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A STUDY OF THE FORMAL AND LITERARY UNITY
OF THE N-TOWN MYSTERY CYCLE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Richard Jacob Daniels, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1972

Approved by

Adviser
Department of English
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INTRODUCTION

E. K. Chambers asserts of all the English mystery cycles that "on the whole the literary problem of the plays lies in tracing the evolution of a form rather than in appreciating individual work."\(^1\) Aside from the fact that these are not the only two perspectives from which the cycles can be viewed, Chambers' statement is misleading when applied to any of the English cycles, the masterful work of the Wakefield playwright being the most obvious exception to it. The statement is also misleading when applied to the N-town cycle,\(^2\) which according to Kenneth Cameron and Stanley J. Kahrl seems to be "essentially the compilation of a single guiding intelligence."\(^3\)

Chambers goes on to say of N-town that it is a "patchwork cycle, roughly put together and in parts easy to break up into its constituent elements."\(^4\) This remark is at once true and misleading. The physical manuscript does exhibit this "patchwork" quality (although the word choice is not a happy one), but the cycle as a work of literature has more unity and cohesiveness than he allows it. I hope to show that Chambers' judgment of the N-town plays as literature is in need of considerable expansion, qualification, and re-examination:

...as literature, of course, much of the *Ludus Coventriae* in its present state makes difficult reading. But some of the
unaltered plays are not without lyrical merit, notably the Pastores, the Magi, and the Resurrection. Some passages of short-lined rime-couët, apparently regarded as appropriate to Milites, are particularly attractive.  

Following Chambers, most scholars have dismissed the N-town cycle as a thing of rags and patches having little literary merit, except in some very few of its parts; they have consistently refused to consider that the cycle may have literary integrity, that it may in some respect be considered a unified work of art. Scholarly work since Chambers has taken four main directions: that concerned with "tracing the evolution of a form" (the earlier work); that concerned with provenance; discussions of staging techniques; discussions of the literary merit of the cycle.

The first group, those interested in filling out Chambers' evolutionary theory, includes most importantly Chambers, Esther Swenson, W. W. Greg, and K. S. Block. Chambers, to whose works I have already referred, is important for determining the course of much subsequent scholarship. Miss Swenson, after an analysis of the different meters and the stage directions found in N-town, concludes that the Proclamation or banns which precedes the plays in the MS "represents an early stage of our plays and... those scenes which do not appear there are later modifications of the cycle..." W. W. Greg, in an effort to "formulate some sort of general theory as to the growth of the cycle," studies meter, the physical make-up of
the MS, and the relations of the Proclamation and the plays. He concludes that

... an original series of plays, ... composed throughout in a distinctive stanza of thirteen lines, with a Prologue in the same metre, was modified and expanded by the substitution and insertion of other plays drawn from another cycle written ... in short-lined octaves. The amalgamation was effected by a reviser who himself worked over the whole and made additions in the romance stanza.

Greg also concludes that two other revisers worked over the cycle, in fact that there may have been "several revisers at work upon the cycle about the same time, circa 1465 to 1470. ..." 7

K. S. Block, the editor of the MS for the EETS, from a study of the "characteristics" of the MS, concludes that

1. MS. Vesp. D. viii is the compiler's book, not a transcript of another MS.
2. It contains a collection of plays made according to a plan which was subject to alteration as it proceeded.
3. Some of the plays and groups of plays had had a separate existence, having been acted as separate plays or groups.
4. One portion of the MS. certainly, and probably two, quires N, P, Q, R, and quires S, T, have also had a separate existence.
5. The compiler had command of other versions of plays or groups of plays from which he drew (Block, pp. xxxiii-iv).

Although Block believes there was a "plan" involved in the compilation of the cycle, she never speculates about what that plan might have been.

