

TO CHESTER AND BEYOND: MEANING, TEXT AND CONTEXT IN EARLY ENGLISH DRAMA

Shifting Paradigms in Early English Drama
Studies

David Mills and edited by Philip Butterworth

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To Chester and Beyond

General Editors
Philip Butterworth, Pamela King and
Alexandra F. Johnston



David Mills 1985

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and Context in Early English Drama

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INTRODUCTION

In bringing together the volumes in this series the general editors are attempting to bring to a wider scholarly and student readership the most important twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship on English medieval drama/theatre. In the second half of the twentieth century there were some fundamental shifts in our knowledge of medieval theatre and its practice. The authors in this series, Professor Alexandra Johnston, Toronto; Professor David Mills, Liverpool; Professor Peter Meredith, Leeds; and Professor Meg Twycross, Lancaster, have between them been responsible for some of the most important research in this field. The purpose of the series is to widen the readership for their work and make it more accessible to scholars in related areas. There are also many young scholars of medieval drama/theatre who are not aware of the depth of investigation that has already been carried out in their field.

This volume presents selected works of David Mills. As is the case with the other authors in this series, much of Mills's work has been published in specialist publications. Mills was one of the outstanding English scholars of his generation. His prodigious scholarly output enabled him to become one of the leading scholars in the investigation and understanding of medieval English theatre. In particular, it was his examination of medieval plays and their texts and contexts in the city of Chester that propelled him and his work towards the pinnacle of achievement in the study of English medieval texts.

Mills's work has not been exclusively concerned with investigation into plays and play texts. Indeed, his early career, at Prescot Grammar School, Merseyside, and then the University of Manchester, where he obtained a first-class Honours degree in English, led him into master's work followed by doctoral research concerned with a comparative study of the versification, vocabulary and style of *Pearl*, *Patience*, *Purity* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1962).

After his time at Manchester he obtained a Leverhulme Fellowship in the Department of English at the University of Liverpool (1962–63), where he completed his Ph.D. It is at this point that one of his colleagues asked him what his research territory was going to be. Mills had not previously thought about this and opted on the spur of the moment for editing the 'Chester plays' despite the fact that his only previous experience for drama/theatre had been that provided by a third-year undergraduate course at Manchester.

It was with the help of A. C. Cawley, Professor of English Language and Medieval Literature at the University of Leeds, that Mills and Bob Lumiansky, an older and already well-established scholar at the University of Pennsylvania, were

brought together in 1966. The two men were to form a long-term partnership in their work on the Chester plays. Their major work was conceived as a three-volume edition titled *The Chester Mystery Cycle* to be published by the Early English Text Society for Oxford University Press. However, only two volumes were published by the EETS, in 1974 and 1986. Volume 3 was published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1983. No other work, before or since, has matched the rigour of investigation into these plays and their context. In addition to these works Lumiansky and Mills went on to contribute introductions to three of the Chester play manuscripts in facsimile and thus provide an invaluable resource for scholars of medieval theatre. These facsimiles were respectively published in the *Leeds Texts and Monograph* series in 1973, 1980 and 1984. After Lumiansky's death in 1987 Mills continued the work they had begun together and went on to publish a modern-spelling version of the plays in order to make them accessible to a non-specialist readership. This work was published in 1992 and retained all the integrity of the earlier scholarly edition.

In 1998 Mills produced his important monograph *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays*, in which the quality of his scholarship was yet again demonstrated in his careful examination of the available records concerning the Whitsun Plays and their context in the city of Chester. Much of the evidence in this work consisted of civic and guild-based accounts, which confirmed a growing interest in the value of such records as means of understanding conditions surrounding the plays at Chester – so much so that Mills became involved in editing the Records of Early English Drama (REED) edition of *Cheshire including Chester*. The volume was published in 2007 and was an expanded work upon the pioneering volume *REED: Chester* that had been edited by Lawrence M. Clopper in 1979. Elizabeth Baldwin was initially appointed as a research assistant and later became one of the co-editors along with Mills and Clopper. The new work included records from the county of Cheshire and many more newly discovered records from and about the city of Chester.

Only two short sections of these seminal works are included in this volume, and they are from *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (1998). They are: 'Medievalism and Revival: Editors and Editions' and "The 1951 Revival" and "The New Tradition". Although the works mentioned represent some of his most densely focused, important and accessible output, they form but a fraction of his total oeuvre. It is from his many articles, chapters in books and other contributions to shared volumes that selection has been made to represent the range and quality of his work in this book. Mills has been very much involved in the selection of articles presented in this volume.

Perhaps the most significant of these articles is also the earliest one presented in this book. It dates from 1969 and is titled 'Approaches to Medieval Drama'. It was first published in *Leeds Studies in English*, although its earlier incarnation was initially delivered as a paper in May 1967 to the Liverpool University Medieval Society. The work marks Mills's entry into scholarship concerning English medieval drama/theatre. He was 31 when the work appeared in print. Already at this stage he demonstrated a clear and mature understanding of the existing knowledge of medieval English drama. His overview of the state of scholarship in England and North America was both perceptive and intelligent. Here he discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the work of E. K. Chambers and the subsequent 'critical revolution' principally engendered by O. B. Hardison and V. A. Kolve. He warns of the pitfalls in the indiscriminate use of modern dramatic terminology concerning medieval plays and their performance. He discusses these concerns by focusing on the 'Literary Approach', the 'Liturgical Approach' and the 'Dramatic Approach'. In some ways, these points of focus selected for this article signalled what was to become the scholarly core of his subsequent work. His grasp of historical, religious, civic and dramatic material at this relatively young age was profound, as was his perception upon what was thought to be known about English medieval drama at this time. The article also points to his developing and abiding interest in the development of the plays at Chester.

Two further articles appeared in 1985 (after he had published his texts and facsimiles of the Chester Mystery Cycle): one was contained in a volume that he edited for *Leeds Studies in English* and titled "'None Had the Like nor the Like Darste Set Out": the City of Chester and Its Mystery Cycle' and the other 'The "Behold and See" Convention in Medieval Drama'. In this latter piece, published in *Medieval English Theatre*, he again orientated his analytical position to pierce the use of modern dramatic terminology in the analysis of medieval English drama. He examined the concepts of 'dialogue' and 'action' in order to penetrate superficial understanding brought about by use of modern terminology, and he analysed the relationship between 'action' and 'direct address'. His choice of these dramatic criteria to be examined was fundamental. The other piece, 'None Had the Like nor the Like Darste Set Out . . .', was effectively his first article to focus solely on the Chester plays. Here, he concentrated on contextualising the development of the plays through their historical, civic and religious purpose, leading to their eventual messy demise in the mid-1570s.

The texts of the Chester plays published in Mills's and Lumiansky's two-volume edition, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, by the Early English Text Society in 1974 and 1986, were motivated by a concern to create an authoritative scholarly edition of the plays. Earlier nineteenth- and twentieth-century editions of the plays

were largely created by antiquarians aligned to learned societies developed in the nineteenth century. Mills contextualises the need as he and Lumiansky perceived the position in the late 1960s. The perspective is discussed in his 'Theories and Practices in the Editing of the Chester Cycle Play Manuscripts' (1987), 'Modern Editions of Medieval English Plays' (1991) and 'Medievalism and Revival: Editors and Editions' (1998).

