

Leeds Studies in English

Article:

Stephen Spector, 'The Composition and Development of an Eclectic Manuscript: Cotton Vespasian D VIII', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 9, (1977), 62-83

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=121819&silolibrary=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

THE COMPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN ECLECTIC MANUSCRIPT:
COTTON VESPASIAN D VIII

By STEPHEN SPECTOR

Cotton Vespasian D. viii, the N-town Cycle, is a manifestly eclectic collocation of mystery plays. Although the bulk of the codex is in the hand of a single scribe, the cycle comprises a perplexing number of constituent parts. It contains, for example, no fewer than twenty-two prosodic forms written on at least seven kinds of paper. The Proclamation at the beginning of the cycle contains descriptions of forty pageants, only some of which correspond to the plays which have come down to us. There are many expositors and homilists in the cycle, three of whom preside over plays which are for the most part incongruous with or omitted by the Proclamation. And many of the forty-one plays in the cycle are inconsistent, either internally or with respect to other plays. Given this disparate assortment of contiguous parts, one may understand why some scholars have considered the cycle to be a rudely-joined patchwork.¹ Yet it is precisely this eclecticism of the text which has inspired much of the most significant study of the plays; for the sheer variety of evidence in the codex provides an extraordinary opportunity to discover the ways in which layers of material were combined in the development of a complex literary artifact five hundred years ago.

Scholars have debated the composition and development of the N-town Cycle for over eighty years.² Although many of these studies have been careful and instructive, all have employed a limited choice of criteria. Most speculation has centred on prosody, but even the best of these studies, by W.W. Greg and Esther L. Swenson, did not adequately consider scribal and manuscript evidence or the use of sources. Greg and Swenson also failed to employ other important tests, such as the degree of verbal correspondence between the Proclamation and the plays, which would have provided a more rigorous standard of judgment for their analyses.³ The outcome has been that prosodic studies have, finally, lacked sufficient evidence from which to draw wholly supportable conclusions. Perhaps as a result, students of the early drama have recently shown signs of scepticism that prosody can be an efficacious or even a valid test of authorship.⁴

I argue in the present study that the strata of the cycle, however labyrinthine they may appear at first sight, can be sorted out according to prosodic tests; and that the different strata were, in fact, often written in characteristic prosodic forms. I attempt to vindicate this thesis by offering a wide range of evidence, including scribal and manuscript evidence; studies of sources,

expositors' speeches, and incongruities within and between plays; and, most important, an examination of verbal and thematic parallels between plays and correlative Proclamation descriptions. Throughout, I accept prosody as a test of authorship only when it is confirmed by evidence of this kind.

The N-town Cycle is especially well suited to provide such evidence. A fully detailed discussion of the germane arguments would, in fact, far exceed the scope of this study. I shall therefore attempt to present only the most salient clusters of evidence, focusing on three portions of the cycle which are crucial to my argument: the "Marriage of Mary and Joseph" play, the speeches of the expositor Contemplacio, and Passion Play 2 (the second of two discrete sequences of passion plays in the codex).⁵

PROSODIC FORMS IN THE CYCLE

Since prosody is essential to my argument, I shall first briefly describe the prosodic types in the cycle. The twenty-two forms I have identified include: six varieties of 13-line stanza; four kinds of *rime couée*; four kinds of octave; two kinds each of quatrain, couplet, and 9-line stanza; 10-line stanzas; and 5-line stanzas.⁶ These prosodic types can normally be distinguished on the basis of rhyme-scheme, metrics, and, where appropriate, stylistic and other tests. One kind of 13-line stanza, for example, which I call the "proclamation thirteener" because it is the basic prosodic form of the Proclamation, is unique in the cycle, in that it rhymes ababababccddc and generally contains four stressed syllables in lines 1-8 and 10-12; the number of all syllables in each of these lines is normally between seven and ten. Lines 9 and 13 most often contain three stressed syllables, and a total of five to seven syllables. The dominant metrical pattern involves an alternation of single stressed syllables with single unstressed syllables; but two unstressed syllables often intervene between stressed syllables, and two stressed syllables are occasionally juxtaposed.⁷

The prosodic form most similar to the proclamation thirteener is the "long thirteener", which has the same rhyme-scheme but contains much longer lines: lines 1-8 most often have five stressed syllables, and a total of between ten and fourteen syllables. Although they have been all but unnoticed by previous students of the cycle, the long thirteeners appear quite frequently and, as I shall demonstrate later, they seem to have been associated with an important reviser. These stanzas can generally be readily distinguished from proclamation thirteeners, as the following two stanzas will illustrate:

TERTIUS VEXILL[ATOR]. In þe secunde pagent by Godys
myth

We þenke to shewe and pley bedene
In þe other sex days by opyn syth
What þenge was wrought þer xal be sene:
How best was made, and foule of flyth,
And last was man made, as I wene.
Of mannys o ryb, as I 3ow plyth,
Was woman wroughth mannys make to bene
And put in paradyse.
Ther were flourys bothe blew and blake,
Of all frutys þei myth þer take
Saff frute of cunnyng þei xulde forsake
And towche it in no wyse.

The serpent toke Eve an appyl to byte
And Eve toke Adam a mursel of þe same.
Whan þei had do þus azens þe rewle of ryte
Than was oure Lord wroth and grevyd al with game.
Oure Lord gan appose þem of þer gret delyte
Bothe to askuse hem of þat synful blame,
And þan almythy God for þat gret dyspite
Assygned hem grevous peyn, as 3e xal se in game
In dede.
Seraphyn, an angell gay,
With brennyng swerd, þis is verray,
From paradise bete hem away,
In bybyl as we rede.

(Procl., ff. 1^r-1^v)⁸

The first of these stanzas is clearly a proclamation thirteener,
the second a long thirteener.

The other kinds of thirteener in the plays are even more
readily identifiable. One of these forms, for example, the "Herod
thirteener" (so named because stanzas of this kind are spoken only
by Herod), is characterized both by its rhyme-scheme, abababbbcccb,
and by its vigorous alliterative verse:

HERODES REX. I ryde on my rowel ryche in my regne,
Rybbys ful reed with rape xal I rende!
Popetys and paphawkys I xal puttyn in peyne,
With my spere prevyn, pychyn, and to-pende!
The gomys with gold crownys ne gete nevyr geyn,⁹
To seke þo sottys sondys xal I sende:
Do howlott howtyn, hoberd and heyn!
Whan here barnys blede vndyr credyl bende
Sharply I xal hem shende.
The knaue childeryn þat be
In all Israel countré,
Thei xul haue bloody ble
For on I calde vnkende.

("Herod", Play 20, f. 101^r)

This prosodic form is also notable for its obscure and polysemous diction.

