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THE YORK CYCLE: FROM PROCESSION TO PLAY

By MARTIN STEVENS

As long ago as 1843, Robert Davies, the York antiquarian, offered the following opinion about the evolution of the Corpus Christi play in York:

From the extraordinary number of pageants [in 1415] . . . it may be conjectured that all of them were not speaking dramas. The time appropriated to the exhibition did not exceed the day of the festival; and even the long duration of a midsummer day . . . would not have sufficed for the performance of so numerous a series of separate pageants, had every one been accompanied with dialogue. Perhaps some of them were little more than short pantomimes or tableaux vivans. . . . It is very evident, however, that long before the close of the fifteenth century, many of the pageants were represented with dramatic dialogue and action, in which professional, or at least practised players took the principal parts.¹

Unhappily, for over a century these observations were totally ignored by scholars. Gradually the myth took shape, based largely on some undigested records from York, that fully developed mystery plays were performed *ad seriatim* on wagons at numbers of stations in various English cities. The established view is well summarized in the following description from A. C. Baugh's widely-read literary history:

Except for the *Ludus Coventriae* the extant English cycles seem all to have been given in a manner peculiar to England. Each episode was performed on a separate stage set on wheels so that it could be drawn from point to point in the city. The stations were designated in advance. At one time there were as many as fourteen [sic] in York and each episode in the cycle had to be repeated fourteen times. Fortunately for the actors, a smaller number generally sufficed. Where the entire cycle was given in one day [as at York] it was necessary to begin early—at six o'clock in the morning or even earlier.²

It was only within the last decade that Martial Rose awakened some doubt about this conception of the Corpus Christi performance at York and elsewhere. Noting that the average play in the York cycle runs to 273 lines and

that each had to be presented at as many as fourteen (sometimes, sixteen) stations, Rose questioned whether there would have been sufficient time in a day for such a performance to have taken place without "intolerable strain on both performers and spectators."³ More recently, Alan H. Nelson submitted the conjectured York performance to a systematic time-study, and, on the basis of some very elaborate calculations, he concluded that "it would have been utterly impossible to mount a true-processional production of the extant cycle in a single day."⁴ I propose here first to expand on Rose's and Nelson's objections to the established theory and then to offer a new hypothesis accounting for the historical development of the Corpus Christi play at York and, by extension, elsewhere.

I

According to the traditional view, all forty-eight plays of the manuscript were performed in their entirety at the several stations along the route. This view, however, fails to take into account the minimum time required for the performance of each of the pageants one time through. For the sake of allowing the tightest possible time schedule, let us take up Martial Rose's assumption that the typical pageant in the York cycle was performed in fifteen minutes. Even at such a breakneck pace, the entire cycle could not have been played at one station in less than twelve hours. To this minimum actual playing time, we would have to add an allowance for the inevitable pauses between pageants so that one wagon could be moved out through the dense perimeter of spectators and the next brought into place. If we were to allow an additional five minutes for these shifts of scene, the total performance time at a single station would increase to sixteen hours (twelve for the plays proper, four for the pauses). We should bear in mind that this figure is still a bare minimum. It does not, for instance, take into account the performance of an expanded cycle of 57 plays as itemized in the second list of the A/Y Book (dated c. 1420). That performance, on the basis of the same calculations, would have taken an additional three hours, making a total playing time of nineteen hours at a single station. We are told in the York *Proclamacio ludi corporis cristi* that "euery player that shall play be redy in his pagiaunt at . . . the mydhowre betwix iiiijth and vth of the cloke in the mornynge."⁵ If we assume, therefore, that the play began at the first station at 5 a.m., the performance of 57 plays would not have ended until midnight, a manifest impossibility. All of these calculations, of course, leave out of account the performance at subsequent stations, and in some years there were as many as fifteen more.⁶ While I do not wish to belabour the argument, the implausibility of the single-day processional performance at York is emphasized when we compare the length of the York cycle (13,121 lines) with the second quarto of *Hamlet* (c. 3,700 lines). What the traditional conception demands is the staging of a play more than three times the length of the longest version of *Hamlet* at a minimum of nine locations in the compass of one day.⁷

Another question raised by the traditional view of the York processional drama relates to its places of performance. We know from the various entries in the York Civic Records that some kind of Corpus Christi play was indeed performed at street corners and even in front of various houses along a route through the narrow streets of medieval York. In 1554, to cite one illustration, four performances alone were planned for Coney Street, a stretch of little more than three hundred yards.⁸ It seems highly unlikely that the full pageants, as they are preserved in the extant text, were performed at stations no more than seventy-five to a hundred yards apart, as would have been necessary in this instance. Actors required to participate in such a wasteful and time-consuming presentation, as well as the cramped spectators, would surely have come to the practical conclusion that one performance in an open place was infinitely more satisfactory than four in narrow and crowded street locations. Just how narrow those streets were is attested by Edwin Benson in his description of medieval York:

Most of the streets were mere alleys, passages between houses and groups of buildings. They were very narrow and often the sky could hardly be seen from them because of the overhanging upper storeys of the buildings along each side. Goods in the Middle Ages and right down to the nineteenth century were carried in towns by hand. Carriages and waggons and carts were not very numerous and would have no need to proceed beyond the main streets and open spaces.⁹

While Coney Street is admittedly one of the more important thoroughfares in York, it is not now, nor was it ever, wide enough to furnish room for a stage and for multitudes of spectators at four locations along its route. With spectators on the street, how, for example, would there have been room for the performance of the Hoseers pageant, which at one point requires Pharaoh and his soldiers to pursue the Hebrews in chariots and finally to be drowned in the Red Sea (*York Plays*, 11/288-404)? It seems much more likely, as I shall demonstrate later, that the street performances were in essence a processional riding put on solely for paying spectators inside and in front of houses along the route. The pageants no doubt stopped at the stations specified, possibly for the quick enactment of a scene or two, but neither time nor space would have allowed the full performance of the cycle at every station.

Nor could there have been enough actors to satisfy the needs of a processional performance based on the surviving text of the plays. By my calculations, there are 372 speaking parts in the 48 extant plays.¹⁰ In a processional performance, the vast majority of these parts had to be assumed by different actors. Let us, for the sake of illustration, examine the casting of the adult part of Jesus, who appears (on the basis of speaking lines) in 24 plays, including all but five of the pageants after the scene with the Doctors in the Temple (Pageant 20). In years when the entire York play was presumably enacted at sixteen stations, the minimum number of actors required for the role would have been fourteen (based on speaking parts for Jesus in consecu-

tive pageants). Thus while the Baptism pageant with its Jesus on stage was enacted at the sixteenth station, the *Mortificacio Christi* (occurring fifteen places after the Baptism play in the York text) with its Jesus likewise on stage was being performed at the first station. In between, all other pageants (except the twenty-sixth, the "Conspiracy," and the thirty-second "The Second Accusation before Pilate") included Jesus as a speaking part. This means that during the period when the fifteen plays in question were performed, fourteen actors were needed to play Jesus. After the Baptism play had been performed at the last station, the actor who assumed the role of Jesus in that pageant could, of course, double. That is, he could make his way quickly from the last station (at the Pavement) back to the first station (at Micklegate), to take the role of Jesus in the next pageant scheduled to begin there. This manoeuvre would have taken at least fifteen minutes; hence, he could not have been back in time to act in the next pageant beginning at the first station (in this instance the Harrowing of Hell). A fifteenth actor would, therefore, have been required to take the part in the Harrowing of Hell play, and the first opportunity for doubling would have come in the subsequent pageant of the Resurrection. But even this opportunity could only have come with swift and perfect timing and virtually no rest between performances.

Bearing in mind this illustration, we are led to wonder why, indeed, the City Council at York enacted the following rule in 1476: ". . . no plaier þat shall plaie in þe saide Corpus Christi plaie be conducte and reteyned to plaie but twice on þe day of þe saide playe And þat he or thay so plaing plaie not ouere twice þe saide day vpon payne of xl s. to forfet vnto þe Chaumbre as often tymes as he or þay shall be founden defaultie in þe same."¹¹ It is highly unlikely that this order was meant to apply to the performance of individual pageants. The reference is specifically to the "Corpus Christi plaie." Moreover, only a handful of pageants would have contained a large enough cast to permit doubling. The order, therefore, must have been meant for the performance of the cycle as a whole. But if that performance was processional, very few actors could possibly have played in more than two plays, and those that did would hardly have distracted the audience with their second, or, for that matter, their third appearance of the day, which would have occurred some five or six hours apart.¹² A rule against tripling simply makes no sense for the kind of performance usually conjectured to have taken place in York. Rules exist because of abuses. The likely abuse in this instance would have been the reappearance of actors in such frequent succession that the dramatic illusion would be blurred. At best, some of the actors in an all-day, ten-station performance of the York cycle (to take a convenient number) might have played three roles, but the number of these actors must have been relatively small since tripling would have involved thirty performances for each.

