the general content was probably indicated by an exemplar containing the Proclamation and some or all of the *urcycle*. However, he, or possibly another clerk directing his work, used this as only a rough guide. Whilst some plays closely follow the plan described by the Vexillatores, from a very early stage the scribe can be seen to have varied the *urcycle* text by adapting the material with which he was working. Although the Proclamation normally devotes a thirteen-line stanza to each ‘pagent’, he wrote just four lines each for the Trial of Mary and Joseph (which became Play 14) and Joseph fetching midwives (which in the extant text forms part of ‘The Nativity’ (Play 15) (Proc./183-6, 187-190)). It is not immediately clear from any of the printed editions that he left sufficient space in each case (on ff. 3^v and 4^r) to accommodate another nine lines of text for each of these descriptions. This contrasts with his layout later in the Proclamation on f. 6^r where the third and first Vexillatores are given a single thirteener between them in which to describe Palm Sunday and the Last Supper (Proc./308-320). These departures from the norm of one stanza per ‘pagent’ imply that the scribe had only a rough idea of what he would be copying when he wrote out these sections of the Proclamation. His flexible attitude to his material means that critical assessment of one section of text may not be valid for the rest.

Seven plays use the Proclamation thirteener for all or most of their text and are close enough to the Proclamation to be ascribed (using Spector’s refinement of Greg’s theory) to the *urcycle*:

Play 1	The Creation of Heaven; the Fall of Lucifer
Play 2	The Creation of the World; the Fall of Man
Play 3	Cain and Abel
Play 4	Noah
Play 22	The Baptism
Play 23	Parliament of Hell; The Temptation
Play 42	Judgement Day

None relates either mainly to the Virgin or the Passion.

Of these plays only ‘Cain and Abel’ (Play 3), ‘The Parliament of Hell and the Temptation’ (Play 23), and the incomplete ‘Judgement Day’ (Play 42) look to have been

copied wholly without changes. The greater part of Plays 1 and 2 were evidently taken from a composite exemplar in which the Creation of Heaven, the Fall of Lucifer, the Creation of the World, and the Fall of Man formed a single dramatic unit. The last quatrain of Play 1 (1/79-end) and the first nine lines of Play 2 (2/1-9) together make up a Proclamation thirteener which starts in one play and ends in the next. This division into two plays provides further evidence of how from an early stage the scribe adapted his exemplars.

He added new material drawing attention to the punishment resulting from man's first disobedience in the 'Fall of Man' section of Play 2. The start of the play is predominantly written in thirteeners up to the point where God first calls Adam to account (2/19¹⁹1-4), as are the closing stanzas dealing with the Expulsion and Adam's recriminations against Eve (2/283-end). Nearly one hundred lines of tail-rhyme stanzas, in which God continues his interrogation of Adam and condemns Eve, have been added between these sections. A linguistic distinction shows that two exemplars may have been combined before the material came for copying. In the thirteeners Eve is tempted by Serpens (2/87-90, 100-112, 115-6), whereas in the tail-rhyme stanzas the 'werm with ... wyls wyk' (2/227) is referred to as Diabolus (2/235) and no attempt was made to correct this inconsistency.

It is unclear whether the scribe was responsible for the additions made to the *urcycle* stanzas that make up a large part of 'Noah' (Play 4). When the Angel enters at 4/117 the Proclamation thirteeners of the play's opening give way to *ababbcbc* octaves, dealing with matters of obedience which in Chapter 5 I shall argue was central to the plays' purpose. The octaves cover the Angel's instruction to Noah, the death of Cain at the hands of the blind archer Lamech, and the obedience of Noah's wife.²⁷ Building on the the notion of punishment created by the added material in the preceding play, the death of Cain (of which this is the only known English dramatic example²⁸) is the first of what I read as quasi-judicial punishments meted out to *N-Town*'s major evildoers.

As he copied the early Old Testament plays the scribe added genealogical material in his *Textura Quadrata* hand. The table giving particulars of Noah's descent from Adam on ff. 16^v-18^r has biographical glosses on f. 17^r in his normal bookhand. Although some words have been lost due to cropping, references to the killing of Cain and Lamech's bigamy remain. The second table tracing Noah's descendants, which starts at the foot of f. 21^r and ends on f. 22^v, is all in *Textura Quadrata* and has no added biographical detail. These genealogies can be read as an integral part of the original recension since there is no

²⁷ Her obedience contrasts with other medieval English dramatisations.

²⁸ Although not known from English texts, it occurs in the Cornish *Creacion of the World*, *Le Mystère de la Passion de Troyes*, Florence's *Quando Iddio fece il Mondo*, the *Egerer Fronleichnamsspiel*, and *Le mistère du Viel Testament*. (Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 208 n. 43).

sign that the scribe compressed them to fit available space, which would be the case if he had added them *post scriptum*.

‘The Baptism’ (Play 22) is particularly important to my overall reading of *N-Town* because it teaches two aspects of orthodox sacramentalism. Edited texts of this play show no *prima facie* sign of revision, but John’s opening speech (22/1-53) was copied on an interpolated leaf by Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector’s scribe C). Although the speech is thematically and prosodically consistent with the text that follows, it cannot be confirmed as part of the *urcycle* since the Proclamation makes no mention of an address by John. The rest of the play seems to have been copied in a single stint, although the Baptist’s closing speech (22/132-183) which is also not mentioned in the Proclamation was probably an addition made before copying. The rhyme scheme is consistent throughout but lines are longer after 22/131. The content of this play shows that both the *urcycle* and the main scribe’s original recension were concerned with sacramental theology. Jesus says to John:

Baptym to take I come to the,
And conferme þat sacrament þat nowe xal be. (22/62-3)

This anachronistic confirmation of the Sacrament is reinforced by lexical repetition. The word ‘baptism’ is repeated no fewer than thirteen times²⁹ in the Proclamation thirteeners, and twice more as part of a proper noun.³⁰ A thematic shift from Baptism to Confession and Penance occurs at the point where the line length changes. After this ‘baptism’ occurs just once (22/136) but there are eleven references to ‘penauns’³¹ and six to its doctrinal prerequisite, ‘shryfte’ (or a cognate form).³² This device of lexical iteration to reinforce important teaching will be noted in several other plays. The expansion of the sacramentalism and other catechetical material forms an integral part of *N-Town*’s orthodoxy which I shall discuss in Chapter 5.

‘The Parliament of Hell; The Temptation’ (Play 23), which in English drama is unique to *N-Town*, corresponds closely with the Proclamation (Proc./269-274).³³ The doctrinal content is explicit. The diabolic trio all express ‘dowte’ (‘grett dowte’ in Satan’s case)³⁴ which is confounded by Jesus resisting temptation through repeated invocation of divine authority.³⁵ The orthodoxy of the text even extends to a reference to ‘materal brede’ (23/101) which is a phrase normally used when considering Transubstantiation. If

²⁹ 22/23, 27, 29, 30, 33, 62, 65, 68, 70, 73, 78, 79, 91.

³⁰ 22/ 54, 119.

³¹ 22/137, 139, 140, 143, 149, 151, 154, 168, 175, 176, 180.

³² 22/147, 151, 163, 166, 176, 177.

³³ The *York Smiths*’ play prefaces the Temptation with a long speech by Diabolus. *York Plays*, p. 186.

³⁴ ‘dowte’ at 23/9, 10, 13, 14; ‘grett dowte’ at 23/4, 21, 28.

³⁵ i.e. ‘be wurd of God’ at 23/ 93, 95, 99, 102 and ‘Goddys wurd’ at 23/100 and ‘holy book’ and ‘Holy Scrypture’ (respectively at 23/131, 184).

this was copied verbatim from the *urcycle*, the uncompromising orthodoxy of its message must have been present in the earliest layer of text.

Proclamation thirteeners which may indicate the presence of less substantial remnants of the *urcycle* can be traced in at least five other plays:

Play 10	Marriage of Mary and Joseph
Play 12	Joseph's Doubt
Play 16	The Shepherds
Play 18	The Magi
Play 20	The Slaughter of the Innocents; Death of Herod

All show a degree of correspondence with the Proclamation, unlike the Ass-and-Foal section of 'The Entry to Jerusalem' (26/347-385) and part of Mary Magdalen's repentance in 'The Conspiracy' (27/141-192) which are also in thirteeners. Since neither is described in the Proclamation these interpolated sections may have been part of the *urcycle*, but on the other hand, they may merely have been composed in what has already been seen to be a widely used stanza. The next sub-heading will show that both were added after a substantial portion of the manuscript (and perhaps all of it) had been copied in the first instance.

The scribe combined text from the Mary Play with *urcycle* material in both the 'Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10) and 'Joseph's Doubts' (Play 12).³⁶ This started the considerable expansion of the limited Marian material described in the Proclamation. Both plays were revised so extensively both during and after copying that I have not been able to follow the sequence in which changes were made.

Since 'The Shepherds' (Play 16) underwent a series of revisions its contents must have been considered specially important. Only two *urcycle* stanzas survive, but the fact that they were retained at the time when new material was added foregrounds their significance. The first is the Angel's opening speech which endorses the sacramental theology already noted in connection with the 'Baptism' (Play 22) and which I believe goes to the heart of the manuscript's purpose:

Sacramentys þer xul be vij
Wonnyn þoſ[r]we þat childys wounde. (16/5-6)

Subsequent revisions to this play build on this foundation of catechetical orthodoxy. The second of the play's Proclamation thirteeners (16/90-112) augments the doctrinal element by combining praise of the Trinity with Marian eulogy. Though metrically consistent with the Proclamation the octave of this thirteener is uncharacteristically alliterative:

Heyle, floure of flourys, fayrest ifownde!
Heyle, perle peerles, prime rose of prise!

³⁶ *Mary Play*, p. 1 &c. See also Fletcher, 'Layers of Revision', 469-78.

Heyl, blome on bedde, we xul be vnbownde
 With þi blody woundys and werkys full wyse!
 Heyl, God grettest, I grete þe on grownde!
 þe gredy devyl xal grone grysly as a gryse
 Whan þu wynnyst þis worlde with þi wyde wounde
 And puttyst man to paradys with plenty of prys. (16/90-7)

The stanza of which this forms part appears to have been included at the expense of a speech by one of the Shepherds. Although they always speak in turn in the tail-rhyme sections of this play this thirteener, which is marked to Primus Pastor, follows a tail-rhyme stanza by Secundus. As I shall show on pp. 34-5 below, this play's emphasis on sacramental theology was strengthened further at a later stage by Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector's scribe C). 'The Magi' (Play 18) and 'The Slaughter of the Innocents; The Death of Herod' (Play 20) both contain Proclamation stanzas. Two of Herod's speeches include thirteeners (18/68-94, 217-229) and match the Proclamation description.³⁷ The earlier section incorporates alliterative quatrains, and tail-rhyme stanzas were grafted on to the *urcycle* remnants for the speeches of the Kings and their exchanges with the tyrant as well as the Angel's warning to Joseph and the killing of the firstborn. Before 'The Purification' (Play 19) was incorporated (discussed on p. 26, below), 'The Magi' had formed a single play with 'The Slaughter of the Innocents' (Play 20, start). This in its turn had been combined with a separate 'Death of Herod' (Play 20, end). The death itself and some of Herod's boasting speech (20/9-21, 27-40) is probably all that remains of the *urcycle* here.

Every other play in the manuscript was in some way revisional. In some parts of the text whole new plays replace earlier versions. Elsewhere old and new material was combined, and was sometimes added to or varied, often in discernable stages. Nine plays all written predominantly in a single stanza show no *prima facie* sign of having been altered or added to. Since they cover episodes mentioned in the Proclamation, if the earliest text was indeed all written in thirteeners, these must all have replaced *urcycle* versions of the same episodes:

Play 5	Abraham and Isaac
Play 6	Moses
Play 7	Jesse Root
Play 21	Christ with the Doctors
Play 24	The Woman taken in Adultery
Play 25	The Raising of Lazarus
Play 39	The Ascension; Selection of Matthias
Play 40	Pentecost

³⁷ Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector's scribe C) wrote 18/221-302 on ff. 95-6. The first nine lines complete a thirteener which the main scribe started on f. 94^V (18/217-220).

‘The Purification’ (Play 19), which is not mentioned in the Proclamation, is also written in a single stanza throughout and shows no sign of having been revised. Although the ‘Trial of Mary and Joseph’ (Play 14) is now prosodically diverse, most of the scribe’s original recension used a single stanza. (I shall show below that prosodic diversity of this play results from the main scribe having added the prologue spoken by Den (14/1-33) at a later stage in the manuscript’s evolution.)

Prosodic diversity suggests that all the other plays may have been revised either during or before copying:

Play 8	Joachim and Anna
Play 9	The Presentation of Mary
Play 11	The Parliament of Heaven; The Salutation and Conception
Play 13	The Visit to Elizabeth
Play 15	The Nativity

The first four of these have already been mentioned in connection with the changes made when the Mary play was adapted for inclusion in the manuscript. ‘The Nativity’ (Play 15) blends two sections of text, combining *ababbcbc* octaves with clusters of quatrains, although it is not clear why this was done. However, the Cherry Tree episode which is not mentioned in the four-line Proclamation description (Proc./187-190) seems to be an accretion. Block, discussing use of the mid-line point for emphasis, considered that ‘the variation in the pointing corresponds with an addition to the original’, linking this addition with the revisions to ‘Noah’ (Play 4) noted on p. 20 above.³⁸ Although neither York, Chester, or Towneley include this episode in their treatment of the Flight into Egypt³⁹, continental versions present it with a palm tree instead of the cherry.⁴⁰ It was also widely known in Marian art and the addition of this section of text, like ‘The Purification’, is more evidence of the special treatment accorded to the Virgin in *N-Town*.

Meredith and Spector both argue that one person was responsible for prosodically distinctive changes made to three of the Marian plays.⁴¹ Although the base stanza of the Contemplacio group rhymes *ababbcbc*, sections of ‘The Salutation and Conception’ (Play 11, end), ‘Joseph’s Doubt’ (Play 12), and the Conclusion to ‘The Visit to Elizabeth’ (Play 13) all use an *abababab*₄ form, often in connection with quatrains. Whilst the *abababab* octave in ‘The Creation of the World’ (2/10-17) might possibly be the first eight lines of a truncated thirteener, it is more likely to be a stanza in its own right where it is twice used in

³⁸ *Ludus Coventriæ*, p. xxvii.

³⁹ York, XVII, (The Marshals); Towneley, 15; Chester, X, 257-288. The 1520 Beverley playlist includes ‘Cowpers: fleyinge to Egippe’. See E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), p.340.

⁴⁰ Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 232 n. 59.

⁴¹ Meredith, *Mary Play*, pp. 4-5; Spector, *Genesis*, pp. 104-8. See also Fletcher, ‘Layers of revision,’ p. 472.

three successive stanzas (11/261-284 and 13/151-174). These revisional octaves must have been added before the text was copied. Play 11 is one of the plays which the scribe copied from two exemplars simultaneously, keeping track of which he was using by marking the loops of the capitula before each stanza.⁴² Since text denoted by these dotted capitula uses both the base *ababbcbc* stanza and the alternately rhyming octave, these revisional stanzas must have been in the exemplar. There is no sign of manuscript disruption where they occur in Play 13, even though the Conclusion to 'The Visit to Elizabeth' which includes 13/151-174 has been compressed so as to make room for the Alternate Conclusion (13/147A-185A).

The earliest substantial alterations to the subject matter announced in the Proclamation were made when the scribe added 'Joseph's Doubt' (Play 12) and the 'Trial of Mary and Joseph' (Play 14).⁴³ Before he reached the start of the Passion a further expansion occurred when he set 'The Purification' (Play 19) in the middle of what had once been the unified Magi / Slaughter of the Innocents sequence. This play is specially significant since it was one of the complete plays added to the original scheme envisaged by the Proclamation. This may account for the date of 1468 probably written by the main scribe at the end of the play in the right hand margin on f. 100v.⁴⁴

'The Purification' was added with more regard to content than dramatic effectiveness or narrative continuity. In order to demonstrate this the evidence for 'The Magi' (Play 18) and 'The Slaughter of the Innocents' (Play 20, start) having once formed a single play must be carefully considered. They share unique features: *Senescallus* appears only in these two plays and the derogatory 'pap-hawk' (18/88, 20/11) is a nonce-word recorded only here by *O.E.D.* and *M.E.D.* Apart from Herod's alliterative thirteeners the dominant stanzas are tail-rhyme (*aaabcccb* and *aabccb*). 'The Death of Herod' (Play 20, end) which corresponds closely with the Proclamation description (Proc./239-242) is in thirteeners and is probably an *urcycle* remnant. The only other stanzas are alliterating quatrains at the start of Herod's opening speech (18/1-20) and a quintuple rhyme *aaaaa* spoken by the Virgin (18/259-264). This unique stanza seems to provide a prosodic contrast between the sincerity of her approbation of the Kings' homage to the Christ child and the deviousness of Herod when he abandons his usual alliterative stanzas in favour of the rhyming verse of the Magi.⁴⁵ However a note of caution must be sounded. The sequence in which he tries to ingratiate himself (18/214-302) was interpolated on ff. 95-6 by Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - Reviser B; Spector's scribe C). Although it is thematically and

⁴² *Facsimile*, p. xvii.

⁴³ See Fletcher, 'Layers of Revision', 469-478 and Meredith, *Mary Play*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴ Block suggested that the date may be connected with the play rather than the compilation of the manuscript (*Ludus Coventriæ*, p. xv).

⁴⁵ Herod speaks the same rhyming stanza as Primus Rex at 18/217-242. This can be compared with his alliterative braggadocio at e.g. 18/69-94.

prosodically consistent with the rest of the section in which it was set, I shall later show that Reviser 2 altered what the main scribe had written elsewhere and the extant version may not be exactly the same as the main scribe's original recension.

Despite their shared features these two plays lack coherence when the text is read as part of a sequence, as though some lines have been lost. Play 18 ends with the Magi indicating their intention to return whence they came:

(The Angel) taught us hom tyll oure halle
A wey by another mere. (18/321-2)

Now we wake
Pe wey to take
Home full ryght. (18/332-end)

Since the Latin stage directions in the rest of this play - though less detailed than the meticulous vernacular of the Passion - are normally precise, it is surprising that there is no mention of the Kings' departure. The thoroughness of the treatment when Primus Rex announces their intention to seek the Messiah is typical of other parts of the play:

Go we to sek owr Lord and our lech,
Yon stere will us tech þe weyis full sone. (18/230-1)

Even though this speech connotes action it is followed by an explicit stage direction:

Tunc ibunt reges cum muneribus ad Jesum, et Primus Rex dicit. (18/234 + s.d.)⁴⁶
A direction at the start of Play 20 and references to unspecified previous action also imply that text has been lost:

Tunc, respiciens, Senescallus vadyt ad Herodem dicens: ⁴⁷
Lord, I haue walkyd be dale and hylle
And wayted as it is 3oure wyll.
The kyngys iij stelyn awey full stylle
Thorwe Bedleem londe. (20/init. s.d., 1-4)

The temporal adverb looks forward to what is about to happen and, significantly, back to what has just happened. Yet 'tunc' cannot refer back either to 'The Purification' or to 'The Magi' (Play 18) at the end of which the whereabouts of the Kings is clear for all to see. The writer needed to explain their failure to re-appear in Play 20.

The report of the Kings' disappearance seems to be a less than satisfactory attempt to resolve the lack of conclusion to Play 18 caused by the loss of part of the earlier unified version of these episodes. The Seneschal's speech reporting that the Magi have gone is not necessary to the 'Slaughter of the Innocents' (Play 20). The play would in fact be poetically stronger if it began with Herod's pomping speech (20/9-56). The rather lame

⁴⁶ = Then the kings will go with gifts to Jesus, and the first king says.

⁴⁷ = Then, looking about him, the Seneschal goes to Herod saying.

opening by Senescallus does nothing to help the actor playing Herod make an initial impact. And if this should be dismissed as a present day critical judgement which ought not to be applied to a medieval text, the start of Play 18 employs just this method, as do other late medieval English versions. The Massacre of the Innocents in *York* (Play XIX) and *Chester* (Play X) both start with self-glorification by Herod. *Towneley* (Play 16) achieves a similar effect with a 115-line opening speech of extravagant sycophancy by Nuncius.

Geographically closer to and more or less contemporary with *N-Town* is the Digby *Candlemas Play*, which after a preliminary announcement by Poeta also starts with a boasting Herod.⁴⁸ The missing lines confirm that the Marian didacticism of 'The Purification' was more important than dramatic logic or poetic effectiveness at this point in *N-Town*'s account of the early life of the Christ child.⁴⁹

The scribe left blank pages after the other plays in Quire H (Plays 15 and 16) but did not do so after Plays 18 and 19. This suggests that 'The Purification' (Play 19) was fitted into space left for it. The writing at the end of Play 18 and the first stanza of Play 20 is fluent and resembles that of most of the rest of quires A - M. Though far from untidy, it is less neat than on the first two pages of 'The Purification' where vertical left-hand margins and careful horizontals point to care that the scribe did not always exercise elsewhere. A similar distinction can also be seen in the second and third stanzas of Play 20 on f. 101^r, which were apparently written out at a different time to the first stanza on the page. The spacing on the first three sides of Play 19 is slightly greater than the scribe's average of 28.179 lines per page for quires A - M (f. 97^v has 31 lines and both sides of f. 98 have 30 lines). These features are consistent with Play 19 having been written out later than the first stanza of Play 20.

This part of Quire H seems to have been written out in the following order. First it was decided to expand the Marian content of the collection by adding 'The Purification'. The scribe may have taken this decision himself but, if not, it was made known to him either before he started 'The Magi' (Play 18) or soon after he began it. Whichever applies, the point at which the unified text was to be divided was determined with more haste than regard to effective performance. After finishing Play 18, the scribe left space that he judged sufficient to accommodate the new material which he either knew he was about to receive or had in his possession. He copied the first stanza of 'The Slaughter of the Innocents' as an *aide-mémoire* to mark the approximate point reached because: i) he was working from a single exemplar for Plays 18 and 20, and ii) he realised that the point

⁴⁸ The relevant article in the composite Bodleian MS Digby 133 is dated 1512.

⁴⁹ The inclusion of the eight lines of verse and two stage directions recording the death of Judas between 30/24 and 30/33 similarly interferes with the dramatic coherence of the build-up to the Trials before Pilate and Herod.

chosen for division left a narrative discontinuity that had to be explained. He then copied 'The Purification' before he finished Play 20.

After this he worked steadily through to at least the end of 'The Raising of Lazarus' (Play 25) which ends on the final verso of Quire M. Since the Passion starts on the following page at the start of Quire N there are two possibilities as to what he did next. Either he started an *urcycle*-based Passion only to abandon it in favour of the extant version or he immediately incorporated the initial Passion sequence. He then finished his initial recension by writing out the concluding events of the Passion (i.e. everything after the Last Words at 32/183 up to and including 'Amen' at the end of the 'Appearance to Mary Magdalen' (Play 37). Since the diverse prosody and the language of the stage directions show that the earlier part of this section of text is a blend of material, he seems to have worked from more than one exemplar. Whilst individual episodes are written mainly in a single stanza, whole plays (as divided by number) tend to be prosodically mixed. The principal stanza forms used are octaves rhyming *ababbcbc*, some tail-rhyme stanzas, and clusters of quatrains, but there are no thirteeners. The language of the stage directions also points to material having been combined. Throughout Passion Play I all directions are in the vernacular, but the early episodes of Passion Play II occasionally use Latin. From Play 35 onwards all directions are in Latin.

He also revised *urcycle* text for 'Cleophas and Luke; the Appearance to Thomas' (Play 38) which combines material described in the Proclamation (in a thirteener plus the first quatrain of another) as separate 'pagents' (Proc./464-480). The Emmaus section is in octaves with a quatrain at the breaking of bread immediately before Jesus reveals his identity to Cleophas and Luke. (The sudden change of stanza may be connected with an allusion to Transubstantiation which, along with examples from other plays, will be considered later in connection with the discussion of orthodoxy in Chapter 5.) Lines are appreciably longer in the Thomas episode. The result is a carefully realised dramatic treatment, unlike 'The Ascension; the Selection of Matthias' (Play 39) and 'Pentecost' (Play 40). Both these plays use the same *ababbcbc*₄*d₃eee_{2/4}d₃* rhyme. Since this unusual stanza is not found elsewhere, both may have been written by the same individual who was not otherwise involved.⁵⁰ The Proclamation descriptions of these plays show considerable hesitancy. The first four lines of a thirteener relate to Thomas (Proc./477-480) and the next nine lines refer to the Ascension (Proc./481-9) with no mention of the choosing of Matthias. Pentecost on the other hand gets a whole stanza (Proc./490-502). Apart from the incomplete stanzas where space was left for their completion (Proc./183-190) this is the only instance where the Proclamation gives less than a whole stanza to a play.

⁵⁰ A similar rhyme scheme used in 'Joachim and Anna' (Play 8) for the exchanges between the Virgin's parents, the shepherds, and the Angel has longer lines, particularly in the *e*-rhymes. See 8/149-249.

Block stated unequivocally that these two plays were unfinished, claiming ‘obvious signs of haste and incompleteness in the compilation’.⁵¹ And though Fry argued that both are doctrinally complete, this does not mean that they were finished from the dramatic standpoint.⁵² Untypical lack of precision in the stage directions (which all end with ‘et cetera’ except for 40/13 + s.d.) suggests that a preliminary draft was copied into the manuscript and that details necessary to a performance text were to be supplied later. Narrative inconsistencies in ‘The Ascension’ also support Block’s reading. Although an incipit mentions ‘*Maria et undecim discipulis et duobus angelis*’⁵³, only one angel speaks and the apostles should number twelve since Matthias was chosen in the previous play.⁵⁴ Mary is silent and the Angel foretells the second coming of Christ without explicating the ‘comfforte’ announced in the Proclamation (Proc./487). Furthermore ‘Pentecost’ is anachronistic since the twelve named apostles include Judas who has already hanged himself. The text also mentions his replacement, Matthias, and omits Thaddeus (Jude). In addition to forgetting his scripture, whoever composed these verses cannot have read either the Proclamation in its entirety or the Death of Judas in the earlier part of ‘The Trial before Pilate’ (Play 30). The scribe too, though normally alert to what he was copying, here seems to have been functioning in automatic mode, which might indicate that he knew the text to be embryonic. ‘Pentecost’ also neglects the biblically-authorised speaking in tongues which is accurately described in the Proclamation:

All maner langage hem spak with tung,
Latyn, Grek, and Ebrew among. (Proc./499-500)

The play mentions glossolalia only obliquely when Primus Judeus, referring to the Apostles as ‘a dronkyn felachepp’ (40/15), claims that:

Muste in here brayn so sclyly doth creppe
Pat þei cheteryn and chateryn as they jays were. (40/18-19)

This dramaturgically unsatisfactory state of affairs implies that these rudimentary texts were included to satisfy the need for a sort of scriptural comprehensiveness rather than dramatic effectiveness, and that the inconsistencies were expected to be removed before the episodes were performed.

After this it remained only for the main scribe to complete his first version of the whole text by returning to the *urcycle* exemplar for the ‘Last Judgement’.

⁵¹ *Ludus Coventriae*, p. xxxii.

⁵² Fry, ‘The Unity of the *Ludus Coventriae*’, p. 564 n. 106.

⁵³ = Mary with eleven disciples and two angels.

⁵⁴ James the Less (with Philip) is also singled out in the interpolated Ass-and-Foal sequence in the Entry into Jerusalem. See Appendix B (ii) on pp. 153-160.

iii) Play 41, numbering, and revisions

The scribe made a number of substantial changes to his initial recension. Whilst most of these can be identified without difficulty it is not usually possible to work out the precise order in which they were made. None the less it is clear that he did not start at the beginning and work through to the end.

The most extensive addition was the insertion of the booklet containing the elaborate 'Assumption of Mary' (Play 41) into what now forms the last gathering.⁵⁵ Because it is not mentioned in the Proclamation the incorporation of this play signals another substantial extension of the Marian content. Without it, the expansion of the life of the Virgin which had begun with changes made to 'Joseph's Doubt' (Play 12), and the addition of the 'Trial of Mary and Joseph' (Play 14) and 'The Purification' (Play 19), would have been incomplete. Inclusion of the Assumption booklet and, indeed, the splendour with which the play was to be staged attest the exceptional nature of *N-Town's* Marian devotion. The text of the play shows only a few minor revisions, most of which are so small that all that can be claimed with certainty is that the writing is not that of the rest.⁵⁶ But Greg and Block both identified 'Pat 3e schuld ben absent' (41/214) on f. 217^v (in the right hand margin 45 mm. from the top) as written by the main scribe, which suggests that he may have been personally responsible for incorporating the play into the manuscript.⁵⁷

All the plays were numbered, probably by the main scribe, including the interpolated booklet containing 'The Assumption'.⁵⁸ Even if the scribe did not write the numerals, they were in place before he had finished with the manuscript. This is important since at the end of this chapter I shall argue that the plays were not bound in the present arrangement until a century or more after the last of the four scribes had finished work. The numbers would have helped a later scholar, whose interests would have been different from those of the plays' compilers, collate the eclectic material with which he was dealing. However, not all the plays were numbered in exactly the same way. The scribe wrote each of the Passion Plays as continuous text, not only in the initial Passion sequence but through the end of 'The Appearance to Mary Magdalene' (Play 37). Except for the first three Old Testament plays all the others start at the top of a page.⁵⁹ Block's text in *Ludus Coventriæ* corresponds more closely with the manuscript *mise en page* than Spector's editorial

⁵⁵ Since 'Judgement Day' (Play 42) is incomplete there must once have been another quire.

⁵⁶ *Facsimile*, p. xxiv.

⁵⁷ *The Assumption of the Virgin: A Miracle Play from the N-Town Cycle*, ed. by W. W. Greg (Oxford: Clarendon, 1915), p. 7; see also *Ludus Coventriæ*, p. 361, n. 7.

⁵⁸ The start of 'The Baptism' (Play 22) written by Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector's scribe C) on f. 112, which was interpolated, has no number.

⁵⁹ 'Cain and Abel' (Play 3) and 'Abraham and Isaac' (Play 5) both follow the plays that precede them without a break. The different layout for these plays may be because at this early stage the scribe had not yet decided what his practice would be.

divisions printed in *N-Town Play*, which give a false impression of separateness in the Passion episodes.

At approximately this stage the scribe re-numbered some of the 'pagents' in the Proclamation in what seems to have been a vain attempt to make them match the sequence in the body of the text. Frustration caused by the inherent impossibility of the task may explain why he did not at the same time complete the two stanzas where he had left space for extra verses.

The 'Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10) was extensively revised. The main scribe added dialogue between Episcopus and Minister (10/92-115 + s.d.) opposite the erstwhile start of the play on f. 48^v. A flower-shaped *signe de renvoi* (with a catchphrase) indicates that this was to be incorporated into the main text at the bottom of f. 50^r.⁶⁰ After the last of these added stanzas a dagger-shaped *signe* re-positions the last two lines to f. 50^v.⁶¹ The stage at which he made the addition is not certain. The fusion of two exemplars described in the previous sub-section may have resulted in a text which immediately needed revision. If so, it would have been logical to make the necessary alterations as soon as it had been copied. On the other hand, the original start of the play is on the first page of a gathering (Quire D). If the order was immediately found wanting, a wholly re-written version would have been less likely to give rise to confusion among those who would use the book. Since he did not start again I tend to think that he added this material after initial recension was complete. Letters in the margin further re-order the text. Since 'E' re-positions one of the added stanzas these must have been done after the new material was added on f. 48^v. These letters do not match the main scribe's upper case forms and it is not clear when or by whom they were written. But the main scribe used a similar method to re-order 'The Shepherds' (Play 16) where the marginal letters clearly match his writing elsewhere. 'A' on f. 90^r is formed the same as the first 'A' on the same page and the first letters of the initial stage direction and 16/2 and 16/3 on f. 88^v. 'C' corresponds with the initial letter of Caym on ff. 17^v-20^v. 'B' on f. 89^v matches the first letter of 'Balaam' half-way down the recto of the same page.

Although it is theoretically possible for f. 143 and Quire O to have been interpolated when the scribe brought the initial Passion sequence into his scheme, I sense that he did not do this until after his preliminary version of all the plays was complete. The Ass-and-Foal scene shows that even at a comparatively late stage he was still reacting to new ideas as they occurred to him. He changed from referring to two unnamed apostles to mention of Philip and James the Less by name in little more than a dozen lines of uninterrupted writing.

⁶⁰ The layout of 'The Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10) and 'The Shepherds' (Play 16) can conveniently be followed in *Ludus Coventriæ*. Unlike Spector who rearranges the play, Block printed the same order of the text and position of play numbers, marginal signs, and other symbols as the manuscript.

⁶¹ The main scribe's obeli should not be confused with those apparently written by Reviser 1 (*Facsimile - A*; Spector's scribe B) which refer to the interpolated f. 51.

My, admittedly subjective, impression is that this interpolation (which Appendix B (ii) will argue has connections with the City of Norwich) was probably included at a very late stage.

The interpolated quire O was an addition to the original recension, not a replacement for spoiled text. It is likely that, at least in its final form, this was added at about the same time as the Ass-and-Foal scene. The plethora of cancellations and catchwords at the end of Quire N (f. 148^v) show two distinct stages of textual development:-

- the stage direction 'Here Judas Caryoth comyth into þe place' is cancelled in faint brown ink;
- 'now cownterfetyd' which would have linked with Judas's speech at the start of Quire P (f. 152^r) is cancelled in red;
- 'Jesus' which would have linked with the speech at the top of f. 150^r is cancelled in red;
- 'my hert is ryth' which, like the cancelled 'Jesus', would have linked with the speech at the top of f. 150^r is cancelled in brown;
- 'Mawdelyn' and 'as a cursyd' which both link with the speech at the top of f. 149^r are both written in the same light brown ink.

In the scribe's first version the Conspiracy between the High Priests and their hangers-on was immediately followed by the entry of Judas and his speech starting 'Now countyrfetyd I haue a prevy treson' (27/269 et seq.) on the first page of Quire P. The bifolium containing Jesus's 'Myn herte is ryght sory' speech (27/205-212) and the discussion between the apostles provides a contrast with the perfidy of the traitor Judas. Further refinements were incorporated when the repentance of Mary Magdalen and Judas's contempt for the casket of ointment was interpolated on f. 149. Venal hypocrisy was added to the list of Judas's many wickednesses and the supreme Christian virtue of mercy extended to the Magdalen. The latter addition informs the discussion of orthodoxy in Chapter 5 (especially pp. 106-9).

The Alternate Conclusion to 'The Visit to Elizabeth' (13/147A-185A) and Den's Prologue to the 'Trial of Mary and Joseph' (14/1-33) were both added after the plays had been numbered. Den's Prologue occupies the whole of f. 75^v opposite the play's original start on f. 76^r where the number had already been entered. This prologue must therefore have been added after 'The Assumption' (play 41) had been incorporated to complete the Marian content of the manuscript. Appendix B (ii) will argue that this section of added text, like the naming of Philip and James the Less on f. 143, can be directly associated with Norwich and it may be that both were added at about the same time, possibly in connection with actual, as opposed to notional, performance. The Alternate Conclusion to 'The Visit to Elizabeth' on f. 74^r consists of twenty-two closely spaced lines of writing. Toward the bottom of the page some of this is set out with two verses to the line. Although a similar

economical layout was used at the bottom of f. 183^v when the scribe resumed work after the initial Passion sequence, the arrangement is none the less uncommon. Since there would have been no need to compress the stanza in this way if the following page had been available when it was copied, Den's Prologue must already have been written out when the Alternative Conclusion was added.

The scribe wrote the 'Procession of Saints' on what was originally the second and third of three blank pages at the end of Passion Play I, after the end of 'The Betrayal' (Play 28). His writing here is larger than in the initial Passion sequence and the *mise en page* is more expansive. The piece has none of the dramatic qualities evident in the rest of the Passion nor is it didactic in any of the ways identified in Chapter 5. Neither the exact stage at which this was done nor the reason for its inclusion is apparent.

The main scribe's work can be summarised as follows. He originally wrote a Passion which from early in its existence was to be performed in a two-year cycle. He may have had a short break between writing these two plays, but for practical purposes the text from Satan's prologue up to the Last Words can be considered as a continuous scribal unit. After a longer delay, he began work on a Creation to Doomsday cycle, the contents of which may have been loosely determined by the Proclamation and the *urcycle* text. But it is evident even before the end of the Proclamation that he had only an approximate idea of what he would be working with. He expanded the Marian content by elaborating the *urcycle* account of the early life of the Virgin and including a whole new play dealing with the Purification. After providing an ending to the incomplete Passion that he had written out earlier, he then copied other episodes including Judgement Day. The treatments of Pentecost, the Ascension, and the choosing of Matthias are adequate from a biblical standpoint but are dramatically unfinished.

When revising this recension he continued to pay attention to the life of the Virgin. He re-ordered some of the text dealing with her early life and incorporated an independent booklet containing the splendid treatment of the Assumption. He added material which I shall argue had local relevance to Norwich to the Trial of Mary and Joseph and the Entry into Jerusalem. The interpolation of a new gathering into the Last Supper included the exemplary teaching of mercy, one of various doctrinal and catechetical aspects which are present at all stages of his work.

b) Reviser 2 (Facsimile - B; Spector's scribe C)

Reviser 2's contribution adds a diachronic perspective to the work of his predecessors. Parkes has dated his writing in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.⁶² Even this may

⁶² *N-Town Play*, p. xxiii, nn. 1 & 2. See also Appendix C (p. 161).

be conservative, since the watermark of the interpolated leaves which he wrote (ff. 95-6 and 112) is similar to a type common in north-west France which, according to Briquet, was not known before 1526.⁶³ Unlike the main scribe's revisions which tended to expand the text, Reviser 2 usually made changes within the framework of what his scribal predecessor had provided. However, Meredith and Kahrl's statement that 'all his alterations are in the direction of prompt-copy' gives an inaccurate picture and must be qualified.⁶⁴

This reviser paid particular attention to two sections of the text, each of which is contained in a single codicological unit. In three of the plays dealing with the early life of Christ he substituted up-to-date vocabulary for words that became out of date only after the turn of the century. These form part of Quire H.⁶⁵ Examples include changing 'sekowth' to 'mervelus' (16/16), 'barne' to 'child' (16/34, 20/34), and 'prune þat pap-hawk' to 'pryke þat paddoke' (18/88).⁶⁶ The more extensive alterations enhance the didactic content and produce a more carefully crafted verse. Both aspects can be seen in his version of the Third Shepherd's opening speech on f. 89^r, here set out alongside the text copied by the main scribe:

Main scribe

Thow I make lyty[!] noyse,
I am an herde þat hattyht Moyse.
I herde carpynge of a croyse
Of Moyses in his lawe.
Of a mayd a barne born,
On a tre he xulde be torn;
Delyver folkys þat arn forlorn,
The chylde xulde be slawe. (16/30-37)

Reviser 2

Thow I make lytyl noyse of this
I am an herde man þat hattyht sayyng amys
I herde spekyng of a chyld of blys
Of Moyses in his lawe.
Of a mayd a child xule be borne

The changes avoid repeating 'Moses' and move away from the alliteration of 'carpynge of a croyse' and 'barne borne'. Since *N-Town* normally reserves alliteration for the forces of evil, the benefit that accrued from doing away with this poetic feature is self-evident.

Deleting the first reference to the Cross also foregrounded the salvific message. Emphasis on the infant Christ, rather than the iconography of the Crucifixion, is further intensified by what has become the repetition of 'child' at 16/34 (in the revised version) and 16/37. By pointing up the text in this way Reviser 2 engages explicitly with the uncompromisingly orthodox validation of the Seven Sacraments by the Angel at the start of the play (16/5-6) and continues this aspect of the main scribe's original recension.

⁶³ *Facsimile*, p. xv.

⁶⁴ *Facsimile*, p. xxiv.

⁶⁵ Block was mistaken when she attributed the revision of 'hende' to 'kende' in the last word of the first line on f. 104^r (in Quire J) to this reviser. The ascenders on 'k' and 'd' are quite different from the way in which he formed these letters on ff. 95-6.

⁶⁶ He was not consistent in his preferences. The other use of the nonce-word 'pap-hawkys' (20/11) is not altered, even though he changed 'gomys' to either 'gollys' or 'gowys' in the same stanza.

In the following play, 'The Magi' (Play 18), he both added ff. 95-6 and revised the first of Herod's alliterative thirteeners on f. 93^r. The original is only partly legible:

I xall marryn þo men þat r....yn on myche,
And þerinne sette here sacramentys sottys ... say!
Þer is no lorde in þis werde þat lokygh me lyche.
For to lame l..... of þe lesse lay
I am jolyere than þe jay . . . (18/73-7)

In the revision Herod pours ironic scorn on the sacraments in even stronger terms:

I xall marryn þo heretykys þat beleuyn amysse,
And þerin sette there sacramentys, fallsse þey are I say!
Þer is no lorde in þis werde⁶⁷ þat lokygh me lyke, iwysse,
For to lame heretykkys of þe lesse lay . . .

Since Herod epitomises evil and wrong thinking, his condemnation of the sacraments serves to enhance their value and those whom he describes as 'heretykkys' are true believers.

Although he left the whole of the initial Passion sequence alone, Reviser 2 added marginalia and minor alterations to speech designations in four consecutive plays in Quire V toward the end of Passion Play II. On f. 189^r he wrote 'Incipit hic' by Cayphas's first speech (34/157) to mark the start of a section of text played in isolation from the rest. This excerpted dramatic episode ends with his annotation, 'finem 1^a die Nota' on f. 196^r between 'Pilate and the Soldiers' (Play 35, end) and 'The Announcement to the Three Marys' (Play 36, start). His changes also mention characters who are not part of the *dramatis personae* in the main scribe's recension. Examples include 'Nota anima latronis'⁶⁸ in the *Descensus* beside the stage direction 'The sowle goth to helle gatys ... &c.' (33/24 + s.d.) on f. 185^v, and in the Harrowing proper 'Nota anima caym'⁶⁹ alongside 'Fro fylth with frende we fare' (35/40) towards the bottom of f. 191^v. Neither the soul of Cain nor that of the robber, who is presumably Barabbas, is referred to in the text. Later the scribe again referred to Cain, when on the facing page (f. 192^r) he added 'And þan / cayme / xall sey / his spech ... &c.' just below 'nota þe devyll' alongside Beliall's speech (35/57-64).

As a result of these changes Cain gets the speech which was formerly spoken by Beliall, possibly with a player representing the Devil in attendance as he speaks. On f. 189^v the reviser allotted new numbers to the knights guarding the Sepulchre in 'The Burial' (Play 34, end). In what may also have been an aid to practical staging 'Arfaxat ij' and 'Ameraunt' became the numerically more logical 'jus' and 'ijus'. It is highly likely that all these revisions had to do with actual performance of a Harrowing and Resurrection play based on 34/158 - 35/end.

⁶⁷ *N-Town Play* (p. 172, fn.) incorrectly prints 'we[rl]d'.

⁶⁸ = Note the soul of the robber.

⁶⁹ = Note the soul of Cain.

