

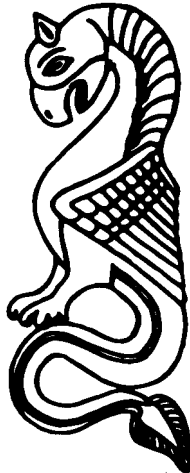
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**THE FIVE CYCLIC MANUSCRIPTS
OF THE CHESTER CYCLE OF MYSTERY PLAYS:
A STATISTICAL SURVEY OF VARIANT READINGS**

By R. M. LUMIANSKY and DAVID MILLS

In the course of preparing a new edition of the Chester cycle of mystery plays for the Early English Text Society,¹ we were faced with the problem of reducing the variant forms in the cyclic manuscripts to some organized system from which general trends could be easily discerned and preliminary decisions made. We decided that the most convenient system would be a series of statistical tables - a separate table for each variation-pattern showing the distribution of the pattern play by play throughout the cycle. These tables proved most helpful to us, but because they contained much information which we did not finally use, and because they were lengthy, we felt that we could not include them in the second volume of our edition. We are therefore most grateful to Professor Cawley for allowing us to present a selection from the tables in this volume of Leeds Studies in English.

It may be helpful at the outset to remind the reader of the five cyclic manuscripts of the Chester cycle, together with their dates, scribes, and the symbols by which we designate them throughout this discussion and in our edition:

Hm	Huntington Library 2	Edward Gregorie	1591
A	British Museum Additional 10305	George Bellin.	1592
R	British Museum Harley 2013	George Bellin	1600
B	Bodley 175	William Bedford	1604
H	British Museum Harley 2124	James Miller <u>et al.</u>	1607

When we had collated these manuscripts and gathered our statistics, two types of information seemed of only secondary value for our decisions, and such information is therefore not included here. Our primary concern was to decide which of the manuscripts would form the most convenient base for the edition. Since our initial choice lay among these five manuscripts, we confined our attention to variants involving the five and decided to

postpone consideration of variants involving fewer than five manuscripts (as when one or more manuscripts lacked a passage found in the others within which variation occurred). The most important effect of this decision was to exclude from initial consideration the whole of Play I (missing in Hm) and of Play V (the H-version of which we regard as a different play from that in the other manuscripts).

The second type of information not represented here has to do with variations in non-spoken material, such as stage directions, speech-headings, play-headings and guild-ascriptions, and Latin quotations. The scribes' attitude to this material, much of which is in Latin, seems to have been somewhat different from their attitude towards the spoken text. The scribes, particularly Bellin and Miller, felt freer to rearrange, or make substitutions within, this material; and while Bellin's variants often attest his weak Latin, Miller was not only a competent Latinist but seems to have decided to replace English stage directions by Latin equivalents. Moreover, the number of variants is too small to allow any overall picture to emerge, and we concluded that a statistical approach to such variants was not the most useful method of study.

The tables given here must be used with caution, remembering that the spoken variants listed in our edition are themselves a selection. We call them the "significant variants," which we define as "primarily . . . variants which affect the meaning of the text"; the implications of this definition are discussed in the section of Vol. I of our edition on Selection and Treatment of Variant Readings, to which readers of this article are referred. Readers should also remember that the statistics take no account of the character of the variation or of its presentation. A lengthy insertion/omission has no more statistical importance than a single lexical variant; and a variation involving two words in a phrase may be represented as two lexical variants or as a single phrasal variant, whichever is required for convenience and clarity. Finally, although continuing discussion since the tables were drawn up has brought about minor changes in the inclusion, exclusion and presentation of variant readings in the edition, we believe that the large number of variants minimizes the effect of any small changes which have subsequently been made. We would emphasize that the statistics form a basis for comparison but that they cannot be regarded as "absolutes"; different editorial principles of selection or presentation would yield different figures, but not, we feel, different conclusions.

Since the statistics were intended to provide a basis for preliminary decisions, their importance lies as much in the questions they raise as in the problems they solve. The answers to those questions lie in the detailed study of the character of the individual

variants which is the central concern of our discussion of textual problems in the second volume of the edition, and it is not our intention here to anticipate their solution. The figures, however, provide useful pointers on these issues.

1. Choice of Base Manuscript. Table I suggests that there are on average about 63 variants to every 100 lines, and Table 2 shows that the highest 4]1 variation-pattern is H's 17.60 variants to every 100 lines. Few of these variants extend beyond a phrase, many being limited to individual words, and there is substantial agreement among the five manuscripts over long passages. These facts suggest that there is no strong case for a parallel texts edition of the cycle.