Many of the shorter stanzas in the text may well be fragments of larger stanzas. It is possible, for instance, that many of the "short-lined" 9-line stanzas, which rhyme ababcdcdc and are metrically identical to lines 1-9 of proclamation thirteeners, are fragments of proclamation thirteeners. In one instance, we may even be able to retrace the process whereby a stanza was divided. In "The Return of Joseph" (Play 12), several 10-line stanzas seem to have been interpolated into a play consisting of proclamation thirteeners.¹⁰ A quatrain (on f. 68^v) appears immediately before a group of 10-line stanzas, and a 9-line stanza occurs immediately after them (on f. 69^r); if the 10-line stanzas are removed, the two shorter stanzas can be seen to comprise a single unit, a proclamation thirteener which existed intact at some earlier stage in the history of the cycle.

"THE MARRIAGE OF MARY AND JOSEPH"

The "Marriage" (Play 10), which consists largely of proclamation thirteeners, illustrates the priority of proclamation thirteener-material in the cycle. Stanzas of this kind constitute most of the Proclamation and part or all of fourteen plays.¹¹ It is of the highest significance for my argument that the Proclamation descriptions written in proclamation thirteeners show extensive and uniform correspondences only to the plays and portions of plays which are also written in this form. These correspondences are, in fact, often so compelling that one must conclude that the Proclamation accounts were written to describe these plays.¹² Moreover, the Proclamation normally either takes no notice of plays written in other prosodic forms, or describes different plays from the ones which have come down to us in those forms.¹³ These facts considered together seem almost certainly to indicate that the Proclamation describes a cycle which has been in part supplanted and in part expanded. The proclamation thirteeners in the plays are the survivals of that cycle, and can in this sense be spoken of as "original" cycle material. A comparison of plays as we have them with the Proclamation descriptions is, then, an essential test of the composition of the cycle: plays which significantly contradict Proclamation accounts can be considered to have displaced the plays which the Proclamation was written to describe; plays not described by the Proclamation can be presumed to have been incorporated after the Proclamation was composed.¹⁴

Proclamation thirteeners, although scattered throughout the cycle in its present form, definitely appear to comprise a discrete layer of material. In addition to their common prosody and their close correspondence to the Proclamation, they exhibit several thematic links across plays. For example, one of the three maidens assigned in the "Marriage" to watch over Mary and safeguard her reputation reappears in the "Return of Joseph" to report that she has done just that: she has listened to Mary's conversation with Gabriel during the Salutation and Conception. Interestingly,

although the play in which this episode occurred (which was presumably written in proclamation thirteeners) has been replaced, its description in the Proclamation has survived, and includes the detail that Mary's three maidens overhear her speech with the angel.¹⁵ Proclamation thirteeners tend to be incongruous with motifs written in other prosodic forms, including the Marian plays which are written in long-lined octaves. In a proclamation thirteener in the "Marriage", for instance, Episcopus assigns the three maidens to Mary - entirely ignoring the fact that in the preceding long-lined octave play, "Mary in the Temple", a figure also named Episcopus had assigned Mary five different maidens. Proclamation thirteener stanzas are not based on the sources used by other strata, most notably the *Legenda aurea*, Nicholas Love's *Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesus Christ* (a translation and adaptation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*), and the *Northern Passion*. Instead, proclamation thirteener-material occasionally recalls *Pseudo-Matthew* and some of the accounts in the other extant mystery play collections. Plays in proclamation thirteeners are often, though not exclusively, inspired by events in Matthew, while motifs in Luke are supplied by plays written in other forms. Stage directions accompanying proclamation thirteeners are normally in Latin and are brief and few in number. Plays in this form seem in general to be independent units, suitable, should the producer have so desired, for separate performance.

The proclamation thirteeners in the "Marriage" have all the characteristics described above. They contain compelling verbal and thematic similarities to the proclamation, and therefore definitely appear to be original cycle material. The original cycle seems to have devoted to this episode two pageants, as described by three stanzas in the Proclamation - more extended attention than was given to any other motif. It follows that the Marriage was a play of central importance to the original cycle.

The similarities between the Proclamation and the proclamation thirteeners in the play are striking from the outset. In both, Episcopus initiates the action by declaring that the law prescribes marriage for all girls of fourteen years of age; the Proclamation partially echoes this speech in the play:

3oure damyselys to weddyng, 3a, loke þat 3e drawe
 þat passyn xiiij 3ere, for what þat 3e owe.
 ("Marriage", f. 49^r)

And brynge here douteryys to dew weddyng
 All þat ben xiiij 3ere and more. (Procl., f. 2V)

In both the Proclamation and the proclamation thirteeners of the "Marriage" play, Mary refuses to marry, and in both, Episcopus consequently expresses dismay and confusion. An angel comes to instruct him, and this speech, in a proclamation thirteener, is strikingly recalled in the Proclamation:

þat all kynsmen of Dauyd þe kyng
 To þe temple xul brynge here du offryng
 With whyte 3ardys in þer honde.
 Loke wele what tyme þei offere there
 All here 3ardys in þin hand þu take;
 Take heed whose 3erde doth blome and bere
 And he xal be þe maydenys make.

("Marriage", f. 50^V)

But for þe kynrede of Dauyd þu sende;
 Lete hem come with here offryng
 And in here handys white 3erdys brynge.
 Loke whose 3erde doth floure and spryng
 And he xal wedde þat mayden hende.

(Procl., f. 3^r)

The next proclamation thirteener in the play contains other verbal similarities to the Proclamation:

Herk, masangere, þu wend þi way.
 Dauyd kynsmen, as I þe say,
 Byd hem come

("Marriage", f. 50^V)

A masangere forthe is sent;
 Dauydis kynrede without delay
 They come ful sone

(Procl., f. 3^r)

Proclamation thirteeners in the remainder of the play also closely parallel the Proclamation, and occasional verbal echoes also appear. When Joseph's staff blooms in the play, for example, Episcopus exclaims,

A ded stok beryth flourys fre, (f. 54^V)

and the Proclamation description is similar:

þe ded styk do floure ful gay. (f. 3^r)

Later, in the play, Mary vows,

In chastyté to ledyn my lyff, (f. 55^V)

while the Proclamation says of Joseph:

Than he plyth to his wyff
 In chastyté to ledyn here lyff. (f. 3^r)

Material written in prosodic forms other than proclamation thirteeners can generally be identified as additions to the original "Marriage". These stanzas, most of which are octaves, sometimes depict motifs which are omitted by the Proclamation. In some cases they reveal links to other strata in the cycle, and in several instances they can be shown to have been interpolated after the play had been copied down. Indeed, a group of three long-lined octaves

on f. 48^V exhibit all these features. Scribal reference marks on ff. 48^V and 50^R indicate that these octaves are to be interpolated at the foot of f. 50^R. The very fact that the octaves were written on f. 48^V (the last leaf of the quire which precedes the "Marriage"), two leaves before their intended position in the play, proves that they were later additions to the play; it seems clear that at the time of their inclusion, the scribe had already copied down the play at least as far as f. 50^V, which consists entirely of proclamation thirteeners. The interpolated octaves depict Episcopus's consultation with the wise men, a scene which is not accounted for in the Proclamation and which contains extended and close verbal reminiscences of the *Legenda aurea*, a chief source of a group of Marian plays which are presided over by the expositor Contemplacio. This common source and the fact that the "Contemplacio group" of Marian plays are also written in long-lined octaves suggest that the three interpolated stanzas are survivals of a Marriage play which Contemplacio tells us once existed in the Contemplacio group. This possibility is made all the more likely by the fact that Minister, a character who appears in the "Presentation of Mary" in the Contemplacio group, also appears in the interpolated octaves - but nowhere else in the "Marriage".¹⁶