Given his willingness to engage in quite minor revisions elsewhere, his interpolation of ff. 95-6 in 'The Magi' (18/221-302) seems rather less likely to be a verbatim replacement for missing text than the one made on f. 51 by Reviser 1 (*Facsimile* - A; Spector's scribe B). Reviser 2 also copied the interpolated opening speech of John the Baptist in 'The Baptism' (Play 22) on f. 112. Since this is the only play which does not have a number it is probable that the numerals were on the page replaced by this interpolation. The new text corresponds prosodically with the part of the play that derives directly from the *urcycle*, and it might be argued that the play would be incomplete without introductory comments by the Baptist although this does not confirm the text as an exact replacement for the original. As in his revisions to 'The Shepherds' (Play 16), Reviser 2 here engages expressly with sacramental theology. He therefore shared the most insistent of the main scribe's doctrinal concerns which is present in even the earliest layer of compilation.⁷⁰

Critics have usually interpreted the Third Vexillator's statement that 'we gynne oure play / In N-town' (Proc./525-6) to mean that the plays were to be peripatetic. If we accept that not all the plays were to be given at the same venue on the same occasion there is much to recommend such a reading. Although there is no evidence that all the plays were ever performed, the changes and annotations in the hand of Reviser 2 strongly suggest that at least those plays to which he paid close attention were acted.

c) Collation and binding

The physical make-up of the manuscript read in conjunction with what little is known about its provenance suggests that it may have been intended as an exemplar from which acting parts might be copied. The plays were almost certainly not bound up in a single codex until some years after Richard James had acquired them for the Cottonian library. To follow the reasoning behind this claim two preliminary points must be noted. First, it was not unusual for a manuscript book to exist in more than one article or component part. It had long been realised that a work so kept could be reproduced more quickly. If a scribe was copying a lengthy codex it was not available for another copyist until he had finished the whole text. A booklet, on the other hand, could be passed on immediately its contents had been transcribed. Indeed the statutes of at least eleven universities, including Oxford, made formal provision for the *pecia* system, under which exemplars were loaned in booklet form so that important works could be quickly copied under conditions that guaranteed the accuracy of the recension. *Pecia* booklets were scholastically validated and were only available to licensed copyists.⁷¹ Second, many manuscripts were arranged for binding by

⁷⁰ e.g. the Angel's speech in the Proclamation thirteener at the start of 'The Shepherds' (16/5-6).

⁷¹ Graham Pollard, 'The *pecia* system in the medieval universities', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts & Libraries: Essays Presented to N.R. Ker*, ed. by M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London: Scolar,

Sir Robert Bruce Cotton and subsequent custodians of his collection. Although he caused some to be made into codices for the first time, others had to be disbound so that he could re-arrange their contents. Tite, who specialises in Cottonian bibliographic practice, observes of Sir Robert that:

My present best estimate is that barely half of his books are in the order and arrangement that they exhibited before they came into his hands. Even in the volumes that appear to have escaped unscathed doubts can arise. To take just one example: Julius D. VII, an important manuscript which includes the chronicle of John of Wallingford as well as specimens of the handwriting of Matthew Paris, has been assigned as a unit and in its entirety to St. Albans Abbey. That attribution is no doubt correct: I am not competent to judge. But I do wonder why Cotton's signature appears three times in the course of it and in rather differing styles - on folios IV (sic), 10 and 46. Would he really have opened an already bound-up volume to sign it in three places on three different occasions?⁷²

Tite's rhetorical question might equally be asked of various indications of ownership that were added to Vespasian D. VIII a century after the last of the revisers had finished with it.

Robert Hegge (1599-1629) signalled his ownership in two places which only make sense if the gatherings were either unbound or bound in discrete booklets when he wrote the relevant entries. His name appears in full in the middle of Quire A at the top of the page on which the plays start (f. 10^r).⁷³ The upper edge of the leaf has been substantially cropped and most of the name is cut away. Since a bookbinder who wished to prosper would be loath to deface the autograph of a customer, it is most unlikely that binding was done during Hegge's ownership. Hegge also wrote 'ego R.H. Dunelmensis possideo' followed by a Greek tag 60 mm. from the top of f. 164^r, the worn and discoloured blank leaf at the start of Quire S. Passion Play II begins on the second recto of this quire.⁷⁴ This booklet was at some stage stored separately for long enough for the outside to have become frayed, stained, and discoloured.⁷⁵ Spector argues that the annotation 'Tho: Kinge the yownger / hath demised' on f. 111^v refers to the son of Thomas Kinge who was married to the daughter of Robert Hegge's brother Stephen, and that the manuscript therefore remained with Hegge's family for some years after his death in 1629.⁷⁶ Like Hegge's own names, this annotation is in a part of the manuscript that cannot readily be explained if the plays were all bound up together when it was written.

1978), p. 148.

⁷² Colin C. Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton, The Panizzi Lectures, 1993* (London: British Library, 1994), p. 45. There is no reason why the state of affairs that Tite describes should have altered in the seven years between the deaths of Sir Robert in 1631 and his librarian Richard James in 1638.

⁷³ The Proclamation is written on the first nine leaves.

⁷⁴ *Facsimile*, p. xxv transliterates this as 'ou [k]tesis alla chresis' meaning 'not possession but use'. Hegge was a Durham man who had been at Corpus Christi College, Oxford at the same time as Richard James. (D.N.B.)

⁷⁵ It seems likely that the booklet containing Passion Play I once also had a protective outer leaf.

⁷⁶ Spector, 'The Provenance of the N-Town Codex', 25-33.

If *N-Town* did not come to the Cottonian library until after the death of Thomas King in February 1633/4, Sir Robert Bruce Cotton who died in May 1631 cannot have worked on the codex. But his librarian Richard James stayed on in the service of Sir Thomas Cotton who inherited the collection. The Oxford-educated James is not known to have changed Sir Robert's bibliographic methods, in which he was well versed. Since the inaccurate description on the flyleaf (given in full on p. 4 above) is undoubtedly in James's distinctive hand, his own death in December 1638 is the *terminus ad quem* for accession.⁷⁷

James's *elenchus* refers to the New Testament only and says nothing about the Old Testament plays. Because he is known to have been a methodical scholar, this also suggests that the manuscript was not all together or bound at the time when he wrote the description.⁷⁸ Moreover he was a noted polemicist in the Protestant cause, who might have been expected to deplore *N-Town*'s insistent Marianism if all the plays were available to him in a single codex. The inaccurate description seems less likely to have been an error than the result of the plays being kept in separate parts. If it was a mistake, Sir William Dugdale fell into the same trap a score of years later when in 1656 he published his *Antiquities of Warwickshire Illustrated*. Wrongly attributing the plays to the Coventry Greyfriars, he claimed that they:

contain'd the story of the New Testament, composed into old English Rithme, as appeareth by an antient MS. ^c intituled *Ludus Corporis Christi*, or *Ludus Coventriae*.

^c In Bibl. Cotton. sub effigie Vesp. D. 9 (sic)⁷⁹

This is clearly indebted to James's description, but since Dugdale said no more about the contents we cannot be sure that he read beyond the title page. On the other hand there is no suggestion that his antiquarianism was, by the standards of the day, other than thorough. He was the custodian and *de facto* librarian of the Cottonian collection during the Civil War, had first-hand knowledge of its books,⁸⁰ and claimed to have sorted much material and arranged for the binding of some eighty volumes.⁸¹ All things considered, it

⁷⁷ Other examples of James's handwriting are reproduced in Tite, *Manuscript Library*, p. 66, Fig. 25 (MS Claudio E. IV) and *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector*, ed. by C. J. Wright (London: British Library, 1997), p. 288, Fig. 4 (MS Titus A. XIII).

⁷⁸ His scrupulous attitude to the written past is clear from his disapproving comment that the Durham cathedral library in his time had become 'rather a sepulchre for bookes then (sic) a place to conserue them'. (British Library MS Sloane 1322, f. 21, quoted in Spector, 'Provenance of the N-Town Codex', p. 29).

⁷⁹ *N-Town Play*, p. xiv n. 4 quoting William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire Illustrated*, 1st. edn. (London, 1656). Block gives the complete description in *Ludus Coventriae*, p. xxxviii. It is unclear when D. 9 was changed to D. VIII.

⁸⁰ Kevin Sharpe, 'Rewriting Sir Robert Cotton', in *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector*, pp. 2, 4.

⁸¹ E. C. Teviotdale, 'Some Classified Catalogues of the Cottonian Library', *Ibid.*, pp. 202-3 quoting William Dugdale, *Life, Diary, and Correspondence*, ed. by William Hamper (London, 1827), p. 24.

seems more likely that he would have made at least a cursory examination of whatever text was at his disposal.

If, as I believe, the plays we now have were not kept together when Dugdale was preparing the *Antiquities of Warwickshire* things would soon be put right. The 1730 second edition which was 'revised, augmented, and continued'⁸² by William Thomas still referred to MS Vespasian D. 9, but amended the description of the manuscript's contents to the 'story of the [Old and] New Testament'.⁸³ Thomas claimed to have made his revisions 'from a Copy corrected by the AUTHOR (sic) himself'⁸⁴ and stated that :

In the Reprinting of this Book care hath been taken to leave nothing out that was in the former Edition, unless it was manifestly a Mistake, or what was corrected by Sir William himself; and as to what has been inserted anew . . . the lesser (additions are set) between Brackets.⁸⁵

The bracketed material therefore included all lesser revisions irrespective of whether they were done by Dugdale or Thomas. But Thomas's time was at a premium because he had been let down by proposed collaborators who initially volunteered their services. As a consequence he had to undertake personally much laborious travelling for which he had not planned.⁸⁶ This would have restricted his opportunities for verifying what his predecessor had written. Since James's description was indeed 'manifestly a Mistake' the balance of probabilities suggests that Dugdale rather than Thomas originally added the revisional '[Old and]'. If this is correct, the plays were not collected into a single volume until some time between 1656, the date of the first edition of the *Antiquities*, and Dugdale's death in 1686. Both dates are well after the manuscript first came to the Cottonian collection between 1633/4 and James's death in 1638.

How the text was collated between the time the last reviser finished work and when they came to the Cottonian library can only be guessed at. The least contentious claim is perhaps that the material was arranged in several discrete codicological units, some of which may have been tacked together to ensure the leaves did not become separated. Several examples of lightly-sewn booklets comprising more than one gathering have survived, and this would have been a practical way of making sure that subsidiary gatherings did not become separated whilst they were being copied.⁸⁷ Even if no sections

⁸² *D.N.B.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 183b.

⁸⁴ *The Antiquities of Warwickshire Illustrated*, 2nd. edn., ed. by William Thomas, 2 vols. (London, 1730), Vol. I, frontispiece.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. x.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, frontispiece.

⁸⁷ Jean Vezin, "'Quaderni simul ligati': Recherches sur les manuscrits en cahiers', in *Of the Making of Books: Essays presented to M.B. Parkes*, ed. by P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997), p. 64. Although most of his examples are taken from continental Europe, Vezin draws particular attention (on p. 67) to Durham Cathedral MS A.IV.34, which is catalogued as 'Notae super Cantica canticorum, in quaterno. Secundo folio tituli est.' This has never been bound and consists of a folder-type cover

of the *N-Town* manuscript were sewn in this way, the person who later foliated the top right hand corner of each recto would not have needed specialist biblical or mariological knowledge to arrange the material in its present order. The plays were numbered and the scribe had provided catchwords for those which start in one quire and finish in the next, i.e. 'Joachim and Anna' (Play 8), 'The Last Supper' (Play 27), 'The Procession to Calvary' (Play 32, start), and 'The Guarding of the Sepulchre' (Play 34, end).⁸⁸

Acting parts could be more conveniently copied from separate gatherings than from a bound codex. In this respect the codicological units can be seen as distant cousins of *pecia* exemplars. Certainly the pre-Reformation custodians of the manuscript would have wanted to be sure that the orthodoxies which the compilers had taken such pains to achieve would be accurately transmitted. The fact that Reviser 2's longer revisions are each contained in a single quire is consistent with this reading. Use for copying in this way would also account for why the Old Testament plays became separated from the rest, since not all the gatherings would necessarily have been sent for copying at the same time. Sections of text might even have gone out of house given satisfactory proof of the *bona fides* and scribal competence of a would-be borrower - as might be the case, say, between abbeys or priories of the same order.

Opposite hand of the scribe: *Speculum N-Town*
content when leaving manuscript

* * * * *

Path of the scribe: *Speculum N-Town*

The textual and codicological prehistory established in this chapter, the unexpected order in which the main scribe wrote out the text, and the tenor of the revisions made by the main scribe and Reviser 2 all add to the complexities surrounding an already far from straightforward literary artefact. Starting with the *urcycle* material all the identifiable stages by which the text developed reinforce sacramental and other orthodoxies. The main scribe substantially augmented the plays' Marian content during the course of recension. These features imply that the scribe - or someone else directing the compilation - was not content merely to provide a biblically-based Creation to Doomsday narrative of the type known from the York and Chester cycles. In order to develop a sense of what lay behind this emphasis on doctrine the next chapter will identify some of the sources which the compilers made use of and start to consider how they adapted them to their purpose.

containing loose subsidiary gatherings, each of which has been fastened by sewn bands at the top and bottom on the folded side. (The temptation to try to establish a link with Robert Hegge must be resisted. Though a Durham man with antiquarian interests, he is not known to have been connected with the Cathedral or its bibliographic practices. It is a coincidence that he and this interesting manuscript both came from the same town.) See also P. R. Robinson, 'The 'Booklet': A Self-Contained Unit in Composite Manuscripts', in *Codicologica, 3. Essais Typologiques*, ed. by A. Gruyts and J. P. Gumbert (Leiden, 1980), pp. 46-69 (especially p. 54).

⁸⁸ The catch-letters at the bottom of versos between ff. 66-72 are in another hand.

Chapter 3

Sources and their identification

[In this chapter each of the sources is distinguished by bold type on the first occasion on which is mentioned.]

Although all the plays depend ultimately on the authority of the Bible, the writers embellished biblical accounts with material taken from the liturgy, apocryphal texts, and a variety of exegetical, homiletic, and instructional works. The ways in which these sources influenced the text of the plays range from close copying to a loose, general influence in which the source provided little more than an outline. Typical of the former is 'The Parliament of Heaven' (Play 11, start) which follows a single source in a way that in places almost amounts to a direct copy. 'The Assumption of Mary' (Play 41) also follows its source very closely. The enumeration of the Decalogue, though not the commentary on the Commandments, will be shown to have been copied verbatim from a late fourteenth-century summa which has not previously been noted in this connection. At the opposite end of the spectrum of influence, other putative sources look to have determined content whilst leaving little or no apparent lexical imprint.

Each of the identified sources will be considered under one of four headings, the first, third, and fourth of which are self-explanatory. The second deals with Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* which had a more extensive influence than its lexical imprint on the text of the plays suggests.

a) Major sources having direct influence on the text

Three works have long been recognised as having been used more extensively than the rest. *Legenda Aurea* and Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* contribute substantially to plays dealing with the life of the Virgin. Passion Play I and much of Passion Play II depend mainly on the *Northern Passion*. Evidence for the use of each of these sources can be found in three or more plays.

At least four of the Marian plays draw on Jacobus de Voragine's ***Legenda Aurea***. Whilst the relevant chapters in Jacobus's text in turn derive from the apocryphal *De Nativitate Mariae* the plays contain numerous parallels that are not in the earlier work. An illustration of this is Contemplacio's endorsement of the priestly office at the start of 'Joachim and Anna' (Play 8) which shows lexical detail which survived translation of the Latin original into the vernacular:

This we clepe *Festum Encenniorum*,

þe newe fest, of which iij in þe 3ere we exercyse.
 Now all þe kynredys to Jerusalem must cum
 Into þe temple of God, here to do sacryfyse.
 Tho þat be cursyd my dygnyté is to dysspyse,
 And þo þat be blyssyd here holy sacrefyse to take.
 We be *regal sacerdocium*, it perteyneth vs to be wysse
 Be fastyng, be prayng, be almes, and at du tyme to wake. (8/34-41)

Both the phrases in italics are taken direct from Chapter 131 of *Legenda Aurea*, ('De nativitate beatae Mariae virginis'):

Quod etiam ex nomine Christi, id est inuncti, innuitur, quia sacerdotes et reges et prophetae in lege veteri inungebantur, unde et nos a Christo christiani dicimur et genus electum et *regale sacerdotium* appellamur . . . Cujus rei gratia cum singulis annis in tribus festis praecipuis Jerusalem frequentarent, *in festo encaeniorum* Joachim cum contribulibus suis Hierusalem ascendit, et cum caeteris ad altare accedens oblationem suam offere voluit.¹

'Regal sacerdocium' is not in *De Nativitate Mariae*, nor is the equivalent of Sara's 'nynty 3ere bareyn' (8/181), which renders *Legenda Aurea*'s ' . . . usque ad nonagesimum annum sterilitatis opprobrium pertulit'.² However, the text does not always follow Jacobus so closely. Two stanzas later, the writer added a topical allusion. The source text illustrates Joachim and Anna's righteous living before God by the example of the charitable division of their goods:

. . . suam substantiam trifarie dividebant, unam partem templo et templi servitoribus impendebant, aliam peregrinis et pauperibus erogabant, tertiam sibi et familiae suae usibus reservabant.³

The play importantly varies this passage, which precedes the one quoted above, by referring to an omission often noted in episcopal visitations, failure to maintain the chancel of a church for which the incumbent was personally responsible. Joachim says:

. . . my godys into thre partys I devyde:
 On to þe temple and to hem þat þer servynge be;
 Anodyr to þe pylgrims and pore men; þe iij^{de} for hem with me abyde.
 So xulde euery curat in þis werde wyde
 3eve a part to his chauncel, iwys,
 A part to his parochonerys þat to povert slyde,

¹ *Legenda Aurea*, 3rd. edn., ed by T. Graesse, (Breslau, 1890), (repr. Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1969), p. 587. = This is also suggested by the name of Christ, which means anointed, because in the Old Law, only priests, kings, and prophets were anointed . . . With this in mind they went up to Jerusalem for the three principal feasts. Once, when Joachim and his kinsmen traveled (sic) to Jerusalem for the feast of Dedication, he went with others to the altar to make his offering.

² *Legenda Aurea*, p. 588. = (she) suffered the shame of childlessness until she was ninety years old.

³ *Legenda Aurea*, p. 587. = They divided all their substance into three parts, one part being reserved unto the Temple and its ministers, one for transient strangers and the poor, and the third for their own needs and those of their household.

The thryd part to kepe for hym and his. (8/51-7)

The rejection by the high priest of Joachim's offering (8/105 + s.d. - 108), the latter's shame and departure to tend his flocks (8/123-131), and the Angel's message that he will meet Anna at the Golden Gate⁴ (8/175-199) can all be traced to *Legenda Aurea*.

Jacobus mentions the 'Festum Encenniorum' without saying how it was celebrated. The play provides an eclectic mix of liturgically unrelated material providing a pastiche of ritual rather than the replication of a particular observance. 'Benedicta sit beata Trinitas' (8/97 + s.d.) is associated in both the *Missal* and the *Breviary* with masses of the Trinity. The sung lines (8/110-6) are from the Mass, and when the angel appears to Joachim and Anna he sings a hymn for Lauds at the Feast of the Apostles, 'Exultet celum laudibus' (8/172 + s.d.). A stage direction specifying that the sign of benediction be given ('*Signando manu cum cruce sole[m]niter*⁵ . . . &c.' (8/116 + s.d.)) adds non-specific ritual gesture. The section may have been composed from memory.

Jacobus's influence in 'The Presentation of Mary in the Temple' (Play 9) is less compelling. *Legenda Aurea*'s perfunctory reference to the fifteen steps surrounding the Temple and the ability of the three-year old Mary to climb them 'ac si jam aetatis perfectae esset'⁶ has been expanded to the point where the source is no longer clearly identifiable. The previous chapter showed that the 'Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10) was revised both during and after copying, and that the scribe had two exemplars before him as he worked.⁷ He kept track of which exemplar he was working from by placing a red dot within the loop of the capitulum before octaves and quatrains.⁸ The stanzas so marked show thematic and lexical indebtedness to *Legenda Aurea* in several places and the play even takes the phrase 'vovete et reddite' (10/95) verbatim.⁹ Further confirmation of its use can be seen in the offering of rods by the unmarried men as they approach the altar. In this section of the play a quatrain has 'Vox' instruct the Bishop (10/229-232), clearly following the wording of Chapter 131, 'mox . . . cunctis audientibus vox insonuit'¹⁰. This contrasts with a section of the play derived from the *urcycle* exemplar (10/116-129) where divine intercession is effected by 'Angelus'. Contemplacio's speech at the start of 'The Visit to Elizabeth' (Play 13) follows Chapter 86 of *Legenda Aurea* ('De nativitate sancti Johannis baptistae'). The reference to the creation of twenty-four priests by David and the appointment of Zachariah to be their superior, as well as other details are come from this

⁴ Spector considers that the Angel's speech 'in large measure faithfully renders the *Legenda Aurea*.' (*N-Town Play*, II, p. 440, n. 8/173-99 and ff.)

⁵ = Solemnly making the sign of the Cross.

⁶ *Legenda Aurea*, p. 588. = as if she were already fully grown up.

⁷ See Meredith's introduction to *Mary Play*, p. 4.

⁸ *Facsimile*, p. xvii ('Marginal signs').

⁹ *Legenda Aurea*, p. 589.

¹⁰ *Legenda Aurea*, p. 589. = presently . . . a voice sounded for all to hear.

source.¹¹ Particularly telling is the phrase ‘summi sacerdotes’ which is taken intact (apart from a change to the accusative case). Although the rest of this play draws on other sources, Jacobus has clearly been used here.

Legenda Aurea is followed particularly closely in the codicologically discrete ‘Assumption of Mary’ (Play 41). The first stanza of Doctor’s opening speech, indeed, proclaims this indebtedness by way of *auctoritas*:

Legenda Sanctorum autorysynth this trewely. (41/13)

The work is frequently described in this way in medieval booklists, and there seems no reason to question Falke’s assertion that ‘Legenda Sanctorum’ here means *Legenda Aurea*.¹² The source text provides a thorough treatment of this final episode in the life of the Virgin in Chapter 119 (‘De assumptione beatae Mariae virginis’).¹³

The clues afforded by the direct assimilation of Latin phrases like ‘summi sacerdotes’ and ‘Festum Encenniorum’ are not available in the case of **Nicholas Love’s Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ**. This vernacular text contributed to several plays. Since ‘Contemplacio’ appears repeatedly in the margin of some copies, not as a *nota* but as an integral part of the text, it may even have suggested the name of the chorus-like expositor of the early Marian episodes. Love’s work was based on *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, which used incorrectly to be attributed to Bonaventure, and Meredith has argued that it is to this, rather than Love’s translation and reworking of it, that we should normally look for the underlying sources.¹⁴ In many places material is common to both texts and it is often difficult to decide whether one, or the other, or perhaps even both were consulted. However, in those plays in which the text replicates Love’s diction his version can be claimed with a degree of confidence. My intention is not to challenge Meredith’s argument, merely to record plays in which I find Love’s *Mirror* has been followed. The importance of this lies less in the frequency or otherwise with which this text seems to have been used, but that it can be identified in places where the text has been revised. Since Love states that his aim in adapting Pseudo-Bonaventure was ‘for the edification of the faithful and the confutation of heretics or Lollards’ (as to which see p. 74 below), this provides support for my central argument that the maintenance of the orthodox *status quo* was an important consideration for the compilers of the *N-Town* plays.¹⁵

¹¹ See *Legenda Aurea*, p. 357.

¹² Falke, *Quellen*, p. 92.

¹³ Incorrectly printed as chapter 114 (‘Cap. CXIII’) in *N-Town Play*, II, p. 528, n. 41/2-4

¹⁴ *Mary Play*, pp. 14-19.

¹⁵ Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: a Critical Edition*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (New York: Garland, 1992), p. xlvi. Since this was not available when *N-Town Play* was published Spector took his quotations from Powell’s 1908 edition.

Three of the early Marian plays have been seen to have been amended before copying by someone who wrote a distinctive alternately-rhyming octave (*abababab*₄). Although Spector has claimed that these revisional stanzas tend to contain extended echoes of Love's *Mirror*, this seems to overstate the case.¹⁶ The last three stanzas of Gabryel's address to the Virgin (11/261-284) in the 'Salutation and Conception' (Play 11, end) show lexical correspondences which support Spector's claim, but the importance of this source to the *abababab* reviser may be more or less confined to this passage. None the less, the play closely echoes the words italicised in the following extract from Love:

Now *take here gude hede & haue in mynde*, how first al þe holy trinyte is þere
abydyng a final answere & assent // of his blessed douthere Marie takyng hede &
 beholding likyngly hire shamefast semblant hir sad maneres & hir wise wordes: And
 forþermore how alle þe *blessed spirites of heuen*, & alle þe *rȝtwislyuyng men in erþe*
alle þe chosen soules þat weren þat tyme in helle as *Adam Abraham Dauid & alle*
oper desiredn here assent in þe which stode þe *sauacion of alle mankynde*.¹⁷

The correspondence goes beyond mere similarity of subject matter:

Mary, come of and haste the,
 And *take hede in thyne entent*
 Whow þe Holy Gost, blyssyd he be,
Abydyth þin answere and þin assent.
 Thorwe wyse werke of dyvinité,
 The secunde persone, verament,
 Is mad man by fraternyté
 Withinne þiself in place present.

Ferthermore, take hede þis space
 Whow all þe *blyssyd spyrtyts* of vertu
þat are in hefne byffore Goddys face,
 And *all þe gode levers and trew*
 That are *in þis erthely place*,
 Thyn owyn kynrede, þe sothe ho knew,
 And *þe chosyn sowlyts* þis tyme of grace
þat are in helle and byde rescu,

As *Adam, Abraham, and Davyd* in fere
 And many oþere of good reputacyon,
þat þin answere desyre to here,
 And þin assent to þe Incarnacyon,
 In which þu standyst as persevere
Of all mankende savacyon. (11/261-282)

¹⁶ *N-Town Play*, II, p. 458, n. 11/261-282.

¹⁷ Sargent, *Love's Mirror*, p. 25.

Apart from the *abababab* octaves Love's influence can be seen in various parts of 'Joseph's Doubt' (Play 12) which, although Marian in its subject matter, does not form part of the *Contemplacio* group. Here again an earlier version has been revised. Although the episode is mentioned in the Proclamation (Pr./170-182) the play comprises both Proclamation thirteeners and ten-line stanzas rhyming *aa₄b₃aa₄bbcbc₃* (with considerable variation in stress). The ten-line stanzas which attest the revision follow Love, with several close lexical correspondences. For example when in Mary's plea to God she says of Joseph:

For vnknowlage he is desesyd . . . (12/130)

the relatively unusual 'desesyd' echoes Love's:

. . . she praied god þat he wold send remedy in þis case, & þat he wold as it were his wille put awey fro hir & fro hir hosbande þis tribulacion & þis disese.¹⁸

Even though it uses different diction Joseph's request that Mary tell him 'þe holy matere of (her) concepcyon' (12/212) and her reply follow Love's *Mirror*:

Joseph asked oure lady of þis wondurful conceyvng, & she gladly told him þe ordere & þe maner þerof¹⁹

The same source was also used in connection with the Alternate Conclusion to the 'The Visit to Elizabeth' (Play 13), though not in the play itself. The Alternate Conclusion is written in a mixture of quatrains and *ababbcbc* stanzas, which again suggests that it was revised at some stage prior to copying. *Contemplacio*'s second quatrain reads:

A, Lord God, what hous was þis on
þat [held] þese childeryn and here moderys to
As Mary and Elizabeth, Jesus and John,
And Joseph and Zakerye also. (13/162A-165A)

Though not particularly close, Love's influence is noticeable in the the content generally and lexically in the first line:

A lord god what house was þat, what Chaumbur & what bedde in þe whech duelleden to gedire & resteden so worþi Moderes with so noble sons, þat is to sey Marie & Elizabeth, Jesus & Jon. And also with hem duellingþo wirchipful olde men, Zakarie & Joseph.²⁰

¹⁸ Love's *Mirror*, p. 34.

¹⁹ Love's *Mirror*, p. 34.

²⁰ Love's *Mirror*, p. 31.

The next two stanzas (13/166A-173A) also contain slight lexical echoes.²¹

‘The Purification’ (Play 19), which was revisional in the sense that it was not one of the plays mentioned in the Proclamation, also draws on Love’s *Mirror*. Part of Symeon’s prayer and Mary’s dedication of Jesus at the altar both correspond with Love’s *Mirror*, although the former also appears in *Meditationes*. Mary’s speech at the end of the play is particularly close to Love’s rendering:

And þer Mary offeryth fowlys onto þe autere and seyth:
 Allmyghtyfful Fadyr, mercyful Kynge,
 Recvyth now þis lytyl offryng,
 For it is þe fyrst in degré
 Pat 3oure lytyl childe so 3ynge
 Presentyth today be my shewyng
 To 3oure hy3 magesté.
 Of his sym pyl poverté,
 Be his devocyon and my good wylle,
 Vpon 3oure awtere receyve of me
 3oure sonys offryng . . . (19/196 + s.d. -206)

Love’s text corresponds in several places:

(Mary) toke þe forseide briddes of Joseph & knelyng done & lifting vp hir eyene,
 deuoutly in to heuen haldyng hem in hir handes, offrede hem seyng þus:

Almi3ty & mercyful fadere of heuen vndurfong 3e þis litel 3ift & offryng, & þe first
 3ift, þat 3our litel child þis day presentep to 3our hie maieste of his symple pouerte. &
 þerwip also þe child Jesus puttinge hese handes to þe briddes & lifting vp his eyene to
 heuen, speke not bot shewep contenance of his offring with þe modere, & so þei
 leyden hem vpon þe awtere.²²

Given Love’s stated intention to edify the faithful and confound heretics and Lollards, it is significant that one of the non-Marian plays closely associated with aspects of sacramentalism also used the same source. Whilst it does not correspond exactly with Love, ‘The Baptism’ (Play 22) shares several features with it in the exchanges between John and Jesus. All four Gospels include the episode but only Matthew 3:14-15 contains John’s initial reluctance, although his refusal is not explicitly linked with the virtue of humility.²³ Love’s account reinforces the analogy by repetition:²⁴

²¹ The equivalent passages are to be found in Love’s *Mirror*, p. 32.

²² Love’s *Mirror*, p. 48.

²³ Matt. 3; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:6-34.

²⁴ A similar technique of lexical iteration occurs in several plays: e.g. tithing in ‘Cain and Abel’ (Play 3), baptism and confession (with its necessary adjuncts of contrition and penance) in ‘The Baptism’ (Play 22), and doubt in the ‘Appearance to Thomas’ (Play 38).

And þen oure lorde Jesus amongis oþer went to John, & praied him þat he wolde baptise him with oþere. And John beholdyng him & knowyng hym in spirite.' was dredde & wiþ grete reuerence seide, *Lord I sholde be baptizeode of þe & þou comest to me? And Jesus answered, Suffre now, for þus it falleþ & besemeþ vs to fulfil alle riȝtwisnes.* As who sey, Sey not þis now, & bewrye me not, or make me not knownen, for my tyme þerof is not ȝit come. Bot now do as I bidde, & baptise me for now is tyme of mekenes, & þerfore I wole now fulfille alle maner mekenes. Here seip þe glose, þat mekenes hab þre degres.²⁵

An adjacent marginal note 'Nota tres gradus humilitatis' draws attention to the importance of the gloss.²⁶ The play's version is similar in detail although there is no lexical influence:

JESUS. Baptym to take I come to the,
 And conferme þat sacrament þat now xal be.
 In Flom Jordon þu baptyze me,
 In watyr þat is wyde.

JOHANNES. My Lorde God, þis behovyth me nought,
 With myn hondys to baptyze the (sic).
 I xulde rather of the (sic) haue sought
 Holy baptym þan þu of me.

JESUS. Suffyr now, Johan, my wyl were wrought;
 All ryghtfullnes þus fulfull we.
 Me to baptyze take þu no dowth;
 Pe vertu of mekeness here tawth xal be,
 Euery man to lere.
 And take ensawmple here by me,
 How mekely þat I come to þe. (22/62-77)

Love's three degrees of meekness are that a man be subject to a ruler, not above anyone who is 'euen with him in estate' or his underling, and lastly to be 'suget & lowed' to those of lower rank. The play sets out similar notions of humility in John's next stanza and the correspondences continue with the stage direction 'Spiritus Sanctus hic descendat super ipsum, et Deus, Pater Celestis, dicet in celo'²⁷ (22/92 + s.d.) which precedes God's announcement of the second person of the Trinity. Love's equivalent is '*þe holi goste came done in likenesse of a doufe & rested vp on him, & þe voice of þe fadere seide*'.²⁸ As I shall show in the next chapter Love's text had been approved at the highest level and whoever composed 'The Baptism' drew on a source which had the very best credentials to reinforce the sacramental message.

²⁵ Love's *Mirror*, p. 66.

²⁶ Like 'Contemplacio' this is present in most copies and is therefore not a *nota* but an integral part of the text.

²⁷ = Here let the Holy Ghost come down to him and let God the Heavenly Father say.

²⁸ Love's *Mirror*, p. 67.

Before the influence of the *Northern Passion* can be considered, Falke's claim that the *N-Town* Passion depended on Tatian's *Diatesseron* must be discounted. His argument is unconvincing both in its detail and because it underestimates the capabilities of those who put the plays together:

Daß der Verfasser aber sich selbst der großen Mühe unterzogen hätte, seinen Stoff aus den vier Evangelisten zu sammeln und chronologisch anzuordnen, ist ebenfalls zurückzuweisen, wenn man bedenkt, in welcher Weise die mittelalterlichen Dichter im großen und ganzen gearbeitet haben. So bleibt also als einzige Möglichkeiten übrig, daß der Dichter auf Grund einer sogenannten Evangelienharmonie seine Spiele verfaßt hat; und wie sich aus Folgendem ergibt, ist als seine Vorlage die Evangelienharmonie des Tatian zu betrachten.²⁹

But when we consider the way in which medieval poets generally worked, we must reject the idea that the compiler would have himself gone to the trouble of collecting and arranging his material from the four evangelists in chronological order. And so the only possibility that remains is that the poet composed his play using one of the so-called Gospel Harmonies; and it is clear (from the extract that follows) that Tatian's Gospel Harmony is to be regarded as his model.

Plays such as the 'Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10) and 'The Baptism' (Play 22) show that those responsible for compilation were well able to combine material from several sources, and there is no reason why they should not have done so for the Passion. Moreover although Tatian's *Diatesseron* had once been in standard use as a Gospel text it had been lost before the start of the Middle Ages. References to Tatian are now usually taken to refer to Victor of Capua's version, *In Evangelicas Harmonias Ammonii*, or a later rendering thereof.³⁰ When the *N-Town* Passion is compared with Victor's text the superficial similarities that are to be expected in versions of the same events are present but there is no proof of its direct influence.

Having disposed of the idea of a formal Gospel harmony, a convincing case can be made for the *Northern Passion*. The influence of this vernacular text can be traced throughout the first Passion sequence (26/1-32/183) and in part of the 'Guarding of the Sepulchre' (Play 34, end). The following discussion calls for a few preliminary words about the *Northern Passion*. Four manuscripts (with collations from five more) were edited as parallel texts by Frances A. Foster in 1913.³¹ In a companion volume published in the following year she looked at the work's influence on dramatic versions of the Passion, placing particular reliance on 'agreement in incidents, small in themselves, which are found

²⁹ Falke, *Quellen*, p. 64.

³⁰ P.L. 68:49-61.

³¹ *The Northern Passion*, ed. by Frances A. Foster, 2 Vols.; E.E.T.S. o.s. 145 and 147, (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1913 and 1916). She later collaborated with Wilhelm Heuser in an edition of two further manuscripts:- *The Northern Passion (Supplement)*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 183, (London: O.U.P., 1930).

nowhere else in Middle English, and either rarely, or not at all in Latin and French'.³² She instanced forty-five places where she considered *N-Town* (which she referred to as 'the Hegge Plays') to have been directly influenced.³³ Since Block's *Ludus Coventriæ* did not appear until eight years after Foster first went to print she had to work from Halliwell's inadequate 1841 edition. Some of her comments do not bear scrutiny in the light of present-day textual scholarship.

Her methodology also leaves some of her identifications open to challenge since, in her eagerness to find correspondences, she quotes from four different manuscripts of the 'original' version of the *Northern Passion*. Nine of the eleven surviving manuscripts of this original version contain dialectal and other variations.³⁴ Three more attest the so-called 'expanded version' which 'added several new episodes that were not in the original, removed others, and rearranged sections of text'.³⁵ Foster correctly noted that these expanded versions were 'much closer to one another than any two MSS. of the original poem; except for the omission of a line in (one copy) and one couplet in (another), their extent is the same, and the majority of variations are merely orthographical'.³⁶ Her illustrations would therefore have been more persuasive if they had all been taken from the same copy. Admittedly many of her comparisons can be supported from the manuscript which she quotes from most frequently (Cambridge University MS. Ii.4.9, *siglum I*), but I shall prove that she was wrong to ignore the expanded versions. Although she does not say so in as many words, she seems to argue that the 'East Midland' origins of *N-Town* would conflict with what she claims to be the northern provenance of the three manuscripts of the expanded versions.³⁷ Whether or not these three copies were made in the north, there is abundant evidence that many - and perhaps most - manuscripts left the *scriptorium* where they were copied.³⁸

I shall examine five episodes to show that the expanded rather than the original version of the *Northern Passion* was used:

- i) the restoration of Malchus's ear during the Betrayal (Play 28)
- ii) the words on the Cross in the Crucifixion (Play 32)
- iii) the suicide of Judas in the early part of the Trial before Annas and Cayphas (Play 30, start)

³² *Northern Passion*, II, p. 82.

³³ *Northern Passion*, II, pp. 89-100. This is part of a chapter headed 'The *Northern Passion* and the Drama', in which she also considers the work's importance to both the York Cycle and one of the Towneley plays ('The Conspiracy and Capture').

³⁴ *Northern Passion*, II, p. 38.

³⁵ *Northern Passion*, II, p. 46. The differences between the versions will be considered in Chapter 4.

³⁶ *Northern Passion*, II, p. 43.

³⁷ *Northern Passion*, II, pp. 101, 17-18.

³⁸ See for example M. B. Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts*, (London: Hambledon, 1991), p. 301, where the author writes of 'constant traffic in books'.

- iv) the Ass and Foal sequence in the Entry to Jerusalem (Play 26, end)
- v) Judas's departure from the Last Supper and his reaction to the Magdalen's anointing of Jesus's feet (Play 27)

These represent both earlier and later periods of scribal activity. The first three were copied as part of the initial Passion sequence, while the last two were written on leaves interpolated after the main scribe had finished his first version of all the plays.

The removal of Malchus's ear can be found half way down f 160^v in a stage direction:

And forthwith he (Peter) smythyth of Malchus here, and he cryeth, 'Help! Myn here, myn here!' And Cryst blyssyth it and 'tys hol. (28/106 + s.d.)

All the Gospels include the incident, but only John names Malchus.³⁹ The episode is in all complete manuscripts of the *Northern Passion* (e.g. D. 559-567), but only the extended versions also give the name (e.g. P. 729 &c.).

'Heloy, Heloy lamazabathany' (32/184), which was not mentioned by Foster, has already been seen to be particularly important because the double form *virgula suspensiva* immediately after it marks the precise end of the initial Passion sequence. Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 both include these words which 'raised grave problems in the late development of Christology, solutions to which are intimated in the variants of some (Vulgate) MSS'.⁴⁰ The variant spellings printed in different versions of the Bible bear witness to this uncertainty:

<i>Vulgate</i>	lema or lama sabacthani
<i>Luther</i>	lama asabthani
<i>Tyndale</i>	lama sabathani
<i>Coverdale</i>	lamma asabthani
<i>King James</i>	Lamasabacthani

This diversity makes the play's correspondence with the *Northern Passion* all the more remarkable. All the texts printed by Foster have 'Lamazabathany' or 'Lama3abathany' although there is less agreement on the other word. The closest to the play is one of the expanded versions with 'Hely, Heloy . . . Lamazabathany' (P. 2979-80, with 'Heloy' also at P. 2986 and 7). H.1787, 1793, 1796c. have 'Ely', and the word is 'Hely' in all the original versions.

Although the main scribe was patently at ease with Latin and the vernacular, his facility is unlikely to have extended to Hebrew, the transliteration of which occurs at the most important point of the Passion narrative. Two things can reasonably be inferred. In view of its relevance to salvific history the exemplar would be likely to follow its source

³⁹ Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:10.

⁴⁰ *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. by Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley, (London: Nelson, 1962), p. 797a.

particularly closely at this literally crucial point. The scribe would also be aware of the need to spell the phrase in such a way that the unfamiliar words would be recognisable. He would therefore be more likely to copy the exemplar *verbatim et literatim* than impose his own spelling.

Sense and narrative continuity, rather than palaeographic or prosodic indications, show the death of Judas early in Play 30 was also revised, but this was done before copying. The scene opens with Cayphas sending a messenger bidding Pilate to the trial of Christ. When he has returned to report that Pilate 'wole be at þe mot-halle in hast sone after þe daye dawe' (30/21), Judas enters, repents, tries to rescind his bargain with Annas and, having failed, hangs himself. In contrast to the Vexillatores' promise of a whole 'pagent' devoted to the suicide (Proc./360-372) the entire episode in the play occupies just ten lines of text which includes two stage directions:

Here enteryth Judas onto þe Juwys, þus seyng:

JUDAS I, Judas, haue synnyd, and treson haue don,
 For I haue betrayd þis rythful blood.
 Here is ȝoure mony aȝen, all and som.
 For sorwe and thowth I am wax wood!
 ANNAS What is þat to us? Avyse þe now,
 ȝu dedyst with us counawnt make:
 ȝu seldyst hym us as hors or kow,
 Derefere þin owyn dedys ȝu must take.

Pan Judas castyth down þe mony, and goth and hangyth hymself.

(30/24 + s.d. - 32 + s.d.)

In the next stanza Cayphas speaks of Pilate's presence in the 'mot-halle' as though Judas had never been there. This brief scene must have been a late addition to the exemplar from which the initial Passion sequence was taken, even though it was copied at the same time as the rest. The ultimate source of Judas's suicide was Matthew 27:3-5, and the episode was widely known in art.⁴¹ Since it takes up eighty-six lines of the expanded versions of the *Northern Passion* and about fifty in the original versions it could not be overlooked. Whilst the source text may here have done no more than jolt the compiler's memory, there are slight hints of lexical influence. Judas laments that he has committed 'treson' and says to the Priests, 'Here is ȝoure mony aȝen.' Each echoes the *Northern Passion*:

I haue betrayd him trayturly,
 And all sakles I haue him sald.

And here yhour maone, als it was,
 I gyf it here to yhow o-gayne. (P. 1070-1, 1074-5)

⁴¹ Examples include the *Holkham Bible Picture Book* (f. 30^r, upper), the *Biblia Pauperum*, the Life of Judas in *Legenda Aurea* (Chapter 45), and the verse 'Suspensio Jude' added to the end of the Towneley manuscript.

