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## The Banns in Medieval English Drama

Bruce Moore

The standard assumptions about the proclamation or riding of the banns as a prelude to the performance of medieval plays are summarized by David Bevington as follows:

The purpose of a 'riding of the banns' was to announce publicly a forthcoming performance of a Corpus Christi cycle. Most such ridings were colorfully festive affairs, combining showmanship and advertisement with a serious ceremonial purpose. Despite the fact that this occasion usually took place several days in advance of the actual dramatic performance of the cycle, an audience evidently gathered together and sat patiently in order to hear this important announcement. The audience witnessed a procession, heard music performed by minstrels, and received a brief account of each individual pageant in the ensuing cycle.<sup>1</sup>

Such an account is confirmed by the extant documents from the north of England (documents from Chester and Newcastle are discussed below), but the evidence from more southern counties (Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Kent) is more puzzling. It would seem that in some of these southern areas the 'riding of the banns' involved more than festive procession and announcement, and may well have included elements of performance. The texts of *The Castle of Perseverance*, *The Play of the Sacrament*, and the N-Town Cycle most likely derive from the East-Anglian area,<sup>2</sup> and it is interesting that 'The Proclamation' for the N-Town Cycle and 'The Banns' for *The Castle of Perseverance* and *The Play of the Sacrament* differ quite markedly in form from the Chester 'Banns'. It is possible that the East-Anglian texts preserve features of a tradition in which the banns involved the

performance of condensed versions of the complete text, or of narration accompanied by mime.

## I

For Chester we have the very late account of the riding of the banns in Rogers' *Breviary*:

Also euery yere that these playes were played, on St. Georges day before, was the banes read, which was a man did ride warlike apparaled like st. George throughe euery streete, with drume musicke and trumpetes. And there was published that the playes were played that yere, And that the breife or banes of the playe was reade what euery Company should playe, which was called the Readinge of the bannes . . .<sup>3</sup>

While we cannot be certain that for the earlier period the riding of the banns took place on St George's day, what evidence there is suggests that the form, at least, of the riding remained fairly constant. The 1539-40 Banns are headed: 'The comen bannes to be proclaymed & Ryddon with the stewardys of euery occupacion'.<sup>4</sup> Many of the expenses for the banns in the guild accounts refer to payments for the horses involved in the riding.<sup>5</sup> The processional route is not entirely clear, but references to payments to prisoners<sup>6</sup> indicate that the route must have taken them past the prisons at North Gate and at the Castle.<sup>7</sup> Clopper suggests that the route taken may have been the same as for the Midsummer Show, in which case 'the companies assembled at the Bars outside Eastgate, where the crier read the Banns and called forth the guilds',<sup>8</sup> and thereafter proceeded through the main streets of the city.

There are hints in the Chester records of some theatrical elements during the riding of the banns. The *Smiths, Cutlers, and Plumbers' Records* for 1560-61 include: 'Cost vs the rydinge the banes our horses & ourselues of the which symyon was one ij s'.<sup>9</sup> The Blacksmiths were responsible for Play XI, the *Purification*, and it seems that at times the actor who was to play Simeon appeared in the riding of the banns, no doubt costumed as he would be in the later performance. This character, however, also made appearances in the Midsummer Show procession. The 1554-55

*Smiths, Cutlers, and Plumbers' Records* include: 'for horsbred to Semeons horse 4d for gloues for him ijd, to prisoners same day ij d'.<sup>10</sup> This suggests that there were similarities between the processions involved in the Midsummer Show and the riding of the banns. Both processions included the ceremony of distributing alms to prisoners. More importantly, there was some interchange of 'entertainments'. Other companies included characters from their plays in the Midsummer Show procession. The Shoemakers were responsible for Play XIV, which includes the characters Mary Magdalene and Judas, both of whom appear in the *Cordwainers and Shoemakers' Records* in association with the Midsummer Show.<sup>11</sup> The Painters, Glaziers, and Broiderers<sup>12</sup> were responsible for Play VII, the *Shepherds*, and the 1576-77 *Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers' Records* include for Midsummer: 'Item to the ij sheperthes for going vppon the Syltes xx d'.<sup>13</sup> The Doby family was obviously skilled in stilt walking, for in 1572-73 two of its members received payments from the same company at Midsummer,<sup>14</sup> and in 1574-75 payments were made for stilt walking at Midsummer Eve and at the riding of the banns: 'Item to rychard dobye for goynge one the styltes at the banes rydenge vj d Item ffor goynge one the styltes one medsomare eue vj d'.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, from the same company in 1567-68 there are payments to two shepherds on Midsummer Eve and for the riding of the banns: 'Item to tow sheppertes for goyng vppon mydsomer euen x d Item to the tow sheppertes when the [sheppertes whytson] banes were Rydden x d'.<sup>16</sup> From this evidence it is fair to conclude that at Chester the riding of the banns involved a procession of members of the guilds through the city, a reading of the banns at the beginning of the procession and perhaps at other points, and some limited theatrical or entertainment elements.

The Chester model for the riding of the banns is largely repeated, I think, at Newcastle Upon Tyne, as the evidence would seem to suggest. All of the references to the banns derive from the *Chamberlains' Accounts*. For 18 May 1510 there is an 'Item paid to thomas Skelltoon ffor vncostes paynttyng & writtyng the bayn off the play xxj d',<sup>17</sup> and for 24 May of the same year there are two payments: 'Item paid to thomas Skellton ffor bryngyng fforth the bayn off the playe x s';<sup>18</sup> 'Item paid to ther mynstrall ffor goyng with the players viij d'.<sup>19</sup> On 13 June 1511 there is another payment to Thomas Skelton for his part in the banns: 'Item paid to thomas Skellton ffor the bayn off the playe xvj s'.<sup>20</sup> The Newcastle documents at least provide the evidence of minstrel activity in the riding of the banns – evidence which is lacking in the Chester guild documents, but which is asserted by Rogers. The payments to Thomas Skelton, at first glance, seem to be unusually high, but I think

that they are clarified by the more detailed entry in the *Chamberlains' Account Books* for the first week of September 1568:

Item paid to robart watson for the bone of the play ffirst for iij<sup>xx</sup>  
mens dinneres 1 s ffor xxxv horsse for the playeres at iiij d A  
horsse xj s viij d ffor wyne at ther dinneres vj s viij d mor for A  
drome viij d To the waites for playinge befor the playeres ij s  
for payntinge the Sergantes stavffes ij s for the sargantes stavffes  
ijs mor to Iohn hardcastell for makinge xlvj litle castelles & vj  
grett castelles to the bonne of the play viij s mor for payntinge  
belsyboubes clovbe iij d<sup>21</sup>

This document, seemingly so detailed, answers some questions and raises others. I think that we can assume that at Newcastle the town-crier or the bann-crier was responsible for organizing all of the aspects of the riding of the banns (and this explains the payments to Thomas Skelton in 1510-11), and that whereas at Chester the costs of the riding were shared by the guilds, at Newcastle this was a municipal responsibility (no matter how costs were eventually recovered). The two references to 'playeres' are more puzzling, and unless the term here means merely 'participants' the only clue to its significance lies in the reference to 'belsyboubes clovbe'. This perhaps suggests that as at Chester some of the actors who were to perform in the plays announced by the banns also took part, in costume, in the riding of the banns. The twofold emphasis on 'playeres' at Newcastle possibly indicates more emphasis on this custom.<sup>22</sup>

## II

When we turn to the south, we find that the evidence for the riding of the banns initially confirms the traditions of the north. The Proclamation of the N-Town Cycle and the Banns for *The Castle of Perseverance* and *The Play of the Sacrament* certainly resemble the Chester Banns. There are, however, some troubling differences – especially the fact that the southern texts are more detailed in their explication of the actions and events of the play(s). The Early Chester Banns in MS BL Harley 2150 are 187 lines long, and the Late Banns in Rogers' *Breviary* are 212 lines long. Although there are some exceptions, the standard pattern is for two plays

to be mentioned in each of the eight-line stanzas. *The Proclamation* for the N-Town Cycle is 528 lines long, and the standard pattern is for one play to be dealt with in each of the 13-line stanzas. More important than the number of lines devoted to each play is the fact that the Chester and N-Town Banns differ in their attitudes to the audience and in what they tell an audience about each play. The Chester Banns are not primarily interested in informing an audience about the content of the plays; rather, they are formal orders to the guilds to bring forth the plays:

The barbers and wax chaundlers also that day  
of the patriarche you shall play  
Abram that putt was to Assay  
To sley Isack his sonne<sup>23</sup>

The corresponding passage in N-Town is radically different in emphasis:

Of Abraham is þe fyfte pagent  
and of ysaac his sone so fre  
how þat he xulde with fere be brent  
and slayn with swerd as 3e xal se  
Abraham toke with good A-tent  
his sone ysaac and knelyd on kne  
his suerd was than ful redy bent  
and thouth his chylde þer offered xuld be  
Vpon An hyll full Ryff  
than god toke tent to his good wyl  
and sent An Angel ryth sone hym tyl  
and bad Abraham a shep to kyl  
And sauyd his chyldys lyff.<sup>24</sup>

If, as seems likely, the N-Town Cycle was performed at various towns,<sup>25</sup> the extra detail may be necessary to inform a potential audience of the detailed content of the performance – whereas at Chester a knowledge of the content could be taken for granted. The N-Town Proclamation is therefore an example of medieval theatrical marketing. And this is no doubt true of the Banns for *The Castle of Perseverance* (which in 156 lines give a detailed explication of the events of the play) and of *The Play of the Sacrament*.