Of all the modern English scholars who concentrate on medieval English plays, Mills probably demonstrates a greater awareness and understanding of the place of didacticism in the drama. This is, of course, affected by the nature of the Chester plays themselves. They are overtly didactic in ways that are not always obvious in other plays. Mills recognises and acknowledges these characteristics and treats them with considerable insight. However, in 'Characterisation in the English Mystery Cycles' (1983) he cites other clear examples of didacticism, including one from the N.town play of *The Woman Taken in Adultery*, when the player playing 'Jhesus' steps out of the reality of the personage and says to and of the audience,

Now God þat dyed ffor all mankende
 saue all þese pepyl both nyght and day
 and of oure synnys he us vnbynde
 hyȝe lorde of heuyn þat best may.

This direct address to the audience takes on an expository function to its didactic purpose. Further didactic considerations occur in 'The Antiquarians and the Critics: The Chester Plays and the Criticism of Early English Drama' (2007), where he identifies a political function of didacticism in defence of the plays against sixteenth-century opponents: 'The didacticism taken as a sign of early origin by nineteenth-century critics now seems part of a defensive strategy of the sixteenth century against clerical opponents of the plays'.

Throughout Mills's collected work there is a growing understanding and articulation of the religious nature of the Chester plays. He very appropriately chips away at the flimsy historical knowledge of the plays through incisive analysis of their religious context. In 'Chester's Covenant Theology' (2000) he discusses the relevance of the 'covenant' motif and concludes,

These covenant passages can all be reasonably seen as modifications to a pre-existent text. Since the primary opposition to Chester's plays came from among theologians of Puritan persuasion, I would postulate that covenant theology was introduced into the cycle to assuage their opposition.

Late sixteenth-century Protestant objections to the doctrinal content of the plays are further discussed in 'Some Theological Issues in Chester's Plays' (2007). Here, Mills describes a prevalent range of late sixteenth-century religious beliefs in Chester and the effect that these had upon revisions of the cycle.

Another dominant preoccupation developed in Mills's research occurred through his work on *Cheshire including Chester* (Records of Early English Drama), when he recovered the previously unpublished letters and documents of Christopher Goodman. In 'The Antiquarians and the Critics: The Chester Plays and the Criticism of Early English Drama' Mills outlines the significance and influence of Goodman's intervention that lead to the demise of the Chester plays. Mills writes,

After Elizabeth's accession, a number of 'puritan' clerics in Chester led by the returned Genevan exile Christopher Goodman, rector of Aldford, opposed plans to perform the plays in the 1570s. Writing to the earl of Huntingdon, President of the Council of the North, on 10 May 1572, Goodman referred to the traditions of origin:

Whereas certain plays were devised by a monk about 200 years past in the depth of ignorance, & by the Pope then authorized to be set forth, & by that authority placed in the city of Chester to the intent to retain that place in assured ignorance & superstition according to the Popish policy. against which plays all preachers & godly men since the time of the blessed light of the gospell have inveyed & impugned as well in Sermons as otherwise when occasion hath served.

In his analysis, Mills cuts through much of the so-called origins and historical accretions of the Chester plays. He carefully outlines the apparent motives of the 'Genevan' exiles, such as Goodman, and suggests ways in which those who wanted to continue with the production of the plays evaded criticism. The recovery of this and other documents by Goodman has provided critical evidence of his role in contributing to the suppression of the Chester plays. Mills gives considerable attention to the analysis of Goodman's role in 'Chester's Covenant Theology' (2000), 'Music and Musicians in Chester: A Summary Account' (1997), "'Some Precise Cittizins': Puritan Objections to Chester's Plays' (1998), 'Some Theological issues in Chester's Plays' (2007), 'Who Are Our Customers? The Audience for Chester's Plays' (1999) and 'Where Have All the Players Gone? A Chester Problem' (1998).

A Note from the Volume Editor

Between 2011 and 2013 I spent much time with David Mills and his wife, Joy, going over the material and its organisation for this volume. In recent years David suffered from Parkinson's disease and additional health problems. Despite these difficulties there were times when he was particularly lucid and perceptive. Throughout his illness Joy provided loving and selfless support that enabled David to continue with his work. It had always been the hope of David, Joy and the general editors of this series that this work could have been published while he was still alive. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case.

David died on 28 September 2013.

PHILIP BUTTERWORTH

PART 1

EDITORS AND EDITING



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Modern Editions of Medieval English Plays (1991)

Editions of medieval plays take many forms – ‘definitive’ editions for scholars, anthologies and teaching texts for students and general readers, facsimiles, modernised versions, performance-texts, abridgements and so on. Each has its own functional value and scholarly worth. But all in some measure manifest the great power that an editor wields to determine the text that is read, to direct the response of the reader or performer, to set the focus and course of criticism and even to influence our idea of what ‘medieval drama’ means. Student readers in particular may not always recognise the ways in which the editor’s selective principles of ‘typicality’, or ‘literary excellence’, or ‘evolutionary progression’, or ‘structural coherence’, stated or undeclared, can shape an anthology or edition. Assumptions about the nature of drama, the mode of production, the kind of theatre for which the text was ‘intended’ and the supposed expectations of a medieval or modern audience often direct practices of emendation or other forms of editorial intrusion. A publisher, too, may unobtrusively control the shape of an edition by imposing upon it commercial considerations of cost, length, format and readership.

Additionally, living within a book culture, the modern reader may forget that dramatic activities uncontained by text were the medieval norm, and that such activities provided a complex frame of reference for the appreciation of minority, text-centred drama. By isolating a written text for discussion, we are often privileging an ‘authorised and official’ form of drama over the less closely regulated ‘popular’ dramatic activities. Indeed, from one viewpoint the medieval play text can be regarded as a vehicle for the containment and thematic direction of potentially anarchic dramatic activities. Little attention has been given to this ‘political’ aspect of the play text – the extent to which it is descriptive, in loosely setting limits to the action and in offering some explanation of what is occurring visually; and the extent to which it becomes prescriptive, seeking to contain the action more narrowly until control of the textual content or possession of the physical playbook itself becomes part of Tudor centralism and censorship.

Above all, we should recognise that a ‘playbook’ is an anomalous form, occupying a position intermediate between a literary text – a purely verbal creation manifested in manuscripts and printed books – and a dramatic action – a visual creation of movement, colour and sound intended for a

collective viewing audience. An edition constantly challenges its reader to construct imaginatively the performative circumstances of its text.