On the other hand, the rule would make very good sense for a single, continuous performance of the cycle in a fixed location. This point will be evident when we bear in mind that the principal roles extend over several pageants. Deus and Jesus (probably played by the same actor)¹³ appear

altogether in 31 pageants; Mary in 14; the Apostles Peter and John in 9; Caiaphas and Anna in 8; Joseph, Herod, Adam, and Eve in 5. In a processional performance without doubling these ten parts alone would require 99 actors (the sum of the parts), whereas only ten would be needed on a fixed stage. While the main roles in such a performance would undoubtedly have been played by professional actors, the hundreds of minor parts in the several pageants could easily have fallen to hired men and, perhaps, amateurs. It is these latter parts that would have been especially susceptible to doubling. For example, the actors playing the three sons of Noah in the ninth pageant could have come back as the three Jews in the eleventh (The Departure of the Israelites), as the three Shepherds in the fifteenth, as the three Kings in the sixteenth and seventeenth, as the three Doctors in the twentieth, and so on. Under these circumstances, the practice of doubling might quickly have been abused.

The extent to which doubling took place in the mystery cycles, unfortunately, cannot be documented beyond a few general references such as the rule in question. But it seems clear that multiple role-playing did occur to the point of abuse at least in York and probably elsewhere. The view expressed by David Bevington that "little doubling was possible" in the mystery plays¹⁴ is apparently based on the assumption that the mystery plays were performed processionally through the streets of medieval cities. If, as I shall hope to establish, a single continuous performance could have taken place in York after a processional riding, our assumptions about doubling practices on the early popular stage will need some reassessment. It should be added that the entry from the *York House Books* refers to the payment of actors. We are told that "no plaier . . . be conducte and reteyned to plaie," which is to say "engaged and hired to play" (see *OED*, s.v. Conduct, *pa. ppl.*, 1a; Retain, *v.*, 2c; the York entry is cited in both definitions). The casting of well over two hundred professional and semi-professional players, which is the number needed for a full processional performance of the York cycle if we allow for as much doubling as possible, is unbelievably large and would have required an immense outlay of wages.

The established assumption that the entire York cycle, as passed down to us in the manuscript, was performed at from nine to sixteen stations along the crowded, narrow streets of medieval York is simply untenable. Neither time nor space would have permitted such a performance.

II

Once we accept the view that the York plays, as we have them, could not have been performed processionally, we are faced with the difficult question of how they might have been presented instead. In the attempt to answer this question, we must bear in mind that there is no hard evidence by which any mode of performance, including the processional, can be proved with absolute certainty. It is true that the York records continually allude to the procession of pageants sponsored by the craft guilds and to stations where the pageants

stopped. But nowhere in the records is there a precise account of the nature of these processions, of the audiences that watched them, or even of the actors that participated in them. There is little doubt in my mind that present-day interpretations of the York records, as well as others, have been influenced by the preconceptions traceable to such early commentators as David Rogers at Chester and Thomas Sharp at Coventry. Take, for example, the following excerpt from the well-known entry for 1457 in the *Coventry Leet Book* describing the visit of Queen Margaret to Coventry:

On Corpus Xpisti yeven at nyght then next suyng came the quene from Kelyngworth to Coventre; at which tyme she wold not be met, but came prively to se the play there on the morowe; and she sygh then alle the pagentes pleyde save domes-day, which myght not be pleyde for lak of day. And she was loged at Richard Wodes the grocer, where Ric. Sharp some-tyme dwelled; and there all the pleys were furst pleyde.¹⁵

On the presupposition that Queen Margaret witnessed a processional performance, one could interpret this entry to say that she was a spectator from morning (“on the morowe”) till night (the “domes-day [play], which myght not be pleyde for lak of day”) at the first station (“there all the pleys were furst pleyde”). The word “pagentes,” under these circumstances, immediately brings to mind both its meanings, “movable stages” and “plays.” But it is equally possible, and perhaps somewhat more plausible, to assume from the outset that the Queen saw a shortened stationary version, perhaps only a dumb show, of the Coventry Corpus Christi play. All that is needed to bring this sense into focus is to interpret the word “morowe” as “the next day” (see *OED*, s.v. *Morrow*, *sb.*, 2b) and the last sentence as “where the entire cycle was originally (at first) played” (*OED*, s.v. *First*, *adv.*, B. 1d). The entry, consequently, may signify one of the following: (1) the Queen saw the performance in front of the house of the grocer Richard Wodes, a location which historically had been the site of the Corpus Christi play (with the implication that it was no longer the site and that a special performance was set up there in 1457 to accommodate the Queen); (2) the Queen stayed at Wodes’ house, in front of which at one time the Corpus Christi play was performed (with no implicit reference to its performance in 1457). If either of the latter interpretations apply, the word “pagentes” could be taken to mean “plays,” though it might also refer to “wagons” used as specific sets (e.g. the stable for the Nativity) in the *platea* of a fixed stage. The fact is that the conventional interpretation of the extract raises more questions than it answers. If the performance was really done processionally, are we to assume that darkness prevented its completion at the *first* station? How much, then, did the spectators see at the conjectured tenth station?¹⁶ And if Wodes’ house, which is known to have been located on Earl Street, was indeed the site of the first station for the processional performance, how could the first station of the Smiths’ pageant have regularly been on Gosford Street, as Hardin Craig

has deduced (pp. xiii–xiv)? The point to be borne in mind is that most of the records are in themselves ambiguous and obscure; they can be made to uphold various presuppositions.

The interpretation that I am about to offer of the York Civic Records requires two basic assumptions, one of which emerges out of the other. First, we need to recognize the fact that the Corpus Christi play at York was sufficiently dynamic to change with the times. Surely, the performance in the late fourteenth century was different in detail, if not in basic form, from that which prevailed in the heyday of the craft cycles some 150 years later. Secondly, we must allow for the possibility that the actual performance did not bear a very close resemblance to the surviving manuscript. It is difficult to know what the full purpose of the register was. One is tempted, of course, to assume that the performance at York accorded closely in most details with the text in the extant manuscript of the plays. Does this view imply then that the register served as a master-script from year to year for the various crafts? The indications are quite to the contrary. We know of at least two guilds that maintained separate copies of their pageants: the Scriveners, whose play survives independently in the Sykes MS, and the Innholders, who promised, according to the unpublished Chamberlains' Book, to bring their "regynall" in to the Common Clerk to be registered before midsummer of 1560 (Chamberlains' Book C5, f.97v). It seems reasonable to suppose that other guilds—especially the prosperous ones like the Mercers—also had their own texts. Scholars have speculated that the Sykes MS of the Scriveners' play was, in fact, a prompt-copy.¹⁷ If that was the case, there would have been little need for the Scriveners, or any other guilds holding their own copy, to consult the register proper from year to year.

The *York House Books*, moreover, provide some additional evidence that the register functioned primarily as a permanent record of the York Plays and that it had little direct connection as such with the performances. The following entry, dated June 17, 1567, is a case in point:

Aggreed that the pageants of Corpus Christi suche as be not allredy registred shalbe with all convenyent spede be fayre wrytten by John Clerke in the old register therof, viz. of vyntenars the Archetriclinus, of thyranmongers, Marie Magd. wasshyng the Lords feete, and of the tylars the latter part of their pageant, of the laborars the purificacon of our Lady, and of the cappers, to be examined with the register and reformed. (Transcribed from *City of York House Book*, B24, f.82; cf. *YCR*, VI, 128.)

When these instructions are compared with the register, it becomes apparent that only one of them was fully carried out: the Purification play was inserted into the MS at the end of Quire xxi, where it is chronologically out of place.¹⁸ The interesting point to note is that all the plays mentioned were apparently performed in some manner for well over a hundred years without being registered or corrected. That can only imply that the register had little con-

nection with the actual performance. The register, in effect, was never fully brought up to date, and at least some of the guilds clearly relied on their own texts or their memories to produce their pageants from year to year.