Although the expanded versions all join ‘money’ and ‘again’ and use the expression ‘trayturly’, none of the original versions do so.

The other two examples were late additions written on interpolated leaves after the main scribe had finished the initial recension. Both make use of extended versions of the *Northern Passion*. The textual indebtedness is evident in the following extract from the interpolated Ass and Foal sequence:

Go to 3on castel þat standyth 3ow ageyn,
 Sum of myn dyscypolis - go forth, 3e to.
 Pere xul 3e fyndyn bestys tweyn:
 An asse tyed and here fole also.
 Vnlosne þat asse and brynge it to me pleyn.
 Iff any ma[n] aske why þat 3e do so,
 Sey þat I haue nede to þis best, certeyn,
 And he xal not lett 3ow 3oure weys for to go.
 þat best brynge 3e to me. (26/347-355)

None of the gospels contains exactly the same details as the play. In Matthew 21:7 both animals are taken in response to Jesus’s bidding, but there is no mention of how to counter objections. Mark 11:2-4 has two disciples sent to find a colt that had never been ridden before (‘pullum . . . super quem nemo adhuc hominum sedit’) and tells how objections should be met. Luke 19:29 is close to Mark. The account in John 12:14-15 recounts the entry itself and does not deal with the fetching. There is only one animal and no mention of its being unridden, or of potential opposition:

Et invenit Iesus asellum et sedit super eum sicut scriptum est | noli timere filia Sion
 ecce rex tuus venit sedens super pullum asinae.⁴²

On the other hand, like the play, the *Northern Passion* mentions two disciples (though not by name), their instruction in how to counter opposition to the enterprise, and the finding of both beasts:

He cald of his discipels twa,
 And bad þat þai suld smertly ga
 To þe cete þat by-for þam stode,
 And þus he said with myld mode:
 ‘Twa bestes bi-for yhow soll yhe fynd,
 And baldly soll yhe þam vnbynd,
 And vn-to me þat þai be broght;
 And if any say to yhow oght,

⁴² = And Jesus came upon a young donkey and rode as it was foretold; be not afraid o daughters of Sion, behold your king comes riding the foal of an ass.

Sais yhour maister of þam has nede,
Pan sall þai suffer yhow gud spede.' (P. 99-108)⁴³

None of the original versions contains the substance of the last three lines quoted here. Whilst it is possible that this detail was supplied from the poet's memory of Mark or Luke, which are the only two gospels to justify Christ's need for the animal, its inclusion alongside other material - all of which can be found in this putative source - is suggestive.

The departure of Judas from the Last Supper was part of a two-stage revision in Quire O without which the narrative would move straight from the conspiracy between the High Priests and their henchmen to Judas's 'Now countyfetyd I haue a prevy treson' (27/269 &c.). The deprecation of the casket of ointment by the disciple who will shortly betray Jesus is part of the second stage of this revision (on f. 149v). Although what he says remains the same, the interpolated material alters its context and emphasis. After 'Judas ryseth prevely and goth in þe place' (27/268 + s.d.) the symbolic distance between him and the other apostles, who in the first stage of the revision demonstrate their loyalty and probity is reinforced by physical separation in the playing area.

Judas's departure at this juncture is not in any of the original versions of the *Northern Passion*, which typically go straight from Jesus's denunciation of Judas to the revelation of celestial mysteries to St. John. However, the expanded versions, like the play, have the traitor apostle leave the feast to join his co-conspirators. The difference is immediately clear when the two versions are compared:

Original

And when Iudas herd þat worde
Sone he rayse vppe fro þe borde
And þan he made doylefull cry

And sayd maistir was it oght I
Ihesus answerd hym I wysse
þou it was and þou it isse.

Pan Saynt Iohne at þe super satte &c.
(G. 265-271)

Expanded

Iudas, when he herd þis worde,
Vp he rase fra þe burde,
And all on heght þus gan he cry,
Nunquid ego sum rabi;
With grete voice þus cried he:
'Maister, menes þou oght by me?'
Ihesus said, 'þi wordes witnes,
And þi self sais þat þou it es.'
And þa wordes was iudas tene
And furth he went fra þam bidene
Vnto þe iewes with wikked will,
His first falsehede to fulfill.

Als saint iohn at þe soper sat, &c.
(H. 265-7, a, b, 268-70, a-d, 271)

⁴³ The siglum is Foster's and refers to Bodleian MS. 14667 (formerly Rawlinson MS. Poetry 175). I have quoted this version here because the continuous text in *Northern Passion*, Vol. III (starting at p. 50) is easier to follow than the parallel texts which have to be negotiated in Vol. I. It should be remembered that the three expanded versions differ only in minor particulars.

Whilst none of the original versions of the *Northern Passion* give a value for the casket, all the extended versions have three hundred pence (H. 128b, P. 157). The play is specific on this point:

The box was worth of good moné
 iij C pens fayr and fre!
 Pis myght a bowht mete plenté
 To fede oure power ken. (27/197-200)

Only two Gospels mention the value of the casket. Mark 14:4-5 has unnamed apostles (plural) query the value which is given as more than three hundred denarii ('plus quam trecentis denariis'). John 12:4-5 mentions Judas by name and is precise about the amount of 'trecentis denariis'. The evidence for the use of the extended version in this episode is convincing.

In the second Passion sequence only 'The Burial' (Play 34) shares the same non-biblical order of events as the *Northern Passion*. The Longeus episode comes immediately after Joseph of Arimathea and the soldiers sent by Pilate have established the death of Jesus. The Proclamation (Proc./399- 415) is typical of the conventional order in following John 19:34-5.⁴⁴ The play also contains lexical traces of the *Northern Passion*. The original versions all have Longeus fall to his knees without specifying the reason for his prayer, for example:

On knese he gane to falle
 and to Ihesu to crye and calle. (A. 1887-8)

Although it might be expected that Longeus's prayer would be of thanks for the restoration of his sight, the expanded versions of the *Northern Passion* all make clear that mercy - also present in the ultimate revision of the interpolated Quire O - is foremost in his thoughts:

Parfor on knese doun gan he fall,
 And to Crist gan he mercy call,
 And loued God all his grace
 Pat was so poplyst in pat place. (P. 3181-3)

This important source was used both for the initial Passion sequence and the interpolations that were added to it at a later stage and the early stages of the conclusion of Passion Play II when the scribe resumed work after the Last Words at 32/183.

⁴⁴ *Northern Passion*, II, p. 96.

b) *Historia Scholastica*.

The overall influence of Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* is more wide-ranging than has previously been acknowledged. Falke made no mention of it and Woolf noted it mainly in connection with the Old Testament, tracing *inter alia* the devil taking the guise of a serpent, Adam's instructing his sons in the duty to make sacrifice, and the killing of Cain at the hands of Lamech to this source.⁴⁵

Whilst there is no reason to disagree with Woolf's findings, as far as they go, the Lamech episode occurs in a different order from *Historia Scholastica* and it repays close scrutiny. Chapter 28 recounts the death of Cain at his hands and the story of Noah is not told until Chapters 32 and 33, whereas the play conflates the incident with the building of the ark. Although not in York, Chester, or Towneley the incident was widely represented in vernacular writing and it occurs in some continental dramatisations such as the *Mistère du Vieux Testament*.⁴⁶ In each case the order is the same order as Chapter 28 of *Historia Scholastica*, that is to say it precedes the story of Noah (which is not told until Chapters 32 and 33) unlike the play, which conflates the two episodes. At first sight this seems to argue against the use of Comestor, and if the identification of the play's use of this source depended solely on this episode there might be some doubt in the matter. Indeed since an illuminated copy of the Book of Genesis (British Library MS. Egerton 1894) shares the same order as *N-Town*, it might even be argued that it would be better to look elsewhere. But the Egerton 'Genesis' does not contain the play's genealogical lists which are identical to material in *Historia Scholastica*.⁴⁷ They follow Comestor closely and the *Textura Quadrata* in which these tables were written points to their importance.

There are several reasons for thinking that these tables were not directly connected with actual or notional performance: 1) both include names that are not referred to in the plays (e.g. Sella, Jabel, Malachel in the former, and Heber, Phaleg, and Na(c)hor in the latter); 2) the ancestry of Noah with its comments about Lamech is not on the pages containing the Noah play, but between the Fall of Man and Cain and Abel; 3) Lamech's bigamy which the scribe noted in his Anglicana hand on f. 17^r is not mentioned in the play. All these details, including the superfluous names appear in the same order in *Historia Scholastica*, which interposes them between the fratricide in Chapter 28 and the start of the Noah story four chapters later.⁴⁸ The work may also have been used for the cursory

⁴⁵ Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*, pp. 115, 125, 135.

⁴⁶ e.g. Martial Rose and Julia Hedgcoxe, *Stories in Stone: The Medieval Roof Carvings of Norwich Cathedral* (London: Herbert, 1977), p. 70. *Viel Testament* distinguishes 'Lamech qui tua Cayn' (= L. who killed C.) from the proto-bigamist Lamech of Genesis 4:18. See *Le Mistère du Vieux Testament*, Vol I, ed. by James de Rothschild, SATF (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1878), pp. 174 &c.

⁴⁷ Ellin M. Kelly, "'Ludus Coventriæ' Play 4 and the Egerton 'Genesis,'" *Notes & Queries*, 217 (1972), 443-4.

⁴⁸ Another dramatically unnecessary annotation is at the foot of f. 24^r: 'Noe schyp was in lenght ccc

treatment of the episode of the burning bush at the start of the austere didactic ‘Moses’ (Play 6).

Comestor’s influence went beyond the Old Testament. *Historia Scholastica* looks to have determined which episodes were included after traces of the *Northern Passion* disappear after the ‘Guarding of the Sepulchre’ (Play 34, end). With just two exceptions the remaining plays follow *Historia Scholastica* rather than the Gospels:

<i>Play</i> <i>no.</i>	<i>Episode</i>	<i>Hist. Schol.</i> <i>chapter</i> ⁴⁹	<i>Gospel</i>
34	Guarding of the Sepulchre	CLXXXII	Matt. 27:65-6
	Three Marys	CLXXXIII	
36	Announcement to Three Marys	CLXXXVI	
	Peter and John at the Sepulchre	CLXXXVII	
37	Appearance to Mary Magdalene	CLXXXVIII	Mark 16:9 John 20:14
38	Cleophas and Luke	CXCI	Mark 16:10 Luke 24:13
	Appearance to Thomas	CXCIV	John 20:25-9
39	Ascension	CXCVIII	Mark 16:19 Luke 24:51
	Selection of Matthias	Acts X	Acts 1:23-6
40	Pentecost	Acts XI-XII	Acts 2:1 &c.

Although *N-Town* does not follow Comestor in every detail, the same sequence of events has been adhered to and, as I shall show in the next chapter, where the plays disregard *Historia Scholastica* the omission can be explained in terms of either christological focus and/or effective dramaturgy. The plays that do not follow this source are the ‘Harrowing of Hell II; Pilate and the Soldiers’ (Play 35, start and end) and ‘The Last Judgement’ (Play 42). The latter needs no explanation in a text which starts with the explicit statement (at the top of f. 10^r) ‘Ego sum alpha et oo, principium et finis’. Omission of the former can be justified by reading the two sections of the play as a composite text which was incorporated in its entirety for the sake of the Harrowing, which is missing from ‘Harrowing of Hell I’ (Play 33) which deals only with the *descensus ad inferos*.

Even this may not mark the limit of *Historia Scholastica*’s importance. In the ‘Last Supper’ (Play 27) Jesus’s precisions regarding the Eucharist which typify the zealous orthodoxy of the plays (which I shall discuss in Chapter 5 (pp. 103-114)) have been shown to derive ultimately from Rabanus Maurus’s *Commentarium in Exodum* (p. 65). Whilst it is possible that the poet may have consulted a copy of Rabanus or read the extract in *florilegio*, I have not identified any other instance of the direct use of patristic exegesis. Although this clearly does not exclude the possibility, it is just as likely that the author of the relevant section referred to *Historia Scholastica*’s account headed ‘De diebus

cubytes, In brede fyfty, and þe heth thretty, þe flos 15 above hyest montayn.’

⁴⁹ See P.L. 198:1635-1653.

azymorum, et agno paschali', which contains the identical precisions.⁵⁰ Comestor was also an indirect influence on *N-Town* by way of *Le Passion des Jongleurs* from which the *Northern Passion* was developed (as to which see p. 83 below).⁵¹

c) Other sources having direct influence on the text

To some extent the identification of a source depends on it having been used frequently, as has been seen to be the case with *Legenda Aurea*, *Love's Mirror*, and the *Northern Passion*. The less a work has contributed, the harder it is to find evidence to corroborate its use. In spite of this epistemological difficulty, evidence of six further sources can be identified.

The components of 'Moses' (Play 6) which are not indebted to *Historia Scholastica* are the Commandments themselves and their exposition. Although the start of the Decalogue is headed '*Custodi precepta Domini Dei tui; Deutronomini vj^{to}*' (6/48 +) this is biblically inaccurate. They are first set out in Exodus 20:3-17 and are repeated in slightly different form in Deuteronomy 5:6-21 (not in chapter 6 as the text claims). The play follows neither version exactly, and omits the prohibition against graven images. The first eight Commandments are perhaps slightly closer to Exodus than Deuteronomy:

<i>N-Town</i> (6/66 + -171 +)	<i>Exodus</i>	<i>Deuteronomy</i>
1. <i>non habebis deos alienos</i>	20:3	5:7
2. <i>non [assumes] nomen Dei tui in vanum</i>	20:7	
3. <i>memento vt sabbatum sancifice[s]</i>	20:8 has <i>diem sabbati</i>	
4. <i>honora patrem tuum et matrem tuam</i>	20:12	5:16 omits <i>tuam</i>
5. <i>non occides</i>	20:13	5:17
6. <i>non makaberis</i>	20:14	5:18
7. <i>non furtum facies</i>	20:15	5:19 has <i>furtumque non facies</i>
8. <i>non loqueris contra proximum tuum falsum testimonium</i>	20:16	5:20

The play's version of these eight corresponds very closely with the text given in Archbishop Pecham's *Constitutiones* which were drawn up at the 1281 Lambeth Provincial Council (*De Ignorantia Sacerdotum*).⁵² But the final two Commandments echo the words, though not the sequence, of Peter Lombard's *Sententiarium Liber Quatuor* rather than Pecham:

9. *non desiderabis vxorem proximi tui, et cetera (sic)*

⁵⁰ *Liber Exodus*, Cap. XXV. (P.L. 198:1153-4).

⁵¹ *Historia Scholastica* also influenced the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* which was one of the sources used by the compiler/s of the Chester Cycle.

⁵² *Speculum Christiani*, ed. by Gustav Holmstedt, E.E.T.S. o.s. 182 (London: O.U.P., 1933), p. clxxxii, quoting *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, ed. by D. Wilkins (London, 1731), pp.54-6.

10. *non concupisces domum proximi tui, non seruum, non ancillam, non bo[vem], non asimum, nec omnia que illius sunt, et cetera (sic)*⁵³

Holmstedt's edition of *Speculum Christiani* prints what is in effect the same combination of Pecham and Peter Lombard as the play.⁵⁴ The ninth and tenth commandments proclaim their indebtedness to the Master of the Sentences, a conventional way of referring to the Lombard:

The nente commaundmente vpon the mayster of sentence III^o ... &c.
Nonum mandatum est secundum magistrum 3^o sentenciarum ... &c.

The tente commaundmente es, vpon the maister of sentence a-forseyde ... &c.
Decimum mandatum est secundum predictum magistrum ... &c.⁵⁵

N-Town departs from the Latin versions in only the smallest details: i) the play has 'nomen Dei' in the second Commandment in place of 'nomen domini';⁵⁶ ii) the main scribe has added 'et cetera' after the ninth Commandment (6/162 +); and iii) *Speculum Christiani*'s 'id est non aliquid quod illius est' is omitted before 'et cetera' in the tenth Commandment.

The closeness of these correspondences does not establish *Speculum Christiani* as the source used, since Gillespie has shown that substantial portions of it derived in turn from a late fourteenth-century *summa* which he calls **Cibus Anime**.⁵⁷ In order to consider the respective claims of these two related works, it is necessary first to look at the way in which each is constructed. Most manuscripts of *Speculum Christiani* are divided into eight *tabulae*, of which the first four consist of the Pechamite syllabus of religious instruction:- the creeds, the Decalogue, the works of mercy, the seven virtues and vices. Other *tabulae* deal with more broadly based didactic and hortatory material. The fifth *tabula* dealing with impediments and aids to spiritual progress seems to be in the nature of a sermon, as is the seventh. In the sixth *tabula* four 'philosophers' bring biblical authority to bear upon prevailing social and political conditions. The eighth contains pious *miscellanea* and prayers. None of the manuscripts is provided with apparatus to help the users find their way round these disparate components.

⁵³ Holmstedt, *Speculum Christiani*, p. clxxxii.

⁵⁴ Holmstedt, *Speculum Christiani*, pp. 16-37.

⁵⁵ Holmstedt, *Speculum Christiani*, pp. 34-7. Since versions exist in both Latin and the vernacular I have quoted both.

⁵⁶ The discrepancy is exaggerated by Holmstedt's editorial emendation rectifying a *lacuna*, 'domini'.

⁵⁷ V. Gillespie, 'The literary form of the pastoral manual with particular reference to the *Speculum Christiani*' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1981), Chaps. 4 and 5, *passim*. He has questioned the identity of some of the manuscripts listed by Holmstedt, and shown that his account of the relationship of the manuscripts is not always reliable. See also the same author's 'The evolution of the *Speculum Christiani*', in *Latin and Vernacular*, York Manuscript Conferences: Proceedings Series 1, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), pp. 40-41.

The *Cibus Anime* consists not of *tabulae* but either two or three books, each of which is subdivided into chapters. Most manuscripts are provided with a list of chapters which suggests that the work's readers, unlike those of the *Speculum Christiani*, were not expected to have prior knowledge of the contents. Although there is no critical edition of the *Cibus*, Gillespie's thesis contains a copy of the chapter list.⁵⁸ The section for Book 1, which includes the Commandments, is taken from Balliol College, Oxford MS. 239, f. 239. Some chapters contain material which is similar to the play's commentary on individual Commandments. Two correspondences are reasonably close:

(Third commandment)

Chap. 14. De comesacionibus [et] inebrietatibus. (*Cibus Anime*)

cf.

Thyn haly day þu keþyst not clene
In gloteny to lede þi lyff. (6/111-2)

This is closer than in the *Speculum*.

(Fifth commandment)

Chap. 24. Qualiter quis mente occidit.

Chap. 25. Qualiter quis lingua occidit. (*Cibus Anime*)

Both components are present in the play's commentary:

The fyfft comaundement byddyth all us
Scle no man, no whight þat þu kyll.
Vndyrstonde þis precept þus:
Scle no wyght with wurd nor wyll.
Wykkyd worde werkyht oftyntyme grett ill. (6/131-5)

Cibus Anime, Chapter 19, 'De reverencia prelatorum et contra eos qui sanctam ecclesiam inhonorant' parallels the sense of the play's second stanza on the fourth Commandment.

None of these unremarkable interpretations is in *Speculum Christiani*, but the correspondences are not on their own sufficient to prove that the writer used the *Cibus Anime*. I have therefore examined one of the manuscripts for further evidence. British Library MS. Harley 2379 is 'a literary miscellany also including [William of] Pagula's *Pars Oculi*, a *Liber Decretorum*, the *Speculum Sacerdotis*, and the *Dieta Salutatis*' as well as the excerpts from the *Cibus Anime* (which start on f. 37^r).⁵⁹ The Commandments, which begin on f. 3 and continue to f. 14, have commentaries that vary from two sides of writing for the first, second and third Commandments to five for the fourth (with between 26 and 30 lines to the page). If, as I believe to be the case, the writer used a copy of this work when he composed his commentary he was faced with an *embarras de richesses*. Unless

⁵⁸ Gillespie, Thesis, Appendix 2, pp. 402-7. The list for Book 1 is taken from Oxford, Balliol College MS. 239, f. 239.

⁵⁹ Gillespie, Thesis, p. 304.

particular material suggested itself for adaptation, as in the case of the third and fifth Commandments quoted above, he would have had no alternative but to generalise because of the length of what he was adapting.

With one exception, the play's commentaries on the other Commandments express unremarkable orthodoxy. Only the penultimate stanza suggests an ultimate source. In order to consider this it is necessary first to look at how the play presents its expositions. The four Commandments dealing with man's relations with God are each given two stanzas, whilst those concerned with his actions toward the rest of mankind get one apiece. The tradition of dividing the Commandments into groups of four and six, had a long history. Bede, Isidore of Seville, and Hugh of St. Victor all referred to it, and Peter Comestor included it in *Historia Scholastica* citing Josephus, an authority to whom he frequently returns. The play recapitulates the gist of Commandments 6, 9, and 10 in the penultimate stanza:

The vj^{te} comaundement of lechory
 Doth exclude þe synfull dede.
 But theys tweyn last most streytly,
 Both dede and thought þei do forbede.
 In wyll nere thought no lechory þu lede:
 Di thought and wyll þu must refreyn,
 All þi desyre, as I þe rede;
 In clennes of lyff þiself restreyn. (6/179-186)

The sentiments correspond with those of Peter Lombard, expressed at some length in *Sententiarum Libri Quatuor*, Distinctio XL (Pars 1):

Unde illi praecepto non moechandi, fit superadditio in Evangelio, Matt. 5, ubi omnis concupiscentia moechandi prohibetur. Sed cum hic prohibeatur concupiscentia alienae uxoris, et alienae rei, quare dicitur lex comprimere manum et non animum?⁶⁰

Whilst this might have provided the underlying inspiration for the play's added commentary, I have found no evidence of the direct use of Lombard's *Sentences* elsewhere and the influence of *Cibus Anime*, though not certain, seems more likely. Harley MS. 2379 makes the same immediate transition from discussion of the tenth Commandment to further consideration of lechery, citing 'sen^{a4}' by way of *auctoritas*. It also prohibits the coveting of 'ancillam non asinum nec que illius sunt et non aliquod quod illius est'. *Speculum Christiani* does not contain this material, and its presence in the same position in both the play and *Cibus Anime* corroborates its use by the writer of the play.

⁶⁰ P.L. 192: 838 = Whence to the commandment against adultery let there be added Matt. 5, where all thought of adultery is forbidden. But with this is forbidden the coveting the wife of another and the goods of another, so how can it be said that the law comprehends the deed and not the thought?

‘The Parliament of Heaven’ (Play 11, start) which also exists in a small number of Belgian, French, and German plays has its origins in an Annunciation sermon of Bernard of Clairvaux. It starts the prose section of *Meditationes* and a number of texts that derived from it⁶¹, one of which was the *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*. A number of correspondences suggest that this was probably used by the play’s compilers. Both share phraseology and a similar order of events. The same unusual number of 4604 years since the Fall of Man (11/1) is particularly striking.⁶² Other similarities include the *Charter*’s:

... & þanne he seyde þus: ‘*Vtinam dirumperes celos & descenderes*’, wolde god, he seyd, þou woldest bresten heuene & come adoon . . .⁶³

which is rendered in Contemplacio’s opening speech as:

Wolde God þu woldyst breke þin hefne myghtye
And com down here into erth . . . (11/9-10)

Here Contemplacio (to whom the speech was allotted after initial recension⁶⁴) is not the prefatory commentator of the previous three plays, but a participant in the action who performs an almost prophetic function. Although the plea to God (‘*utinam dirumperes caelos et descenderes*’⁶⁵) came originally from Isaiah 64:1 there is no suggestion that the play uses the Vulgate directly. The start of Contemplacio’s next stanza:

A, woo to vs wrecchis of wrecchis be,
For God hath haddyd ssorwe to sorwe. (11/17-18)

follows the *Charter* closely:

... wo me wrecche, he seip, þat god had eked more sorowe to my sorowe.⁶⁶

Although the writer of this play was selective in what he took from this source, even when he omits some of the original, he always followed its narrative order. This can be seen in Contemplacio’s fourth stanza:

‘A’, quod Jeremye, ‘who xal gyff wellys to myn eynes

⁶¹ Peter Meredith and Lynette Muir, ‘The Trial in Heaven in the *Eerste Bliscap* and other European plays’, *Dutch Crossing*, 22 (1984), 85.

⁶² cf. *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church and his Followers*, Vol. I, ed. by C. Horstman, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895), p. 345. New edition with Preface by Ann Clark Bartlett (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999).

⁶³ *Yorkshire Writers*, p. 347.

⁶⁴ Alan J. Fletcher, ‘The ‘Contemplacio’ prologue to the N-Town Play of the Parliament of Heaven’, *Notes & Queries*, n.s. 27 (1980), 111-112.

⁶⁵ = O that you would break the heavens and come down.

⁶⁶ *Yorkshire Writers*, I, p. 347.

Pat I may wepe bothe day and nyght
 To se oure bretheryn in so longe peynes?
 Here myschevys amende may bi mech myght.
 As grett as þe se, Lord, was Adamys contryssyon ryght.
 From oure hed is falle þe crowne. (11/25-30)

The quotation combines two passages which are separated by several lines in Horstman's edition, which records the reference to Jeremiah (9:1) as a marginal *nota*:

Quis dabit capiti meo aquam & oculis meis fontem lacrimarum, & plorabo [die ac nocte] interfeccionem filie populi mei, a, he seip, who schal ȝeu me water to myn heued . . .

In the next eight lines the *Charter* eulogises the Virgin in her capacity as the Prioress of the imagined Abbey. Somewhat surprisingly in view of the resolute Marianism of other plays the play omits this. The last line of the stanza quoted takes its inspiration from:

*Cecidit corona capitii nostri, ve obis quia peccauimus, I ne can nouȝt ellis seyn, he seip, but, þe fairest flour of al oure garlond is fallen away.*⁶⁷

The use of the *Charter* continues into the speeches of Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace, at which point it is diluted with the influence of Love's *Mirror*, particularly in the revisional *abababab* octaves.

In 'The Last Supper' (Play 27) the account of the Passover Feast given in the *Northern Passion* has been expanded by incorporating detail which derived ultimately from Rabanus Maurus's *Commentarium in Exodus* although this may not have been used directly. In giving what purports to be 'infformacyon in þe same forme as þe eld lawe doth specyfye' (27/393-4), the play goes beyond the minimum detail necessary to expound the symbolic meaning of the Eucharist to a late medieval audience. Agreement between the play and Rabanus starts with the importance of eating unleavened bread:

... et azymos panes cum lactucis agrestibus. Panes quippe sine fermento comedit, qui recta opera sine corruptione vanae gloriae exercet; quia mandata misericordiae sine admixtione peccati exhibit.⁶⁸

The play is substantially similar:

With no bytter bred þis bred ete xal be:
 Pat is to say, with no byttnesse of hate and envye,
 But with þe suete bred of loue and charyté,
 Weche fortefyet þe soule gretlye.

⁶⁷ *Yorkshire Writers*, p. 347-8.

⁶⁸ P.L. 108:50 (C) = especially unleavened bread with wild salads. Let him who would practice good works without the taint of pride eat loaves which are naturally risen; in this way he will show compassion without hint of sin.

And it xuld be etyn with þe bytter sokelyng:
 þat is to mene, 3yf a man be of synful dysposysyon,
 Hath led his lyff here with myslevyng,
 Perefore in his hert he xal haue bytter contrycyon. (27/396-404)

The next stanza not only replicates the sense of Rabanus's exegesis but also echoes its diction:

Also, þe hed with þe feet ete xal 3e:
 Be þe hed 3e xal vndyrstand my Godhed,
 And be þe feet 3e xal take myn humanyté.
 Peſe tweyn 3e xal receyve togedyr, indede. (27/405-8)

Here 'humanyté' has been taken direct from this ultimate source:

Caput ergo agni vorare, est divinitatem illius fide percipere. Pedes vero agni vorare,
 est vestigia humanitatis ejus amando et imitando perquirere.⁶⁹

Other similarities include the treatment of the uneaten parts of the Paschal lamb. 'Yt xuld be cast in þe clere fyre and brent' (27/414) parallels Rabanus's 'si quid autem remanserit,
 igni comburetis'.⁷⁰ Those who eat must be dressed 'renes accinctos'⁷¹ to guard against intervention by the devil in the generative act when the loins are unclad:

The gyrdyl þat was comawndyd here reynes to sprede
 Xal be þe gyrdyl of clennes and chastyté. (27/417-8)

None of these details has a *prima facie* connection with contemporary instruction in the Eucharist. Although the correspondences support the case to be made for the use of Rabanus Maurus's Exodus Commentary the same details are given in *inter alia* Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*. Since it has already been seen to have contributed extensively to *N-Town* it may well also have provided this section of text.

Both parts of the Harrowing of Hell broadly follow the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (*Descensus Christi ad Inferos*), both as regards the Descent in Play 33 and the actual Harrowing in Play 35. And whilst this Apocryphal work must be considered to be the ultimate source, both episodes can also be found in *Legenda Aurea*, *Meditationes*, *Historia Scholastica*, and *Love's Mirror*. However, the words of the risen Christ at first follow the **Middle English Harrowing of Hell** so closely that it must have been known to the play's compiler:

⁶⁹ P.L. 108:51 (C) = Therefore to eat the head of the lamb is to comprehend the divinity of his faith. Moreover to eat the feet of the lamb is to contemplate human nature by loving and copying it.

⁷⁰ P.L. 108:51 (D) = But if anything should be left over, you must burn it in the fire.

⁷¹ P.L. 108: 51-2 = the loins girt.

M/E *Harrowing*

Hard gates haue y gon
& suffred pines mani on;
thritti winter & þridde half 3ere
haue y wond in lond here;

þai bete me tyl y ran on blode,
þai dempt me to hong on rode;
alle for adams sinne ywis,
þan haue y þoled þis.

(*Auchinleck* / 43-6,55-8)⁷²

N-Town

Hard gatys haue I gon
And peynes sofryd many on
Stomblyd at stake and at ston
Ny3 thre and thretty 3ere.

For manrys loue I tholyd dede,
And for manrys loue I am rysyn up rede.
For man I haue mad my body in brede,
His sowle for to fede.

(35/73-5, 81-4)

The connection between play and the vernacular text is particularly compelling in the first two lines. But since it has not left its mark elsewhere, either in the Harrowing plays or in *N-Town* as a whole, the overall importance of this source appears to be minimal. The section is short enough to be memorised without conscious effort and it might even be argued that the play's re-ordering of this material could have resulted from the verses being imperfectly remembered. Against this, the play varies the content of the Auchinleck manuscript in a telling way that suggests express didactic purpose rather than casual memory. It adds not just a reference to the Resurrection, but unmistakeable reference to Transubstantiation ('I haue mad my body in brede' (35/83)) which is not in the original. Were it not for this pointed reference the importance of the Middle English *Harrowing of Hell* would seem negligible. As it is, this single reference to sacramental theology speaks in its own way as distinctly as the lengthier expositions of orthodoxy taken from *Legenda Aurea*, *Love's Mirror*, and the *Northern Passion*.

The last source to have left a lexical imprint is the only wholly secular text which I have identified. Part of the Prologue of Satan (Play 26, start) contains echoes of the **Statute, 3 Edw. IV, c.5**. This sumptuary enactment provides a *terminus a quo* of 1463 for composition of this section of text. The argument of Benkovitz who suggested that either Pseudo-Bonaventure or *Love's Mirror* 'was very likely the inspiration' for Satan's Prologue is not wholly convincing.⁷³

Satan marshals his forces of transgression on two fronts. Although most of his 'new engynes of malycyous conspiracy' (26/50) are devised against God, his costume offends civil law. His stated aim is deliberately to disrupt both Church and state:

Loke þu sett not be precept nor be comawndement:
Both sevyle and canoun sett þu at nowth. (26/93-4)

⁷² *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus*, ed. by William Henry Hume, E.E.T.S. e.s. 100 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1907), p. 5.

⁷³ Miriam J. Benkovitz, 'Some notes on the 'Prologue of Demon' of *Ludus Coventriæ*', *Modern Language Notes*, 60 (1945), 79.

The start of the Prologue establishes his wish to gain revenge for his expulsion from Heaven. It is to this section that Benkovitz sought to ascribe the *Meditationes / Love's Mirror* influence. The statute's influence is only felt when Satan shifts his attack from the second person of the Trinity to enmesh the audience in his subversive teaching by expounding 'the dyvercyté of (his) dysgysyd varyauns' (26/65). Whilst the correspondences are seldom close, the general indebtedness can be seen in the following extract:

Off fyne cordewan a goodly peyre of long-pekyd schon;
 Hosyn enclosyd of þe most costyous cloth of crenseyn
 (Pus a bey to a jentylman to make comparycyon),
 With two doseyn poyntys of cheverelle, þe aglottys of syluer feyn;
 A shert of feyn Holond (but care not for þe payment!)
 A stomachere of clere Reynes . . . (26/69-74)

cf.

no Knight under the State of a Lord, Esquire, Gentleman, nor other Person, shall use not wear . . . any Shoes or Boots having Pikes passind the Length of Two Inches . . . No Man but such as hath Possessions of the yearly value of xl s. {shall wear] in Array for his Body . . . any Fustian, Bustian, nor Fustian of Naples, Scarlet Cloth in Grain . . . No man but such as have Possessions to the Yearly Value of Forty Pounds or above [shall] wear . . . any Girdle garnished with Silver or any Corse of Silk made out of this Realm of England.⁷⁴

The content of Satan's next stanza:

Candace, wolle, or flokkys, where it may be sowth,
 To stuffe withal þi dobbelet and make þe of proporcyon
 Two smale legges and a gret body . . . (2677-9)

is closer to the statute:

No Yeoman, nor none other person of the [same] Degree . . . shall use nor wear . . . any Bolsters nor stuffing of Wool, Cotton, nor Cadas, nor [any] stuffing in his Doublet.

Less specifically, 'a gown of thre 3erdys' (26/81) falls clearly within the category of 'excessive and inordinate Apparel', the object set out in the statute's preamble. Faint echoes can also be heard toward the end of Satan's speech:

A beggerys dowtere to make gret puruyauns
 To cownterfete a jentylwoman, dysgeysyd as she can.

⁷⁴ *Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. II, pp. 398-9.

And yf mony lakke, þis is þe newe chevesauns:
 With here prevy plesawns to get it off sum man;
 Here colere splayd and furryd with ermyn, calabere⁷⁵, or satan,
 A seyn to selle lechory to hem þat wyl bey. (26/101-6)

The mysogynistic third and fourth lines here quoted can be disregarded when making comparison with the statute, which reads:

no Esquire nor Gentleman, nor none under the degree of Knight, nor none of their Wives, except the Sons of Lords and their Wives, and the Daughters of Lords, Esquires for the King's Body, and their Wives [shall] wear from (the appointed day) any Velvet, Satin [branched], nor any counterfeit Cloth of Silk resembling the same, or any Corses wrought like to Velvet or to Satin [branched] or any Furr of Ermine.

Satin and ermine are common to both play and statute, and calaber (defined by the *O.E.D.* as 'a kind of fur, apparently obtained from some foreign species of squirrel') would include 'a Corse wrought like to Velvet'. The adjective 'counterfeit', which the statute applies to silk cloth, may have prompted the play's compiler when he needed a verb with which to decry the beggar's daughter.

d) Sources having more remote influence

Up to this point my identifications have all been supported to some extent by direct, lexical comparisons - although much of the influence of *Historia Scholastica* is of a more general nature. Two other sources appear to have contributed narrative content without affecting the phraseology of the plays for which they were used.

Legenda Aurea has been seen to be the source of one of the two exemplars that were combined to form 'The Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10). The ultimate source of the other exemplar, written in Proclamation thirteeners, was *Pseudo-Matthew* (also known as *Liber de Ortu Beatae Mariae et Infantae Salvatoris*). From Chapters 7-10 the compiler of this exemplar took the centrality of Episcopus and his address to 'universus populus'⁷⁶ which he rendered as 'lordyngs bothe hye and lowe' (10/1). The Bishop's name is similar in both. 'Abiathar summus pontifex' in this source becomes 'Abysakar Episcopus' in the play's initial stage direction, and 'þe grete bushop Abyacar' at Proc./118. Mary's age is given as fourteen, as opposed to many accounts of the same events which do not follow *Pseudo-Matthew*.⁷⁷ All the maidens assigned to tend Mary are mentioned by name, and the Bishop's reaction to her vow of single life is identical. He first queries her

⁷⁵ Since 'calabere' is the the antepenultimate word in this line, *N-Town Play*'s capitalisation is incorrect.

⁷⁶ *Evangelia Apocrypha*, ed. by Constantin Tischendorf (Leipzig: Avenarius et Mendelssohn, 1853), p. 65.
⁷⁷ e.g. *The Middle English Stanzaic Versions of the Life of St. Anne*, ed. by Roscoe E. Parker, E.E.T.S., o.s. 174 (London: O.U.P., 1928), p. 111, l. 409.

decision, before accepting it and offering a prayer. Both texts have the unmarried men of the tribe of Juda ('all kynsmen of Dauyd' (10/126)) bear rods as symbols of their single status.⁷⁸ 'Joseph's Doubt' (Play 12) has also been substantially revised, and here too there are signs of the influence of *Pseudo-Matthew*. The same attendant maidens appear as in the Marriage play, and Joseph's misunderstanding that Mary is blaming an angel (12/71-4) seems to be indebted to:

Ut quid me seducitis ut credam vobis quia angelus domini impregnaevit eam? Potest enim fieri ut quisquam se finxerit angelum dominui et deceperit eam.⁷⁹

I have already noted the ultimate influence of the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* on the two parts of the Harrowing of Hell. Another Apocryphal book, *Vita Adae et Eva* may have contributed detail in 'The Fall of Man' (Play 2). The play is a combination of two exemplars, the text of which can be distinguished lexically and prosodically. The earlier part of the play is, with two exceptions, all written in thirteeners, as is the actual expulsion (2/283-334), but the section following God's discovery of the disobedience of Adam and Eve is in tail-rhyme. In the thirteeners the tempter of Eve is identified as 'Serpens' (2/87-90, 100-112, 115-60), whereas the tail-rhyme references are to 'Diabolus' (2/235, 267). Eve's lament in the antepenultimate stanza (a thirteener, therefore once part of the *urcycle*) concludes with her begging Adam to kill her as punishment for the trouble she has brought upon them, which is not in *Genesis*, but was known from *Vita Adae et Eva*.

* * * * *

The foregoing are most unlikely to be all the sources that are capable of identification. I have only accounted for about half the plays, and many of those are dealt with in part only. Whilst some sections of text were no doubt original composition, anyone with a specialist knowledge of late medieval religious writing would probably be able to extend my findings. For example in 'The Appearance to Thomas' (Play 38, end) the insistent burden of 'Quod mortuus et sepultus nunc resurrexit' at the end of each stanza of the lament (38/360, 368, 376, 384) suggests a religious lyric that has yet to be identified. None the less, three of my findings add to the overall picture. *Cibus Anime* has been identified as the source of the Decalogue and the inspiration behind some of the commentaries on the Commandments. I have shown that the extended version of the *Northern Passion* was used rather than one of the original recensions claimed by Foster. Lastly I have showed that the influence of

⁷⁸ In the stanzas which derive from *Pseudo-Matthew* 'virga' is always rendered '3erde', whilst 'wand' or 'rodde' is used in the text taken from the *Legenda Aurea* exemplar.

⁷⁹ *Evangelia Apocrypha*, p. 72. = And what do you take me for that I should believe that an angel of God made her pregnant? What really happened was that someone dressed as an angel to deceive her.

Historia Scholastica reached beyond the Old Testament episodes. For all its limitations this information makes it possible to consider in the next chapter the attitudes and likely educational background of the dozen or so individuals who were responsible for the creation of the manuscript and its contents.

Chapter 4

What the source texts say

This chapter will look at how the identified sources inform my reading, both intrinsically and in the ways in which they were used by the writers of the plays. First I shall describe the general nature and contents of each source and indicate the purpose for which it was written. Texts will be grouped under sub-headings according to whether they were written in Latin or the vernacular and, wherever possible, I shall indicate the work's relative availability.¹ The second section will argue that *Historia Scholastica*, *Love's Mirror*, *Cibus Anime*, and the extended version of the *Northern Passion* all have particular significance. Thirdly I shall show some of the ways in which the writers adapted and added to the sources that they worked from. The chapter will end by arguing that, considered as a whole, the sources imply that those who wrote, compiled, copied, and revised the plays were all regular clerics.

a) Description and availability

Most of the identified sources point to an unremarkable Catholic orthodoxy, particularly where the Latin works are concerned. The vernacular texts also present conventional Catholicism, none more so than Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* which addresses doctrinal shortcomings.

Since the plays depend for their ultimate authority on the scriptures it is appropriate to start by considering the Bible. Whilst its ready availability in the later Middle Ages is not in doubt, the same cannot be said for its contents. Biblical canonicity was not settled until the 1546 sessions of the Council of Trent, some years after the last of *N-Town*'s four scribes had finished work. The distinction is important because, at the time the plays were written, Pseudo-Matthew (*Liber de Infantia*) and the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (which in its complete form comprises the *Acta* (sometimes *Gesta*) *Pilati* and the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*) both had an authority that has largely disappeared over the intervening centuries. This affects present day attitudes to the *Contemplacio* plays, for which the former was used, and the Harrowing of Hell episodes which are indebted to the *Descensus*. Where the plays

¹ Printed copies can be largely excluded from the reckoning since the latest date that has been suggested (by M. B. Parkes) for the start of the manuscript is the last decade of the fifteenth century (and some of the plays may well have come into being some years earlier). None of the identified sources is known to have been available in printed form before the turn of the century. The first book printed in England, the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy* appeared in 1476 and although Caxton's translation and expansion of a French version of Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Sanctorum in Englysshe*, probably appeared in 1484 (William Caxton (London: British Library, 1976), pp. 9, 66) the evidence points to the *N-Town* compilers having used the Latin original.

rely on this sort of extra-biblical material they none the less present conventionally acceptable scripture, irrespective of whether the compilers consulted the original Latin or vernacular versions - or even worked wholly from memory, as seems to have been the case for the passage beginning 'Hard gatys haue I gon' (35/73-84). The same applies to the putative influence of the *Vita Adae et Evaे* at the end of the 'Fall of Man' (Play 2, end). Although today this is not normally included among the Old Testament Apocrypha its use does not imply heterodoxy. Such non-canonical texts were widely available, both in Latin and in translation.

i) Latin sources

Muir has shown that with the development of affective piety in the later Middle Ages two thirteenth-century Latin texts, both of which contributed either directly or indirectly to *N-Town*, had become supremely important to religious drama.² The pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi* has been called:

a life of Christ, a biography of the Blessed Virgin, the fifth gospel, the last of the apocrypha ... a summary of medieval spirituality, a religious handbook of contemplation, a manual of christian iconography.³

In spite of the breathless nature of his description this commentator none the less conveys the versatile nature of what was a very widely known work. The text emphasises aspects of the earthly life of Jesus, especially the earliest years about which the Gospels supply very little information. It has recently been claimed that one of the work's underlying principles was that pious invention 'consistent with the scriptural text was a licit spiritual enterprise', a sentiment which would have struck a chord with the writers of much medieval drama.⁴ *Meditationes* was translated into most vernaculars and reached a far wider readership than merely the Poor Clares to whom it was addressed.