Although further county volumes from the REED project may change the picture for other areas, already it seems that in southern areas such as Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Kent, from a relatively early time, there is evidence of players associated with a particular town visiting other towns to perform.<sup>26</sup> There is also abundant evidence of wider community drama – groups of villages or towns in a particular area pooling their resources. In 1530 twelve communities contributed to the expenses of the Great Dunmow Corpus Christi Play, and between 1530 and 1546 twenty-six communities (all within a radius of nine miles) contributed in various years to this play.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, at Bassingbourne in Cambridgeshire in 1511 twenty-seven surrounding villages contributed to a play 'of the holy martyr St. George'.<sup>28</sup> What is surprising, however, is some of the evidence for payments to players who are reading the banns. There is no evidence about how the payments were collected for the Great Dunmow play, but Wright suggests that this was done by 'collectors or bann criers',<sup>29</sup> and he further suggests possible reasons for the payments: 'for food ordered in advance, for special accommodation, for support of a worthwhile project'.<sup>30</sup> He also speculates: 'For more effective advertisement the collectors may have been attended by the Dunmow mummers or by bann criers giving a synopsis of the play'.<sup>31</sup>

At Long Sutton in Lincolnshire in 1542-43 the churchwardens made payments to two theatrical groups from neighbouring towns. One is for the players of Frampton: 'Item gyuen in rewarde to framton players whan they were here v<sup>s</sup>'.<sup>32</sup> Five shillings is at the top of the range for payments to players in the accounts from 1542 to 1560. It is therefore something of a surprise to find that in the same year, 1542-43, the bann criers from Frieston were also paid five shillings for the banns of their play: 'In primis payd to freston playars whan thay cryed y<sup>e</sup> bane here v<sup>s</sup>'.<sup>33</sup> It is significant that this emolument of five shillings is quite separate from and in addition to payment for food and drink: 'Item payd in reward to the Bayne of freston in [Bred and] ale ix<sup>d</sup>'.<sup>34</sup> Twenty years later there are further payments for banns from neighbouring towns. In 1563-64: 'Item paid to y<sup>e</sup> bayne of Dunnyngton vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup>'.<sup>35</sup> In 1564-65: 'Item paid to the bayne of Leake the somme of x<sup>s</sup> . . . Item paid to y<sup>e</sup> bayne of boston x<sup>s</sup>'.<sup>36</sup> Six shillings and eightpence is the sum paid to 'y<sup>e</sup> players that played vpon Trynytie sonday' in 1561-62,<sup>37</sup> and the sum paid to players from Spalding in 1564-65,<sup>38</sup> but ten shillings is twice the amount paid to groups of players from Bolingbroke and Ipswich in the same year.<sup>39</sup> In the following year there is another ten shilling payment for banns: 'Item paid to the bayne of Kyrton x<sup>s</sup>'.<sup>40</sup> The Riding of the Banns in these contexts cannot be of the

kind in existence at Chester and Newcastle. One major difference is that Frieston, Donington, Leake, Boston, and Kirton are relatively small villages or towns, twenty or more miles away from Long Sutton, and obviously engaged in an advertising campaign. And yet this is an advertising venture for which they are *paid*, and paid more than players from other towns who obviously put on a performance. These payments are also quite different in form from those made at Great Dunmow in Essex, where the various sums perhaps support Wright's hypothesis that the payments include sums for food and accommodation in advance. In 1532, for example, the payments were: High Rothing 4/8, Great Canfield 2/5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, Dunmow Priory 3/4, Stebbing 9/-, Little Canfield 4/-, Little Easton 5/-, Lindsell 6/1, Great Easton 10/3, Great Dunmow 15/3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, Barnston 4/6, High Easter 6/8, Good Easter 2/3, Shalford 2d, Thaxted 1/11, Great Bardfield 4/-, Rayene 3d.<sup>41</sup> They also differ from the kinds of payments made by the Cluniac Priory at Thetford in Norfolk, where it appears that between 1504 and 1509 the Priory contributed to the costs of games and plays in surrounding villages: 'to lopham game viij<sup>d</sup> . . . to the pley of Myldenale xij<sup>d</sup> . . . to Berdewell game xij<sup>d</sup> . . . to Ixworth pley xvij<sup>d</sup> . . . to Shelfanger pley iiij<sup>d</sup>'.<sup>42</sup> The only reasonable conclusion is that the Banns also involved performance, and performance of some magnitude, to gain the payments received.<sup>43</sup>

The most detailed records of bann criers so far published are from Kent,<sup>44</sup> and although this is a county slightly outside the area from which the extant Banns derive, the records indicate traditions entirely in keeping with those of Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk. Two records from Dover are indicative of the pattern: 1479-80 'It' paid in money . . . yeven to þe bane cryere of Romene vjs viij<sup>d</sup> ī vino xvij<sup>d</sup>;<sup>45</sup> 1481-82 'Item . . . paid to the bane criere of hethe vjs viij<sup>d</sup> & ī wyn viij<sup>d</sup>'.<sup>46</sup> First, as with many of the records from Kent, a distinction is made in the accounts between payments to the bann criers or players and other expenses incurred (mainly for food and drink), although occasionally these two expense items are combined. Secondly, the payment of six shillings and eightpence (which also occurs often in the Lincolnshire records) occurs as a common payment to bann criers or players, and also to other entertainers. Thirdly, if for the sake of comparison we take the period 1478-1488, the payments to the bann criers are very high indeed – in this period they are matched only by payments to the minstrels of the king, of the Earl of Arundel, and of the Earl of Gloucester, and they are exceeded only on one occasion by a payment of ten shillings to the minstrels of the Earl of Arundel. Fourthly, there are payments to various players without reference to the banns (for



example, the Earl of Arundel's players, and players from Hythe, Sandwich, and London), but these groups of players are consistently paid half the amount (three shillings and fourpence, i.e. payments of one sixth of a pound) paid to the bann criers. The consistency of the 6/8 payments (i.e. payments of one third of a pound) argues against the notion (as Wright suggests for Great Dunmow) that these are prepayments for food and drink and accommodation expenses on the day of the performance of the play. Rather, these payments match the payments for various kinds of performance or entertainment.

