

# Leeds Studies in English

## Article:

John Marshall, 'Her virgynes, as many as a man wylle': Dance and Provenance in Three Late Medieval Plays *Wisdom/The Killing of the Children/The Conversion of St Paul*, *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 25, (1994), 111-48

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**'Her virgynes, as many as a man wylle':  
Dance and Provenance in Three Late Medieval Plays  
*Wisdom/The Killing of the Children/The Conversion of  
St Paul***

John Marshall

In a paper presented at the *Wisdom* Symposium in 1984, Alexandra Johnston suggested that it was possible, 'to make an educated guess about the original audience of a morality from the social status of the protagonist'.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the merit of the suggestion, as a line of inquiry it reveals as much about the lack of evidence available in the area of morality play provenance as it does about the concern a playwright may have shown for protagonist/audience correspondence. Nevertheless, as long as a desire for knowledge about the origins and authorship of medieval plays exists, no matter how critically unfashionable, researchers will depend, to varying degrees, upon just this kind of textual inference. Apart from the obvious ones of local reference, language, scribal identity and manuscript attribution, other useful indicators of this type include the minimum number of players needed for the performance, the range and nature of the theatrical devices employed, the type of staging required or implied, the likely time of year of performance, and whether indoor or outside production is best suited to the needs of the play and the occasion. The interpretation of these indicators, in conjunction with the increasing volume of evidence from the Records of Early English Drama (REED) projects, probably represents the best chance of determining the provenance of those plays that otherwise resolutely refuse to give up their origins. This is particularly so of that group of plays that comprise the Macro and Digby collections. That these plays are East Midland in dialect is beyond doubt, but who, where, and under what circumstances they were performed is much less certain. In spite of some recent rigorously argued claims for patronage, to be discussed below, the absence of scholarly consensus is in itself, perhaps, an indication that the relative lack of hard

evidence about these plays forces a degree of speculation that makes almost anything seem possible. In these circumstances, it seems useful to draw attention to another potential indicator of a play's auspices that has received much less notice than those listed.

Of the six different plays that make up the Macro and Digby manuscripts only the earliest, *The Castle of Perseverance*, does not include dancing of some kind. This, in itself, is quite an extraordinary statistic that suggests, unless this represents simply a coincidence of survival, that dance may have figured more prominently in some kinds of medieval drama than has previously been thought. Given the centrality of dance, to all levels of medieval society, as a form of religious worship and social recreation, it would, perhaps, be surprising if it did not frequently appear in the drama of the period as visual entertainment and an effective means of representing states from spiritual joy to worldly excess. The dances in *Mankind* and *Mary Magdalen* are of the latter type, and are performed by named characters from within the plays. In *Mankind*, 'Her they daunce' (l. 81) directs Newguise, Nowadays and Nought to dance in front of, or more probably around, the still figure of Mercy, in an attempt to destroy his spiritual control. In *Mary Magdalen*, a gallant (Curiosity), leading Mary astray, asks her, 'But wol yow dawns, my own dere?' (l. 530), to which she assents. In both cases, the dance is an entertaining and effective means of developing character and of furthering the plot, but is of little help in determining auspices. More helpful, in this respect, are the dances in the three remaining plays which, although of different types, have in common performance by dancers in groups, rather than by individual characters. Not only do the dances vary in type they also seem to differ in status, ranging from the structurally integrated dances of *Wisdom*, through the addition of dancing to the original role of singing in *Candlemas Day and the Killing of the Children*, to the use of dance as a further attraction or substitute for processional staging in *The Conversion of St Paul*.<sup>2</sup>

The three dances in *Wisdom* are the most elaborate examples surviving in a medieval English play text, and yet until two productions in the 1980s demonstrated how crucial they are to the play's structure and aesthetic they had received very little critical attention.<sup>3</sup> In the form of a masque, or more accurately at the time 'a disguising', the dances portray, more effectively than words, the depths of worldly corruption to which the three powers of the Soul, Mind, Will and Understanding, fall. Having agreed amongst themselves that maintenance, perjury and lechery were never more prevalent in the land than now, they consent to display their own

debased conditions in the form of a dance;

Mynde: Now wyll we thre do make a dance  
Off thow that longe to owr retenance. (ll. 685-86)

Mind is the first to call on his retainers, whose appearance is described in a stage direction;

Here enter six dysgysyde in the sute of Mynde, wyth rede  
berdys, and lyouns rampaunt on here crestys, and yche a warder  
in hys hande; her mynstrallys, trumpes. Eche answer for hys  
name. (after l. 692)

It would seem from his speech that Mind joins in with this dance as he announces, 'And the sevente am I, Mayntennance' (l. 696). This would suggest that the dance was, probably, a *ronde* or early type of branle since a dance based on sideways movement, with the dancers usually holding hands or linking fingers to form a chain or circle, would allow for an uneven number of all male dancers in a configuration particularly suited to being watched.<sup>4</sup> The fact that the dancers each carried a 'warder' might suggest that it was these batons which linked the dancers.<sup>5</sup> Presumably Mind, as Maintenance, did not have a warder himself. His status, in relation to his retinue, might render it inappropriate, and in practice it would not have been necessary, as seven men dancing in a line need only six warders to connect them. Such an arrangement presents the possibility that the warders were used in a way similar to that of the sword dance ceremony. The fact that evidence in this country for these dances is later than the play and limited to north-eastern England might make this seem doubtful, but it is worth noting that one of the characteristics of the sword dance is the calling-on song in which the characters of the dance are introduced in a manner not unlike that used by Mind in *Wisdom*.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in drawing attention to the appropriateness of trumpeters to accompany his dance, Mind makes an interesting military connection;

Off batell also yt ys on instrumente,  
Yevynge comfort to fyght.  
Therfor they be expedyente  
To thes meny of meyntement. (ll. 703-06)

Although the sword dance ceremonies occasionally involve an element of hero combat, they are not, essentially, about fighting as such, and, except possibly at an allegorical level, nor is Mind's 'Deullys dance'. Nevertheless, the playwright considered the possession of a 'warder' sufficiently important for each dancer that he recorded it in the stage direction. Whatever his intentions may have been, such formality implies a function more spectacular than that of merely signifying character.

Following Mind's dance, Understanding introduces his dancers, whose entrance and appearance are similarly recorded in a stage direction;

Here entrethe six jorours in a sute, gownyde, wyth hodys abowt  
her nekys, hattys of meynenance thervpon, vyseryde dyuersly;  
here mynstrell, a bagpype. (after l. 724)

A line dance of the type led by Mind would be appropriate here, too, since Understanding appears to join, or lead, the dance as, 'Perjury, yowr fownder' (l. 733), making for an uneven number of dancers. A dance of this kind would also maximize the dramatic effect of the two-faced masks worn by the jurors. Two, slightly different, effects are possible, depending upon the position of the faces. If, for example, 'vyseryde dyuersly' in the stage direction, and the reference by Understanding to, 'Jorows in on hooode beer to facys' (l. 718) means a Janus-like mask, with a face at the front and one at the back, then a line dance provides an opportunity to establish one face before turning to reveal the other in a highly effective visualization of, 'Fayer speche and falsehede in on space ys' (l. 719). Although physically not difficult to achieve, the success of this effect relies upon an element of audience surprise that is, somewhat, forestalled by Understanding drawing attention to the two faces of fair and false speech shortly before the dancers enter. There is also a practical problem in this arrangement with the other items of costume noted in the stage direction. The 'hodys abowt her nekys, hattys of meynenance thervpon' would spoil the effect of a front and back differentiated only by the mask as it would be obvious to the audience which way the dancers were facing. An interesting effect could still be achieved by turning to show the backward looking face of falsehood, but the inclusion of the hoods and hats might suggest that the two faces were positioned side by side, facing forward.<sup>7</sup> In either case, a branle seems a likely dance form for a visual spectacle where it is, perhaps, more fitting for the dancers to face the audience than each other.

In so far as the third dance provides some of the only evidence for women performing on the medieval English stage it is, perhaps, the most interesting of them all. Will, whose dance it is, describes it as, 'a sprynge of Lechery' (l. 747), and details of the costume are given in a stage direction;

Here entreth six women in sut, thre dysgysyde as galontys and  
thre as matrones, wyth wondyrfull vysurs congruent;<sup>8</sup> here  
mynstrell, a homepype. (after l. 752)

There are some puzzling aspects to this stage direction, and the dance to which it refers, that it will be useful to explore, as well as considering the type of dance that may have been performed. On the face of it, the direction is straight forward; six women dance together, three costumed and masked as fashionable young men, and three dressed as matrons.<sup>9</sup> Gallants, of the finely attired, lady's man variety, seem entirely appropriate to a dance of lechery, but 'matrones' do not readily spring to mind as partners in their debauchery. The most common use of the word 'matron' combines married status with a sense of moral or social dignity. More specifically, it can refer to women with an expert knowledge in matters of childbirth, which is unlikely to have been the kind of expertise that the gallants were interested in.<sup>10</sup> Neither sense fits the nature of the dance exactly and unless 'matron' has another meaning, now lost, it seems most likely that the word is intended, here, to identify three of the dancers as married women, rather than maidens. In the light of the vice that their dance represents, these 'matrones' should, probably, be seen in the same tradition as the adulterous wives of *fabliaux* and folk-tales.

The gallants and matrons are given names by Will, as Mind and Understanding had done for their dancers, but it is not immediately clear how they are attributed;

Cum slepers, Rekleshedde and Idyllnes,  
All in all, Surfet and Gredynes,  
For the flesche, Spousebreche and Mastres,  
Wyth jentyll Fornycacyon. (ll. 753-56)

Eccles, the editor of the Macro text, in a note on the names, suggests that the three gallants are, 'Rekleshedde', 'Idyllnes' and 'Surfet and Gredynes'. The latter being a double name for the single character that seems to be implied by the preface, 'all in all'. The matrons take the roles of, 'Spousebreche', 'Mastres' and 'Fornycacyon'.