Another prosodic form which seems to be part of a different stratum and also an addition to the original play is a long thirteener at the bottom of f. 50^V and the top of f. 53^R. Significantly, this stanza occurs at precisely the point where the Proclamation divides the Marriage into two pageants: the stanza may well have been written to combine the two plays into one. If so, the author of this stanza may have played a crucial role in altering the cycle from short pageants to longer plays, an idea which is entirely consonant with a hypothesis to which I have already alluded: that the poet of the long thirteeners brought about major alterations in the cycle. I shall pursue this question later in this article.

An obvious interruption of the original text was *E* quire (ff. 51-52), which contains octaves written by a later hand on paper not found elsewhere in the codex. This quire was definitely interpolated after the play had been copied down, and one by-product of the interpolation was that *D* quire was split into *D* and *F* quires.

Octaves and quatrains later in the play also appear to be additions to the original text. Episcopus's second prayer for God's aid, for instance, which is written in a quatrain on f. 54^R, is not described in the Proclamation; nor is it found in *Pseudo-Matthew* or the other cycle accounts. It is, like much of the Contemplacio group, derived from the *Legenda aurea*, as is the detail that God's response is spoken by Vox (rather than conveyed by an angel, as earlier in the play). In all, it seems clear that this stanza and the other stanzas in forms other than proclamation thirteeners are additions to the original play, and that at least some of these additional stanzas were taken from the Marriage play of the Contemplacio group.

The proclamation thirteeners in other plays also show close thematic similarities to the Proclamation, including some motifs which occur nowhere else in the extant medieval English drama. In

many instances, the Proclamation accounts echo lines from proclamation thirteeners in the plays, and there can be little doubt that these accounts were written to describe the proclamation thirteener-material which has come down to us.

CONTEMPLACIO

Contemplacio presides over a sequence of Marian plays which was apparently once independent of the N-town Cycle. Indeed, his speeches retain, as we shall see, several vestiges of this previous existence. These speeches are found in five plays: "The Conception of Mary" (Play 8), "Mary in the Temple" (Play 9), the "Marriage" (Play 10), "The Salutation and Conception" (Play 11), and "The Visit to Elizabeth" (Play 13); Contemplacio also delivers a Conclusion after Play 13. His speeches, like Plays 8, 9, and 13, are written predominantly in long-lined octaves, and it is evident that the stanzas in this form constitute a discrete stratum. Plays 8, 9, and 13 are linked by common prosody and sources,¹⁷ a common focus on Mary, a mixture of Latin and English in stage directions, by scribal notations (which I shall discuss later) and, of course, by Contemplacio. As we have seen, several octaves in the "Marriage" seem to have been taken from the Marriage play of the Contemplacio group; in addition, a few octaves at the end of Play 11 may have survived from the Salutation play promised by Contemplacio. Material in this stratum is occasionally incongruous with other strata, as I have already tried to demonstrate with respect to the proclamation thirteener plays.

Contemplacio welcomes the audience at the beginning of Play 8 to a performance of five plays, the subjects of which correspond to Plays 8-11 and 13; he also promises a Conclusion which will follow the "Visit to Elizabeth", an arrangement which, as I have noted, actually obtains in the cycle. Greg and others argued that Contemplacio was created specifically for the N-town Cycle, but a variety of evidence indicates that Contemplacio's speeches, though much revised, are survivals of the previous incarnation of the Contemplacio group. First, Contemplacio does not include in his welcoming speech, or elsewhere, any description of "The Return of Joseph", which, as I have said, appears to have been an original cycle play. Instead, he describes only plays which have come down to us in long-lined octaves. It follows that Contemplacio's speeches were written to describe exactly what he claims to describe: a sequence of five Marian plays (which were written in long-lined octaves). Prosodic and other evidence indicates, indeed, that Contemplacio's speeches are of a piece with those Marian plays. As already noted, the basic prosodic form of Contemplacio's addresses, like that of the plays over which he presides, is the long-lined octave. For example, the first two stanzas of his initial speech, in which he describes the five plays about to be presented, are in this form: and these descriptions accord very well with the Marian play-material in the same prosodic form. The long-lined octaves of Contemplacio's speeches fail to account for events in the Marian plays only when those events, including, most notably, the Parliament of Heaven, are depicted in a different prosodic form.

The long-lined octaves in Contemplacio's speeches, then, stand in the same relationship to the stanzas of this kind in the Marian plays as the proclamation thirteeners in the Proclamation do to the proclamation thirteeners in the cycle.

This conclusion is supported by scribal evidence as well. Greg, who thought Contemplacio's speeches were being composed as the codex was transcribed, considered Contemplacio's entire Conclusion after the "Visit to Elizabeth" to have been squeezed into a space left by the scribe in anticipation of contributions by a reviser.¹⁸ But here Greg's observation of the evidence was (uncharacteristically) slightly mistaken, and this resulted in a significant error in his conclusions. In fact, the scribe appears to have transcribed the "Visit" up to the end of Elizabeth's final speech on f. 73^V and left some blank space; then he wrote down the first stanza of Contemplacio's Conclusion and left a little more blank space. All this material is written in the scribe's normal hand, normally spaced. The scribe then evidently received the stanzas for which he was waiting, but they were more substantial than he had expected (a fate he suffered more than once in his work on this manuscript); these new stanzas had to be squeezed into the spaces available by dint of writing two lines as one in small script, both at the end of the play proper and after the first stanza of Contemplacio's Conclusion. Significantly, all but one of these new stanzas were apparently contributed by an important reviser of the cycle whose characteristic prosodic form was octaves rhyming abababab.¹⁹ Thus all the evidence seems to demonstrate clearly that the long-lined octaves in Contemplacio's speeches were not written by a reviser as the manuscript was transcribed, but rather were part of the Marian plays before they were incorporated into the cycle. Stanzas written by the "abababab-poet", on the other hand, definitely appear to have been added to Contemplacio's speeches as the speeches were being written down.