With these two assumptions in mind then—namely that the cycle changed over the years and that the surviving MS does not necessarily preserve the plays as performed—I would like to offer the following hypothesis to explain the development of the Corpus Christi cycle in the city of York. Sometime in the middle of the fourteenth century, the various trade guilds in York began to represent appropriate biblical scenes on pageant wagons which were drawn over a prescribed route through the city as part of the Corpus Christi procession. Beginning as *tableaux vivants*, these scenes gradually included a few spoken lines, but until at least 1426, they were not independent plays and they bore only a skeletal resemblance to the collected pageants of the York register. The latter did not come into existence until the second half of the fifteenth century, at which time the religious procession and the Corpus Christi play had clearly become established as separate events taking place on consecutive days. A dramatic procession continued to be held on the day of the play with short enactments of scenes before the houses of burgesses who had paid for the privilege, but in time a longer, more detailed version of some or all of the cycle was given at the last stop on the route, the Pavement, where the general public gathered. Eventually, the major roles in this longer version were assumed by professionals. The guilds continued to provide the pageant wagons, which were drawn into place as needed to represent *sedes* in the stationary performance. The play itself undoubtedly changed in substance from year to year as guilds flourished and declined. There is no reason to believe that the entire cycle as preserved in the MS was ever presented, but it seems clear that certain pageants—the Mercers' Judgment Play, to cite one instance—were included in each performance. The scripts for the individual plays were preserved in manuscript or in memory by the individual guilds. The register, in turn, was compiled by the city fathers in an early effort to collect and preserve archives of the city.

I emphasize that the foregoing sketch is strictly conjectural. But then, so would any other be. The fact is that the York civic records are frequently ambiguous and incomplete. Unquestionably many circumstances relating to the mystery plays are left unrecorded. Those who may object to my account will find that no other explanation, even the established one, is capable of documentation.¹⁹ The sketch I have offered is at least consistent with logic, and some parts of it are clearly warranted by a close re-examination of several crucial entries in the records, including the famous *ordo paginarum* of Roger Burton for the year 1415.

Before scrutinizing that entry, I want to call attention to one general implication that results from my conjectures. If I am right about the development of drama in York, then we must reconsider the rise of the other Northern Corpus Christi cycles as well. The assumption that the cycles as we have them date from the latter part of the fourteenth century is based almost entirely on the traditional interpretation of the York records, with the implication that

any reference to the Corpus Christi play is, *ipso facto*, a reference to the extant register. When F. M. Salter, in his seminal study of the Chester Plays, moved the date of that cycle forward some fifty years to 1375, he relied for his new date exclusively on the entries of records from such places as Beverley, York, and Coventry.²⁰ But, like others before him, he failed to ask what type of performance took place in these cities. If, as I suspect, they were civic ridings of a sequence of *tableaux vivants* connected with the religious procession of Corpus Christi Day, the cycles as we have them in the several extant MSS did not really begin until some seventy-five years later. It is interesting to note in this connection that none of the surviving MSS is given a date earlier than 1430-40, and even that date is probably too early.²¹ If fully-developed cycles were really performed in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, one is led to wonder why not a single MS survives from that period. The evidence suggests that the great Northern cycles, as we know them, date from the fifteenth century, not the fourteenth.

III

The crucial fact thus far overlooked by historians of the medieval drama is that up to 1426 the religious and dramatic processions of Corpus Christi were one and the same at York. In its full context, the Burton list of 1415—a document often used to substantiate processional performances elsewhere—emerges much more clearly as a masterplan for the Corpus Christi procession than as a scenario for the plays. This point becomes clear when we re-examine the document proper.

Much of the confusion associated with Burton's list results from the fact that the entire entry has never been transcribed and published in one place. In addition, its relationship to other crucial dramatic documents in the *York Memorandum Book A/Y* has not been noted by any of its editors. Here are the facts, as ascertained by my recent examination of the manuscript: the *ordo paginarum* of 1415 begins at the top of folio 252v²² and extends to the middle of folio 254v; it is written by one scribe, presumably Roger Burton, though numerous corrections appear in several later hands, some in different coloured ink. The *ordo* proper does not end, as in L. T. Smith's transcription, with the listing of the last pageant, but with the following enumeration of torchbearers and other participants in the Corpus Christi procession:

Portours————vij torcheae	Chaloners ————iiij torcheae
Coblers ————iiij torcheae	ffullers ————iiij torcheae
Cordwaners———xiiij torcheae	Girdellers ————torcheae
Cottellers———ij torcheae	Taillours ————torcheae
Weuere	Et lvij ciues ciuitatis
seruautes———iiij torcheae	habuerunt torcheas <i>similiter</i> die
Carpenters———vj torcheae	Corporis Christi
Ordinatu[m] est quod Portours Coblers eant antea primo. Et [tunc a	
dexteris] Webster <i>seruauntz</i> et Cordwaners. Et [e]x opp[osito] Fullers,	

C[u]ttellers, Girdellers, Chaloners, Carpenters, [Taillours]. Et tunc boni [cives et postea xxii]ij, xij, Maior, et iiij^{or} torcheae [magistri Thome de Bukton].²³

Immediately after this entry, on the middle of folio 254v, the text continues with the item headed "Proclamacio ludi corporis cristi facienda in vigilia Corporis Cristi," transcribed by Miss Smith in her Introduction but placed apart from the *ordo* and, therefore, not acknowledged as part of the same general entry (see *York Plays*, p. xxxiv). The *Proclamacio* continues onto folio 255r, where, after the first seven words, the writing is crowded and appears to be in a different hand, over an erasure. Thereafter, in the same crowded hand, occurs the second list of pageants, in a two-column format. This list is similarly followed by an enumeration of torches for the religious procession.²⁴ The fragmentary publication of these three items—that is, the two Burton lists and the proclamation—has made it impossible for scholars to recognize their collocation in the manuscript, a fact that may have some bearing on the interpretation of their purpose and use.

The first point that emerges from this re-examination of the manuscript is that the procession of pageants was followed by two columns of torchbearers, made up of guildsmen and prominent citizens, including the Council of Twenty-Four, the Twelve Aldermen, and the Mayor. The ending of the *ordo paginarum* serves as incontrovertible proof that in the year 1415 the pageants paraded through the streets of York as part of the religious procession on Corpus Christi Day. When we now recall the length of the York cycle as it survives in the register, we must recognize the utter impossibility of its performance, even one time through, in such a context. A religious procession was subject to restraints of time that would not have been imposed on a separate dramatic procession. From a 1426 entry, which we will have cause to examine more closely in a moment, we learn that the procession began "ad magnas portas, prioratus Sancte Trinitatis Ebor, et sic processionaliter eundo ad ecclesiam cathedralen Eborancensem; et deinde ad hospitale Sancti Leonardi Ebor', sacramento predicto ibidem relicto" (see *MB*, II, 156). It is reasonable to suppose that this procession from Trinity Gates, to the Minster, to St Leonard's Hospital, took place in the morning, before Mass, at which time undoubtedly the Sacrament was brought into the Cathedral. This means that the time for the procession was a scant five hours, roughly between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m.,²⁵ and even that schedule would have been threatened if craftsmen, players, and civic officials did not quite manage to meet at "the mydhowre betwix iiijth and vth of the cloke in the morning," as specified in the *Proclamacio ludi corporis cristi* (see *York Plays*, p. xxxiv). Under these circumstances it is understandable that the Proclamation implores the participants to move their pageants "ilk one after oþer as þer course is, without tarieng." One unauthorized or prolonged stop could disturb the timing of the whole procession with the catastrophic result of delaying the Mass.

Before we look further into the York civic records, I want to consider one other implication of the combined religious and dramatic procession in the

early years of the fifteenth century. The Chamberlains' Rolls indicate that later, when the two processions are separated, the Corpus Christi pageants were performed before the Mayor and the Aldermen. Thus, for example, in 1433-34, the Mayor and various "honorable men" watched the pageants from a specially constructed chamber at a price of 6s. 8d. Still later, in 1478-79, the Mayor and Aldermen saw the dramatic parade from the windows of Nicholas Bewyk's house.²⁶ But when the pageants were brought forth as part of the religious procession, the most prosperous and distinguished burgesses of York, including the twenty-four members of the Common Council, the twelve Aldermen, and the Mayor walked immediately behind the Sacrament according to the established usage.²⁷ The traditional view that the plays of the register were performed at various stations along the route of the combined play and procession described in the *ordo* of 1415, would force the absurd conclusion that the Mayor and the other dignitaries were subjected to countless prolonged stops along the way while the plays ahead were being performed. Undoubtedly the pace of the procession, even when there were only *tableaux vivants*, was already painfully slow. How much slower it would have been with a full performance of the York plays as we know them strains the imagination.

The entry in the *York Memorandum Book* which describes the visit of Friar William Melton to the city of York in 1426 has special significance for this study. It is this entry that sets forth the separation of the play and the procession. Acting on the advice of the friar, the Mayor convened the citizens in the Common Hall, and with their consent he ordained that the play, thereafter, would take place on the Vigil of the Feast and the solemn procession on the Feast day proper. Friar William had recommended this change because public revelling, drunkenness, shouting, and singing had accompanied the procession, and, as a result, many people disregarded the divine services of the day. He took pains, however, to commend the play, which he deemed good in itself (*MB*, II, 156-58).