Table 2, whose results may be conflated with the unique readings in Tables 4, 5 and 6, suggests that Hm has fewest forms which are not shared by one or more other manuscripts. R, its nearest rival in Table 2, can be shown to be a far weaker candidate both from the high number of unique forms in Table 4 under HmBH]A/R, and also from the large number of readings which Table 3 shows it to share with A. Thus Hm seems to provide the best textual "norm" for an edition, despite its lack of Play I. Its readings are not necessarily "older" or "better" than those of the other manuscripts, but it provides a more convenient base for an edition than the others do.

Yet the unique variants listed also suggest that there is a marked difference between the manuscripts, in that - with the exception of R - the later a manuscript, the greater the number of unique forms. Thus, while suggesting Hm as a suitable base, the tables also draw our attention to this interesting correlation which will require further consideration.

2. Manuscript Relationships. A further point arises from the unique readings. Table 2 shows that H has by far the largest number - over 1000 more than B. The basic division between H and "the Group" of ARB noted by H. Deimling² (to which Hm was added when it was rediscovered) is clearly demonstrated. The statistics do not show if the cause is error, deliberate "emendation," or reliance upon one or more different originals.

A second point, which appears most clearly in Table 3, although it is also evidenced from the AR agreements in Tables 5 and 6, is the very close relationship between A and R. Bellin obviously used his earlier manuscript when writing his later one, as critics have generally noted. But Table 2 shows that R has

fewer readings not found elsewhere than any other manuscript apart from Hm; it is closer to the norm than A. Moreover, it lacks about 700 A-forms and supplies over 450 of its own, a fact further confirmed by the large number of instances listed in Table 4 in which A and R differ in their treatment of the same base form. The subject for investigation is not the undoubted closeness of A and R, but the reason for R's more conservative approach.

Table 3 shows an appreciable measure of agreement between B and H. The possibility that B and H could be a sub-group is eliminated both by the large number of unique readings in each, as indicated by Table 2, and also by the fact that where both differ from the norm, there is a high probability that each will have a different form, as is shown in the B/H figures in Table 4. Here it is not the points at which the manuscripts differ which require investigation but those at which they agree.

No other sub-groups emerge from the tables, although each point of agreement among a number of the manuscripts demands close study of the nature of the variation.

The tables are not the most suitable guide to the nature of the exemplar or the exemplars. It might seem from them that Hm could have served as exemplar for at least AB, but a study of material found in other manuscripts and not in Hm eliminates that possibility.

3. Cycle or Play-collection. W. W. Greg³ once argued that Chester was a unified cycle and that it was also a single textual unit, so that a textual relationship which held good for one part of the cycle would hold good for the whole cycle. F. M. Salter⁴ argued that textually the cycle could be regarded as a collection of plays, each with its own textual history. The choice between these different approaches seems to us to depend at least in part upon the state of the exemplar and the habits of the scribes, neither of which can be demonstrated statistically. If the exemplar was much altered and difficult to read, and if the scribes were willing to "emend" or "substitute" where they could not read or understand, it would be difficult to explain variations in terms of transmission by a series of scribes over a period of time. Statistics cannot solve this problem, since a comparatively high or low number of variants may be a result of the state of the exemplar or of the scribe's notions of correctness.

The statistics do, however, indicate one interesting point, namely that H, although it very frequently has a high number of

unique readings, diverges markedly from the norm in only eleven of the twenty-three "five-manuscript" plays (i. e. excluding Plays I and V) here listed - II, III, IV, VII, VIII, XII, XVI, XVII, XX and XXI. This pattern contrasts with the comparatively consistent pattern of divergence of the other scribes throughout the cycle and requires a more detailed examination.

The above comments draw attention to some of the more important conclusions and directions pointed by the tables and also indicate some of the lines of inquiry which we are now considering. We hope that readers of our new edition will find these tables useful summaries of the variants which we have selected, and that the information they provide will be helpful in further discussions of the cycle.

Prefatory Note to Table 1

- (1) Play I is missing from Hm and the number of lines in the play listed below is that of the longest version, R; the 301 lines are regarded as a single variant, an Hm omission. Play V in H differs so markedly from Play V in HmARB that we regard it as a single large-scale difference, an HmARB]H variant.
- (2) A is damaged at the beginning and end. For convenience, in the edition we have included the readings in A's damaged lines among the variants. Since Play I is presented as a single variant, the figures for that play are unaffected by our editorial practice, but the numbers of variants listed under A for Play XXIV are affected by the inclusion of damaged lines.
- (3) Play XVI in H is presented as two plays in HmARB, the second bearing no number. We have therefore numbered the second play in HmARB as XVIA.