The abababab octaves are evidently not the only revised stanzas in Contemplacio's speeches. In three of these speeches, long-lined 9-line stanzas occur,²⁰ and the first two of these seem on stylistic grounds to be revisional: they appear to have been appended to long-lined octaves which once were the concluding stanzas in Contemplacio's speeches. The third of these 9-line stanzas can, I think, be convincingly established as revisional, for this stanza, which occurs in Contemplacio's prologue to the "Marriage" (Play 10), has Contemplacio promise a Parliament of Heaven. Significantly, Contemplacio did not mention this motif in his initial speech, and the scene itself (in Play 11) is written in stanzas which are metrically distinct from the long-lined octaves of Contemplacio's speeches and the Marian plays. Moreover, Contemplacio's prologue to Play 11 is probably the work of a reviser. Unlike the Contemplacio of the other Marian plays, who essentially mediates between the plays and the auditor, this Contemplacio mediates, within the fictive framework of the play, between man and God; he is personally and passionately involved in the action of the play. Furthermore, both scribal notations and reference to the sources of the play indicate that the speeches now assigned to Contemplacio were spoken originally by angels and archangels.²¹ At some point,

then, a reviser wrote *Contemplacio* into this scene in Play 11, and a long-lined 9-line stanza was attached to *Contemplacio*'s prologue to Play 10 in order to account for this alteration. Perhaps one can say more: the fact that the scribe made the notations referred to in the margins around *Contemplacio*'s speech in the play suggests that *Contemplacio* was written into Play 11 as the codex was transcribed. This, in turn, would indicate that the revisional 9-line stanza was added at the same stage.

What has become of *Contemplacio*'s promised Salutation play? Block suggested that it, like the original cycle play, was supplanted by the present play.²² But there are a few long-lined octaves at the end of the play which has come down to us,²³ in one of which Mary says that she wishes to visit Elizabeth immediately. This is consonant with the order of plays in *Contemplacio*'s opening speech, and these stanzas may, therefore, be survivals of the *Contemplacio* group.

Since *Contemplacio*'s speeches correspond inexactly to the cycle, one may wonder why they were retained. One reason may have been that their inclusion was a stage in the segmentation of the cycle into units capable of production in a single day. This process was evidently carried further in the introduction of two discrete Passion Plays, in the second of which an expositor (perhaps significantly named *Contemplacio*, though very probably different in origin from the earlier *Contemplacio*) says that the Passion Plays were to be presented as separate units. Division of the cycle appears to have been pursued even after the manuscript had been transcribed: a marginal notation by a reviser on f. 196^r between Plays 35 and 36 reads "finem 1^a die Nota", and was evidently intended to mark the conclusion of one day's performance.

At which stage in the history of the cycle were the *Contemplacio* plays incorporated? Certainly after the composition of the original Proclamation, which omits them. To be more precise, there are several indications that these plays were added as the manuscript was being transcribed. To begin with, the octaves on f. 48^v, which were very probably taken from the *Contemplacio* group, were added to the "Marriage" only after that play had been transcribed (at least in part); this suggests that the incorporation of the *Contemplacio* group was under way as the manuscript was being copied out. In addition, as we have seen, *Contemplacio*'s speeches were altered as the manuscript was being transcribed. These alterations reflect important changes in the make-up of the *Contemplacio* group, changes of the sort that would have resulted from a major reworking of the group, such as its inclusion in the N-town Cycle. This theory can now be supported by a kind of scribal evidence which has not previously been noticed: the loops of the capitula preceding the octaves and quatrains in the "Marriage" and in the *Contemplacio* plays contain dots.²⁴ By contrast, the capitula preceding the proclamation thirteeners in the "Marriage" and elsewhere are never dotted. This regular discrimination between prosodic forms disallows the possibility that the dots are mere decoration appearing in random locations. The scribe appears instead to have been attempting to keep track of the octave and quatrain material as he copied it down, which in turn suggests that he was incorporating it into the text at that time.

Another kind of evidence also indicates that the Contemplacio plays were added as the manuscript was transcribed. The scribe's normal procedure at this stage was to produce large gatherings, quired in twenties.²⁵ There are only three exceptions. *V* quire, the last gathering in the codex, has only six leaves, an arrangement one might expect at the end of a text when only a limited amount of material remained to be copied down.²⁶ *M* quire, the gathering preceding the Passion Plays, is unusually short because, as we shall see, the Passion sequences were written down at a different time from the bulk of the manuscript. In this sense, *M* quire was also "final", and therefore abnormally brief. The third short gathering in the codex, comprising only eight leaves, is *C* quire, which contains the bulk of the first two Contemplacio plays.²⁷ As G.S. Ivy observes in a different context, when a comparatively short quire occurs within a volume, the reader must be alert to the possibility that the compilation of the text did not proceed according to its original plan.²⁸ This seems to be the explanation of the brevity of *C* quire, which was apparently included only after *D* quire had been at least partially transcribed. This reconstruction of events is consistent with the fact that *C* quire contains the three octaves on f. 48^v which were designated for interpolation into the "Marriage" after that play, in *D* quire, had been partially transcribed. In all, the inclusion of *C* quire appears to have resulted from a change in plans as the manuscript was being transcribed. And this, considered together with the other evidence that the Contemplacio plays were added to the cycle at that stage, strongly suggests that the change in plans was none other than the decision to incorporate the Contemplacio group into the cycle.

PASSION PLAY 2

Passion Play 1 and Passion Play 2 may once have been produced independently, as evidenced by the prologue to Passion Play 2, in which an expositor named Contemplacio refers to plays presented "the last 3ere" and goes on to list the plays about to be performed. His description of the plays of the previous year contains both thematic parallels to and verbal echoes of Passion Play 1, clinching the fact that Passion Play 1 is the intended referent. It seems fair, then, to subscribe to the generally held view that the Passion Plays were at least at some point produced in different years. Is the Contemplacio of Passion Play 2, like his namesake in the Marian plays, a survival of an earlier existence of the plays with which he is associated? Possibly, but one piece of evidence inspires doubt. Contemplacio's list of plays about to be performed is vague (a defect one cannot attribute to the Contemplacio of the Marian plays): we are told only that trials before Annas, Cayphas, and Pilate will be presented, "And so forth in His Passyon". This vagueness is remarkably consistent with the fact that Passion Play 2, as we have it, contains no clear-cut conclusion, but dovetails into *rime couée*-material. It is possible, therefore, that Contemplacio's speech was composed specifically for the N-town Cycle.

Passion Plays 1 and 2 do not correspond to the plays described in the Proclamation, indicating that they supplanted the New

Testament plays which the Proclamation was written to describe. They seem to have been originally intended for continuous performance on a fixed polyscenic stage, and their division into separate plays, which was accomplished by the addition of playnumbers, may represent nothing more than an attempt to harmonize them with the Proclamation. The Passion Plays are easily distinguished from the rest of the cycle on several counts. They are indebted to the *Northern Passion*, a poem which had little influence on the other plays in the cycle. They are prosodically distinct from the other plays in their mixture of short- and long-lined varieties of quatrain, octave, and couplet. They are unique also in their elaborate English stage directions, which refer to a "place" and scaffolds. And they are unlike the rest of the cycle in that they are written on kinds of paper not found elsewhere in the codex in a hand which, while still that of the main scribe, is far more irregular and untidy than the main hand in any other part of the codex; the leaf-rulings in the Passion Plays are also unlike those elsewhere in the codex. There are prosodic distinctions between the two Passion Plays, it is true, but they are certainly more dissimilar to the other constituents of the cycle than they are to each other. Passion Play 2 has, by the way, a worn flyleaf, which may indicate separate storage of Passion Play 2 and the plays subsequent to it.²⁹

The characteristic features of Passion Play 2 appear uninterrupted from the first play in this sequence, "The Trial Before Annas and Cayphas" (Play 29), up to "The Trial Before Pilate" (Play 31). Play 32, "The Crucifixion", also consists of Passion Play 2 material until the appearance of *rime couée* on f. 183^v. For our purposes in this article it is worth taking a look at this meeting of Passion Play 2 prosodic forms with *rime couée*, for it is here that two major strata of the text were joined.