Curiously, the significance of this entry has thus far been entirely overlooked. The fact is that after 1426 the city of York permanently separated dramatic and religious processions. It is true that in the course of time the dramatic festivities were moved forward to Corpus Christi Day again and the religious procession to the day following, but the civic records consistently show that the two were kept apart in subsequent times.²⁸ The implications of this change for the rise of the drama in York are momentous. After 1426, the York pageants became an independent civic enterprise, free of ritual and ready for expansion. While the civic records unfortunately provide no proof, I am inclined to believe that the next twenty years brought profound changes to the shape of the drama in York, including the full enactment of at least some of the pageants as we know them. Gradually each guild must have commissioned its own play, which then was copied into the register. If this view is correct, the register must reflect the dramatic shape of the York cycle in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. But no matter what the explanation, it could not reflect conditions of performance earlier than 1426.

IV

Just exactly what those conditions were can only be inferred. But if we judge from the development of Corpus Christi processions elsewhere, we can assume that the guilds of York put together a lavish civic riding of a sequence of Old and New Testament scenes. It is clear that even before the separation of dramatic and religious processions, some few lines were spoken by the participants as the pageant wagon processed through the streets of York. We find, for example, that in 1422 the Pinners and Latoners agreed to take over "in pagina sua *materiam loquelarum* que per prius in pagina sua et in pagina de les payntours et steynours ludebatur" (*MB*, II, 103—italics added), where "materiam loquelarum" specifically refers to the material "of the speeches." Moreover, Burton's list contains various verbs of "speaking" and "saying" (e.g. in Pageant 5 *loquens*, Pageant 8 *premuniens*, Pageant 12 *declarans*, etc.). But in all essential details the procession must have been composed of *tableaux vivants* in the manner of the Corpus Christi procession throughout Europe for several centuries to follow. Faithful descriptions of such processions survive in detail from many cities in continental Europe. Various "Prozessionsordnungen" (or "Pompa eucharistica") from Munich are a case in point. For example, in 1574, the Munich procession was composed of 55 pageants ("Figuren"), called "lebende Bilder" by Alois Mitterwieser (p. 33), representing scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The procession opened with the carrying of candles by the youngest guild members. Immediately following were the 27 members of the St George fraternity, and then in order came the Duke's steward with a contingent of horsemen, St Margaret (played by the daughter of a local doctor) leading an enormous dragon, St George in splendid armour followed by a shield-bearer and six horsemen in full armour, then the craft guilds with pageant after pageant representing scenes from the Old and New Testament in chronological order (requiring a total of 1439 "players"), one hundred and fifty students, various groups of the clergy, the Duke's trumpeters and pages carrying the instruments of the Passion, the holy sacrament carried by four priests, and finally the Archduke Ferdinand and his court (Mitterwieser, pp. 34–35). Even more lavish processions took place in subsequent years. In 1612, the pageants increased to 61, and they were introduced by a giant sitting on a mountain, presumably reading the banns. Spectacle became ever more important. For example, the chestmakers, who brought forth Noah's Ark, borrowed wild animals, including monkeys, owls, and cubs from the Archduke's estate. The smiths, who portrayed the Massacre of the Innocents, were accompanied by twenty old women carrying their murdered children. Inventories of costumes together with memoranda books spell out all the conditions of performance in detail. Casting was given special attention. For example, yearly, two brothers, both blacksmiths, were chosen from the village of Mittenwald to represent the giants Goliath and Urias. The Duchess herself chose ladies-in-waiting for the parts of Saints Margaret, Judith, Veronica, and Ursula. In 1593, on a count ordered by Wilhelm V, it was estimated that nearly twenty thousand visitors

came to Munich. Participants in the procession assembled as early as four in the morning and processed through the entire town. In earlier years the procession came to its conclusion in time for high mass, but later throughout old Bavaria, the spectacle became so involved and prolonged that the procession was held after mass (pp. 35-46, 98).²⁹

I am well aware that the foregoing account is not closely related, in time or place, to the civic ridings at York. But it happens to provide for us a fuller description of civic processions, based on primary documents, than any that can be reconstructed from medieval England. There is no reason to suppose that the basic features of the Corpus Christi procession changed significantly over the years, though unquestionably it became more lavish and popular wherever it was allowed to flourish. I therefore submit that the procession in York during the early fifteenth century, when it combined dramatic spectacle and religious ritual, was similar to the Continental procession in all essential details. Evidence from representations that are closer in time and place to early fifteenth-century York supports this view. The well-known *mystères mimés* in many parts of France during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were, in fact, *tableaux vivants* rather than plays. In describing these shows, Grace Frank observes: "Usually the actors of these tableaux were mute and indicated the small amount of action involved by pantomime, but sometimes a few words were spoken."³⁰ Such a performance is exactly the sort I am conjecturing for York prior to 1426. What has confused the issue about the English Corpus Christi play all along is the survival of registers and playbooks, which have caused us to regard the early records of Corpus Christi ridings in the light of the expanded forms in later times. Divested of this association with the York register, the early municipal records from York will present us with a picture of the Corpus Christi procession very similar to those described on the Continent and in Scotland and Ireland.

A closer look at Burton's list of 1415 is now in order. It would be worth asking, first of all, what purpose it was meant to serve. Surely, if the prevailing view is correct that the York plays were composed in the fourteenth century and then revised in stages, of which the last took place some time after 1415, there must already have been a composite playbook in existence at the time when Burton compiled his list.³¹ That being the case, one wonders why there was a need for such an explicit list in the first place. As a matter of record, a simple list, showing the name of the craft and its pageant, would certainly have sufficed, as indeed it did in towns like Beverley and Hereford.³² The writing of such a detailed description would only make sense if there was no composite manuscript and if the Common Council, therefore, decided to set down an *ordo paginarum* as a guide to subsequent processions. Notably, when the clerk of the Council later made a second list, he gave only brief titles.

The several pageants, when seen in the light of Burton's descriptions, can be pictured much more readily as a procession of a series of *tableaux* than as a sustained dramatic performance at each of ten or twelve stations. While many of the pageants depict a sequence of short scenes, all of them could

easily have been performed with mimetic action and occasional short speeches. Interestingly, there are no finite verb forms in the list, only present participles: "Deus prohibens," "Jesus . . . portans crucem," etc. Moreover, many of Burton's descriptions of episodes are considerably more restricted in scope than the surviving text in the register. For example, the Gloueres play in Burton's list is simply described as "Abel et Kaym immolantes victimas". No allusion is made to the angel of the play in the register, no mention of the quarrel, the murder, and the curse upon Cain. The complicated action of the Hoseers' *Departure of the Israelites from Egypt* in the register is represented by Burton simply as "Moyses exaltans serpentem in deserto, Pharao Rex, viij Judei admirantes et expectantes". In this short descriptive statement, there is no reference to the raging Pharao, to his Counsellors, to Moses and the burning bush, to the deadly plagues, the Exodus, and the final spectacular pursuit by the Egyptians in chariots and their drowning in the Red Sea—all of which were included in the play.

A clue to the nature of the processional riding depicted by Burton may well be in his description of the Tilers' pageant: "Maria, Joseph,³³ obstetrix, puer natus iacens in presepio inter bouem et azinum, et angelus loquens pastoribus, et ludentibus, in pagina sequente." The interesting and somewhat puzzling feature of this Nativity scene is the speech of the Angel to the shepherds and players of the next pageant. Would it not be likely that this angel sat on the thatched roof of the stable, beckoning the shepherds who processed immediately behind? If that was the case, only one Nativity set was needed, and much of the complexity associated with the representation of individual pageants might, by such clustering, have been eliminated. Suppose, for example, that the Tilers' wagon was the first in a sequence of several pageants which assembled at the various designated stations to represent a composite scene. Thus, after the Tilers' wagon was drawn to a halt at a given location, the Chandlers followed: "Pastores loquentes ad inuincem, stella in oriente, angelus nuncios pastoribus gaudium de puero nato." The shepherds in this instance needed no wagon; they simply walked. The star in the East was probably fixed to the roof of the stable,³⁴ and the Angel who announces the good tidings of Christ's birth is the same already mentioned in the Tilers' pageant. Next came the Orfeuers, Goldbetters, and Monemakers with a scene described as follows: "Tres Reges venientes ab oriente, Herodes interrogans eos de puero Iesu, et filius Herodis et duo consiliarii et nuncius. Maria cum puero, et stella desuper, et tres Reges offerentes munera."³⁵ I don't know how this scene could ever have been played on one pageant stage, whether as part of a procession or a stationary play. But the guilds in question, as I picture the representation, could easily have brought the Herod pageant to a stop a short distance from the Tilers' Nativity set. On this wagon were Herod, the two counsellors, and, in later years, Herod's son and the messenger. Shortly after, the three kings, equipped in splendid fineries by the Goldsmiths, rode on their horses to the Herod pageant and, after some dialogue, walked to the Nativity pageant, guided once more by the Star on its roof, to make

their offerings. When this little tableau was played out, the Tilers moved their wagon on, and the Chandlers and Orfeuers (etc.) followed, to repeat the scene at the next scheduled stop. Similar combinations of scenes could well have taken place in other parts of the processional representation, notably the sequence of events between the Betrayal and the Crucifixion, comprising Pageants 28 to 33 in Burton's list.