Gibson, who restricts her comments to England, goes further than Muir's assessment of the work's importance claiming that:

It is probably fair to say that the Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes* was, with the sole exception of the Bible and the apocryphal gospels, the single most influential literary text upon the vernacular English drama.⁵

² Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, p.5 &c.

³ *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, ed. by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, quoting *Smaointe Beatha Chriost*, ed. by Cainneach Ó Maonaigh (Dublin, 1941), p. 325. The same quotation appears in Sargent, *Love's Mirror*, p. xix.

⁴ John Fleming, 'The Friars and Medieval English Literature,' in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1999), pp. 349-375 (p. 373).

⁵ Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 10.

However, this statement is not wholly convincing, since Gibson seems to consider Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* as more or less identical to its parent text. As I shall shortly show, the *Mirror* was more than a mere translation of *Meditationes* and must be considered as a separate work. None the less, even though pseudo-Bonaventure survives in comparatively few manuscripts it was widely known and was translated into most European languages. One hundred and thirteen surviving copies of *Meditationes* have been identified 'including forty-four (the largest single national group) in English libraries'.⁶

The second of the paramount sources proposed by Muir, Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, is a commentary on a sequence of legends organised round a calendar of saints' days. Widely used in the preparation of sermons, its readership was predominantly - though not exclusively - clerical. The appeal of the work has been said to be that:

it enabled Mary, and therefore Jesus, to appear in the world embedded in that plausible nexus of blood relations on which, though satisfying about her cousinage to Elizabeth and John the Baptist, the canonical gospels gave ... scanty and contradictory information.⁷

Although the quotation addresses representations of the Holy Kinship, the application to drama is self-evident. Since it frequently dwells on the human aspects of Jesus's life, it called for no great leap of the imagination to represent the second person of the Trinity in a contemporary context. The *Legenda*'s distribution and influence have been described thus:

The popularity of the *Legend* was such that it survives in some thousand manuscripts, and with the advent of printing in the 1450s, editions both in the original Latin and in every Western European language multiplied into the hundreds. It has been said that in the late Middle Ages the only book more widely read was the Bible.⁸

This is a more secure assessment than Gibson's extravagant claims for *Meditationes*. Furthermore *Legenda Aurea* is the only one of the identified sources for which I have found specific evidence of local popularity in East Anglia. In Tanner's study of late medieval Norwich wills the only books that occur with greater frequency are liturgical texts. It is mentioned eleven times in the 104 documents that Tanner examined for the period 1440-1489 and eighteen times in total.⁹ He found no instances of lay ownership.¹⁰

Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* has been seen to have exercised a diverse and far-reaching influence on the plays. Compiled in about 1170 as a textbook for use in

⁶ Sargent (ed.), *Love's Mirror*, p. xix.

⁷ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, (Oxford: O.U.P., 1985), p. 9.

⁸ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, Vol. I, p. xiii.

⁹ The period probably covers the composition of the plays and the initial recension of the manuscript.

¹⁰ Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1378-1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), Appendix 6, p. 196. None of the other sources used can be securely identified in Tanner's lists.

the Paris schools, it is a compendium of biblically based material amplified by reference to the *Glossa Ordinaria* and other commentaries. It treats the Old Testament as a literal and historical study and avoids allegorical interpretation and typological exposition.¹¹ The New Testament *Historia evangelia* ends, like the Gospels, with the Ascension. A further 123 chapters dealing with the Acts of the Apostles were added later by Peter of Poitiers.¹² However, it was Comestor himself who in Chapter XXXVII (*De variis opinionibus historiae*) discussed the historiographical difficulties posed by the Gospel narratives which, after the Calling of the Apostles, do not agree. He rejected the co-ordinate authority of harmonised versions (such as those of Ammonius of Alexander, Eusebius Caesariensis, and Theophilus) in favour of a selective account consistent with Jesus having preached to the Apostles in private ('occulte') before the imprisonment of John. In view of the importance of this chapter, I have quoted it in full with a translation in Appendix D on pp. 162-3.

As with other Latin texts it is difficult to come by reliable numbers of surviving copies, but an impression of *Historia Scholastica*'s wide distribution can be had from surviving book lists. By comparing numbers of surviving manuscripts it can be seen to have been much more readily available than the forty-four known copies of *Meditationes*. It came early to England, with copies known to have been at Durham in 1194 and Rochester in 1202.¹³ The Augustinian Canons at Leicester, who toward the end of the fifteenth century recorded their bookholdings with exceptional thoroughness, held at least five copies.¹⁴ And in spite of the paucity of surviving records from mendicant houses, it is known that the Austin Friars had four copies at York by 1372, whilst the Carmelites had a copy at Aylesford in 1381 and two at Hulne in 1433.¹⁵ Although the Benedictines at Canterbury had no fewer than twenty-one copies by 1480, the numbers from York and Leicester are probably more typical of large institutional libraries. A French translation by Guyart Desmoulin enjoyed something of a vogue among the nobility in France¹⁶, but Comestor's Latin original seems not all to have been rendered into English¹⁷ and this side of the Channel its use was mainly restricted to clergy.¹⁸

¹¹ David Luscombe, 'Peter Comestor', in *The Bible in the Medieval World*, Studies in Church History, ed. by Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 109-129.

¹² Migne confusingly prints this with Peter Comestor's text (P.L. 198: 1645-1722).

¹³ James H. Morey, 'Peter Comestor: Biblical Paraphrase and the Medieval Popular Bible,' *Speculum* 68 (1993), p. 26.

¹⁴ *The Libraries of the Augustinian Canons*, ed. by T. Webber and A.G. Watson, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues, 6 (London: British Library, 1998), pp. 219-220; entries numbered 530, 531, 532, 533, 539 (?), 540.

¹⁵ *The Friars' Libraries*, ed. by K.W. Humphreys, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues, 4 (London: British Library, 1990), pp. 12-13, entries 7, 8, 9, 25a.; p. 158, entry 11; p. 173, entries 41 and 42.

¹⁶ C. Du Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, 2nd edn., (London: Phaidon, 1994), p. 160. As its author acknowledges, the scope of this book is wider than its title implies, since it covers all medieval manuscripts whether illuminated or not.

¹⁷ Morey, 'Peter Comestor,' *passim*.

¹⁸ 'Magister Historiarum' is only mentioned in one of the wills studied by Tanner, but the legacy in

These three texts all date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, unlike the latest of the main Latin sources, the *Cibus Anime*, which was compiled in the 1390s. Since it is less well known than the others, some background detail is called for. The work has received extensive critical attention from Gillespie in connection with his research on *Speculum Christiani*, part of which derived from it.¹⁹ The basic catechetical content of both works goes back to Archbishop Pecham's 1281 Lambeth *constitutiones*, which were perhaps the best-known of a number of similar episcopal measures to address the education of the clergy. Following the precepts established by Pecham the *Cibus Anime* dealt *inter alia* with the Articles of Faith, the Ten Commandments, the corporal and spiritual Works of Mercy, and the Deadly Sins. All found their way in an abbreviated form into the *Speculum*. Gillespie considers that the overtly homiletic *Cibus* 'is operating at a higher level of pastoral sophistication' than the slightly later *Speculum*.²⁰ An illustration of its scholarly approach can be seen in the tacit assumption that readers of its version of Commandment 10 would be familiar with Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. The importance of the *Sentences* to contemporary religious education can hardly be overstated. The Lombard's text formed the core of both Bachelors' and Higher degrees in theology at Oxford.²¹ The mendicants used it in their own centres of study of higher theology such as the Franciscan schools at Coventry, Exeter, London, Norwich, Stamford, and York. In this respect the Friars Minor probably followed the practice of the Dominicans, and the Carmelites taught a comparable syllabus at the similar institutions which they maintained at Coventry, London, and Stamford as well as at Oxford.²²

Just fourteen copies of *Cibus Anime* are known, of which I have only been able to establish the early provenance of two.²³ Harley 237 belonged to the Carthusians at Mount Grace and Harley 3820 was one of the two books owned by a recluse at Sheen.²⁴ Since the plays originated in East Anglia, neither of these copies appears to be relevant.

ii) Vernacular sources

Whilst the Latin sources (which except for the *Cibus Anime* are substantially older than the vernacular ones) point to formal theological training based on traditional learning, the vernacular works show that those responsible for the plays were also receptive to some

question was made by a cleric. (Tanner, *Church*, p. 195.)

¹⁹ Gillespie, 'The Evolution of the *Speculum Christiani*', pp. 39-61.

²⁰ Gillespie, Thesis, p. 204.

²¹ *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages by the Late Hastings Rashdall*, Vol. III, 2nd edn., ed. by F.M. Powicke and A.B. Emden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 159.

²² Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973), pp. 229-230.

²³ Gillespie, Thesis, p. 401 (Appendix 1).

²⁴ N.R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, 2nd. edn. (London: R. H.S., 1964), pp. 132, 179. It is not clear whether the Sheen recluse was attached to the Charterhouse.

more recent writing - provided that the orthodoxy of their compilation should not be thereby compromised. In this respect the credentials of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* are beyond reproach. Love's expansion and partial translation of *Meditationes* dates from the early fifteenth century.²⁵ The work is not merely orthodox in content but actively proclaims its opposition to heresy, a characteristic that distinguishes the *Mirror* from its textual progenitor. The *Mirror*'s acceptability is formally attested in seventeen of the surviving manuscripts by a prefatory Latin memorandum:

... circa annum domini Millesimum quadrigentesimum decimum, originalis copia huius libri ... presentabatur Londiniis per compilatorem eiusdem . N . Domino Thome Arundell, Cantuarie Archiespupo, ad inspiciendum & debite examinandum antequam fuerat libere communicata. Qui post inspeccionem eiusdem per dies aliquot.' retradens ipsum librum memorato eiusdem auctori.' proprie vocis oraculo ipsum in singulis commendauit & approbavit, necnon & auctoritate sua metropolitica, vt pote catholicum, puplice communicandum fore decreuit & manduit, ad fidelium edificationem, & hereticorum sive lollardorum confutacionem.²⁶

around the year 1410, the original copy of this book ... was presented in London by its compiler, N. to the Most Reverend Father and Lord in Christ, Lord Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury for inspection and due examination before it was freely communicated. Who after examining it for several days, returning it to the above mentioned author, commended and approved it personally, and further decreed and commanded by his metropolitan authority that it rather be published universally for the education of the faithful and the confutation of heretics or Lollards.²⁷

In addition to his archiepiscopal duties Thomas Arundel three times served the Crown as Chancellor before being finally removed from that office in December 1409.²⁸ His tenure of the see of Canterbury was less sporadic, lasting from January 1397 until his death in February 1414 (with a short interruption during 1398-9 when he was translated to St. Andrews²⁹). His later career at the head of the English church therefore had a stability that was lacking in his political service to the Crown. From this secure ecclesiastical platform he was able to combat heresies that were perceived to flourish in the wake of Wyclif

²⁵ A.I. Doyle, 'Reflections of Some Manuscripts of Nicholas Love's *Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesus Christ*', *Leeds Studies in English*, 14 (1983), 83.

²⁶ Sargent, Love's *Mirror*, p. 7.

²⁷ Translation by Sargent. See Love's *Mirror*, p. xiv.

²⁸ 1386-89, 1391-96, and 1407-1409. See John A.F. Thomson, *The Transformation of Medieval England, 1370-1529* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 162, 392. Perhaps the imprecision of the date in the memorandum ('circa annum domini 1410') was a deliberate attempt not to associate the text too closely with the period of Arundel's final fall from royal favour.

²⁹ This was because of his involvement with four of the Appellant lords who opposed the faction with which Richard II surrounded himself in the early 1380s. See R.N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 107.

Arundel's 1409 Lambeth Constitutions had addressed several issues that Chapter 6 will argue are specifically relevant to the plays. They forbade discussion of the sacraments beyond a simple presentation of the church's determinations on the subject.³⁰ Preaching in the vernacular, which had been of concern to the Church for several decades, was to be licensed. Preachers were forbidden to criticise clerical vices before the laity, and *vice versa*. Of particular relevance to the Carthusian Love was the provision that no book, pamphlet or tract be composed, translated or promulgated until it had been approved by the local diocesan or, if necessary, provincial council.³¹ In going to the highest possible authority to obtain this approval, Love exceeded the requirements of the 1409 Constitutions. It is not hard to see why Arundel gave his *nihil obstat*, since the *Mirror* exhorted direct obedience to ecclesiastical authority, insisted on auricular confession to a priest, and discussed each of the sacraments with care, paying special attention to Eucharist. The *Mirror* survives:

in fifty-six complete or originally-complete manuscripts, four extracts, and an additional composite version: it was printed by Caxton in 1484 and 1490, by Pynson and de Worde in 1494, again by Pynson in 1506, and by de Worde four more times in the first thirty years of the sixteenth century.³²

The frequency with which this popular work was printed and re-printed may show the extent of contemporary demand for it more surely than manuscript survival. Even after the Reformation the work 'continued to be kept and known . . . by Catholics in England and in exile on the continent of Europe, lay-people, clergy and members of religious orders, a mixed public, as in the Middle Ages'.³³

The other identified vernacular influences all predate Love's *Mirror*. The *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* was written before 1380, the date of the earliest known recension in the Vernon manuscript. Like much of Love's *Mirror* it has its origins in the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Even though copies are to be found in the same codices as *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (sometimes even interpolated between sections of that text), the *Charter* is a separate and unrelated work, which uses the figurative construct of the Abbey as the basis of a series of allegorical meditations on the spiritual implications of a number of scriptural events. Into this is woven the treatment of the Four Daughters of God which the 'Parliament of Heaven' (Play 11, start) draws on. The *Charter*'s inclusion of this episode

³⁰ Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), pp. 355-6.

³¹ Sargent, *Love's Mirror*, pp. xliv-xlv. The Carthusians were prominent in the making and distribution of manuscripts.

³² *Ibid.*, p. lxiii.

³³ A.I. Doyle, 'The Study of Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, Retrospect and Prospect' in *Nicholas Love at Waseda*, ed. by Shoichi Oguro, Richard Beadle and Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 164-5.

achieves more than just a quantitative increase in the work's allegorical content, since it makes the story of the Daughters an integral part of the story of the Abbey.³⁴

The *Charter* is known from twenty-four manuscripts as well as three early prints, which, as with Love's *Mirror*, attest the work's contemporary popularity. The *Charter* was 'explicitly aimed at an audience in the world wishing to live in some way under religious discipline', but it was also read by professed clerics.³⁵ None of the surviving manuscript copies can be traced to a source which might be directly relevant to the East Anglian origins of *N-Town*.

The most extensively used of the vernacular sources is the *Northern Passion*. Whilst it shares the predominantly scriptural origins of the other identified sources, it cannot be claimed as part of the mainstream of religious education, and it was far less widely distributed than the others. The original versions (see pp. 48-54) are substantially based on the anonymous thirteenth-century *Passion des Jongleurs* which, in the century after it was written, had influenced the compilers of the early French Passion plays. This provides a further link with *Historia Scholastica* to which it was directly indebted. One of this work's most recent editors has described its suitability for dramatic adaptation in the following terms:

La *PJ* (sic) contient, outre sa grande quantité de discours au style direct en forme de dialogues et monologues, plusieurs éléments qui auraient rendu assez facile son adaptation dramatique. Les descriptions des actions et des intentions des personnages permettaient déjà une certaine caractérisation. Les fréquents changements de scène, annoncés par des expressions de transition . . . se seraient très bien prêtés à une division en scènes; par endroits, ils suggèrent l'emploi d'un décor et d'une action simultanés.³⁶

As well as its great quantity of direct speech in the form of dialogues and monologues, the *PJ* contains several elements which would have made its dramatic adaptation quite simple. The descriptions of action and the intentions of the *dramatis personae* already permitted a degree of characterisation. The frequent changes of scene, announced by transitional phrases . . . would have lent themselves well to division into scenes; in places they suggest the use of scenery and simultaneous action.

All these features, direct speech, description of action and intention, frequent, clear-cut changes of scene, and simultaneity of action, which are already well on the way towards dramatic writing, occur in both the original and expanded versions of the *Northern Passion*.

³⁴ Stella Brook, 'The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost', *Modern Language Review*, 54 (1959), p. 483.

³⁵ Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1989), p.324.

³⁶ *La Passion des Jongleurs*, ed by Anne Joubert et Amari Perry (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), p. 90.

It, too, could therefore be readily adapted to set the last days of Christ's life in a realistic contemporary context.³⁷

The expanded texts of the *Northern Passion* change the order of some sections, omit a few lines of description in others, and also add new material.³⁸ An introduction has been included which, after reciting the Gospels by way of *auctoritas*, promises that humankind shall 'get þe victory / Of þe fende oure fals enemy' (H. 41-2*). The expanded versions make the role of Judas more prominent by including *inter alia* his observations on the ointment offered by the Magdalen and giving a longer treatment of his ineffectual repentance.³⁹ Mary's journey on the road to Calvary which culminates in her presence at the foot of the Cross is elaborated, as is the description of the setting of the tablet by Pilate at the Crucifixion. Whilst these additions add vivid detail to the sense of scriptural authenticity claimed in the added introduction, the expanded version also deals with the Legend of the Rood at much greater length than the original texts. In keeping with the orthodoxy which characterises its overall approach, *N-Town* ignores the legendary aspects of the Cross, for which no biblical or quasi-scriptural authority could be claimed.

The earliest of the eleven manuscripts of the original, unexpanded version of the *Northern Passion* (Cambridge University MS. Gg. 1.1.) has been dated to 1300-1330 with most of the rest no later than the end of the fifteenth century. If Foster's dates are correct some of these were probably produced after the surviving copies of the expanded version, which have been assigned to 1340-60 (Rawlinson MS Poetry 175 (Bodl. MS 14667)), 1390-1410 (B.L. MS Cotton, Tiberius E. vii), and the beginning of the fifteenth century (B.L. MS Harleian 4196).⁴⁰ The fact that the original version was still being copied after the expanded version came into being shows that the variations in the expanded version were incorporated as alternatives rather than necessary amendments. The question may be asked - though unfortunately not answered - whether the clerk or clerks responsible for the *N-Town* plays that draw on the *Northern Passion* used the extended version in preference to the original version, or whether the choice was determined by what was available.

I have only found contemporary locations for two copies of the original version. Cotton, Vespasian D. IX was held by the Carthusians at Sheen and Rawlinson C. 86 (Bodl. 11951) belonged to the Cluniac Priory at Bermondsey.⁴¹ None of three surviving manuscripts of the expanded version is listed in Ker's *Medieval Libraries* or its Supplement

³⁷ Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 182, n. 19.

³⁸ Detail has been omitted from e.g. the strewing of palm fronds in the Entry into Jerusalem, Christ's washing of the disciples' feet in the Last Supper, and the description of the diabolic beast in the dream of Pilate's wife.

³⁹ In 'The Last Supper' (Play 27) this incident is an interpolation in the hand of the main scribe (f. 149^V, the second page of Quire O).

⁴⁰ Foster, *Northern Passion*, Vol. II, pp. 9-18.

⁴¹ The earlier numbering of the *N-Town* manuscript as D. 9 noted by Sir Thomas Dugdale (see. pp. 40-1) is probably a coincidence.

nor do they appear in Cavanaugh's study of privately owned books.⁴² Because the expanded version has survived in such small numbers it could be of great benefit to the study of *N-Town* should a contemporary location for any of them be discovered.

It only remains briefly to mention the sumptuary statute whose influence I detect in Satan's Prologue at the start of Passion Play I. Since the administration of civil and canon law was less rigidly demarcated before the Reformation than after and monastic and mendicant libraries frequently held collections of civil enactments, the apparent quotation of the sumptuary statute, 3 Edw. IV, c. 5, does not argue against *N-Town*'s origins in a house of regulars.⁴³

b) Choice of sources⁴⁴

In addition to the orthodox Catholicism that can be inferred from the identified sources as a whole, *Historia Scholastica*, *Love's Mirror*, *Cibus Anime*, and the *Northern Passion* each has individual significance to my reading.

The *N-Town* plays, like Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, avoid typological exposition (notwithstanding the claims that this was the basis on which the plays were compiled).⁴⁵ The first six plays take few opportunities to look forward to the New Testament and seldom explicate typological references. In 'The Fall of Man' (Play 2) God anticipates the eventual fate of the Devil ('In helle logge þu xalt be loky[n]' (2/233) 'Tyl a maydon in medyl-erth be born' (2/263)) and the Seraphim incorporate prophecy in the expulsion from Paradise:

Herein come 3e no more
 Tyl a chylde of a mayde be born
 And vpon þe rode rent and torn
 To sauе all þat 3e haue forlorn,
 3oure welth for to restore. (2/291-5)

In the next play Abel makes a single reference to the salvation of humankind when he speaks of divine mercy as that:

⁴² Ker, *Medieval Libraries; Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: Supplement to the Second Edition*, ed. by N. R. Ker and Andrew G. Watson, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1987); Susan H. Cavanaugh, 'A Study of Books Privately Owned in England, 1300-1450' (unpublished University of Philadelphia dissertation, 1980).

⁴³ Swanson, *Church and Society*, pp. 140 *et seq.*

⁴⁴ In this section the four sources discussed are each distinguished by bold type when first mentioned.

⁴⁵ Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, pp. 221-257, especially p. 233. Gauvin, whilst acknowledging the limited way in which the *N-Town* Old Testament plays expressly prefigure the life of Christ, none the less claims that the selection of the New Testament episodes was determined by typology. (*Un Cycle*, pp. 102-115)

Which, in a lombys lykenes,
 Pu xalt for mannys wyckydnes
 Onys ben offeryd in peynfulnes
 And deyn ful dolfolys. (3/75-8)

Apart from these references to the Redemption there is no explicit prefiguration in those plays which belong strictly to the Old Testament. Only 'Jesse Root' (Play 7), which is constructed in what Ysaia calls a 'spyryte of prophecie' (7/3,) gives clear indications as to what the biblical future holds. The Proclamation sets the tone:

Kyngys and prophetys with wordys ful sote
 Schull prophesye al of a qwen,
 Pe which xal staunch oure stryff and moote,
 And wynnyn us welthe withoutyn wen,
 In hevyn to abyde.
 They xal prophecye of a mayde,
 All fendys of here xal be affrayde.
 Here sone xal sauve us, be not dismayde,
 With hese woundys wyde. (Proc./ 109-117)

The play's emphasis is as much on the Virgin mother as her son, as can be seen from the numerous Marian references by Ysias (7/4, 9), Dauyd (7/30-1), Salomon (7/43-4), Roboas (7/52), Micheas (7/56), Abias (7/60), Danyel (7/63-4), Asa (7/66), Achas (7/108), Ozyas (7/112), Ezechias (7/116), Sophosas (7/120), and Manasses (7/ 124).

Questions asked in other plays about potentially typological material are couched rhetorically. In 'Moses' (Play 6), for example, a stage direction having no direct relevance to what has gone before introduces the burning bush, '*Hic Moyses videns [rubum] ardentem admirande dicit*' (6/16 + s.d.). The prophet asks:

A, mercy, God, what menyth 3on syte? (6/17)
 before sharing his puzzlement with the audience:

It fyguryth sum thyng of ryght gret fame;
 I kannot seyn what it may be. (6/21-2)

Because it burned and was not consumed the Burning Bush was seen as a type of the Virgin Birth, yet the writer made no attempt to use it as an *exemplum* to be expounded, and did nothing to resolve the prophet's uncertainty or the curiosity that he might prompt in an audience.⁴⁶

The absence of typology becomes more noticeable when this play is compared with other contemporary versions. The majority of the incomplete Towneley play resembles

⁴⁶ Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 78.

N-Town in setting the filial obedience of Isaac against Abraham's obedience to the word of God. But eight lines before the end the surviving text contains a tantalising hint of what the missing conclusion may have been:

ISAAC. Sir shall I lif?
 ABRAHAM. Yei, this to tokyn. (*Towneley*, 4/278)

What the survival of Isaac is to 'tokyn' has been lost or destroyed. Although the word suggests that the play's meaning was to be expounded, the concluding part of the play was in the leaves that are now missing from the manuscript. The Chester Expositor allows no such misunderstanding:

This deede yee seene done here in this place,
 in example of Jesus done yt was,
 that for to wynne mankinde grace
 was sacrificyed one the roode. (*Chester*, IV/464-7)

And although in York the typology is not explicit, the text has an adult Isaac of similar age to Jesus at the Crucifixion:

He is of eelde to reken right
 Thyrt 3ere and more sumdele. (*York*, X/82)

By making this identification the York treatment likens the sacrifice to be made by Abraham to God's sacrifice of his own son.

Le Mistére du Vieux Testament is far more detailed than any of the surviving English versions. Misericorde links the Abraham and Isaac episode directly with the Passion of Christ by using the *figura* of the lamb, anticipating both the biblical recording of the episode and its later exposition:

Vous sçavez que Abraham entent
 Le tuer, mais la voulenté
 Doit suffire en bonne equité
 Et laisser l'enfant, et qu'il vive;
 Mais c'est figure monstrative
 De la passion Jhesucrist,
 Du quel sera fait maint escript
 Et maint proverbe admiratif,
 De ses douleurs figuratif,
 Ainsi que cestuy qui dira
 Que Jhesucrist obeyra
 Jusque a la mort et, comme aigneau
 Prins en sacrifice nouveau,
 Souffrira sans occasion
 Qu'on le maine a l'occision,
 Le loy le met, et des prophétes

Seront les prophecies faictes
Et escriptes en plusieurs lieux⁴⁷. (*Viel Testament*, 10340-57)

You know that Abraham means to kill him, but equity looks to the intent and he lets the child go and he lives; but this is the *figura* of the passion of Christ, about much will come to be written with many admiring proverbs. So will it about Christ's obedience even unto death, and, like the lamb taken for the new sacrifice, he will suffer by being taken to his death without cause. The law ordains it and it is foretold by the prophets and written in various books.

As noted in the previous chapter, *N-Town* makes nothing of the other figural possibilities of the story. Isaac carrying the fuel for his own immolation prefigured Christ carrying the Cross to Calvary, yet the play's only comment is Abraham's command:

Now, son, in þi necke þis fagot þu take,
And þis fyre bere in þinne honde. (5/113-4)

In the *Viel Testament*, by contrast, as he complies with his father's command Isaac carries not a billet of firewood but 'boys' (wood), the same substance of which the Cross will be made. This was probably intended as part of the play's extensive treatment of the myth of the Holy Rood which *N-Town* deliberately avoids.

Although *Historia Scholastica* influenced most of the Old Testament episodes, the main scribe followed it with particular closeness in the genealogical material which he copied in *Textura Quadrata*. He probably also took the biographical material written in his normal Anglicana bookhand in the table containing the ancestry of Noah (on ff. 16^v- 18^r). I have argued (on pp. 55-6) that Comestor also influenced the contents of the manuscript after the scribe resumed work after the Last Words at 32/183. Where these plays do not follow the *Historia*'s scheme the omission can in each case be justified either as dramatic expediency or on thematic grounds:-

CLXXXIV *De alio ordine dierum.*

(Concerning the re-ordering of days.)

Whilst the effects that medieval stagecraft could achieve should never be underestimated, such a scenic transformation would undoubtedly have been difficult. Omitting the inversion of the order of day and night ensures that an audience would not be tempted to marvel at stagecraft instead of the enactment of Resurrection, which is the focus of the plays' attention at this point.

CLXXXV *Opiniones de horae resurrectionis.* }

(Opinions concerning the hour of the Resurrection.) }

CLXXXIX *De mandato custodum.* }

⁴⁷/Rothschild, *Viel Testament*, II, pp. 61-2.

(Concerning the setting of the guard.) }

Both chapters are the stuff of scholarly debate which could only be included at the cost of dramatic momentum.

CXC *Quod Dominus apparuit mulieribus in via.*

(Why the Lord appeared to the women in the street.)

The appearance to these women is conflated with the Announcement to the Three Marys in Play 36.

CXCIII *Quod postquam comedit cum eis insufflans dedit Spiritum sanctum.*

(Why after he had eaten with them he exhaled the Holy Spirit.)

The plays allude to the episode obliquely in the unfinished 'Ascension; Selection of Matthias' (Play 39) and 'Pentecost' (Play 40)⁴⁸.

CXCIV *Quod Dominus apparuit aliis absentae Thoma.*

(Why the Lord appeared to the others in the absence of Thomas.)

By concentrating solely on the doubts of Thomas the text of the play brings the teaching of Jesus into sharper focus.

CXCV *De apparitione ad mare Tiberiadis.*

(Concerning the appearance at Lake Tiberias.)

Like the reversal of day and night in Chapter CLXXXIV, this too may have been ignored for reasons either of effective staging and/or narrative urgency.

CXCVI *Opiniones de morte Joannis Evangelistae.*

(Opinions concerning the death of John the Evangelist.)

This is another scholarly nicety - like Chapters CLXXXV and CLXXXIX - which is not essential to the enactment of the life of Jesus.

CXCVII *De apparitione Domini in Galilaea, mandatum est discipulis, ut docerent gentes, et baptizarent.*

(Concerning the appearance of the Lord in Galilee, the commission of the Apostles so they might teach people and give baptism.)

The Commission of the Apostles is also secondary to the plays' main purpose which at this point is to narrate the last days of Jesus.

Marginal notes form an integral part of *Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ*. Material taken direct from the pseudo-Bonaventuran original is designated 'B' and Love's additions are marked 'N'.⁴⁹ The latter group themselves around three main themes: obedience to ecclesiastical hierarchy and the related matters of offerings and tithes, auricular confession to a priest, and the sacrament of the Eucharist.⁵⁰ I shall show in Chapter 5 that all three were explored in one or more of the plays. Where Love's additions

⁴⁸ See 39/35-43, 40/11-12.

⁴⁹ e.g. *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 35.

⁵⁰ Sargent, *Love's Mirror*, p. xlvi.

comment directly on Wycliffite positions they are designated ‘Contra Lollardos’ in many later manuscripts.⁵¹ The overt orthodoxy of Love’s *Mirror* proclaimed in the memorandum (quoted on p. 74) shows that the theological position of those responsible for *N-Town* was opposed to Lollardy. This begs the question whether, and if so to what extent, the plays can be read as a response to heresy, which I shall address in Chapter 6.

The wording of the Decalogue in ‘Moses’ (Play 5) was to all intents and purposes copied *verbatim et litteratim* from *Cibus Anime*. But the work’s influence on the play’s commentaries was at best remote and sometimes non-existent. Only the exposition of the third, (perhaps the fourth), and fifth Commandments and the play’s penultimate stanza seem to draw on it directly. The other commentaries are loose generalisations composed to take the place of what in the *Cibus* amounts to several pages of text. The need to replace the lengthy original came about because the writer allowed himself just sixteen lines of verse for the Commandments dealing with man’s dealings with God and eight for those that covered his dealings with the rest of mankind.

Since a basic treatment of the Commandments was common to both *Cibus Anime* and the more readily available *Speculum Christiani*, it is significant that the writer of this play seems to have consulted the one which was less widely distributed. The explanation lies in the way in which each is structured, which in turn reflects why they were made. *Cibus Anime* is usually divided into two (or less often three) books, each comprising several chapters. Book 1 contains fifty-two chapters, book 2 has sixty-four and sometimes more; recensions which include the third book have a further seventeen chapters. Most copies are provided with a list of chapters to facilitate use. This was needed since what is in effect a short theological *summa* would have had little practical value without some way for the reader to find what he was looking for. In contrast to the *Cibus Anime*’s methodical approach, *Speculum Christiani* is shorter and more diffuse and is divided not into books and chapters, but into *tabulae*, of which the first four cover the Pechamite syllabus. It follows its preamble with a broad explanation of the basis on which it is divided.⁵² Such an arrangement is better suited to the instructional nature of this text than the sort of detailed prefatory *apparatus* used for the *Cibus Anime* would be. Gillespie finds that its sophisticated apparatus and careful *ordinatio* are characteristic of this type of reference work.⁵³ I think it unlikely that such a learned text would have been used because it was the only version available. There would have been little difficulty in obtaining a copy of *Speculum Christiani* if one were required. It seems more likely that the clerk who composed the play would have felt more at ease with the advanced work in view of its

⁵¹ e.g. *Ibid.*, p. 24. See also Doyle, ‘Reflections on Some Manuscripts’, 82-93.

⁵² Holmstedt, *Speculum Christiani*, pp. 8-9.

⁵³ Gillespie, Thesis, p. 2.

rehearsal of *auctoritates*, in much the same way as today's scholar consults *O.E.D.* in preference to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

Use of the extended version of the *Northern Passion* implies specialist knowledge. Compared with the other major sources like *Legenda Aurea* and *Meditationes*, and even the more recent *Mirror*, it was little known and - if the three surviving manuscripts give even an approximate indication of its distribution - not readily come by. There are two possible explanations why the clerk who wrote the base text of the initial Passion sequence used it. He may have known that it had contributed to the York and Towneley cycles.⁵⁴ On the other hand he may have been aware that it was based on the *Passion des Jongleurs*, which had been used by the compilers of French Passion plays. Some will favour the former alternative because both the Northern cycles are written in dialects of Middle English and, as the crow flies, East Anglia is nearer to York than to France. Neither of these reasons is wholly convincing. Language would not be a significant factor to a clerk who had Latin as his *lingua franca*, and distance is not the only way to measure proximity. A sea voyage might take less time than a shorter journey made on foot or by horse, and well-established trading connections existed between East Anglia and the Low Countries and northern France. Moreover York staged its cycle differently. The guilds moved their plays from 'station' to 'station' on wagons, which served as playing sites. But stage directions in the *N-Town Passion Plays* specify elaborate polyscenic staging more like the multiple stages which were widespread in France.⁵⁵ Another factor which seems to suggest the French influence is the prior existence of the initial Passion sequence as separate booklets. The *N-Town Passion* once existed as two discrete dramatic units in isolation from the Old Testaments, Marian, and other plays. They included the biblical events between the Conspiracy and the Crucifixion but we can only guess the precise point at which Passion Play II ended, since the scribe added the closing episodes some time later. But if the final event was the Resurrection, as seems likely, the treatment would resemble the French plays which tended not to present later episodes in the life of Christ. This important topic of *N-Town's* affinities with continental drama calls for more careful consideration than the limits of my thesis allow.

The *Northern Passion* is also revealing because two substantial sections of text, both dealing with extra-biblical material were ignored. The first is the suicide of Judas which even the original versions deal with at length (see, e.g. G. 817-904). The traitor disciple despairs of getting mercy from Jesus and asks the Jews to rescind the deal. Although they stand by the bargain he returns the thirty pieces of silver and hangs himself. His stomach bursts and his guts fall out. The Jews then, after deciding the money cannot

⁵⁴ Foster, *Northern Passion*, II, pp. 89-101. The *Northern Passion* may also have influenced the Cornish *Ordinalia*, some features of which resemble French treatments.

⁵⁵ Peter Happé, *English Drama before Shakespeare* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 53.

be paid to the treasury, buy Calvary, the field of blood, which would later be used for the Crucifixion. Matthew 27:3-8 gives a brief account which is similar in most respects except for the physical details which are apocryphal. The expanded versions include more apocryphal material elaborating why Judas did not ask for mercy and explaining why his guts spilled. The play only includes details authorised by the account in Matthew 27:3-5, which is the the only gospel to include the event:

Here enteryth Judas onto þe Juwys, þus seyng:

JUDAS I, Judas, haue synnyd, and treson haue don,
 For I haue betrayd þis rythful blood.
 Here is 3oure mony a3en, all and som.
 For sorwe and thowth I am wax wood!
ANNAS What is þat to us? Avyse þe now,
 þu dedyst with us counawnt make:
 þu seldyst hym as hors or kow,
 þerfore þin owyn dedys þu must take.

Pan Judas castyth down þe mony, and goth and hangyth hymself.

(30/24 + s.d.-32 + s.d.)

The play also largely ignores the Legend of the Holy Rood, which is only mentioned obliquely in the stretching of Christ's limbs before the Crucifixion. The significance lies not so much in the relative absence of sadistic detail as the avoidance of the apocryphal material which all texts of the *Northern Passion* contain immediately before the Crucifixion. The original versions tell the story at length (e.g. D. 1293-1520) and the expanded versions contain almost nine hundred lines about legendary aspects of the Cross and its origins (e.g. P. 1745-2618). There are two possible reasons why this apocryphal material may have been omitted. First, it would detract from the dramatic urgency of the events leading up to the Crucifixion - and therefore the redemption of mankind. Second, this section of text lacked biblical *auctoritas* and would have offended against notions of what might properly be included in a play that depended on the scriptures for its ultimate authority. Since I argue that the plays' compilers and writers had scholastic backgrounds the latter alternative is the more plausible.

c) How the sources were used

Provided a work contained the appropriate material and dealt with it acceptably, it could be used in various ways. Although the writers of some plays followed their sources closely and others used them as little more than an *aide-mémoire* to give a general indication of what material should be included, most used them in ways that fall between these extremes. In a few cases parts of a source text seem to have been ignored in order to

achieve effective dramatic composition. To illustrate the range of possibilities I shall consider 'The Parliament of Heaven' (Play 11, start), 'The Assumption of Mary' (Play 41), and parts of the Passion, each of which draws predominantly on a single source.

The start of the Debate of the Four Daughters of God uses the *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* comparatively freely. *Contemplacio* ignores references to Adam and Eve, David, and Solomon which in Horstman's edition are several pages before the debate itself.⁵⁶ He then invokes first Isaiah then Jeremiah in his impassioned plea that humankind be saved (11/1-33), making the point with a narrative urgency lacking in the *Charter*. After this the play corresponds fairly closely - allowing for the changes needed to versify the prose original - with the section of the *Charter* headed '*here now hou goddys dou3tren pleteden for mannus soule aforñ here fadur*'.⁵⁷

The treatment of the *Charter*'s Latin is untypical, since other plays usually translate the original.⁵⁸ Early in the Debate, *Contemplacio* omits the source's Latin and goes straight to the vernacular, losing the precision of the *Charter* in the process. Lines in his third stanza (11/17-18, here italicised) seem to continue an earlier reference to Isaiah:

Haue mende of þe prayour seyd by Ysaie,
Lete mercy meke þin hyest magesté.
Wolde God þu woldyst breke þin hefne myghtye
And com down here into erth

*A, woo to vs wrecchis of wrecchis be,
For God hath haddyd ssorwe to sorwe.* (11/7-10, 17-18)

The third and fourth lines here quoted (11/9-10) render Isaiah 64:1 ('Utinam disrumperes caelos et descenderes') but the last two lines belong elsewhere (Jeremiah 45:3). The *Charter* makes this clear:

... þanne wente Ierome þe prophete & sou3te hem also; & for he mi3te not fynde hem, he made a reuful mone & seyde þus: *Ve michi misero, quoniam addidit dominus dolorem dolori meo; laboravi in gemitu meo*, wo me wrecche, he seip þat god hab̄ eked more sorowe to my sorowe.

Neither the plea which the Virtues add to *Contemplacio*'s opening stanzas ('Aungelys, archaungelys, we thre / þat ben in the fyrst ierarchie, &c.' (11/33-48)) nor Psalm 11:6, 'Propter miseriam inopum et gemitum pauperum nunc exsurgam' are in the *Charter*.⁵⁹ Although the former may have been added to heighten dramatic impact, the

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 347.

⁵⁷ Horstman, *Yorkshire Writers*, Vol. I, p. 349 &c.

⁵⁸ See e.g. 'Moses' (Play 6) *passim*; the rendering of the Gradual Psalms in 'The Presentation of Mary' (Play 9); the rebuttal of the doctors's feigned erudition at 21/33 in 'Christ and the Doctors' (Play 21).

⁵⁹ The Septuagint version quoted appears in a somewhat different form in Isaiah 33:10.

latter provides a secure biblical basis for what is about to happen when God anticipates the outcome of the debate. The play here provides both Latin and a translation, unlike Contemplacio's confused mention of the prophets which gives only the vernacular.

The selective way in which translation is used refines the typically clerical association of Latin with important teaching. Therefore when Psalm 11:6 (Vulgate), '*Propter miseriam inopum / Et gemitum pauperum / nunc exurgam*' (11/48a) authorises the Incarnation, it is translated immediately:

For þe wretchydnes of þe ned
And þe porys lamentacyon
Now xal I ryse þat am almyghty. (11/49-51)

Later when Gabriel quotes Luke 1:28, '*Ave, gracia plena, Dominus tecum*' (11/216), in praise of the Virgin this is immediately followed by 'Heyl, ful of grace, God is with the' (11/217). In contrast, when a choir of angels reprise these same words at the end of the play there is no translation since, once the meaning has been made clear, the aim is to exalt rather than expound. Latin also emphasizes the importance of the theme of mercy announced by the Virtutes, who *ex abundante caritate* wish to see not only man delivered from sin but also the fallen Lucifer restored to his former place among the angels. Misericordia is the only one of the Four Daughters to depart from the vernacular:

Thu seyst, Veritas mea et Misericordia mea cum ipso (11/85)

The quotation from Psalm 88:25 (Vulgate) is not in the *Charter* and the linguistic hierarchy implied by her use of Latin establishes Mercy's function as *prima inter pares*. She brings the Debate to an end by quoting Psalm 84:11 (Vulgate) :

Now is þe loveday mad of us fowre fynialy,
Now may we leve in pes as we were wonte.
Misericordia et Veritas obviauerunt sibi,
Justicia et Pax osculate sunt. (11/185-9)

This play's embellishments of the *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* all contribute to *N-Town's* veneration of the Virgin and associate her with the supreme virtue of mercy.

Of the major texts, the *Northern Passion* can be considered most fully. Apart from the Ass and Foal episode on f. 143 which was added after the main scribe finished the original recension, the earliest trace is in the first section of 'The Last Supper' (Play 27) when Jesus sends Peter and John to meet Simon the Leper (27/25-8). The influence of this work continues through the rest of the initial Passion sequence, i.e. up to the point in Passion Play II where the main scribe broke off at the Last Words (32/183). When he resumed work at 32/184 he blended the play described in the Proclamation with new

material.⁶⁰ In this section of text I have only been able to trace the *Northern Passion* in sections of 'The Burial; the Guarding of the Sepulchre' (Play 34). This source makes no contribution to the Prologue of Satan or its rebuttal in the Baptist's Prologue, the Conspiracy, or the Entry into Jerusalem. Nor does it contribute to the start of Passion Play II in which Contemplacio's introduction seems to be poetic invention. But after these introductory episodes both Passion Plays contain sufficient similarities, as regards both content and lexis, to suggest that the *Northern Passion* was the main source used. It is instructive to note where the plays vary the contents of the original and introduce extraneous detail.