The juxtaposing of these strata led, as one might expect, to some confusion in the text. Some material was evidently displaced. The first stanza of the *rime couée* on f. 183^v, for example, seems to have had its first three lines removed in order to allow for a smooth transition from Passion Play 2 material. A bit later, a whole stanza was probably lost: the first speaker heading in the *rime couée* material reads "Secundus Iudeus"; Primus Iudeus's speech, which presumably once preceded this, apparently went the way of the first three lines of the initial *rime couée* stanza. This in turn suggests that the *rime couée* treatment of the Crucifixion was once more substantial, perhaps a complete play. Other difficulties arose from the fact that the Passion Play 2 treatment of events was not always congruous with the *rime couée* version: the Virgin Mary, for example, has two exits from the Cross, one in each stratum. This and other confusions confirm the idea that the Passion Play material is demonstrably distinct from the *rime couée* material.

The Passion Plays, as I have noted, contradict the Proclamation accounts, and were therefore presumably added after the composition of the Proclamation. There are, however, four stanzas in the Proclamation (on ff. 7^r-8^r) which accord with the Passion as portrayed in the cycle, and two aspects of this correspondence are highly significant to this study: first, the Proclamation stanzas are not proclamation thirteeners but long thirteeners; second, the events they describe are located not in the Passion Play 2 material but in

rime couée.³⁰

Let us first consider the question of the four stanzas of long thirteeners in the Proclamation. These are not the only stanzas of this kind in the Proclamation. Indeed, the initial stanza in the Proclamation, a purely decorative speech welcoming the audience, is a long thirteener. The next long thirteener is the second of two stanzas describing the "Fall of Man" (Play 2), quoted on p. 64. Interestingly, the portion of Play 2 which this stanza describes - and in one instance echoes - is written largely in *rime couée*. It is surely more than coincidence that the five long thirteeners in the Proclamation which describe plays all contain very close accounts of material written almost entirely in *rime couée*. It seems apparent that the "long thirteener-poet" felt some degree of proprietorship over the *rime couée* in the cycle, an idea which finds support in the fact that two plays containing *rime couée* which are not described by long thirteeners in the Proclamation have long thirteeners within their text.³¹ We have already seen that the long thirteener-poet may have joined the two parts of the "Marriage" into one relatively long play. We can now add that he seems to have harmonized the *rime couée*-material with the Proclamation, having contributed descriptions of those *rime couée* plays which were unlike the original Proclamation accounts. This in turn suggests that the *rime couée* plays had displaced the plays which the original Proclamation accounts had been written to describe. The stanzas which the long thirteener-poet contributed to the plays are all located amid *rime couée* and proclamation thirteener-material; this is perhaps an indication of the stage in the history of the cycle at which he worked. One might add that within the plays he evidently preferred to write hortative, boastful, and highly laudatory verse, having written speeches for such figures as Herod, Satan, and Death.

Now let us return to the *rime couée* in the "Crucifixion" and subsequent plays. As already noted, the long thirteener accounts in the Proclamation correspond quite closely to this material. Indeed, both the long thirteener accounts and the *rime couée* in the plays depict motifs unique in the extant medieval English drama, viz. the division of the Harrowing of Hell into two parts and the appearance of the resurrected Christ first to the Virgin Mary. The long thirteener accounts are inaccurate only with respect to motifs which have come down to us written in forms other than *rime couée* (i.e. the prosodic forms of the Passion Play). For example, a long thirteener makes Longinus cast his spear at Christ prior to Anima Christi's descent into hell; but in the plays, the Longinus episode occurs much later, in a scene in the "Burial" (Play 34) written in four short-lined quatrains and a short-lined octave (on ff. 187^v-188^f) - a combination of prosodic forms which is typical of Passion Play 2. The Longinus scene described by the long thirteener has, it seems clear, been replaced by the Passion Play 2 version of this motif. It has been noted above that the Passion Plays appear to have supplanted other earlier cycle plays, with the result that the Proclamation accounts were rendered incongruous with that part of the cycle. The same thing has probably happened here: Passion Play 2 has supplanted *rime couée* material, and where this has occurred, the long thirteener accounts in the Proclamation are no longer

accurate.

I shall now consider scribal and manuscript evidence which supports my conclusion. Several scholars have argued that the Passion Plays were independently transcribed and, at some later date, simply inserted into the N-town codex. There is good reason to believe, however, that Passion Play 2 was transcribed, wholly or in part, as it was introduced into the cycle, and this in turn supports the idea that *rime couée* antedated the Passion Plays in the cycle. The argument turns on ff. 184-85, which contain *rime couée* stanzas depicting the conclusion of the Crucifixion, John's bringing Mary to the temple, and most of the Harrowing of Hell, Part 1. Since the handwriting on these leaves, like that of the bulk of the codex, is firmer and more regular than the handwriting of the Passion Plays proper, we may infer that they were transcribed at a different time from the Passion Plays. Although these leaves lack watermarks, their chain-spaces correspond to those of YHS in a Sun or Bunch of Grapes paper, the paper of the bulk of the codex; they are, it is clear, distinct from the rest of Passion Play 2, which is written on a variety of Two Crossed Keys paper. Folios 184-85 appear, in fact, to be copies of play-material which preceded the Passion Plays in their inclusion into the cycle; they also seem to have been already transcribed when Passion Play 2 was added to the manuscript. The evidence supporting these ideas is a bit complex but, I think, conclusive. First, although the text preceding and following ff. 184-85 is incomplete without them, and gathering on which that text is written is complete and intact. What evidently happened is that the scribe stopped his transcription of Passion Play 2 material on f. 183^v, leaving most of that page blank. When he returned to the folio he wrote down the first of the *rime couée* in this part of the cycle, and the change in ink colour at the point of transition confirms the idea that he had paused in his transcription. These stanzas served as a bridge to f. 184^v, but once again there had been a change in plans, for the scribe had received more material than he had allowed space for. As a result, he had to copy the *rime couée* on f. 183^v in a small hand, in several instances writing two lines as one.³² Most of the compression of two lines into one on f. 183^v occurs at the bottom of the page, indicating that the scribe could not extend his transcription of these stanzas onto the next page; on that next page, by contrast, the writing is not at all cramped, and lines are recorded singly rather than two as one. This evidence, considered together with the change in paper and the more regular handwriting of ff. 184-85, clearly indicates that ff. 184-85 were already written when f. 183^v was being copied down. Indeed, this is not the only instance in which *rime couée* was copied on the Two Crossed Keys paper of Passion Play 2, though Passion Play 2 material never appears on the paper of the *rime couée* plays. Presumably the *rime couée* was available to the scribe as he copied Passion Play 2, but the reverse was not the case.³³ Two conclusions follow. First, the *rime couée* was already part of the cycle when Passion Play 2 was incorporated, an idea which confirms the evidence already adduced that the *rime couée* plays, as described by the long thirteeners in the Proclamation, were partially supplanted by Passion Play 2. Second, Passion Play 2 was transcribed, at least in part, as it was incorporated into the cycle. In fact, the entire

