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THREE SOUTH ENGLISH LEGENDARY NATIVITY POEMS

By O.S. PICKERING

Revision of existing literary works is common in the Middle English period, and seems frequently to have been preferred to fresh composition. Like the successive copying of popular texts over a wide span of years, such revision raises questions about the conservatism of medieval taste, the concept of authorship, the continued ability to compose in particular styles, and the amount of literature actually in circulation. But revision further implies, at the very least, that the existing text was not to the reviser's purpose, and this is especially the case with religious verse, whose content was a vehicle for strongly-held opinions and universal concern. Thus objection might be taken to the inclusion or omission of a particular fact, story or doctrine; greater emphasis on certain aspects might be desired to suit personal inclination or a change in the religious climate; a more didactic intention might require additional explicitness; or inspiration may lead a writer to add more.

With these general observations in mind, I propose to discuss specific revisions in the late thirteenth-century *South English Legendary* (*SEL*). Constantly revised in the course of two hundred years, it spread to many different parts of the country and was, it seems, put to different uses by different people. Many of its saints' lives¹ exist in more than one form, while the associated *temporale* narratives, unrestricted by calendrical limitations, and with a less stable place in the collection, were freely developed out of one another.² The *South English Nativity of Mary and Christ* (*NMC*),³ one of the earliest *temporale* poems, exists in three versions: (a) the original; (b) an expanded form; and (c) an altered form based on (b). It was seemingly to remedy (a)'s narrative deficiencies that the (b) version was made, for it inserts several episodes omitted in (a) (principally the Conception and Birth of John the Baptist, and the Visitation), taking its extra material from another *temporale* poem, the *Abridged Life of Christ*, which is itself partly dependent on the (a) version. The principal innovation in (c) is to replace the Massacre of the Innocents with its own more dramatic account, thereafter omitting all subsequent material in favour of a concluding prayer to the Virgin.

NMC (a) is closely related to two other *SEL* Nativity poems, the *Conception of Mary* (*CM*), and its continuation, the *Expanded Nativity* (*EN*). These three well illustrate both the subtleties of Middle English revision and (as not infrequently happens) the

difficulty of distinguishing the original composition. In her article on the *temporale* narratives,⁴ Minnie E. Wells held that *CM* and *EN* (to which she referred together as the 'Concepcio Marie', although aware that two authors were involved)⁵ were the source of *NMC* (which, with its own later continuation, the *Ministry and Passion*, she referred to as the 'Long Life of Christ', thinking them to constitute a single poem). She did not, however, present any evidence for this conclusion beyond a misguided attempt, based on a corrupt manuscript, to show that "the text of the *Long Life* is less accurate than that of the *Concepcio*" (p. 332). Close examination in fact establishes that *NMC* (a) was written first, and that *CM* and *EN* were adapted from it.

The Nativity of Mary and Christ and the Conception of Mary

The 814-line *NMC* (a) describes the Nativity story from the marriage of Joachim and Anne as far as Christ among the Doctors in Jerusalem. *CM*, 280 lines long, begins with an 84-line prologue, after which ll. 85-280 follow *NMC* 7-192 so closely in taking events down to the end of Mary's Betrothal that there is virtually line-by-line correspondence between them. Usually the differences are merely of phrasing, *CM* showing more verbal economy, but on several occasions the texts diverge sufficiently to establish the version in *NMC* as the original.

(1) The first divergence occurs during Anne's grief at Joachim's disappearance after the rejection of his offering in the temple. *NMC* reads:⁶

Gret deol made Anne at hom for hym, ne myhte no womman more;
In an herber heo sat a day, wepinge wel sore.
Heo wrong er honden and cryede on God, vnder a lorer tre,
And as heo lokede vward toward Ihesu Crist heo gan peron yse
A sparwe nest wip 3onge bryddes: 'Lord, þyn ore', heo sede,
'Eche þyng bote vs þou sendest ioye and eche þyng of is
blede', (57-62)

and *CM*:⁷

Gret deol made his wif vor him, : no womman miȝte more.
As heo was in morninge adai : wepinge wel sore
& gan to wringe hire honde: : swete lord, heo sede,
Eche þing þu ȝeuest Joie : & eche þing of blede.

(135-8) p. 72

NMC's version corresponds to Chapter 2 of one of its principal sources (either direct or indirect), the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*: "Et dum nimis fleret in viridiario domus suae, in oratione elevans oculos suos ad dominum vidit nidum passerum in arbore lauri, et emisit vocem cum gemitu ad dominum dicens: Domine deus omnipotens, qui omni creaturae donasti filios . . . me solam a benignitatis tuae dono exclusis?"⁸ The author of *CM* seems to have omitted deliberately

all reference to the sparrows by joining the second half of *NMC* 61 to the first half of 59.