A similar pattern emerges at New Romney in Kent. This town has the most extensive records of payments to bann criers or players, and over a period of eighty years the sum of 6/8 occurs with some consistency. Payments for other entertainments are variable, but the following figures give some indication of relative rewards: 3/4 is a fairly standard payment for 'better-class' minstrels;<sup>47</sup> payments to players in the years 1538-41 (to the Lord Warden's players, the king's players, the players of Rochester, and the prince's players) vary from 8d to 5/-,<sup>48</sup> in 1517-18 the town spent £3-18-6 on its own play.<sup>49</sup> The bann criers from Lydd (of the towns which proclaimed their plays this is the closest to New Romney), received 6/8 on four occasions;<sup>50</sup> on one occasion they received 8/5, probably indicating that entertainment expenses were included in the amount.<sup>51</sup> On three occasions the bann criers from Hythe received 6/8.<sup>52</sup> On their first appearance in the records the bann criers from Folkestone received only 3/4, but received 6/8 on succeeding occasions.<sup>53</sup> The bann criers from Brookland consistently received less than those from Lydd, Hythe, and Folkestone, usually 4 or 5 shillings.<sup>54</sup> Bann criers from other towns (Appledore, Rye, Wye, Bethersden, and Halden) appear less frequently in the records, and they received lesser payments.<sup>55</sup> There is evidence that the people of New Romney responded in large numbers to the advertising of the Lydd players, for on two occasions there are records of payments to men to guard the town while the Lydd play was on.<sup>56</sup> Folkestone is 22 miles from New Romney, and obviously could not expect to attract large numbers to their play. The payments, however, suggest that the people of New Romney received some extensive entertainment from the bann proclaimers. Indeed, in 1503-04 when the bann criers from Lydd were in town a payment was made to John Lane: 'Item sol' Iohn Lane in parte solucionis pro labore suo in isto ludo iij<sup>s</sup> iij<sup>d</sup>'.<sup>57</sup> What this 'labour' entailed is not stated, and it may be that Lane was involved in preparations for the performance; but since 3/4 is such a standard payment for performance of various kinds, it is possible that he in fact took part in the performance – in 1502-03 this

same John Lane was paid 'in regard' pro portant' unum parcellum Bannarum ludi ville de Romene', which is possibly, as Dawson suggests, a reference to 'bills, perhaps, to be nailed up in neighbouring towns'.<sup>58</sup> It suggests, at least, that John Lane is one of New Romney's bann criers, and therefore probably one of its actors. As early as 1880 Robertson attempted to sort out the implications of these records, and concluded:

... I am inclined to believe that the expressions 'crying the bans' and 'proclaiming the bans' were peculiar to a certain town clerk of Romney, and meant 'reciting the parts of each character', or acting the play. Perhaps the meaning of each scene was proclaimed to the audience, by a man blessed with a strong voice, as each change was made. Whenever, thus, the play became a succession of *tableaux-vivants*, or a series of marionette performances, the men who shouted out, or proclaimed, what the scene meant, or what the figures were supposed to say, would fitly be said to cry the bans, for the word 'bans' means proclamations.<sup>59</sup>

The records now reveal, however, that the payment system and even the terminology are not peculiar to a particular New Romney scribe; rather, payment for the performance of the banns of a play is standard practice in many areas.<sup>60</sup> Nor is there evidence in the documents that the payments to the bann criers are donations towards the later staging of the play, or some form of pre-payment for later attendance. Given the widespread distribution of the terminology it is evident that the banns of a play cannot be equated with the play itself.

A similar pattern emerges at Hythe, where on three occasions the players or bann criers of Lydd<sup>61</sup> are paid 6/8, as are the bann criers of New Romney on one occasion.<sup>62</sup> In keeping with the payments delivered by other towns, the bann criers of Brookland are paid only 5/-.<sup>63</sup> The 1508-09 accounts for expenses incurred during the visit of the Lydd bann criers are interesting because they provide some detail about the nature of these expenses: 'for ale for the same banecriours xjd . . . for ij capons and for wyne for the seid banecriours ijs vjd . . . for a lambe for the same banecriours xijd . . . for wyne for the same banecriours iiijd . . . to a coke & to a turnebroche & a dishwasher iiijd . . . for a dosen of bredde & 1 stande of ale for the banecriours of Lydde xxjd'.<sup>64</sup> They also indicate that we are dealing with

quite a large number of performers. Finally, the records from Lydd confirm the prevailing pattern and also provide some interesting new details. Between 1486 and 1534 there are payments to bann criers from Hythe, Folkestone, Appledore, Brookland, and Ivychurch, ranging from 3/4 to 6/8.<sup>65</sup> But there is also a payment in 1465-66 to the players of Hythe for the performance of a play in the town: 'for Exspence of þe playere of hethe her on dedicaciō day viij<sup>s</sup> x<sup>d</sup> . . . yoven to hem þe same tyme vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup>.<sup>66</sup> There are eight payments to players or bann criers from New Romney. The four earliest payments (1450-52, 1454-55, 1465-66, 1476-77) refer only to players, and the final four (1479-80, 1516-17, 1525-26, 1532-33) refer to bann criers; with one exception, the payment is always 6/8. Two of the early payments to players make it clear that a play was actually performed in Lydd. Just as in 1465-66 the players of Hythe performed a play on the church's Dedication Day (November 1), so in 1454-55 the Romney players put on a play on the same day: 'Item sol' pro pane et birra dictis lusoribus de Romene ostendentibus suum ludum hic die dedicacionis ecclesie . . . ij<sup>s</sup> . . . Item dat' eisdem lusoribus eodem die in Curiositate x<sup>s</sup>.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, in 1465-66 the New Romney players performed in Lydd on the Monday of Whitsun: 'Itm' in Exspence of þe playere of Romene shewyng her play her on whitsonmōday iij<sup>s</sup> . . . It' yoven to hem þe same tyme vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup>.<sup>68</sup> Later, in 1516-17, the bann criers of Romney were paid the standard 6/8, but in the same year there is an interesting payment for guards: 'Itm' paid for the labo<sup>r</sup> of v. men wacchyng the towne at the play day of Romene xx<sup>d</sup>.<sup>69</sup> This suggests that the townsfolk responded to the advertising campaign of the bann criers, and all travelled the three miles to New Romney to enjoy the 'play day', leaving the town guarded, just as the New Romney townsfolk did on two occasions when they attended the Lydd play. And, indeed, these three years when the banns were performed in one town, and the play was performed in another, are confirmation of the fact that the 'crying of the banns' and the 'play' are not one and the same thing.

### III

What form this performance of the banns took can be only a matter of conjecture, but it is useful to look again at the Banns for *The Castle of Perserverance* and *The Play of the Sacrament* and the Proclamation for the N-Town Cycle in the light of the Long Sutton evidence. The Banns for *The Castle of Perseverance* were

proclaimed a week before the performance of the play, and the audience is promised that the roles, 'parcellys',<sup>70</sup> which have been described will be played 'in propyrtes' (132), that is with full stage effects. The account of the Banns given by Eccles is not, I think, entirely accurate; he claims:

It is clear from the banns that a travelling company acted the play on tour, giving one performance in each village or town they visited. One week in advance, two men with banners and trumpets rode into town, gathered a crowd, and announced to 'the good commons of this town' that a play would be presented 'on the green in royal array'. The two banner-bearers told the story and urged all good neighbours to come early to the play.<sup>71</sup>

Now this is not necessarily quite what the Banns say. Towards the end of the Banns we find the statement:

Dese parcellys in propyrtes we purpose us to playe  
Dis day seuenenyt before 3ou in syth  
At . . . on þe grene in ryal aray.  
3e haste 3ou þanne þedyrward, syrrys, hendly in hyth,  
All goode neyborys ful specyaly we 3ou pray,  
And loke þat 3e be þere betyme, luffely and lyth,  
For we schul be onward be vnderne of þe day,  
Dere frendys. (132-39)

While it is true, as Eccles claims, that '[a]ny place-name could be inserted'<sup>72</sup> in line 134, it does not necessarily follow that the play is to be performed in the town where the Banns are cried. Indeed, the whole feel of this passage suggests that the 'goode neyborys' are being urged to attend a performance of the play at a venue outside their own village. On the other hand, this is obviously, as Eccles says, a travelling company (otherwise there would be no need for variation in designated place of performance), but this passage in the Banns suggests that once the place of performance has been chosen by the company, an advertising campaign is conducted in surrounding villages. The staging requirements of *The Castle of Perseverance* are quite demanding (the castle itself, the scaffolds, and so on), but what the 'vexillatores' say in the Banns does not preclude the possibility that a condensed and

mimed version of the play was presented – with costume, perhaps, but without elaborate stage properties – as part of the advertising campaign.

Lines 85-117, which describe how Mankind is enticed into the world from the Castle of Perseverance, falls prey to covetousness, and at his death is concerned primarily about the distribution of his wealth, are representative of the mode of the Banns as a whole:

þe Badde Aungyl to þe Werld tollyth hym downe  
þe Castel of Perseueraunce to fle fro þe vayle  
And blysse.  
þanne þe Werld begynnyth hym to restore.  
Haue he neuere so mykyl, 3yt he wold haue more;  
þus þe Badde Aungyl leryth hym lys lore.  
þe more a man agyth, þe harder he is.