sequence may well have been transcribed at this time. This would explain several of the curious features of Passion Play 2 to which I have already referred, including the appearance of several *rime couée* stanzas on Two Crossed Keys paper, Contemplacio's apparent uncertainty about the constituents of the sequence, and the fact that Contemplacio has the name of an earlier expositor in the cycle. Passion Play 2 was probably not transcribed along with the bulk of the manuscript, as already noted. It therefore seems fair to conclude that this sequence was transcribed and incorporated into the cycle after the bulk of the codex had been copied down.

There is no reason to think that Passion Play 1 was transcribed at the same time as Passion Play 2, though the hand of both sequences is distinctly less regular than it is in the rest of the codex. Passion Play 1, in fact, seems to have been copied down with no thought of juxtaposition with Passion Play 2: it concludes with a seemingly unrelated Procession of Doctors which was probably included because blank space was available.³⁴ Here, as in Passion Play 2, the handwriting and other evidence indicate that the time of transcription was different from that of the bulk of the manuscript, and the abnormal brevity of the gathering preceding Passion Play 1 supports this hypothesis.

It is possible that the Passion Plays replaced plays which had been copied down along with the bulk of the manuscript: ff. 184-85 may even be physical survivals of the earlier plays. But these two leaves almost certainly did not physically survive the *rime couée* plays that the long thirteener-poet had before him, for they omit the Longinus episode which the long thirteener description places between John's bringing Mary to the temple and the Harrowing of Hell. This may suggest that some revision of the text took place between the work of the long thirteener-poet and the inclusion of Passion Play 2.³⁵ Why were ff. 184-85 included in Passion Play 2 at all? Judging from the small amount of space originally left blank on f. 183^v, the "Crucifixion" was to have ended rather quickly, to be followed immediately by the "Burial". This arrangement would have omitted John's taking Mary from the Cross to the temple - an omission which would have been consistent with the Passion Play 2 material, in which Mary had already left the Cross. Perhaps more importantly, it would have omitted also the first part of the Harrowing of Hell, which would presumably have been presented later as a single play. By adding ff. 184-85, the scribe retained the division of the Harrowing into two plays - a motif which is, as I have said, unique to the N-town Cycle in the medieval English drama; this may well have been his purpose in including these leaves.

CONCLUSIONS

A study of this kind is necessarily speculative and entirely dependent on inference rather than historical fact. Still, disparate tests are occasionally so clearly corroborative that one is tempted to feel confident about the findings which emerge. Perhaps the most important of these findings is that the N-town Cycle is after all susceptible of analysis by prosodic tests, when such tests are

supported by a wide range of other literary and bibliographical evidence. I have also found it possible to make conjectures, on the basis of internal evidence alone, about the history of the compilation of a composite text. In the case of the N-town plays, this compilation may have proceeded in the following stages:

(1) A cycle consisting of plays in proclamation thirteeners was collected and then described by a Proclamation written in the same form. This may well have been the N-town play spoken of in the Proclamation.³⁶

(2) The bulk of Vespasian D. viii was transcribed; as the transcription was proceeding, the Contemplacio group of Marian plays and the work of the abababab-poet were added to the cycle. This poet seems to have added stanzas to Contemplacio's Conclusion and to several plays, including the "Visit to Elizabeth", for which he supplied alternative endings. The year 1468, written on f. 100^v, may date this stage in the history of the cycle.

(3) The Passion Plays were incorporated into the cycle, replacing several plays, including some in *rime couée*. Passion Play 2 was transcribed, wholly or in part, as it was added to the cycle.

There may have been steps in between Stages 1 and 2 though there is no irrefutable evidence that this was so. In any event, it is apparent that several plays, notably those in short-lined octaves, were added sometime before the end of Stage 2. The *rime couée* material and the contributions of the long thirteener-poet were also included before Stage 2 was over. "The Assumption of the Virgin" (Play 41) is in a different hand on paper not found elsewhere in the codex, and may therefore have been incorporated after the main scribe had completed his transcription of the text.³⁷ Several marginal notations, minor corrections, and a few interpolations were made by other scribes after the codex had been written down. One of these interpolations is E quire; others are ff. 95, 96, and 112, which are in the hand of a scribe who made many minor alterations as well as notations in the text. Marginal notes at several points indicate, incidentally, that the manuscript was used in the production of plays.³⁸

In sum, the cycle in its present form appears to be an amalgam of one cycle of moderate size, three once-independent sequences, several individual plays, and occasional interpolations.³⁹ The inclusion of the Passion Plays, the "Assumption of the Virgin", E quire, and ff. 95, 96, and 112 resulted in the bewildering distribution of paper varieties in the codex; prior to these additions, the manuscript appears to have consisted solely of Bunch of Grapes and YHS in a Sun paper.

It is interesting that many of the characteristics which are often cited as being typical of the N-town Cycle are actually restricted to specific strata. The frequently-noted allegory in the cycle can be isolated to a large extent to the plays of the Contemplacio group, especially if one includes the Parliament of Heaven with these plays. The tendency to have dramatic figures act as expositors - another of the so-called characteristic features of the entire cycle - is most notable in the Passion Plays. Yet these

features were not alien to the original cycle: Death is portrayed in proclamation thirteeners in "Herod" (Play 20), and he is both a personification and an expositor. The original cycle anticipated later additions in several other instances as well. Proclamation thirteeners in the "Marriage", for example, include an account of Anna's Barrenness and the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, episodes which received elaborate treatment in Plays 8 and 9, the first two plays of the Contemplacio group. And the presentation of a Parliament of Hell in proclamation thirteeners in the "Temptation" (Play 23) perhaps invited the inclusion of the Parliament of Heaven in Play 11. Other thematic motifs which were emphasized in the original cycle, such as Joseph's infirmity and doubt, were amplified in later additions, including E quire and the "Nativity" (Play 15).

Scholars will do well to consider the strata of the plays before attempting to discover in the text the pervasive influence of any single poet. This caveat may apply to other eclectic manuscripts as well. But this does not rule out the possibility of doctrinal or thematic unity in a composite text, for unity can result from a single conception on the part of a final compiler, even when a text has been developed over several earlier stages of compilation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank Professor A.C. Cawley for his very careful reading of this article, and for his helpful suggestions for revision.