Eccles claims that Will does not give himself a new name, as Mind and Understanding did, although he calls his dance, 'a sprynge of Lechery'.<sup>11</sup> One might argue that 'Lechery' is indeed his new name, but in the context of the speech in which it occurs, it makes more sense as a reference to the subject matter of the dance than to the name of the character under whose auspices it is performed. The position of the speech before the entrance of Will's dancers is also out of keeping with the point at which Mind and Understanding change their names. For both characters, this happens after they have called on stage, by name and in pairs, their respective dancers. These speeches of introduction follow such a similar pattern that if Will does have a new name it is likely to be found in a corresponding position. As Eccles discovered, his distribution of names amongst the dancers leaves nothing in the speech for Will. However, his reading of the situation is not the only one possible. The assumption that Will introduces the gallants as a group of three, who are then followed on by the matrons, need not necessarily be correct. It seems more appropriate in a visual representation of lechery for the gallants and the matrons to be partners, and introduced by Will in their pairs. It is also possible that, 'Surfet and Gredynes' is not a single character but the names of two dancers. If these two were paired, the tag, 'all in all' could have the meaning 'all together', in the sense of both entering at once, rather than 'all in one' from which a combined character could be inferred.<sup>12</sup> On this basis, the gallants would take the roles of, 'Rekleshede', 'Surfet' and 'Spousebreche', and be partnered by the matrons as, 'Idyllnes', 'Gredynes' and 'Mastres'. These couples would then be the, 'thre fortherers of loue' (l. 759) referred to by Will later in his speech. Not only does this re-attribution of names make more sense of the relationship between the dancers but also it leaves the name, 'Fornycacyon' to be adopted by Will as his, entirely appropriate, new identity.<sup>13</sup>

Although Will has a new name, like Mind and Understanding, he does not seem to take part in his dance, as they appear to have done in theirs. Mind's participation seems fairly clear from the way in which he counts himself in with the dancers that he has just introduced; 'And the sevente am I, Mayntennance/Seven ys a numbyr of dyscorde and inperfyghtnes' (ll. 696-97). Understanding also leaves little doubt about his inclusion in the dance when he says, 'They daunce all the lande hydyr and thedyr,/And I, Perjury, yowr fownder./Now dance on, ws all! The worlde doth on ws wondyr' (ll. 732-34). Will, on the other hand, says nothing that might suggest he was similarly involved. On the contrary, he seems to confirm his non-participation by drawing attention to the exclusively female membership of his

dance; 'Thys dance of this damesellys ys thorow this regyn' (l. 760). The reasons for him not dancing are probably quite simple. The dances of Mind and Understanding represent essentially political vices where the element of organized conspiracy is aptly expressed in a group dance. If, as suggested, both were a type of line dance, like the branle, then it is fitting for Mind and Understanding to join in on the grounds of content and form alike. The situation is quite different for Will's dance. The vice his dancers portray could have a group dimension, but it seems more logical for it to be expressed in terms of male/female coupling. In such circumstances, Will, or 'Fornycacyon', would be something of a gooseberry in the dance.

Beyond dancing as three couples, it is difficult to be certain about the type of dance the 'fortherers of loue' may have performed, but a possibility is that it, at least, began as a basse dance.<sup>14</sup> This popular but rather sedate dance was considered by Arbeau, a sixteenth-century French dancing master, to be particularly favoured by wise and dignified matrons for being full of virtue and decorum.<sup>15</sup> It is also the type of dance, in its Spanish guise, that Cornelius presents as part of his wooing of Lucre in *Fulgens and Lucre*, a play almost contemporary with *Wisdom*.<sup>16</sup> Of possibly greater significance, in the context of Will's dance of lechery, is the late medieval association of the basse dance with Mary Magdalene. Drawing upon pictorial, musical and dramatic sources, Colin Slim has made a case for this being the dance that Magdalene and the gallant performed to convey delight in worldly pleasure.<sup>17</sup> As a dance of gliding advances and retreats, the basse dance may not perfectly fit the description of 'a sprynge of Lechery', which seems to imply more in the way of leaping. Nonetheless, there is something to be said for beginning the dance in a manner that the audience would recognize as a serene symbol of courtship that develops, physically and metaphorically, into something more base.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from being a dance for couples, the other reason why Will probably does not dance has to do with the sex of the dancers. Although not stated as such, the first two groups are, presumably, all male dancers as befits their characterization and costume and, therefore, present no difficulty in being joined by Mind and Understanding. The gallants and matrons, though, are specifically mentioned as being played by women. This may be because the type of dance was better suited to female performance, or because it was thought improper to have lechery performed by a mixed group, even though both sexes are portrayed in the dance. For whatever reason, the separation of the sexes in this way suggests that it might have been



considered inappropriate for Will, as a man, to dance with a group of women.

Perhaps the choice of women, rather than men, to perform the dance was influenced by a sense of moral propriety but whatever the motive, the identification in the stage direction of the dancers as women is explicit. This is not a view accepted by all critics of the play, however. Suzanne Westfall, in her study of Tudor patronage, is only the most recent of scholars to suggest that the dances were performed by boys.<sup>19</sup> She believes them to have been members of a household Chapel, but more often the case for boys derives from the attempt to see *Wisdom* as a professional play. David Bevington was perhaps the first person to propose such auspices, but it is a position that has been maintained by Donald Baker, the most recent editor of the play.<sup>20</sup> Their motive for replacing the women with a small group of boys, who perform all the dances as well as the Five Wits and the seven devils, is to reduce the human staging requirement of the play to a manageable size for touring. This overlooks the stage direction which, in stating, 'Here entreth six women in sut', is identifying the sex of the dancers and not that of the characters they play, which is conveyed by the division into 'galontys' and 'matrones'. For Bevington and Baker to be right, the stage direction, carried out to the letter, would have created an unnecessary confusion, involving three of the boys in a simultaneous double disguise of women dressed as gallants.

There is no evidence in the text to support the case for boys, or the idea that all the dances were performed by the same group of six. If anything, the text confirms that each dance had its own group of dancers. Only two eight-line stanzas separate the finish of one dance from the entrance of the next. Apart from raising a question of the dancers' stamina, this hardly seems sufficient time in which to effect the changes in costume that would be required of a single group. It is also worth pointing out that the only reference in the text to the dancers' exit comes after the third and final dance, where a stage direction and Will's instruction to leave may be directed at all dancers, rather than his alone;

Dompe deuys, can ye not dare?

I tell yow, outwarde, on and tweyn!      *Exient*      (ll. 775-76)

A single group of dancers would have made two earlier exits before this final departure. The text gives no indication of this happening. There is no reason why the playwright should have obscured the number and nature of the dancers when writing the stage directions which, taken at face value, account for eighteen dancers,

in addition to Mind and Understanding, made up of twelve men and six women.

In order to consider how this number and distribution of dancers may help in determining the provenance of *Wisdom*, it is necessary to see them in the context of the other casting requirements of the play. Disregarding the possibility of doubling, for which it has to be said there is very little evidence, the play requires six actors for the speaking parts (four of whom, Anima, Mind, Will and Understanding, also sing), five singers (the Five Wits of the Soul), seven small boys<sup>21</sup> (the devils who run out from under the mantle of the Soul, one of whom probably acted as the 'schrewe boy' taken out of the audience by Lucifer) and at least four minstrels (two or more trumpets, bagpipe and hornpipe). With the dancers, this amounts to the active involvement of forty people, made up of men, women and children.

A cast of this size, for a play that lasts little over an hour, suggests a major artistic undertaking for a special occasion. It would also seem, logistically, to discount the theory of professional performance, at least in terms of a travelling production. Interestingly though, both manuscripts of *Wisdom* indicate that cuts could be made to the text that would have the effect of reducing the numbers involved. This could be seen as a way of creating a touring version of the play, adapted to the size of a professional company. Alternatively, the cuts could simply register an awareness that performance of *Wisdom* was still viable with only limited human resources. This would be useful information for any group borrowing the manuscript in anticipation of performance, especially a group without the same access to dancers, musicians and singers as the original production. Both manuscripts indicate that the dances, and their accompanying speeches, could be left out by noting 'Va' in a contemporary hand in the left margin against line 685 where Mind announces, 'Now wyll we thre do make a dance' and 'car', in the Macro text, after line 784 which concludes the business with the dances; the Digby text does not reach this point. Moreover, the Macro text appears to indicate that the Five Wits, who sing and process, could also be omitted. After the stage direction which marks their first entrance (after line 166) a hand, other than that of the main scribe, has written, 'va va va', seemingly implying its deletion.<sup>22</sup> The Wits exit stage direction (after line 324) is not annotated in any way, and nor is their re-entrance with Anima towards the end of the play (after line 1064). This may have been deliberate in order not to confuse the omission of the Five Wits with the speeches between the stage directions, or the necessary re-appearance of other characters. On the other hand, it may be nothing more than inconsistent notation. It is probably safer not to draw too firm conclusions from the evidence but to note the possibility that the annotation

records an occasion when the Five Wits were not played. If this had coincided with the omission of the dancers the play would have been reduced to six speaking parts and seven mute devils.

Whatever the circumstances of subsequent performances, the original production seems to have required an impressive cast of actors, singers, dancers, musicians and small boys. This extraordinary list has, in part, been responsible for *Wisdom* being identified with just about every kind of group and institution known to have promoted drama (and some that are not) during the late middle ages. Mark Eccles, in his introduction to the Macro text, gives a useful summary of these, which is updated by Baker, Murphy and Hall in their edition of the Digby play.<sup>23</sup> Since the publication of these volumes, there have been two further attempts to determine the auspices of *Wisdom*. Gail McMurray Gibson has argued for an original performance in the monastery of Bury St Edmunds from the evidence of manuscript ownership and the abbey's power to influence all aspects of spiritual and temporal life in the monastic borough town.<sup>24</sup> Suzanne Westfall, on the other hand, sees the aesthetics of noble household performance in the staging requirements of *Wisdom*, that could adequately be met by the various members of a Chapel.<sup>25</sup>

Both cases are strongly made but are not without problems. Probably most damning in the instance of monastic auspices is the sheer lack of evidence. Very few records of dramatic activity survive from the abbey at Bury St Edmunds. In those that do, mention is only made of payments towards the local Boy Bishop ceremony and to the receiving of minstrels and players.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, taking the, albeit, limited and fragmentary evidence of monastic houses in England as a whole, there is no indisputable proof of them generating, rather than receiving, theatrical performances.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the lack of evidence, there are other reasons that make the case for the monastery at Bury St Edmunds less than entirely convincing. Part of the justification for identifying the Trinity College, Hartford production of *Wisdom* in 1984 with monastic auspices was the textual evidence of the, 'contemplative theme and the characterization of the Mightys as cloistered monks'.<sup>28</sup> The evidence, in the text, for the latter may not be as unequivocal as the statement suggests but even if it were, a play about miscreant monks, even ultimately reformed ones, seems an odd choice of material for monastic entertainment, especially in the circumstances, as further defined by the production, of presentation before the monarch. It may also be significant that, whilst the abbey was rightly renowned for the extent and quality of its library, it was not known as a lavish patron of the arts.<sup>29</sup> In the absence of firm evidence, it is impossible to say whether the abbey at Bury St

Edmunds had either the will or the artistic experience to patronize a production of *Wisdom*. In the context of the dances, though, I wonder whether a monastery, even with the resources and influence of the house at Bury St Edmunds, would be the most likely patron of a play that, in its first performance at least, specifically placed the participation of women on the list of staging requirements.