Hard a man is in age and covetouse be kynde.  
Whanne all oþyr synnys Man hath forsake,  
Euere þe more þat he hath þe more is in hys mynde  
To gadyr and to gete good wyth woo and wyth wrake.  
(85-95)

The narrative in this passage is insistently in the present tense, and the action is insistently suggestive of mime. Mankind's covetousness could easily be suggested by very traditional and conventional gestures. In the early thirteenth century text, *The Vision of Thurkill*, which is an account of a vision of Heaven and Hell supposedly experienced by an Exeter peasant in 1208, there is a section which describes an open-air Theatre of Hell where sinners are compelled to act out their pre-mortuary sins for the entertainment of the devils. The passage *De quodam iusticiario* describes a justiciary who had held a high reputation, but who had in fact built up his wealth by taking bribes during the performance of his legal duties:

Cum autem hic in theatri ludibrio coram malignis spiritibus adduceretur omnesque ei acclamarent et cachinnando insultarent, coactus est gestus et modum vitae transactae representando replicare. Nam nunc ad dexteram nunc ad laevam se huc illucque divertens quasi cum utraque parte litigantium loquebatur, nunc

istos de proponenda causa informans, nunc illos de responsione et causarum contradictione muniens; manus ipsae a mobilitate sua interim non quiescebant, sed nunc ab his nunc vero ab illis pecuniam accipiebant acceptamque numerabant, numeratam alicubi reponebant.<sup>73</sup>

[When this man was brought forth into this theatre of mockery before the malignant spirits and all gave him mocking applause and insulted him by laughing derisively at him, he was forced to repeat the gestures and style of his past life by re-enacting them. And so, turning himself in different directions, now to the right, now to the left, hither and thither, as if he were addressing each of the two parties to a legal dispute, now instructing these men here (the plaintiffs) about the pleas they needed to propose, now setting up a defence for those men there (the defendants) by giving them a legal rebuttal of, and a plea counter to, the plaintiffs' pleas, his hands the while were never still as he rapidly changed sides: his hands kept on receiving money, now from these, now forsooth from those, and his hands kept counting the money so received, and his hands kept pocketing the money so counted.]

While the obsessive money-counting is obviously a stock gesture of avarice, as is the surreptitious holding out of the extended palm for the bribe, the other mimetic gestures in this passage would seem to require an actor's art; and they give us, I think, a sensing of how the actors of the Banns would have 'come across' to the 'goode neyborys' in village after village. The visual element, for instance, in *The Castle of Perseverance* Banns is very much to the fore: what we hear (insistently in the present tense) is not narrative so much as description of what is progressively there to be seen. It is not inconsistent with mimetic performance:

Dus þe Goode Aungyl caste is behynde  
And þe Badde Aungyl Man to hym takyth,  
Dat wryngyth hym wrenchys to hys last ende  
Tyl Deth comyth foul dolfully and loggyth hym in a lake  
Ful lowe.  
Þanne is Man on molde maskeryd in mynde.

He sendyth afftyr hys sekkatours, ful fekyl to fynde,  
And hys eyr aftyrward comyth euere behynde,  
I Wot Not Who is hys name, for he hym nowt knowe.

Man knowe not who schal be hys eyr and gouerne hys good.  
He caryth more for hys catel þanne for hys cursyd synne.  
To putte hys good in gouernaunce he mengyth hys mod,  
He wolde þat it were scyfftyd amongys hys ny kynne.  
But þer schal com a lythyr ladde wyth a torne hod,  
I Wot Neuere Who schal be hys name, hys cloþis be full þynne,  
Schal eryth þe erytage þat neuere was of hys blod,  
Whanne al hys lyfe is lytyd upon a lytyl pynne  
At þe laste.  
On lyue whanne he may no lenger lende,  
Mercy he callyth at hys laste ende:  
'Mercy, God! be now myn frende!'  
Wyth þat Mans spyryt is paste.

(96-117)

The accounts of the casting behind of the Good Angel and the embracing of the Bad Angel, and the sudden appearance of Death, lend themselves readily to accompanying mimed action. And the description of that ordinary, ubiquitous and disturbingly sinister figure, the unexpected heir hitherto unknown who comes from nowhere and whose name is 'I Wot Not Who' – 'a lythyr ladde wyth a torne hod . . . hys cloþis be ful þynne' – strikes us very much as an account of what the audience is in the process of seeing.<sup>74</sup>

The insistent allusion to some form of dramatic action in this passage can be established by means of a contrast, for if one were to look for a comparable passage in the later drama, it is Richard II's remarkable meditation on death which comes immediately to mind:

For within the hollow Crowne  
That rounds the mortall Temples of a King,  
Keepes Death his Court, and there the Antique sits  
Scoffing his State, and grinning at his Pompe,  
Allowing him a breath, a little Scene,

To Monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with lookes,  
Infusing him with selfe and vaine conceit,  
As if this Flesh, which walls about our Life,  
Were Brasse impregnable: and humor'd thus,  
Comes at the last, and with a little Pinne  
Bores through his Castle Walls, and farwell King.<sup>75</sup>

The affective similarity between the two passages is striking. In both, all man's wealth and wit and wonder are mercilessly reduced at the last to a minutia which is also, suddenly, everything there is: 'al hys lyfe is lytyd upon a lytyl pynne', 'with a little Pinne / Bores through his Castle Walls, and farwell King'. In both there is finely evoked a sense of man's utter vulnerability, in the former because man has left the round and fortified Castle of sanctifying grace, in the latter because man is himself the Castle rounded with 'Brasse impregnable', yet breached with a pin. In both there is a haunting sense of the 'Other': the 'lythyr ladde' and the 'Antique' in the skull are brothers under the skin. And yet the differences are striking. Every salient feature in the former passage is immediately, physically visualizable; nothing in the latter passage is (or is meant to be).<sup>76</sup> The 'lythyr ladde' is there as the 'Antique' is not; the 'lytyl pynne' is there, so forlornly clutched, as the 'little Pinne', boring through brass, is not. Everything in the former passage is projected outwards, onto a stage, even the most inner of feelings; everything in the latter passage devolves inwards, away from the 'little Scene', and into the mind of the musing king. That is why everything in the former passage is mimable; nothing whatever in the latter passage is. No mimer in the world could mime Death boring through Richard's impregnable walls as he half-soliloquizes his lines; the lines were not intended for dramatic presentation of that kind. But the lines from the Banns for *The Castle of Perseverance* would seem to call for such a mime.

#### IV

The dramatic mode of narration accompanied by mime was by no means unusual in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in praxis as well as in theory. Many medieval commentators, for instance, supposedly because they suffered under a misunderstanding of the classical theatre, hypothesized that the classical dramatist, or his representative, read out his work while actors mimed it, and this fiction



received its most famous visualization in the so-called *Terence des Ducs* manuscripts from the early fifteenth century.<sup>77</sup> The most direct source of this misunderstanding is probably to be located in Isidore of Seville's definition of *Mimi* in his influential *Etymologiae*. The tradition is reflected in Lydgate's account of the classical stage in his *Troy Book* (written between 1412 and 1420).<sup>78</sup> Lydgate describes a theatre with a small semi-circular altar, upon which was erected a pulpit in which the poet stood and recited his works (860-82). He goes on to describe the content of the plays, all of which 'was tolde and rad of þe poete' (896). He then comments that in the midst of this theatre there was a 'tent' (900), and from this 'tent' masked actors would emerge to mime the actions which the poet described: 'So þat þer was no maner discordaunce / Atwen his dities and her contenaunce' (905-06). Wickham's suggestion that the *Troy Book* passage shows strong similarities to Lydgate's own mummings and disguisings, and that it may 'portray quite accurately the London indoor 'theatre', c. 1430, for which Lydgate wrote',<sup>79</sup> has not generally been well received, and it is often suggested that the *Troy Book* passage must be derivative of some such work as Isidore's *Etymologiae*. The two explanations, however, are not mutually exclusive. There seems little doubt that Lydgate did consult some such secondary source;<sup>80</sup> but it is also very likely that the misconception about the classical theatre may well have produced its own late medieval imitations. Lydgate's mummings and disguisings, with one exception, are not especially demanding on the performers, but their mode of performance is significant – the narrator reads out the text while the actors perform the mime.