(2) A few lines later there is another divergence:

þo com an aungel þere to hire: 'Ne doute þe noþing', he
seide,
'For þat child þat þou on erþe schalt bere is al by Godes
rede.'
(67-8)

þo com þus an angel to hire; : doute þe noȝt! he seide,
Icham þe angel þt habbe ibore : bifore god þi godhede;
A douȝter þu schalt her bere : al bi godes rede,
Marie schal hire name beo, : þt holi lif schal lede.
(143-6) p. 72

As *CM* this time has the longer text, it at first looks as if *NMC*'s author has left out two lines necessary to make the angel's message explicit, since this is the first time that Anne has heard that she will bear a child. But *NMC* again agrees with *Pseudo-Matthew* - "apparuit angelus domini dicens: Noli timere Anna, quoniam in consilio dei est germen tuus" (Tischendorf, p. 57) - whereas *CM*'s version follows the apocryphal *Gospel of the Birth of Mary*, Chapter 4: "Ne timeas Anna, neque phantasma putes esse quod vides. Ego enim sum angelus ille qui preces et eleemosynas vestras obtuli in conspectu dei, et nunc missus sum ad vos ut annuntiem vobis nascituram filiam quae Maria vocata super omnes mulieres erit benedicta" (Tischendorf, p. 115). This abridgement of *Pseudo-Matthew* was adopted by Jacobus de Voragine as the basis of his chapter on the Nativity of the Virgin in the *Legenda aurea*, the version of the *Birth of Mary* that normally influenced Middle English verse narratives. Only when *CM* diverges from *NMC* do we find in either poem material from the *Birth of Mary* omitted by Jacobus, as here (for Jacobus gives no details of the content of the angel's message to Anne)⁹ and in two other passages discussed below. In this first case the author of *CM* may have found *NMC* 67-68 too elliptical.

(3) *CM* next has four lines on Mary's birthplace not in *NMC*:

In ierl̄m heo was ibore : In hire fader house iwis
Biside þe ȝate of iosaphat, : þt nouȝe an abbei is
In honourance of s. anne : of blake nonnerie,
In þe stude þer heo was bore : þe swete maide marie.
(161-4) p. 74

These occur between *NMC* 82-83, immediately after Mary's birth, and relate information which, if present in his exemplar, a later writer would seem unlikely to leave out, but there is evidence that they have been added. Although Jerusalem is said by *Pseudo-Matthew* to be where Joachim lives (Tischendorf, p. 54), *NMC* 13 and the parallel *CM* 91 follow the *Legenda aurea* (Graesse, pp. 587, 589) in giving his home as Galilee, and later, after *CM* has ended, *NMC* 198 and 756-757 explicitly record that Mary was born in Nazareth. *CM* 161-165 are therefore probably an addition to the original narrative.

(4) The next divergence occurs during Mary's childhood in the temple:

Fort eue heo was panne in her bedes, wiþ word and ek wiþ
 pouhte;
 panne cam an aungel eche day to hire fram heuene and mete
 er brouhte.
 Lute [oper] mete me sey her ete, ac þat heo wan wiþ er honde
 Among pore men heo deled it al, and lyuede by Godes sonde.
 (117-20)
 In hire beden heo wolde þenne beo : vorte eue wel softe.
 To hire angeles come al day : & confortede hire wel ofte.
 (199-200) p. 76

The second passage (*CM*) leaves out all reference to Mary's food, but whether or not this was the author's intention in diverging from *NMC*, *CM* 200 corresponds to the similarly general statement in the *Birth of Mary*: "Quotidie namque ab angelis frequentabatur, quotidie divina visione fruebatur, quae eam a malis omnibus custodiebat et bonis omnibus redundare faciebat" (Tischendorf, p. 117). *NMC* 117-120, on the other hand, agree with Chapter 6 of *Pseudo-Matthew* (Tischendorf, pp. 63-64).

(5) Lines 223-236 provide the most clear-cut proof of alteration on the part of the author of *CM*, for here the revision of *NMC* is carried out without proper regard to the sense. When Mary reaches the marriageable age of fourteen, the priests' dilemma about her future is resolved by a heavenly voice which in *NMC*, as in the *Legenda aurea* (Graesse, p. 589), without preliminaries gives instructions for choosing her spouse:

A voys þer com fro heuene and het þat þei scholden take
 Alle men of Dauydis kynde þat weren wiþoute make
 And þat of helde weren to habben wyf - and þat eche of hem
 bere
 A bare 3erd to þe auter, as Byathar þe bischop hem scholde
 lere;
 And wheches 3erde bygonne to blowe and a coluer þeron
 ybrouht,
 þat [þei] bytoken hym Marye to spouse - þat þei [bileuen it]
 nouht.
 (143-8)