The argument for a household Chapel performance of *Wisdom* is rather more persuasive. Suzanne Westfall describes the Chapel as, 'a performing coterie' during the early Tudor period, involved in staging sacred and secular plays as well as musical entertainments that incorporated disguisings.<sup>30</sup> Not only, in her view, does the musical and rhetorical training of the Chapel make them suitable candidates for performing a play like *Wisdom* but also their number and division into men and boys means that they can cope with the distribution of speaking and singing roles. The number of men and boys in a Chapel inevitably varied between households, but the Duke of Norfolk's Chapel in the late fifteenth century, for example, comprised seven adults and between five and seven children.<sup>31</sup> Although there is no actual evidence to connect Norfolk with *Wisdom*, it will be clear that these numbers closely correspond to the six adult speaking characters and the five parts for children, described as virgins, who sing as the Wits of the Soul.<sup>32</sup> A noble household would also be able to provide the minstrels required to accompany the dances. Westfall compiles a great deal of persuasive evidence for Chapel involvement in a range of religious and secular entertainments during the Tudor period, but her attempt to demonstrate the self-sufficiency with which a Chapel could accommodate *Wisdom* causes her to miss an opportunity to further her claim in respect of the dances. Westfall believes that the Chapel boys who sang as the Five Wits also doubled as the dancers, but a household performance could provide other candidates for the dancing. In some late fifteenth-century examples of court entertainments which involved Chapel performance, the guests and retainers of the noble host participated in allegorical dances as a finale to the festivities.<sup>33</sup> *Wisdom*, although bearing little resemblance to these secular entertainments, could possibly have presented a similar opportunity for participation in its three dances to the members and guests of a noble household.

In many ways the fit between the staging requirements of *Wisdom* and the facilities of a noble household seems too good to be true. However, it is important to enter a caveat or two. The primary role of the Chapel was singing, not acting – it is not until the beginning of the sixteenth century that records refer to even the Chapel Royal Gentlemen as players – and *Wisdom*, although it requires some

singing, is above everything else a play. If the play had been written for Chapel Gentlemen one might have expected rather more opportunity for them to demonstrate their choral skills. An alternative arrangement, alluded to by Westfall, involves the employment of household players in the speaking roles.<sup>34</sup> On the grounds of numbers alone, this would seem to disqualify *Wisdom* from household auspices in that the play requires six actors, and very few household companies, including the King's, employed anything like that number.<sup>35</sup>

As there are logistic reasons for being cautious about household performance, so there are other reasons concerning the appropriateness of the play itself. This is much more difficult territory, and the absence of surviving texts known to have Chapel auspices deprives us of comparison. Nevertheless, *Wisdom* does not look very much like the predominantly secular entertainments, involving Chapel members, described at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Nor does it fall into the category of scriptural plays noted in the Earl of Northumberland's Household Books.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, while the religious tone of *Wisdom* may have appealed to the more conservative members of the aristocracy, there is little in the play of immediate relevance to such an audience, as there is, for example, in a play like *Fulgens and Lucres*. Whilst caution encourages doubt it cannot deny the fact that Chapel involvement in household performance is one of the few identifications of the play with a place capable of accommodating the dances without distorting the evidence of the text.

Part of the attractiveness of the case for household Chapel auspices lies in the meeting of the staging requirements of *Wisdom* by an assortment of readily available, trained personnel. However, there are other groups capable of drawing upon comparable resources that may have had better reasons for producing the play than the aristocracy. In his 'Introduction' to *The Macro Plays*, Mark Eccles, somewhat non-committally, suggested that, '*Wisdom* may have been presented by the men and women of a town or guild for a general audience'.<sup>37</sup> Almost no-one, it seems, has taken up his suggestion, even though in many ways it is very plausible. Certainly the impression given by the records collated by Ian Lancashire, in *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain*, is of town and guild drama dominant in the fifteenth century, with household drama, in the form of travelling players, taking precedence in the sixteenth century. Although there are too many variables to make the case an authoritative one, this general impression is borne out by the particular experience of places like King's College, Cambridge. Here, during the second half of the fifteenth century, much of the entertainment was supplied by local parish

players.<sup>38</sup> It is not, of course, always possible to determine the nature of the dramatic activity simply from the occurrence of a town or parish name in the records. Many references to 'game' and 'play' are probably to Robin Hood or other forms of seasonal celebration. However, there is considerable evidence for religious guilds taking responsibility for a range of plays in the fifteenth century. Many of these were scriptural, but in one instance, at least, a will bequest to a guild in connection with a, 'ludo de Mankynd, et aliis ludis' implies involvement with moralities.<sup>39</sup>

In many respects, religious guilds, with their particular concern for the safe passage of members' souls through purgatory, are ideal institutions for the promotion of plays with repentance and the sacrament of penance at their theological heart.<sup>40</sup> In the specific case of *Wisdom*, the final emphasis, in Christ's nine points, on acts of charity would seem to confirm not only that a lay rather than a religious audience was intended but also that the play has particular relevance to the values and purposes of religious guilds, especially in respect of almsgiving.<sup>41</sup> Of course, these are matters of concern to all Christians, but for many religious guilds they represented an institutionalized *raison d'être*, and drama is clearly a very effective means of publicly demonstrating and celebrating their significance. This appropriateness of subject matter was, in many instances, matched by a resource capability. Some of the wealthier guilds even employed their own Chapels, thereby duplicating the performance resources of noble households.<sup>42</sup> Even without such a facility, religious guilds were clearly capable of generating, as well as receiving, dramatic activity. In so doing, they presumably drew on their own members as performers, as their craft guild counterparts did for Corpus Christi pageants, or employed outsiders when necessary.<sup>43</sup> For example, the need for singers, men or boys, could in some cases be met more easily by the religious guilds, through their association with a parish church, than by craft guilds who may have been in competition for the services of cathedral or parish choir members. The employment of minstrels, too, was a common enough feature of guild feasts not to present a problem in a production of *Wisdom*.

There is no doubt that a religious guild of some wealth could have had access to the resources necessary for meeting the acting, singing and music requirements of *Wisdom*, which directs attention once more on to the dances. There is some evidence that dance was an accepted part of guild festivities. The Holy Trinity guild at Wisbech, for example, paid ten shillings in 1379 to the minstrels and a further six shillings and eight pence for the purchase of apparel for ten dancers.<sup>44</sup> That the

payment was for clothing, rather than performance, suggests that the dancers themselves came from within the guild. Dancing of, perhaps, a different kind, but still seemingly associated with a parish guild, is indicated by the dedication day celebrations of St Mary parishioners recorded regularly in King's Hall, Cambridge accounts from 1342-43 until 1477-78.<sup>45</sup> In some instances guilds refer specifically to women dancing. The guild of St John Baptist at Boston, Lincolnshire, for example, includes in its 1389 certificate the requirement for all the sisters to come together on the saint's day and dance with each other on pain of a fine.<sup>46</sup> And in an unspecified context, guild accounts for 1483 in Croscombe, Somerset acknowledge a six shilling contribution at the 'wyfes dansyng'.<sup>47</sup> Such activity in guild festivity may have been more prevalent than the evidence suggests, given that of the more than 500 returns made in 1389, in response to a parliamentary order for information regarding the foundation, statutes and property of guilds, only five were not made up equally of lay men and women.<sup>48</sup> Although this, almost certainly, did not mean that womens' participation in guild activity was as equal as their number, it is evidence of a shared role within a significant aspect of medieval religious and social life that, in turn, suggests an active engagement in those guild functions that were deemed decorous. At this time, in England at least, this would have excluded acting in plays but not, it would seem, dancing.

The difficulty in associating the dances in *Wisdom* with guild members, though, is that they do not seem to have much in common with the types of dance for which there is guild confirmation. This is, perhaps, because the functions of the dances were so different. The dances performed by the sistren of St John Baptist and the parishioners of St Mary were part of the guilds' annual rituals, and presumably traditional in nature, whereas the allegorical dances in *Wisdom* were occasional and probably derived from social dances popular at the time. Dances dedicated to the foundation of a guild are more likely to be recorded in certificates and financial accounts than recreational dancing which, even so, would have had a place in guild celebrations. Many guild members may have seen, or participated in, both kinds of dance on the same festal day.

Another consideration is that some of the more prestigious guilds, particularly in market towns, became synonymous with the civic governing body, developing in their members, not without some justification, pretensions towards the gentry.<sup>49</sup> These guilds may have manifested their sense of upward mobility in the nature of their entertainments, as much as individual members did in the purchase of land and the building of grand houses. To them a play like *Wisdom*, incorporating three

disguisings with overtones of the court, in which men and women of the fraternity could take part, might seem especially attractive. With the added possibility that guild members' sons took on the, 'lyknes of dewylls', *Wisdom* could have been, for some, a family affair.

The case for a religious guild producing *Wisdom* seems to be as plausible as either of the other two recent claims for patronage. In some respects it is stronger. Religious guilds are known to have produced a variety of plays which may have included moralities. Much of the meaning of moralities, especially *Wisdom*, accords with the principles on which the guilds were founded. The extensive human staging requirements of *Wisdom* could be met by a combination of guild members and trained personnel, to whom the guild had access. And an entirely appropriate physical setting, for the indoor performance that the play requires, could be found in the guildhall.

This is probably as far as the case for religious guild auspices can be taken. Neither manuscript of the play contains the kind of information that would allow a specific guild identification to be made. Nevertheless, it is possible to make a speculative identification, but as it relies upon circumstantial evidence that emerges from consideration of another play in the Digby collection, it may seem more convincing if deferred until after that discussion.