Once we envisage a procession independent of the surviving register, we will be able to set straight some other prevalent misconceptions. One such involves the representation of the two Noah pageants in Burton's list. We are told that the Shipwrights presented a scene showing "Deus premuniens Noe facere archam de lignis leuigatis." The Pessoners and Mariners followed with "Noe in Archa et vxor eius, tres filij Noe cum vxoribus suis, cum diuersis animalibus." On the basis of those descriptions, the Shipwrights simply presented a scene in which God warns Noah to make an ark. The Pessoners and Mariners, in turn, presented the ark, with Noah, his wife, their three sons and wives, and various animals aboard. The latter pageant, no doubt quite spectacular, was propelled in some way through the streets of York and probably resembled Noah's ship as described in the Mariners' records of Hull.³⁶ It is noteworthy that the problems raised by the two Noah plays in the York register are not raised by the description of the procession. Here the Noah of the Shipwrights' pageant does not build the ark; he is only instructed to do so. In the register, God gives Noah very explicit instructions, and Noah responds:

My werynes is wente away,
To wyrk þis werke here in þis feylde
Al be myselfe I will assaye. (8/93-96)

He then builds an ark, step by step before our eyes. Confusion of the procession and the play has led some scholars to assume that Noah was required to build the ark at one station, then to dismantle it before building it anew at the next station, and so on.³⁷ But regardless of how the scene may finally have been enacted in the play, the procession did not require the building of an ark.³⁸

The second list, already mentioned as containing only short titles, has been given a date of c. 1420 by M. G. Frampton.³⁹ It seems likely to me that this list was meant to update and correct the one of 1415. The most obvious difference between the two lists is that the second expands the number of pageants from 51 to 57. However, of the six additional pageants, only one, the Sausmakers' *Suspencio Jude*, is actually new.⁴⁰ The others were included as episodes within larger pageants in the first list. Thus, for example, the Tielmakers, Milners, Turnours, Hayresters, and Bollers were listed as the guilds responsible for the following pageant in 1415:

Jesus, Pilatus, Cayphas, Anna, sex milites tenentes hastas cum
vexillis, et alij quattuor ducentes Jesum ab Herode petentes Baraban

dimitti et Jesum crucifigi, et ibidem ligantes et flagellantes eum, ponentes coronam spineam super caput eius; tres milites mittentes sortem super vestem Jesu.

In the second list, we find that the Tylemakers are specifically assigned to the *Condemnacio Christi per Pilatum*, the Turnors and Bollers to the *Flagellacio et Coronacio cum Spinis*, and the Milners to the *Particio Vestimentorum Christi*. It has been customary to regard such differences between the two lists as changes in performance and to conclude that by the time of the second list York had prospered sufficiently to enlarge its cycle of plays. To me it seems much more likely that the second list ascribed to individual guilds the episodes for which they were responsible all along. With the likelihood that guilds combined their wagons and resources to represent composite scenes at the various stops along the route, the determination of individual guild responsibility was no doubt difficult. The process of amalgamating pageants was inevitable in the growth of the dramatic procession. Hence, despite the second list which attempts to particularize the responsibility of individual guilds, we read repeatedly in the York records of guilds that combined their efforts to present Corpus Christi pageants.⁴¹ Burton's earlier list, in fact, bears a closer resemblance to the register than does the second list. On this basis alone, we may reasonably conclude that the second list does not reflect essential changes in guild assignments and the dramatic substance of the procession. Nor does it, any more than the first list, describe the plays of the register.⁴²

V

By what steps, then, did the Corpus Christi dramatic procession, as a separate entity from the religious procession, develop into a full-fledged drama in the years after 1426? The civic records show that even until the very end, there was some manner of processional drama at York. However, there is no reason to suppose that the processional riding changed drastically from the form it took in the days of Roger Burton. It is true that, after 1426, the severe constraints of time imposed by the religious observance were removed. Moreover, without having to worry over delaying the procession of dignitaries at the end, the pageant masters could move from station to station at a more leisurely pace.⁴³ For reasons already given, the York cycle, as preserved in the register, could not have been enacted in its entirety before the several appointed residences. But, with ever greater crowds attracted to York, and with no room for them to see the pageants except at the traditional last stop, the Pavement, there is reason to believe that this location, in due time, witnessed a larger, continuous performance of the play and that the surviving register is, in fact, a somewhat idealized text for that performance.

The Pavement is the oldest open space in the city of York. Angelo Raine renders the following description of it:

All through mediaeval times it was the place where punishments were inflicted and proclamations made . . . It was one of the two mediaeval market-places, the other being Thursday Market. In those days there was no Parliament Street nor Piccadilly, and the Pavement was lined with houses, shops, and storehouses of rich York merchants . . . On the Pavement prisoners convicted of treason were publicly executed opposite the end of the Shambles . . . Near the bottom of the Shambles, at the edge of the Pavement near to Hosier Row, stood the pillory . . . Not far from the pillory in that part of the Pavement that lay in St. Crux Parish was the Bull Ring where bulls were baited . . .⁴⁴

The performance of the Corpus Christi Play on the Pavement was always the last of the day, and, unlike most of the other stations, the Pavement, according to an entry in the Chamberlains' Account Book, was "accustomyd to goe free" (C3 [3], f. 9).⁴⁵ It was here then that the vast majority of spectators may have seen the play—at the site of such other civic spectacles as bull-baiting, executions, and public punishments. It is true that the civic records do not, as such, substantiate the existence of a larger, stationary performance at the Pavement. But then, the purpose of these documents is not to describe the plays but rather to preserve the corporation records, which happened on occasion to contain information relevant to the plays, including lists of expenditures and receipts, petitions by the guilds, and assessments of fines. Since no receipts were taken in at the Pavement, one would not expect to find reference to the performance there in the Chamberlains' records. However, the House Book entry for April 4, 1476, which has already been mentioned, does suggest that a single, continuous performance, as here conjectured, did take place. It instructs four of the most skilled players within the city to "examen all the plaiers, *plaiies*, and pagents, thrughoute all the artificers belonging to Corpus Christi *plaiie*" (YCR, 1, 5; italics added), implying that smaller units were part of a larger whole. When later the entry forbids actors to appear more than twice on stage, the reference is to "þe saide Corpus Christi *plaiie*," in the singular, not the "plaiies" specified earlier. The House Book entry thus seems intended to regulate a single performance—the only kind, as already shown, in which tripling of parts could become an abuse. Hence, even if the Pavement is not mentioned specifically as the site, the records give warrant to the type of performance conjectured here. A similar presentation apparently took place at Aberdeen, where, according to Anna Jean Mill, either dumb-shows or *tableaux vivants* may have travelled in procession and later become incorporated in a stationary performance at a "playfield."⁴⁶ The sequence of pageant ridings and a single, standing performance seems to have occurred elsewhere as well. At Chelmsford, ten men were hired to "beare the pagiante," but the performance proper took place in a "'pightell' or enclosure, upon a scaffold, with stages for the spectators" (Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, II, 346–47). So also at Louth, Lincolnshire, where "pagents yerely of Corpus Christi

Day” were “brought forth as the Course is,” but where, in addition, a stationary performance was played “in the markit-stede on corpus Christi Day.”⁴⁷ Newcastle, according to Chambers, might well have followed a similar plan: “Perhaps the pageants first took part in the Corpus Christi procession proper and afterwards gathered in a field” (*Mediaeval Stage*, II, 385).

When one considers the practical problems raised by a dramatic riding, even of *tableaux vivants*, through the streets of medieval York, the type of continuous, standing performance I have conjectured for the last station appears a logical, if not inevitable, development. Let us, for the moment imagine that last station: a packed public square, where, in the course of several hours, the pageant carts arrive each presenting its tableau or pageant. Undoubtedly, the carts would collect there. Indeed, they could not be taken back to their places of storage on Toft Green, which was located across the River Ouse, until the last pageant had made its way across Ouse Bridge, which in medieval times was the only means of access for vehicles entering the city from the west, as the Corpus Christi pageants did invariably.⁴⁸ The impulse to let the carts stand in the Pavement, at least for a time, so that the public could admire the craftsmanship of the guilds, would have been natural. And once several of these wagons stood in juxtaposition—for example, Heaven and Hell, or Pilate’s Hall and Calvary—the scenario for a continuous performance would virtually write itself.