The primary work on provenance has been done by E. K. Chambers, Hardin Craig, and Kenneth Cameron and Stanley J. Kahrl. All agree that the N-town or Ludus Coventriae cycle is not the true Coventry cycle. Chambers says that N-town is either "the text of a
strolling company, or, as seems to me more probable, that of a stationary play at some town in the East Midlands not yet identified. Hardin Craig argues at length that N-town is in fact the lost Lincoln cycle. As evidence he mentions the dialect of the plays, which, he says, "points straight to Lincoln..." certain resemblances between N-town and the Castle of Perseverance, and also what he calls the "general appropriateness of assigning" the N-town plays to Lincoln (for instance, Lincoln was especially dedicated to the worship of the Virgin, and N-town devotes more plays and episodes to the Virgin than does any other cycle). Moreover, Craig finds some interesting correspondences between the Lincoln civic records and the plays. Cameron and Kahrl adduce more evidence to support Craig's contention that N-town is the lost Lincoln cycle, and they conclude that the N-town plays are the Lincoln plays. In contrast, Mark Eccles believes that N-town was "probably acted in Norfolk during the fifteenth century," an opinion based entirely on his contention that the Castle of Perseverance also belonged to Norfolk.

The third group, those concerned with the staging of the cycle, includes most importantly Esther Swenson, Cameron and Kahrl, and Anne Cooper Gay. Swenson concludes that the audience was stationary and that such movable pageants as were used were rolled in before them. Cameron and Kahrl expand this idea. They also assume that N-town is the Lincoln cycle and draw specific conclusions about where
and how the N-town plays would have been acted in Lincoln. Furthermore, they study the Lincoln civic records to discover detailed correspondences between items from the records and what is known about the N-town cycle. The work of Cameron and Kahrl is quite persuasive, if not absolutely conclusive; and my argument about the literary nature of the cycle may lend some support to their contention that N-town is the lost Lincoln cycle. Anne C. Gay argues that "place and scaffold" staging is the probable type of staging envisioned for the whole N-town cycle, and that there is no evidence in the N-town MS "that preambulatory staging was ever considered in connection with these plays." I think that she is right on both counts (although I will not argue this opinion) and that my argument for viewing the cycle as a unified work of literature can supplement and strengthen her assertions about its staging.

The fourth group, those who consider the literary merit of the cycle, includes Timothy Fry, Waldo F. McNeir, and Eleanor Prosser. Fry alone tries to find unity in, or even deals with, the cycle as a whole; but, unfortunately, he does so by imposing a doctrinal scheme (the "abuse of power" theory or the theory of the devil's rights) upon the whole cycle, rather than simply pointing it out in the few plays in which it is relevant. He does, however, notice a number of interesting details that other readers have quite missed. Waldo F. McNeir compares and contrasts the Passion sequences from the four extant
English mystery cycles and draws some useful and original conclusions about the N-town Passion plays, especially those scenes detailing the Crucifixion, Deposition, and Burial of Christ. But he also re-states a number of commonplaces, and it is of course none of his purpose to view any of the cycles as a whole. 16

Eleanor Prosser argues imaginatively and, for the most part, convincingly, for the value of the N-town "Passion Play. I" as dramatic art and for its writer's originality, especially in his treatment of Mary Magdalen. She also demonstrates that the N-town plays of Joseph's Return (12) and The Woman Taken in Adultery (24) are controlled and effective works of dramatic art. But neither is Miss Prosser concerned to view the cycle as a whole. She is, in fact, opposed to doing so: "even the Hegge [N-town] plays, a compilation of independent units produced in different years, have been considered as a structural unit." She is also opposed to viewing any of the mystery cycles as a single drama, but she is surely wrong in this. She states that "an entire mystery cycle should not be considered as one play" and then defines "a single play as any defined unit presented without break by a single cast." 17 These statements are based, as Martin Stevens has observed,

... on the false assumption that all medieval drama was produced processionally as it was at York, where, in [Prosser's] words, 'the interval between plays was a total break.' If indeed, at Wakefield, there was no such break,
Miss Prosser's generalization is invalid (as it is, incontestably, for the *Ludus Coventriae*). . . . 18

Moreover, at the top of f. 1 of the N-town MS, in a 'small Elizabethan hand,' is written the title "The plaie called Corpus Christi," an indication that someone living quite close to the time of actual production thought of this cycle as a single play (Block, p. xxxvii). Although I disagree with this basic assumption of Prosser's, I find that her work on particular plays is valuable and stimulating, and I shall refer to it often in the course of this study.