In contrast, *CM* first has the voice explain this ritual in terms of Isaiah's prophecy (xi. 1-2):

þo com a uois to hem & sede: : þencheþ in isaie!
 þt maide ches hire spouse : þoru his prophecie.
 Nou sede isaye : þt þer scholde springe
 A 3erde of Jessees more : of dauid þe kyng,
 & aflour scholde springe : of þulke more also,
 & þer vppe ali3te þe holi gost : & come so þerto.
 (223-8) p. 76

This agrees with Chapter 7 of the *Birth of Mary*, and in both this work and *CM* the voice gives no further instructions, but leaves the high priest and his fellows to decide what to do:

Her þoru þis men wuste : hou hi scholde on take.
 Of dauies kunde he het eche man, : þt was wippoute make
 & of elde to habbe wif, : þt ech of hem bere
 A 3erde to þe auter, : þt non vorbore nere;
 & wuche 3erde bigonne to blowe : & a coluere þer vppe
 ibro3t,
 þt he tok marie to spouse, : þt it nere bileued no3t.
 (229-34) pp. 76, 78

Apart from changes necessary to make it fit the new speakers, this passage closely corresponds to *NMC* 143-148 quoted above. But then *CM* falls into error, prompted by *NMC*'s repetition in the high priest's mouth of the voice's instructions, a repetition unauthorized by the Latin sources:

Glad was þe bischop þo of þis tokenynge; sone he let crye
 þere,
 þat alle þat were of Dauydis kynde a 3erd to þe auter bere.
 (149-50)

Forgetting the alterations of a few lines earlier, *CM* unthinkingly preserves this couplet of *NMC*'s, with the result that it makes the high priest give out the same order for the second time:

þe biscop was þo glad Inou3, : he let crie þere
 Al þt were of dauies kunde : a3erde to þe auter bere.
 (235-6) p. 78

(6) Finally, *CM* ends with a couplet (not in *NMC*) which lessens the harshness of *NMC*'s conclusion to its short discourse, after the Betrothal, on the three states of womanhood. To *NMC*'s:

Heo was mayde and wyf and wydewe; hose nys non of þe þre,
 Bote heo come to amedement of hire may heo nout be,
 (191-2)

it adds:

Ac napeles þer wippoute : me mai ifynde some,
 Ac, 3if god wole, hi mowe amende, : ar hi to deþe come.
 (279-80) p. 80

Its author clearly felt some rounding-off to be necessary.

Although the *CM* reviser's motives for introducing these half-dozen changes may be difficult to assess with certainty, the fundamental reason for his revision of *NMC*'s account of Mary's Conception, Childhood, and Betrothal into a separate poem is suggested by *CM*'s position in the manuscripts which preserve it. Whereas *NMC* is normally found outside the *SEL*'s cycle of saints' lives, *CM* occurs

in a calendrical position in two of the three manuscripts that preserve it complete: in Ashmole 43 (ff. 208v-212r) it is placed for 8 December, the Feast of the Conception of the Virgin, and in Pepys 2344 (pp. 353-358) for 26 July, the Feast of St Anne.¹⁰ It would seem that the reviser wished to provide an item of similar length to most of the saints' lives to fill a gap in the calendrical sequence. M.E. Wells (p. 330) suggested that *CM* was written for St Anne's Day, but the Feast of the Conception is more likely, particularly in view of the Advent theme of the poem's lengthy prologue. This, which celebrates mankind's good fortune in Christ's Incarnation and is set apart from normal *SEL* verse-style by its greater lyricism and its use of internal rhyme, provides one final piece of evidence for *CM*'s indebtedness to *NMC*. Among the prophets who yearn in this prologue for Christ's Advent is Simeon:

Him longede ek after is face : þe holi symeon,
 & alle blisse him was bynome, : & ofte gradde bifore:
 Louerd, wanne woltou come? : wenne woltou be ibore?
 Wene 3e ic mowe dure? : wene 3e ic mowe ise? (56-9) p. 66

Lines 58-59 derive from two lines (587-588) of the passage in *NMC* on Simeon, preceding the Purification:

So grete wil he hadde him to abyde þat whanne + any wis
 man com,
 For he hopede here of him tidinge esche he wolde ylome:
 'Wenestou out þat he wole be ybore, and þat ich mowe him
 yse?
 Wenestou out þat Y dure mowe fort he ybore be?' (585-8)

CM's author, it seems, has rewritten lines from a much later passage in *NMC*'s narrative, and fitted them into his discursive prologue.