Scholarly Editions

From the late eighteenth century the Romantic imagination found the Middle Ages a useful point of appeal for native English values, unrefined passions and popular culture. In the early nineteenth century this interest was met by a number of book clubs formed with the aim of making previously unpublished texts available to subscribing members, often at high cost. Some of these clubs (e.g. the Surtees Society, founded in 1834, or the Camden Society of 1838) are still productive, and the products of all are on the shelves of our longer-established libraries. They include the first full editions of our older plays – Thomas Sharp’s *Digby Plays* (Abbotsford, 1835), James Raine and James Gordon’s *Towneley Mysteries* (Surtees, 1836), James O. Halliwell’s *Ludus Coventriae* (Shakespeare, 1841) and Thomas Wright’s *Chester Plays* (Shakespeare, 1843 and 1847).¹ But the emphasis was upon access rather than accuracy and, in the absence of any consistent editorial philosophy, the editions are uneven and unreliable.

The impetus towards the modern edition of the play came through the interest in comparative philology in England in the second half of the nineteenth century. The links between this linguistic interest, the work of the Philological Society and its project for a ‘New English Dictionary on Historical Principles’, and the energising influence of F. J. Furnivall have been well documented.² In 1864 the Early English Text Society (hereafter EETS) was founded as a utilitarian venture to serve the project by publishing accurate texts that provided evidence of early language and manners. Play texts formed an important component of the Society’s early output, and, remarkably, some of these old editions remain as our only ‘standard’ texts to this day, still awaiting replacement by modern editions with different priorities.

¹ T. Sharp, *Ancient Mysteries from the Digby Manuscripts Preserved in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford; Edinburgh: Abbotsford Club, 1835); J. Raine and J. Gordon, *The Towneley Mysteries* (London: Surtees Society, 1836); J. O. Halliwell, *Ludus Coventriae: A Collection of Mysteries Formerly Represented at Coventry on the Feast of Corpus Christi* (London: Shakespeare Society, 1841); T. Wright, *The Chester Plays*, 2 vols (London: Shakespeare Society, 1841–47).

² See W. Benzie, *Dr. F. J. Furnivall: A Victorian Scholar Adventurer* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1983).

Such are George England's *Towneley Cycle*,³ for which A. W. Pollard provided side-notes, and Katharine S. Block's *Ludus Coventriae*.⁴ Hardin Craig found little to add to his *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* (1902) when he revised it in 1957 (reprinted 1967).⁵ Other editions, which are still on library shelves, have been subsequently superseded – *The Chester Plays* of Hermann Deimling (1892) and the mysterious 'Dr Matthews' (1916), which was reprinted as late as 1967; Furnivall's *Digby Plays* (1896) and, with A. W. Pollard, *The Macro Plays* (1904); L. A. Magnus's *Respublica* (1905); R. L. Ramsay's *Magnifyence* (1908); and Osborn Waterhouse's *Non-Cycle Mystery Plays* (1909).⁶

Ian Lancashire⁷ has discussed the manifestations of what he terms the 'Victorian distaste for medieval drama' in these early editions, and his essay should be read by all who are compelled to use them. Here I would emphasise two consequences of the Society's work that seem particularly important for the development of the subject. First, the play texts published by the Society have created an impression of the kind of drama comprehended by

³ *The Towneley Plays, With Side-Notes and Introduction by Alfred W. Pollard*, ed. by George England, Early English Text Society, ES 88, 2nd edn (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1957). [The current 'standard' edition is now *The Towneley Plays*, ed. by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, Early English Text Society, 2 vols, SS13, 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Ed.]

⁴ *Ludus Coventriae or The Plaie Called Corpus Christi, Cotton Vespasian D. VIII.*, ed. by K. S. Block, Early English Text Society, ES 120 (Oxford; London: Oxford University Press, 1922). [The current 'standard' edition of this work is now *The N-Town Play Cotton MS Vespasian D.8*, ed. by Stephen Spector, Early English Text Society, 2 vols, SS11, 12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Ed.]

⁵ *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. by Hardin Craig, Early English Text Society, ES 87 (London: Oxford University Press, 1902; repr. 1967). [The current 'standard' edition of this work is now *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. by Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 27 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2000). Ed.]

⁶ *The Chester Plays*, ed. by Hermann Deimling, Early English Text Society, ES 62, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1892); *I and Dr Matthews*, Early English Text Society, ES 115 (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), vol. 1; *The Digby Plays*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society, ES 70 (London: Oxford University Press, 1896); *The Macro Plays*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall and A. W. Pollard, Early English Text Society, ES 91 (London: Oxford University Press, 1904); *Respublica 1553: A Play on the Social Conditions of England at the Accession of Queen Mary*, ed. by L. A. Magnus, Early English Text Society, ES 94 (London: Oxford University Press, 1905); *Magnifyence: A Moral Play* by John Skelton, ed. by R. L. Ramsay, Early English Text Society, ES 98 (London: Oxford University Press, 1908); *The Non-Cycle Mystery Plays, Together with the Croxton Play of the Sacrament and The Pride of Life*, ed. by Osborn Waterhouse, Early English Text Society, ES 104 (London: Oxford University Press, 1909).

⁷ Ian Lancashire, 'Medieval Drama' in *Editing Medieval Texts: English, French and Latin Written in England*, ed. by A. G. Rigg (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), pp. 58–85.

the vague term *medieval*, in contrast to non-EETS texts, which are vaguely felt to be 'Renaissance'. The foundation of the Malone Society in 1909 for the exact reproduction of English play texts printed before 1640⁸ – now less precisely stated as 'reprinting of documents referring to drama and plays of the Renaissance period' – may have sharpened this perception, for the EETS now defines its purpose as 'printing of English texts earlier than 1558'. This limit accommodates plays such as *Respublica* or *Magnificence*, but the Society's output of early Tudor plays is very restricted; W. W. Greg re-edited *Respublica* in 1952 (reprinted 1969) for EETS, but Paula Neuss's edition of *Magnificence* (1980) was published in the Revels Plays series and Medwall's plays – never edited for the Society – appear in the Tudor Interludes series, edited by Alan H. Nelson.⁹

Second, the Society's editions presupposed a specialist readership whose principal requirement was a conservative transcription allied to fairly light modern punctuation. Furnivall countered a protest from Hermann Deimling in his *Chester Plays* edition about this conservatism by commenting,

As our members are more or less accustomed to faithful prints of MSS., we like as little change in MS. habits as is needed for understanding of the text. Our books are not meant chiefly . . . for girls and boys.

(p. xxix)

The – to modern eyes – forbidding-looking texts of these early editions were accompanied by a scanty apparatus of notes and glossary, together with brief introductory descriptions of the manuscripts and their language. Other information was included at the discretion of the individual editor – and of Furnivall himself! – and varied considerably. Pollard's *Towneley* introduction deals mainly with the supposed three stages of the cycle's development, and was written under the influence of evolutionary theories of literature. Deimling's *Chester* introduction deals with the relationships among the four cycle manuscripts (he was unable to locate the fifth and earliest!) and ignores entirely the performance history of the cycle attested in guild and civic records, whereas Craig's *Coventry* edition gives major place to performance records.