Much of the work done on the evolution, provenance, and staging of the cycle is necessary and worthwhile, but most of the scholarship done on N-town has been devoted to these three areas, at the expense of critical examinations of the cycle. It is a critical examination of the N-town cycle as a work of literary art that I intend to make, and in doing so I will ignore some problems that the cycle presents. Its provenance, for instance, and the problem of how the MS may have been put together, are not my concern, although Appendix A of this study is addressed to some aspects of these issues. Furthermore, I will, for the most part, pretend that the Proclamation preceding the plays does not exist. And it is not my purpose to study possible ways in which this cycle might have been staged; however, I will not ignore stage directions or the various other MS clues as to staging, for these are often quite relevant to literary analysis. My purpose is to argue:
that the N-town cycle was compiled according to a plan or formal idea, that the whole cycle was intended to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary; and that the recurrent, gentle image of the kiss adds unity of imagery to formal unity.

I will assume throughout my argument that the cycle was compiled, and planned, by one man. In doing so, I will be following the lead of other students of the cycle. Block, for instance, states that "the evidence of the MS. supports the view that a compiler is putting together parts to make a whole. . . ." (p. xxxiv). Cameron and Kahrl maintain that

. . . the N-Town Plays as we have them are essentially the compilation of a single guiding intelligence, who has sought to do two things. He has made an older set of banns fit a group of Corpus Christi plays without forcing those banns to fit Marian plays available to him; he has created transitional dramatic scenes that will connect separate pageants into coherent, cinematic action. The resulting manuscript is a kind of register of all the plays available to the compiler. . . .

Cameron and Kahrl also mention (with particular reference to Timothy Fry's article) "an unfortunate tendency on the part of many scholars to think of the N-Town Plays as a unified whole. . . ." They seem to conclude, then, that this compiler, this "single guiding intelligence," was a kind of technician of drama who took all of the plays available to him, put them in what seemed to be good order, and then did some creative work on the stagecraft of the resultant mélange.
This view, although more complimentary than most published views of N-town, does not go far enough, and it underrates the dramatic and literary value of this much-maligned cycle. I intend to show that the N-town cycle is unified, controlled, by a single, complex purpose, that this "single guiding intelligence" who compiled the plays was more than a mere technician, and that he was both selective and inventive in the process of compiling this cycle.

There is no general agreement about the reason or reasons why the N-town cycle was compiled. The surviving manuscripts of the other three English cycles are generally thought to be registers, kept as archival records, to guide productions. But this does not seem to be true of N-town. W. W. Greg concludes that the extant manuscript of the N-town cycle "was written, not for purposes of acting, but of private reading" (Problems, p. 399). K. S. Block mentions several times that the compiler had a purpose, and she concludes that this purpose was subject to change as the compilation progressed (p. xxxiii). But she never indicates what that purpose was. Cameron and Kahrl argue that the manuscript of N-town is a "kind of register of all the plays available to the compiler, but a register that has served, at least in part, for a prompt script on at least one occasion." Their evidence for this inference is that "numerous marginal notes in the MS. indicate its use by a prompter or stage manager. . . ." They also add that the quarto size of Vespasian D. viii, "as opposed to the
folio manuscript in which the other cycles are preserved, argues for a portable script rather than a formal register maintained by a central governing authority."²¹ Perhaps this inference is right, but it seems to be based on the assumption that the compilation was guided entirely by pragmatic, rather than devotional and artistic, aims. I think it is reasonable to ask whether the N-town compiler might not have been motivated at least in part by some aesthetic purpose. Is it not possible that the imagination of this "single guiding intelligence," of this educated medieval Christian, was stirred and deeply moved by the profound theme with which he dealt, the redemption of all mankind?

Madeline H. Dodds, who compares the N-town Proclamation and plays in order to study the growth of the cycle, contradicts herself in an interesting way. She notes first that "the whole easily splits up into separate plays, but it seems to have been arranged deliberately, if clumsily, as a cycle. The purpose for which this was done is undiscovered." Later in the same article, however, she states that

... about the year 1468 [date found in the Purification play, f. 100v] someone took this old cycle of plays and amalgamated it with several other cycles. ... His object was twofold, -- to convey instruction and to honour the Virgin, -- and he selected all his plays with a view to these ends.²²

I believe that Dodds is clearly right in pointing out the "twofold" purpose of this cycle, to honor the Virgin and to instruct the audience, and that she is also correct in saying that the N-town compiler (she says "someone") was ruled in his selection of plays by this purpose.
No critic of N-town has studied the implications of Miss Dodds' statement of the purpose of the cycle. Indeed, the one critic, Timothy Fry, who has tried to demonstrate the unity of the cycle is concerned to show that its emphasis is "Christocentric."\(^{23}\) But this is off the mark, for such an approach obscures the importance of Mary. One honors the Virgin, not by emphasizing her story at the expense of the Savior's, but by developing her subordinate role as the Mother of God. And this, as I hope to show, is what we find has occurred in the N-town plays. It is upon the Blessed Virgin Mary that attention must be centered if one is to understand the unified structure and purpose of the N-town plays, for this cycle was compiled specifically to honor and glorify her for being the Mother of God, the vessel by which God's mercy was carried into the world.