Lydgate's texts of this kind include *A Mumming at Windsor*, *A Mumming at Eltham*, *A Mumming at London*, *The Mumming at Bishopswood*, *A Mumming for the Mercers of London*, and *A Mumming for the Goldsmiths of London*. Two texts, *A Pageant of Knowledge* and *A Mumming at Hertford*, are slightly different in mode in that they begin with narration accompanied by mime, but conclude with the actors speaking some dialogue. The first part of *A Mumming at Hertford* may be taken as representative of the mode of narration accompanied by mime. A Presenter gives a formal introduction, explaining that certain rustics have arrived at the castle to complain about the treatment they have received from their wives. The presenter then outlines the men's complaints with a speech that is obviously accompanied by lively and comic mime. The narrational mode is remarkably similar to the passage from the Banns of *The Castle of Perseverance* quoted above:

For *Obbe* þe Reeve, þat gooþe heere al to-forne,  
He pleyneþe sore his mariage is not meete,  
For his wyff, *Beautryce Bittersweete*,  
Cast vpon him an hougly cheer ful rowghe,  
Whane he komeþe home ful wery frome þe ploughe,  
With hungry stomake deed and paale of cheere,  
In hope to fynde redy his dynier;  
Þanne sitteþe *Beautryce* bolling at þe nale,  
As she þat gyveþe of him no maner tale;  
For she al day, with hir iowsy nolle,  
Hathe for þe collyk pouped in þe bolle,  
And for heed aache with pepir and gynger  
Dronk dolled ale to make hir throte cleer . . .<sup>81</sup>

The action involves a series of rollicking, farce-like vignettes which are meant to demonstrate the husbands' claim that 'þer is noon eorþely stryff / May beo compared to wedding of a wyff' (21-22). The description of action, however, is not merely narrational. It takes the form of verbal cues given to the actors by the narrator, and explanations of the action which may not be entirely clear in the mime. '*Obbe* þe Reeve' is clearly the cue for this actor to step forward and begin his performance, and the narrator gestures to him verbally and no doubt physically: 'þat gooþe heere al to-forne'. The wife's name '*Beautryce Bittersweete*' and the opening description of her gestures and facial expressions ('an hougly cheer ful rowghe') set the tone for her whole mimetic performance at this point, as do her drinking to cure the aftermath of her drunkenness, her 'bolling at þe nale' and 'pouped in þe bolle'. All of this indicates miming of no mean skill, and miming which is certainly more demanding and complex than her climactic physical violence: 'with hir distaff she hitteþe him in þe nekke' (52). Hobbe the Reeve has mimetic demands made on him too, though these may be more simple. He is obviously stooped as he drags himself home from work, and the commentary explains his gestures: 'he komeþe home ful wery frome þe ploughe'. He must also indicate his ravening hunger: 'With hungry stomake deed and paale of cheere . . . In hope to fynde redy his dynier'. What ensues is traditional knock-about farce as husband and wife fight. The comedy is broad and deliberately exaggerated, for its intent, at this stage, is to make the women as grotesque as possible. All this changes, of course, when the women speak – and demolish the husbands' case.

Lydgate's dramatic pieces illustrate just how common a dramatic mode was the combination of narration and mime in the fifteenth century, and he was writing in an area closely associated with the N-Town Cycle, *The Play of the Sacrament*, and *The Castle of Perseverance*, as well as with many of the other extant plays – *The Norwich Grocers' Play*, the *Brome Abraham*, *Dux Moraud*, the *Rickingham Fragment*, the other Macro Plays, and the Digby Plays.<sup>82</sup> Lydgate also wrote verses which appear to have been designed for recital in explication of the dumb-shows of a Corpus Christi procession, and he was closely involved with civic pageants as well.<sup>83</sup> The civic pageant, in fact, provides one of the clearest examples of narration accompanied by mime, for in the fourteenth century and probably until the middle of the fifteenth century, the tableaux were explained to the audience by a pageant-interpreter.<sup>84</sup> Earlier than the civic pageants there is the evidence of *La Seinte Resureccion*, where it is likely that the narrative passages were meant to be read out during performance by an Expositor or *meneur de jeu*.<sup>85</sup> More germane to my argument, however, is the Prologue to *The Pride of Life*. The Prologue has attracted attention mainly because it outlines the plot of the play, and therefore fills in details for the play's missing sections; but though interpretation of it is made difficult by the fact that many words were illegible or lost in the now destroyed manuscript, and the restorations are purely conjectural, the Prologue has a dramatic and, indeed, mimetic interest as well. In this it bears some resemblance to the Banns of *The Castle of Perseverance* and *The Play of the Sacrament*, and to the Proclamation for the N-Town Cycle, except that the Prologue is narrated immediately prior to the performance of the play. After some introductory stanzas calling for silence, the King of Life is introduced:

[Of þe Kyng of] Lif I wol 3ou telle;

[He stondith] first biffore

[All men þat beth] of flessch and fel

[And of woman i]bore.

[He is, forsoth, ful] stronge to stond,

[And is] bycomin of kinge,

[3iveth] lawis in eche a londe,

[And nis] dradd of no thinge.

[In] pride and likinge his lif he ledith,  
Lordlich he lokith with eye;  
[Prin]ce and dukis, he seith, him dredith,  
[He] dredith no deth for to deye. (17-28)<sup>86</sup>

The first part of line 18 ('He stondith') is conjectural, but the second half of the line suggests that the King of Life is actually present. The use of the present tense throughout the passage (especially 'Lordlich he *lokith* with eye') is further confirmation of the actor's presence, and the narrator's words suggest that the King of Life exhibits traditional gestures of pride and arrogance. Once the necessity for mime is recognized, the rest of the Prologue is revealed for what it is: a condensed dumb-show version of the whole play:

[Her ek is þe] ladi of lond,  
[Þe fa]inist a lord for to led;  
[Glad] may he be fort to stond  
[And b]ehold þat blisful bled.

[Þat]t ladi is lettrit in lor  
As cumli becomit for a quen,  
And munit hir mac euirmor,  
As a dar for dred him to ten.

Ho bid him bewar or he smert,  
[F]or in his lond Det wol alend;  
[As] ho louit him gostlic in hert  
Ho bit him bewar of his hend.

[Ho] begynit to charp of char  
Þes wordis wytout lesing:  
'Det dot not spar  
Knytis, cayser, ne kyng.

Nou lord, leu þi likynd  
Wyc bringit þe soul gret bal.'

Dis answer ho had of þe kyng;

'3e, þis a womanis tal.'

(41-60)

The Queen is introduced, and in response to her husband's arrogant boasting, she exhibits gestures of grief – perhaps the traditional wringing of the hands. She warns him of the threat of Death, of his mortality (perhaps by means of the traditional gestures of warning and admonition – the holding up of the forefinger with fist clenched, or the holding out of the hand with palm outward), but the King of Life scornfully dismisses her warnings as mere woman's talk (no doubt once again enforced by a gesture of rejection). The rest of the Prologue is similarly evocative of a condensed dumb-show of the play: the appearance of the bishop who 'precit al þat he coupe' (69); the King's boredom with the sermonizing; his eventual brusque and chagrined dismissal of the bishop; his overweening challenge to Death; Death's arrival on the chilling cue 'Deth comith' (81), as in the comparable line in the Banns of *The Castle of Perseverance* – 'Deth comyth'; the tourney between the King of Life and Death, and the King's inevitable defeat; the intercession of the Virgin Mary to save the King's soul, and so forth.