The Expanded Nativity and the Nativity of Mary and Christ

EN, which runs to 897 lines in its principal manuscript, Egerton 1993 (ff. 30r-40r),¹¹ begins with the Annunciation to Zacharias and, like *NMC* (a), ends inconclusively, after the account of Christ among the Doctors, with a sketch of the political situation in Israel at the time of the Ministry. As the following analysis indicates, it comprises chronologically-arranged versions of those liturgical gospels containing the story of Christ's Nativity and Infancy, alternated with passages borrowed or adapted from *NMC* 193-814.¹² There are, however, a good many lines from neither source which, if not linking-passages, usually consist of additional comment or information. The analysis shows as precisely as possible the linear parallels between *EN* and *NMC* (a), but in the case of the gospel paraphrases it has not for the present purpose seemed useful to distinguish translation from supplementary matter. The bracketed numbers in the left-hand column refer to the lineation in Horstmann's edition.¹³

- 1-46 (277-322) Annunciation to Zacharias : Luke i. 5-24
- 47-53 (323-329) Joseph and Mary's separation after the Betrothal : *NMC* 193-200
- 54-90 (330-366) Annunciation to Mary : Luke i. 26-38
- 91-138 (367-414) Visitation : Luke i. 39-56
- 139-192 (415-468) Birth of John the Baptist : Luke i. 57-79
- 193-196 (469-472) Joseph's return to Nazareth : *NMC* 245-248
- 197-216 (473-492) Joseph's trouble about Mary : Matt. i. 18-25
- 217-252 (493-528) Journey to Bethlehem, Birth of Christ, Annunciation to the Shepherds : Luke ii. 1-14
- 253-372 (529-648) The Census, Journey to Bethlehem, Birth of Christ, Midwives, Shepherds : *NMC*, as follows:
EN 253-262/*NMC* 325-334; *EN* 265-268/*NMC* 335-338;
EN 273-286/*NMC* 343-356; *EN* 297-312/*NMC* 359-374;
EN 327-330/*NMC* 377-378, 375-376; *EN* 341-342/*NMC* 379-380; *EN* 343-354/*NMC* 385-396.
- 373-404 (649-680) Adoration of the Shepherds, Circumcision : Luke ii. 15-21
- 405-438 (681-714) Death of the Sodomites, the Magi's departure for Judaea : *NMC* 457-490
- 439-478 (715-754) Adoration of the Magi : Matt. ii. 1-12
- 479-550 (755-826) The Magi's journey, gifts, adoration, departure, and death : *NMC*, as follows:
EN 479-506/*NMC* 491-518; *EN* 507-512/*NMC* 537-542;
EN 517-524/*NMC* 543-550; *EN* 527-528/*NMC* 565-566;
EN 529-531/*NMC* 555-558; *EN* 533-536/*NMC* 561-564
- 551-586 (827-862) Purification : Luke ii. 22-32
- 587-620 (863-896) Purification, Simeon : *NMC*, as follows:
EN 587-588/*NMC* 567-568; *EN* 593-600/*NMC* 571-578;
EN 605-616/*NMC* 581-592
- 621-632 (897-908) Simeon's prophecies : Luke ii. 33-35
- 633-652 (909-928) Their meaning : *NMC*, as follows
EN 633-644/*NMC* 603-614
- 653-666 (929-942) Anna, and the return home : Luke ii. 36-40

- 667-710 (943-986) Herod's journey to Rome, and burning of the ships : *NMC*, as follows:
EN 671-702/*NMC* 617-646; *EN* 705-710/*NMC* 647-652
- 711-742 (987-1018) Flight into Egypt, Slaughter of the Innocents :
 Matt. ii. 13-18
- 743-812 (1019-88) Herod's wickedness, Journey into and life in Egypt, Herod's death : *NMC*, as follows:
EN 743-744/*NMC* 663-664; *EN* 745-746/*NMC* 667-668;
EN 751-764/*NMC* 669-682; *EN* 765-780/*NMC* 717-732
- 813-826 (1089-102) Return from Egypt : Matt. ii. 19-23
- 827-830 (1103-06) Why Jesus was called 'of Nazareth' : *NMC* 757-760
- 831-872 (1107-48) Christ among the Doctors : Luke ii. 40-52
 (*EN* 831-860), but also *NMC*, as follows:
EN 849-850/*NMC* 785-786; *EN* 851-852/*NMC* 789-790;
EN 862-864/*NMC* 792-794; *EN* 867-870/*NMC* 765-768
- 873-897 (1149-73) The political situation in Israel : *NMC*, as follows:
EN 873-887/*NMC* 797-812

The main non-biblical narrative episodes in *EN*, but not *NMC*, are the death of the Magi, 537-550 (813-826); the Holy Family's life in Egypt, 781-790 (1057-66); and the death of Herod, 791-812 (1067-88).