The conjectured standing performance at the Pavement could not have arisen suddenly but rather must have evolved over a period of years. Perhaps something of the following sequence of changes occurred at York. After a separate day was assigned for the processional riding of the pageants in 1426, individual guilds gradually expanded their speeches. In due time, professional actors were hired by some of the more affluent guilds to play major roles.⁴⁹ With the expansion of the pageants, efforts had to be made to conserve time, and for this reason the guilds agreed to perform the longer speeches at only one station, the last. Here the type of clustering already described for the pageant ridings took place on a larger scale until, eventually, one long continuous play, known as the Corpus Christi Play, took place. The professional actors, at this point, assumed the major roles, and the amateurs were, more and more, eliminated from this expanded performance of the cycle. Quite possibly only segments of the whole cycle were enacted during any one year. Combinations of pageants into one continuous play seemed to have taken place elsewhere, as, for example, at Newcastle, where in 1552 the Merchant Adventurers laid out £31. 1s. 11d. “for the fyve plays, whereof the towne must paye for the ostmen playe iiiij li”.⁵⁰ The York records, unhappily, are least complete for precisely the years during which these changes must have occurred, namely between 1426, the date when the dramatic and religious processions were separated, and 1476, when the Corporation House Books commence. Indeed, during the half-century in question, the *Memorandum Book A/Y* seems to have been neglected by its compilers. It contains only very occasional references to the

plays, and most of these are from guild ordinances which allude only tangentially to the maintenance of pageants and the collection of pageant silver.⁵¹

When we return now to a reconstruction of the Pavement performance, it is easy to imagine the gradual assemblage of pageant wagons, each a jig-saw piece in a theatrical picture of cosmic proportions. The Tanners (or Barkers) would bring, first of all, their Heaven-pageant ("Deus . . . creans et formans celos"); the Plasterers follow with an Earth-pageant ("Deus . . . creans terram");⁵² the Cardmakers next with a tableau of the "Creation of Adam and Eve" ("Deus pater formans Adam de lymo terre"); and then the Fullers with a Paradise-pageant ("Deus prohibens Adam et Euam ne comederent de ligno vite"). With the permanent *sedes* established, subsequent scenes would come into place for as long as the dramatic action required. Noah's Ark, Pharaoh's chariots, the three Kings on their horses—these and many more moved in and out of the playing area as needed. The focus of the day's drama was no doubt on the Passion, and the Doomsday play of the Mercers, the richest guild in York, formed a fitting grand finale. If the "Day of Judgment" was the ceremonial climax of the play as a whole—allowing in theatrical terms a "curtain scene" for the entire cast—the Crucifixion must have furnished the highest moment of drama. And the Pavement was the most appropriate place for its enactment, for it was here that York, in daily life, executed the condemned.

The manuscript of the *York Plays* renders an unmistakable sense of continuity in terms of theatrical settings and dramatic action. A notable example occurs in the segment of the Passion, extending from Play 26 ("The Conspiracy") to Play 36 ("Death and Burial") of the register. Altogether there are some 4400 lines in this segment of the cycle, and the eleven pageants form one composite Passion play. The dramatic narrative moves forward with such natural coherence in action, theme, and style, that one would be hard-pressed, without rubrics, to know where one pageant ends and the next one begins. Indeed, so blurred are the lines of demarcation that Lucy Toulmin Smith, in her edition, has entitled the Tilemakers' play "The Second Trial Before Pilate *Continued . . .*" (italics added), even though there is no actual continuation of a trial scene.

The *mise-en-scène* for the Passion sequence could easily have been built up piece by piece with the introduction of new pageants or props into the playing area. Thus, the Cutlers, who did the "Conspiracy" tableau (Pageant 26), brought in Pilate's hall, the only permanent *sedes* in that play. Next came the Baxters, appropriately, with a pageant stage of "The Last Supper" (Pageant 27), followed by the Cordwainers' stage of Cayphas' hall (with the Mount of Olives scene, in Pageant 28, enacted in the *platea*, probably near the Heaven-pageant). The next scene, "Peter's Denial, and the Trial Before Caiaphas" (Pageant 29) requires no set; hence the Bowers and Flecchers, two of the less prosperous guilds, supplied only the necessary props, ropes and scourges (again, appropriately). The Tapissers and Couchers next brought forth Procula's chamber with its "bedde arayed of

pe beste" (30/154), and then came the Listers with a hall for the "Trial Before Herod" (Pageant 31). Now the stage was fully set; all the major sets were assembled, and the remaining guilds each contributed essential props for subsequent episodes: the thirty pieces of silver by the Cooks and Water-leaders (Pageant 32), the crown of thorns by the Tilemakers (Pageant 33), the Cross by the Shearmen (Pageant 34), the tools of the Crucifixion by the Pinners and Painters (Pageant 35), the blood for the piercing of Jesus' side by the Butchers (Pageant 36).

The continuity between the pageants is nowhere more evident than in "The Stations of the Cross." In the manuscript, the action from the Condemnation to the Burial takes place in four separate pageants. A processional performance of these four pageants would not only have required a multitude of actors (e.g. four Christs, three groups of soldiers, two Pilates, Cayphases, Annas, Marys, and Johns) but three separate crosses (Pageants 34, 35, 36) and two Crucifixion scenes (Pageants 35 and 36). On the other hand, a set using the market-place would have allowed one panoramic scene with the same cast of characters: the soldiers leave Pilate's hall with the bound Jesus at the end of Play 33; they lead him to Calvary and meet Wymond who brings forth the Cross (Pageant 34); they mount Jesus on the Cross (Pageant 35) and leave him dying; Pilate points to "zone hill" (36/16) and the Cross, as he continues his legal debate with Cayphas and Annas (perhaps moving from his hall to Calvary), while John and the two Marys approach from another direction; and as the crowd around the Cross presses ever closer, Jesus dies, Longeus pierces his side, Joseph and Nicodemus arrive to plead for the body (Pilate is "full preste in þis presse" 36/327), and they take it down to conclude the action of Pageant 36. If, indeed, actors had to push their way through the dense crowd of spectators in the market square, as they made their way from one *sedes* to another, one would find justification for the rants at the beginning of three of the plays, a feature that is usually associated with the pageant in procession. The plays, here and elsewhere, fade into each other so pervasively that their coherence is manifest.

But the question still remains, why is the manuscript divided into so many apparently self-sufficient pageants if the play was really one continuous dramatic performance? The answer, I think, lies in the evolution of the Corpus Christi Play in York and in its underlying sponsorship. From the very beginning, the individual guilds were responsible for the dramatic substance of the pageants. Even in later years, when speeches were added to the tableaux and the dramatic procession became more elaborate, the guilds remained in charge of the pageants. The festival itself, however, was the responsibility of the City, which annually appointed officials to supervise and co-ordinate the procession. No doubt, at one point, probably in the mid-fifteenth century, the Mayor and Aldermen decided to collect a register of the plays and required each of the guilds to submit a text of the episode assigned to it. Whether or not these texts are faithful representations of an actual performance is open to speculation. My own assumption is that they

reflect something of the dramatic continuity of the performance I have conjectured for the Pavement.

My reconstruction of the drama at York from religious procession to a true Corpus Christi play is admittedly conjectural, especially in the later phases. Nevertheless, I hope to have shown that it is more consonant with the facts at hand than is the traditional view of a processional performance at York fixed in its form at the time of Roger Burton's *ordo paginarum*. At the very least, we can be certain that the York Corpus Christi play, as we have it in the manuscript, could not have existed before 1426. And since the development of the drama elsewhere in England has generally been traced on the model of York, it is now fair to say that the Corpus Christi cycle, as we know it, dates not from the late fourteenth century but from the latter half of the fifteenth.