All four of the extant English mystery cycles are generally unified by the Christian view of history which they unfold. Erich Auerbach, in a contrast of Old Testament and Homeric styles, describes this kind of unity:

\[\ldots\text{ as a composition, the Old Testament is incomparably less unified than the Homeric poems, it is more obviously pieced together--but the various components all belong to one concept of universal history and its interpretation. If certain elements survived which did not immediately fit in, interpretation took care of them; and so the reader is at every moment aware of the religio-historical perspective which gives the individual stories their general meaning and purpose.}\]\(^{24}\)
Auerbach further states that

"... the claim of the Old Testament stories to represent universal history, their insistent relation--a relation constantly redefined by conflicts--to a single and hidden God, who yet shows himself and who guides universal history by promise and exaction, gives these stories an entirely different perspective from... the Homeric poems..." (Mimesis, pp. 16-17).

This idea is obviously relevant to, for instance, the plays of Noah and of Abraham, which appear in all of the English cycles; and in all of the cycles Christ's life, Passion, and Resurrection are seen as the fulfillment of this "religio-historical perspective." In the N-town cycle, this idea is also particularly relevant to the plays dealing with Joachim and Anne, parents of the Virgin Mary and traditionally viewed as human links between Old Testament and New, and with the Virgin herself. For they were all chosen by this "single and hidden God" and forced to endure the earthly conflicts which such choice necessarily entails.

Auerbach's remarks about the typical form and purpose of the medieval Christian cycle drama can be applied to the English cycles, including N-town, with enlightening results. He shows, for instance, that anachronisms, the "low" style, and "everyday and real" events are all aesthetically and morally appropriate to the cycle dramas (Mimesis, pp. 155-62). Although it would be valuable to demonstrate such a point in reference to N-town, it will be more to my purpose to note the ways this cycle, which has a greater number of unique plays
than the other cycles, differs from Auerbach's statements about the
typical medieval Christian drama. For instance, Auerbach says that:

Everything in the dramatic play which grew out of the liturgy
during the Middle Ages is part of one—and always of the
same—context; of one great drama whose beginning is
God's creation of the world, whose climax is Christ's second
coming and the Last Judgment. The intervals between the
poles of the action are filled partly by figuration, partly by
imitation, of Christ. Before his appearance there are the
characters and events of the Old Testament—of the age of
the Law—in which the coming of the Saviour is figurally
revealed; this is the meaning of the procession of prophets
(Mimesis, p. 158).

This description generally fits the York, Wakefield, and Chester
cycles, but not so much N-town, where we find that the advent of the
Virgin Mary is as much "figurally revealed" as that of Christ. The
N-town Prophets play (7) consists of a procession of kings and
prophets (a combination unique to N-town) more than half of whom
emphasize the coming of the Virgin rather than the Savior. (This is
not done at the expense of emphasis on Christ, for it is clear through-
out the play that Mary is important because she is to be His mother.)
Moreover, all of the unique plays and many unique elements in N-town
are devoted to the story of Joachim and Anne (Mary's parents), and to
the girlhood, womanhood, and old age of the Virgin (Block, p. 11).
This Marian emphasis is unique to N-town.

My intent, then, as stated, is to show that the N-town plays are
not a haphazard amalgamation, that they were ordered by a single
guiding intelligence for the dominant purpose of honoring the Virgin.
If, as I claim, the whole cycle was compiled to honor Mary, then we should find in its Old Testament plays an emphasis on her which does not appear in the corresponding plays of the other English cycles. And so, in Chapter I of this study, I will examine the N-town Old Testament plays in comparison with those of the other English cycles to show that there is, at least in some appropriate places, a unique Marian emphasis in N-town. This emphasis occurs in the plays of the Fall of Man (2), Moses (6), and the Prophets (7).