⁸ See F. P. Wilson, 'The Malone Society: The First Fifty Years: 1905–56' in *Collections IV* (London: Malone Society, 1956), pp. 1–16.

⁹ *Respublica: An Interlude for Christmas 1553 Attributed to Nicholas Udall*, ed. by W. W. Greg, Early English Text Society, OS 226 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952); *Magnificence: John Skelton*, ed. by Paula Neuss (Manchester; Baltimore: Manchester University Press; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); *The Plays of Henry Medwall*, ed. by A. H. Nelson (Cambridge; Totowa, NJ: Brewer; Rowman and Littlefield, 1982).

By the time Katharine Block came to edit the N.town cycle, W. W. Greg had delivered his Sandars Lectures on 'Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Mystery Cycles',¹⁰ and the introduction to her edition shows the influence of his rigorous quasi-scientific approach, as she marshals textual variants, watermarks, stanza forms, structural features and source material to establish the complex process by which the extant manuscript was put together, and its implications. Her bibliographical sophistication contrasts with the irritatingly conservative transcript of the accompanying text.

A different kind of edition from those of the Society was produced by Lucy Toulmin Smith in her *York Plays* (1885).¹¹ Miss Smith had acquired her father's historical and social priorities working with him on records of English guilds¹² and saw the cycle as a social as well as a literary document. Her introduction draws upon the civic records of drama at York both to establish a performance history for the cycle which covers content and production and to suggest the wider context of civic drama within which the cycle was located. Still wider comparisons with other cycles and related texts are drawn, and a modern notation is offered for the music in the cycle. Although the self-evidently erroneous manuscript order of the plays is retained, editorial titles, scene divisions and stage directions are supplied. Where York and Towneley have plays in common, the Towneley text is printed for comparison at the bottom of the page. In a passage duplicated in the plays of the Masons and Goldsmiths, Miss Smith omits the Masons' section as unnecessary to print twice over, but supplies the necessary collation. With its appendices comparing the contents of the English cycles and listing plays and places in Great Britain, this edition offers its readers a wide and helpful range of material for interpreting the text and anticipates some priorities of more recent editions. Reissued in 1963, it was only recently superseded as the standard edition of the York cycle.¹³

The new critical perspectives of the 1960s brought keener awareness of the deficiencies of the older editions and gave impetus to the production of

¹⁰ *Ludus Coventriae or the Plaie Called Corpus Christi*, ed. by K. S. Block, Early English Text Society, ES 120 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922); W. W. Greg, 'Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Miracle Cycles' in *The Library*, 3rd ser., 5 (1914), 1–30, 168–205, 280–319, 365–99 (and as a separate publication, London: Alexander Morning, 1914).

¹¹ *York Plays: The Plays Performed by the Crafts or Mysteries of York on the Day of Corpus Christi in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries*, ed. by Lucy Toulmin Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885).

¹² *English Guilds, Their Statutes and Customs*, ed. by Lucy Toulmin Smith and Lujo Brentano, Early English Text Society, OS 40 (London: Oxford University Press, 1870).

¹³ *The York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle, York Medieval Texts (London: Edward Arnold, 1982).

new, more accessible editions. Since the mid-60s the EETS has replaced a number of its older editions with new ones – *The Macro Plays*,¹⁴ *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*,¹⁵ *The Chester Mystery Cycle*¹⁶ and those plays formerly included under the title of ‘The Digby Plays’.¹⁷ Richard Beadle re-edited *The York Plays* for a commercial publisher.¹⁸ New editions of Towneley by A. C. Cawley and Martin Stevens, York by Arthur Brown et al. and N.town by Stephen Spector are in preparation for the Society. Some foretaste of the Towneley edition is given in Cawley’s 1958 anthology (discussed ahead) and the more recent edition of the *Talents* play.¹⁹

Two major features distinguish these new editions from their predecessors. First, they are bibliographically and textually more reliable and consistent. Furnivall, with characteristic insouciance, had silently added the plays of *Christ’s Burial* and *Christ’s Resurrection* from Bodley MS e Museo 160 to the plays of MS Digby 133 in his so-called *Digby Plays*, and had relied upon the somewhat inaccurate copying of George Parker for his text, leaving a number of misconceptions and errors to be corrected by the later editors. The 1982 edition presents the plays in the Digby 133 sequence, unlike its predecessor; it removes Furnivall’s tendentious division of *Mary Magdalen* into ‘Parts’ and ‘Scenes’ but does insert location indicators, such as ‘[Jerusalem – Pilate’s Palace]’; and it offers the two plays from e Museo as independent plays, whereas Furnivall had presented them as two parts of one play.

Second, the new editions supply a much fuller apparatus. S. J. Herrtage’s glossary to Furnivall’s *Digby Plays* occupies just eleven pages, while that in the 1982 edition occupies fifty-two and separates words from names. Though not providing a complete glossary, the new edition does include ‘special

¹⁴ *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind*, ed. by Mark Eccles, Early English Text Society, OS 262 (Oxford; London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

¹⁵ *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. by Norman Davis, Early English Text Society, SS 1 (Oxford; London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

¹⁶ *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, Early English Text Society, 2 vols, SS 3 and SS 9 (Oxford; London: Oxford University Press, 1974 and 1986).

¹⁷ *The Late Medieval Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and e Museo 160*, ed. by Donald C. Baker, John L. Murray and Louis B. Hall, Early English Text Society, OS 283 (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁸ See note 13. [Richard Beadle has now completed the modern ‘standard’ work of the *York Plays: The York Plays a Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, Early English Text Society, 2 vols, SS23, 26 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 2013). Ed.]

¹⁹ A. C. Cawley and Martin Stevens, ‘The Towneley *Processus Talentorum*. Text and Commentary’, *Leeds Studies in English*, 17 (1986), 105–30; A. C. Cawley, ‘The Towneley *Processus Talentorum*. A Survey and Interpretation’, *Leeds Studies in English*, 17 (1986), 131–9.

contextual meanings' and words 'disguised orthographically'; it significantly does not include the etymologies of the earlier glossary, suggesting a changed perception of the concerns and capabilities of the reader. While Furnivall provided no notes, the new edition has thirty-six pages of notes, dealing with textual, source and staging problems. In place of Furnivall's anecdotal ten-page introduction, the new edition's ninety-one pages of introduction treat each play individually, offering a detailed apparatus of versification and language; but additionally consideration is given to sources and there is an account of the character and staging of each play, uniting literary and dramatic concerns and implying that some users may be considering practical performance. An extensive bibliography is also provided.

The 1982 Digby edition is about midway in an editorial spectrum. The modern heir to the EETS's philological tradition is Norman Davis's *Non-Cycle Plays*,²⁰ a more extensive collection than its predecessor, which provides an introduction to each play that concentrates upon bibliographical, textual and linguistic matters, and glossaries of Anglo-Norman, of names and of 'unfamiliar' English words and senses; it introduces performance history for the Norwich Grocers' play and an appendix on the music of the Shrewsbury Fragments, but is otherwise unconcerned with production matters. At the other extreme, Richard Beadle²¹ simply refers his readers to existing studies on the language, versification and sources of York, concentrating – as Miss Smith's 'heir' – on the character of the manuscript and the performance history. He corrects errors in Miss Smith's transcript and also the errors in the manuscript sequence which she reproduced. Unlike her, he does not introduce editorial directions into the text. Beadle had the advantage of the REED work on York's drama records in his account of the performance history of each play.²² At the overlapping section of the Masons' and Goldsmiths' plays, he is able plausibly to reconstitute from production records what was in effect a single play 'partly with the help of evidence not accessible to Miss Toulmin Smith'.