## V

The Banns for the N-Town Cycle were proclaimed a week before the performance. In their present form, there is much emphasis in them on what the actors 'purpose to shewe' (53), and there is no overwhelming evidence in the extant text that it was accompanied by mime. And yet, as suggested above, the N-Town Banns differ quite markedly in dramatic mode from the Chester Banns. The description of the second pageant, for example, may be just a summary of well-known events, but it is also a point by point account of a performance:

The Serpent toke Eve an Appyl to byte  
and Eve toke Adam a mursel of þe same  
whan þei had do þus a-zens þe rewle of ryte  
than was oure lord wroth and grevyd al with grame  
Oure lord gan appose þem of þer gret debyte  
both to Askuse hem of þat synful blame  
and þan almythy god ffor þat gret dyspite

*The Banns in Medieval English Drama*

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 a-way  
in bybyl as we rede. (40-52)

The line 'as 3e xal se in game', as with the following 'purpose to shewe' (53), suggests that this extant form of the Banns is primarily a verbal announcement of the actions which are to be performed in the following week. It is, of course, quite different from the corresponding passage in the Chester Banns, where the opening sequence of the Cycle is referred to in only the most summary of ways:

You wurshipfull men of the draperye  
loke that paradyce be all redye  
Prepare also the mappa mundi  
Adam and eke eve (Chester, p. 34, lines 34-37)

There are perhaps three possible explanations for this difference of emphasis. First, the explanation suggested earlier: whereas the Chester Banns are addressed to an audience fully conversant with the content of the Cycle, the Banns for the N-Town Cycle are addressed to an audience not fully conversant with the performance which is to be given. Secondly, the N-Town Banns may preserve elements of a prior dramatic tradition in which the actions of the plays were mimed to an accompanying narration. Indeed, it has become a commonplace of scholarship that the Cycle plays as we now have them may have developed out of the *tableaux vivants* which had become part of the Corpus Christi procession. Tydeman summarizes the hypothesis in this way:

The idea may have occurred to the guilds that their usual banners, visual devices, and walking figures (such as St Magnus in 1298) might be appropriately supplemented by displays having scriptural significance – Noah's Ark, the Tree of Knowledge, the Manger at Bethlehem – especially if a particular biblical tableau were appropriate to the trade responsible for its mounting . . . . From these simple beginnings it was no doubt a logical step for

the guilds to include in the parade wheeled floats carrying human figures in costume (possibly deriving from the walking impersonators) to depict scenes from the Old and New Testaments in dumbshow, and so create mobile versions of the French *mystères mimés*; after a while the characters on the vehicles possibly began to deliver brief speeches either as they travelled or when the floats came to a halt. It is probable that from this germ may be traced the growth of the spoken processional cycle plays of the British Isles.<sup>87</sup>

While all of this is hypothesis, it is interesting that some aspects of the hypothesized 'development' correspond to actual elements of the Riding of the Banns at both Chester and Newcastle in the sixteenth century, where part of the advertising of the plays includes costumed actors riding in procession. Moreover, even within the commonly accepted account of the development of the Cycles, one possible transitional stage is often ignored – an intermediary stage between dumb-show and full performance, in which the events depicted in dumb-show were described and explicated by a narrator-figure. The third explanation for the difference of emphasis between the Chester Banns and the Banns of *The Castle of Perseverance* is the one offered in this article – that in some parts of England in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Banns for various kinds of plays were either condensed versions of the complete plays or dumb-show versions of them, with narration accompanied by mime.

The final evidence for the case I am arguing occurs, I think, with *The Play of the Sacrament*. Towards the end of the Banns the 'Secundus Vexillator' announces:

And yt place yow, thys gaderyng þat here ys,  
At Croxston on Monday yt shall be sen;  
To see the conclusyon of þis lytell processe  
Hertely welcum shall yow bene. (73-76)<sup>88</sup>

Davis rejects the idea that the play belongs to a town called Croxton: 'for the very nature of the proclamation implies a travelling company'.<sup>89</sup> I find nothing in the Banns which absolutely demands that this is the play of a travelling company. It is equally feasible that the Banns are the advertising medium for a play from the town of Croxton. Which Croxton, of course, is more difficult to discern. Yet within the

text of the play there is the claim that the Doctor comes from 'þe colkote, a lytyll besyde Babwell Myll' (621), and Davis comments: 'Babwell Priory was a Franciscan house a mile or so from Bury St. Edmunds on the road to Thetford in Norfolk, and one of the numerous Croxtons is less than three miles from Thetford (there is another in Norfolk, near Fakenham, and others in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire), and so about twelve from Babwell'.<sup>90</sup> Davis concludes that the 'region of Thetford is a possible one for the origin of the play'.<sup>91</sup> If that is true, there is no overwhelming need to assume a group of travelling players. And there is some interesting 'circumstantial' evidence. Thetford, as we have seen, is very close to Croxton, and the accounts for Thetford Priory for 1506/7 include the payment: 'Item sol' in regard to the gylde of Crokeston xx<sup>d</sup>.<sup>92</sup> In a footnote Wasson suggests that this 'reference may be to a contribution to the Bann-criers for the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*'.<sup>93</sup> If this were so, it would be fully in keeping with the dramatic traditions of this area. Moreover, the Banns of *The Play of the Sacrament* clearly indicate that more than a verbal proclamation is involved in 'þis lytell processe':

S[o]uereyns, and yt lyke yow to here þe purpoos of þis play  
That [ys] representyd now in yower syght,  
Which in Aragon was doon, þe sothe to saye . . . .  
(9-11)

There follows a summary of the play, and, as we have seen, towards the end the audience is told that they may 'see the conclusyon of þis lytell processe' on Monday at Croxton. However, the Vexillator's lines ('þe purpoos of þis play / That [ys] representyd now in yower syght') clearly imply that something is being seen. And it is surely no accident that in the summary of the events of the play much emphasis is given to those scenes which are most easily conveyed by means of mime, as well as to some of the play's sensational elements. In the Banns the number of characters is greatly reduced, and the Doctor episode is omitted. The first part of the play is reduced to the meeting between the Christian merchant Aristorius and the Jew Jonathas, and it is narrated in a manner which is most conducive to mime:

Off þis Cristen merchaunte he freyned sore,  
Wane he wolde haue had hys entente.



Twenti pownd and merchaundyse mor  
He proferyd for þe Holy Sacrament.

But þe Cristen marchaunte theroff sed nay,  
Because hys profer was of so lityll valewe;  
An hundder pownd but he wolde pay  
No lenger theron he shuld pursewe.

But mor off ther purpos they gunne speke,  
The Holi Sacramente for to bey;  
And all for þe wolde be wreke,  
A gret sume off gold begune down ley.  
Thys Crysten merchante consentyd, þe sothe to sey,  
And in þe nyght affter made hym delyueraunce.

(21-34)

The scene could easily be mimed by means of the kinds of gestures mentioned in relation to the passages from *The Vision of Thurkill* and the Banns of *The Castle of Perseverance*. Plenty of time is allowed for the actions to be performed. But the summary of the rest of the play does not sit easily with the notion of accompanying mime:

Thes Jewes all grete joye made they;  
But off thys betyde a straunger chaunce:

They grevid our Lord gretly on grownd,  
And put hym to a new passyoun;  
With daggers gouen hym many a greuyos wound;  
Nayled hym to a pyller, with pynsons plucked hym doune.

And sythe thay toke þat blysed brede so sownde  
And in a cawdron they ded hym boyle.  
In a clothe full just they yt wounde,  
And so they ded hym sethe in oyle;

And than thay putt hym to a new turmentry,  
In an hoote ouyn speryd hym fast.  
There he appyred with woundys blody;  
The ovyn rofe asondre and all tobrast.  
Thus in our lawe they wer made stedfast;  
The Holy Sacrement sheuyd them grette fauour;  
In contrycyon thyr hertys wer cast  
And went and shewyd ther lyues to a confesour.  
(35-52)

Common sense dictates that if mime is at work here it is not synchronized with the vexillators' words, since there is too much stage business to be performed in such a short time. The mime therefore could not be like that in Lydgate's mummings, where the narration and the mime are conterminous. One notes, however, that each quatrain is devoted to a self-contained scene, and it is possible that there were breaks in the proclamation while the action was mimed. It is equally possible to imagine other forms of production. For example, if the characters playing the Jews surround the sacred Host so that it is hidden from view, appropriate gestures could be performed to create the illusion of action – with 'daggers' and hammers and 'pynsons' and a 'cawdron' briefly appearing, and a 'clothe' all 'blody' – until the climactic moment when on the line 'The ovyn rofe asondre and all tobrast', the Jews surrounding the Host are 'flung' to the ground to a drum-clap, and so reveal the Host 'transformed' to the bloodied person of Christ. The specifics of performance are obviously not recoverable, although the Banns make it clear that minstrels are involved: 'Now, mynstrell, blow vp with a mery stevyn' (80). But that there *is* performance of some kind is certain.