At first sight, there seems very little connection between *Wisdom* and *Candlemas Day and The Killing of the Children*, (hereafter referred to as *The Killing of the Children*). Generically they are certainly different, but in other respects there are some notable parallels. Both are written, predominantly, in double quatrains rhyming ababbcbc, but then so is much East Anglian drama of the period. More significantly, they appear to have been copied by the same scribe, with the exception of a small section of the Candlemas sequence.<sup>50</sup> As *The Killing of the Children* is dated 1512 at the beginning and the end of the manuscript, this means that possibly a decade or two separates the copying of each play. The other similarity, of course, is that both plays include dance as a theatrical device. Whereas the *Wisdom* dances were integral to the original performance, even if subsequently omitted, the dances in *The Killing of the Children* look as though they may be additions to the original staging intentions of the play. As it exists in the manuscript, the play combines the scriptural events of the massacre of the innocents and the purification of the Virgin. A prologue and epilogue, given by the Poet, records that the occasion of the performance was St Anne's Day and that in the previous year the Shepherds and



Magi episodes had been shown, while for the following year the Disputation of the Doctors was scheduled. Such a programme could represent a Corpus Christi cycle, presented not on a single day, as at York, or on consecutive days like Chester, but spread over a number of years. From the scenes listed by the Poet, it is impossible to tell whether the incidents dramatized extended beyond those of immediate relevance (to 'Oure Ladye and Seynt Anne' (l. 18), to whom the performance is dedicated) to include all the episodes that conventionally comprised a Corpus Christi cycle. The Poet, though, describes a series of only three plays, and to impose the structure of an entire cycle upon this evidence is to be swayed overmuch by the survival of manuscripts and records from the comparatively few English towns where this was the case.

Whether a mini-series or an entire cycle is involved, there is some evidence to suggest that *The Killing of the Children*, as it appears in the Digby manuscript, was compiled from existing material, with the composition of the Poet's speeches designed to create the impression of a self-contained unit. On their own, there is nothing that dramatically connects the two episodes of the play other than chronology and the characters of Mary and Joseph. Although some coherence is achieved from the context of the plays that preceded and followed them, a playwright, commissioned for the occasion described by the Poet, would surely have made more attempt to unify the two parts than, 'Here dieth Herowde, and Symeon shalle sey as foluyth' (after l. 388). Furthermore, the sequence in the text, of massacre followed by purification, is in festal order but contrary to that given by the Poet in the prologue, where the episodes are reversed. His order is the more traditional and follows that of the N-Town manuscript and the Beverley Cycle list. Presumably, the prologue indicates an intention to preserve such an order, whereas the text may have been copied from a source that followed the alternative sequence, also favoured by the Chester and the Towneley plays. The confusion is sufficiently blatant to imply that the text of the two episodes and the Poet's speeches were not composed at the same time and that the latter may denote a change in the conditions of performance of the former. To some degree, this is confirmed at the end of the play where the second scribe draws a line beneath Anna's final speech and writes, 'finis'. The first, and main, scribe cancels 'finis' and adds a couplet to Anna's speech before completing the play with a two stanza epilogue from the Poet. The implication is that the second scribe was copying from a source without the Poet's final speech. There are a number of circumstances that could explain this situation. It may be that the Digby text derives from a town where the regular production of a

cycle of plays became practically or economically difficult to sustain by the early sixteenth century. As a result, serialization may have seemed preferable to complete cancellation, especially as the composition of contextualizing opening and closing speeches was all that was required, as far as the text was concerned, to effect the change. Alternatively, a town establishing drama as part of a St Anne's Day celebration may have borrowed the play text from elsewhere and had the Poet's speeches specially written for the purpose. Another possibility is that a town or guild, already possessing one of the plays in the Poet's series, decided to extend the scope of their performance by the addition of related episodes, either borrowed or newly written.

The positioning of the dances in the play appears to corroborate the textual evidence for some kind of change in the circumstances of performance. There are three dances in *The Killing of the Children*, none of which occurs in the actual text of the two episodes, even though performance of the play can give the impression of quite close integration. This is achieved, in no small part, by the dances being performed by the group of virgins who figure in the Candlemas part of the play. However, closer inspection reveals the inclusion of the dances to be part of the process that also made the Poet's speeches necessary. The first dance occurs at the end of the prologue where the Poet, having dedicated the performance, 'to the honor of God, Oure Lady, and Seynt Anne' (l. 51), begins the proceedings with;

And ye menstrallis, doth youre diligens!  
And ye virgynes, shewe summe sport and plesure,  
These people to solas, and to do God reuerens!  
As ye be appoynted, doth your besy cure! (ll. 53-56)

That 'sport and plesure' refer to dance is confirmed by the stage direction, '*et tripident*', occurring immediately after the speech. In the manuscript sequence the dance and the dancers, dislocated from their festal function, have no connection with the Herod and messenger scene which follows. Their purpose, at this point, is simply one of enhancing the entertainment. The virgins do not dance again until the end of the play, where the initial impression of being part of the original text turns out to be false. In Simeon's final speech he instructs Anna to:

Doth youre devire and youre diligent laboure,  
And take these virgynis euerychon with you,

And teche hem to plesse God, of most honoure. (ll. 542-54)

Dance would not seem to be one of the didactic implications of this instruction, as Anna's reply suggests that it was complied with off-stage;

Lyke as ye say, I wille do this houre.

Ye chast virgynis, with alle humylite,

Worshippe we Jhesu, that shalbe oure sauyoure-

Alle at ones, come on, and folowe me. (ll. 545-48)

This sounds like the exit line that the second scribe certainly thought it was by underlining and writing 'finis' beneath it. The first scribe then complicates the issue by cancelling 'finis' and adding a couplet to Anna's speech;

And shewe ye summe plesure as ye can,

In the worshippe of Jhesu, Oure Lady, and Seynt Anne!

(ll. 549-50)

As before, 'plesure' is glossed as dance by the marginal stage direction, '*et tripident*'. At this point, the situation is somewhat confused by the Baker, Murphy and Hall edition of the play. They give the stage direction following Anna's couplet as, '*Anna Prophetissa et (virgynes) tripident*'. This not only suggests, somewhat improbably, that the old lady dances with the virgins but also it makes her last-line instruction to them, in the original text, sound as though it is referring to dance steps! The '*Anna Prophetissa*', written in the right hand margin, is actually a speech heading to the first scribe's couplet and not part of a stage direction. Although this naming is not strictly necessary, as the preceding speech is also Anna's, it re-emphasises the continuation of the play after the second scribe's attempt to finish it. The stage direction should, therefore, read, '*et tripident*', exactly as it does in the earlier instruction, following the prologue, where it refers just to the 'virgynes'. The completion of this, the second, dance gives way to the Poet's final speech in which he seeks the customary pardon for any offence caused by the performers' 'sympylle cunnyng', advertises the coming year's attraction, and closes the show with;

Wherfor now, ye virgynes, er we go hens,

With alle your company, you goodly avaunce!

Also, ye menstralles, doth your diligens;  
Afore oure departyng, geve vs a daunce! (ll. 563-66)

The positioning of the dances at the beginning and end of the play, in close proximity to the Poet's speeches, strongly suggests that, like them, their function was to augment theatricality and create a greater sense of self-containment. As it exists, the play, including the Poet's part, consists of only 566 lines, which would take little more than half an hour to perform. The dances would clearly extend this to something, in terms of time and experience, more worthy of the occasion. Conversely, if the two episodes had been part of a one-day cycle, the inclusion of dances would have impeded progress and possibly seemed incongruous to the narrative process. Certainly, none of the other dramatizations of these episodes, that survive, include dance of any kind.

If the dances give the impression of being supplementary, it is possible to tell something of the virgins' original role in the play from two stage directions; 'Her virgynes, as many as a man wylle, shalle holde tapers in ther handes' (after l. 464), and, 'Here shal Symeon bere Jhesu in his armys, goyng a procession rounde aboute the tempille, and al this wyle the virgynis synge *Nunc dimittis*' (after l. 484). The functions of liturgical singing and processing with candles derive from the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin. Their execution here by 'virgynes' is probably attributable to the *Golden Legend*, where a noble lady, sorrowful of missing the feast mass through the absence of her chaplain, fell asleep during her prayers and experienced a vision of Mary attended by virgins, with candles, who sang the mass.<sup>51</sup> The allusion to this tradition in the Digby play seems to be unique in surviving *Purification* pageants, as none of the others specifically refer to virgins in their treatment of the occasion. Indeed, only the Coventry Weavers' pageant includes a procession of any kind and this, although accompanied by singing, is essentially a dramatic device to get Simeon, Anna and the Clerk down from the pageant stage in order to meet the approaching Mary and Joseph. Of the others, N-Town and Chester have stage directions for the singing of *Nunc dimittis* by Simeon, whereas York has him speak the lines from Luke 2: 29-32. The incomplete Towneley text does not reach this point. Although the Chester text suggests that Simeon may sing alone, the accounts of the Smiths, who produced the pageant, tell a slightly different story. In each of the six years for which accounts survive, the Smiths made payments, in addition to those who played the speaking parts, to various singers and musicians from the cathedral. These ranged from anonymous

'synngares' to the highly respected Elizabethan composer, Robert Whyte. Of particular interest here, though, is the payment for the performance in 1561, 'to Sir Io Genson for songes xij<sup>d</sup> to the 5 boyes for singing ij<sup>s</sup> vj<sup>d</sup>'.<sup>52</sup> John Genson was a minor canon of Chester Cathedral, one of only ten monks who remained to staff the cathedral after the dissolution of its former existence as St Werburgh's Abbey. He died some time between 1567 and 1572.<sup>53</sup> Given his engagement, the boys would, almost certainly, have been drawn from the eight choristers of the cathedral.<sup>54</sup> That these payments were made in connection with the performance of the pageant can be inferred from their place in the account between the wages, 'to Symyon 3<sup>s</sup> 4<sup>d</sup>' and, 'to the Angell vj<sup>d</sup>'. The fact that Simeon was required to sing and that the angel was also, probably, played by a boy who received the same remuneration as each of the singers, might suggest that, in the case of these two characters, the Smiths were looking to the cathedral for more than just singers and songs. The involvement of cathedral personnel in the Chester Smiths' *Purification* pageant may suggest that the single musical reference in the text is not an entirely accurate reflection of the contribution in performance. This would not be all that surprising as the realization of a text is an enhancing, and not merely reproductive, process. Texts, after all, tend to indicate intention, not record achievement. In this light, the employment of the boys in Chester may have been, simply, to accompany Simeon singing *Nunc dimittis*, or to cover the business with the angel over the word 'virgin' in the book on the altar, but they could also have been used to process with candles.