The 1982 Digby edition aspires to be multifunctional and to reach an audience of more diverse interests than the readers of Furnivall's edition – an audience of whom fewer prior assumptions can be made. But as an edition expands beyond the narrowly textual, so the limits of inquiry become progressively less clear and the problem of reconciling the editorial process

²⁰ See note 15.

²¹ See note 13.

²² *Records of Early English Drama: York*, ed. by Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

with performance history and production becomes more difficult. The scholarly edition today is consequently fuller, more diverse in content and takes correspondingly longer to bring to press than its predecessors. As scholarly editions have widened their appeal, so they have begun to incorporate features characteristic of texts for the 'non-professional reader'. The length of many medieval plays and the complexity of editorial apparatus make them seem daunting research projects to young scholars, and unattractive commercial propositions to modern publishers. We all have good reason to be grateful to EETS for its continuing willingness to produce large editions at affordable prices.

In these circumstances, however, is it always necessary or desirable to publish the plays of a single manuscript, such as Digby 133, as a collection rather than individually? This question may be particularly apposite in the case of two 'cycle' manuscripts – the British Library's Cotton Vespasian D VIII and Huntington I (Towneley) – which have been described as compilations or editorially constructed manuscripts employing the organising framework of a play cycle. Peter Meredith has suggested that the N.town manuscript was produced to create 'an all-inclusive play adequate to anyone's needs'²³ and that 'the matters that the N-Town manuscript raises are related to revision – turning a heterogeneous collection of plays into a homogeneous whole'.²⁴ The consequences of this view are seen in his edition of *The Mary Play*,²⁵ abstracted from the manuscript as an originally independent play and reconstituted in its earlier form by relegating to appendices 'later' revisions – part of 'Joseph and the Generations', 'Joseph's Trouble' and an alternative ending. The introduction and notes focus on bibliographical and textual problems and draw upon source material. This is a scholarly edition in paperback form with conservative transcript, page-foot collation and full glossary. Yet its priorities are very different from those of Miss Block, and the 185 pages needed for the 1,596 lines of 'core-text' offer an apparatus on a scale that would be prohibitive for an edition of the whole manuscript.

The Towneley manuscript has traditionally been regarded as the official register of Wakefield's play cycle, although this identification is now challenged. But such a view does not preclude its function as a descriptive account of available plays or as an anthology compiled perhaps for local

²³ Peter Meredith, 'Scribes, Texts and Performances' in *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. by Paula Neuss (Cambridge; Totowa, NJ: D.S. Brewer; Barnes and Noble, 1983), p. 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁵ *The Mary Play from the N.town Manuscript*, ed. by Peter Meredith (London; New York: Longman, 1987).

use from scattered local resources. The stylistic heterogeneity of the text, its borrowings from York, its duplicated episodes – notably the two *Shepherds' plays* and the 'Dicing for Christ's Cloak' – are suggestive, though not conclusive, indicators of this possibility.²⁶ A. C. Cawley's anthology of plays attributed to the Wakefield Master²⁷ is indicative of the ways in which this collection may be broken down into subgroups. Recently, he and Martin Stevens, co-editors of the projected EETS edition of the manuscript, have abstracted the *Talents* for independent editing as 'an anomaly' and 'a later addition', publishing a conservative transcript with glossarial/translation notes, together with a critical survey and interpretation by Cawley.

If indeed some texts took their final shape only in the process of preparing our extant manuscripts as the scribe, or his director(s), sought overall coherence for their text, the manuscript assumes the status of a printer's copy text, the final version before a book is set in print. Moreover, its value as an index of performance history and production becomes problematic and great caution must be used when evaluating any staging diagrams or stage directions it contains. While, for example, the extensive stage directions of the N.town *Passion Play* may describe performance, they may equally reflect an unachieved ideal or be a stimulus to the reader's imagination.

This possibility anticipates the situation of the later printed play, intended as much or more for reading as/than for actual performance. *Everyman*, though dramatic in form and pre-Reformation in focus, is a close translation of the Dutch play *Elckerlijc*, and the opening in Skat's print, 'Here beginneth a tretise', may indicate its status as a reading rather than an acting text, perhaps accounting for some of the unique features which set this play apart from other English 'moralities'.²⁸ After John Rastell's publication of Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres* (c. 1512) the playbook becomes as much literary as dramatic in function.

There is a case for regarding a civic register such as the British Library's Additional 35290 of the York Cycle as a different kind of manuscript from the N.town and Towneley manuscripts – one which might be modified according to production circumstances, which possibly bore traces of past revision and change, and might contain a variety of equally valid 'authorised' forms of the cycle for different purposes or for use at different times. But

²⁶ David Mills, "The Towneley Plays" of "The Towneley Cycle", *Leeds Studies in English*, 17 (1986), 95–104.

²⁷ A. C. Cawley, ed., *The Wakefield Plays in the Towneley Cycle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958).

²⁸ *Everyman*, ed. by A. C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961).

even here the descriptive function of the Register is uncertain and its relation to actual performance doubtful. Complaints in the York records and on the Register itself about ‘unregistered’ material suggest that the practical concerns of ‘producer’ and performers might not always coincide with the controlling intentions of the officially authorised text.

Facsimile Editions

The facsimile edition of a medieval play manuscript is a recent phenomenon. Traditionally, the textual scholar worked directly with original materials (or employed an assistant), and although photographic technology had made facsimiles possible by the start of this century, costs were high, definition poor and the public demand for texts requiring specialist palaeographical skills probably low. As technology developed, the interested scholar without access to the manuscripts would probably purchase a microfilm, since it was cheaper than a photograph and could show finer detail by transmitted light. The black-letter page of the early printed book reproduced better on the printed page and became the concern of the Malone Society. Yet in 1907–8 the *Macro Plays* were offered by J. S. Farmer in three volumes of the Tudor Facsimile Texts Series,²⁹ a subscription series that included facsimiles of printed play texts, such as *Everyman*.

Since 1960 the resurgence of interest in medieval drama and improvements in the quality and cost of facsimiles have promoted the facsimile edition as a useful tool in the ‘back to basics’ approach in which a close description of the visible evidence of the manuscript was an essential prelude to editorial decisions and to critical judgements. The facsimile thus belongs to the same impulse which led REED to publish accurate plain transcripts of drama records as the neutral bases for research.