NOTES

- ¹ Bernard ten Brink, for example, wrote that the cycle seems to be "the product of a purely external agency, which has placed the most heterogeneous elements side by side without consideration" (*Early English Literature*, trans. William Clarke Robinson (London, 1893), II, p. 284).
- ² For example, ten Brink, II, 283-84; Charles Davidson, "Studies in the English Mystery Plays", Yale Univ. Diss. (1892), p. 135; E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford, 1903), II, pp. 146, 417-19; Elbert N.S. Thompson, "The 'Ludus Coventriae' ", *MLN*, 21 (1906), 18-20; Charles Mills Gayley, *Plays of Our Forefathers* (New York, 1907), pp. 138-39, 326-27; Samuel B. Hemingway, *English Nativity Plays* (New York, 1909), *Yale Studies in English*, 38, pp. xxxii-xxxviii; W.W. Greg, *Bibliographical and Textual Problems in the English Miracle Plays* (London, 1914), pp. 108-43; Esther L. Swenson, *An Inquiry into the Composition and Structure of the Ludus Coventriae*, *University of Minnesota Studies in Language and Literature*, 1, (Minneapolis, 1914); Madeleine H. Dodds, "The Problem of the 'Ludus Coventriae' ", *MLR*, 9 (1914), 79-91; K.S. Block, "Some Notes on the Problem of the 'Ludus Coventriae' ", *MLR*, 10 (1915), 47-57; Frances A. Foster, *The Northern Passion*, EETS OS 147 (1916), II, pp. 97-101; Howard R. Patch, "The *Ludus Coventriae* and the Digby Massacre", *PMLA*, 35 (1920), 324-43; W.W. Greg, "The N-Town Plays", *The Library*, Series 4, I (1920-21), 182-84; K.S. Block, introduction to the *Ludus Coventriae* (1960 reprint of EETS ES 120, 1922; since this introduction subsumes the arguments of her earlier article in *MLR*, all future references to Block will be to this later study); E.K. Chambers, *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1945), pp. 47-49; Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 239-59; Eleanor Prosser, *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: A Re-evaluation* (Stanford, 1961), pp. 201-5; Kenneth Cameron and Stanley J. Kahrl, "The N-Town Plays at Lincoln", *Theatre Notebook*, 20 (1965-66), 61-69, and "Staging the N-Town Cycle", *Theatre Notebook*, 21 (1967), 122-38, 152-65; Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), pp. 306-10, 416-18; Mary Lampland Tobin, "A Study of the Formation and Auspices of the *Ludus Coventriae*", Rice Univ. Diss., 1973, passim; and Stephen Spector, "The Genesis of the N-Town Cycle", Yale Univ. Diss., 1973 (hereafter referred to as "GN-TC").
- ³ By considering only general thematic similarities between the Proclamation and plays and ignoring verbal echoes, Greg and Swenson laid themselves open to potential subjective errors of judgment; indeed, other scholars applied the same tests to produce different results. Here I seek out verbal as well as thematic parallels between plays and Proclamation accounts. Greg and Swenson also failed to identify several stanza types and to differentiate between stanzas which share a common rhyme-scheme but are metrically distinct. Their theories about the compilation of the text consequently contain several significant inaccuracies. However, their attempts to identify material which was not associated with the original cycle - especially the Marian plays - provide the foundation for any subsequent history of the cycle. The present study is indebted to their work and to K.S. Block's careful study of the sources of the plays and the evidence provided by the manuscript.
- ⁴ See Rosemary Woolf, pp. 306-10 and 417, n. 20, and Cameron and Kahrl, "Staging the N-Town Cycle", 124-27. Eleanor Prosser extended her fascinating discussion of unity in the cycle to conclude that the first sequence of

Passion plays in the text, despite its prosodic variety, was the product of "one mind" (pp. 201-5). My findings indicate that the sequence was compiled in at least two stages, employing disparate materials ("GN-TC", pp. 65-70); but see p. 78 in the present study.

- 5 For a more detailed discussion of the strata in the entire cycle see "GN-TC", from which the present study is in large part derived.
- 6 See "GN-TC", pp. 6-17.
- 7 Scansion of the kinds of verse which appear in this cycle is problematic. One cannot dogmatize about the number of stressed syllables in any given line, for instance, because no inviolable metrical paradigms are evident. The designation of stressed syllables is in any case contingent upon the pace and emphasis which the individual reader detects in the poetry (see Marie Borroff's excellent discussion of this in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Hamden, Conn., 1973 reprint, *Yale Studies in English*, 152, pp. 173-77). However, it is sufficient for the purposes of the present study simply to distinguish between discrete prosodic forms, a task which can usually be accomplished with relative ease.
- 8 I quote (and edit) from the manuscript; and I refer to folios rather than line numbers because the current edition of the cycle will soon be superseded by a new edition which I am preparing for the Early English Text Society.
- 9 geyn] ageyn.
- 10 See "GN-TC", pp. 51-57.
- 11 "The Creation of Heaven and the Fall of Lucifer" (Play 1), "The Creation of the World and the Fall of Man" (Play 2), "Cain and Abel" (Play 3), "Noah" (Play 4), "The Marriage of Mary and Joseph" (Play 10), "The Return of Joseph" (Play 12), "The Shepherds" (Play 16), "The Magi" (Play 18), "Herod" (Play 20), "The Baptism" (Play 22), "The Temptation" (Play 23); and "Doomsday" (Play 42); proclamation thirteeners also appear on the interpolated ff. 143 and 149 in "The Entry into Jerusalem" (Play 26) and "The Last Supper" (Play 27) respectively.
- 12 It seems unlikely that events could have been the other way around, i.e. that the Proclamation was written before the plays were. There would have been no practical reason for this; in addition, it seems more probable that a poet would condense echoes of a play into a 13-line description than that he would scatter echoes of a 13-line description throughout an entire play.
- 13 The only exception is a group of short-lined octave plays, which are generally consistent with the Proclamation descriptions but lack the extensive verbal and thematic similarities found between the Proclamation and the proclamation thirteeners in the plays. The Proclamation accounts may have been written specifically to describe these plays, but the poet must have been far less familiar with them than with the proclamation thirteener plays (perhaps these descriptions were written at a different time, or even by a different poet); see "GN-TC", pp. 71-80.
- 14 The Proclamation may have omitted to describe plays which were about to be deleted from the cycle (see Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, II, p. 419). But there is no evidence to support this idea, and it would have been odd for the scribe to remove Proclamation accounts of certain plays and yet retain the plays themselves as he transcribed the text. All indications

are to the contrary: indeed, several of the plays not mentioned by the Proclamation, as we shall see, appear to have been incorporated into the cycle as the codex was transcribed.