Similar arrangements of employment may have existed for the performance of the Digby *The Killing of the Children*, where boys with trained voices were needed, in the first instance, to sing, and, subsequently, to dance as well. The casting of boys in these roles may seem uncontentious but recent discussions of the play have assumed that the combination of virgins and dances can only mean the involvement of young women.<sup>55</sup> The argument for boys, though, is fairly sound. As already shown, the original function of the virgins was to sing and process, and whilst the latter might well have been accomplished by girls, it is unlikely that the former would have been in the context of public performance, especially as one of the virgins has a brief speaking role in the play. Although the word 'virgin' can apply to either sex, it would seem to refer, in the context of the play and the tradition illustrated in the *Golden Legend*, to chaste young women. However, of all the roles in which boys played women, that of youth is likely to present the least visual and vocal discrepancy.<sup>56</sup> A similar situation exists in *Wisdom*, where the Five Wits, who sing and process, are described by both Anima and a stage direction as,

'vyrghynes' (after l. 164). There is no evidence one way or the other in the text, but given their function in the play, as singers of liturgical office, they are likely to have been boys.

Further evidence of boys' involvement in *The Killing of the Children* appears to have been recorded, indirectly, in the manuscript itself. At the end of the play, the first scribe has listed, 'The namys of the pleyers', which he totals as seventeen. This is useful insofar as it confirms that the two episodes were performed as an entity, with the same Mary and Joseph used throughout, and conveys information about casting. At first sight, it is difficult to see what criterion the scribe is using in his list, for although it starts with 'The poete' and 'Kyng Herowde' it is not in any order of appearance (taking the play as a whole or the episodes separately), and nor is it in an order of importance based on character status or part length. It could be argued that the list divides on the sex of the characters, with the men listed first. To a large extent this is true, with 'Joseph' being named before 'Maria', but the latter half of the list also includes 'Angelus' who would not automatically be characterized as female. What is fairly certain, though, is that the angel would have been played by a boy, and I suspect that the scribe was separating the players according to the parts to be played by men and those to be performed by boys or young men. Thus, the list gives nine mens' parts and eight for boys, as only one virgin (the speaking part) is included. The actual number would, of course, have been larger to account for the other virgins, 'as many as a man wyllle'. If at least one boy was required in the speaking part of a virgin, and boys are the most likely source of singers in the liturgical context, then there seems very little reason to doubt, without evidence to the contrary, that they also danced. Nevertheless, girls should not be entirely excluded from the pleasures of medieval theatre. They clearly did take part in public displays of dancing, and it is not impossible that they partnered the boys in *The Killing of the Children* dances.<sup>57</sup> In many ways this would echo the vision in the *Golden Legend*, where the company of virgins is joined by a company of young men, all of whom carry candles.<sup>58</sup>

For the original performances of *The Killing of the Children* it would, presumably, have been enough for the scribe to record 'virghynes' in the text for whoever produced the play to know exactly what was required in terms of casting, or at least to have been aware of the range of acceptable alternatives. Much the same may have been true of the dances. The only information about them in the text is that they could be performed by any number and that they were accompanied by minstrels. The Poet establishes a context for the dances by drawing attention to their

twofold purpose of entertainment and Christian worship; 'These people to solas, and to do God reuerens' (l. 55). Anna, in her final couplet, similarly acknowledges the dual function of 'plesure' and 'worshippe' in the dances. Because of the religious context and the open-endedness of the numbers involved, a ring dance seems the most likely form for the dances to have taken. This type of dance, long associated with the Church, is thought to have originated in imitation of the dance of the angels.<sup>59</sup> As a symbol of divine mystery, the ring dance provided those on earth with an opportunity to participate in those mysteries. Within the form of a circular dance a variety of steps was possible, ranging from simple sideways movements to the more vigorous stamping of feet with the clapping of hands, and even to the inclusion of great leaps. The three dances in *The Killing of the Children* may have consisted of one such dance repeated, although a more entertaining alternative is that each dance represented a variation of the basic ring dance.

*The Killing of the Children* list of players, in distributing the parts almost equally between men and boys, also raises some interesting questions regarding auspices. The numbers involved, on their own, would seem to discount the view that it is a professional, touring play.<sup>60</sup> The Poet's indication that it forms part of an annual celebration, in which the performance of each section would never be more frequent than once every three years, and the stage direction that provides, in the role of the virgins, an opportunity for open-ended casting suggest above all a community play. Unfortunately, the Poet does not make it clear whether the group performing *The Killing of the Children* also took responsibility for the Shepherds and Magi or Doctors plays, which came before and after it. He implies as much by stating that, 'the last yeere we shewid you in this place' (l. 25), but this should not be read as proof of a single group concern. The Poet and his use of 'we' may be devices to focus on the collective purpose and collaborative nature of the whole project which, possibly, spread over a number of years, in a series of separate performances, might otherwise appear fragmentary. Within the series, different groups could have taken responsibility for individual pageants, in the manner of craft guild involvement in some Corpus Christi plays, with overall control retained by some governing body. To some extent, this arrangement is borne out by the survival of the manuscript. If performance of all the plays rested with a single group, one might have expected the other texts, for the adjacent years at the very least, to have survived with *The Killing of the Children*. In their absence, the separate existence of the play suggests a system of plural responsibility.

Although *The Killing of the Children* was part of a performance schedule quite

unlike anything else recorded in England, the play itself is very much the kind of enterprise undertaken by religious and craft guilds.<sup>61</sup> As is often the case, the text gives no formal indication of original ownership, but it does, somewhat intriguingly, provide speculation on authorship. At the end of the play, after the list of players and in a hand a little later than that of the main scribe, someone has written, 'Jhon Parfre ded wryte thys booke'. The same hand made an earlier, aborted, attempt to record the attribution at the end of the text of the play before realising that the scribe had included the list of names on the verso of the last folio. Whoever was responsible for the information clearly felt that it was important. The formula used implies an active relationship of John Parfrey with the text, rather than passive ownership that seems to be the case with the Hyngham inscription at the end of the *Macro Wisdom* and *Mankind*.<sup>62</sup> Quite what 'wryte' actually means here is difficult to resolve, as it could range from original authorship of the play, to composition of the Poet's speeches, to the final compilation registered in the manuscript, or even to the function of scribe. Whatever the nature of his involvement it merited a permanent record, and identifying John Parfrey might go some way to determining the play's provenance.

Although the name is not uncommon in the region of East Anglia from which the play originates, and family members have been located in the area of Thetford, there is one candidate who is of particular interest.<sup>63</sup> In his will of 1509, John Parfrey, a wealthy draper of Bury St Edmunds, leaves sufficient funds not only to ease his soul through purgatory and meet the needs of his family but also to pave the road to Ipswich and endow the ringing of the St Mary curfew bell.<sup>64</sup> The latter bequest was made in gratitude for a safe return home, made possible by following the sound of the bell after losing his way in dense fog.<sup>65</sup> Such altruism is not, in itself, sufficient reason for connecting him with *The Killing of the Children*, but, if he was involved, his civic reputation might explain why any association with the play was worth recording after his death. Gail McMurray Gibson makes a similar point in her recent work that seeks to establish a working relationship between some of the Macro and Digby plays and the monastery at Bury St Edmunds.<sup>66</sup> Whilst she, interestingly, exploits the manuscript associations with the place, principally relating to ownership, the linkage is, perhaps, overstated. Possession may be nine tenths of the law but it is not necessarily synonymous with authorship or auspices. The monastery may, at one time, have held the texts in its famed library, or provided the scriptorium in which they were copied, but it does not follow that they were instrumental in their literary composition or theatrical production. However, in the



case of *The Killing of the Children* there is, perhaps, a good reason for seeing a connection between the text, the town of Bury St Edmunds and John Parfrey.

In common with many other wealthy merchants of the town, John Parfrey was a member of what used to be known as the Alderman's guild.<sup>67</sup> The history of this burghal elite, established in the first half of the twelfth century as a guild merchant, and its opposition to the power of the abbey, has been well documented.<sup>68</sup> Membership, open to men and women, was essentially a matter of wealth, and its function, initially, was to deal with non-governmental, commercial concerns. Increasingly, however, it extended its powers to the governance of secular affairs, with the offices of alderman of the town and alderman of the guild becoming synonymous. This fusion of guild membership with municipal government continued until the burgesses took complete control of the town with the dissolution of the abbey in 1539. Their progress to power, however, was not entirely smooth. Consequent upon the revolt in 1327, the abbey revoked the charter of privileges so recently won and abolished the guild.<sup>69</sup> This setback in no way diminished the political ambition of the burgesses who re-formed under the protection of the Candlemas guild, or Guild of the Purification of our Lady. This guild, possibly the same as the Guild of St Mary in St James' Church, seems to have been founded almost immediately after the loss of the 1327 charter.<sup>70</sup> The guild was one of considerable prominence in the fifteenth century, acting as trustee for land bequeathed to the town and as custodian of the common funds. Membership was elite and much sought after, as is shown by the 1504 will of John Hedge of Bury with his bequest, of two gallons of wine annually for twelve years, to the Candlemas brotherhood, providing they accepted in membership his tantalizingly named brother, Robert Hedge.<sup>71</sup> Although there was not the same merging of town and guild offices as before, it is evident that there existed a remarkably close relationship between the guild and the governing body of the town. By the fifteenth century the guild was recognized as the leading non-monastic institution in Bury St Edmunds, and as a fraternity, or as individuals, would have taken an active interest in all aspects of the political and social life of the town. Not least amongst these would have been the occasions of civic and religious ceremony. Of these, the most important to the guild would have been the celebration of the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin. At the time of the guild returns in 1389 this required members to assemble with a candle to hear the mass at the altar before St Mary's image.<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere, the celebration took on a more dramatic form. At Beverley, for example;

all the bretheren and sisteren shall meet together in a fit and appointed place, away from the church; and there, one of the gild shall be clad in comely fashion as a queen, like to the glorious Virgin Mary, having what may seem a son in her arms; and two others shall be clad like to Joseph and Simeon; and two shall go as angels, carrying a candle-bearer, on which shall be twenty-four thick wax lights. With these and other great lights borne before them, and with much music and gladness, the pageant Virgin with her son, and Joseph and Simeon, shall go in procession to the church. And all the sisteren of the gild shall follow the Virgin; and afterwards all the bretheren; and each of them shall carry a wax light weighing half a pound. And they shall go two and two, slowly pacing to the church; and when they have got there, the pageant Virgin shall offer her son to Simeon at the high altar; and all the sisteren and bretheren shall offer their wax lights, together with a penny each. All this having been solemnly done, they shall go home again with gladness.<sup>73</sup>