The first modern facsimile – David Bevington’s 1972 *Macro Plays*,³⁰ which initiated a new series by the Folger Library – was in part intended to protect the manuscripts from further wear by reducing the need to consult them. To facilitate the photography, the library disbound the manuscripts and, in reassembling them, corrected an error in the gathering of *The Castle of Perseverance*, thereby destroying the sequence of page numbers in the

²⁹ *The Tudor Facsimile Texts*, ed. by J. S. Farmer (London; Edinburgh: T. C. and E. C. Jack): *Wisdom* (1907), *Mankind* (1907), *The Castle of Perseverance* (1908).

³⁰ *The Macro Plays. The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind. A Facsimile Edition with Facing Transcriptions*, ed. by David Bevington, Folger Facsimiles Manuscript Series, 1 (New York; Washington: Johnson Reprint Corp.; Folger Shakespeare Library, 1972).

manuscript. Bevington arranges the plays 'in probable chronological order', thereby further dislocating the correspondence with Furnivall's edition. The quality of reproduction is high, with variations in tone registered clearly, and the user is assisted by the provision of facing plain transcriptions and page-foot collations and textual notes. In the transcript of *Wisdom*, words are supplied as necessary from the Digby version. For the textual scholar, the introduction has a section on ownership and textual matters (including a comment on the relation of the Digby and Macro versions of *Wisdom*). But additionally Bevington has an introductory section in which he provides the reader with an overarching critical context; the plays become the starting point for a discussion of the origin and early history of the English morality play, including matters of staging and characterisation.

This approach, which seems to envisage a wide readership, is very different from that of the Medieval Drama Facsimiles Series launched in 1973 by Leeds Texts and Monographs, which addresses more narrowly the specific textual interests of the scholar. Its general editor, A. C. Cawley, describes the aims of the series in its first volume as 'to complement the Early English Text Society editions of medieval English plays, and to encourage the study of the primary documents for medieval English drama'.³¹ The introductions to the volumes in the series have been written by editors of the EETS or equivalent edition, and access to that edition seems presupposed of the reader. Hence there is no transcription or collation, and reference is by folio and line (which has to be counted on the appropriate folio by the user). The introductions are textually and bibliographically descriptive – literary-critical material is not admitted. The presentation is starkly sectionalised, with extensive marshalling of references.

The series is reasonably priced (for facsimile), paperbound and photographed in black and white with the occasional colour frontispiece. Since individual pages are not tonally adjusted, rubrication and marginalia do not always register clearly. The manuscripts are reproduced in their original dimensions with the exception of Chester HM2, which, without explanation, appears in reduced form. Photographic quality varies, from Chester's Bodley 175, printed from microfilm, to York's British Library Additional 35290, splendidly photographed. Eight volumes have so far appeared in

³¹ *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A Facsimile of MS Bodley 175*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles, 1 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1973), p. iii.

the series: Chester manuscripts Bodley 175,³² Huntington 2,³³ and Harley 2124,³⁴ the manuscripts of Towneley,³⁵ N.town³⁶ and York³⁷ (with the 'Ordo Paginarum' section of the York Memorandum Book), the Digby and e Museo manuscripts of the *Digby Plays*³⁸ and the manuscripts of the non-cycle plays.³⁹ Two other volumes – the Coventry manuscripts introduced by Pamela King and individual manuscripts of cycle plays – are in preparation.

Access to facsimiles of two antiquarian copies is offered by *REED Newsletter*: Henry Bourne's 1736 printed text of the Newcastle Shipwrights' play of *Noah's Ark*⁴⁰ and John Kirkpatrick's transcript of the Norwich Grocers' play of *The Fall of Man* discovered in 1972 and not available to Davis for his EETS edition.⁴¹ Though important documents, these transcripts perhaps have less to reveal about the nature of the text than the medieval manuscripts, but are symptomatic of the same scholarly concern with original sources.

³² Ibid.

³³ *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A Facsimile of Huntington Library MS 2*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles, 6 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1980).

³⁴ *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A Facsimile of British Library MS Harley 2124*, ed. by David Mills, Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles, 8 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1984).

³⁵ *The Towneley Cycle: A Facsimile of Huntington Library MS HM 1*, Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles, 2 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1976).

³⁶ *The Towneley Plays: A Facsimile of British Library Cotton Vespasian D VIII*, ed. by Peter Meredith and Stanley J. Kahrl, Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles, 4 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1977).

³⁷ *The York Play: A Facsimile of British Library MS Additional 35290, Together with a Facsimile of the Ordo Paginarum Section of the A/Y Memorandum Book, and a Note of the Music by Richard Rastall*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith, Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles, 7 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1983).

³⁸ *The Digby Plays: Facsimiles of the Plays in Bodley MS 133 and e Museo 160*, ed. by Donald C. Baker and J. L. Murphy, Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles, 3 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1976).

³⁹ *Non-Cycle Plays and the Winchester Dialogues: Facsimiles of Plays and Fragments in Various Manuscripts and the Dialogues in Winchester College MS 33*, ed. by Norman Davis, Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles, 5 (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1979).

⁴⁰ John Anderson and A. C. Cawley, 'The Newcastle Play of Noah's Ark', *REED Newsletter*, 1 (1977), 11–7.

⁴¹ JoAnna Dutka, 'The Fall of Man: The Norwich Grocers' Play', *REED Newsletter*, 1 (1977), 1–11.

Editors tend today to ask questions of their manuscripts that are certainly different and hopefully more powerful than those of their predecessors. They resist – even react against – tacit assumptions that the text is primarily a guide to the language and customs of a past age or that there is a necessary connection between the performance and textual histories of a play. Issues such as the date of original composition or the successive layers of revision, featuring prominently in early editions, are now acknowledged rather as conventions of editorial introductions. The facsimile edition signals the extent to which attention now concentrates upon the character and purpose of the extant manuscript and the need to scrutinise it minutely for the evidence which it may contain.

Anthologies

The ‘image’ of medieval drama that a new generation of students receives is largely conditioned by the kind of texts they use. When, in 1890, A. W. Pollard produced his play anthology, *English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes*,⁴² he directed it towards ‘the many lovers of literature unable to make the subject their special subject’. His anthology addressed the two problems that still determine student editions – the prohibitively high cost of full and scholarly editions and the need to offer students an adequate linguistic and critical framework. Pollard provided thirteen ‘specimens of pre-Elizabethan drama’, abridged and – with the exception of Chester material from the Huntington manuscript which Pollard had transcribed – taken from scholarly editions; other material was added in appendices. The modern student would notice many differences from today’s anthologies: the conservative text, the glossary of ‘unusual forms’, the mere forty-seven pages of notes. One suspects, however, that the extensive introductory essay expounding an evolutionary thesis of drama development was widely influential. Strong overseas sales encouraged the Oxford Press to commission a second edition, and the collection was kept thereafter in print and revised to its eighth edition in 1927. New scholarship, such as Chambers’s work, was progressively assimilated, and the 1904 edition included illustrations from early art. Still a standard teaching text in the 1950s, it was actually reissued in 1961.