V

The evidence presented in this study suggests that the dramatic activity associated with the proclamation of the banns, especially in the southern counties, was more extensive than has hitherto been suspected. In the absence of extant contemporary descriptions, the interpretation of the evidence is of necessity conjectural. However, the records of payments to the performers of the banns and the texts of the surviving banns offer strong evidence for the argument that

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proclamation of the banns involved condensed versions of the complete p  
narration accompanied by mime.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston, 1975), p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> For the provenance of *The Castle of Perseverance* see *The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles, EETS os 262 (London, 1969), pp. xi-xv. For *The Play of the Sacrament* see *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS ss 1 (London, 1970), pp. lxxvi-lxxxv. For argument about the supposed Lincoln provenance of the N-Town Cycle see, for example: Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 239-80; Kenneth Cameron and Stanley J. Kahrl, 'The N-Town Plays at Lincoln', *Theatre Notebook*, 20 (1965), 61-69. For East-Anglian provenance see, for example, Mark Eccles, 'Ludus Coventriae Lincoln or Norfolk?', *Medium Aevum*, 40 (1971), 135-41; Gail McMurray Gibson, 'Bury St. Edmunds, Lydgate, and the N-Town Cycle', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 56-90.

<sup>3</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Chester*, ed. Lawrence M. Clopper (Toronto and Buffalo, 1979), p. 325, lines 26-33. Hereafter referred to as *Chester*.

<sup>4</sup> *Chester*, p. 34, lines 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the expense items are very general, for example: *Cordwainers and Shoemakers' Records* 1549-50 'Item peyd ffor Reyding the banes xix d', *Chester*, p. 49, line 32; *Smiths, Cutlers, and Plumbers' Records* 1553-54 'for ridinge the banes xiiij d the Citty Crier ridd', *Chester*, p. 53, line 14. Typical references to payments for horses include: *Smiths, Cutlers, and Plumbers' Records* 1566-67 'for bred for our horses that day we Rod the banes xij d', *Chester*, p. 77, lines 34-35; *Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers' Records*, 1574-75 'Item for bred to oure horses when wye rede the banes viij d', *Chester*, p. 106, line 24; see also *Chester*, p. 81, line 33, p. 92, line 1.

<sup>6</sup> For example, *Cordwainers and Shoemakers' Records* 1567-68 'Item payde newton & the presonares yat day yat whe rode ye banes v d', *Chester*, p. 79, lines 23-24; *Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers' Records* 1567-68 'Item to the prysoners j d Item to newton for Rydyng of the banees j d', *Chester*, p. 81, lines 34-35.

<sup>7</sup> *Chester*, p. lv.

<sup>8</sup> *Chester*, p. lv.

<sup>9</sup> *Chester*, p. 66, lines 13-14. Other records from this company suggest emphasis on ceremonial dress: 1571-72 'ffor the Banes for dressinge our huddes xiiij d for gloues same day x d', *Chester*, p. 90, lines 38-39.

<sup>10</sup> *Chester*, p. 55, lines 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> 'Item spend in setting out of mare modelan on mydsomar even xx d', *Chester*, p. 69, lines 27-28; 'Item payd vpon mydsomer yeven ffor the setyngge ffowrthe of marye modeand and Iudas the some of xvj d', *Chester*, p. 71, lines 17-18. See also *Chester*, p. 74, line 31; p. 79, line 30; p.

87, line 14; p. 88, line 36.

<sup>12</sup> At times the play is attributed to only the Painters and Glaziers, or to only the Painters – see R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents*, with an essay 'Music in the Cycle' by Richard Rastall (Chapel Hill and London, 1983), p. 197.

<sup>13</sup> *Chester*, p. 120, line 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Chester*, p. 98, lines 14-16.

<sup>15</sup> *Chester*, p. 107, lines 22-24.

<sup>16</sup> *Chester*, p. 83, lines 39-41.

<sup>17</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Newcastle Upon Tyne*, ed. J. J. Anderson (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1982), p. 14, lines 21-22. Hereafter referred to as *Newcastle*.

<sup>18</sup> *Newcastle*, p. 14, lines 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> *Newcastle*, p. 14, line 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Newcastle*, p. 17, line 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Newcastle*, p. 56, lines 18-27.

<sup>22</sup> From the limited evidence available, a similar situation appears to have existed at Beverley. In 1423 Thomas Bynham was paid 6s 8d for composing the banns of the Corpus Christi play, which banns were to be proclaimed throughout the city, and minstrels were paid 20d for riding with the bann-criers – see Arthur F. Leach, 'Some English Plays and Players, 1220-1548', in *An English Miscellany presented to Dr. Furnivall in honour of his seventy-fifth birthday*, ed. W. P. Ker, A. S. Napier, and W. W. Skeat (1901; re-issued New York and London, 1969), pp. 205-234 (at 215). The banns for the York *Creed Play*, which were proclaimed on St Bartholomew's eve before performance on Whitmonday, similarly appear to have been limited to the city – see *Records of Early English Drama: York*, ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1979), p. 177, lines 34-41.

<sup>23</sup> *Chester*, p. 35, lines 4-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ludus Coventriae or The Plaie called Corpus Christi*, ed. K. S. Block, EETS es 120 (London, 1922), lines 79-91.

<sup>25</sup> The travelling company theory depends entirely on interpretation of lines 525-27 of The Proclamation: 'A sunday next yf þat we may / At vj of þe belle we gynne oure play / In N. town'. It is not certain, however, whether 'N' is the initial of an actual town, or an abbreviation of *nomen*.

<sup>26</sup> The evidence from Sussex, when fully published, will no doubt confirm my argument about the Banns in the southern counties. Cameron Louis, 'Early Drama in Sussex', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 123 (1985), 145-50, cites a payment at Rye for the proclaiming of the banns in 1520: 'Item spent at Master Wymond vppon theym of Broklond proclaymig ther banyes for ther stage play iiijjs viijd'. For dramatic activity at Rye, including payments to bann criers, see Graham Mayhew, *Tudor Rye* (Falmer, 1987), esp. pp. 58-59.

## *The Banns in Medieval English Drama*

<sup>27</sup> Robert Wright, 'Community Theatre in Late Medieval East Anglia', *Theatre Notebook*, 28 (1974), 24-39. See also Richard Beadle, 'Plays and Playing in Thetford and Nearby 1498-1540', *Theatre Notebook*, 32 (1978), 4-11.

<sup>28</sup> Noted in E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (London, 1903), II, 338.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> Wright, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> Wright, p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Records of Plays and Players in Lincolnshire 1300-1585*, ed. Stanley J. Kahrl, *Collections VIII* (Oxford, 1969 [1974]), p. 70. Hereafter referred to as *Lincolnshire*. See also Kahrl's 'Secular Life and Popular Piety in Medieval English Drama', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan, *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, 28 (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 85-107, esp. p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> *Lincolnshire*, p. 70.

<sup>34</sup> *Lincolnshire*, p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> *Lincolnshire*, p. 72.

<sup>36</sup> *Lincolnshire*, p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> *Lincolnshire*, p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> *Lincolnshire*, p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> *Lincolnshire*, p. 72.

<sup>40</sup> *Lincolnshire*, p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> Wright, p. 30.

<sup>42</sup> *Records of Plays and Players in Norfolk and Suffolk 1330-1642*, ed. David Galloway and John Wasson, *Collections XI* (Oxford, 1980-81), pp. 106-07. See also Beadle, 'Plays and Playing in Thetford and Nearby 1498-1540'.

<sup>43</sup> Other references to bann criers in Lincolnshire include: Leverton in 1526 (*Lincolnshire*, p. 20), Louth 1527-28 (*Lincolnshire*, p. 80), 1547-48 (*Lincolnshire*, p. 83).

<sup>44</sup> *Records of Plays and Players in Kent 1450-1642*, ed. Giles Dawson, *Collections VII* (Oxford, 1965). Hereafter referred to as *Kent*.

<sup>45</sup> *Kent*, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> *Kent*, p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> 1479-80: 'Item . . . dat' in regardis mimis Regine . . . iij<sup>s</sup> iijj<sup>d</sup>. 1480-81: 'Et sol' in Regardis Datis mimis Regis iij<sup>s</sup> iijj<sup>d</sup>. *Kent*, p. 122.

<sup>48</sup> *Kent*, pp. 134-35.

<sup>49</sup> *Kent*, p. 131. In 1456 there is a reference to a Play of the Resurrection – see W. A. Scott Robertson, 'The Passion Play and Interludes at New Romney', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 13 (1880), 216-26 (at 217). In 1463-64 there is a payment 'pro ludo interludii Passionis Domini' (*Kent*,

p. 120), and this play appears to have been revived in 1517 (Robertson, p. 218), and again in 1560 (*Kent*, pp. 202-11). There was perhaps also a St George play; see Robertson, pp. 218-19.