NOTES

- ¹ *Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York During the Reigns of Edward IV, Edward V, and Richard III* (London, 1843), p. 236.
- ² *A Literary History of England*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1967), II, 282-83. There were sixteen stations in 1542; see Anna Jean Mill, "The Stations of the York Corpus Christi Play," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XXXVII (1948-51), 502.
- ³ *The Wakefield Mystery Plays* (London, 1961), pp. 23-24.
- ⁴ "Principles of Processional Staging: York Cycle," *MP*, LXVII (1970), 310.
- ⁵ Lucy Toulmin Smith, ed., *York Plays* (1885; rpt. New York, 1963), p. xxxiv.
- ⁶ While my figures only hint at some of the impossibilities raised by a close examination of the time scheme, Alan Nelson's "systems analysis" study of the York Plays positively destroys the traditional conception of the processional performance at York. Professor Nelson considers in detail, among other matters, the delays between performances at the several stations occasioned by the time differentials between the long and short pageants. Thus, the whole performance of the cycle would be delayed at subsequent stations for at least as much more time as it would take to play a longer play that follows a short one. This scheme, in addition, could create extremely long and uneven pauses between pageants at the various stations; see "Principles of Processional Staging," *passim*.
- ⁷ An interesting and neglected study by Alfred Hart concerning the length of plays written between 1587 and 1616 closely agrees with my conclusion that the extant York text would have required a minimum of twelve hours for one performance, not counting pauses between pageants. Hart bases his study on the frequent and quite consistent references by dramatists and actors to a performance time of two hours in all the important London theatres of the time. He calculates further that the typical acting versions of plays came to approximately 2300 lines, thus establishing 1150 lines as the average hourly rate of performance. The rate of speech, which according to Hart was faster in Elizabethan times than it is now, averaged 176 words per minute by his count. On the basis of Hart's figures, the 13,121 lines of the York cycle would have taken a minimum of eleven-and-a-half hours to perform. Other extant English cycles are of the same approximate length: Chester, 11,155 lines; N-Town, 10,730 lines; Wakefield, 12,276 lines (not counting lacunae). For Hart's study, see *Shakespeare and the Homilies* (Melbourne, Melbourne U.P., 1934), pp. 77-153.

- ⁸ The full list of stations appears in the unpublished York Chamberlains' Books (C4, f. 59). For a discussion of these stations, see Mill, *op. cit.*, 492-502.
- ⁹ *Life in a Medieval Christian City, Illustrated by York in the XVth Century* (London, 1920), p. 10.
- ¹⁰ This figure does not include such silent roles as the six unnamed Apostles in "The Last Supper" or Jesus in "The Resurrection." The count, furthermore, excludes erroneous listings of parts by Lucy Toulmin Smith, as, for example, the three *magistri* in addition to the doctors in Play 20. The words *doctor* and *magister* were synonymous for the York playwright, as witness the reference by the doctors to themselves as *maisters* (20/129). At the close of the play, moreover, the *dramatis personae* are listed, and only the word *doctor* appears there. Clearly the cue lines in the MS to *magister* and *doctor* are intended for the same persons.
- ¹¹ Because Robert Davies' transcription of this entry (see *Extracts*, p. 237) and Angloe Raine's (*York Civic Records*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, 98 (1939), I, 5; hereafter cited as *YCR*) differ in essential details, I have transcribed the passage anew from the *City of York House Book: Containing Minutes of the Proceedings of the Corporation, 1476-1479*, B1, f. 14v. Raine erroneously transcribed "be conducte and reteyned to plaie twice on þe day." The entry clearly reads "to plaie but twice." Davies' transcription, in this instance, is trustworthy in content, though not in spelling.
- ¹² Stanley Kahrl, at a recent Conference, made the intriguing suggestion that the entry may not refer to doubling at all: "What it says is that no player is to act more than twice. Does not this suggest that no play was put on at more than two stations, for the obvious reason that there was not time for more? Would not the actors with the popular plays be likely to want to put on their play as often as possible, to the detriment of the pageant wagons following?" See "Informal Minutes of Conference 53," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, XII (1969), 90. Perhaps so, but if that is the meaning, the phraseology is unusually circuitous even for the York civic records, which are not always a model of clarity. The prohibition, after all, twice directs itself specifically to the "player," not the "play" or the pageant master, who was in charge of its progress through the city.
- ¹³ In the York Festival performance of 1966, one actor, John Westbrook, took both parts. Actually, God and Jesus never appear together in any of the pageants except the late version of the "Coronation," as performed by the Innholders. That the original play was written for one actor seems to be borne out by the staging of the "Transfiguration," in which God the Father descends in a cloud (see stage direction after 23/168), while Jesus stands by and the Apostles fall prostrate to the ground. Here God is evidently only a cloud accompanied by a gleam of light (see 20/186). The Holy Ghost appears similarly as a ray of light in the Pentecost play (44/115-16). In the Judgment play, where we would logically expect to find both God the Father and the Son, the playwright consistently cues lines to "Deus," though on one occasion "Deus" speaks of "mi fadir of heuene" (48/233).
- ¹⁴ *From Mankind to Marlowe* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard U.P., 1962), p. 49.
- ¹⁵ Quoted by Hardin Craig, ed., *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, 2nd ed., EETS, ES, LXXXVII (1957), p. 74.
- ¹⁶ According to Craig, Coventry probably had ten stations, one for each city ward; see p. xiii.
- ¹⁷ See A. C. Cawley, "The Sykes Manuscript of the York Scriveners' Play," *Leeds Studies in English and Kindred Languages*, Nos. 7-8 (1952), 48.
- ¹⁸ For details, see Miss Smith's comments, *York Plays*, pp. xx, xxi, n. 4, and 433, n. 1. Though Miss Smith was unaware of the 1567 House Book entry, she was right in attributing the text of the Purification play to the same scribe as the one who copied the Fullers' pageant according to the instructions of the Chamberlains' Book in 1558 (see pp. xv and xxi, n. 4). Both the Chamberlains' Book and the House Book identify one John Clerke as the Common Clerk responsible for copying the plays. Space is specifically reserved in the manuscript for the Vintners' play of the Wedding at Cana and the Ironmongers' play of Mary Magdalen (see p. xv). The other instructions are not entirely clear. The reference to the latter part of the Tilers' pageant may well square with the note, in a sixteenth-century hand, at the end of the Tille Thekers' play in the register:

- "hic caret pastoribus sequitur postea" (see p. 117, n. 1). The Cappers' play in the register still contains a lacuna of one leaf (see p. 199, n. 1).
- ¹⁹ The commissioning of the register, whenever that event occurred, is never once mentioned in the copious records that survive from medieval York.
- ²⁰ *Medieval Drama in Chester* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1955), p. 42.
- ²¹ The traditional York date of 1430-40 is Lucy Toulmin Smith's (see p. xviii). However, W. W. Greg takes exception: "There is no evidence of any register being compiled before about 1475. . . . The editor of the York Plays assigned the extant manuscript to 1430-40, but this is certainly too early. I do not think that any competent critic today would place it much before the middle of the second half of the century"; see *Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Miracle Cycles* (London, 1914), p. 28. Of the five Chester manuscripts, none is earlier than 1591. The *terminus a quo* for the *N-Town* MS is 1468. The MS of the Towneley Plays is dated c. 1460.
- ²² Lucy Toulmin Smith uses the old foliation and assigns the beginning of the *ordo* to 245^v. Actually, there are two older foliations in the MS of the *A/Y Book*: one in the top centre, the other in the top right. The new numbers, assigned by Maud Sellers, are at the bottom.
- ²³ The entire *ordo*, together with the instructions for the procession, was translated (with many inaccuracies) by Francis Drake in his *Eboracum: or the History and Antiquities of the City of York* (London, 1736), pp. xxx-xxxii (Appendix). Miss Smith published a transcription of the first list of pageants in her Introduction to the *York Plays* (1885), pp. xix-xxvii. Thereafter, in 1892, the *York Memorandum Book A/Y*, along with numerous other civic documents, suffered considerable damage, when the Muniments Room of the Guild Hall in York, where the archives were then stored, was severely flooded by the River Ouse. In consequence, much of the *ordo paginarum*, despite restoration efforts, is now nearly illegible. It was for this reason that Maud Sellers, in her edition of the *York Memorandum Book*, did not include the list of pageants, but referred the reader to Miss Smith's transcription (see *Surtees Soc.*, 125 (1915), II, 118; hereafter cited as *MB*), although Sellers did transcribe the processional instructions at the end of the entry. In my own transcription of the latter, I have relied on Miss Sellers' edition for all illegible manuscript readings, which appear in square brackets. A new, fully edited text of the *ordo paginarum* gathering, prepared by Martin Stevens and Margaret Dorrell, is to be published in *MP*.
- ²⁴ The second list was not included in Miss Smith's Introduction, and it has never been edited together with the first. Much of this list is now completely illegible, owing to the flood damage and unsuccessful efforts at restoration. It was first transcribed by Robert Davies in his *Extracts*, pp. 233-36. But because Davies' transcriptions contains a number of inaccuracies (e.g. Pageant 48 is ascribed to the *Wiredrawers* instead of the *Winedrawers*), the list was newly transcribed by Angelo Raine and printed by M. G. Frampton in "The Date of the 'Wakefield Master': Bibliographic Evidence," *PMLA*, LII (1938), 101-3, n. 79. However, neither Davies nor Frampton includes the concluding instructions for the religious procession. The latter were transcribed by Miss Sellers; see *MB*, II, 118-19.
- ²⁵ For the times of the canonical hours, see Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1933), I, 74.
- ²⁶ Noted in the unpublished Chamberlains' Rolls C1:2 ml; and C3:7 ml (dorse).
- ²⁷ In describing the Corpus Christi processions in Bavaria, Alois Mitterwieser observes: "Der ehrenvollste Platz in der Prozession ist der gleich hinter dem Himmel. Er war fuer den Kaiser, den Landesherrn, den Rektor der Hochschule, den ersten Buergermeister bestimmt"; see *Geschichte der Fronleichnamsprozession in Bayern* (Muenchen, 1930), p. 98.
- ²⁸ Corpus Christi Day was apparently re-established as the day of the play by 1476; see *YCR*, I, 6. References to the procession on the day following Corpus Christi are numerous; see, for example, the entries for the years 1490 (*YCR*, II, 59), 1530 (*YCR*, III, 132), 1541 (*YCR*, IV, 51), and 1555 (*YCR*, V, 120).
- ²⁹ Mitterwieser emphasizes the point that the Corpus Christi representations in Bavaria were processions, not plays. With reference to the word "spil," which recurs in the records, Mitterwieser reinforces a point known well by all students of the medieval drama, viz. that the terminology describing "performances" is uncertain: "Man unter-