Whether the Bury Candlemas guild's celebration of the feast developed in this way is not known. The dramatic qualities inherent in the liturgical ceremony certainly make it unlikely that mimetic elaboration would be confined to the Beverley example. Interestingly, David Mills sees a similar combination of liturgy and mimesis as central to the structure of the Candlemass part of the Digby play.<sup>74</sup> Although there is no evidence that the play evolved from the ceremony, it is perhaps significant that of all the pageants dealing with the purification, the Digby version remains closest to the liturgical rite. Even in the absence of a history, it is reasonable to claim that a guild dedicated to the Purification of the Virgin is a likely contender for association with a Candlemas play. The case for that guild being the one from Bury St Edmunds, of which John Parfrey was a member, is strengthened by the existence of another guild. All members of the Alderman's or Candlemas guild were also members of the guild dedicated to St Nicholas, which was also known as the Dusse after its foundation in 1282 by twelve priests.<sup>75</sup> In addition to functions common to other fraternities, the guild ministered to the poor and cared for the needs of alien merchants who came to Bury St Edmunds. Like the Candlemas guild,

membership was dependant upon wealth and social standing. Of interest here, though, are two more public activities of the guild. They were, appropriately, sponsors of the town's Boy Bishop ceremony observed in the parish church of St Mary, and, therefore, not unfamiliar with quasi-dramatic activity,<sup>76</sup> but perhaps more importantly, they were also responsible for maintaining the *Scola Cantus* or Song School. This school, situated in Song School Street between the abbey grounds and the grammar school, taught the rudiments of the sung mass and psalter, as well as providing an education in reading and grammar.<sup>77</sup> It was independent of the abbey, who not only had their own monastic school but also retained control over the fabric and finances of the local grammar school. The Song School was, according to one historian, 'a venerable local institution, entrenched in the hands of the townsfolk', by the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>78</sup>

These twin concerns of the Duse guild would seem to have considerable relevance to the performance of a play like *Candlemas Day and The Killing of the Children*. The saint, to whom the guild was dedicated, and the occasion of the Boy Bishop ceremony on Holy Innocents' Day are significant points of connection with a play that commemorates the massacre. As beneficiaries of the guild's sponsorship, the celebrants of the Boy Bishop in St Mary's Church may well have come from the *Scola Cantus*, less than a hundred yards away. The school and its scholars is also a very likely source for the virgins who sing *Nunc dimittis* and process with candles in *The Killing of the Children*, as well as other female roles in the play.<sup>79</sup>

Although the only evidence connecting *The Killing of the Children* with Bury St Edmunds is the, somewhat, tenuous manuscript attribution to John Parfrey, it is evident that the town possessed, in the common membership of two prominent and prestigious guilds, institutions with both reason and resources to take responsibility for this section of a series of plays. Whether Bury St Edmunds had a cycle or series of plays is not certain. An 'interludium' of Corpus Christi is listed as the function of one of the two Bury guilds of that name in the 1389 certificate returns, and a guild ordinance of 1477, dealing with fines for craft guild violations, reveals that the Bury Weavers' guild was responsible for the pageant of the Ascension and the gifts of the Holy Ghost in, 'the processione in the feste of Corpus Xte'.<sup>80</sup> There is no way of telling whether these pageants were theatrical or not. They may have been visual representations only. Another problem is that these references are specific to the Feast of Corpus Christi, and not to St Anne's Day proclaimed as the time of the performance for *The Killing of the Children*. Of course, the survival of so little evidence of dramatic activity does not, in itself, preclude the possibility of the series

of plays being from Bury St Edmunds. As Gail McMurray Gibson has pointed out, the last day of the summer Bury Fair, held over three days at the Feast of St James between July 24th and 26th, coincided with St Anne's Day.<sup>81</sup> It may have been for such an occasion that John Parfrey compiled or revised *The Killing of the Children*. If it was performed by the Candlemas guild it is possible that they also presented the other plays in the series. The survival of only one of the plays, though, might rather suggest that they were the responsibility of other guilds in the town.

A final difficulty in this theory of auspices concerns the discrepancy between the date of John Parfrey's death in 1509 and the date of the manuscript recorded by the scribe as 1512. The simplest explanation is that the Digby text is a copy made in 1512 of an earlier version with which John Parfrey had, in some way, been connected. Fortunately, someone made sure that he was not forgotten.

Some of the argument for connecting the Bury Candlemas and Dusse guilds, through John Parfrey, with the Digby *The Killing of the Children* can be used to speculate on the same guilds' involvement with *Wisdom*. If the Candlemas guild did undertake *The Killing of the Children* it is unlikely to have exhausted their desire or capacity for dramatic entertainment. The play, forming part of a corporate venture, would have been regarded as an essential contribution to the general social and religious life of the town, in which guild dedication could be closely identified with public performance. *Wisdom*, on the other hand, may have represented a more spectacular opportunity for the expression of prominence within the civic community. Unfortunately for this line of argument, there is no incontrovertible evidence to connect a performance of *Wisdom* with Bury St Edmunds. What associations there are all relate to ownership of the two manuscripts. However, there are some circumstantial factors that might favour an identification with the town.

The coincidence of the same scribe's involvement with the Digby *Wisdom* and *The Killing of the Children* probably has more to do with the reasons behind copying the texts than with common auspices, although it is a factor. Both plays actively employ liturgical singing as a theatrical device to be performed by virgins; roles that could be met by the boys from the *Scola Cantus*. The nature of moralities, like *Wisdom*, is in keeping with the purposes of religious guilds, and the Candlemas guild, in particular, may have taken pleasure in seeing portrayed the corruption that ensues when those committed to contemplation and celibacy choose *vita mixta* and meddle in secular affairs. The plot takes on a significant edge when considered in the light of the struggle for municipal independence from monastic authority that

characterized the civic history of Bury St Edmunds. Another, even more speculative, factor concerns the *Wisdom* stage directions. These are extremely thorough, not only in regard to stage action but also in detail of costume. What is more, they, uniquely in plays of the period, specify the type of cloth to be used. This helpful, but somewhat unusual, practice could be explained by the high level of visual signifiers, relating to costume as metaphor, featured within the play. Alternatively, it could be explained by the high proportion of Candlemas guild members being drapers, like John Parfrey, with, one might suspect, as much interest in textiles as in texts.<sup>82</sup> Finally, the guild, in their prominent civic role, held the occupancy of the Guildhall, which would have provided excellent accommodation for performance in a hall measuring, internally, about 21ft 6ins by 119ft (6.5m x 36m).<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, the hall underwent considerable rebuilding and refurbishment in the second half of the fifteenth century and it is not impossible that a performance of *Wisdom* may have figured as part of the fund-raising or re-opening celebrations.

The dances in *The Conversion of St Paul*, like those in *The Killing of the Children*, are additions to the original staging requirements of the play. But unlike the dances of the virgins, the dances which follow Saul's progress are not referred to by the similarly named Poet. They do, however, occupy an equivalent place in being identified with the Poet's speeches. Whether this is influence or coincidence is impossible to say. In the Digby manuscript of *The Conversion of St Paul*, copied, for the most part, in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, there are three marginal stage directions of, 'Daunce', written in a hand later than that of the main scribe but probably contemporary with the interpolated Belial and Mercury scene of about 1550.<sup>84</sup> The first instruction comes at the end of the Poet's two stanza prologue, the second just before his conclusion to the first station representing Jerusalem, and the third in a similar position at the end of the second station that presented the road to Damascus. In these positions they appear to act as a bridge between the geographically separated episodes of the play and, as such, may be no more than an entertaining elaboration of the Poet's role. Alternatively, they may, like the dances in *The Killing of the Children*, have been a consequence of a change in the conditions of performance.

In spite of some attempts to prove otherwise, the play, as represented by the Poet, is clearly intended for processional performance, with the audience moving twice to take up new positions at the second and third stations.<sup>85</sup> The Poet's

conclusion to the first station seems unequivocal in the matter;

Fynally, of this stacyon thus we mak a conclusyon.  
Besechyng thys audyens to folow and succede  
Wyth all your delygens this generall processyon. (ll. 155-57)

This echoes the 1st Knight's earlier commitment to travel on Saul's behalf, 'I shall yow succede, and make perambulacyon/Thorowoute Damaske . . .' (ll. 67-68), and is re-inforced by the stage direction, '*Finis istius stacionis et altera sequitur*' (after l. 161), which separates the Poet's two stanzas between stations. It is true that the conclusion to the second station does not make such overt reference to audience movement but one might reasonably expect them to have got the idea by then. Certainly, the Poet's introduction to the third station, which follows in the text immediately after the previous conclusion and confirming stage direction, sounds as though he is re-establishing his acquaintance with the audience after some delay.

There is nothing sufficiently specific in the Poet's speeches to suggest the environment in which the processional performance took place. One attractive possibility is that, in imitation of a number of medieval festal processions, including Corpus Christi, the performance began at one parish church, probably outside given the introduction of Saul's horse, and moved to another, where a stage may have been set up over the porch to allow for, 'Godhed spekyth in heuyn' (after l. 182), before moving inside for Saul's sermon in Damascus.<sup>86</sup> This combining of spiritual theme and physical action in a journey creates for the audience an element of participation in the play by making them literally followers of Saul. There is no reason why processional dance should not have accompanied this movement, as it did successfully in a production of the play in Winchester Cathedral in 1982.<sup>87</sup> But it is just as possible that the dances were introduced as a substitute for procession rather than as a complement to it.