TABLE 1

CORRELATION OF NO. OF LINES WITH NO. OF 5-MS VRs

	<u>No. of Lines</u> <u>(Hrm)</u>	<u>No. of 5-MS</u> <u>VRs</u>
I	301	1
II	704	564
III	328	325
IV	491	412
V	455	1
VI	722	471
VII	696	670
VIII	421	363
IX	263	128
X	497	319
XI	334	142
XII	312	281
XIII	485	285
XIV	432	244
XV	366	159
XVI	394	315
XVIA	479	308
XVII	336	242
XVIII	432	222
XIX	275	148
XX	192	142
XXI	390	253
XXII	340	174
XXIII	722	374
XXIV	708	390
TOTALS	11,075	6,933

TABLE 2

READINGS FOUND IN ONE MS AND NOT IN THE OTHER FOUR MSS

4] 1

	ARBH] Hm	HmRBH] A	HmABH] R	HmARH] B	HmARB] H	TOTALS
I	1	0	0	0	0	1
II	47	54	33	44	229	407
III	19	18	21	35	108	201
IV	21	22	19	64	153	279
V	0	0	0	0	1	1
VI	37	62	39	76	55	269
VII	46	57	30	70	186	389
VIII	22	53	29	36	93	233
IX	11	16	10	23	17	77
X	27	38	31	54	44	194
XI	12	18	5	31	27	93
XII	13	13	10	36	115	187
XIII	31	25	34	43	40	173
XIV	16	25	22	54	42	159
XV	11	22	11	39	22	105
XVI	10	15	11	33	153	222
XVIA	9	18	11	20	161	219
XVII	6	12	6	24	120	168
XVIII	12	42	12	25	55	146
XIX	6	21	10	31	36	104
XX	10	8	7	19	55	99
XXI	14	28	16	36	68	162
XXII	14	24	16	30	24	108
XXIII	28	47	53	52	68	248
XXIV	24	80	31	55	77	267
TOTALS	447	718	467	930	1,949	4,511

TABLE 3

READINGS SHARED BY THREE MSS AND READINGS SHARED BY TWO MSS

3] 2

	RBH] HmA	ABH] HmR	ARH] HmB	ARB] HmH	HmBH] AR	HmRH] AB	HmRB] AH	HmA] RB	HmAB] RH	HmAR] BH	TOTALS
I	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
II	2	4	9	5	40	1	3	0	5	11	80
III	3	1	5	2	34	2	1	0	3	8	59
IV	1	3	5	3	29	3	2	1	4	17	68
V	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VI	1	0	5	9	79	4	1	4	3	15	121
VII	1	3	5	28	57	3	4	3	3	18	125
VIII	2	2	8	5	42	1	2	2	2	6	72
IX	0	1	1	2	26	1	0	0	2	2	35
X	2	2	4	4	42	2	1	5	0	6	68
XI	1	0	0	1	28	1	1	0	0	3	35
XII	0	0	11	2	24	0	0	0	2	7	46
XIII	0	0	4	5	51	1	0	2	2	12	77
XIV	0	0	3	3	33	0	0	1	0	10	50
XV	2	0	1	3	21	0	2	2	2	2	35
XVI	4	0	6	4	10	0	2	0	1	5	32
XVIA	0	2	4	4	24	0	1	0	1	7	43
XVII	0	1	2	3	16	0	4	0	0	2	28
XVIII	1	0	2	5	26	1	1	0	1	8	45
XIX	0	0	1	1	20	1	0	0	0	8	31
XX	1	1	1	2	13	0	0	0	0	4	22
XXI	1	0	5	5	22	2	1	3	0	3	42
XXII	0	0	4	4	27	0	1	1	0	6	43
XXIII	1	0	4	7	54	1	0	4	3	8	82
XXIV	0	2	11	2	49	0	1	2	1	7	75
TOTALS	23	22	101	109	767	24	28	30	35	175	1,314