Several plays rearrange the order of events. In 'The Last Supper' (Play 27) the Passover is celebrated in the house of Simon the Leper, which in the *Northern Passion* and the gospels is a separate venue where Mary Magdalen washes the feet of Jesus.⁶¹ In conflating these two episodes the play acquires a unity of place that intensifies its teaching.⁶² The surreptitious departure of Judas to conspire with the High Priests is a further part of this re-ordering. In Passion Play II the influence of the *Northern Passion* is first evident in 'The Trials before Pilate and Herod' (Play 30, end). Here the perfunctory version of the suicide of Judas has been added (30/24 + s.d. - 32 + s.d.) in place of what must have been the much fuller treatment announced in the Proclamation (Proc./360-372). The play gives no physical details of his death nor does it mention the uses to which the blood money is put by the High Priests. Both these extra-biblical topics are explored at some length in the *Northern Passion*, where the remorse of Judas is dealt with only after the Trial before Pilate is over and Jesus has been led away to Pilate. The account in the expanded versions (e.g. H. 857-900b.) is even longer.

'The Dream of Pilate's Wife' (Play 31, start) also varies this source. The audience sees Satan as he 'enteryth . . . into þe place in þe most orryble wyse' (31/ init. s.d.). After a prologue and converse with one of the devils in hell he goes to Pilate's wife and silently draws aside the curtain to the bed where she lies asleep. As she wakes from her dream she describes what has happened:

A fend aperyd me beforne
As I lay in my bed slepyng fast.
Sethyn þe tyme þat I was born
Was I nevyr so sore agast.
As wylde fyre and thondyrblast
He cam cryeng onto me. (31/62-7)

⁶⁰ *Passion Play*, pp. 8-9.

⁶¹ Matthew 26:6-7, 18-19; Mark 14:3, 12-17; Luke 22:7-14 (does not include the gift of ointment at the house of Simon the Leper); John 12:3, 12, 13:1 &c.

⁶² This need not imply that the writer was applying Aristotelian poetics.

These words make it impossible that Satan suddenly assumes angelic disguise, about which the *Northern Passion* is specific ('Als ane aungell he went by nyght' (P. 1419)). The order has also been changed. In the source text her intervention does not happen until after Pilate has offered Barabas to the Jews in place of Jesus. By changing the sequence of events the play heightens the pressure on Pilate during the Second Trial when, reluctantly, he sentences Jesus to death. It might also be argued that the re-ordering ensures that nothing is allowed to detract from the build-up to 'The Crucifixion' (Play 32), the central episode of Passion Play II which is imminent.⁶³

Even where there are no lexical echoes of the *Northern Passion* its influence is seldom far away. For example, the soldiers wish to ascertain whether Jesus is dead and seek to implicate Longeus in their investigation:

SECUNDUS MILES	He is ded, how þinkyth 3ow? He xal nevyr go nor speke.
PRIMUS MILES	We wyl be sure or þan we go. Of a thyng I am bethowth; 3ondyr is a blynd knyth I xal go to, And sone a whyle here xal be wrowth. (34/83-8)

Neither the Bible nor the *Northern Passion* contains this uncertainty, nor is it mentioned in the Proclamation description (Proc./399-411).⁶⁴ But once the soldiers' misgivings have been dealt with the play goes back to the source to comment on the sharpness of the spear handed to Longeus by the soldiers (H. 1874; cf. 34/98). Source and play both also emphasize the innocence of the blind knight, albeit in different ways. The extended versions of the *Northern Passion* stress his ignorance of what he was doing:

þe knight, þat wist neuer what he wrought
Putted fast and spared noght &c. (H. 186a-7)

The play justifies his ready obedience by invoking the Sabbath day:

Sere, at 3oure comawndement with 3ow wyl I wende
In what place 3e wyl me haue.
For I trost 3e be my frend;
Lede me forth, sere, oure Sabbath 3ou save. (34/93-6)

⁶³The Crucifixion is central to Passion Play II in the same way as the Last Supper is the main episode in Passion Play I.

⁶⁴(John 19:33) 'ad lesun autem cum venissent ut viderunt eum iam mortuum' = but when they came to Jesus they saw that he was already dead.

The writer has added topical relevance by treating the incident in this way. Play and source both emphasise the faith that follows as the result of the restoration of Longeus's sight. The *Northern Passion*'s account of the episode begins zeugmatically:

Both water & blude bilue out ran;
Of þat ilk bale oure blute bigan,
þe water water wesche all oure wa oway (*sic*),
þe blude vs boght to blis for ay. (H. 1879-1880b.)

In the play Longeus first recognizes (on f. 188^r) 'þe mayndonyss (*sic*) sone' (34/106) before falling on his knees to offer a prayer for mercy.⁶⁵ At the end of the episode the powerful visual image of the setting of ladders against the cross associates the resultant theme of mercy with the crucified Christ to mark the play's transition to the Deposition.

Other parts of the Passion which do not have their origins in the *Northern Passion* contribute to the overall picture in various ways. The text marks as optional an encounter between Judas and the Devil in the middle of the Last Supper:

Pan Judas xal gon ageyn to þe Jewys. And, yf men wolne, xal mete with hym and sey þis spech folwyng - or levyn't whether þei wyl - þe devyl þus seyng:

(27/465 + s.d)

Demon's speech that follows this stage direction contains an unmistakeable reference to Transubstantiation when he approves of Judas's betrayal of Jesus:

Thow hast solde þi maystyr and etyn hym also. (27/470)

Since this element is not in any texts of the *Northern Passion* it can be assumed that the optional speech was included as much for doctrinal reasons as an ornament to actual performance. Rewfyn and Leyon, the 'temperal jewgys' (26/195) first met as part of the Conspiracy, who link up with Gamalyel to compass the downfall of Jesus in 'The Betrayal' (Play 28) add to the general sense that all opposition to the word of Christ is wrong. To counter the sense of boding evil, precise details deriving ultimately from Rabanus Maurus's *Commentarium in Exodus* of how the Passover feast was to be celebrated validate Eucharistic observance. Whether this and other sacramental orthodoxies were added as a response to heretical views about Transubstantiation will be considered in Chapter 6.

The episode of Veronica is also not in the *The Northern Passion*, but it can be traced back to Latin versions of the *Gesta Pilati* (the first section of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*).⁶⁶ Its origins were therefore acceptable because they were quasi-scriptural

⁶⁵ Spector and Meredith both emend this. *N-Town Play*, Vol. I prints '[maydonnys]' (p. 341). *Passion Play* has 'maydonyss' (p. 135).

⁶⁶ Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 135. Woolf considered the inclusion of this episode as evidence of continental influence (*English Mystery Plays*, p. 260). Veronica here is not the woman mentioned in *Legenda Aurea*, Chapter 53 (*De Passione Domini*) or the woman cured of an issue of blood, with whom she is sometimes

(see above p. 76) unlike the wholly mythical material relating to the Holy Rood which the writer was at pains to avoid. Moreover by the late Middle Ages the Veronica legend had acquired an independent validity as one of the Stations of the Cross, all of which except for Christ's falls are included in *N-Town*.⁶⁷

It is seldom possible to trace the use of major sources such as *Legenda Aurea*, Pseudo-Matthew, Love's *Mirror*, and *Meditationes* because the early Marian plays which draw on them were extensively revised. However 'The Assumption of Mary' (Play 41) which contains very little that was not taken from Jacobus.⁶⁸ Chapter CXIX of *Legenda* is divided into two parts, 'De assumptione beatae Mariae virginis' and 'De modo assumptionis beatae Mariae', of which only the theologically validated former section has been used.⁶⁹ The *auctoritates* such as Epiphanius and Peter Comestor cited by Jacobus are not in the 'De modo assumptionis' section, which loosely claims to have its origins 'in quodam sermone ex diversis dictis sanctorum compilato, qui in pluribus ecclesiis legitur'.⁷⁰ This play therefore resembles those episodes which, whilst following the biblically verifiable sections of the *Northern Passion*, avoid the extra-scriptural Legend of the Holy Rood.

The writer of the Assumption followed dramatic convention by starting with the potentially transgressive characters. Only when he had established this subversive element did he mine the source for material wherewith to glorify the Virgin. He varied some of the detail in *Legenda Aurea* and incorporated additional features. The latter has John the Evangelist appear at the door of Mary's house after he has been miraculously translated in a shining cloud with a clap of thunder from Ephesus.⁷¹ In the play this is reduced to a passing reference in a speech ('by a whyte clowde I was rapt to these hylls' (41/191)). This alteration was perhaps made in order not to lessen the dramatic impact of the moment of the Assumption by including unnecessary detail at this preliminary stage. Even though the direction 'Et hic assendet in celum cantantibus organis' (41/521+ s.d.) gives no particulars of what effects were envisaged, the taking up of the Virgin is likely to have been

identified.

⁶⁷ The stations which were painted or carved on the walls of churches developed in the later Middle Ages largely under Franciscan influence. They were designed for devotional purposes and those who observed the correct sequence and said the appropriate prayers at each station could thereby gain indulgences. They now normally comprise:- Christ receiving the Cross; (First Fall); Christ meeting his Mother; Simon the Cyrene made to carry the Cross; Veronica wiping Christ's face; (Second fall); Christ meeting the Women of Jerusalem; (Third fall); Christ being stripped of his clothes; Christ being nailed to the Cross; the Death on the Cross; the Deposition; the Burial. (O.D.C.C.)

⁶⁸ It will be remembered that this play is a discrete codicological unit copied by a different scribe to the rest. It has distinctive prosodic, lexical, and semantic features, and was to be staged in a way that was similar to, but not the same as, the Passion Plays.

⁶⁹ Graesse, *Legenda Aurea*, pp. 504 and 517 respectively.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 517 = in a sermon which was compiled from various sayings of saints and which was read in many churches.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 505.

achieved with extravagant spectacle. It is less easy to suggest why the three maidens who attend Mary in the *Legenda* are reduced in the play to two.

The writer also introduced new characters. Sapientia, who seems to represent Christ as the personification of mercy, (41/107-114) is an addition, as are Episcopus Legis and the three Principes. At first the latter speak contemptuously of Mary:

... Art thou ferd of a wenche?
What trowste thou sche myht don vs agayn? (41/66-7)

Episcopus is 'prest of the lave' (41/40), concerned to deal severely with 'sweche harlotis / That geynseyn oure lawe and oure Scripture' (41/49, 50). This attribution of law-breaking and blasphemy to his adversaries resembles the catch-all approach of Satan's Prologue at the start of the Passion where the audience is urged to set 'both sevyle and canoun (law) . . . at nowth' (26/94). But the parallel is not exact since the function of the Principes does not remain constant. Whilst all three Princes start off as adherents of Episcopus, after Primus Princeps - 'princeps sacerdotum' *pace* Jacobus⁷² - has thrown himself on the Virgin's bier he professes his faith and Peter grants him healing powers. He later preaches to and converts Secundus Princeps. After this, these two no longer rank with Episcopus as symbols of evil. Tertius Princeps, on the other hand, remains set in his ways and is carried off by Demons (41/464-489) whose evil designs on the first two Principes ('They schul brenne' (41/483) and 'Drag we these harlotis in hye / Into the pet of helle for to lye' (41/486-7)) are confounded.

'The Assumption' makes extensive use of music as an integral part of the action. The material taken from *Legenda Aurea* is slightly varied, for example in the 'Veni tu electa mea' (41/317) and 'Beatam me dicent omnes generaciones' (41/324), both of which also appear in the liturgy for the feast of the Assumption.⁷³ But other music has different origins. The psalm 'Exiit Israel de Egipto' (41/369) and the antiphon 'De terra plasmati' (41/453) are from the ceremony for the burial of the dead. 'Assumpta es, Maria' which brings *N-Town's* celebration of the Virgin's life to a triumphant, and no doubt spectacular climax is both an antiphon and an alleluia verse for the feast of the Assumption.⁷⁴ Without these additions, even the splendid details provided by Jacobus did not adequately express the veneration that this writer - like the clerk who used the *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* to compose the Parliament of Heaven - wished to engender.

The range of ways in which the writers used their textual sources is analogous to the variety noted in the main scribe's treatment of the material with which he was working.⁷⁵

⁷² Graesse, *Legenda Aurea*, p. 508.

⁷³ Spector, *N-Town Play*, II, p. 532, n. 41/318-29 s.d. quoting JoAnna Dutka, *Music in the English Mystery Plays, Early Drama, Art, and Music Reference Series*, 2, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1980), p. 139.

⁷⁴ Spector, *N-Town Play*, II, p. 535, n. 41/522 quoting Dutka, p. 68.

⁷⁵ See p. 20.

d) Clerical readership

When considered *en bloc* the identified sources exhibit a scriptural and doctrinal emphasis which makes it very unlikely that the plays were composed and compiled by laity. Although by the later fifteenth century religious works in the vernacular were increasingly being acquired by devout lay persons and secular clergy, intellectual access to most of the Latin sources identified in Chapter 3 was almost wholly reserved to the regular orders.⁷⁶ Physical access was similarly restricted. A complaint that friars liked to keep their books to themselves seems to have been founded in fact. When at the end of the fourteenth century the Franciscans at Oxford were accused of denying secular scholars access to their book collections, the order's Regent Master made no attempt to deny the charge, preferring rather to justify the reasons for so doing. Other orders seem to have had similar policies where their books were concerned.⁷⁷ Moreover it is hard to see how a group of individuals could have worked on the manuscript and its contents with a common purpose over a period of several decades, as I argued early in Chapter 2, unless they belonged to some sort of community. And whilst a guild or pious lay confraternity might at first sight seem to provide the necessary continuity of corporate endeavour, it is unlikely that the members of such an institution would all have had the religious education that can be inferred from familiarity with the identified sources. Members of a secular institution would also probably not have had the linguistic skills to which the plays bear witness. Even though the regular clergy did not have a monopoly on reading Latin the written word was largely another matter. The fluency of *N-Town's* non-vernacular stage directions points to a facility that would have been uncommon outside those who had been formally educated. It would have been rarer still to find several lay persons sharing this ability. On the other hand an abbey or priory would provide a group of clerics having a similar purpose and, to varying degrees, the necessary educational background. Such a house of regulars would also probably have had among its books most of the identified source texts and it would have been able to arrange for access to any which it did not own.

* * * * *

Together the sources could be said to constitute 'þe lyberary of oure Lordys lawe lyght' (9/252), to use the Angel's words before the presentation of Mary in the Temple.

⁷⁶ John A. F. Thomson, *The Early Tudor Church and Society, 1485-1529* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 146, quoting *London Consistory Court Wills, 1492-1547*, 4-5, 14. (Nos. 7, 22); Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon, 1984), pp. 101-7.

⁷⁷ Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse, 'The Franciscans and Books: Lollard Accusations and the Franciscan Response', in *Studies in Church History: Subsidia IV, From Ockham to Wyclif* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 369-384

M.E.D. defines 'lyberary' in this quotation as 'a great deal of learning; a body of records; a whole history'. This 'lyberary' imparts authority to all the plays, and even those episodes which lack direct scriptural validation keep within the bounds of theological acceptability. Thus, the scene in which Veronica wipes Jesus' brow on the road to Calvary which could be traced back to the quasi-scriptural *Gospel of Nicodemus* was permissible, but the writer scrupulously ignored several hundred lines in the *Northern Passion* dealing with the Legend of the Holy Rood. Plays for which no direct sources have been established derive their authority by association with the rest.

Familiarity with most of the sources was confined to those who have been categorised as 'professional' readers, that is to say scholars and clerks.⁷⁸ The ability to read these texts, however, was not of itself enough. The writers had to be able to translate their learning into creative activity appropriate to their didactic aims. Because the composition, compilation, copying, and revision involved perhaps a dozen persons with a common purpose, it is almost certain that the manuscript and the plays that it contains originated in a house of regulars. For all the many inaccuracies of Richard James's description on the flyleaf, one detail at least seems correct: the contents of the manuscript were 'scenice expressa . . . per monachos sive Fratres'. In the next chapter I shall show how the conventional source material that these regulars adapted concentrated on specific doctrinal and allied matters.

⁷⁸ M. B. Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', in *The Medieval World*, ed. by David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby, (London: Aldus, 1973), p. 555. Parkes distinguishes 'Professional' readers (clerks and scholars) from 'cultivated' or recreational readers, and 'pragmatic' readers who needed a minimum ability to read or write for mercantile purposes.

Chapter 5

Orthodoxy and obedience

The close reading of the text done in connection with the investigation of the sources has revealed that all layers of compilation express not only scriptural narrative but also doctrinal orthodoxy. Most of the plays reinforce this formal teaching with expressions of obedience, often addressing this theme from a theological standpoint.

a) The teaching of orthodoxy

Reference in the Proclamation to 'gentyllys and 3emanry of goodly lyff lad' (Proc./9) implies that the compilers envisaged a lay audience, but there are few clues about the doctrinal content of the *urcycle*. God was to be worshipped 'as is ryth' (Proc./19) and the transgression that led to the Expulsion from Eden is described as 'a3ens þe rewle of ryte' (Proc./42). Mercy, which I shall show to have been an important strand in the plays' teaching, is mentioned twice. Christ preaches 'of peté and of mercy' (Proc./289) and Judas hangs himself because he 'noth trostyth in Godys peté' (Proc./371). The Vexillatores also stress the civil duty to tithe (Proc./55, 57, 64). Remnants of the *urcycle* evidenced in the text by Proclamation thirteeners are more informative since they include several references to the Seven Sacraments and other matters of doctrine. Later layers of text present further orthodoxies, such as sacramentalism, which go beyond mere scriptural instruction. These doctrinal elements, which can be loosely described as catechetical,¹ include: i) broadly distributed references to the Trinity, ii) the Seven Deadly sins which are treated both as theological abstractions and by way of *exempla*, iii) exposition of the Decalogue, iv) general emphasis on sacramentalism, with four of the Sacraments addressed individually, and v) express teaching of the supreme virtue of Mercy. Closely associated with the teaching of religious duties are vi) civic and parochial responsibilities.

i) The Trinity

The plays start with the conventional '*Ego sum alpha et oo, principium et finis*' (Revelations 1:8), shortly followed by God's proclamation:

I am oo God in personys thre,
Knyt in oo substawns. (1/12-3)

¹ I am grateful to Dr. Eamonn Duffy for suggesting this blanket description during a stimulating and helpful discussion about *N-Town's* teaching.

All the English cycles open with the same quotation and Chester (I/9) and Towneley (I/5-6) both also refer to the Trinity, as does the Cornish *Ordinalia* (l. 3).² However *N-Town* mentions the Trinity with exceptional frequency, even in the Old Testament plays. As early as 'Noah' (Play 4) Shem's wife declares:

I xal me kepe from all trespace
Dat xulde offendre Goddys face
Be help of þe Trynyté (4/63-5)

In 'Joachim and Anna' (Play 8) the bishop Ysakar blesses the congregation thus:

Benedicat vos diuina majestas et vna Deitas,
Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. (8/114-5)

Although not found in exactly this form in the York or Sarum Uses these lines are close to a benediction used for the Feast of the Trinity.³ Following normal *N-Town* practice the Latin is immediately translated:

Now of God and man blyssyd be 3e alle.
Homward a3en now returne 3e.
And in þis temple abyde we xalle
To servyn God in Trinýté. (8/117-120)

In 'The Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10) *Benedicta sit Beata Trinitas* (which also correctly belongs with the Feast of Trinity) is sung in place of the *Alma Chorus* specified by the Use of Sarum for the nuptial mass.⁴ (See also pp. 111-2 below.)

All three persons of God speak in 'The Parliament of Heaven' (Play 11, start) after Mercy, Peace, Truth, and Justice have sought the salvation of humankind (11/173-184). In the second section of the same play 'The Salutation and Conception' (Play 11, end) a curious and, on the face of it, unplayable stage direction⁵ provides that the Virgin Mary be visited by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

Here þe Holy Gost discendiþ with iij bemys to oure Lady, þe Sone of þe Godhed nest with iij bemys to þe Holy Gost, the Fadyr godly with iij bemys to þe Sone. And so entre all thre to here bosom . . . (11/292 + s.d.)

² York mentions the Trinity just four times, and not at all in the opening play. See Gerald Byron Kinneavy, *A KWIC Concordance to the York Plays* (New York: Garland, 1986). For the *Ordinalia* see *Ancient Cornish Drama*, Vol. I, ed. by Edwin Norris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), p. 3.

³ *N-Town Play*, II, p. 439, n. 8/110-16.

⁴ *Mary Play*, p. 104, n. 907. The Use of York omits the *Alma Chorus*.

⁵ Mills has argued semantically that the 'bemys' may be blasts on a trumpet. David Mills, 'Concerning a stage direction in the *Ludus Coventriæ*', *English Language Notes*, 11 (1974), 162-4.

Mary's next speech, in which she refers to 'parfyte God and parfyte man' (11/294), ends by giving thanks to the Trinity. Gabryels's closing encomium includes a clear reference:

I comende me onto 3ow, þu trone of þe Trinýté,
O mekest mayde, now þe modyr of Jesu.
Qwen of Hefne, Lady of Erth, and Empres of Helle be 3e. (11/333-5)

Several other plays before the start of the Passion also associate the Virgin with the Trinity, providing further evidence of *N-Town's* mariological emphasis. Sephor, one of the women who attend Mary during her confinement fuels Joseph's doubts with the words:

Forsothe, þe aungel, þus sayd he,
þat Goddys sone in Tryníté
For mannys sake a man wolde be
To save þat is forlorn. (12/67-70)

In 'The Visit to Elizabeth' (Play 13) Mary tells Joseph that 'þe blyssyd Tryníté be in þis hous' (13/48). Elizabeth knows that 'be þe Holy Gost with joye Goddys son is in (Mary) cum' (13/84) and later in the same play speaks of her as the 'trone and tabernakyl of the hy3 Trinité' (13/138). Joseph's remorse at having doubted Mary's word prompts him to confess in 'The Nativity' (Play 15), 'I haue offendyd my God in Trinýté' (15/44). Symeon in 'The Purification' (Play 19), which is explicitly Marian, addresses his prayer to 'gode God in Trinité' (19/21). The Marian connection with the Trinity is expounded at some length by the twelve-year-old Jesus in 'Christ and the Doctors' (Play 21):

Allthyng is brought to informacyon
Be thre personys, oo God in Tryníté.
And on of þo thre hath take incarnacyon,
Both fiesche and blood, of a mayd fre. (21/65-8)

Such references are not confined to the text written by the main scribe. In 'The Magi' (Play 18) Secundus Rex tells the infant Jesus:

In Goddys howse, as men xall se,
Thow xalt honour þe Trinýté;
Iij personys in oon Gode free,
And all oo Lord of Myght. (18/247-50)

These lines were written out by Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector's scribe C), whose version may not have been identical to the original recension.

ii) The Seven Deadly Sins

The Seven Deadly Sins are mentioned specifically early in Passion Play I. First, by re-naming them, Satan tries to subvert traditional teaching:

I haue browth 3ow newe namys, and wyl 3e se why?
 For synne is so pleasunt to ech mannys intent.
 3e xal calle pride 'onesté', and 'naterall kend' lechory,
 And covetyse 'wysdam' there tresure is present;
 Wreth, 'manhod', and envye callyd 'chastement'
 (Seyse nere sessyon, lete perjory be chef);
 Glotenye, 'rest' (let abstynawnce beyn absent). (26/109-115)

As a response to these and Satan's other exhortations to civil and religious transgression John the Baptist also invokes the Deadly Sins when he tells the audience to mend their ways:

... I councel þe 3e reforme all wronge
 In 3oure concyens of þe mortall dedys sevyn.
 And for to do penawns loke þat 3e fonge;
 For now xal come þe kyngdham of hevyn. (26/129-32)

In this connection it must be noted that penance is a constituent of the Sacrament of Confession, which will be considered later in this chapter. Later in the same play Peter repeats a similar invocation of the Seven Deadly Sins and the associated need for Confession:

Many of 3ow be dome. Why? For 3e wole not redresse
 Be mowthe 3oure dedys mortal,⁶ but þerin don perdure.
 Of the wych but 3e haue contrycyon and 3ow confesse,
 3e may not inheryte hevyn, þis I 3ow ensure. (26/410-3)

Murder is the only sin dealt with individually, but this is done in three different sections of the manuscript. Divine punishment is the inevitable consequence of the crimes committed by the fratricide Cain (in Quire B), Herod who ordered the Massacre of the Innocents (in Quires H-J), and Judas who was complicit in the death of Jesus (part of the initial Passion sequence, in Quire S). All pay with their lives for what they have done, not as a consequence of judicial process, but directly or indirectly by the hand of God. These episodes were built up as the compilation developed. Only the Death of Herod formed part of the *urcycle* (Proc./239-242; 20/168-284). The deaths of Cain and Judas were both

⁶ *N-Town Play* prints 'Dedys Mortal' which is not authorised by the manuscript (f. 144^r). I have quoted in lower case for the sake of consistency with 26/130 in the previous quotation.

set somewhat awkwardly into pre-existing text with the result that narrative and dramatic efficacy were in each case sacrificed to content.

The killing of Cain by the blind archer Lamech occurs in 'Noah' (Play 4) while the Ark is on the stocks.⁷ The importance of the episode is signalled both palaeographically and in the way it was to be staged. The start of the episode (six lines from the bottom of f. 23^r) is marked with a larger and more elaborate *capitulum* than others either in this play or in the manuscript as a whole. The text draws attention to the scene by clearing the playing area:

*Hic transit Noe cum familia sua pro naui, quo exeunte locum interludii sub intret statim Lameth conductus ab adolescente.*⁸ (4/141 + s.d.)

Although Cain is punished for fratricide, the play presents all killing in the same way since the boy who misdirects Lamech's aim is beaten to death.

In achieving the death of Herod at the hands of the personified Mors, the writer ignored the principal sources of Marian material, *Historia Scholastica* which had been used for the death of Cain and Lamech's boy and *Legenda Aurea*.⁹ Since both describe the death of Herod in similar detail either could have been consulted if the sole object was to kill the tyrant. Comestor's version (Chapter XVI) reads:

Dehinc variis affligebatur languoribus. Nam febris non mediocris erat, prurigo intolerabilis in omni corporis superficie, assiduis vexabatur colli tormentis, pedes intercutaneo vitio tumuerant, putredo testiculorum vermes generabat, creber anhelitus et interrupta suspiria, quae ad vindictam Dei ab omnibus referebantur.¹⁰

Then he was afflicted by different illnesses. For he had a high temperature, the itching all over his body was intolerable, he was afflicted by chronic neck ache, his feet swelled with infection under the skin, festering of his testicles produced maggots, and his breath came in rapid uneven gasps, all of which was reported by everyone as being the vengeance of God.

Whilst the writer of the play avoided all suggestion of a lingering death he was careful to retain the element of divine vengeance. As the banquet to celebrate the Massacre of the Innocents gets under way, Mors, who claims to be 'Goddys masangere' (20/177) and 'sent fro God' (20/181), declares that he will kill Herod and his henchmen. With the festivities reaching their climax as soon as Herod commands: 'menstrell, rownd abowte, / Blowe up a mery fytt!' (20/231-2), all is over in a trice:

⁷ See Proc./67-78 for the Noah episode.

⁸ = Here Noah goes with his family in front of the vessel, and as they leave the playing place let Lameth immediately creep in led by a boy.

⁹ Graesse, *Legenda Aurea*, p. 66.

¹⁰ P.L. 198:1546.

Hic, dum buccinant, Mors interficiat Herodem et duos milites subito, et Diabolus recipiat eos. (20/232 + s.d.)

Here, while they are sounding their trumpets, Death should kill Herod and his two soldiers in an instant, then the Devil should receive them.

In the next stanza the Devil claims Herod for his own, after which Mors tells how his ultimate inevitability extends to all humankind. There is none of the preoccupation with the horrible physical details given by both Peter Comestor and Jacobus. Herod's punishment is aggravated not by the excruciating symptoms, but by its timing. His death comes bathetically, at the very moment he is celebrating his evil deed.

Compared with these fully realised episodes the death of Judas is cursory. The extant text is not the version described in the Proclamation, according to which a whole 'pagent' was devoted to his remorse, the attempt to give back 'xxx pens' to Cayphas, the despair which led to his suicide, and his final descent into hell (Proc./360-372). Instead, just two quatrains deal with his realising what he has done and the suicide. The amount of his reward and the descent into hell are omitted and the scene sits awkwardly in 'The Trials Before Pilate and Herod' (Play 30). This sparse treatment, which is quoted in full at the top of p. 85, lacks dramatic impact. The significance of the episode lies in the fact of its inclusion rather than its unconvincing nature. Since Judas's death is recited in 'The Selection of Matthias' (Play 39) (39/70-5) it is not essential to later narrative. It cannot have been added as a continuation of the theme which started with the deaths of Cain and Herod. When the scribe copied the initial Passion sequence, of which this forms part, he had not yet written out the Lamech episode and the Death of Herod. If, as I believe, the punishment of murder was the common purpose of these episodes, the deaths of Cain and Herod were more likely to have been a response to the death of Judas than *vice versa*. The inclusion of Judas's suicide seems more likely to have been prompted by the *Northern Passion* (see pp. 55-6). The extended treatment it receives immediately before the section headed '*Accusacio ideorum ante pilatum*' could not readily be ignored.¹¹

iii) The Ten Commandments

In addition to the commentaries on each of the Ten Commandments in 'Moses' (Play 6) and the stanza based on the *Sentences* (6/179-186, as to which see p. 62 above) two other plays make brief references to this catechetical *sine qua non*. Satan claims to find dereliction in the audience:

¹¹Foster, *Northern Passion*, Vol. I, p. 93 (H₂, 904a).

Of his comaundementys in 3ow gret necglygens is aspyed. (26/400)

But Satan's word which has already been discredited by John the Baptist's riposte to his prologue is not reliable. However the position of Episcopus is irreproachable when in 'The Presentation of Mary in the Temple' (Play 9) he instructs the Virgin:

Dowtere, God hath 3ovyn vs comaundementys ten,
Which, shortely to say, be comprehendyd in tweyn.
And þo must be kept of all Crysten men. (9/170-2)

This assertion of the universal importance of the Decalogue is notable because it seems to refer to the division of the Commandments into two (noted in Chapter 3 in connection with the *Cibus Anime* on p. 93) without specifying the basis on which they should be 'comprehendyd in tweyn'. Failure to explain the distinction either here or in 'Moses' (Play 6) implies that for the clerks who composed these plays the matter was self-explanatory.

iv) The Seven Sacraments

Emphasis on both general and specific aspects of sacramentalism signals in the clearest possible way the orthodoxy of the *N-Town's* teaching. The Seven Sacraments had first been set out by Peter the Lombard in the middle of the twelfth century (*Sentences*, Bk. 4, dist. i, num. 2).¹² Detailed study of this central tenet of the Catholic faith would therefore have formed part of the educational background of the clerks who wrote and compiled the plays. The Sacraments' importance was reinforced in the late Middle Ages when they were affirmed in 1439 as part of the deliberations on the Eucharist at the Council of Florence. The Angel at the start of 'The Shepherds' (Play 16) announces the Church's position in straightforward terms:

Sacramentys þer xul be vii
Wonnyn þo[r]we þat childys wounde. (16/5-6)

Since these two lines form part of a thirteener which probably formed part of the *urcycle* sacramentalism can be said to have been present *ab initio*. However, the plays recorded in the manuscript go beyond this general statement. Of the Sacraments first enumerated by Peter the Lombard only Confirmation, Orders, and Extreme Unction are not addressed individually and in each case their omission can be justified. There were pragmatic reasons for leaving out Confirmation. Since the regular minister of the rite was the bishop in person, it was normally deferred until a convenient occasion presented itself.¹³ As

¹² O.D.C.C., 'Seven Sacraments'.

¹³ See e.g. John Mirk who says little about Confirmation because 'hyt ys þe bisschopes ofyce'. John Mirk's

episcopal duties increased opportunities for Confirmation became increasingly scarce, so that by the end of the Middle Ages it had become a custom honoured as much in the breach as in the observance.¹⁴ Orders would have had little, if any, relevance to an audience addressed as laity ‘bothe more and lesse / Gentylls and 3emanry of goodly lyff lad’ (Proc./7-8). Lastly, although Unction is not included specifically, even in the incomplete text in which it survives ‘Judgement Day’ (Play 42) provides a stern reminder of the fate of those who transgress the articles of faith.

Each of the other four Sacraments is vigorously propounded. Baptism and Confession are taught in ‘The Baptism’ (Play 22), reinforced in each case by lexical iteration, a stylistic device which several other plays use to emphasise important themes. The word ‘baptym’ and its cognates occur thirteen times in seventy lines of text. There is another reference toward the end of the play, and ‘Johan Baptyste’ is so addressed three times.¹⁵ This Sacrament is instituted formally by Jesus:

þe lawe of God þu dost fulffylle þis tyde.
Baptym to take I come to the,
And conferme þat sacrament þat nowe xal be. (22/61-3)

These words are as definitive in their way as the blanket endorsement of sacramental theology by the Angel in ‘The Shepherds’ (Play 16). None the less, when John at first protests that he is unworthy to perform the rite, Jesus repeats the message:

Me to baptyze take þu no dowth;
þe vertu of mekenes here tawth xal be,
Euery man to lere
And take ensawmple here by me,
How mekely þat I come to þe.
Baptym confermyd now xal be. (22/73-8)

Confession is not mentioned in the Proclamation description (Proc./256-268), which suggests that the Baptist’s closing speech in ‘The Baptism’ (Play 22) was an addition to an earlier version of this play. The rhyme scheme is similar to the rest, but the lines are appreciably longer in this section, which may indicate that the addition was made before rather than during copying. This Sacrament is dealt with after the baptism of Jesus immediately following his departure for the desert and uses the same stylistic method as the earlier part of the play. The Baptist repeats the word ‘penauns’ (spelt in various ways) eleven times in fifty lines of verse, and the associated notion of ‘schryft’ or its cognate seven

Instructions for Parish Priests, ed. by Gillis Kristensson (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1974), p. 102, l. 649.

¹⁴ O.D.C.C., ‘Confirmation’.

¹⁵ i.e. at 22/23, 27, 29, 30, 33, 62, 65, 68, 70, 73, 78, 79, 91. John at 22/136, 54, 119.

times in the same section. By delivering the message twice John emphasises that confession must be oral:

Do penauns and synne forsake,
Shryfte of mowth loke þat 3e make. (22/154-5)

The next stanza repeats 'schryfte of mowth':

Shryfte of mowthe may best be sauе,
Penauns for synne what man wyl haue
Whan þat his body is leyd in grave,
His sowle xal go to blys. (22/167-170)

Other plays refer to Confession in passing. For example Peter's address to the people of Jerusalem in Passion Play I quoted above on p. 105 alludes to oral confession:

Many of 3ow be dome. Why? For 3e wole not redresse
Be mowthe 3oure Dedys Mortal, but þerin don perdure. (26/410-1)

In the important passage in which Jesus enters the city (as to which see pp. 114-5 below and Appendix B (ii), especially p. 166) the people take Peter's message to heart and plead for mercy. In 'The Presentation of Mary' (Play 9) the infant Mary climbs the steps of the Temple whilst reciting a simple gloss on the Gradual Psalms (Pss. 120-134), followed in each case by the first verse of the psalm in question. These include:

The fyfte is propyr confessyon
þat we be nought withowth God thus. (9/118-9)

There can be little doubt that 'propyr' here means oral.

Eucharist, the central act of Christian worship, is dealt with in the 'Last Supper' (Play 27). The play is not only precise in detail such as the familiar gesture when Jesus 'takes an oblé in his hand lokyng upward into hefne' (27/372 + s.d.) but it is also careful to announce the provenance of this Sacrament. Jesus says to the disciples:

It was comawndyd be my fadyr to Moyses and Aaron
Whan þei weryn with þe Chylderyn of Israel in Egythp. (27/351-2)

Absolute obedience is due to the word of God. The message is reinforced by incorporating supererogatory detail which had its origins in Rabanus Maurus's *Commentarium in Exodum*.¹⁶ The precisions concerning the unleavened bread, the simple clothes to be worn by the celebrants, and the staves they are required to carry are not directly connected with

¹⁶ In Chapter 3 I suggested that Rabanus Maurus's text may have reached the play by way of *Historia Scholastica*.

the Mass, but they would add to the solemnity of the occasion in performance. Instruction about the disposal of uneaten remains ('Yt xuld be cast in þe clere fyre and brent' (27/414)) may suggest the wariness about the desecration of the host which has been interpreted by scholars of anti-semitism as part of the Church's general insecurity about Transubstantiation.¹⁷ Later in the same speech Jesus states the orthodox position:

Bretheryn, be þe [vertu] of þese wordys þat [re]hercyd be,¹⁸
 Pis þat shewyth as bred to ȝoure apparens
 Is mad þe very flesche and blod of me,
 To þe weche þei wole be savyd must ȝeve credens. (27/381-4)

The precision of this statement allows no room for error. Even the Devil is permitted only to voice the orthodox interpretation. In a short scene marked in the text as optional¹⁹ Demon says to Judas, 'Thow hast solde þi maystyr and etyn hym also' (27/470).

Since 'The Last Supper' is part of the initial Passion sequence and was therefore copied out and perhaps composed before the other plays dealing with the Sacraments, it is significant that other parts of the manuscript also contain references to Transubstantiation. For example, the Proclamation hints at Cleophas and Luke recognizing the risen Christ by recalling the Eucharist:

In brekyng of bred þei know Cryst well. (Proc./474)

The equivalent play has Jesus divide a loaf in a way that calls the Last Supper - and therefore the Mass - to mind:

With myn hand þis bred I blys,
 And breke it here, as ȝe do se.
 I ȝeve ȝow parte also of þis,
 This bred to ete and blythe to be. (38/213-6)

Although the cutting of the bread in even pieces without a knife (see 38/285-6) can be read as a miracle writ small, the miraculous nature of the event cannot be the only purpose of the episode. The disciples would not be 'blythe' without the spiritual benefit gained by partaking of the Eucharistic sacrament.

Jesus also refers to Transubstantiation towards the end of 'Harrowing of Hell, II' (Play 35) in the concluding section of the Passion:

¹⁷ Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 308; Robert Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (London: Methuen, 1991), pp. 31-2.

¹⁸ The emendation is validated by the manuscript. The line, now partially cropped, is written in the right margin on f. 154^r. It is copied in full at the foot of the page *in red* with an insertion point marking where it is to be positioned.

¹⁹ 'Pan Judas xal gon ageyn to þe Jewys. And, yf men wolne, xal mete with hym and sey þis spech folwyng - or levn't whether þei wyl - þe devyl þus seyng.' (27/465 + s.d.)

For man I haue made my body in brede,
His sowle for to fede. (35/83-4)

During the Agony in the Garden in 'The Betrayal' (Play 28) an Angel descends with 'a chalys with an host þerin' (28/52 + s.d.). His words to Jesus are unambiguous:

Þis chalys is þi blood, þis bred is þi body,
For manrys synne evyr offeryd xal be. (28/61-2)

Transubstantiation was considered so central to the compilers' message that references to this doctrinal essential go beyond the play that was specifically devoted to the Eucharist.

Two plays endorse Matrimony. Excerpts from the nuptial Mass are incorporated in the heavily revised and reordered 'Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10). The Trinitarian emphasis of the pastiche of ritual offered by the play (see above, p. 103) adds to the solemnity of the occasion. The start of the play uses the device of lexical iteration noted in connection with Baptism and Confession to stress the legality of the proceedings. The word 'lawe' is used by Episcopus, Joachym, and Anne six times in the first three stanzas and five more times between 10/85-100. The ceremony itself starts with the singing of 'Benedicta sit beata Trinitas' (10/301 + s.d.) which is sung in the Use of York in nuptial masses. But this need not imply that the play's compiler was taking material from this form of service. In the Norwich diocese where *N-Town* originated the Use of Sarum was more usual. In Sarum and all other Uses 'Benedicta sit beata Trinitas' is sung in masses for the Holy Trinity. Regardless of whether this is strictly appropriate to the nuptial rite the overall importance accorded to the Trinity has already been noted, and its use here helps create a sense of religious ceremony.²⁰ It was less important strictly to adhere to a particular liturgical observance than to create a situation on stage to which members of an audience could relate from personal experience. The examination and responses which are recognizable as textual ancestors of the equivalent in the Book of Common prayer contribute to this sense of the familiar. Episcopus asks:

Joseph, wole 3e haue þis maydon to 3oure wyff
And here honour and kepe as 3e howe to do? (10/302-3)

Joachym's response is:

Here I take þe, Mary, to wyff,
To hauyn, to holdyn, as God his wyll with us wyl make.
And as longe as bethwen us lestyght oure lyff
To loue 3ow as myselff my trewth I 3ow take. (10/310-13)

²⁰ Meredith considers its use here appropriate. (*Mary Play*, p. 103, n. 874 sd.)

Similarity to the order of service still in use extends further, with the presiding minister, Episcopus, delivering a benign valediction to draw the proceedings towards their close (10/331-340).

‘Christ and the Doctors’ (Play 21) also deals with the need for formal marriage. The twelve-year-old Jesus is questioned as to why his mother was married to the aged Joseph, by whom she could not bear child.

What nede was it here to be wedde
 Onto a man of so grett age
 Lesse þan þei myght bothe a go to bedde
 And kept þe lawe of maryage? (21/241-4)

Although the Doctor frames this question from a secular standpoint, the reply by Jesus justifies matrimony on theological grounds:

To blynde þe devyl of his knowlache,
 And my byrth from hym to hyde;
 Pat holy wedlok was grett stopage
 þe devyl in dowte to do abyde. (21/245-8)

The play has already discredited the Doctors by contrasting the hyperbole of their claims to learning with Jesus’s simple statement:

Omnis sciencia a Domino Deo est:
 Al wytt and wysdam, of God it is lent. (21/33-4)

The mastery of ‘gramer, cadens, and of prosodye’ (21/8), excellence in dialectic (21/13), and supreme skill in ‘grett canon and in cevyl lawe’ (21/25) give way to vulgar abuse when confronted with this supreme logic. The audience is therefore unable to ignore this play’s teaching of matrimony.

v) Mercy

Mercy, the most important of the Christian virtues, is presented both as one of the traditional attributes of the Virgin and as a *desideratum* in its own right. Several plays directly offer mercy to the penitent whilst others mention it as incidental to their main topic. In ‘The Nativity’ (Play 15) both midwives seek mercy, but for different reasons. It is Zelomy’s immediate response when confronted with tangible evidence of the virgin birth (15/226). The sceptical midwife Salomé is told by the Angel to ask the Christ child for mercy when she begs for relief from her withered hand. Adopting what amounts to a confessional tone she exceeds the Angel’s instructions when she addresses both the Christ child and the Virgin:

O gloryous chylde and Kynge of Blysse,
 I aske 3ow mercy for my trespace.
 I knowledge my synne, I demyd amys.
 O blysyd babe, grawnt me sum grace!
 Of 3ow, mayde, grawnt me solace,
 Sum worde of conforte sey now to me. (15/282-9)

Relief is granted, Mary speaks of God's 'hy3 mercy' (15/312) and Zelomy of the Virgin's 'endles mercy' (15/317) in the play's last few lines. This is another example of *N-Town*'s insistent Marianism. In *Pseudo-Matthew*, from which the episode derives, Salome's prayer is addressed to God alone.²¹

'The Woman Taken in Adultery' (Play 24) announces its central theme in Jesus's opening stanza:

Nolo mortem peccatoris.
 Man, for þi synne take repentaunce.
 If þu amende þat is amys,
 Than hevyn xal be þin herytaunce.
 Thow þu haue don a3ens God grevauns,
 3ett mercy to haske loke þu be bolde. (24/1-6)

Using the technique of lexical iteration that has been noted in connection with Baptism and Confession, the play stresses the importance of its message by repeating 'mercy' ten times in the next thirty-four lines.²² The play varies the emphasis of the biblical account of the episode in John 8:3-11, in which the accused woman walks free because none of the Scribes and Pharisees dare accuse her. In *N-Town* there is little doubt about her guilt. The youth with whom she has been caught rushes onto the stage with his boots unlaced and his breeches in his hand.²³ He compounds his guilt by threatening violence to any who stands in his way:

3iff any man stow me þis nyth,
 I xal hym 3eve a dedly wownde!
 I[f] any man my wey doth stoppe,
 Or we depart, ded xal [he] be.
 I xal þis daggare put in his croppe. (24/127-132)

The plural pronoun at the start of the penultimate line here quoted may be addressed to an audience, but it can also be read as implicating the woman. Unlike the gospel account, the

²¹ *Pseudo-Matthew*, Cap. X. Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, p. 75.