That the N-town plays were ordered by a single guiding intelligence for the dominant purpose of honoring the Virgin may become clearer with an analogy from the visual arts. In Chapter II, I will compare the N-town cycle with three cycles of medieval wall-paintings, those in the English parish churches of Chalgrove and Croughton and, most importantly, Giotto's fresco cycle in the Arena Chapel at Padua. All three of these cycles emphasize the life of the Virgin, but Giotto's cycle represents, I believe, the closest analogy to the N-town cycle. There are correspondences between the two in form and details. Both are cyclic and narrative in form, leading ultimately to the Last Judgment. Both contain a number of identical scenes, the most important being those which depict the story of Joachim and Anne and the early life of the Virgin.

A comparison of these two cyclic forms, and of their correspondences in details, will show that the unifying purpose of the Arena
Chapel frescoes, or something very much like it, also controls the N-town plays. I do not claim, of course, that the compiler of the N-town manuscript was influenced by Giotto's work, or even that he knew it; rather, I claim that identity of purpose and use of the same legendary matter (mainly, the *Golden Legend*) led him to create a cyclic structure as unified and, in its way, as controlled as that of the Arena Chapel frescoes.

In Chapter III, I will be primarily concerned with the recurrent use of the kiss image in the N-town cycle. Kisses, of one sort or another, occur in at least seventeen of the cycle's forty-two plays, often at climactic moments. The kiss image has several complex meanings and effects. First, it is a sign of the reconciliation of heaven and earth (it gains this meaning in the Parliament of Heaven scene, play 11). Second, it is a sign of peace and concord between those who exchange it. Third, it often evokes at once the sacred and profane, is a sign of human warmth and affection as well as a sign of God's friendship for man. Fourth, the kiss is sometimes used to emphasize the mediating function of the Virgin and thus is a further means of emphasizing her importance, of honoring her. Fifth, the kiss of betrayal in N-town has particularly great dramatic impact because Judas is the only character to kiss the living Christ on the face, and because his kiss is so obviously a degradation of the sacred and human values of previous kisses in the cycle. The kiss image is
found throughout the cycle, occurring first in the Abraham play (5) and last in the play of the Virgin's Assumption (41). It does not occur in any play concerning the Infancy or Ministry of Christ. The kiss image is one important means used to unify the cycle, and it is perhaps the major means used to evoke the sacred and profane. Thus, I believe it is also one-way employed to accomplish the instructional purposes of the cycle, if we understand instructional in the poetic as well as the homiletic sense. And since this is poetic drama, I see nothing amiss in the assumption.

The following chapters offer, I believe, persuasive evidence that the N-town cycle is a unified work of art. I do not claim that it is unified in the same sense as King Lear, Paradise Lost, or Crime and Punishment. The unity of the Elizabethan play or literary epic or great novel does not belong to N-town or to any of the mystery cycles as whole works. Medieval writers did not seek these kinds of unity. What, then, do I mean when I say that the N-town cycle is a unified work of art? Specifically, I believe that the whole cycle is controlled by one dominant purpose, to honor the Virgin. I would not claim that this is its only purpose. Within the parts of the whole, many modes, I think, are used to give coherence to groups of plays or to separated plays and groups. Cameron and Kahrl have shown that the cycle is unified in terms of stagecraft (although this does not mean that the same staging techniques are used in every part). Timothy Fry has
shown the relevance of the theory of the devil's rights in some plays.

Eleanor Prosser has shown that the first Passion Play is unified dramatic art. To this list I would add my demonstration of the significance of the recurrent image of the kiss.

C. S. Lewis, debating the question of whether or not Malory's *Morte Darthur* is one book or several, states that he does not . . . for a moment believe that Malory had any intention either of writing a single 'work' or of writing many 'works' as we should understand the expressions. He was telling us about Arthur and the knights. Of course his matter was one—the same king, the same court. Of course his matter was many—they had many adventures. 26

The mystery plays are not romances, but we do have in the N-town cycle, and in each of the cycles, both one whole work and a variety of parts; one King, and many "adventures" among His "court." The N-town cycle is, however, more complicated, for it honors the Queen as well as the King. Lewis goes on to say that "the choice we try to force upon Malory is really a choice for us. It is our imagination, not his, that makes the work one or eight or fifty. We can read it either way. We can read it now one way, now another. We partly make what we read." 27 This points out both a truth and a danger. I have made my choice, and I have attempted throughout my work to avoid the danger.
Footnotes


2. *Ludus Coventriae or The Play called Corpus Christi*, Cotton Ms. Vespasian D. VIII, ed. K. S. Block, EETSES, 120 (London, 1922). Citations from N-town in my text are from this, the standard edition--hereafter cited in the text as Block. I prefer the title N-town, from the Proclamation (1. 527) preceding the plays. The title *Ludus Coventriae* is misleading, since this is not the play of Coventry. Some prefer to call these the Hegge plays, after the first known owner of the manuscript.