TABLE 4

READINGS SHARED BY THREE MSS AND UNIQUE READINGS IN TWO MSS

3] 1/1

	RBH] Hm/A	ABH] Hm/R	ARH] Hm/B	ARB] Hm/H	HmBH] A/R	HmRH] A/B	HmRB] A/H	HmAH] R/B	HmAB] R/H	HmAR] B/H	TOTALS
I	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
II	5	0	0	8	3	1	10	0	4	13	44
III	0	1	1	3	4	4	2	1	4	12	32
IV	1	0	1	4	5	0	2	1	1	20	35
V	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VI	2	4	3	6	10	3	1	3	1	9	42
VII	8	0	9	15	7	2	9	4	8	12	74
VIII	1	1	2	0	8	1	7	4	0	3	27
IX	0	0	1	1	6	0	0	0	0	2	10
X	3	2	4	4	7	3	1	1	0	3	28
XI	0	0	0	0	6	0	1	1	0	0	8
XII	0	0	1	6	0	2	3	0	4	9	25
XIII	1	0	3	1	7	1	0	2	0	3	18
XIV	2	0	3	3	5	1	2	0	2	3	21
XV	1	0	0	1	3	0	0	2	0	1	8
XVI	1	1	3	5	4	2	7	1	6	6	36
XVIA	1	1	0	1	3	1	5	0	3	10	25
XVII	0	0	4	4	3	2	3	0	0	6	22
XVIII	0	0	1	2	6	2	4	1	1	3	20
XIX	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	6
XX	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	6	12
XXI	4	1	2	5	4	0	1	2	2	10	31
XXII	1	0	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	2	11
XXIII	1	0	3	1	4	3	2	2	1	4	21
XXIV	2	0	2	4	4	2	5	1	3	4	27
TOTALS	35	12	46	77	102	32	67	26	43	143	583

TABLE 5

READINGS SHARED BY TWO MSS, DIFFERENT READINGS SHARED BY TWO MSS,
 UNIQUE READINGS IN ONE MS

2] 2/1

	HmA] RB/H	HmA] RH/B	HmA] BH/R	HmR] AB/H	HmR] AH/B	HmR] BH/A	HmB] AR/H	HmB] AH/R	HmB] RH/A	HmH] AR/B	HmH] AB/R	HmH] RB/A	AR] BH/Hm	AB] RH/Hm	AH] RB/Hm	TOTALS
I	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
II	0	0	0	0	0	1	12	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	19
III	0	0	0	1	0	1	8	3	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	17
IV	0	0	0	0	1	1	7	2	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	16
V	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VI	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	2	7	0	2	7	2	1	25
VII	1	0	0	1	0	2	20	1	0	9	1	3	4	1	0	43
VIII	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	1	2	4	2	1	3	0	1	20
IX	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
X	1	1	1	0	0	1	3	1	0	2	0	0	6	0	0	16
XI	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
XII	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	11
XIII	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	1	0	2	0	0	12
XIV	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	1	3	1	0	11
XV	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	8
XVI	2	0	0	0	1	1	6	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	14
XVIA	1	1	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
XVII	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	6
XVIII	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
XIX	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	6
XX	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	6
XXI	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	1	3	0	1	1	0	0	13
XXII	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	1	8
XXIII	0	0	3	0	0	0	5	0	0	7	0	0	1	0	0	16
XXIV	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	0	18
TOTALS	6	4	10	5	2	13	115	10	7	62	4	10	46	7	6	307

TABLES 6 AND 7

6. READINGS SHARED BY TWO MSS AND UNIQUE READINGS IN THE OTHER THREE MSS
7. UNIQUE READINGS IN ALL FIVE MSS

2] 1/1/1

1/1/1/1/1

	HmA]	R/B/H	HmR]	A/B/H	HmB]	A/R/H	HmH]	A/R/B	AR]	Hm/B/H	AB]	Hm/R/H	AH]	Hm/R/B	RB]	Hm/A/H	RH]	Hm/A/B	BH]	Hm/A/R		Hm/A/R/B/H	TOTALS
I	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
II	0	1	2	2	5	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	14
III	0	4	5	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	16
IV	1	0	2	1	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	14
V	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VI	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3	3	14
VII	1	3	6	4	13	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	6	6	39
VIII	0	1	4	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	11
IX	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
X	0	2	0	3	4	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	13
XI	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
XII	1	2	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	12
XIII	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	5
XIV	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
XV	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
XVI	2	3	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	11
XVIA	1	1	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	9
XVII	0	2	4	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	18
XVIII	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	7
XIX	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
XX	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
XXI	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
XXII	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
XXIII	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	7
XXIV	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
TOTALS	9	23	33	29	68	3	2	5	5	16	3	2	5	5	5	16	16	16	16	16	25	25	218

NOTES

- 1 R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, The Chester Mystery Cycle, a two-volume edition; Vol. I, Text, including variant readings, to be published by EETS in 1974 as Supplementary Series 3.
- 2 H. Deimling, The Chester Plays, EETS, ES, 62 (1892), pp. xvii-xxviii.
- 3 W. W. Greg, "Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Miracle Cycles," The Library, V (1914), 25-6, 179-80; a modified statement appears in The Play of Antichrist from the Chester Cycle (Oxford, 1935), pp. xiii-xiv.
- 4 F. M. Salter, The Trial and Flagellation with Other Studies in the Chester Cycle (ed. W. W. Greg), Malone Society Studies (Oxford, 1935), pp. 31-2; also, his review of Greg's edition of "Antichrist," RES, XIII (1937), 341-52.