15 See Greg, pp. 128-29.

16 See Block, p. xxii.

17 See "GN-TC", pp. 100-105, and Sister M. Patricia Forrest, "Apocryphal Sources of the St Anne's Day Plays of the Hegge Cycle", *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 17 (1966), 38-50.

18 Greg, p. 130, n. 1.

19 The one stanza which was not written by this reviser is the last stanza in the Conclusion, a long-lined octave which is metrically and stylistically similar to Contemplacio's other long-lined octaves, and was probably of common origin with them.

The abababab octaves have not previously been distinguished from the short- and long-lined octaves rhyming ababbcbc. The "abababab-poet" also wrote quatrains at the points of transition to and from other forms (a few of these quatrains appear on ff. 73^V and 74^X). Much of his work echoes Love's *Mirroure*, and his stanzas are often accompanied by English stage directions. His most important contributions were to the Salutation and Conception scene at the end of Play 11 (in which several of his octaves echo the *Mirroure*, while the neighbouring octaves, rhyming ababbcbc, do not) and to the "Visit to Elizabeth", for which he provided alternative endings. In the first of these, Mary and Joseph leave Elizabeth shortly after their arrival, while in the second Mary stays for three months. The latter conclusion was depicted in the stanzas the abababab-poet wrote for Contemplacio's Conclusion - stanzas which reveal extensive verbal similarity to the *Mirroure*. Thus the two endings of the "Visit to Elizabeth" do not appear to have resulted from the incompetent joining of contradictory plays, as earlier scholars have argued, but rather from the provision of alternate conclusions by a single reviser; see "GN-TC", pp. 107-12.

20 See ff. 37^V, 42^X, 48^F.

21 See Greg, p. 125, n. 1, and "GN-TC", pp. 87-89.

22 Block, p. xxiv.

23 See ff. 65^F, 65^V-66^F.

24 This feature begins with C quire, on f. 41^F in the "Conception of Mary" and continues as far as f. 62^F in play 11. Thereafter it occurs irregularly in Play 11 and the "Visit to Elizabeth". Probably because of oversight and confusion, one octave in the "Marriage" (on f. 57^X) lacks a dot and one quatrain in the "Return of Joseph" (on f. 67^X) is dotted.

25 This finding is based upon my study of watermark sequences in the codex, which will appear in *Studies in Bibliography*. It is worth noting here that the two-leaf gatherings in the manuscript seem either to be interpolations or to have resulted from the division of larger quires by such interpolations. Discounting these cases and other interpolations into the cycle, there are only three short gatherings in the codex.

26 One leaf preceding this quire and one leaf following it have been lost. As G.S. Ivy observes ("The Bibliography of the Manuscript Book", *The English*

Library before 1700, ed. Francis Wormald and C.E. Wright (London), 1958, p. 41), the scribes' tendency to shorten their quires when little of their text remained was particularly noticeable.

- 27 The Contemplacio group-material begins on f. 37^v in B quire; the last few leaves of this quire had apparently been left blank when C quire was introduced.
- 28 Ivy, p. 41.
- 29 This idea, which has been proposed by others, including Block (pp. xxxviii, n. 1, xxxix, n. 1), is supported by several other bits of evidence: Robert Hegge, the earliest known owner of the manuscript, initialled the flyleaf of Passion Play 2; the number "2" is written on this flyleaf, just as "1" is written on the flyleaf preceding f. 1. An inkstain also appears on the flyleaf of Passion Play 2 but not on the preceding leaf (cf., however, f. 151^v). The inkstain and the wear on the leaf show that this quire at least was stored separately. Similar evidence can be found on the outer leaves of other gatherings as well, suggesting that the manuscript remained unbound for a time.
- 30 These four long thirteeners were noted by Greg (p. 136), who did not, however, associate them with the incorporation of the *rime couée* plays they describe. None of the other long thirteeners in the cycle has been previously identified. It may be noted that the second of the four long thirteeners is metrically ambiguous, containing fewer long lines than most stanzas in this form and yet more long lines than proclamation thirteeners. For our purposes this is irrelevant since the other long thirteeners, by surrounding this stanza, in essence absorb it. It is harmonious with those stanzas and integral to their function.
- 31 The long thirteeners appear in the "Shepherds" (ff. 90^r-90^v) and "Herod" (ff. 102^r-102^v and 103^r-104^r). Long thirteeners also appear in the "Baptism" (John the Baptist's closing sermon on ff. 114^r-115^r, a speech not accounted for in the Proclamation) and in the "Temptation" (ff. 116^r-116^v, 117^r, and 118^r-119^r).
- 32 The scribe normally wrote two lines as one only when transcribing a variety of *rime couée* which has very short lines (and only two stressed syllables in each line). Elsewhere he did this only when squeezing stanzas into a small amount of space.
- 33 Tobin, p. 109, n. 16, arrived independently at the same conclusion.
- 34 See Rosemary Woolf's discussion of the concluding scenes of Corpus Christi tableaux (p.75). She also argues that the Passion Plays can be said to have been written down independently of each other, and of the rest of the cycle, because they were each written on a kind of paper which does not appear elsewhere in the codex (p. 309 and p. 418, n. 22). A great many manuscripts comprise more than one kind of paper, and a shift in watermarks does not in itself normally prove separate transcription of any portion of a manuscript. However, given the palaeographic evidence and the other indications of the separate origin of the Passion Plays, it seems clear that in this instance the different paper does reflect different times of transcription.
- 35 A revision of this kind would explain the occasional appearance of an English stage direction amid prosodic forms which are normally accompanied by stage directions in Latin (on ff. 185^v, 190^v, 199^r). Alternatively, ff. 184-85 may have been transcribed in anticipation of Passion Play 2.

- ³⁶ One cannot argue with confidence about the precise scope of the original cycle since many of the plays described in the Proclamation have been wholly replaced; one cannot, therefore, determine to which strata they belonged. Judging from the proclamation thirteeners which have survived in the plays listed in note 11, the original cycle seems to have contained several Old Testament plays, a Nativity group which emphasized Joseph and Mary, Ministry plays, perhaps a Passion sequence and a Doomsday play. It was certainly far less extensive than the present cycle, as indicated by the number of scenes and plays which are not accounted for by the Proclamation.
- ³⁷ Block, following Greg, attributed a marginal correction in the "Assumption" to the main scribe (p. xvii). The palaeographical evidence in this case, however, is uncertain.
- ³⁸ Although I do not discuss production methods here, it seems apposite to observe that the original N-town Cycle may well have been of manageable size for an itinerant troupe, and was perhaps performed in a single day. Subsequent additions to the text would have made the cycle too unwieldy for a one day production, and it is possible that the enlargement of the cycle was accompanied by new methods of performance. The division of the cycle into groups of plays no doubt resulted from its considerable size.
- ³⁹ Some plays, such as the "Trial of Joseph and Mary" and the "Nativity", may have been added to the cycle in pairs. Other plays, specifically those in rime couée and short-lined octaves, may have been added in larger groups.