In 1909, encouraged perhaps by Pollard’s success and by the interest in early drama generated by William Poel’s revival of *Everyman*, Ernest Rhys

⁴² *English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes: Specimens of the Pre-Elizabethan Drama*, ed. by A. W. Pollard, 8th edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890, 1927).

edited *Everyman, with Other Interludes* in the popular Everyman Library, including a random group of seven cycle plays together with Bale's *God's Promises*. It was reprinted seven times in the next fifteen years. In 1956 this volume was replaced by A. C. Cawley's *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*.⁴³

This last anthology has become an established classroom 'standard'. In addition to *Everyman*, it offers a reconstructed skeletal cycle of fourteen plays, allowing a better sense of cycle form. Presentation is attractive – a modern-spelling edition based on scholarly editions or (for the Towneley material and *Everyman*) Cawley's work on original manuscripts, an apparatus of side-glosses and footnote translations on the same page and editorial indications of locations, settings and action. The editor is uncompromising in his defence of the subject: 'There is no longer any need to be hostile . . . or to be patronizing or squeamish [about such drama]'. Each play has its own headnote, and the brief introduction encourages appreciation of the inherent qualities of the plays rather than presenting them as examples of a wide-ranging thesis. Sensitive to the needs of the beginning student and, importantly, leaving space for the teacher, this edition was to become an attractive introduction to the early drama for many of the 1960s scholars.

Pollard's American counterpart, J. M. Manly's two-volume *Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama* (1897–98),⁴⁴ had the aim of 'helping the student to follow the fortunes of modern drama through its strange and interesting nonage'. The anthology was flawed by the inaccuracy of its texts and particularly by the absence of a projected third volume of notes, glossary and descriptive historical essays, but it is a huge collection which was reprinted as late as 1967, presumably to meet the new demands for student texts. David Bevington's *Medieval Drama*⁴⁵ replaces this anthology and typifies the modern attitude to the subject in offering 'Medieval Drama as an artistic achievement in its own right' in place of Manly's condescension. It is a coursebook, sectionalised from 'Liturgical Beginnings' to 'Humanist Drama', with accompanying essays and headnotes to its sixty-four pieces. Particular attention is given to the plays as drama (e.g. the N.town 'Passion Play' is offered with possible 'theatre-in-the-round staging'), and this concern continues in the editorial directions to

⁴³ *Everyman, with Other Interludes*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London; New York: J. M. Dent; E. P. Dutton, 1909); *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, ed. by A. C. Cawley, rev. edn (London; New York: J. M. Dent; E. P. Dutton, 1974).

⁴⁴ J. M. Manly, *Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama*, 2 vols (Boston; New York: Ginn and Co., 1897–98; repr. New York: Dover Books, 1967).

⁴⁵ *Medieval Drama*, ed. and trans. by David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975).

the texts. Textual accuracy is guaranteed by checks against manuscripts or photographs, and conservative spelling is adopted. Latin and French texts appear in the original with accompanying translation, and side-glosses and page-foot translations accompany the English texts. The cycles are represented by a reconstructed cycle of Banns and twenty-seven plays. The chronological limits of Manly's anthology now translate into a series of generic categories. The book offers students a wide selection and a positive line of approach to the whole subject. In England, Cawley's anthology suggested further developments. The same editor went on to provide two editions which offered more detailed and scholarly apparatus, perhaps for students ready to progress beyond the first anthology. In 1958 he published his excellent edition of those Towneley plays assigned by stanza and style to 'the Wakefield Master',⁴⁶ and in 1961 a new edition of *Everyman*.⁴⁷ Both offer an insight into the semantic problems of the texts and discuss issues of source and content while insisting on the plays as drama. His *Everyman* anthology was complemented in 1976 by Glynne Wickham's *English Moral Interludes*⁴⁸ in the same series and format, with a strong insistence upon the plays as drama validated by the editor's practical experience. 'Interlude' is stretched somewhat to include *Mankind*. Peter Happé has edited two important paperback anthologies containing extensive and helpful introductions and conservative texts based on editions but collated with manuscripts/facsimiles, and with editorial stage directions. *English Mystery Plays*⁴⁹ offers a thirty-eight-episode reconstructed cycle, which, by duplicating episodes from different manuscripts, encourages comparisons and contrasts. *Four Morality Plays*⁵⁰ brings into revealing juxtaposition four long allegorical plays, not readily accessible even in scholarly editions.

The subject has been fortunate in that scholars of the stature of Bevington, Cawley and Wickham have recognised the importance of teaching anthologies as a means of introducing students to the plays and to current scholarly thinking. But each selection has its own underlying assumptions, and while some plays are regularly anthologised, others are – for various reasons – largely neglected. Perhaps anthologies should cede priority now to

⁴⁶ See note 27.

⁴⁷ See note 29.

⁴⁸ *English Moral Interludes*, ed. by Glynne Wickham, 2nd edn (London; Totowa, NJ: Dent; Rowan and Littlefield, 1985).

⁴⁹ *English Mystery Plays: A Selection*, ed. by Peter Happé (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975).

⁵⁰ *Four Morality Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Magnificence, King Johan, Ane Satire of the Thrie Estates*, ed. by Peter Happé (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

other enterprises. There is urgent need for student texts of complete cycles and the longer plays at prices which students – and their teachers! – can reasonably afford. Moreover, teacher and student might have more choice if the contents of large manuscript anthologies were published as separate plays or groups. Above all, we need accurate and clearly glossed texts with good bibliographies, dispensing with elaborate introductions and notes to reduce price; a more exploratory critical approach might well result.

The Editions of the Chester Cycle: A Case Study

In the 1960s R. M. Lumiansky and I began collaboration on a scholarly edition of the Chester cycle for the EETS to replace the Deimling-Matthews edition. This project has already generated a series of studies and editions in a research programme which is still ongoing, and it therefore seems appropriate to use it as a case study to give focus to the general issues raised earlier, though I would emphasise that our procedures are not necessarily typical of or applicable to editions of other medieval plays.

Chester's editorial problem differs from that of other cycles because the text of the full cycle is evidenced in five manuscripts and there are also three manuscripts/fragments of single plays extant. We therefore had a choice of manuscript.⁵¹ In 1892 Deimling chose as base the latest cycle-manuscript as representing the older and better textual tradition; the British Library's Harley 2124 was written in 1607 by three scribes, the principal being James Miller, a scholar with 'editorial' tendencies. The practical disadvantage of this choice was that the 1607 text differed considerably from the others in particular readings and also lacked a number of long passages present in the other manuscripts,⁵² so that a large number of 'majority' readings, together with those extended passages, had to appear in page-foot collation, making the structural implications hard for the reader to assess. We felt that there was no means of assigning priority or superiority among the manuscripts, and therefore we sought as base text the version that enabled the clearest and most convenient presentation of data for the reader's assessment. For us, that meant the fullest possible version with the largest number of supported

⁵¹ David Mills, 'Theories and Practices in the Editing of the Chester Cycle' in *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1987), pp. 110–21.