At first *EN* makes only sporadic use of *NMC*, as, for example, of ll. 245-248. These are part of a longer passage that corresponds to *Pseudo-Matthew*, Chapter 10:

þo vr leudey þoru þe Holy Gost as 3e hereþ mid childe was,
 Iosep was euere in Bethleem and nuste nout of þis cas.
 Aboute is nedes and is mester ney monþes he was þere;
 In wynter he wente to is wif, as hit ful in þe 3ere.
 þo fond he is wyf myd childe grete: Lord, þat him was wo!
 'Miscas,' he seyde, 'ichabbe ynou, þei ich nadde no mo.'
 (245-50)

EN's author, having translated the Benedictus, inserts a couplet of his own (191-192), rewrites *NMC* 245-248 to fit the new context (193-196), and then (the repetitions revealing the break in continuity) embarks on the gospel version of Joseph's trouble:

Bileue now of sein Jon . and of Zakarie,
 And telle we forþ, as we bigonne, . of iosep and of marie!
 In his owne contrey in bedleem . nize monþes iosep was,
 After þat is wif wiþ childe, . he nuste no3t of þe cas,

Aboute his mester and his nede, . to winnen him spense þere;
 In winter he wende to is wif, . as hit fel in þe zere.
 þo marie, ihs moder, . & iosep spoushod nome,
 Heo was ifounde hire wombe fol, . ar heo to gadere come ...
 (191-8) pp. 86-7

From l. 253 onwards, however, *EN* draws extensively on *NMC*. The direction of the influence is not always obvious, for the reviser does not simply borrow from or rephrase *NMC*, but alternately expands and abridges it, with no little skill and care. An examination of 253-372 will illustrate his procedure and achievements.

EN 253-262, 265-268, on the imperial census, correspond exactly to *NMC* 325-338; but *EN* 263-264, 269-272, not in *NMC*, supply further information on the tax which could seemingly have equally been part of the original composition:

And vch peni þat me him sende . was worp oþer tene
 Of comune moneie þt was þo, . haupte hadde inow to spene.
 (263-4) p. 89
 Here was þe lond of Jude furst . vnder rome ibrougt,
 To 3iue vche 3er þider truage, . þat dere was seþþe a bougt;
 Vor heo þat weren vnder þe emperour . paynimes were echon,
 And heo of Jude alle giwes, . here kinde nas not on.
 (269-72) pp. 89-90

However, the first addition (source material found, for example, in Chapter 6 of the *Legenda aurea* (Graesse, p.40)) is placed after instead of before the aside of 261-262, which in *NMC* (333-334) naturally concludes the discussion of the pence:

And nabeles ic may it leue . þt he ne dude as wel for þanne
 Vor þe loue of þe panes, . as to wite þe nombre of vche
 manne.
 (261-2) p. 89

EN 263-264 consequently read like an afterthought inserted by a later writer.

NMC 339-342, Joseph summoned to Bethlehem, are not found in *EN*, presumably because the matter has already been told in the preceding gospel paraphrase, but *EN* 273-286 correspond to *NMC* 343-356 which, unlike Luke, describe the Journey in detail. *EN* then adds a further ten lines on the stable, material again found in the *Legenda aurea* (Graesse, p. 41):

A mersorie hit was icleped; . amidde þe weie it was,
 Side walles hit hedde to, . ac non helewouþer nas:
 Hit was opene at eiper ende, . to gon yn al þat wolde.
 Vor þre þing hit furst arered was, . þat hous of such folde:
 þat men mihte þe haliday . þer inne pleize and wende
 And sitte vor idelnesse . and driue þe day to ende,
 And þat men mihte þer inne go, . whanne it luper weder were,
 And þat pore men þer inne leiþe . þat wiþ outen yn were.

þis was to akinges burþtime . awonder yn inome.
 Glad was 3et oure ledi . heo mi3te þer inne come.
 (287-96) p. 90

However, the first line adapts a phrase found in *NMC* 357 ("Amydde þe heye weye it stood"), while the last neatly picks up *NMC* 358: "Glad was Iosep and is wyf þat þei myhte þere byleue".

EN 297-312, a legendary amplification of the Birth of Christ, correspond to *NMC* 359-374, but the unique 313-326, reflections on Mary's miraculous and painless childbearing, proclaim themselves by both their content and style to be the work of a separate author. Especially noticeable is the rhetorical questioning of 315-318, lines distinguished by their gentle lyricism, sudden contemporary focus, and sense of personal concern:

Whar was as al þe nobleye, . þat fel to aquene,
 At akinges burþtime, . whar was hit isene?
 Ledics and chamberleins, . scarlet to drawe and grene,
 To winden ynne þe 3onge king? . al was lute, ich wene.
 (315-8) p. 91

The voice is not that of *NMC*, nor of the *SEL* in general.