²² i.e. at 24/ 7, 10, 16, 24, 33 (mercyable), 34, 35, 36, 38, 40.

²³ 'Hic juuenis quidam extra currit in deploydo, calligis non ligatis et braccas in manu tenens.' (24/124 + s.d.)

play has her accusers name her crime; the woman ‘þis same day / In synfull advowtery hath don offense’ (24/195-6). The stage direction in which Jesus writes in the earth includes the clause, ‘dum isti accusant mulierem’ (24/196 + s.d.).²⁴ Furthermore she confesses her guilt, acknowledging her ‘myslevynge’ (24/155) with a direct simplicity that is in complete contrast to the vulgar abuse heaped on her by her accusers. When they spurn the offer of gold and silver for her name to be kept ‘in cleynes’ (24/164) she pleads that she should be punished by death:

Stondynge 3e wyl not graunt me grace,
But for my synne þat I xal dye,
I pray ȝow kylle me here in þis place. (24/169-171)

She acknowledges her ‘synnys abhomynable’ (24/211). In view of this combination of circumstantial evidence, direct accusation, and her admission, her guilt is not in question. The Proclamation states the play’s theme to be Christ preaching ‘of peté and mercy’ (Proc./289), which is restated more fully in Jesus’s long speech at the start of the play in which repentant sinners are assured that mercy will be theirs.

In ‘The Last Supper’ (Play 27) Maria Magdalen despairs about what will become of her and can only turn to God:

Alas! Alas! I xall forfare
For þe grete synnys þat I haue do,
Lesse than my Lord God sumdel spare,
And his grett mercy receyve me to. (27/145-8)

She appeals to Jesus directly for mercy at the start of the following stanza (27/154). After he has cast out her demons she again speaks of mercy in thanking him:

Now am I brought from þe fendys brace,
In þi grett mercy closyd and shytt. (27/182-3)

This triple iteration of ‘mercy’ emphasizes the theme. However, neither this episode, Judas’s accusation that her ointment should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor, nor his conspiracy with the High Priests’ henchmen formed part of the original recension of Passion Play I (see Chapter 2, pp. 33-4). Both episodes are part of the two-stage revision of the interpolated Quire O (ff. 149-151), with the element of mercy added the later of the two. Clearly the text was considered deficient without this addition. Whilst the gathering of the Apostles may have been added to provide a more fully realised dramatic spectacle, the absolution of the Magdalene can only be justified on doctrinal grounds.

²⁴ = While they are charging the woman.

Peter preaches repentance and Jesus announces ‘þe tyme of mercy’ (26/458) as part of ‘The Entry into Jerusalem’ (Play 26). A stage direction specifies that the Cives to whom the speech is immediately addressed are in penitent garb:

Here þe iiij ceteseynys makyn hem redy for to mete with oure Lord, goyng barfot and bareleggyd and in here shyrtys, savyng þei xal have here gownys cast abouth them.
(26/449 + s.d.)

This precise dress was associated with penance and in the next chapter I shall argue that a contemporary audience would instantly have made this connection.

Another forceful reference to mercy is the explanation given in the Proclamation for the suicide of Judas:

For gret whanhope, as 3e xal se,
He hangyth hymself vpon a tre,
For he noth trostyth in Godys peté. (Proc./369-371)

These instances are in addition to the personification of Mercy in ‘The Parliament Of Heaven’ (Play 11) as one of the Daughters of God. Given the plays’ clerical origins and the notion of linguistic hierarchy it is significant that here Misericordia alone uses Latin. This confers linguistic precedence over her sisters. It is therefore appropriate that it should be she who announces:

Systyr Ryghtwysnes, 3e are to vengeabyl.
Endles synne God endles may restore.
Above all hese werkys God is mercyabyl. (11/105-7)

Read with the catechetical orthodoxies this widely distributed emphasis on mercy suggests an absolute confidence on the part of the *N-Town* compilers in the universal application of their message. But the qualities personified as the Four Daughters of God were traditional attributes of the Virgin. By featuring their debate, which is not referred to in the version described in the Proclamation (Proc./157-169) as a justification of the Annunciation, the writer of this play added yet another layer of Marian celebration.

The ending is missing from ‘Judgement Day’ (Play 42). Although the penitent souls think that it is ‘to late to aske mercy’ (42/39) God welcomes them to heaven, for which they duly give thanks:

On kne we crepe, we gon, we glyde
To wurchepp oure Lorde, þat mercyfful is.
For thorwe his woundys, þat be so wyde,
He hath brought us to his blys. (42/57-60)

This treatment is to be expected. More surprising is the last of the surviving stanzas in which 'Omnes Dampnandi' also ask for mercy:

A, mercy, Lord, mekyl of myght,
We aske þi mercy and not þi ryght;
Not after oure dede so us quyth.
We haue synnyd. We be to blame.

Although their plea for mercy is bound to fail, it would be instructive to know whether, and if so, how the text justified the rejection of this plea.

vi) Parochial and other lay obligations

Two of the plays address civic and parochial duties with religious connections. 'Cain and Abel' (Play 3) emphasizes the importance of tithes. The Proclamation announces this preoccupation by using 'tythyng' three times in the one descriptive stanza (Proc./55, 57, 64). The opening of the play shows the brothers seeking parental advice as to how their patrimony should be shared. Abel readily receives Adam's injunction to live in the fear of God and offer first fruits:

The best schep, ful hertyly,
Amongys my flok þat I kan se,
I tythe it to God of gret mercy
And better wolde if bettyr myht be. (3/83-6)

Again mentioning mercy, the text uses the technique of lexical iteration to reinforce its message, as earlier noted in connection with Baptism and Confession in 'The Baptism' (Play 22) and mercy in 'The Woman taken in Adultery' (Play 24). After the passage here quoted 'tythe' or its cognate occurs eleven more times before Cain kills his brother at 3/149, a total of twelve instances in little more than sixty lines of verse. But this is not the only Cain and Abel play in English to mention tithes repeatedly. The Towneley *Mactacio Abel* repeats 'tend' more than two dozen times, but the jocular loutishness of the Wakefield Master's Cain and the boisterous by-play between the brothers subverts any possible didactic intent to the point where the audience is almost expected to share their contempt for tithing. The absence of the brothers' offerings from the York equivalent may be due to a bifolium missing from the manuscript, and in Chester both brothers refer to the gifts as 'sacrifice' (e.g. at I/522, 554, 573).²⁵ *N-Town* on the other hand concentrates on the point it is making with effective solemnity. Furthermore, as noted on pp. 98-9 above, Cain will pay

²⁵ Beadle, *York Plays*, p. 76, headnote. Since tithes remained a bone of contention until well into the twentieth century, the late dates of the Chester manuscripts do not affect the reading here.

the ultimate price for his misdeeds. Although the primary reason for his death at the hands of Lamech must be his mortal sin, fratricide is only the most serious of Cain's many crimes.

'Joachim and Anna' (Play 8) establishes Joachim's piety by making a metaphorical link with clerical responsibility:

I am clepyd ryghtful, why wole 3e se,
 For my godys into thre partys I devyde:
 On to the temple and to hem þat þer servyng be;
 Anodyr to þe pylgrimys and pore men; þe iij^{de} for hem with me abyde.
 So xulde eueri curat in þis werde wyde
 3eve a part to his chauncel, iwyss,
 A part to his parochonerys þat to povert slyde,
 The thryd part to kepe for hym and his. (8/50-7)

The *M.E.D.* defines 'curat' as, 'a parish priest; also, a prior having spiritual charge of a parish', and it is not at first clear why this reference to clerical office should have been included. Joachim is not a priest, and his speech seems intended merely to demonstrate his personal piety. The explanation seems to lie in the source. The passage derives from *Legenda Aurea*, Cap. CXXXI, which imposes similar duties on both man and wife:

ambo ... justi erant et ambo sine reprehensione in omnibus mandatis domini incedebant omnemque suam substantiam trifarie dividebant, unam partem templo et templi servitoribus impendebant, aliam peregrinis et pauperibus erogabant, tertiam sibi et familiae suae usibus reservabant.²⁶

They were both righteous and walked without reproach in all the commandments of the Lord. They divided all their goods into three parts, one part being reserved for the temple and its ministers, one for transient strangers and the poor, and the third for their own needs and those of their household.

Jacobus made no distinction between the responsibilities of clergy and laity, setting a high standard for both. Although the failure of rectors to repair their chancels was widespread, it is not known to have been unduly prevalent in East Anglia which was a wealthy and ecclesiastically well-supervised area. The reference to 'curat' perhaps reflects the presumed origins of the manuscript in a house of regulars (as I have argued in Chapter 4). Monks or friars might be expected to be critical of dereliction from duty by secular clergy.

²⁶Graesse, *Legenda Aurea*, p. 587.

b) Obedience: the reinforcement of orthodoxy

The teaching of catechetical and associated material is backed by repeated references to obedience. The writers introduced this in places where it is not in either the immediate textual sources or the Bible, and to an extent not found in most contemporary dramatic analogues. Their approach was theological. Absolute obedience is due only to the word of God, whereas obedience to man and man-made ordinances is limited by the bounds of authority and the claims of conscience.²⁷ This feature is present in one form or another in most of the plays up to and including 'Cleophas and Luke' (Play 38) and there are traces also in the incomplete 'Last Judgement' (Play 42). Where it is not mentioned directly the text refers to prophecy and/or specific orthodoxy, both of which express the will of God. The only plays written out by the main scribe in which no such material can be identified are the two which in Chapter 2 (p. 29) I argued are unfinished, 'The Ascension' (Play 39, start) and 'Pentecost' (Play 40).

Although obedience to the will of God is inherent in the subject matter in all the Old Testament episodes, the plays develop and emphasize its importance. Lucifer, for example, complies with his ejection from Paradise with words that make it clear that he is still subject to divine authority:

At thy byddyng þi wyl I werke,
And pas fro joy to peyne smerte. (1/75-6)

When in 'The Creation of the World' (Play 2, start) God instructs Adam on the principles that will govern his life in Paradise, the writer added a nuance that is not in the Bible:

All xal be buxum at þi byddyng. (2/34)

He also shifted the focus from the dominion of man mentioned in Genesis to the obedience of the fish and beasts which is not referred to.²⁸ Other contemporary versions tend to be closer to the spirit of Genesis. Towneley has Adam 'mayster' of 'fishe, fowle, beast - more and lesse' (*Towneley*, II/83-4) and in Chester he is 'keper of more and les, / Of fowles and fysh in flood' (*Chester*, 1/166-7). York describes all creatures as Adam's 'suglettes' (*York*, IV/15) and the Cornish *Ordinalia* gives him power over them (l. 70).²⁹ *Viel Testament*, in which God addresses both Adam and Eve, refers to subjection rather than obedience:

Vous aurez soubz vostre pouvoir
Tous les poissons entièrement

²⁷ See *O.D.C.C.*, 'Obedience'.

²⁸ 'Dominamini piscibus maris &c' (Genesis 1:28) = you shall have dominion over the fish of the sea &c. (Authorised Version)

²⁹ *Ancient Cornish Drama*, Vol. I, p. 7.

Qui font en la mer leur manoir,
 Partout universellement;
 Puis vous aurez semblablement
 Les bestes en vostre obeissance
 Qui ont sur la terre mouvement . . . (*Viel Testament*, ll. 838-844)³⁰

You shall have in your power absolutely all the fish that make their residence in the sea whatsoever and wheresoever; then you shall similarly have the beasts that go on the ground subject to your authority.

N-Town's other Old Testament plays also elaborate the notion of obedience. 'Noah' (Play 4) is unlike the northern civic cycles but is typical of the continental tradition in its treatment of Uxor Noe. She is pious and concerned not only to live free from sin, but also to instruct their children to do so:

I am 3oure wyff, 3oure childeryn þese be.
 Onto us tweyn it doth longe
 Hem to teche in all degré
 Synne to forsakyn, and werkys wronge. (4/40-3)

The wives of Shem, Ham, and Japhet all echo their husbands' expressions of righteous living, for example:

JAPHET	Japhet, þi iij ^{de} sone, is my name. I pray to God wherso we be þat he vs borwe fro synfull shame, And in vertuous levyng evyrmore kepe me.
VXOR	I am 3oure wyff and pray þe same,
JAPHET	þat God vs sauе on sonde and se; With no grevauns þat we hym grame, He grawnt vs grace synne to fle. (4/79-86)

In fact in the *N-Town* version it is Noah himself who, pleading infirmity due to his extreme age, is at first reluctant to comply with the Angel's command to build the Ark. He only states his readiness when told that he will be instructed by God which, of course, validates God's word.

The civic cycles, on the other hand, follow an Eastern legend in which Uxor Noe yields to the Devil's wiles and, as a consequence, becomes argumentative and reluctant to enter the Ark.³¹ Chester omits the diabolical association, but she 'will not out of this towne' and is loath to leave her 'gossips everychone' (*Chester*, III/200-1). York contrasts her recalcitrance not only with Noah but also their sons and their wives, and blows are

³⁰ *Viel Testament*, Vol. I, p. 35.

³¹ Muir, *Biblical Drama*, pp. 73-4.

exchanged before she can be induced to embark. Comic violence is also a feature of *Towneley* where the couple are, if anything, even more at odds. In the corrupt transcription of the Newcastle text, which is all that survives of that city's cycle, she is not only contrary but even flirts with the Devil to find out what her husband is up to.³²

'Abraham and Isaac' (Play 5) keeps to a minimum or omits biblical material that is not directly related to the conflicting claims of obedience inherent in Abraham's unwavering love of God and the mutual love between father and son.³³ The play has just three characters, the named protagonists and an Angel. The selectivity of this approach can be seen in Abraham's economical introduction:

Abraham my name is kydde,
And patryarke of age ful olde.
And 3it be þe grace of Godde is bred
In myn olde age a chylde full bolde. (5/9-12)

When he bids his son kiss him the boy's reply is typical of the obediential diction in many of the plays:

At 3oure byddynge 3oure mouthe I kys. (5/25)

Abraham replies in similar vein when he is first summoned by the Angel:

Al redy, sere, here I am.
Tell me 3oure wyll, what þat it be. (5/75-6)

When the Angel tells him of the sacrifice that he must make, his personal sadness is subordinate to the need to comply with divine authority and he replies without a moment's hesitation:

Now Goddys comaundement must nedys be done -
All his wyl is wourthy to be wrought.
But 3itt þe fadyr to scle þe sone,
Grett care it causyth in my thought!
In byttyr bale now am I brought,
My swete childe with knyf to kylle.

³² *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. by Norman Davis, E.E.T.S. s.s. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. xl, 22-3.

³³ The story of Abram/Abraham is told in Genesis, Chapters 11-25. It begins with the generations of Shem (Gen. 11:27) and continues with Abram's marriage to Sarai, who was barren. They journey with Lot through Canaan and Egypt, after which Lot goes to Sodom and Abram to the plain of Jordan. God promises Abram that his tribe will be numberless (Gen. 13:16), which is also repeated in later chapters. When he was ninety-nine years old God re-named him Abraham and instituted the practice of circumcision. He changed Sarai's name to Sarah. After the destruction of the cities of the plain Isaac was born to her in her old age (Gen. 21:1-5). Abraham was constant in his faith and worship throughout.

But 3it my sorwe avaylith ryght nowth,
For nedys I must werke Goddys wylle. (5/89-96)

The resolve of neither wavers. When Abraham finally tells Isaac why they have gone to the mountain without a beast for the offering, the boy's first thought is not of fear but of pious gratitude that he has been chosen:

Almyghty God of his grett mercye,
Ful hertyly I thanke þe, sertayne.
At Goddys byddyng here for to dye
I obeye me here for to be sclayne. (5/145-8)

The stylistic awkwardness of the last line here quoted shows the writer's determination to include the reference to obedience at all costs. Even after his reprieve Isaac repeats his willingness to comply with divine will in a prayer of thanks:

At þi byddyng to dye with knyff
I was ful buxum evyn as þi thralle. (5/246-7)

N-Town largely ignores the typological elaborations which other versions incorporate.³⁴ This challenges Stevens's claim that Old Testament prefigurations of the Passion and redemption of humankind were the underlying basis on which *N-Town* material was selected. Nor does the play include the biblically-authorised digressions offered in other dramatic versions.³⁵ *York* in particular gives far more detail than is needed to treat obedience effectively. It refers to Abraham's great age, the renaming of Sara and her barrenness, and facilitates a typological reading by having an adult Isaac 'of eelde to reken right / Thyrti 3ere and more sumdele' which is close to Jesus's age at the Crucifixion (*York*, X/81-2). The two servants are dramatically unnecessary and, whilst both Abraham and Isaac are obedient to God's word, they do not comply with the same promptness. The Northampton version, which may be a decade or so earlier than *N-Town*, contains a handful of obediential references (e.g. at ll. 49, 69-70, 253, 273), which are neither as numerous nor as pointed as those in the *N-Town* play, and blurs its focus by depicting Sara as a stereotypically over-protective mother.³⁶ The contemporary Brome treatment portrays Isaac as obedient to his father in a way that is sufficient for the demands of the story and no more, and expresses the piety of Abraham only in general terms.³⁷ In marked contrast to

³⁴ Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, p. 233. See also the discussion of *Historia Scholastica* in the previous chapter (pp. 88-9).

³⁵ No comparison can be made with *Towneley*, since two leaves which are thought to have contained the conclusion of 'Abraham' and the start of the next play are missing from the manuscript. *Towneley Plays*, p. 57, endnote.

³⁶ *Non-Cycle Plays*, pp. 32-42.

³⁷ *Non-Cycle Plays*, pp. 43-57.

the obedient piety shown in the *N-Town* version, when (after prevarication by Abraham) the infant Isaac finally learns that he is to be killed he does not initially understand why this should be. Believing that he has offended his father the infant thinks immediately of his mother:

Now I wold to God [my] moder were her on þis hyll!
Sche woold knele for me on both hyre kneys
To save my lyffe. (*Brome*, 175-8)

The Brome play was the source of part of the wide-ranging Chester treatment, which also includes the institution of circumcision and the rescue of Lot. All three components are interpreted by Expositor as prefigurations of the New Testament. His closing speech expresses an emphasis on typological prefiguration that is absent from *N-Town*:

This deede yee seene done here in this place,
in example of Jesus done yt was,
that for to wynne mankinde grace
was sacrificed one the roode.
By Abraham I may understand
the Father of heaven that cann fonde
with his Sonnes blood to breake that bonde
that the dyvell had brought us to
By Isaack understande I maye
Jesus that was obedyent aye,
his Fathers will to worke alwaye
and death for to confounde. (*Chester*, IV/464-475)

Viel Testament invokes divine will to overcome the main protagonists' temporisation. Abraham is at first incredulous when Ceraphin orders him to sacrifice his son:

O puissant Dieu, je te requier mercy!
Dont vient cecy?
Quelle admonicion,
Quel mandement? J'en ay le cuer transsy,
Dieu, qu'esse cy?
Je suis en grant soucy
D'avoir icy
Veu telle vision,
Qui mension
Fait de l'occision
De Ysaac, mon filz, que Dieu demande avoir. (*Viel Testament*, 9729-39)³⁸

³⁸ *Viel Testament*, Vol. II, p. 19.

O mighty god, I cry you mercy. Where does this come from? By what order, whose command? My blood runs cold. What is this, God? I think I must have had a bad dream about God calling for the death of my son Isaac.

Abraham only complies with the order when the Angel commands submission to the will of God. Isaac, too, is at first reluctant to accept his fate and pleads with his father to be spared. But by the time he does this Abraham has himself been taught the need for unqualified obedience to the will of God and answers:

Mon enfant, il est impossible;
C'est le divin commandement. (*VT*, 10130-1)³⁹

My child it is impossible; it is the will of God.

The method is similar to the initial reluctance of *N-Town*'s Noah.

Perhaps not surprisingly obedience features prominently in connection with the Virgin. 'Jesse Root' (Play 7) sets the tone, when in the opening stanza Isaiah declares:

Pat a clene mayde thourgh meke obedyens
Shall bere a childe which xal do resystens
Ageyn foul Zabulon, þe devyl of helle. (7/4-7)

This strand runs through all the early Marian plays. In 'The Presentation of Mary' (Play 9) the three-year old, who is praised as a paragon of mild and gracious behaviour towards her parents (9/89) has to recite the opening verses of each of the Gradual Psalms. These are preceded in each case by a quatrain in which she sets out her own spiritual position. One of these stanzas makes the tacit obedience of *Ad te leuaui oculos meos, qui habitas in celis* (sic) (Ps. 122) explicit:

The fourte is meke obedyence as is dette
To him þat is above þe planetys sefne.
To þe I haue myn eyn sette
Pat dwellys above þe skyes in hefne. (9/114-7)

Mary sees her obedience as not only due to God. In 'Joseph's Doubt' (Play 12) she and her husband exchange expressions of mutual compliance with the other's wishes. Having overcome his doubts and admitted the error of his thinking Joseph vows to 'Serve þe at foot and hone' (12/208) before asking her to tell him about the immaculate conception. She starts her reply in obediential terms:

At 3owre owyn wyll as 3e bydde me:
Ther cam an aunge[!] hyght Gabryell,

³⁹ *Viel Testament*, p. 46.

And gret me fayr, and seyd, 'Aue!' (12/213-5)

She also expresses uxorial obedience in the Conclusion to 'The Visit to Elizabeth' (Play 13) when Joseph says it is time to leave for home:

Al redy, husband, without defens,
I wyl werke by 3oure counsayl. (13/153-4)

For his part Joseph is touchingly eager to reciprocate, particularly where the will of God is concerned:

MARIA ... husband, of 3oure honesté
Avoyd 3ow hens out of þis place
And I alone with humylité
Here xal abyde Goddys hy3 grace.
JOSEPH All redy, wyff, 3ow for to plese
I wyl go hens out of 3oure way . . . (15/114-119)

He takes the same idea further in 'The Purification' (Play 19) which was probably among the last plays to be included in the compilation (see Chapter 2, pp. 14, 26). Mary states that in accordance with established practice they have to give thanks for the birth so that she may be purified 'in Goddys syght' (19/102). Joseph's response manages to combine husbandly solicitude, reverence for the Virgin Mother, and obedience to what he sees as the conflicting doctrinal imperative:

To be purefyed haue 3e no nede,
Ne þi son to be offryd, so God me spede.
For fyrst þu art ful clene,
Vndefowlyd in thought and dede;
And anothyr, þi son, withowtyn drede,
Is God and man to mene.
Wherfore it nedyd not to bene,
But to kepe þe lawe on Moyses wyse.
Wherffore we xal take us betwene
Dowys and turtelys for sacrefyce. (19/107-116)

Jesus also functions as a paradigm of obedience. At the end of 'Christ and the Doctors' (Play 21) although Mary acknowledges that '3oure faderys wyl must nedys be wrought' (21/265) he none the less emphasizes his humanity by voicing his compliance with her wishes:

Now for to plese my modyr mylde
I xal 3ow folwe with obeydence. (21/273-4)

In 'The Baptism' (Play 22) Deus Pater not only enumerates obedience as one of his distinguishing qualities, but also stresses that all who would be saved must obey him:

That he is buxhum, meke, and mylde
 I am wel plesyd, withowtyn drede,
 Wysly to wysse 3ow from weys wylde.
 To lysten his lore all men I rede,
 And 3oure erys to herke.
 Take good heed what he doth preche
 And folwyth þe lawys þat he doth teche.
 For he xal be 3oure altheris leche,
 To sauе 3ow from deuelys derke. (22/97-105)

In 'The Temptation' (Play 23) Jesus not only defeats the lures of Satan by repeated references to the word of God (at 23/93, 95, 99, 100, 102) but in his next speech also links obedience and scripture:

It is wretyn in holy book
 Bi Lorde God þu xalt not tempte.
 Allthyng must obeye to Goddys look. (23/131-3)

In the plays before the Passion, God's word is endorsed by obediential utterances spoken by both good and evil characters. When the Serpent/Devil⁴⁰ is condemned for ever to creep on his belly his response is:

At þi byddyng fowle I falle,
 I krepe hom to my stynkyng stalle. (2/267-8)

Moses responds with alacrity to God's summons:

I am here, Lorde, withowtyn les;
 3owre gracyous wyll to do I am bownde. (6/27-8)

Gabriel is no less prompt to implement the wishes of the Holy Ghost after the Parliament of Heaven:

In thyn hey inbasset, Lord, I xal go;
 It xal be do with a thought.
 Beholde now, Lord, I go here to;
 I take my flyth and byde nowth. (11/213-6)

⁴⁰ Although Proclamation thirteeners in this play refer to Serpens, tail-rhyme stanzas always speak of Diabolus. See Chapter 2, p. 20.

In 'The Raising of Lazarus' (Play 25) the Messenger (25/211-2), Martha (25/321-2, 383-4), and Primus Consolator (25/401) all make generalised utterances of this sort. But the emphasis intensifies towards the end of the play. Obedience is expressed in both particular and general terms. Bidden to life, Lazarus answers Jesus:

At 3oure comaundement I ryse up ful ryght.
Hevyn, helle, and erthe 3oure byddynge must obeye. (25/425-6)

The account in John 11:1-44, which *N-Town* follows closely, makes no reference to obedience. But in the play Peter voices his compliance with Jesus's order as he goes to help Lazarus:

At 3oure byddynge his bondys we vnbynde.
Allthyng muste lowte 3oure magesté. (25/433-4)

and John repeats the sense of the latter line:

Allthyng vndyr hevyn must nedys obeye þe. (25/439)

This intensification of obediential content can be read as a deliberate response to the imminent start of the Passion, in which the forces of evil mount the ultimate challenge to divine will.

The different approach to obedience in the Passion Plays was probably because they had separate origins from the rest. As I have shown on pp. 15-19, the initial Passion sequence was copied before the rest of the manuscript, and when the scribe added the closing episodes he tried to make the rest of Passion Play II blend with the text he had written out up to the Last Words at 32/183. Moreover, even before he copied the initial Passion sequence the Prologues of Satan and John the Baptist had been tacked on to the start of an earlier exemplar of Passion Play I. Whilst their approach to obedience conforms with the rest of the Passion it does not match the other plays. On the other hand the Ass-and Foal section of the Entry into Jerusalem (on f. 143) and the two-stage revision of the Last Supper containing the repentance of the Magdalen, Judas's scorn for her, and speeches by all the other Apostles (in Quire O) were additions, which treat it in a similar way to the rest.

Unlike the rest of the plays which reinforce obedience to divine command (or other orders of which they approve), the original recension of the Passion Plays debates at length the authority to which obedience is due. This is barely touched on elsewhere. Passion Play I begins with Satan's bogus claim to supremacy in which he breaches sumptuary legislation by 'the dyvercyté of (his) dysgysyd varyauns' (26/65) and subverts catechetical orthodoxy by re-naming the Seven Deadly Sins (see above, pp. 105-6). He leaves an audience in no doubt as to his evil intentions:

Loke þu sett not be precept nor be comawndement:
Both sevyle and canoun sett þu at nowth. (26/93-4)

John the Baptist counters this by encouraging awareness of sin, confession, and righteous living. Without these prologues, Passion Play I would start with the attempts of the High Priests and their allies to establish Jesus as having offended against ‘þe lawe’. They almost never use the sort of obediential diction used in other sections of the manuscript to endorse compliance with divine authority. Instead they present the law as a given which must be complied with at all costs. In the early part of Passion Play I ‘lawe’ is used no less than twenty-three times between 26/166-332 (i.e. before the interpolation of f 143) and the text contains much quasi-legalistic discourse.⁴¹ Annas and Cayphas invest themselves with juridical powers and are jointly addressed by the Messenger as ‘jewgys of Jewry’ (26/257). Cayphas says he represents ‘buschopys of þe lawe’ and is ‘jewge with powerys possyble’ (26/210, 211). The Doctores nominate Rewfyn and Leyon as ‘temporal jewgys’ (26/195). Rewfyn accuses Jesus of being ‘an eretyk and a tretour bolde / To Sesare and to oure lawe, sertayn’ (26/309-310), Gamalyel tells him that ‘bothe treson and eresye in þe is fownde’ (28/114), and Leyon calls on his fellows to ‘bryng forth þis tretoure’ (28/121).

The middle section of Passion Play I is more like the non-Passion episodes. In ‘The Last Supper’ (Play 27, start) the Apostles make obediential utterances to show their instant compliance with Jesus’s wishes. Peter asks where the Maundy should be kept so they ‘may serve withowte latyng’ (27/20). When Jesus, in a passage that is close to the *Northern Passion*⁴² tells him where the venue will be, the writer has added ‘At þi wyl, Lord, it xal be don’ (27/33) which is not in the source. John is similarly concerned:

To provyde, Lord, for þi comyng
With all þe obedyens we kan attende,
And make redy for þe in althyng,
Into what place þu wy[lt] us end. (27/21-4)

He also adds his voice to Peter’s:

In all þe hast þat we may go[n],
Pin comaw[n]dement nevyr to denye. (27/35-6)

The celebration of the Passover feast is an example for all to follow, in which Jesus enjoins the participants to ‘fulfylle my comawndement’ (27/432) and ‘to kepe my preceptys’ (27/436). The final section of Passion Play I contrasts Jesus’s expressions of his readiness

⁴¹i.e. at 26/166, 168, 172, 178, 180, 184, 188, 190, 210, 212, 215, 217, 220, 222, 224, 234, 238, 300, 310, 314, 315, 317, 332.

⁴²Foster, *Northern Passion*, Vol. I, p. 23. e.g. H. 181-2.

to fulfil his destiny with the continued sniping of his accusers who purport to uphold the law. Gamalyel accuses him of crimes against both state and the church ('treson and eresye' (28/114)) and Leyon summons him as 'þis tretoure' (28/121) and challenges him to 'shewe forth þi wychecrafte and nygramansye' (28/131). Jesus counters these increasingly unfocussed charges by contrasting them with the only law to which obedience is due:

Withinne þe temple sen me 3e have -
 þe lawys of God to teche and lere
 To hem þat wele here sowlys sawe. (28/138-140)

The start of Passion Play II also concentrates on 'þe lawe', if not quite so densely as Passion Play I. 'Herod; The Trial Before Annas and Cayphas' uses the word eleven times between 29/26-159 and fourteen times between 30/12-223.⁴³ The High Priests continually return to the same theme in 'The Trials before Pilate and Herod' (Play 30, end).⁴⁴ For Herod all Christians are traitors (e.g. at 29/32, 42, 48), a theme which is reprised by one of the soldiers at 29/55. The result discredits the ever wilder charges levelled against Jesus that started with the accusations at the end of Passion Play I.

The positions of some characters in the Passion are equivocal. Before 'The Death of Judas' (Play 30, start) Pilate is addressed with the honorific 'Prynce of al þis Juré and kepere of þe lawe' (30/12), and at first he seems to throw in his lot with the Conspirators. Summoned to meet Cayphas at the counsel house he signals his compliance with the sort of promptness that *N-Town* normally applies to divine command:

I xal be þere in hast, and so þu mayst say.
 Be þe oure of prime I xal comyn hem to;
 I tery no lenger, no make no delay. (30/16-18)

However, he finds Jesus innocent of the charges brought against him and pleads lack of jurisdiction because Jesus was 'outborn in þe lond of Galelye' (30/122). References to 'þe lawe' dwindle when, after deciding the innocence of Jesus, he reluctantly complies with custom and practice by granting Barabas's reprieve. Reluctance of a different sort is exhibited by Simon the Cyrenian. All the Synoptic Gospels make clear that he bears the Cross only under duress.⁴⁵ The play elaborates the element of coercion by having his hesitant compliance result from a change in register on the part of Judei. When Simon says he has errands to do the unctuous tones of Primus Judeus are replaced with the abuse and

⁴³ i.e. at 29/26, 30, 40, 43, 55, 60, 65, 91, 127, 147, 159.

⁴⁴ i.e. at 30/43, 46, 59, 83, 85, 96, 129, 162, 176, 180, 223 and 30/12, 43, 46, 59, 83, 85, 96, 129, 147, 154, 162, 176, 180, 223.

⁴⁵ Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26.

threats of Secundus. The result nullifies what might otherwise be construed as complicity in the Crucifixion.

* * * * *

Before considering the reasons behind this careful exposition of Catholic doctrine it is well to take stock of the findings up to this point.

In the second half of the fifteenth century an unfinished, two-part Passion play was combined with other dramatic writing to provide a sequence of plays dealing with Christian history from the Creation to the Last Judgement. The resultant text included Marian episodes which, even before the addition of an independently copied Assumption, testified to an exceptional devotion to the Virgin on the part of the writers and compilers. The manuscript recording this eclectic compilation was written in East Anglia in the second half of the fifteenth century, predominantly by a single scribe. There is no evidence that in this recension the plays were ever performed. Before he finished with the text this scribe made several revisions and additions, perhaps with a view to actual performance. During the decade before the Reformation parts were revised in another hand, apparently also for performance. Until codification in the late seventeenth century the text consisted of several booklets of numbered plays, some or all of which may have been only lightly - if at all - sewn.

All the identified sources used by the writers contained doctrinally acceptable material, and were for the most part readily available to regular clerics. Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* is slightly different from the rest since it was written ^{with} the suppression of heresy and the maintenance of orthodoxy in mind. Only the *Northern Passion*, of which just three copies of the version used have survived, is in any way exceptional because of its known connection with dramatic writing. It was used for this purpose in the north of England, Cornwall, and - by way of its textual ancestor, *La Passion des Jongleurs* - in France. When adapting this work the writer/s avoided using legendary material which lacked scriptural authority.

The catechetical orthodoxy discussed in this chapter was added to the material which the writers took from the sources which they used. However, they were not content merely to instruct, but also called for pious obedience from the lay audiences to whom their teaching was directed. Why this should be forms the subject of the concluding chapter.

Chapter 6

A general or a specific audience?

The nature of any dramatic text depends on how it was to be acted and for whom it was to be performed. Since not all the plays in the manuscript were designed be staged in the same way only the intended audience is available to help assess the compilers' aims. Although the relationship of the Proclamation to the plays is uncertain there seems no reason to discount the Vexillatores' appeal to 'gentyllys and 3emanry, of goodly lyff lad' (Proc./9). The problem is to decide whether the catechetical orthodoxy with its substrate of obediential references was directed only at those who did not accept the teaching of the Church, or a more broadly based cross-section of the populace, which would include pious and devout individuals at one extreme and outright - if possibly covert - heretics at the other, with varying combinations of piety and devotional shortcomings in between. I shall argue that the latter is more likely.

To examine these alternatives it is necessary first to look more closely at the claim that *N-Town* came from East Anglia. I have reviewed the evidence for location in Appendix B in two parts, (i) linguistic (pp. 144-152) and (ii) textual (pp. 153-160). The former re-examines and adds to the data printed in *L.A.L.M.E.* whilst the latter shows *inter alia* that two sections of text, both of them additions made by the main scribe after his original recension was complete, have links with Norwich. In arguing these connections with the city, neither of which has been noticed before, I do not seek to equate the plays with guild-sponsored dramatic activity of the sort known from Chester and York. *N-Town* had no direct connection with the Norwich civic cycle.¹ My purpose is, rather, to establish a link with the city that was not only the political and economic centre of East Anglia but was, more importantly, also the diocesan capital, where during the early fifteenth century the expression of orthodox Catholicism included vigorous anti-Lollard proceedings.

a) Lollardy in East Anglia

Lollardy is by virtue of its imprecision a convenient label to attach to the disparate, heterogeneous, and fluid beliefs that challenged the authority of the Church in late medieval England. The original doctrinal objections were formulated from within the Church by Wyclif and his academic followers. However, by the time of the failed Oldcastle rebellion in 1414 Lollardy had become largely divorced from its clerical origins and began to be seen as a threat to not only the church but also the state. Although Lollard beliefs were justified

¹ The evidence for guild plays in Norwich is reviewed in Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, pp. xxii-xxxvi.

- sometimes with considerable ingenuity - by use of the Bible, many of Wyclif's ideas gave way to less intellectually rigorous criticisms of contemporary religion.² Even before the main scribe started work on the initial Passion sequence most heretics were tradesmen, artisans, and occasionally parish clergy. At this popular level Lollardy denied most or all of the Sacraments, and paid special attention to Transubstantiation, the theological doctrine of the conversion of the whole substance of the bread and wine into the whole substance of the Body and Blood of Christ, with only the accidents (i.e. the outward appearance of the bread and wine) remaining. Other Lollard beliefs included the rejection of spiritual direction by the formal representatives of the church, opposition to pilgrimages, and condemnation of the veneration of images as idolatry. A significant offshoot of the inherent anticlericalism was opposition to the payment of tithes and other church dues.

Heresy showed marked regional variation and in East Anglia the Lollards have been described as having 'adhered on the whole to the extremer forms of heretical belief'.³ Most of these radical views are thought to have come from the energetic teaching of 'dominus' William White, an educated preacher who travelled and taught throughout the region. Although he went to the stake in September 1428 for persisting in heretical activities after having abjured, White's sole influence is thought to have been responsible for the relative uniformity of Lollard thinking in the region.⁴ Although the study of Lollardy tends to suffer from paucity of evidence, records of heresy trials held in the Norwich diocese under Bishop Alnwick between 1428 and 1431 have survived.⁵ The forensic method was formulaic. Each enquiry opened with questions about the Sacraments, to which all other issues were subordinated.⁶ Although Wyclif's thinking during his final years at Oxford had concentrated on the Eucharist alone, most of the Norwich defendants were opposed not only to Transubstantiation but also to other Sacraments.⁷ Some denied sacramental theology as a whole.

Apart from one Colchester (Essex) man arrested in Ipswich, all the defendants came from within the diocese. Most lived in small towns and villages in the south and east of Norfolk and north-east Suffolk; unlike London, Bristol, and Coventry, Norwich itself seems not to have been a centre for Lollard activity.⁸ Of the sixty defendants in the court

² On 30th April 1414 it was enacted that the suppression of heresy should be included in the duties of the chancellor, treasurer, justices, sheriffs, bailiffs and other royal officers. Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 597.

³ John A.F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards, 1414-1520*, (Oxford: O.U.P., 1965), p. 125. Much of the previous paragraph is also indebted to this work.

⁴ Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 84-8.

⁵ *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-1431*, ed. by Norman Tanner, Camden Society Fourth Series, Vol. 20 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977).

⁶ Ann Hudson, 'The Examination of Lollards', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 46 (1973), 145-159.

⁷ Leff, *Heresy*, p. 550.

⁸ Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 26.

book ten condemned the Sacraments in general, twenty-nine mentioned Baptism, thirty-seven Confession, thirty-five Eucharist, twenty-three Confirmation, twenty-eight Matrimony, eleven Orders, and ten Extreme Unction. Other charges included concerns about saints and prayer, morality and Canon Law, clergy and religious orders, and contacts with other known heretics. Thirty-seven of the trials refer to the veneration of relics, and charges related to tithes and other clerical dues were laid against more than half of the defendants (thirty-two).

Alnwick's purpose seems to have been to rehabilitate offenders. After the guilty had abjured they were usually flogged (on more than one occasion) either in their parish church or its cemetery during solemn procession of the parish, or in the town market place on market day. Four of the accused were so punished in Norwich, either at the Cathedral church or in the market place. Several of the defendants were made to present themselves in public dressed for a flogging without being actually beaten. The penitent had to appear in the market place (not necessarily where he or she lived) or in solemn Sunday procession, barefoot and in a shirt bearing a candle which was later to be offered at the high altar of their parish church.⁹ The public nature of these punishments served a dual purpose as both a corrective to the penitent and a warning to those who might be tempted to commit similar heresies. Repeated appearances at more than one venue would have spread news of the fate of the guilty as widely and quickly as possible. Word of these events would also bring the ultimate fate of relapsed penitents to mind. Once seen, burning at the stake was not easily forgotten; John Bale recalled the death of Thomas Norrice half a century after he had witnessed the event in 1507.¹⁰

Since none of the accused followed Norrice or White to the stake, Alnwick's prosecutions may have been successful in returning some of the accused to the fold. There is no further direct evidence of Lollardy in Norfolk until the last decade of the century. But even if heresy in the diocese disappeared from view after 1431 it persisted in nearby areas. In 1438 the abbot of Bury (in the Norwich diocese) was ordered to take action against heretics in Cambridgeshire and report what he had done to the King. Heresy, though not proved, was suspected in Essex in 1450. In 1457 there were investigations in the neighbouring dioceses of Lincoln and Ely and executions took place in Kent in the 1450s and 1460s. Between 1462 and 1464 further trials at Lincoln saw fifty heretics punished, some of them at the stake. In 1494 Bishop Goldwell called for suspected heretics to be investigated at Norwich. Although no cases came to light as a direct result of this inquiry,

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 22-3. Examples of penitents dealt with in this way include John Skylan of Bergh Apton (p. 151) and William Hardy of Mundham (p. 156). Both were required to appear in procession 'capite, et pedibus denudatis, corpore camisia et braciis solum induto, more penitentis' which suggests that sentencing as well as enquiry might be formulaic. Thomas Wade (p. 37) was to be 'collo, capite, et pedibus ac tibiis de nudatis, corpore camisia et femoralibus dumtaxat induto'.

¹⁰ Peter Happé, *John Bale*, (New York: Twayne, 1996), p. 2.

isolated instances of the punishment of heresy are recorded from 1500 onwards. The last record of anti-Lollard proceedings in East Anglia before the Reformation was in May 1512.¹¹

The absence of further trials in the Norwich diocese has been explained in various ways. Tanner claimed that the silence reflected a general tolerance in the region, and several historians have suggested that clerical laxity was responsible.¹² This seems doubtful since Alnwick's successor, Bishop Brouns (who held the see from 1436-1445) was a canon lawyer with a proven record in maintaining orthodoxy. He had instituted anti-Lollard proceedings during a brief term at Rochester, played a prominent part in Archbishop Chichele's 1428 convocation against heresy, and soon after he took over at Norwich was a member of the English delegation at the Council of Basel which aimed to return Hussites to the Church.¹³ There is no reason why this vigorous opponent of heresy should suddenly fall silent, even if his successor, Lyhert, (1446-1472) appears to have been indifferent to the problem.¹⁴ Hudson has suggested that the comparative absence of evidence can be explained by a shift in patterns of Lollard activity. Whereas earlier teaching was based on 'the dominance of the individual, peripatetic preacher' such as White, later instruction was based on small groups meeting less openly in 'conventicles' which would have kept a lower profile.¹⁵ It seems likely that most Lollards would have adopted the guise of orthodoxy whilst persisting in their heretical beliefs. The trials, punishments, and occasional burnings through the rest of the century all emphasised the need for them to beware vigilant orthodoxy. Although numbers were probably lower than the weight of critical attention that they have received might suggest, Lollards are unlikely to have disappeared completely in the decades between Alnwick's trials and the writing of the *N-Town* plays.