⁵² R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, 'The Five Cyclic Manuscripts of the Chester Cycle of Mystery Plays: A Statistical Survey of Variant Readings', *Leeds Studies in English*, 7 (1974), 95–107.

readings, so that page-foot collation was minimised and divergencies could be expressed, as far as possible, as ‘omissions’ rather than ‘additions’. Whereas the latest manuscript had fewest supported readings, the earliest – Huntington 2 of 1591 by Edward Gregorie, not available to Deimling – had the most. Though it lacked the first play, we preferred to supplement this loss from the ‘runner-up’ – George Bellin’s 1600 copy, now Harley 2013 – rather than increase the overall complexity of apparatus by adopting a different base manuscript. Our intention from the outset was therefore to present data accurately, clearly and ‘neutrally’, though we hope that our readers recognise the inevitable subjectivity of even the lightest editing. For example, we elected to list ‘significant’ variants, meaning by ‘significant’ ‘a variant which affects the meaning of the text’; but that distinction involves subjective judgement. Variants might affect rhyme or the syllabic structure of a line; but in noting such instances we employed no preconceived notion of metre. All the extant cycle manuscripts either ignore the eight-line stanza which predominates in the cycle or reduce it to quatrains; we elected to restore the stanza division. Punctuation, too, however light, imposes a personal reading on the text, and even a collation term such as *omission* has a tendentially censorious ring. But our intention was to free the edited text from subjective value judgements and theories of origin and transmission in order to permit a closer analysis of it as a record of change at a later point in the editing process.

A consequence of this pragmatic approach was that many of the preliminary considerations of bibliographical and textual evaluation could be postponed until the text and its variants were in place. This in turn affected the pattern of our edition, since the cycle was too long to be accommodated in edited form in a single volume. We were enabled to present the text with its variants conveniently in a single volume, together with manuscript descriptions.⁵³ We then planned to provide an apparatus of notes and glossaries specific to that text in a second volume and to draw together internal and external evidence about the cycle in a third volume, which would deal with textual and source problems, survey the evidence for the cycle’s performance history and offer a specialist analysis of the music. Here, however, commercial considerations overtook the academic project. Though the publication of the text volume predicated the publication of the apparatus, the material for the remainder of the edition proved too extensive for the EETS to accept. Accordingly, a truncated apparatus of notes and glossary (without a Latin or names glossary) was published by the Society,⁵⁴ and the material intended for the third volume

⁵³ See note 16.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

was substantially redrafted and published separately in the form of a collection of essays.⁵⁵ Though a reader's sense of the wholeness of the editorial process has perhaps been dissipated by this format, the three volumes, each with its own *raison d'être*, form part of a single editorial impulse centring upon the text. The presentation emphasises the distinction between the descriptive assembly of data and the various stages in its evaluation.

The text aspires to be an accurate transcript of the base manuscript, with some spelling normalisations, such as 'F' for 'ff' and 'v' for consonantal 'u'. The three single-play manuscripts were excluded from collation and printed in appendices together with four major divergences in Miller's manuscript. We did not wish to emend the text in any way, since such intrusion involved subjective notions of priority, but EETS insisted upon emendation in a number of specified instances 'where the Hm reading seems palpably nonsensical'. We reluctantly acceded to this requirement, still feeling that material from the later apparatus was being used to shape the text received by the reader.

Even before our first volume appeared, we were fortunate to be involved in the Leeds Facsimile project and have, together or singly, introduced facsimiles of three Chester manuscripts.⁵⁶ Facsimiles of the three single-play manuscripts are in preparation, and I would hope that all the cycle manuscripts, together with Banns and other material, might be made available in time. I can attest to the value of the discipline of close description imposed by this series upon its editors, and I am reassured that readers of our edition can verify or query our readings and descriptions for themselves.

In our second volume our concern was semantic: what did the words mean? Variants among the manuscripts offered meaningful choices which could be evaluated lexicographically, taking account also of the opinions of previous editors. Selective use was also made of known sources, such as *A Stanzaic Life of Christ*, and of obvious analogues, such as the Vulgate Bible (knowledge of whose content can no longer be assumed of readers), the *Historia Scholastica* and the *Glossa Ordinaria*, suggesting both the meanings of passages and also the degree of invention in the text. The notes are, therefore, a mixture of the textual and linguistic, the contextual and the critical.

The *Essays* volume offers a still wider and more individually intrusive evaluation of the bibliographical and textual issues discussed piecemeal in the notes. Analysing the patterns of variation, we characterised the lost common exemplar of the extant manuscripts and the practices of the individual

⁵⁵ *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 1983).

⁵⁶ See notes 32–5.

scribes, rewriting the textual history of the cycle and discovering in the manuscripts a record of underlying change – their exemplar had embodied alternatives and choices. At this stage we introduced performance history, aided by L. M. Clopper's study of the cycle's development⁵⁷ and his REED volume of Chester records.⁵⁸ In our account of the cycle's development and staging and of its individual plays, we also provided edited transcripts of the relevant documents for the reader's convenience. These included the pre- and post-Reformation Banns; two scribes preface the cycle with the latter, and Deimling printed Bellin's 1600 transcript at the start of the text; but their connection with the extant cycle is debatable and we felt that they should be printed separately as evidence of performance history. Though the studies of external and internal evidence were separated, they concurred in their demonstration of the underlying instability of the cycle text. The apparatus was completed by a descriptive classification of stanza forms and an essay on music by Richard Rastall.

In our edition we have sought to involve the reader in the editorial process by displaying clearly the possibilities and problems that the text contains, and by signalling the stages in our own processes of appraisal. Among our greatest satisfactions have been the renewal of critical interest in the cycle that followed the publication of our edition and the appreciation of its values as practical theatre, notably at Leeds,⁵⁹ at Toronto and at the 1987 Chester Festival.

From the beginning Robert Lumiansky insisted that the main priority after the publication of the scholarly edition must be an edition for students in modern spelling with accompanying linguistic apparatus. Such an edition is now in preparation. Moreover, it is obvious that the editorial process must extend beyond the establishment of the text, for beyond our third volume lie further essential studies: the topographical, social and economic factors that shaped the production; the political and theological background which the cycle addressed and in which it developed and was suppressed; the sources and models which its authors adopted; and the continuing exploration of its literary and dramatic values. As the study widens its scope, so the need for the REED collections of Lancashire and Cheshire records and for new

⁵⁷ Lawrence M. Clopper, 'The History and Development of the Chester Cycle', *Modern Philology*, 75 (1977–78), 219–46.

⁵⁸ *Records of Early English Drama: Chester*, ed. by Lawrence M. Clopper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

⁵⁹ *Staging the Chester Cycle: Lectures Given on the Occasion of the Production of the Cycle at Leeds in 1983*, ed. by David Mills (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1985).

editions of sources such as the *Stanzaic Life* becomes more urgent. Editing is now a collective scholarly enterprise that resists the specialist circumscriptions placed upon it by the past.

Moreover, those extending explorations, radiating out from the manuscript text, will in time seek out the deficiencies of our current edition and will provide the impetus to re-edit the old texts yet again.