The reviser then places *NMC* 377-378 (on St Helena and the hay) before 375-376 (the ox and the ass), possibly to clear the ground for another addition, ten lines on the beasts' homage to Christ (331-340). *NMC* returns to this subject later (399-400), making the ox and ass the first of a series of miraculous witnesses of the Nativity (a section *EN* largely omits):

Of þe [miracle] of þe bestes 3e habbeþ iherd, of þe oxe and
 þe asse byfore:
 Hou þei kneleden a3en him þat hem made, þo he was ybore.
 (399-400)

This admitted repetition might be thought to cast doubt on *NMC*'s originality, especially as *EN* 331-334 follow on easily from 329-330 (*NMC* 375-376):

Boþe þe asse and þe oxe, . þo me oure lord to hem brou3te,
 A3ein him kneleden boþe . and honoureden him þat hem
 wrou3te.
 Now was þis awonder dede . and a3e kunde inow;
 Vor wel ichot þat oxen kunne . bet now drawe ate plow,
 And asses bere sakes . and corn aboute to bringe,
 þan to make meri gleo . and knele bi fore a kinge.
 (329-34) p. 92

But these contemporary reflections are again stylistically distinct, while *EN*'s next, very short, couplet:

Vor, 3e seþ wel, fewe bestes . more bostor beþ,
 þan asse oþer oxe, . as 3e ofte iseoþ, (335-6)

looks to be a strained expansion of *NMC* 401: "Wel 3e witeþ þat þe oxe and þe asse boystes bestes bep". *EN* 337-340, taking up the idea of *NMC* 402-404, are then again of a quality and immediacy unparalleled in the other poem:

How coupen heo here legges bowen . & here knen so to wende,
 To knele bifore a king? . who made hem so hende?
 Now weren hit wonder gleomen to, . who brou3te hem such mod?
 Ac whan we habbeþ al ido, . þat child ibore was god.
 (337-40) p. 92

EN 341-354 correspond to *NMC* 379-396, the story of the midwives, except for the omission of *NMC* 381-384, possibly because they contribute little to the narrative. Thereafter *NMC* begins its account of the witnesses, while *EN* adds eighteen more lines on the circumstances of the Nativity (355-372). The first six of these are derived from ll. 111-118 of the *SEL's Anastasia*,¹⁴ and vigorously refute the legend of the saint's presence at the Birth. The remaining twelve explain, on the lines of the *Legenda aurea* (Graesse, p. 45), why the shepherds were watching their flocks on midwinter's night; they serve to introduce the subsequent translation from Luke ii.

The remainder of *EN* could be similarly analyzed, but for reasons of space I shall concentrate on instances where manipulation of *NMC* seems undeniable. These range from the rewriting of single lines to selection from and rearrangement of a whole passage.

(1) *NMC* 555-558, on the Adoration of the Magi, read:

þei come in and founde þat swete bern myd is moder Marie,
 Ac Iosep ne founde þei nout leste þei þouhte folye
 - [þat þe] child hadde is sone ybe, and þat þe moder
 vnclene were.
 þes þre kynges seten adoun on kne and here presauns him
 bere.
 (555-8)

EN borrows the first three of these lines as 529-531, but as the presentation of the gifts has already been described in its gospel translation (471-473), *NMC* 557 is twisted and 558 replaced by an expletive:

þat þe child hedde is sone ibeo, . & þat þe child hedde
 beo vnclene;
 Ne sei3en heo nou3t bote god, . to mis þenche nou3t ene.
 (531-2) p. 98

(2) Later, when he finds himself speaking for a second time of Simeon's desire to see Christ, the author of *EN* deliberately recasts *NMC*:

Answere he hadde of þe Holy Gost, þat he ne scholde neuir
 dyen
 Ar he yseye our lord ybore on erþe wyþ is eyen,
 (589-90)

so that he can fit in an acknowledgement of the repetition:

Of þe holi gost he hedde onswere, . as we seide bi fore
 þat he ne scholde neuer þene dep þole, . ar he seiþe god
 ibore. (613-4) p. 100

This refers back to 565-567 in the preceding gospel translation.

(3) A more complicated case, involving alteration of the couplet scheme, is *NMC* 641-646 (i.) and *EN* 695-702 (ii.). The subject is David's supposed prophecy of Herod's burning of the ships, Psalm *xlvi*. 4-7 (*xlvii*. 5-8):

(i.) þat kynges of erþe wondry scholde and oure lord iknowe nouht,
 Ac whanne þei him yseye drede sore scholde [and] ystourbled
 be of here þouht,
 And of anguyses [as] of a womman þat in trauayle of childe
 were,
 And defouly wiþ wel hasty red þe schipes of Tars þere.
 þis was ysed by þe kyng Heroudes þat in angwisch was and
 drede,
 And defouledede alle þe schipes of Tars wiþ wel hasty rede.
 (641-6)