Investigation by diocesan authorities was not the only way in which suspected Lollards were unearthed. From the time of Wyclif the Carmelite friars had upheld the standards of orthodoxy and been at the forefront of anti-heretical activity, nowhere more so than in the order's powerful Norwich-based eastern province which also had houses at Cambridge, Maldon, and Ipswich in addition to four more in Norfolk.¹⁶ The White Friars were responsible for the anonymous compilation between 1439 and 1444 of sixty years' systematic collection of anti-Lollard evidence known as *Fasciculi Zizaniorum magistri Johannis Wycliff cum Tritico*, which has been described as 'a notable tribute to the stand

¹¹ Thomson, *Later Lollards*, pp. 136-8.

¹² Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532*, p.166.

¹³ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, p. 448.

¹⁴ Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *Seable Signs: The Iconography of the Seven Sacraments, 1350-1544* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994), p. 151 n. 67.

¹⁵ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, p. 449.

¹⁶ Burnham Norton, Blakeney, King's Lynn, and Yarmouth in addition to Norwich (see map between pp. 140 and 141).

made by the Order in defence of orthodoxy'.¹⁷ Hudson believes this may 'with a high degree of probability ... be considered to come from the Norwich Carmelite house'.¹⁸ Thomas Netter, the order's Prior Provincial who was at Norwich for much of the decade before his death in 1430, was personally responsible for another important study, *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae Ecclesiae*. No fewer than five Carmelites had been present at the trial of William White,¹⁹ including Netter himself and John Keninghale who succeeded him as Provincial. John Thorp 'ordinis Carmelitarum, sacre pagine doctor' (sometimes 'professor') attended several of the Alnwick trials²⁰ and four 'white dogs' were in court when John Skelly, a known associate of White and John Whaddon (who was also condemned to death in 1428), was found guilty of rejecting most of the Sacraments and a wide range of other heresies.²¹

b) *N-Town and Lollard beliefs*

The clerks who contributed to the *N-Town* manuscript as writers, scribes, and revisers shared the priorities of those who prosecuted the defendants in the Alnwick trials. The plays engage with sacramental theology as a whole and deal individually with the Sacraments which were most widely condemned. They stress the duty to pay tithes, refer to other known Lollard concerns, and in emphasising the mercy that was available to those who would seek it by oral Confession, they parallel the court's insistence on abjuration.

Some of the defendants denied the Sacraments outright. Isabella Davy was arraigned 'quod non deberet credere in sacramentis Ecclesie'.²² For Thomas Ploman the Sacraments were 'modicum vel nichil . . . ponderanda'.²³ The case against Thomas White of Bedingham is one of several in which the court left nothing to chance, setting out each individual Sacrament. He was condemned 'quod ipse tenuit nonnullas opiniones contra sacramenta Baptismi, Confirmacionis, Penitencie, Eucaristie, Ordinis, Matrimonii et Extreme Unxionis' in addition to heretical views on tithes, pilgrimage, and images.²⁴

Baptism featured in almost half the the Alnwick trials with several Lollard positions being voiced. Richard Fleccher of Beccles had said that 'the sacrament of Baptem doon in water in forme custumed in the Churche is nother necessarie ne vailable to manys salvacion'.²⁵ John Reve of Beccles confessed 'Y have holde, beleved and affermed that the

¹⁷ James Crompton, 'Fasciculi Zizaniorum II', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 12 (1961), 160.

¹⁸ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p. 44.

¹⁹ Nichols, *Seeable Signs*, p. 115.

²⁰ see Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, pp. 32, 41, 54, 93, 157, 163, 168.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 64. = because one ought not to believe in the sacraments of the Church.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 103. = to be considered little if at all.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 193 = because he held opinions against the sacraments of Baptism &c.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 86.

sacrament of Baptem done in water in fourme customed in the Churche is of non avail and not to be pondret if the fadir and modir of the childe be cristened and of Cristene beleve'.²⁶ Hawisia Moone held that 'alle Cristis puple is (sic) sufficiently baptizied in the blood of Crist, and so Cristis puple nedeth noon other baptem'.²⁷

In 'The Baptism' (Play 22) John the Baptist's message that 'with contryscyon, schryffte, and penauns, þe devil may 3e dryve' (22/151) epitomises the plays' overall orthodoxy. The same play's treatment of Confession is no less typical. Not only was this the most frequent of the sacramental objections mentioned in the court book, recorded in thirty-seven of the sixty trials, but it was reported with marked uniformity. The heretics' basic complaint was always said to be along the lines of John Skelly's statement that 'confession shuld be made unto no prest, but only to God, for no prest hath poar to asoile a man of synne'²⁸ even if not all of the defendants went so far as to include Skelly's anti-clerical reference. Margery Baxter enlarged on the theme by attributing venal motives to those who heard the confessions.²⁹ Although not all Lollards rejected the need for confession, many were critical of the penances which might be imposed as its consequence. Several of the defendants voiced opinions similar to those of Hawisia Moone who told the court officers that 'no man is bounde to do no penance whiche ony prest enjoyneth [hym] to do for here synnes whyche thei have confessed unto the pr[est], for sufficient penance for all maner of synne is every persone to abstyne hym from lyng, bakbytyng and yvel doyng, and no man is bounde to do noon other penance'.³⁰

The solemnity of *N-Town's* treatment of Eucharist in 'The Last Supper' (Play 27) and references to Transubstantiation in other plays contrasts with the contemptuous attitudes recorded in thirty-five of the trials. As Thomson has pointed out, the scribe who wrote the court book seems to have thought disbelief in Transubstantiation so much a part of Lollard doctrine that he entered it in the record as a matter of course.³¹ When the appositely named William Masse (whose views on this matter were uncharacteristically orthodox) was examined, the scribe wrote the standard condemnation before realising that it did not apply in this case:

Item quod nullus sacerdos habet potestatem conficiendi corpus Christi in sacramento altaris, sed quod in sacramento altaris post verba sacramentalia a sacerdote rite prolata [remanent] panis materialis et vinum materiale.³²

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 111.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 140.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 56.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 42.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 141.

³¹ Thomson, *Later Lollards*, p. 126.

³² Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 205. = Item that no priest has the power to effect the body of Christ in the sacrament of the altar, but that after the sacramental blessing has been given material bread and material wine remain.

The words 'form in the manuscript, a two-line paragraph in which the first half of each line has been deleted'.³³ As with Confession there is very little variation in the responses given by the other defendants, which seem in all cases to have been recorded with particular care. Although not all contain the reference to remanence, the deposition by Baldwin Cooper is typical: 'no prest hath poar to make Goddis body in the sacrament of the auter, and that aftir the sacramental wordis said of the prest at messe ther remayneth nothyng but oonly a cake of material bred'.³⁴

The sanctification of Matrimony by Episcopus in 'The Marriage of Mary and Joseph' (Play 10) and the validation of this Sacrament by the twelve-year-old Jesus in 'Christ and the Doctors' (Play 21) contrast with the Lollard stance. The usual heretical position, which had much to do with distrust of the clergy, was that consensual love alone was sufficient for marriage without the need for formal solemnization. Although not all the accused voiced her reference to prohibited degrees³⁵, Hawisia Moone spoke for the majority when she stated that 'oonly consent of love betuixe man and woman, withoute contract of wordis and withoute solennizacion in Churche and withoute symbred askyng, is sufficient for the sacrament of matremoyn'.³⁶

Tithing which is endorsed in 'Cain and Abel' (Play 3) by lexical insistence featured in more than half the trials. In contrast to the more or less uniform views expressed about Eucharist and Confession, a wide variety of attitudes were recorded. In six cases the defendants simply maintained that tithes should be withheld.³⁷ John Skelly elaborated this by claiming that 'it is leful for all men to withdrawe and take away tithes and offeryngges from churches and prestes, for offeryngges and tithes make prestes proude'³⁸ and John Pyrye added a further objection 'quia Deus non habet aliquam partem de eisdem'.³⁹ For William Hardy it was 'meritorie and charitable all men to withdrawe and withholde from the prestes and curates alle offringes and tithes, for offringes and tithes make prestes proude and lecherous and vicious, and therefor it were more meritorie to spende suche good in other use'.⁴⁰ In seven cases the withholding of dues was justified with a vague qualification such as 'dumtamnen hoc prudenter fiat' or 'so it be do prudently'.⁴¹ Some of the defendants had clearly given thought to what constituted prudence in this context since six of them argued that the money held back should go to the poor.⁴² This line of argument is

³³ *Ibid.* p. 205 n. a.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 126.

³⁵ I am grateful to Dr. Bella Millet for her help on the semantics of consanguinity.

³⁶ Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 141.

³⁷ *Ibid.* , pp. 64, 67, &c.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 77. = because God does not receive any part of them.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 153.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp. 95, 112, 135, &c.

⁴² *Ibid.* pp. 61, 141, 177, 179, 183, 185.

condemned outright when in ‘The Last Supper’ (Play 27) in the revisional Quire O Judas applies similar reasoning to the value of the ointment with which the Magdalen anoints Jesus’s feet:

Lord, methynkyth þu dost ryght ylle
To lete þis oynement so spylle!
To selle it, yt were more skylle,
And bye mete to poer men. (27/195-6)

The range of views was probably permitted because tithing was not a matter of dogma. None the less tithes were important to the Church if its representatives were to carry out their various pastoral functions effectively. Furthermore they were a legal incident of land and disobedience to a valid law was unacceptable. However *N-Town* does not extend its endorsement of the duty to tithe to the oblations and mortuary fees which as proof of a defendant’s anti-clericalism the court book normally mentions in the same breath. Instead of defending the clerical position, the plays exhort payment. No doubt some of the money and goods so paid were misapplied and there were clergy who converted tithes to their personal use. However, although clerical dereliction was a tale that tended to lose nothing in the telling, the plays are clear where priestly responsibilities lie. Joachym serves as an example to all:

I am clepyd ryghtful, why wole 3e se,
For my godys into thre partys I devyde:
On to þe temple and to hem þat þer servyng be;
Anodyr to þe pylgrimys and pore men; þe iij^{de} for hem with me abyde.
So xulde eueri curat in þis werde wyde
3eve a part to his chauncel, iwys,
A part to his parochonerys þat to povert slyde,
The thryd part to kepe for hym and his. (8/50-7)

By equating ‘pylgrimys’ with ‘pore men’ the plays take a position opposed to a widely held Lollard belief, which featured in thirty-four of the Alnwick trials. John Pert is one of several who held that ‘no maner of pylgrimage oweth to be do to ony seyntes, but the expenses whiche shuld be do and made in suche pilgrimages shuld be yoven to the pore puple’.⁴³

The repeated insistence on mercy and its Marian associations noted in Chapter 5, is given a specific topical relevance in the ‘Entry into Jerusalem’ (Play 26, end). Immediately before the ‘frendys, beholde þe tyme of mercy’ speech (26/458 &c.) as Jesus enters the city a stage direction reads:

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 170.

Here be iiij ceteseyngs makyn hem redy for to mete with oure Lord, goyng barfot and barelegged and in here shyrty, savyng þei zal have here gownys cast abouth them. And qwan þei seen oure Lord þei xal sprede þer clothis beforne hym, and he xal lyth and go þerupon. And þei xal falle downe upon þer knes all atonys. (26/449 + s.d.)

This departs from the biblical accounts, in which the citizens cast either branches (John 12:13), clothes (Luke 19:36), or both (Matt. 21:8; Mark 11:8) in Jesus's path. The immediate source text, the extended version of the *Northern Passion*, is sparse:

þai broght vnto him bestes twa
 Ane asse with hir fole alswe,
 þaire clathes þai laid with owten lett
 And ihesu seþin obouen þai sett,
 And he rade vnto þe towne;
 Pai kepid him with processioune
 And did vnto him grete honowre,
 Als þaire souerayne and sauiowre. (H. 74a-82)

The writers have elaborated both the immediate and ultimate sources in such a way that the Cives who throw their 'gownys' in the path of Jesus are dressed as penitent heretics presenting themselves for punishment. William Hardy, for example, was to go in solemn procession about the churchyard at his home village of Mundham on three Sundays and about the market place at Loddon dressed 'capite et pedibus denudatis, corpore camisia solomodo induto'.⁴⁴ William Bate was to be similarly punished at the parish church at Sething and at Loddon 'capite et pedibus denudatis, corpore camisia et femoralibus dumtaxat induto'.⁴⁵ Women were treated no differently; Margery Baxter was sentenced to be whipped four times 'collo, capite, et pedibus denudatis, corpore curtello solomodo induto'.⁴⁶ Alnwick conceivably saw his actions in rehabilitating wrongdoers as part of this larger mercy.

The augmentation of the Marian content might also be read as a response to another objection voiced by many of the defendants. The veneration of the Virgin that is so evident throughout *N-Town* was not shared by the defendants in the Alnwick trials. The shrine of the Virgin at Walsingham is referred to contemptuously as 'Maria de Falsyngham'⁴⁷ and 'the Lefdy of Falsyngham'⁴⁸ and Woolpit, which also had a shrine devoted to her, was belittled as Foulpit. Of the thirty-seven defendants who rejected the adoration of images as idolatry no fewer than fifteen mention the Virgin. Hawisia Moone's objection is typical: 'no worship ne reverence oweth be do to ony ymages of the crucifix, of

⁴⁴ Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 156. = with bared head and feet his body dressed only in his shirt.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 162. = with bared head and feet his body dressed in a shirt down to his thighs.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 43. = with bared neck, head, and feet, her body clad only in a shift (?).

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 47, 74.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 148.

Our Lady ne of noon other seyntes'.⁴⁹ Whilst such condemnation challenges the method of worship rather than the object of the devotion, the distinction is a fine one which might well be lost on those who were zealous in the cause of orthodoxy.

c) **The secular dimension of *N-Town***

Some of the plays mention unrest and disorder which are not directly related to religion. The accreditation of Rewfyn and Leyon as 'temperal jewgys þat knowyth þe perayl' (26/195) implies that parts of the Passion have an explicit secular dimension. Rewfyn refers to temporal and spiritual wrongdoing in describing Jesus as 'an eretyk and a tretour bolde / To Sesare and to oure law' (26/309-10). However, the emphasis here is on the secular. The sentence of death proposed by Annas shortly afterwards is not burning at the stake which would be applied to a relapsed heretic but the normal punishment for treason, a crime against the state:

Let hym fyrist ben hangyn and draw,
And þanne his body in fyre be brent. (26/319-320)

Although as one of the 'temperal jewgys' Rewfyn is not competent to pronounce on religious matters, Annas in his capacity as High Priest has the necessary authority.

Two other plays also associate unacceptable religious belief with crimes against the state or civic authority. Satan's Prologue at the start of Passion Play I enjoins the audience to disregard all authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical:

Loke þu sett not be precept nor be comawndement:
Both sevyle and canoun sett þu at nowth. (26/93-4)

In an enduring reminder of the subversive potential of novelty for the sake of novelty, Satan provides examples of the various novel ways in which he proposes to set the established order on its head. His ideas are confuted by John the Baptist, his scheming comes to nothing, and the text implies that his attempt at turmoil will perish.

The early part of the codicologically discrete 'Assumption of Mary' (Play 41) also expresses a topical concern for law and order. Episcopus Legis and the three Principes debate what is to be done about those who spread the word of the Resurrection. The Princes respectively suggest imprisonment until the trouble has passed, beating them to death, and hanging. Episcopus voices his concern about the public reaction if they should do so:

Nay, seris, nowth so. [You] bettyr avyse;
Haue in syth before what after may tide.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 142.

Yif we slewe hem, *it wolde cause the comowns to ryse,*
 And rathere the devyl sle hym than we schulde that abi[de]. (41/79-82)

Although spoken by a religious dignitary the words here italicised are a threat to the state rather than to the Church.

The articulation of this sort of fear must be read against a long history of civil unrest and lawlessness in East Anglia, which was particularly marked in Norwich. In 1272 for reasons that have not been fully explained a group of citizens violently attacked the cathedral priory and burned parts of it. This resulted in the hanging of thirty of the culprits and the excommunication of other wrongdoers. The Crown seized the city's liberties and made it pay the enormous sum of £2,000 towards repairs to the cathedral. Memories of this remain in the collective consciousness to the present day.⁵⁰ Tension remained high and further problems arose in the fourteenth century concerning the respective temporal jurisdictions of the City and the Cathedral Priory. According to Tanner, 'scarcely a decade passed between 1370 and the Reformation during which a clash between the two sides . . . is not recorded'.⁵¹ The grant to the city of county status in 1404, which was meant to resolve these simmering resentments, made things worse because of ambiguities in the way that it dealt with liberties whose title was claimed by both sides. There were significant further disturbances in 1437 and 1443 and lesser incidents through most of the rest of the fifteenth century.⁵² The Benedictine Carrow nunnery was also in dispute with the City concerning the jurisdiction over disputed lands until shortly before the Reformation. And although the Dominicans had come into conflict with the citizens in the early 1400s this seems to have been resolved by the middle of the century. After this all four mendicant orders seem to have co-existed with the civil authorities and one another in a way that the Benedictines in the Cathedral and their nuns at Carrow found impossible. At one point they were even internecine dispute between these two houses. The Cathedral also wrangled intermittently with successive bishops⁵³.

For all the social disorder the plays avoid taking sides and never condemn the secular authorities as such. The characters whose civil actions are called into question - Satan and his minions, Herod, the High Priests, Rewfyn and Leyoun - also function as agents of religious destruction. The plays - especially the Contemplacio group - present Episcopus as a figure of exemplary authority. This contrasts with the view of Margery Baxter who castigated no less a person than Alnwick himself as:

⁵⁰ I first learned of the attack on the Cathedral from the Norwich-born owner of the house in which I was staying on a visit to the city in 1998.

⁵¹ Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 141.

⁵² See Philippa Maddern, *Violence and Social Order, East Anglia 1422-1442* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 175-205; Chris Humphrey, 'To Make a New King: Seasonal Drama and Local Politics in Norwich, 1443', *Medieval English Theatre*, 17 (1995), 29-41.

⁵³ Tanner, *Church in Norwich*, p. 155 et seq.

... dictum Caypham, Nowicensem episcopum, et eius ministros, qui sunt membra
diaboli . . .⁵⁴

The plays can be read as treading a middle path between the opposing claims of city and cloister.

d) The purpose of the manuscript

There are several reasons why the main aim of the plays' writers and compiler cannot have been a reaction to the perceived dangers of Lollardy. The first is a matter of chronology. The possible dates of composition and compilation mentioned in Appendix C (p. 161) range at one extreme from between 1462 and 1468 for the earliest sections of text to the contribution of Reviser 2 (*Facsimile B*; Spector's Scribe C) only a few years before the Dissolution of the Monasteries at the other. The lapse of time between the 1428-31 trials which are the only direct evidence of Lollard activity in the Norwich diocese and the earliest date is too great to support the idea of an immediate response. If the manuscript was copied as late as the last decade of the fifteenth century as Parkes suggests⁵⁵ this takes the text even further away from the trials, even if Bishop Goldwell's unsuccessful 1494 investigations may perhaps indicate clerical unease at this later time.

The plays never refer to Lollardy by name, which might be expected if this were the principal aim. Heresy, a word that is even less specific than Lollard, is mentioned only occasionally and, except in one instance not as a direct condemnation of specific beliefs. The exception is in 'The Magi' (Play 18) which imputes heretical teaching to Herod when he boastfully announces:

I xall marryn þo men þat r....yn on myche,⁵⁶
And þerinne sette here sacramentys sottys say!
Þer is no lorde in þis werde þat lokygh me lyche.
For to lame l of þe lesse lay⁵⁷
I am jolyere than þe jay,
Stronge thevys to steke,
Þat wele oure lawys breke. (18/73-79)

Although the illegibility of some words makes it difficult to establish the precise meaning, Herod seems to be pouring scorn on sacramental theology in general and, since 'myche' is a

⁵⁴ Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, p. 46. = the said Caiaphas, Bishop of Norwich, and his ministers who are the devil's limbs.

⁵⁵ *Facsimile*, p. xxvii n. 4; *N-Town Play*, Vol I, p. xxii n. 1.

⁵⁶ Spector's edition omits 'a' between 'on' and 'myche'. See also *Ludus Coventriae*, p. 153 and *Facsimile*.

⁵⁷ The illegibility of the original fourth word in 18/75 is tantalising. Block prints 'l...rys' suggesting in a footnote that it may have been either 'lo[ve]rys' or 'le[ve]rys'. (*Ludus Coventriae*, p. 154, n. 3.)

contemptuous reference to the host, the Eucharist in particular.⁵⁸ Since the episode occurs well before the institution of the supreme Sacrament in ‘The Last Supper’ (Play 27) this is dramatically anachronistic. Normally Herod’s alliterative bombast does little more than reflect his dramatic function as a villain of the deepest dye, yet this revision specifically implicates him in Lollard errors. Significantly, this section of text is one of those to which Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector’s Scribe C) paid special attention. Although his alterations retain the anti-sacramentalism of the main scribe’s recension they also make Herod responsible for leading wrong-thinking heretics further astray:

I xall marryn þo heretykys þat beleuyn amysse,
 And þerin sette there sacramentys, fallsse þey are I say!
 þer is no lorde in þis we[rl]d þat lokygh me lyke, iwyssse,
 For to lame heretykkys of þe lesse lay . . . &c.

These revisions show that objections to sacramental theology were perceived to be an issue when the *urcycle* was composed, when ‘The Shepherds’ was first written and copied, and when this play was revised. The alterations were made decades after the main scribe first copied the play and, more importantly, a century after the trials in the Alnwick court book took place. Even if the original version contained a hint of paranoia on the part of those responsible, Reviser 2’s more pointed later version suggests that whatever suspicions existed refused to go away and may not have been entirely without foundation.⁵⁹

The word ‘heretic’ is given a less than specific meaning. First Annas, arguing the need to uphold what he repeatedly calls the ‘lawe’, issues a command that:

Yf any eretyk here reyn, to me 3e complayn. (26/170)

There is no indication of precision here nor, in view of the role played by the High Priests in compassing the downfall of Jesus, can this line be read as condemnation of heresy. When Rewfyn calls Jesus ‘an eretyk and a tretour bolde’ (26/309) and Gamalyel says that Jesus has been found guilty of ‘bothe treson and eresye’ (28/114) the context nullifies the derogatory meaning. Lastly, Thomas Didimus uses the word when defining his role in convincing sceptics about the Resurrection:

... be my grett dowte oure feyth may we preve
 A3ens all þo eretykys þat speke of Cryst shame. (38/386-7)

⁵⁸It is tempting to read the fourth word in the penultimate line here quoted as ‘Lollards’.

⁵⁹Such a claim has been made for the Towneley Passion sequence. See T. R. De Welles, ‘The Social and Political Context of the Towneley Cycle’ (unpublished University of Toronto Dissertation, 1981), pp. 319-341.

‘Eretykys’ here refers not so much to specific transgressive theology as to general non-belief. Such references are both non-specific and few and far between. The infrequency is particularly noticeable when contrasted with the lexical density which the writers applied to some of the instructional material, such as that dealing with Baptism, Confession, and tithing.

On the other hand there is no doubting the plays’ insistence on catechetical orthodoxy. If references to the individual Sacraments and the doctrine of mercy occurred in the text *en passant* they could be dismissed as no more than manifestations of the plays’ overall orthodoxy, acquired by a sort of compositional osmosis. But this is not the case. The key concepts of Baptism, Confession and Penance, tithes, and mercy are all elaborated from what are usually spare accounts in the sources, and are reinforced by the stylistic device of lexical iteration. Matrimony and Eucharist are taught no less forcefully even though their importance was stressed in other ways.

None of this implies that the Sacraments, tithing, and the virtue of mercy were aimed solely at heretics. The endorsement of the Decalogue by Episcopus in ‘The Presentation of Mary’ (Play 9) is typical of the wider relevance of the plays’ catechetical teaching:

... God hath 3ovyn vs comaundementys ten,
Which, shortly to say, be comprehendyd in tweyn.
And þo must be kept of all Crysten men,
Or ellys here judgement is perpetual peyn. (9/170-3)

The other matters of doctrine that are found all through the plays must equally ‘be kept of all Crysten men’ or, as the Proclamation has it, ‘both more and lesse, / gentyllys and 3emanry of goodly lyff lad’ (Proc./7-8). *N-Town* presents its teaching in a way that is opposed to known heretical positions in East Anglia, but it does so as part of larger concerns having a wider relevance to all believers. It would in any event be a self-defeating exercise to address an audience that might be disposed to stay away from the enactment of material that might conflict with their personal beliefs.

Although the purpose of the plays’ subsidiary concern with civil order is not entirely clear, it offers clues as to the possible identity of the regular clerics responsible for its composition and compilation. Whilst the text is critical of civil indiscipline and clerical shortcomings it avoids condemning either faction outright, preferring to reserve its strictures for conventional figures of evil. This even-handedness is surprising. Arundel’s *Constitutions* forbade clerics to criticise the Church to a lay audience, but contained no restriction on the condemnation of secular shortcomings.⁶⁰ Since the friars - unlike the monastic orders - maintained good relations with the Norwich city authorities during the

⁶⁰ See discussion of Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* on pp. 82-3.

later fifteenth century, it is reasonable to infer that the plays originated with one of the four main mendicant orders. Although the evidence is not conclusive, the best claim can perhaps be made for the White Friars, the 'Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel' which propagates a special devotion both to the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus.⁶¹ Throughout this thesis I have emphasized the insistent and exceptional reverence accorded to the Virgin, and adoration of the Christ Child is evident in the *Contemplacio* plays. Moreover the Carmelites led the way in the opposition of heresy and the maintenance of the orthodox status quo, which I have argued were a significant part of *N-Town*'s purpose. Their involvement in this sort of activity can be seen in the presence of Netter, Keninghale, Thorp, and others at the Alnwick trials, and the major histories of heresy (*Fasciculi Zizaniorum* and Netter's *Doctrinale*) which have been associated with the Norwich priory. As the map between pp. 140 and 141 shows, the order's other houses in East Anglia were so located that they could readily carry out their self-appointed mission of vigilance in all parts of the diocese. But the final piece of evidence is the particular niche occupied by the Norwich Carmelite house in secular matters:

(it) enjoyed a special relationship with the city government. Thus the commonalty agreed in 1488, apparently at the invitation of the Carmelites to become the second founder of the friary in succession to Philip Cowgate, the merchant who had originally founded it in the thirteenth century, the mayor becoming 'the principal founder'; acting on this the mayor and commonalty, eleven years later, exempted the Carmelites from all tolls in the city.⁶²

The tax-exempt status would be a cogent reason why no hint of offence should be given to the city rulers, and would explain why the plays negotiate the criticism of clerical and secular abuses so even-handedly.

The precise nature of the manuscript is not certain. The lack of uniformity in staging methods prescribed by the stage directions suggest that the compilers envisaged that the contents would not be performed *seriatim* in their entirety, but as individual plays or small groups of plays. The unbound condition of the manuscript and Reviser 2's concentration on codicologically discrete units support this reading, and suggest that it may have been used an exemplar from which playing parts were to be copied. However, whether the plays be read in their entirety, in groups, or individually the main purpose of the contents of British Library MS Cotton, Vespasian D.VIII is the *cura animarum* rather than scriptural instruction. This concern is mixed with, and perhaps in the minds of the compilers to some extent dependent upon, exhortations to civil order and municipal responsibility.

⁶¹ O.D.C.C. 'Carmelite Order'. Marianism is often one of the first things that the order today looks for when trying to establish Carmelite provenance for a text.

⁶² Tanner, *Church*, p. 157.

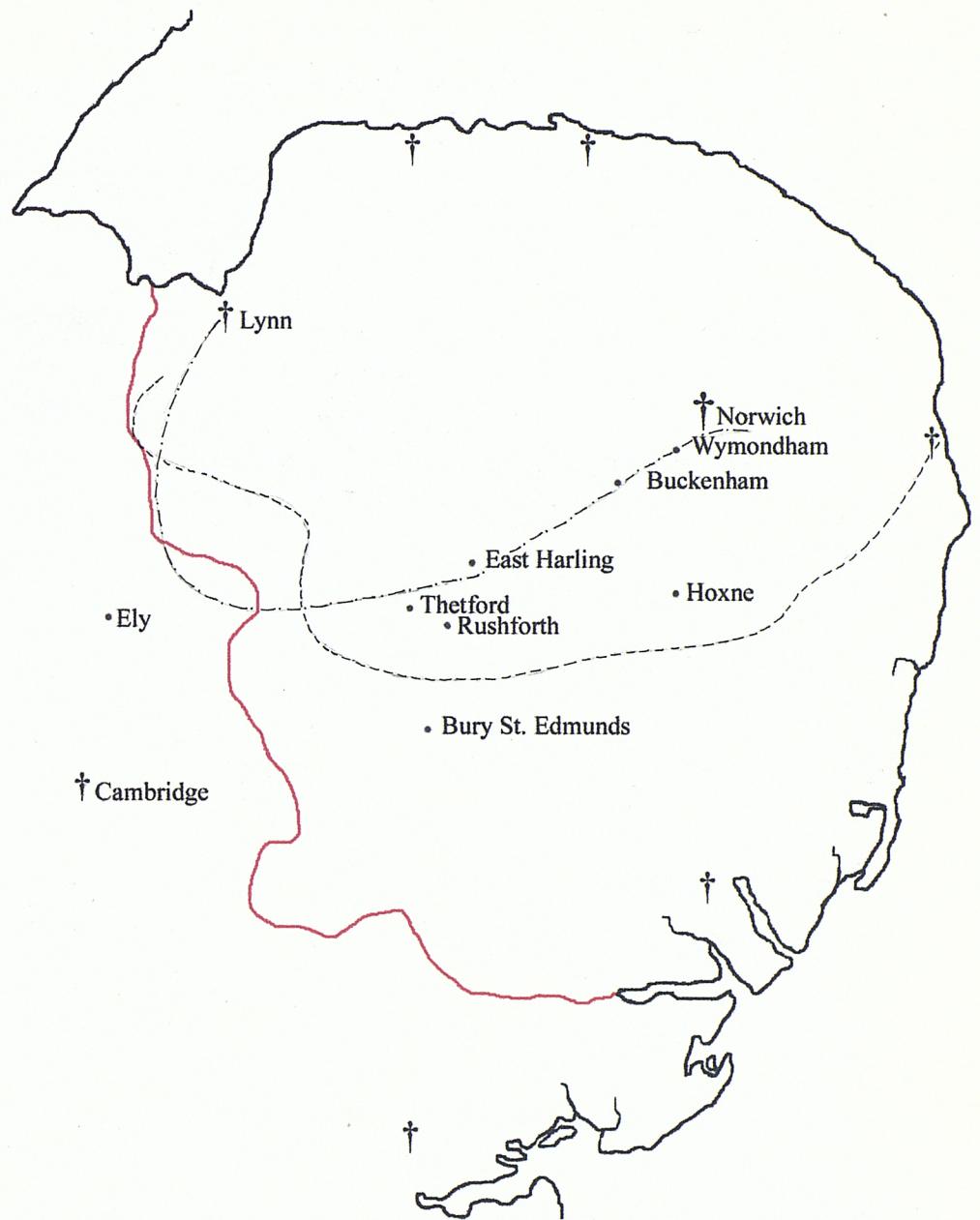
Future research.

I have identified three topics arising out of my present research which I hope to be able to look at more closely.

- i) Since my reading has destabilised Foster's findings about the influence of the *Northern Passion* in respect of *N-Town* ('the Hegge plays'), I propose in the short term to review her comments in respect of York and Towneley and extend my findings to include the Cornish *Ordinalia*.
- ii) I intend to investigate what, if anything, the paper trade can tell us about East Anglian dramatic writing. Whilst most of the paper used for the *N-Town* manuscript was imported from northern France, some came from Piedmont, and the Play 41 scribe wrote on stock from central Italy. Of particular interest is the French 'Laced Hand' paper used by Reviser 2 for ff. 95-6 and 112 which is similar (though not identical) to that used for the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and *Mankind*.⁶³ If the routes by which this assortment of material reached East Anglia can be ascertained it may be possible to make connections with clerical and scholastic influences.
- iii) Part of the remit of my thesis has been to demonstrate the differences between the plays recorded in the *N-Town* manuscript and the York, Towneley, and Chester cycles. I have supported this and other arguments by quoting from not only English plays but also a number of texts from the mainland of Europe, chosen more or less arbitrarily according to what have been readily available. The continental connection needs to be investigated on a more methodical basis. Although the compilers followed the Creation to Doomsday pattern which is known mainly from the civic cycles from northern England, the text also hints at the influence of dramatic models from France or the Low Countries. This long-term project will have two components, familiarisation with the principal European texts, and investigation of possible ways in which transmission may have taken place. Some work has already been done on Norfolk links with the Netherlands, but France may prove more problematic. The proposed investigation of the paper trade may be relevant.

⁶³Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays*, p. lxxi.

EAST ANGLIA



— = approximate extent of Norwich diocese (omitting enclaves of peculiar jurisdiction)

† = Carmelite houses

----- = 'xal' isogloss (southern extent)

- - - - - = 'thi' isogloss

(Not drawn to scale)

Appendix A

Physical make-up of the codex

[The contents of the two mutually complementary parts of this Appendix are based on *Facsimile*, pp. xiv-xvi and *N-Town Play*, pp. xviii-xxi and xxxix-xl.]

i) Watermarks

Initial Passion sequence:

Quires N, P, Q, R	<i>Bull's Head</i>
Quires S and T (part)	<i>Crossed Keys</i>

Rest of original recension:

Quire T (leaves left blank after initial Passion sequence)	
Quires A, B	<i>Bunch of grapes</i>
Quires C, D, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, V, W	<i>YHS in Sun</i>

Additions and interpolations:

ff. 95-6, 112	<i>Laced hand</i>
Quire E	<i>Pitcher</i>
f. 143	(unidentified)
Quire O	<i>Bunch of grapes</i>
ff. 214-222 (Play 41)	<i>Two-wheeled cart</i>
flyleaf	<i>Escutcheoned cross</i>

Most of the principal types of paper came from Piedmont, although the two-wheeled Cart stock used for Play 41 was probably made in central Italy.¹ The Bull's Head paper used for the original recension of Passion Play I was of 'provenance champenoise ou peut-être bisontine'² and the Pitcher stock used for Quire E was 'sûrement champenoise'.³ The 'tête de boeuf à yeux et à nez' group to which the Passion Play I paper belongs was produced *circa* 1410-1480 and the YHS in Sun mark 'ne remonte qu'au milieu du XV^e s'.⁴ Reviser 2's ff. 95-6 and 112 both have a mark very similar to a group that became common in north-west France, 'main généralement lacée au poignet, au quatre doigts serrées, le pouce très écarté', not known by Briquet before 1526.⁵

¹ Briquet, I, p. 228. Fabriano is south west of Ancona.

² i.e. the Champagne region or Besançon. Briquet, IV, pp. 715-6.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 324-5.

⁴ Briquet, III, p. 498.

⁵ Briquet, III, p. 573.

ii) **Collation**

The contents of each Quire are shown by line reference and play title. Catchwords and catch-letters are italicised. Additions to and revisions of the main scribe's original recension are indicated in bold type to the right of the page.

Quire / [line]	Content / { <i>Catchwords</i> }	<i>Scribe</i>
flyleaf	(Richard James's description)	
A²⁰ [Proc.; 1/1 - 3/end]	Proclamation Creation of Heaven; Fall of Lucifer Creation of the World; Fall of Man	
B²⁰ [4/1- 8/196]	Cain and Abel Noah Abraham and Isaac Moses Jesse Root Joachim and Anna (part) { <i>catchword B-C</i> }	
C⁸ [8/197 - 9/end]	Joachim and Anna (concl.) Presentation of Mary in the Temple Contemplacio's Link	
D² [10/1-145]	Marriage of Joseph and Mary (part)	
E² (interpolated) (51 ^v - 52 blank)	[10/155-174]	written by Reviser 1
	Marriage of Joseph and Mary (contd.)	
F¹⁶ [10/146-154, 175 - 11/end]	Marriage of Joseph and Mary (concl.) Parliament of Heaven; Salutation and Conception { <i>catch-letters on all versos between ff. 66-72</i> }	
G²⁰ (wants 16) [12/1 - 15/217]	Joseph's Doubt Visit to Elizabeth + Conclusion Alternate Conclusion Den's prologue Trial of Mary and Joseph Nativity (part)	added by Main scribe added by Main scribe
H¹⁵ + ff. 95-6 interpolated after H ⁹	[15/218 - 20/162]	
	Nativity (concl.) Shepherds	
ff. 95-6	Magi Purification Slaughter of the Innocents; Death of Herod (part)	written by Reviser 2
J²⁰ + f. 112 interpolated after J ⁹ (wants 10-11)	[20/163 - 24/56]	

	Death of Herod (concl.)	
	Christ and the Doctors	
f. 112	Baptism	written by <i>Reviser 2</i>
	Parliament of Hell; Temptation	
	Woman Taken in Adultery (part)	
K ²	[24/57 - 164]	
	Woman Taken in Adultery (contd.)	
L ²	[24/165 - 268]	
	Woman Taken in Adultery (contd.)	
M ¹⁰	[24/269 - 25/end]	
	Woman Taken in Adultery (concl.)	
	Raising of Lazarus	
N ¹² + f. 143	interpolated after N ⁷ [26/1 - 27/140]	
	Prologues of Satan and John the Baptist	
	Conspiracy	
	Entry into Jerusalem	
f. 143	Ass and Foal	interpolated by <i>Main scribe</i>
	Last Supper (part)	
	{ <i>catchword N-O</i> ; <i>N-P cancelled</i> }	
O ³	(interpolated) [27/141 - 268 + s.d.]	
	Last Supper (contd.)	
	Magdalen and the ointment	interpolated by <i>Main scribe</i>
P ²	[27/269 - 368]	
	Last Supper (contd.)	
Q ²	[27/369 - 465 + s.d.]	
	Last Supper (contd.)	
R ⁸	[27/466 - Procession/end]	
	Conspiracy with Judas	
	Last Supper (concl.)	
	Betrayal	
	Procession of Saints	
S ¹⁶	(ff. 164 blank) [29/1 - 32/24]	
	Herod	
	Trial before Annas and Cayphas	
	Death of Judas	
	Trials before Pilate and Herod	
	Satan and Pilate's Wife	
	Second Trial before Pilate	
	Procession to Calvary (part)	
	{ <i>catchword S-T</i> }	
T ⁸ + ff. 184-5	interpolated after T ⁴ [32/25 - 34/225]	
	Procession to Calvary (concl.)	
ff. 184-5	Crucifixion	interpolated by <i>Main scribe</i>
	Harrowing of Hell I	
	Burial; Guarding of the Sepulchre (part)	
	{ <i>catchword T-V</i> }	
V ²⁰	(f. 209 blank) [34/226 - 38/end]	
	Guarding of the Sepulchre (concl.)	
	Harrowing of Hell II	

Christ's Appearance to Mary		
Pilate and the Soldiers		
Announcement to the Three Marys		
Peter and John at the Sepulchre		
Appearance to Mary Magdalene		
Cleophas and Luke		
Appearance to Thomas		
W⁶ + ff. 213-222 interpolated after W³ (f. 213 blank)		[39/1 - 42/130]
Ascension		
Selection of Matthias		
Pentecost		
ff. 213-222	Assumption of Mary (interpolated)	Play 41 scribe
	Judgement Day (incomplete)	

Appendix B

Place of origin

i) Linguistic evidence

The headnote to the Linguistic Profile in the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* assigns the manuscript to Norfolk.⁶ This location is based on data compiled from a detailed examination of ff. 1-20 only and 'scanning' to f. 106 and should therefore not be read uncritically. Furthermore, although the *Atlas* claims that each printed Linguistic Profile represents the language of a single scribal text, it is unclear whether this is in fact the case. The scanned section includes the work of both revisers (respectively on f. 51 and ff. 95-6) as well as that of the main scribe, which is not immediately apparent from the way the text of the plays is presented in Block's edition from which *Atlas* took its data. It is not clear whether the Linguistic Profile ignores these pages.⁷

A potentially more serious objection is that the limited sample means that only the Proclamation and the first three plays were considered in full, with further data gathered randomly from the text up to the 'Death of Herod' (Play 20, end). Since this omits part of the Ministry, all the Passion, and the final plays, and spelling differs in various sections of the text, findings based on it may not be representative of the whole. I have therefore looked at further evidence, discussed below under separate headings, in respect of (a) the initial Passion sequence, (b) Play 41, and (c) the work of each of the two revisers.

I have prefixed all words listed in each section with the Questionnaire number (to resolve possible ambiguities), the County Dictionary page number for Vol IV of the *Atlas*,

⁶ *L.A.L.M.E.*, Vol. III, pp. 339-40.

⁷ Block mentions the revisional hands only in her introduction (*Ludus Coventriae*, p. xvi) whereas Spector also refers to them in footnotes.

and play / line references (up to a maximum of three per word). With a few exceptions in the case of Norfolk, the numbers printed in the County Dictionary for East Anglia all appear in Key Map 6 on p. 339 of Volume IV. The List of Linguistic Profile Numbers on pp. 327-331 gives Grid references for the numbers that are printed in the Key Maps, and indicates those which are not included. The warning that 'in East Anglia (especially Norfolk) ... an individual writer's range of variant spellings for a single word is generally greater than most other counties'⁸ has to be borne in mind when this evidence is considered.

N.B. Page numbers in all four lists refer to *L.A.L.M.E.* Vol. IV where grid numbers (which do not correspond with the O. S. National Grid) are listed on p. 327-331. Key Map 6 on p. 339 covers Cam, Ely, Nfk, and Sfk.)

a) Main scribe (Additional forms found in the initial Passion sequence)

I have supplemented the printed data with additional forms noted from the initial Passion sequence (26/1 to 32/183), omitting from this list the interpolations on ff. 143 (Ass and Foal) and 149-151 (the repentance of the Magdalen and the gathering of the Apostles). Since this part of the manuscript was copied earlier than quires A-M (the Proclamation and Plays 1-25) from which the *Atlas* took its data, these forms are chronologically closer to the time when the main scribe acquired his original orthographic habits. The following should be read in addition to the printed Linguistic Profile:-

2	(p. 4)	thes	26/188
		hese	29/82
9	(p. 16)	ere	27/348 + s.d.
		þer	26/6
10	(p. 18)	seche	27/121
		swech	26/444, 32/109
		sweche	26/396
11	(p. 20)	qweche	27/501
		wech	27/54, 79
		weche	27/72, 318, 400, &c.
12	(p. 23)	ech	26/282
18	(p. 35)	where	26/439
21	(p. 36)	wace	28/104
31	(p. 54)	thanne	29/86
32	(p. 58)	þo	31/49
41	(p. 74)	qwyl	31/init. s.d.
45	(p. 83)	notwh	32/104
		notwth	26/252, 28/144
52	(p. 93)	qwher	29/215

⁸ *L.A.L.M.E.*, Vol. II, p. x.