In *The Conversion of St Paul* manuscript the scribe has written, '*Poeta si placet*' above the word 'Conclusyon', at the end of the first station, suggesting that in some instances the speech which refers to the audience following in procession could be left out. None of the other speeches delivered by the Poet has the same option. In these circumstances the play could be performed at a single site, without enormous loss of dramatic unity, especially if the dances were used to demarcate the changes in stage location. The recognition by the scribe that the play had the potential for different staging methods may indicate that the manuscript was not

prepared for exclusive use, or that he was aware of the need for alternative staging in particular circumstances. If, for example, the play was performed in celebration of the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul on January 25th – there is no evidence that it was – the weather may not always have been kind enough to allow for outdoor, processional performance. At such times there would hardly be sufficient notice to summon up dancers for an indoor performance, although omission of the Poet's reference to the 'generall processyon' would still be necessary. By the middle of the sixteenth century, single site production may have prevailed and justified the registering of the dances in the manuscript.

However it was staged, responsibility for its production is most likely to have resided with a town or parish guild. Without the Belial and Mercury addition, the play has twelve speaking parts, which even with doubling could not be played by less than nine or ten players. Add to them a number of dancers and it becomes improbable that the play was the property of a travelling company.<sup>88</sup> As the dancers are not characterized in the manner of *Wisdom*, or even *The Killing of the Children*, it is fruitless to speculate on who they were beyond the likelihood of guild members or their children. However, there is in the King's College, Cambridge, *Mundum Book* a tantalizing payment that may throw some light on the kind of auspices analogous to a play like *The Conversion of St Paul*. In the account for 1499-1500 the following appears;

Item in commemoratione Sancti palli soluti in regardis  
parochianis beate marie in collegio ludentibus & gestantibus iij<sup>s</sup>  
iiij<sup>d</sup> in potu iiij<sup>d</sup> <sup>89</sup>

A similar payment the following year confirms by date the indication above, that the occasion is the Feast of the Commemoration of St Paul, rather than the Conversion. The translation of the item in the REED volume gives 'gesturing' for '*gestantibus*' and glosses it as 'possibly miming'. Although semantically this may be correct, it is difficult to see why miming should be differentiated from 'playing' unless '*ludentibus*', in this instance, refers to a non-mimetic activity.<sup>90</sup> This would be very unusual, and the sense of '*gestantibus*' may be closer to the '*gesticulari*' given as the Latin equivalent, with the more common '*tripudiare*', for 'to Dawnce' in *Catholicon Anglicum*.<sup>91</sup> If this was the meaning intended, the record would match very closely the little that is known about *The Conversion of St Paul*. It is tempting to see more than coincidence at work here; the parishioners of an important local church act and

dance at the time of the Feast of the Commemoration of St Paul, the date of the college performance is very close to that conjectured for the manuscript of the Digby play, and the language of the play is identified as East Midland with East Anglian features and instances of usage found frequently in the Cambridge area.<sup>92</sup> Even if the play and the payment are unrelated, the extent of coincidence suggests an auspices for the play very similar to that recorded in the King's College accounts.

The payment also confirms, as do a number of the Cambridge records, the significant role that dance played in a variety of commemorative and festive occasions. Evidence of this kind, and of the three plays discussed here, points to a policy of maximizing participation in performance where financial consideration, in the form of professional payments, was not a determining factor. These are the conditions under which parish or religious guilds essentially operated, and whilst the expansion of speaking roles was not really feasible, the use of dance, as a festive and numerically open-ended activity, was an ideal alternative. It may also have made possible the participation of girls and women, otherwise excluded from theatre at the time. In the hands of religious guilds, the plays performed over a number of years may well have seen revisions, interpolations and additions of this kind not always formally recorded in the text. What is certainly clear from the manuscripts of the three plays is that change and adaptation was the norm rather than the exception. All three bear evidence of scribal awareness of an active life for the plays beyond the original performances. *Wisdom* can still be performed when the cast is reduced from forty to six, *The Killing of the Children*, in the marginal note, '*Vacat ab hinc*' between the two episodes, acknowledges an occasion when the Candlemas part may be omitted, and *The Conversion of St Paul* provides the option of alternative staging by cutting the references to procession. In this light, the manuscripts begin to look like copies of plays made after successful performance and held for reference or borrowing by other interested parties. Maybe, at one time, the Macro and Digby texts were lodged in the library at the abbey of Bury St Edmunds. The library was certainly not restricted to monastic use, with distinguished citizens borrowing from as early as the twelfth century. By the fifteenth century it seems that townspeople were making more use of it than the monks.<sup>93</sup> Such borrowings may account for the marginal scribbling in some of the play texts, and the frequency of seemingly unconnected signatures. More important than matters of possession, the manuscripts declare their contribution to a lively and versatile dramatic tradition, of which dance was a significant part.



NOTES

I should like to thank Peter Meredith, of the University of Leeds, for his generous advice and criticism in the preparation of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Alexandra F. Johnston, 'Wisdom and the Records: Is There a Moral?', in *The 'Wisdom' Symposium*, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio (New York, 1986), pp. 87-101, at 94.

<sup>2</sup> Of these plays *Wisdom* is unique in surviving in two manuscripts. Macro provides a complete text (c. 1465-70) and Digby a later (c. 1490-1500) incomplete copy of 752 lines. The two texts are very close and what differences there are suggest that both were copied from a common exemplar rather than one from the other. See *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, ed. Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall Jr., EETS 283 (1982), p. lxvi. All references to the Digby texts are from this edition. Quotations from *Wisdom* are, unless otherwise stated, from the complete Macro version in *The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles, EETS 262 (1969).

<sup>3</sup> The two productions of *Wisdom* took place in Winchester Cathedral (1981) and Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut (1984). For reviews of the productions see Avril Henry, 'Wisdom at Winchester Cathedral', *Medieval English Theatre*, 3 (1981), 53-55; Peter Happe, 'Wisdom', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 24 (1981), 196-97; Therese Coletti and Pamela Sheingorn, 'Playing *Wisdom* at Trinity College', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 27 (1984), 179-84.

<sup>4</sup> On this and other dances of the period see Mabel Dolmetsch, *Dances of England and France from 1450 to 1600* (London, 1949; reprint New York, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> It is not clear from the stage direction precisely what kind of 'warders' are intended here. They may have been batons or truncheons, both of which were carried as symbols of office and used, amongst other things, to signal the commencement or cessation of hostilities in a battle or a tournament. See the *OED* entry for 'Warder', *sb*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> On the English sword dance ceremony see Alex Helm, *The English Mummers' Play*, The Folklore Society (Woodbridge, 1981). Earlier examples from elsewhere can be found in Violet Alford, *Sword Dance and Drama* (London, 1962). See particularly Plates 1 (Sword Dancers and Carnival Maskers at Zurich, 1578) and 12 (Portuguese Sword Dancers in Goa, 1548). Another variation is depicted in 'La Kermesse de la Saint Georges' (c. 1559) by Peter Bruegel, see H. Arthur Klein, *Graphic Worlds of Peter Bruegel The Elder* (New York, 1963), p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Some discussion of 'caps of maintenance' can be found in Iris Brooke, *Medieval Theatre Costume* (London, 1967), p. 78. For details of their use in heraldry see Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* (London, 1909, revised, 1949), pp. 378-82. For an

interesting discussion on two-faced masks, with a fifteenth-century illustration of Janus with faces side by side, see Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, 'Masks in Medieval English Theatre: The Mystery Plays 2', *Medieval English Theatre*, 3 (1981), 69-113, at 76-79. Another and more local example of two faces beneath a single hat is the misericord in Norwich Cathedral described by G. L. Remnant in *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (London, 1969), p. 108 as 'Deceit' and dated c. 1480. Coincidentally 'Dyscheyit' is the name given to the last of the Perjury dancers to be introduced by Understanding in the play (line 727). The misericord is reproduced in Edward G. Tasker, *Encyclopedia of Medieval Church Art* (London, 1993), p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> Both manuscripts have 'conregent' here, which Eccles emends to 'congruent'. The *OED* has a definition for 'conregent' of 'ruling or reigning together', but this derives solely from the *Wisdom* example and does not make much sense in the context of visors. 'Congruent', on the other hand, could mean that the visors were appropriately matched to the male and female roles of the dancers. However much the emendation improves the sense, it is a fairly major editorial intervention.

<sup>9</sup> There is a very remote, and certainly less dramatic, possibility that the dancers represented only women, as 'gallant' can refer to a woman as a 'fashionably attired beauty' (*OED*, s.v. Gallant, B sb b.). The first illustrative quotation given in the *OED* for this meaning is from the play, *Lusty Juventus*. However, the use of the term in the play does not appear to illustrate the meaning in quite the way that the *OED* suggests. It seems to imply more of a moral than a sartorial judgement.

<sup>10</sup> *OED*, s.v. Matron 1 and 2.

<sup>11</sup> Eccles, p. 212, note to line 752 sd.

<sup>12</sup> *OED*, s.v. All, adj 8d and 9d.

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Peter Meredith for suggesting this interpretation.

<sup>14</sup> Dolmetsch, pp. 1-48.

<sup>15</sup> Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchesography*, trans. Mary Stewart Evans (New York, 1967), p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> *The Plays of Henry Medwall*, ed. Alan H. Nelson (Woodbridge, 1980), p. 76, l. 380.

<sup>17</sup> H. Colin Slim, 'Mary Magdalene, musician and dancer', *Early Music*, 8 (1980), 460-73, at 462-65.

<sup>18</sup> In some respects, this would mirror the development of the basse dance on the Continent in the sixteenth century where the characteristic steps and movements acquired hops and leaps (see Dolmetsch, p. 1).

<sup>19</sup> Suzanne R. Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford, 1990), p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> David Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 116, and Donald C. Baker, 'Is *Wisdom* a "Professional" Play?', in *The 'Wisdom' Symposium*, pp. 67-86.

<sup>21</sup> The manuscript stage direction gives only 'vj' small boys. Eccles, p. xxxv, quite reasonably, assumes this to be an error as they represent the seven deadly sins.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Davis in his review of David Bevington's facsimile edition of the Macro plays in *Notes and Queries*, 22 (1975), 78-79, says of the marks, 'they are simply interlaced curves making a line-filler' (79). This seems unlikely as none of the other stage directions are treated in this way.

<sup>23</sup> Eccles, pp. xxxiv-xxxv, and Baker *et al.*, pp. lxx-lxxii.