(ii.) þat þe kingus here of erþe . to gadere beþ ibrouþt
 And wondreden, whanne heo seiþe oure lord, . & destorbed
 were in here þouþt,
 And also imeued ek, . and mucþe drede hem nome þere
 And sor, as of awommon . þt in trauail of child were,
 And deolfoliche þe schipes of thars . wiþ wel hasti breþe.
 þis was seid bi eroudes, . as it miþte wel eþe,
 þat destourbed was and imeued, . & in anguise & in drede
 Defouledede þe schipes of thars . wiþ wel hasti rede.
 (695-702) p. 103

It may look as if *NMC* has accidentally omitted *EN* 697, in consequence got its couplets out of joint, and recovered by combining *EN* 700-701 into one line, 645. But *EN*'s version is unusually repetitious (especially in 697 and 701), and includes an ungrammatical line (699), a break of sense in mid-couplet (699-700), and a patent fill-in ("as it miþte wel eþe", 700). Lines 695-699 are in fact closely based on the Vulgate: "Quoniam ecce reges terrae congregati sunt: conuenerunt in unum. Ipsi uidentes sic admirati sunt, conturbati sunt, commoti sunt: Tremor apprehendit eos. Ibi dolores ut parturientis, In spiritu uehementi conteres naves Tharsis". Evidently unsatisfied with *NMC*'s version, the author of *EN* returned to the Psalter for a more authentic account, but nevertheless preferred to adapt *NMC* rather than make a new translation. Awkwardly,

the result was five lines instead of the four of *NMC*'s freer rendering. In order to get the couplets running correctly the reviser consequently expanded *NMC* 645 by inserting "as it miȝte wel epe/pat destourbed was and imeued" (700-701).

(4) Earlier, when *NMC* ends its section on the Purification at l. 616, having treated only half of Simeon's prophecies and Anna not at all, it seems as though *EN* preserves the more original text, for it carries on (as we should expect), to deal with the remainder of the episode as told by Luke. Overall, however, *EN* discusses the prophecies (Luke ii. 34-35) not in the biblical order of its earlier translation (623-632), as would be natural if it were indeed the original, but in the order imposed by *NMC* which selects only "Ecce positus est hic in ruinam, et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel" and "Et tuam ipsius animam pertransibit gladius" (*NMC* 601-616, *EN* 633-644). As a result, *EN* returns in 645-646 to the intervening "et in signum, cui contradicetur", and in 647-652 passes to the final dictum, "ut revelentur ex multis cordibus cogitationes". It then adds fourteen lines on Anna and on the Holy Family's return home, paraphrased from Luke ii. 36-40. Again, therefore, we see the reviser filling out the existing poem by drawing more material from the Bible.

(5) My final example comes from the passage on Christ among the Doctors where, as often, in *NMC* continuous narrative is interspersed with, and in *EN* the gospel story followed by, additional circumstantial explanation. Much of the extra-biblical matter in *EN* (861-872) is selected from *NMC* and rearranged, 862-864 corresponding to *NMC* 792-794, and 867-870 to the much earlier *NMC* 765-768. But what is more, even the preceding gospel translation borrows from *NMC*, as can be seen by comparing *EN* 849-852:

Sone, quaþ oure ledi, . what hastow vs ido?
 Wel sori we þe habbeþ isouȝt, . þi fader and ic also.
 What is þat, quaþ þis oper, . þat ȝe me habbeþ isouȝt?
 Neste ȝe þt in mi fader þing . i moste nede be brouȝt?
 (849-52) p. 107

with *NMC* 785-786 and 789-790:

'Leue sone', oure leuedy seyde, 'why hastou þus [vs] ydo?
 [Lo], we habbeþ þe wel sori ysouhte, þi fader and ich also!'
 (Nou clepede heo Iosep is fader þat þe Iewes ne vnderȝete
 So sone þat he were Godes sone, for is resouns so grete.)
 'Leue moder', þat child sede, 'why habbeþ ȝe me ysouht?
 Nuteþ ȝe nouht þat in my fader þing ich mote be nede
 ybrouht?'
 (785-90)

From *NMC*'s thirty-four lines on the episode (763-796), the author of *EN* has selected and rearranged eleven.

Of all the correspondences between the two poems there is only one place where *NMC* would seem to preserve the less original reading. In *EN* the lines:

Ac þo þe þre kinges comen to bedleem, . as þis child lay
þe sterre bi cam al to nouȝt, . þt neuer eft me hire ne say
(527-8) p. 98

are placed, as expected, at the end of the passage on the star's marvellous properties and before the Adoration of the Magi. But in all the *NMC* manuscripts they are positioned out of context as ll. 565-566, after the final departure of the Magi and before the Purification. The likely explanation is that finding these lines wrongly positioned in his exemplar the author of *EN* reinstated them with his customary craftsmanship in their obvious place, although the possibility that at this point he may have been working from a more correct version of *NMC* than has been preserved cannot be discounted.