54	(p. 98)	thurwe	29/80
55	(p. 102)	qwan	26/449 + s.d.
99	(p. 146)	cowde	31/91
		cow[de]	31/19
103	(p. 150)	day	26/316
		dey	27/115, 28/16, 29/177, &c.
107	(pp. 155-6)	erde	29/92 + s.d.
		herd	28/59
115	(p. 163)	ey	26/399
		<i>pl.</i> eyne	28/74
137	(p. 181)	gef	26/175
		geve	27/295
		gyf	26/56, 292, 335, &c.
		gyff	26/61, 63
139	(p. 186)	gode	31/78
145	(p. 193)	efne	27/539
		hefne	26/13, 27/75, 123, &c.
149	(p. 195)	heye	28/129, 29/31
159	(p. 204)	kend	26/10
		kende	32/137
169	(p. 210)	lyff	27/403
196	(pp. 227-8)	elde	30/182
		holde	26/47
		hoold	26/164 + s.d. (x 2)
197	(p. 228)	oon	26/164 + s.d.
199	(p. 230)	odyr	28/80 + s.d.
200	(p. 233)	houre	26/98, 27/78
203	(p. 236)	pepyll	30/178
215	(p. 251)	sylver	27/ 298, 305
231	(p. 260)	the	27/44, 30/206, 32/44
232	(p. 261)	thow	27/470
		þu	27/69, 71, 28/109, &c.
249	(p. 278)	qwat	27/515
260	(p. 293)	wurchep	27/188
263	(p. 297)	ȝoure	30/96
268	(p. 300)	- om	29/110

Apart from forms which are either not recorded or are alien to East Anglia (notwh, notwht, wace, þo, herd, efne, kend, -om) my additions to the Linguistic Profile have all been recorded from Norfolk - almost all of them are found in more than one location. 'Holle' for old and 'hefne' are recorded from no other county; 'gode' and 'þu' are also recorded widely from Cambridge, Ely, and Suffolk, though 'þu' is missing from Ely, as is 'kende'; whilst 'oon' and 'wurchep' are absent from Suffolk, there is a cluster of entries for 'sylver' from Bury St. Edmunds (Sfk.) against one from each of Cambridge, Ely, and Norfolk. The variants here listed tend to occur for the most part slightly to the north and east of the

notional mean location at East Harling (Key map 6 - 4080⁹) proposed by Samuels and McIntosh.¹⁰

The overall picture is not significantly different from the printed Linguistic Profile. Taking the two together, spellings recorded either solely or predominantly within Norfolk include: ȝyt, quan, cherch, gyf, gyff, ȝeue, wurchep, wurchipe. The various spellings for 'world' also belong unmistakeably to this county: 'werlde', 'werde', and 'werl-' are not recorded outside Norfolk and only 'werd' can be found just across the boundary near to and at Ely and in the extreme north-west of Suffolk. Most of the forms which are also found outside Norfolk have a broadly similar distribution to 'xuld' and 'xal'. These long-recognised indicators of East Anglian scribal origins are both missing from the coastal north of Norfolk and from Cambridge and Ely. 'Xal' occurs densely throughout the rest of the county as well as the northern part of Suffolk, where an isogloss would run approximately: Mildenhall - Bury St. Edmunds - Stowmarket - Hoxne (see map between pp. 140 and 141). Suffolk records for 'xuld', though fewer than for 'xal', extend somewhat further toward the south of the county. Both wh- and the later qw- forms are recorded from a similar area: 'qwyl' does not occur outside Norfolk; 'qwher' is also limited to the county apart from a single instance recorded from Suffolk (Key Map 6 - 8430¹¹); 'qwan' is known from the extreme north-east of Ely and, like 'qwat' also extends into the southern half of Suffolk. Since qw- spellings gradually replaced the corresponding w- and wh- forms as the fifteenth century progressed¹², the use of both ways of spelling such words may imply that the scribe first learned to write a considerable period of time before he started work on the manuscript. Even with this supplementary list the Linguistic Profile is still incomplete.

b) Play 41 scribe

The codicologically discrete 'Assumption of the Virgin' (Play 41) has a different orthography from the work of the main scribe. Greg considered that there was no reason to suppose that it was copied in a different locality from the rest of the manuscript, which he placed without further precision in East Anglia.¹³ Samuels has found characteristics of Bury in its spelling, which Spector feels might indicate that the scribe had been educated there before moving north across the county boundary.¹⁴ However the *Atlas* contradicts Beadle's claim that the mixing of -ng(e) and -and in the present participle is characteristic of

⁹ Grid 595 289.

¹⁰ *N-Town Play*, p. xxxvi.

¹¹ Grid 624 266.

¹² *L.A.L.M.E.*, Vol. I, p. 26.

¹³ Greg, *Assumption of the Virgin*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *N-Town Play*, Vol. I., p. xxxviii, quoting a personal communication.

Norfolk.¹⁵ Although six of the Linguistic Profiles from Norfolk record both forms, the combination can also be found in four from Cambridge, a further four from Ely, and three from Suffolk.¹⁶ In this connection it should be noted that the *Atlas* data for these counties were respectively compiled from 16, 14, and 29 documents and texts for Cambridge, Ely, and Suffolk, as against no fewer than 64 for Norfolk. The distribution of the combined forms of the present participle is therefore not significantly less for Cambridge and Ely than for Norfolk, and the combination is only slightly less common in Suffolk.

The following list contains seventy-nine of the target words in the *Atlas* Questionnaire, in one hundred and twenty-nine variant spellings. Those marked with an asterisk (68) are not in either the Linguistic Profile printed in the *Atlas* or my supplementary list for the main scribe's initial Passion sequence:-

1	(p. 3)	the	41/2, 3, 6, &c.
2	(p.4)	* thise	41/9
8	(pp. 12-13)	hem	41/36, 46, 81, &c.
10	(p. 18)	sweche	41/46, 49, 381
		swyche	41/373
11	(p.19)	* qwyche	41/116, 167, 221
15	(p. 29)	ony	41/42, 43
16	(p. 29)	mech	41/23
		meche	41/65, 188, 215, &c.
		myche	41/61, 104
17	(p. 33)	ben	41/66, 70, 214, &c.
		beth	41/90, 271
18	(p.35)	* wern	41/105
22	(pp. 37-9)	* schalt	41/109
		* schal	41/64, 110, 160, &c.
		* schall	41/65
		* schul	41/46, 129, 176, &c.
		* schuld	41/214, 261, 265, &c.
		* schulde	41/82, 210
24	(p. 44)	wyl	41/140
25	(p. 46)	wold	41/155, 204
31	(p. 54)	* thanne	41/294
33	(p. 60)	* yif	41/56, 252, 269, &c.
36	(p. 63)	ageyn	41/266, 337, 480
		* ageyne	41/429
40	(p. 73)	* yit	41/59
45	(p. 83)	not	41/118
		* nouth	41/268
48	(p. 86)	* word	41/154
53	(p. 95)	* mot	41/476

¹⁵ *Ibid.* quoting Beadle, Thesis, I, pp. 92-3.

¹⁶ Cam. 291 379 672 698; Ely 73 552 557 558; Nfk. 58 281 421 424 574 621 626; Sfk. 4231 4266 8340.

		myht	41/143
54	(p. 97)	* thorow	41/71
	(p. 98)	* throw	41/521
55	(p. 103)	* when	41/200, 227, 306
65	(p. 115)	* abowtyn	41/463
66	(p. 116)	* abouen	41/518
		above	41/11
69	(p. 119)	* eyer	41/372
70	(p. 120)	alle	41/21, 311, 332, &c.
84	(p. 133)	* blessid	41/352, 366
		* blesydyd	41/163
		* blissid	41/297, 506, 24, &c.
		* blysid	41/527
		* blyssid	41/509
87	(p. 136)	* brether	41/143, 213, 233, &c.
		brother	41/236, 238, 243, &c.
94	(p. 142)	* com	41/330, 480, 516, &c.
95	(p. 143)	* con	41/374
101	(p. 148)	* dayes <i>pl.</i>	41/174
102	(p. 150)	deth	41/8, 55
103	(p. 150)	deye	41/93, 139, 270, &c.
105	(p. 154)	* doun	41/437
107	(p. 156)	erthe	41/16, 180, 340, &c.
		* herthe	41/491
116	(p. 165)	fer	41/190, 479
117	(p. 166)	* fader	41/445
125	(p. 171)	* ferste	41/18, 105
127	(p. 174)	* flech	41/230, 302
133	(p. 179)	* fruth	41/158, 456
137	(p. 182)	* yaf	41/120
142	(p. 189)	haue	41/211
143	(p. 191)	hed	41/93, 389, 442, &c.
145	(p. 193)	hefne	41/139, 167, 180, &c.
		* hevene	41/244
		* hevyin	41/260
148	(p. 195)	hens	41/403, 406
149	(p. 196)	* hie	41/137, 123
		* hye	41/30, 31, 128, &c.
150	(p. 198)	* hytht	41/501
153	(p. 199)	* heder	41/207
159	(p. 205)	kend	41/516
		kende	41/159
		* kynde	41/152
160	(p. 205)	* knawe	41/42
169	(pp. 209-10)	lyf	41/511
176	(p. 215)	* mon	41/484
180	(p. 216)	* moder	41/104, 115, 119, &c.
181	(p. 217)	my	41/101
		myn	41/101

189	(p. 224)	* neuyr	41/276
191	(p. 225)	ny	41/312
197	(p. 228)	on	41/142
199	(p. 231)	* othir	41/202
200	(p. 233)	houre	41/45
		oure	41/187, 218, 250, &c.
		* owre	41/29, 52, 209
201	(p. 234)	* outh	41/154
		owth	41/134
203	(p. 236)	* pepil	41/61
205	(p. 237)	* prey	41/426
		* preye	41/237
210	(p. 241)	sey	41/75
211	(pp. 245-7)	se	41/144, 192
		* see	41/175
217	(pp. 252-3)	* seustere	41/183
		* suster	41/348, 352
220	(p. 255)	sum	41/193
221	(p. 255-6)	* sonne	41/176
		sone	41/153, 201, 208, &c.
223	(p. 257)	sowle	41/505
226	(p. 258)	sterre	41/391
228	(p. 259)	sunne	41/118
232	(p. 260-1)	thou	41/216, 503
		þu	41/215
233	(p. 261)	* thy	41/217, 341
		þi	41/342, 440
237	(pp. 266-7)	thre	41/7, 12, 336, &c.
247	(p. 276)	wel	41/265
258	(p. 290)	* wythoutyn	41/350, 361
		* wythowte	41/379
260	(p. 292)	worchepe	41/515, 523
		* worschepe	41/452
261	(p. 295)	* ye	41/236, 253, 254, &c.
262	(p. 295)	* you	41/219, 232
		* yow	41/59, 240, 247, &c.
263	(p. 296)	youre	41/102, 248, 282, &c.
		yowre	41/151, 317, 497
264	((p. 297)	* yer	41/6
		* yeris <i>pl.</i>	41/91

‘Hevyin’, ‘hytht’, and ‘seustere’, all of which are used once only, are not recorded in the County Dictionary. All the rest occur in Norfolk except for ‘yif’ for which there are single entries for each of other three counties, and five nonce variants: - ‘blysid’ from Leicestershire, ‘mot’ from Yorks, ‘myht’ and ‘wythoutyn’ from Suffolk; ‘brether’ which the Play 41 scribe wrote with the identical spelling several times also gets just one entry from Ely. Words recorded solely or predominantly from Norfolk are more numerous:

‘thorow’, ‘blissid’, ‘com’, ‘herthe’ which is widespread in the county but has been noted just once from each of the other three, ‘fer’, ‘hefne’, ‘neuyr’ which is also widespread locally but merits a single entry from Suffolk and one from Wisbech (on the Ely/Norfolk border), ‘outh’, ‘sustere’, ‘sonne’, ‘worchepe’ which though recorded from the other counties is most frequent from Norfolk, ‘youre’, and ‘yowre’.

Although Cambridge lacks twenty-two of the variants noted for this play and Suffolk twenty-one, all but ten are recorded from Ely. The numbers of texts from which the *Atlas* took its data must again be taken into account when evaluating these figures. The evidence suggests that ‘The Assumption’ was copied by someone who acquired his orthographic habits within Norfolk, although the relative frequency of Ely spellings may point to a location west of the main scribe.

c) Reviser 1 (*Facsimile* - A; Spector’s scribe B)

Reviser 1’s twenty lines of text on f. 51 use only eight forms which do not also occur in either the printed Linguistic Profile or my list for the initial Passion sequence:-

6	(p. 10)	yt	10/167
19	(p. 36)	ys	10/159, 171
24	(p. 44)	woll	10/170
100	(p. 147)	doughter	10/172
168	(p. 209)	lye	10/160
188	(p. 222)	nother + ne	10/162
231	(p. 260)	the	10/158
233	(p. 261)	thi	10/158

Spector cites this reviser’s use of ‘dowty’ as characteristically East Anglian, but this can be narrowed slightly.¹⁷ All the forms I have noted are recorded from Norfolk but ‘ys’, ‘lye’, ‘doughter’ and ‘doughter’ do not appear in Suffolk. ‘Ys’ and ‘lye’ are also absent from Ely, as is ‘yt’. A location within the ‘thi’ isogloss (approximately: Wisbech (Ely/Nfk. border) - Lynn - Wymondham - extreme NW Suffolk (see map between pp. 140 and 141) is plausible, but in view of the small size of the list it seems better to conclude that Reviser 1 came from the same general area as the main scribe.

d) Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector’s Scribe C)

Although this scribe copied more text than Reviser 1 (ff. 95-96^r, 112, and revisions to several plays) there is still not enough to give more than an approximation of his origins.

¹⁷ *N-Town Play*, p. xxxviii.

Citing ‘xall’, ‘xulde’, &c., ‘mekell’, and the revision of the main scribe’s ‘myrke’ to ‘thyrke’, Spector again assigns his hand to East Anglia, but this too can be narrowed to some extent. I have noted a further twenty forms not used by the main scribe:-

16	(p. 30)	moch	22/51
28	(p. 50)	frome	18/260
87	(p. 136)	broþer	18/279
88	(p. 137)	brynn-yng	22/9
105	(p. 155)	downe	18/251, 278
115	(p. 163)	eye	18/227
124	(p. 170)	fyere	22/9
127	(p. 174)	fleshe	18/252
137	(p. 181)	gyff	18/241
143	(p. 192)	hede	18/273
		heed	18/288
170	(p. 210)	lytyll	18/287
180	(p. 217)	mōþyr	18/282
189	(p. 224)	neuyr	18/280
197	(p. 228)	oo	18/250
		oon	18/249
212	(p. 248)	sek	18/230
226	(p. 258)	stere	18/231
		sterre	18/278
*		thow	18/248
259	(p. 291)	warse	18/275
262	(pp. 295-6)	yow	22/3, 13, 23
266	(p. 299)	yong	18/282
268	(p. 300)	-ombe (-amb)	22/41, 47

All except ‘lytyll’ (which is wholly missing from eastern England) are recorded from these four counties and ‘downe’, ‘frome’, ‘fyere’ are restricted to Norfolk, mostly to the south of the county. ‘Warse’ is recorded once only from the north east of the county at Broomholm and also once from Lincs. No fewer than eight of Reviser 2’s spellings are missing from Suffolk: ‘frome’, ‘broþer’, ‘downe’, ‘eye’ (which is found all over the other three counties), ‘fyere’, ‘hede’, ‘warse’, and ‘yow’. The data is consistent with a location in southern Norfolk; Samuels placed this reviser a little to the east of the main hand.¹⁸

The sum of the linguistic evidence is consistent with all the scribes having acquired their orthographic practices in southern Norfolk, and the notional mean location of East Harling for the main scribe is plausible on dialectal grounds.

¹⁸ Ibid.

ii) **Textual evidence.**

[The principal places referred to in this section are included in the map between pp. 140 and 141]

The *Atlas* indicates the approximate location ‘where a particular scribe learned to write’.¹⁹ Where he actually worked is a matter to be deduced in each case from whatever supplementary evidence may be available, which in the case of East Harling is problematic.²⁰ There were no houses of regulars in the immediate vicinity and the village is not known to have contained any other institution where the scribe might have learned his skills.²¹ However, the influential and well-connected heiress Lady Ann Harling who owned East Harling and much of the surrounding area was the patron of a college of secular canons six miles to the south-west at Rushforth (now Rushford²²) which had been founded by her Gonville forebears in the first half of the fourteenth century.²³ The college maintained a grammar school which benefited substantially under the terms of her will. Although she did not make this until 1498, she had begun to make arrangements in connection with its dispositions more than twenty years earlier, since two manors were vested in the college under License in Mortmain dated 15 Edw. IV (1474/5). The will probably gave effect to an arrangement that had already already been in place for a considerable time and quite possibly existed on a *de facto* basis even before the License in Mortmain. One such testamentary provision increased the number of pupils by setting up bursaries for:

v poore childeryn naturally and originally born wythynne the diocese of Norwiche
residente in the said College.²⁴

In what was perhaps an allusion to her own childless state the scholars were to be known as ‘Dame Annys Childeryn’. The above quotation shows that the school took pupils from a very wide area, since the Norwich diocese comprised almost the whole of present-day

¹⁹ *L.A.L.M.E.*, Vol. I, p. 23.

²⁰ *N-Town Play*, Vol. I, p. xxxvii-xxxviii. Spector quotes private correspondence from McKintosh. East Harling is south of the road from Thetford to Norwich. (See O.S. Landranger map 144 - National Grid ref: TL 995 864)

²¹ Here and in the following paragraphs I have taken information from the O. S. Map of Monastic Britain, South Sheet (Third Edition, 1976). The accompanying booklet (H.M.S.O., 1978), though unattributed, acknowledges R.N. Hadcock as the chief compiler for England.

²² National Grid ref: TL 924 812.

²³ [Edward Kedington] Bennet, ‘Notes on the Original Statutes of the College of St. John the Evangelist of Rushworth, Co. Norfolk, Founded by Edmund Gonville, A.D. 1342’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 10 (1888), 50-64, 277-382, quoted by Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, pp. 96-104. Although her biography of Ann Harling is adequate, Gibson does not consider linguistic evidence.

²⁴ Bennet, p. 369.

Norfolk and Suffolk (see map between pp. 140 and 141). At the age of eighteen when they were required to finish their studies at Rushworth, Dame Ann's Children could either return whence they had come, use their learning to forge an administrative career, or further their education by choosing to live by rule.

Regardless of whether the main scribe learned his skills at Rushworth, which is at best no more than a possibility, or at some other school, he would have had to go elsewhere to train as a regular cleric.²⁵ There were no houses in the immediate neighbourhood, but nearby Thetford²⁶ had Augustinian and Dominican priories as well as the Austin Canons, who were also at Buckenham (8 miles NW of East Harling). The Benedictines had houses at Hoxne (11 miles SE) and Wymondham (15 miles NE) in addition to the Cathedral Priory at Norwich, where all four principal mendicant orders were also present. The city is less than twenty miles from East Harling by road. Somewhat further away were houses of regulars at Bury St. Edmunds (18 miles SW; Benedictines, Dominicans), Ely (28 miles W; Dominicans), Cambridge (30+ m. SW; Augustinian Canons, Dominicans, all four mendicant orders), and Lynn (28 miles NW; Benedictines, all four mendicant orders).

Since most of those who joined monastic and fraternal orders tended to ~~join~~^{go forth to} houses close to their home towns and villages the linguistic evidence of location is sufficient to place the origins of the *N-Town* manuscript within the Norwich diocese. However, two revisions made by the main scribe after he had completed the initial recension can be located to the city of Norwich itself

The Prologue added to the start of the 'Trial of Mary and Joseph' (Play 14) can be connected with the city with reasonable confidence.²⁷ In this section of text Den, a stereotypically venal summoner, calls people to attend the bishop's court. 'Den' (otherwise 'Deen') was the surname of the Constable of Norwich's Mancroft Ward from 1476-8²⁸. This would have to be dismissed as a coincidence were it not for some of the names mentioned in his speech. Scattered among the sobriquets and derogatory nicknames are several surnames (italicised in the following extract) which are to be found in surviving lists of city officials:

I warne 3ow here all abowte
þat I somown 3ow, all þe rowte!

²⁵ Although the evidence for location in the East Harling area is dialectal, it is interesting that the Master of the Rushforth college for 1443/4 was John Wurlych, an alternative spelling of which, Worlych, appears three times (one of them cancelled) in marginal *notae* on f. 207^r. Both spellings are variants of Worledge, which is claimed not to be recorded outside Suffolk. (P. H. Reaney (ed.), *A Dictionary of British Surnames*, 2nd edn. revised by R. M. Wilson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987). The coincidence is curious.

²⁶ All the locations in this paragraph are in the map between pp. 140 and 141.

²⁷ The addition of Den's Prologue is discussed on p. 33.

²⁸ *An Index to Norwich City Officers, 1453-1835*, ed. by Timothy Hawes (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society, 1986), p. 51.

Loke 3e fayl for no dowte

At þe court to pere.

Both Johan Jurdon and Geffrey *Gyle*,
Malkyn Mylkedoke and fayr Mabyle,
Steven Sturdy and Jak-at-þe-Style,
And Sawdyr *Sadelere*.

Thom Tynkere and Betrys *Belle*,

Peirs *Pottere* and Whatt-at-þe-Welle,

Symme Smalfeyth and Kate *Kelle*,

And Bertylmew þe bochere.

Kytt Cakelere and Colett *Crane*,

Gylle Fetyse and fayr Jane,

Powle Pewterere and *Pernel Prane*,

And Phelypp þe good flecchere.

Cok *Crane* and Davy Drydust,

Luce Lyere and Letyce Lytyltrust,

Miles the myllere and Colle Crakecrust,

Bothe Bette þe bakere and Robyn *Rede*.

And loke 3erynge wele in 3oure purs,

For ellys 3oure cawse may sped þe wurs,

Pow þat 3e slynge Goddys curs

Evyn at myn hede!

Fast com away,

Bothe Boutyng þe browstere and Sybyly *Slynge*,

Megge Merywedyr and Sabyn *Sprynge*,

Tyffany Twynkelere, fayle for nothyng,

The courte xal be þis day. (14/5-33)

The surnames of other constables are particularly numerous.²⁹ In the following list each name is followed by the dates when the individual held office and the ward he represented:

Giles, Gyles, Gyls Robert	1479, 1482	Wymer
Giles, Gyles, Gylis, Gylys Thomas	1502-10	Spittalland
Sadler, Sadeler John	1474-7	Wymer
Sadyler, Sadyller Richard	1503-4	Wymer
Bell, Belle Robert	1487-94	Coslany
Belle William	1528	Berstreet
Potter John	1518	West Wymer
	1533	St. Stephen
Potter William	1493	Wymer
Crane William	1502	Wymer
Parnell, Pernell Richard	1484	Northern
Rede Edward	1472	Mancroft

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

Rede Nicholas	1464	North Conisford
Rede Simon	1499-1500	Northern

Several of the other names mentioned have local connections. Redes were civic office-holders and Kelle and Springe both appear as constables after the Reformation, as do Smalpece or Smalepece (cf. Smalfeyth (14/15)) and Litelprowe and Lytelwode (cf. Lytyltrust (14/22)). Since Mancroft Ward abutted the city's market place which, then as now, was regularly visited by visitors and residents alike, the renown - or infamy - of its Constable would have been assured.³⁰ The same presumably held good to a lesser extent for holders of this office in other wards. This preponderance of names with known local associations strongly suggests that Den's speech was written and copied with Norwich in mind.

The evidence for the second connection with the city is more opaque. The two apostles who fetch the ass and her foal for Christ's Entry into Jerusalem on f. 143 which was interpolated into Quire N are specified as Philip and James the Less, which had a particular local significance. Although the two who fetch the beasts are not named in the gospels, other Passion plays also give them names.³¹ York, Chester, Rouergue, Alsfeld, and Heidelberg send Peter and Philip, whilst Towneley, Michel's *Passion*, and Revello specify Simon Peter and John. The Cornish *Ordinalia* names Matthew and James the Great.³² So far as I have been able to ascertain only *N-Town* gives this combination. These names, which are not necessary to the action or narrative continuity, were not supplied at random. The scribe incorporated them as an added refinement even as he was writing out the interpolation, changing from the general to the specific as he wrote. Jesus's command is non-specific:

Go to 3on castel þat standyth 3ow ageyn,
 Sum of myn dyscypolis - go forth, 3e to.
 Per xul 3e fyndyn bestys tweyn:
 An asse tyed and here fole also. (26/437-40)

In keeping with the generalised instruction to '3e to', compliance is indicated by a character identified in the text merely as 'Primus Apostolus'. Using the first person plural, he makes one of the typically obediential utterances that are found throughout *N-Town*:

Holy prophete, we gon oure way;
 We wyl not 3oure wourd delay. (26/356-7)

³⁰ This market place was one of the venues where penitents are known to have been punished. See Chapter 6, p. 139.

³¹ See Matt. 21:1-2; Mk. 11:1-2; Lk. 19:29-30; (John 12:14)

³² Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 244, n. 2; Jean Michel, *Le Mystère de la Passion (Angers 1486)*, ed. by Omer Jodogne (Gembloix: Duculot, 1959), l. 15167.

But after this the scribe added precision, writing speech designations naming first 'Philippus' (26/364, 377) and then 'Jacobus Minor' (26/373) as the two who volunteer for the errand.

There is no reason why he should have shifted from the general to the particular unless the names had a special significance. Their identity would also have had to be obvious to an audience, which presents what at first glance seems to be a paradox. Philip and James the Less do not identify themselves verbally, yet it would be futile to distinguish them if they would not have been recognized. I believe that their costumes would have provided the necessary clues. Whilst dramatic practice need not necessarily have followed the iconography of the apostles attested in glass and other church art,³³ an account of two biblical plays performed at the time of the 1439 Oecumenical Council in Florence suggests that this was indeed the case:

The Apostles walk barefoot and are dressed as they can be seen in holy paintings: some with beards and some without, just as they really were.³⁴

This description carries particular weight because it was written by an Orthodox Patriarch who would have been familiar with the iconography but not the staging conventions. (Biblical drama only developed in Russia at the end of the seventeenth century).³⁵ If the convention was in general use it would occasion no comment in a European audience. The idea is given further support by a stage direction in Jean Michel's *Passion*, which was written in 1486 and was therefore more or less contemporary with *N-Town*. For the first of the four days of performance the apostles in Michel's account wore 'habits seculiers' according to their occupations as fishermen, a carpenter, a tax-gatherer, &c. before adopting costumes which did not warrant detailed description:

Icy laissent saint Pierre et saint André leur nave et leurs rethz et suyvent Jhesus en habit de pescheur, jusques a la seconde journee qu'ilz viennent en habit de apostre.³⁶

Even if we can only guess at how the identification may have been achieved, the apostles were evidently represented in a way that would have been immediately recognizable.

³³ James was conventionally portrayed with a fuller's club, the instrument of his martyrdom, and Philip carried either a long tau cross or a basket of loaves.

³⁴ *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*, ed. by Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series, 4 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1983), p. 246.

³⁵ Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 8.

³⁶ Jodogne, Michel's *Passion*, p. 53, l. 4015 + s.d. = Here St. Peter and St. Andrew leave their boats and nets dressed as fishermen and follow Jesus, until the second day when they appear dressed as apostles.

N-Town constructs the entry into Jerusalem as the ritualised greeting of a royal ruler entering a city. Before the arrival of Jesus, John tells the audience that they are to conduct themselves as though in the presence of a king:

Onto þe cetylward he is now comyng.
Wherfore dresse ȝow with all dew dylygens
To honowre hym as ȝoure makere and kyng. (26/423-5)

The citizens reinforce John's analogy by repeating 'kyng' three more times in half-a-dozen lines. The first greets the news of the imminent visit of 'þis hefly (sic) kyng' (26/443) with joy, before the second and third make the comparison with urban ritual even more precise:

SECUNDUS	Yf oure eerly <i>kyng</i> swech a jorné xuld take,
CIUES	To do hym honour and worchepe besy xuld we be.
TERCIUS	Meche more, þan, to þe hevnly <i>kyng</i> bownd are we
CIUES	For to do þat xuld be to his persone reuerens. (26/444-8)

The entry itself is a spectacle enacted before citizens who 'goyng barfot and barelegged and in here shyrty' cast their clothes in the path of Jesus and prostrate themselves (see pp. 139-140), as a choir of children scatters flowers while singing the Palm Sunday hymn, 'Gloria Laus' (26/449 + s.d., 454 + s.d.). The implied message is clear. Jesus is even more more important than a king, the earthly ruler to whom the greatest honour and reverence are due. Of all the disciples only Philip and James the Less play an active part in the preparations for this highly symbolic event. Their dramatic and symbolic significance is heightened by two marginal annotations on f. 144^v, where a later hand wrote 'here enterith (?) þe fyrst prophete' by the stage direction 'Here spekyth þe iij cete seynys, þe fyrst þus seyng' (26/441 + s.d.). The same hand added 'here entreth þe parte off þe ij^{de} prophete' on f. 145^r after 'Creyng mercy! Mercy! Mercy!' (26/457). These annotations were presumably made in connection with an actual performance.

I believe these names were added because the Norwich mayoral elections were held on the joint feast day of Sts. Philip and James the Less (May 1st). I have looked for alternative explanations in vain. The names were not taken from either of the main sources. Like the Gospels, the *Northern Passion* and *Historia Scholastica* are silent on the matter. There were just seven double church dedications to Philip and James the Less in the whole of England of which the nearest was more than 150 miles away in Worcestershire.³⁷ There were no guilds dedicated to them in East Anglia and theirs was not one of the major feasts celebrated in Norwich cathedral.³⁸

³⁷ Frances Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedications, or England's Patron Saints* 3 vols., (London: Skeffington, 1899), Vol I. pp. 74-5. She lists 4 in Northumberland, and 1 apiece for Durham and Bristol.

³⁸ The major feasts were Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity, Assumption and

If the ‘prophets’ mentioned here are indeed Philip and James the Less - and it is difficult to see who else the annotations might refer to - the attention of the audience is drawn three times in as many minutes to the insistent presence of the two saints who were directly associated with the mayoral election. After fetching the beasts they next appear when one of them (presumably Philip) is in view while the citizens rehearse their duty to give homage. When he is joined by James, the two together become the only apostles who hear the ‘Frendys, beholde þe tyme of mercy’ speech (26/458-469) which Jesus delivers to the penitent Cives as he enters the city and sets in train the events that will culminate in the Crucifixion. The two of them only join the rest of the twelve at the start of the next play (27/init. s.d.). An audience alert to nuances of status in public spectacle would interpret their prominent role as granting precedence over their fellow disciples.³⁹

The picture becomes clearer when the circumstances of the Mayoral election are looked at more closely. In 1415, the year after the city became a county in its own right, the feast of St. Philip and St. James the Less was instituted as the day on which it would choose its Mayor. The following extract from the so-called ‘Composition’ (which remained the authoritative basis for municipal government until the nineteenth century) shows that it was not just the ruling oligarchy who were expected to take an interest in the proceedings:

The Meir of y^e Cite of Norwich 3erly shal be chosen uppon y^e day of apostles Phillip and Jacob in y^e Gyldhalle, to wiche eleccion y^e Meir & xxiiij^{ti} Concite3eyns of y^e same Cite and iche of hem shal come, but he yat hath resonable cause of excusacion, uppon peyne of ijs. to the use of y^e Commonalte be y^e Comone Sergeant to be arered and payed. And also alle tho persones for y^e Comon counsel for y^e 3er chosen un to y^e same eleccion shullen come and iche of hem shalle come uppon peyne of xijd., but he yat hath cause of resonable excusacion. And also alle y^e Cite3eyns Dwellers wit inne y^e same Cite unto y^e forseid eleccion shul frely come as they arn behoden, and y^e doores of y^e Halle to all Cite3einis ther wollyng entren and comen inne shulle ben open and not kept ne none from thens forbarred ne avoyded but foreyns.⁴⁰

Since deliberations were to take place in open session before the commons in what looks to have been time-honoured fashion (‘as they arn behoden’), the chosen date was significant not only to the mayoral candidates and the elite group of senior office-holders but also to ‘alle y^e Cite3eyns Dwellers wit inne y^e same Cite’. *N-Town* addresses a similar

Nativity of the Virgin (15th August and 8th September), and All Saints; quasi main feasts were Circumcision (1st January), Purification (2nd February), and the octave of Easter. (Barbara Dodwell, ‘The Monastic Community’, in *Norwich Cathedral*, ed. by Ian Atherton, Eric Fernie, Christopher Harper-Bill, and Hassell Smith, (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 234.)

³⁹ See Benjamin R. McRee, ‘Unity or Division? The Social Meaning of Guild Ceremony in Urban Communities’, and Lorraine Atreed, ‘The Politics of Welcome’, in *City and Spectacle in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson, (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1994), pp. 189-207, 208-234.

⁴⁰ *Records of the City of Norwich*, ed. by William Hudson and John Cottingham Tingey, Vol. I, (Norwich: Jarrold, 1906), p. 94.

cross-section of society when in the Proclamation one of the Vexillatores speaks to an audience comprising 'bothe more and lesse, / Gentyllys and 3emanry' (Proc./7-8).

The scene is charged with several layers of meaning, without necessarily referring to either of the two royal visits that may have been made to the city in the latter part of the fifteenth century. These visits, if they happened, may not have yet taken place at the time when f. 143 was added.⁴¹ In more general terms, entries and processions were established means by which municipal rulers demonstrated their responsibilities towards the citizenry, who in turn acknowledged their acceptance of the polity.⁴² They symbolised power and, in a hierarchic society, the nuances attaching to its exercise. The provisions of the 1415 Composition provide an illustration of this. The Mayor was entitled to have a ceremonial sword carried before him in procession at all times except when the king was present.⁴³ Processions and formal entry were familiar concepts which did not depend on an actual royal event. The iteration of 'king' by John and the Cives during the preparations for the entry would have carried general resonances for every citizen as well as particular meaning for those knew about the single occasion on which the Mayor's prerogative did not apply. The pre-eminence accorded to Philip and James the Less confers tutelary status on the very apostle/saints whose day was so important in the constitutional governance of the city.

Both sections of text for which have I argued these Norwich associations are additions to the scribe's initial recension, and were very likely done with an actual performance in mind. Since it does not follow that both related to the same performance, they must be assessed separately. So far as the Entry into Jerusalem is concerned, the named apostles still perform a dramatic function even if they are shorn of the layer of meaning for which I have argued. Therefore this part of the evidence cannot be considered conclusive. However, the local references in Den's Prologue would only have a meaning if the play to which they were prefixed was performed in the city itself. Regardless of whether the rest of the manuscript was compiled and copied in Norwich, this play would have to be acted in the city for its added local allusions to make sense to an audience.

⁴¹ Richard III 'is said to have visited Norwich in 1483' and Henry VII was there at Christmas 1486 on his way to Walsingham. (*V.C.H. Norfolk*, Vol. II, pp. 491-2)

⁴² Lorraine Atreed, 'The Politics of Welcome; Ceremonies and Constitutional Development in Later Medieval English Towns', in *City and Spectacle in Late Medieval Europe*, p. 210.

⁴³ Hudson and Tingey, *Norwich Records*, Vol. I, pp.31-2.

Appendix C

Date

Handwriting experts do not agree about when the manuscript was copied, and other aspects of the evidence are not conclusive. The earliest possible date for quires A to M is probably 1468 which is written, apparently in the hand of the main scribe, at the end of 'The Purification' (Play 19). Greg considered that this hand was 'of the later fifteenth century'.⁴⁴ Block and Wright, who illustrated his findings from f. 127^v, independently narrowed this further to the third quarter of the fifteenth century.⁴⁵ On the other hand Parkes's more recent opinion that the main scribe worked during 'the last decade of the fifteenth century at the earliest' cannot be ignored, even though it was based on some pages examined in reproduction rather than the whole of the manuscript in the original.⁴⁶

None of these commentators mention the order in which the plays were copied. I have argued in Chapter 2 that the main scribe's consistently different spellings in the initial Passion sequence suggest that this section of the text pre-dated the rest, perhaps by a year or more.⁴⁷ When composition (as distinct from copying) is considered, indirect references to the 1463 sumptuary statute in Satan's Prologue (26/1-124) give a possible *terminus a quo* earlier than the date of 1468 written at the end of 'The Purification'. Although the speech in question forms part of the initial Passion sequence stylistic and prosodic evidence suggests that it was probably grafted on to a pre-existing *exemplar*, so the bulk of Passion Play I and Passion Play II up to the Crucifixion might theoretically be earlier still.

At the other end of the time scale Parkes, using the evidence of the scribal hands alone, put the two Revisers in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.⁴⁸ But additional evidence is available for two sections of text copied by Reviser 2 (*Facsimile* - B; Spector's Scribe C), who wrote ff. 95-96 on paper which was not used for other sections of the manuscript. Although the watermark does not exactly match any of those illustrated by Briquet it is of the category 'main généralement lacée au poignet, au quatre doigts serrés, le pouce très écarté' (group 11.341-348) which is not recorded before 1526.⁴⁹ Presumably this scribe made his revisions at or about the same time as he copied these leaves and the unwatermarked f. 112 (which Meredith and Kahrl consider to be part of the same paper stock since the chain lines match those on ff. 95-96)⁵⁰.

⁴⁴ Greg, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Ludus Coventriæ*, p. xv; C.E. Wright, *English Vernacular Hands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), p. 23 (and facing plate).

⁴⁶ *Facsimile*, p. xxvii, n. 4.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 2, p. 21.

⁴⁸ *N-Town Play*, p. xxiii, nn. 2, 3.

⁴⁹ Briquet, IV, p. 573.

⁵⁰ *Facsimile*, p. xv.

No section of the text recorded in the manuscript can be shown to have come into being before 1463. At the later end of the chronological range, parts were revised at a date that cannot have been earlier than 1526. The manuscript was worked on over at least thirty years and the figure may have been twice as long.

Appendix D

Peter Comestor

Historia Scholastica - In Evangelia

(*Patrologia Latina*, 198: 1558)

Cap. XXXVII. *De variis opinionibus historiae.*

Hucusque idem est ordo historiae evangelicae apud omnes. Deinceps variae ordinantur, usque ad incarcerationem Joannis. Quidam dicunt, quod circa proximum pascha post baptismum, convertit Dominus aquam in vinum, ideo quia Joannes, consequenter post hoc miraculum, narrat eum ascendisse in Hierusalem, et ejecisse ementes, et vendentes de templo (*Joan.* ii), quod nunquam ab eo factum dicunt, nisi in pascha. Sed eis obviat Ecclesiae consuetudo, quae in Epiphania factum esse tenet, quotannis solemnizando memorat. Fuerunt etiam qui dicerent, quod eadem die, qua baptizatus est, fecerit hoc miraculum. Sed Mattheus ait: 'Tunc Jesus ductus est in desertum' (*Matth.* IV), et Marcus: 'Statim expulit Iesum Spiritus in desertum' (*Marc.* I). Habet enim Ecclesia, quod eadem die, sed revolutis annis haec tria facta sunt. Adventus magorum tredecima die primi anni; baptismus eadem die tricesimi anni, vel tricesimi primi anni; mutatio aquae eadem die revoluto anno. Unde Maximus episcopus in sermone qui sic incipit: Cum plura nobis, fratres, etc. Sic ait: Sicut posteritati suae fidelis mandavit antiquitas, hodie Salvator a Chaldeis adoratus est, hodie fluenta Jordanis benedictione proprii baptismatis consecravit, hodie invitatus ad nuptias aquas vertit in vinum. Unde et in antiquioribus libris dies Epiphaniorum, id est plurium illustrationum Christi. Epiphania enim *illustrationem* sonat. Has tres tamen manifestationes propriis quidam nominibus distinguunt, epiphaniam vocantes eam *illustrationem*, quae facta est per stellam, quasi de sursum factam; theophaniam eam, quae in baptismo, quasi a Deo id est a Patre factam; Bethaniam eam, quae in nuptiis, quasi in domo factam. Beth enim *domus* sonat. Verumtamen adhuc restat inter summos et catholicos doctores de ordine historiae duplex opinio. Quidam enim sribentes unum ex quatuor, imitantes Ammonium Alexandrinum, Eusebium Caesariensem, Theophilum, qui septimus a Petro sedit Antiochae, qui dicunt Dominum post jejunium aperte praedicasse, discipulos congregasse, et sermonem in monte factum, ante vini miraculum, quia legunt Dominum et discipulos ejus invitatos ad nuptias.

Communior autem et veracior opinio est, Dominum post illud miraculum discipulos vocasse occulte, et occulte praedicasse, usque ad Joannis incarcerationem, sed post publice, et hunc ordinem prosequemur, sine alterius ordinis praejudicio.

Up to this point the order of events is the same in all the gospels. Thereafter they are arranged differently up to the imprisonment of John. Some say that our Lord changed the water into wine around the time of the first Passover after his baptism, because John tells that directly after that miracle he went up to Jerusalem where he cast the merchants and traders out of the temple (*John*, 2), which they say he could only have done at the Passover. But the custom of the Church in commemorating the event at Epiphany each year contradicts this. There have also been those who said that he performed the miracle on the day on which he was baptized. But Matthew says: ‘Then Jesus was led into the wilderness’ (*Matt.* 4), and Mark: ‘At once the Spirit sent Jesus into the wilderness’ (*Mark*, 1). Indeed the Church considers that these three events took place on the same day but in different years. In the first year the arrival of the wise men was on the thirteenth day; the baptism was on the same day in the thirtieth year, or the thirty-first year; the changing of the water (into wine) on the same day in the following year. From which bishop Maximus in a sermon which starts, ‘Many things with us, brothers &c.’ says: ‘As antiquity has handed down faithfully to succeeding generations, on this day the Saviour was worshipped by the Chaldeans, on this day he consecrated the waters of Jordan by the blessing of his own baptism, and he changed the water into wine as guest at the wedding. From which in the older books (we read of) the day of Epiphanies, that is of the several manifestations of Christ. For Epiphany signifies *manifestation*. But there are those who distinguish these three appearances under different names, calling the representation shown from above by a star, epiphany; theophany was in baptism as if by God from on high; Bethany was at the wedding as though in a house. For Beth means house. Nevertheless until now there has always been a difference of opinion among the most exalted and catholic scholars. For some harmonise a single account (following the example of Ammonius of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Theophilus the seventh bishop of Antioch after Peter) saying that our Lord preached openly after he had fasted, that he summoned the Apostles, and that he gave the sermon on the mount before the miracle of the wine, because they understand that our Lord and his disciples were guests at the wedding. But the more widely held and truer account is that after that miracle our Lord summoned the Apostles in secret, and preached secretly until the imprisonment of John, after which he taught in public, and without prejudice to the other order of events, it is this order that we shall follow.

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