<sup>50</sup> 1478-79, 1486-87, 1493-94, 1509-10; *Kent*, pp. 122, 124, 125, 129. In 1503-04 there is a payment: 'Item sol' in regarde balliuo et Iurate de lydde quando illos veniebant ad proclam' ludi vij<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup>'; *Kent*, p. 127.

<sup>51</sup> In 1476-77; *Kent*, p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> In 1482-83, 1494-95, 1504-05; *Kent*, pp. 123, 125, 128. In 1465-67 the 'hominibus lusoribus de heth' (*Kent*, p. 120) also received 6s 8d, but it is not clear if this is a reference to bann criers.

<sup>53</sup> 1474-75, 1478-79, 1533-34; *Kent*, pp. 121, 122, 134.

<sup>54</sup> 4/- in 1494-95 and 1521; 5/- in 1506-07 and 1534-35. The payment of 13s 6d in 1519-20 includes entertainment expenses as well as payments to the bann criers; *Kent*, pp. 125, 132, 129, 134, 131.

<sup>55</sup> For example: 1495-96 Rye 4/-; 1508-09 Bethersden 3s 4d; 1511-12 Halden 20d; *Kent*, pp. 126, 129, 130. In 1519-21 Bethersden had a 'play of St. Christina, on three days, with play-wardens, rehearsal, [and] riding with the banns . . .'; Ian Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1588* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 82, item 374.

<sup>56</sup> 1478-79: 'Item sol' Willielmo Quitman pro vigilacione sua tempore primi lusi de Lyd iiij<sup>d</sup>. Three other men received payment for the same task; *Kent*, p. 122. 1493-94: 'Item solut' Thome Lambarde pro vigilacione in villa tempore ludi de lyd iiij<sup>d</sup>'; *Kent*, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> *Kent*, p. 128.

<sup>58</sup> *Kent*, pp. 127, xiv.

<sup>59</sup> Robertson, 'The Passion Play and Interludes at New Romney', 221.

<sup>60</sup> Some very detailed late records from New Romney (for 1560) indicate that donations were received from some nearby towns – there is a 'gifte of the parishe of Ivechurch towarde o<sup>f</sup> playe' of 3/4, and another gift of ten shillings 'of the towne of Lydd towarde o<sup>f</sup> playe'; *Kent*, p. 207. The quite lavish outlays on all kinds of matters relevant to the production of the play, however, reveal that this was a revival of some special importance, and it is therefore understandable that the parish of Ivychurch and the very close town of Lydd might contribute (see *Kent* pp. 204-11 for details of the expenses). This record is also of interest for evidence of the fact that the bann criers were costumed, for there are expenses incurred in London 'ffyrst in bearde & heares for the bane cryers & a here & beard for the ffoole'; *Kent*, p. 209.

<sup>61</sup> In 1486-87 the reference is to players, in 1503-04 to bann criers (the payment is made up of 6/4 from one Ward and 4d from another), and in 1508-09 to bann criers; *Kent*, pp. 83, 85, 86.

<sup>62</sup> 1503-04; *Kent*, p. 85.

<sup>63</sup> In 1494-95 they were paid this sum for their banns; *Kent*, p. 84. In 1505-06 the players of

Brookland were paid 14/6 (*Kent*, p. 86), but in the context of other payments this probably includes other expenses for the entertainment of the players.

<sup>64</sup> *Kent*, p. 86.

<sup>65</sup> Hythe received 7s 10d in 1473-74 (*Kent*, p. 97), but this includes both reward and expenses. Folkestone received 8s 4d in 1473-74 (*Kent*, p. 97), again including both reward and expenses, 6s 8d in 1477-78 (*Kent*, p. 97), and 5/- in 1532-33 (*Kent*, p. 104). Appledore received 3s 8d in 1467-68 for the 'schewars of the play of apuldur' (*Kent*, p. 95), and 5/- in 1516-17 for the bann criers (*Kent*, p. 99). Brookland received 5/- in 1518-19 and 1520-21 for bann criers (*Kent*, pp. 100, 101). Ivychurch received 5/- in 1521-22 and 3s 4d in 1530-31 for bann criers (*Kent*, 101, 103).

<sup>66</sup> *Kent*, p. 95.

<sup>67</sup> *Kent*, p. 92.

<sup>68</sup> *Kent*, p. 95.

<sup>69</sup> *Kent*, p. 99.

<sup>70</sup> *The Castle of Perseverance*, line 132, in *The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles. All quotations from *The Castle of Perseverance* are from this edition.

<sup>71</sup> *The Macro Plays*, pp. xxi-xxii.

<sup>72</sup> Footnote to line 134.

<sup>73</sup> Latin text is from H. L. D. Ward, 'The Vision of Thurkill', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 31 (1875), 420-59. The passage *De quodam justiciario* is on p. 452.

<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, concern about the dispersal of one's worldly goods after death is also the target of satire in the *De quodam justiciario* passage: 'Nam sine testamenti executione subito decedens quicquid de mamnone iniquitatis et mercedibus injuste per linguam satis venalem acceptis sibi aggregaverat et in thesauro reposuerat ab alienis rapaci ingluvie distracta sunt et consumpta' [He died suddenly without making a will, and all the mammon of iniquity, all the moneys unjustly made by his corruptly venal tongue and which he had hoarded up for himself and secreted in his treasury, was with rapacious greed squandered by strangers and spent].

<sup>75</sup> *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, The Norton Facsimile, prepared by Charlton Hinman (London, New York, Sydney and Toronto, 1968), p. 357.

<sup>76</sup> This is not to deny the possibility that a pictorial image may lie behind this passage. Peter Ure, ed., *Richard II* (London, 1956), p. 102, points to a woodcut by Holbein the Younger: "'The Emperor sits on his throne . . . surrounded by his counsellors and on the right a poor man kneels demanding justice. The Emperor . . . turns from him with frowning face towards the rich oppressor, who attempts, with little success, to excuse himself. Death has sprung upon the throne behind the monarch, and is about to tear the imperial crown from his head.'" This does not approach very closely to Shakespeare's lines (except for "kill with looks" at l. 165); the general influence of the *imagines mortis* may be admitted, but no closer parallel has yet been traced'. The point is,



surely, that while there is a general iconographical tradition which lies behind this passage, Shakespeare very quickly moves into metaphor which is primarily conceptual.

<sup>77</sup> On this issue see, for example: Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London, 1972), pp. 25-38; Grace Frank, *The Medieval French Drama* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 1-17; Mary H. Marshall, 'Theatre in the Middle Ages: Evidence from Dictionaries and Glosses', *Symposium*, 4 (1950), 1-39, 366-89; John Norton-Smith, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London & Boston, 1974), pp. 162-69.

<sup>78</sup> *Lydgate's Troy Book*, ed. H. Bergen, Part 1, EETS es 97 (London, 1906).

<sup>79</sup> Glynn Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300 to 1660*, vol. I, 1300-1576 (London, 1966; New York, 1966), p. 195.

<sup>80</sup> Norton-Smith, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 168.

<sup>81</sup> *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. H. N. MacCracken, Part 2, EETS os 192 (London, 1934), lines 30-42.

<sup>82</sup> On the Digby Plays see D. C. Baker and J. L. Murphy, 'The Late Medieval Plays of Ms. Digby 133: Scribes, Dates and Early History', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 10 (1967), 153-66.

<sup>83</sup> For the text of the Procession of Corpus Christi see *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. H. N. MacCracken, Part 1, EETS es 107 (London, 1910), pp. 35-43. For an example of a pageant see: Carleton Brown, 'Lydgate's Verses on Queen Margaret's Entry into London', *MLR*, 7 (1912), 225-34; Robert Withington, 'Queen Margaret's Entry into London, 1445', *MP*, 13 (1915-16), 53-57.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Wickham, *Early English Stages*, I, 51-111.

<sup>85</sup> See W. Noomen, 'Passages Narratifs dans le Drame Médiéval Français: Essai d'Interpretation', *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 31 (1958), 761-85.

<sup>86</sup> Text quoted from *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS ss 1 (London, 1970).

<sup>87</sup> William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 98-99.

<sup>88</sup> Quotations are from the edition in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*.

<sup>89</sup> *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, p. lxxxiv.

<sup>90</sup> *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, pp. lxxxiv-lxxxv.

<sup>91</sup> *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, p. lxxxv.

<sup>92</sup> *Norfolk and Suffolk*, p. 106.

<sup>93</sup> *Norfolk and Suffolk*, p. 106.