- schied damals noch nicht genau zwischen Buehnenspiel, Festzug, oder lebenden Bild." Elsewhere he indicates that in his wide search through Bavarian records he found virtually no evidence of true Corpus Christi plays; see especially pp. 99, 102, n. 35, and 103, n. 108. Similarly lavish processions were presented elsewhere: cf. the account of a procession in Lisbon in *The Fugger News Letters*, ed. Victor von Klarwill, tr. Pauline de Chary (New York, 1924), Series 1, Letter 53; and the description by Syr Rychard Tor-kyngton Person of a morning-long procession in Venice, recorded by Thomas Sharp, *A Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries Anciently Performed at Coventry* (Coventry, 1825), pp. 172-73.
- ³⁰ Cf. *The Medieval French Drama* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 165-66. Anna J. Mill conjectures similar "dumb show" processions for Aberdeen, among other cities in Scotland; see *Mediaeval Plays in Scotland*, St Andrews Univ. Publ., 24 (London, 1927), p. 63; and E. K. Chambers regards the Dublin plays "to be only dumbshow accompaniments of a procession"; see *The Mediaeval Stage* (London, O.U.P., 1903), II, 365 (hereafter cited as *M.S.*).
- ³¹ According to this theory, regardless of the particulars, revisers were at work on large parts of the cycle, spanning series of plays. It would follow accordingly that the extant register is a revised version of an earlier compilation. For various theories regarding the revision of the cycle, see E. K. Chambers, *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (London, O.U.P., 1945), pp. 29-33; Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama in the Middle Ages* (London, O.U.P., 1955), pp. 220-33; and J. W. Robinson, "The Art of the York Realist," *MP*, LX (1963), 241-51.
- ³² Chambers, *M.S.*, II, 340-41, 368-69.
- ³³ Cf. Smith, *Josep*. All quotations from Burton's list have been transcribed directly from the manuscript.
- ³⁴ Cf. M. D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1963), pp. 135-36.
- ³⁵ In the MS., "filius Herodis" and "nuncius" are added above the line. These parts may have been added later.
- ³⁶ See Chambers, *M.S.*, II, 370-71.
- ³⁷ See, for example, M. L. Spencer, *Corpus Christi Pageants in England* (New York, 1911), pp. 188-89, n. 10.
- ³⁸ It is worth inquiring how the proponents of a purely processional performance would explain the staging of the Noah play in the Towneley cycle. Without the presence of a heaven mansion, God, who has a prominent speaking part in the *Processus Noe*, would have to appear on the ark. York at least solves this problem by including two separate pageants.
- ³⁹ "The Date of the 'Wakefield Master'," 103.
- ⁴⁰ This pageant, as described in 1424 when it had been discontinued as an independent unit by the Saucemakers, is a good example of the trade symbolism and the spectacle which dominated the early Corpus Christi procession. The records indicate that "Judas se suspendebat et crepuit medius in ludo Corporis Christi" (*MB*, II, 171). Apparently, by some device not described, the hanging Judas "burst apart in the middle" wherever the pageant made its stop. Little imagination is needed to envisage the props supplied by the Saucemakers!
- ⁴¹ For example, the Payntors and Latoners who were assigned separate plays in the second list (the *Expansio* and *Levacio Christi* respectively) petitioned to amalgamate their pageants in 1422 (with the added provision that the Painters would from time to time be exempt from supporting a pageant altogether); see *MB*, II, 102-3. The 1415 list already combines these pageants and ascribes them collectively to the Pynners, Latoners, and Payntours.
- ⁴² If the two lists describe what were mainly *tableaux vivants* and not the plays of the register, M. G. Frampton's approach to the dating of the York and Wakefield cycles is untrustworthy. Frampton worked on the assumption that any changes which took place between 1415 and 1422 (the *terminus ad quem* for the second list) were changes in the plays proper. He concludes, for example, that in the years between 1415 and 1422 a play on "The Casting of Lots for Christ's Garments" was added to and in turn dropped from the York

- cycle. That play, Frampton believes, then made its way to Wakefield as the *Processus Talentorum*; see "The Processus Talentorum," *PMLA*, LIX (1944), 651-53.
- ⁴³ All references in the York civic records to delays in the procession occur before 1426; see *MB*, I, 51-2; the York "Proclamation" of 1415, *York Plays*, p. xxxiv; and the following statement from an entry dated 31 January, 9 Henry V (1422) in the *MB*: "ludus in die Corporis Christi in ista civitate, cujus institutio ob magnam devocionis causam . . . antiquitus facta fuit, heu plus solito impeditur pro multitudine paginarum, et nisi celerior et melior provideatur cautela, timendum est multo magis brevissime processu temporis impediri" (II, 102). Interestingly, the first reference to darkness hindering the performance of a play comes in c. 1432 (the date inferred by a reference to Thomas Snaudon as mayor) when the Goldsmiths complained that their play "ubi Fergus flagellatus erat" could not be performed "clara die, sicut faciunt pagine precedentes" (*MB*, II, 124). The indication is that the performance expanded into an all-day affair shortly after 1426.
- ⁴⁴ *Medieval York: A Topographical Survey Based on Original Sources* (London, 1955), pp. 177-80.
- ⁴⁵ Enterprising York citizens apparently built stands in front of their houses and sold seats for the processional riding. The city, in response, made an ordinance requiring such entrepreneurs to pay "tercium denarium monete sic recepte camerariis civitatis"; see *MB*, II, 63.
- ⁴⁶ *Mediaeval Plays in Scotland*, p. 63.
- ⁴⁷ Quoted by Stanley J. Kahrl, "Medieval Drama in Louth," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, X (1967), 131; Chambers, *M.S.*, II, 383.
- ⁴⁸ The plays, in fact, were suspended for three years during the 1560s, after the Ouse Bridge had collapsed as a result of a heavy snowfall; see R. B. Knight, pp. 409-10. The earliest extant map of York, that by John Speede, shows that the Ouse Bridge was still the only bridge within the city wall as late as 1610.
- ⁴⁹ Because very few guild records have survived from York, the payment of actors cannot be well documented. To my knowledge only the Bakers' and the Mercers' records survive, and even these are incomplete. Both, however, show payments to actors. The Bakers, between the years 1543 and 1557, recorded regularly the payment of 10s. 8d. for the "plaer" or the "plaers" of the pageant; see A. J. Mill, "The York Bakers' Play of the Last Supper," *MLR*, XXX (1935), 146-50. The first reference in the Mercers' records to the payment of actors occurs in 1453, when three men were paid ten pounds to bring out the pageant of "Domysday"; see M. Sellers, *The York Mercers and Merchant Adventurers, 1356-1917*, Surtees Soc., 129 (1918), p. xxiv.
- ⁵⁰ Quoted by N. Davis, ed., *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, EETS, Supplementary Text I (1970), p. xxvii. The same type of consolidation occurred in the later performances of the *N-Town* cycle.
- ⁵¹ I have found a total of seven references to pageants during this period, and of these two cannot be dated precisely; see *M.B.*, I, 69, 148 (?), 150-51, 160 (?); II, 123-24, 180-82; 193. The only other municipal records covering these years occur in the unpublished Chamberlains' Rolls and Books, but these are only partially preserved and confine themselves to outlays of expenses.
- ⁵² These two essential pageants may have served as well for ceremonial occasions, such as the elaborate royal entry spectacle for Henry VII in 1486. The *York Civic Records* describe the first exhibit as a place "craftely conceyved . . . in maner of a heven, of grete joy and anglicall armony; under the heven shalbe a world desolate, full of treys and floures . . ." (I, 156). It is known that such civic ceremonies borrowed stage effects and pageants from the Corpus Christi Play. In the same royal entry ceremony, the Weavers' pageant of the Assumption was rented for a sum of 4s.; see *TCR*, I, 159, n.