<sup>24</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1989), and 'The Play of Wisdom and the Abbey of St Edmunds', in *The 'Wisdom' Symposium*, pp. 39-66. The question of ownership is dealt with in some detail in both works, but for a summary see the article in *The 'Wisdom' Symposium*, pp.40-43. The case rests principally on the Latin inscription at the end of the Macro text that claims that the book belongs to a monk named Hyngham, who has been identified, by some, as the abbot of Bury St Edmunds from 1474 to 1479. Other connections made are with Bury as the birthplace of the earliest known collectors of both manuscripts. Myles Blomefylde owned the Digby text in the sixteenth century and Cox Macro the copy that now takes his name in the eighteenth century.

<sup>25</sup> Westfall, pp. 52-54.

<sup>26</sup> *Records of Plays and Players in Norfolk and Suffolk 1330-1642*, ed. David Galloway and John Wasson, Malone Society Collections XI (Oxford, 1980-81), pp. 147-48.

<sup>27</sup> Johnston, pp. 97-99. For an overview see Ian Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (Toronto and Cambridge, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio, 'The Staging of *Wisdom*', in *The 'Wisdom' Symposium*, pp. 1-17, at 5.

<sup>29</sup> Robert S. Gottfried, *Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis: 1290-1539* (Princeton, 1982), p. 211.

<sup>30</sup> Westfall, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Westfall, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Johnston, p. 101, has tentatively raised the possibility of the Howards, Dukes of Norfolk, being the original patron of *Wisdom*. The family held a seat at Stoke-by-Nayland in Suffolk during the period of the play.

<sup>33</sup> A particularly interesting, and well documented example, occurred on Twelfth Night, 1494 when Henry VII entertained the mayor and his brethren with the ambassadors from France and Spain. The entertainment included, 'a goodly Interlude', the figures of St George, a fair virgin and a huge red dragon spitting fire, speeches, and a sung anthem of St George. It was brought to a close with the entrance of, 'xij lordes knights and Esquyers with xij ladies dysguysed' who danced to a 'small Tabret & a subtile ffedyll'. See Sydney Anglo, 'William Cornish in a Play, Pageants, Prison, and Politics', *The Review of English Studies*, 10 (1959), 347-60; W. R. Streitberger,

'William Cornish and the Players of the Chapel', *Medieval English Theatre*, 8 (1986), 3-20; and Westfall, pp. 37-38.

<sup>34</sup> Westfall, p. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Westfall, Appendix A, pp. 210-12, where the average troupe size works out as 3.39, and Lancashire, Appendix I, pp. 347-408.

<sup>36</sup> Westfall, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> Eccles, p. xxxv.

<sup>38</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge*, ed. Alan H. Nelson, 2 vols (Toronto, 1989), II, 710-11.

<sup>39</sup> Lancashire, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> On guilds and purgatory see Barbara Hanawalt, 'Keepers of the lights: late medieval English parish gilds', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 14 (1984), 21-37, and Clive Burgess, '"A fond thing vainly invented": an essay on Purgatory and pious motive in late medieval England', in *Parish Church and People: Local studies in lay religion 1350-1750*, ed. S. J. Wright (London, 1988), pp. 56-84.

<sup>41</sup> On the appropriateness of *Wisdom* for a lay audience see Rev. John Joseph Molloy, *A Theological Interpretation of the Moral Play, 'Wisdom, Who Is Christ'* (Washington, DC., 1952), pp. 150-56.

<sup>42</sup> H. F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Medieval England* (London, 1919), p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> For craft guilds hiring members as actors see John Marshall, 'Players of the Coopers' Pageant from the Chester Plays in 1572 and 1575', *Theatre Notebook*, 33 (1979), pp. 18-23.

<sup>44</sup> Westlake, p. 107.

<sup>45</sup> Nelson, *Cambridge*, pp. 3-59.

<sup>46</sup> Westlake, p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> Westlake, p. 61.

<sup>48</sup> *English Gilds*, edited by Toulmin Smith, EETS 40 (1870), p. xxx.

<sup>49</sup> Hanawalt, pp. 25-26.

<sup>50</sup> Baker *et al.*, p. liv.

<sup>51</sup> *The Golden Legend*, edited by F. S. Ellis, 7 vols (London, 1900), III, pp. 25-26.

<sup>52</sup> *Records of Early English Drama: Chester*, ed. Lawrence M. Clopper, (Toronto, 1979), p. 67.

<sup>53</sup> R. V. H. Burne, *The Monks of Chester* (London, 1962), pp. 180-81.

<sup>54</sup> R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral* (London, 1958), p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Baker *et al.*, p. lxiii, has 'village girls collected for the occasion', and Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 99, sees in the Virgins a violation of 'the English medieval custom of all-male performers'.

<sup>56</sup> Evidence of boys dressed as girls, singing and dancing from a *Computus* roll of 1441 is

quoted by E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols (London, 1903), I, 361.

<sup>57</sup> For references to girls dancing see Nelson, *Cambridge*, pp. 25, 30, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Ellis, *The Golden Legend*, III, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Two quite well known paintings of the fifteenth century depicting angels dancing in a ring are, *The Last Judgement* by Fra Angelico (Museo di San Marco, Florence), and *'Mystic Nativity'* by Sandro Botticelli (National Gallery, London). For a history of the ring dance and the Church see E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine*, trans. E. Classen (London, 1952; reprinted Westport, Connecticut, 1977).

<sup>60</sup> Baker *et al.*, p. lxi, and Donald C. Baker, 'When is a Text a Play? Reflections upon What Certain Late Medieval Dramatic Texts Can Tell Us', in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, ed. Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey (Bloomington, 1989), pp. 20-40, at 33.

<sup>61</sup> For a range of references to religious and craft guild plays see Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain to 1558*.

<sup>62</sup> Eccles, p. xxvii. It has been suggested that Hyngham may have been the scribe as well as the owner of the Macro copy; see Richard Beadle, 'The Scribal Problem in the Macro Manuscript', *English Language Notes*, 21 (1984), pp. 1-13, at 9.

<sup>63</sup> Baker *et al.*, p. lvi.

<sup>64</sup> *Wills and Inventories from the Registers of the Commissary of Bury St Edmunds and the Archdeacon of Sudbury*, ed. Samuel Tymms, The Camden Society, 49 (London, 1850), pp. 108-13.

<sup>65</sup> Gottfried, p. 44, n. 51.

<sup>66</sup> Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 126.

<sup>67</sup> Gottfried, pp. 44 and 147-48.

<sup>68</sup> M. D. Lobel, *The Borough of Bury St Edmund's: A Study in the Government and Development of a Monastic Town* (London, 1935), and Gottfried, *Bury St Edmunds*.

<sup>69</sup> Gottfried, pp. 222-31.

<sup>70</sup> Lobel, p. 147, and Westlake, p. 226.

<sup>71</sup> Tymms, *Wills*, p. 104. Robert Hegge, of course, is the name of the earliest known owner of Cotton MS Vespasian D. VIII (The N-Town manuscript).

<sup>72</sup> Westlake, p. 226.

<sup>73</sup> Toulmin Smith, *Gilds*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>74</sup> David Mills, 'Religious drama and civic ceremonial', in *The Revels History of Drama in English: Volume I, Medieval Drama*, ed. A. C. Cawley, Marion Jones, Peter F. McDonald and David Mills (London, 1983), pp. 152-206, at 159-65.

<sup>75</sup> Gottfried, pp. 134, 148 and 190; Lobel, pp. 46 and 73; Westlake, pp. 12-14.

<sup>76</sup> Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 121, and Galloway and Wasson, *Norfolk and Suffolk*, pp. 147-48.

<sup>77</sup> Gottfried, p. 211.

<sup>78</sup> Gottfried, p. 211.

<sup>79</sup> It is worth noting in this context that some Boy Bishop ceremonies appear to have included dance as part of their celebrations. See Backman, *Religious Dances*, pp. 64-66.

<sup>80</sup> Karl Young, 'An Interludium for a Gild of Corpus Christi', *Modern Language Notes*, 48 (1933), 85-86; Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 114; Westlake, p. 225; Chambers, II, 343-44.

<sup>81</sup> Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, p. 126.

<sup>82</sup> Gottfried, p. 147.

<sup>83</sup> Margaret Statham, 'The Guildhall, Bury St Edmunds', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 31 (1968), 117-57, at 131-32.

<sup>84</sup> Baker *et al.*, p. xvii.

<sup>85</sup> For a summary of opposing opinions see Baker *et al.*, pp. xxvi-xxviii.

<sup>86</sup> For the building of stages over church doors see *The Medieval Records of a London City Church (St Mary at Hill)*, ed. Henry Littlehales, EETS 125 (1904) and EETS 128 (1905), pp. 198, 301, 304 and 327. Although the only connection that *The Conversion of St Paul* has with Bury St Edmunds is the ownership of the manuscript in the sixteenth century by Myles Blomefylde who was born there in 1525, the town offers a particularly good example of a locality suitable for the type of staging suggested in this article. The south door of St James' Church (now St Edmundsbury Cathedral) faces the Notyngham porch built on the north side of St Mary's Church in 1440. The two entrances are exactly aligned and a little over a hundred yards apart, separated by a churchyard. Performance of *The Conversion of St Paul* could have begun with the first station at the door of St James' Church, processed to the north side of St Mary's Church for the second station, where God was raised above the porch, and then entered the church for the final station. The appeal of this location is somewhat diminished by the fire of 1465 which gutted the interior of St James' Church. Rebuilding was not completed until 1550 but perhaps, for the sake of speculation, the south door survived.

<sup>87</sup> For a review of the performance that mentions the dancing, see Peter Meredith, 'The Conversion of St Paul at Winchester Cathedral', *Medieval English Theatre*, 4 (1982), 71-72. There is considerable evidence for the use of processional dance in medieval European religious ceremonies. Corpus Christi processions were frequently accompanied by dances, as were celebrations in honour of saints. See Backman, *Religious Dances*, p. 86 and pp. 97-102.

<sup>88</sup> Baker *et al.*, p. xxviii.

<sup>89</sup> Nelson, *Cambridge*, p. 75.

<sup>90</sup> On Latin terms used in records of dramatic activity see Abigail Ann Young, 'Plays and Players: the Latin terms for performance', *REED Newsletter*, 9 (1984), 56-62, at 60.

<sup>91</sup> *Catholicon Anglicum: an English-Latin Wordbook dated 1483*, ed. Sidney J. H. Herrtage,

EETS 75 (1881).

<sup>92</sup> Baker *et al.*, p. xix.

<sup>93</sup> Gottfried, p. 212.