In conclusion, it is interesting to look more generally at *EN*'s make-up. Its use of gospel translations sharply distinguishes it from both *NMC* and *CM*. In MS Egerton 1993 it directly follows *CM* as though part of the same poem, but while "And telle we forþ, as we bigonne, : of iosep and of marie!" (192) must refer to *CM*, I think it unlikely that one author wrote both. They are associated in no other manuscript, and *CM* was, as we have seen, seemingly revised from *NMC* for a particular purpose. Further, although gospel material is not available for filling out the story of Mary's early life, in view of my previous discussion I do not think that the author of *EN* would have left the first 200 lines of *NMC* so little changed as they are in *CM*. As it is, in continuing *CM* he makes virtually no use of *NMC* for over 250 lines, and in so doing ignores the apocryphal stories of Mary and the maidens, Mary at the well, Joseph's dispute with the maidens, and the trial of Mary and Joseph. Most of *EN*'s first 250 lines are in fact taken up with biblical versions of events treated by *NMC* either only very sketchily or not at all: the Conception of John the Baptist, the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Birth of John. And later *NMC* makes no mention of either the Shepherds or the Circumcision. The (b) version of the poem, as mentioned earlier (p. 105), remedies this state of affairs by lifting material from the *Abridged Life of Christ*. The author of *EN* prefers to correct the disproportionately legendary bias of *NMC* by inserting a stiffening of gospel translations. I have suggested elsewhere¹⁵ that *NMC* may have been composed as a legendary supplement for an audience already familiar with the Gospel story. I suggest here that its more comprehensive revisions may have been written for a wider audience in whom less knowledge could be assumed.

NOTES

- 1 Printed in *The Early South-English Legendary*, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS, OS 87 (1887); *The South English Legendary*, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, EETS, OS 235, 236, 244 (1956-59).
- 2 Described, with details of their manuscripts, in Pickering, "The *Temporale Narratives of the South English Legendary*", *Anglia*, 91 (1973), 425-455.
- 3 Ed. Pickering, *Middle English Texts*, 1 (Heidelberg, 1975).
- 4 "The Structural Development of the South English Legendary", *JEGP*, 41 (1942), 320-344. Miss Wells's views have recently been restated by Laurence Muir, "Translations and Paraphrases of the Bible, and Commentaries", in Chapter 4 of *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, II, ed. J. Burke Severs (Hamden, Connecticut, 1970), p. 405.
- 5 Printed as one continuous poem, "Geburt Jesu", in *Altenglische Legenden*, ed. Carl Horstmann (Paderborn, 1875), pp. 64-109.
- 6 I quote *NMC* from my edition (see fn. 3), which is based on MS Stowe 949, ff. 88v-100v.
- 7 I quote *CM* from the text in MS Ashmole 43 which, with that in MS Egerton 1993, is printed by Horstmann in *Altenglische Legenden* pp. 64-81, to which I refer by page. My line-numbering, however, follows the slightly more complete text in the unprinted MS Pepys 2344, pp. 353-358.
- 8 *Evangelia apocrypha*, ed. Constantius Tischendorf, editio altera, (Leipzig, 1876), pp. 56-57.
- 9 *Legenda aurea*, ed. Th. Graesse, 3rd ed., (Dresden, 1890), p. 588.
- 10 In Egerton 1993 (ff. 27r-30r) it is grouped with other *temporale* narratives before the saints' lives, but in a fourth manuscript, Bodley 779 (ff. 27lv-272v), an extract beginning with Mary's Birth is placed after *Birinus* (5 December). A fifth, the non-*SEL* MS Laud Misc. 622, contains only *CM*'s prologue (f. 71r-v).
- 11 MS Bodley 779, ff. 22r-23v, includes an extract on the Birth of Christ.
- 12 Tabular lists of Latin sources for the combined 'Concepcio Marie' (*CM/EN*) were attempted by F. Holthausen, "Zu AE. und ME. Dichtungen, II", *Anglia*, 14 (1892), 317-318, and by M.E. Wells, *The Structure and Development of the South English Legendary* (New York University Ph.D. thesis, 1939), p. 40. Both are over-pedantic. Holthausen did not even consider the *Legenda aurea*, and neither he nor Miss Wells took into account the possibility of a Middle English source.
- 13 *Altenglische Legenden*, pp. 81-109, where the lines of *CM* and *EN* are numbered continuously. In quotations from *EN*, page references are to this edition.
- 14 *The South English Legendary*, EETS, OS 236, pp. 589-590.
- 15 Pickering, fn. 3, pp. 41-2.