14."The 'Stage' and the Staging of the N-Town Plays," RORD, 10 (1967), 140.


17 Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays (1961; rpt. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 54-55. Prosser's assertion that the "independent units" were acted in different years must be based on Contemplacio's statement, in his prologue to the Passion Play, II (Block, p. 271), that "We intendyn to procede þe mater þat we lefte þe last þere" (1. 6). This, however, is one of those clear, straightforward statements that creates a mystery where none would otherwise have been. There is no other evidence that the statement is directly relevant to the extant MS. Possibly the compiler forgot to strike or alter it.


19."The N-Town Plays at Lincoln," Theatre Notebook, 20, 64.

20."Staging the N-Town Cycle," TN, 21, 123.

21."The N-Town Plays at Lincoln," p. 64.


23."The Unity of the Ludus Coventriae," pp. 543-47 (and note, p. 543). Fry does observe the balance maintained between Christ and Mary (see p. 570), but his insistence that the cycle is Christocentric obscures the Virgin's importance in these plays.


25 The Virgin is, by my count, emphasized thirteen times, Christ eleven. But numbers are not so important here as the obvious fact that only in this cycle and this Prophets play is the Virgin given such prominence.

CHAPTER I

PREFIGURATION OF THE VIRGIN IN THE N-TOWN OLD TESTAMENT PLAYS

If, as I claim, the whole of the N-town cycle was compiled to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, then we should find in its Old Testament plays an emphasis on the Virgin which does not appear in the corresponding plays of the other English cycles. And so, before proceeding to the comparison of N-town and Giotto's Arena Chapel frescoes, I will examine the N-town Old Testament plays to see whether, in comparison with other English cycles, they give greater prominence, in the appropriate places, to the prefiguration of Mary. I say appropriate places because we should not expect to find in some plays, especially those of Cain and Abel and of Abraham and Isaac, any particular reference to the Virgin. No woman figures prominently in these plays. The Cain and Abel plays establish the worldly equivalents of good and bad angels, or of angels and devils: those destined for the City of God include Abel, and derive from Seth, those belonging to the City of Man derive from Cain. Also, Abel, the good shepherd, is at times a type of Christ, especially when he sacrifices to God his best lamb and when he himself is murdered by Cain. In the Abraham
and Isaac plays we have, as the Chester expositor tells us explicitly, a figure of the Crucifixion. These plays are appropriate places to find reference to Christ, not to the Virgin.

There are no references or allusions to Mary in the first play of N-town, The Creation of Heaven and the Angels and the Fall of Lucifer, nor are there any in the corresponding plays of York (1, 2), Chester (1), or Towneley (1/1-161). But in the second play of N-town, The Creation of the World and Man and the Fall of Man, we do find reference to her. This is the first play in which we should expect to hear of her, for the medieval audience knew her in part as the second Eve, just as they understood Christ to be second Adam. As Gabriel says to Mary in the N-town Salutation and Conception play, just after Mary has obediently agreed to be Christ's mother, "here fis name Eva is turnyd Ave" (11/219). And furthermore the Virgin, through her meek obedience (her dominant trait in the N-town cycle), helps to repair the damage caused by Eve's first disobedience and thus becomes co-redemptrix with Christ. In the N-town Prophets play (play 7) Micheas refers to this Eve-Mary parallel when he says that "Evyn lyke as Eve Modyr of wo was / So xal a maydyn be modyr of blyss" (7/53-54). Moreover, in the N-town Fall of Man play, Satan greets Eve with the words "heyl Ffayr Wyff and comely dame" (2/169), and the audience would have heard in them a premonition of Gabriel's salutation to Mary, which marks the beginning of the redemption.
"Heyl fful of grace god is with the" (Salutation and Conception, 11/218). Also in the N-town fall of Man play, Deus, after the fall, tells Diabolus, the "wyckyd worm fful of pryde" (2/341), that:

Vpon þi gutt þou xalt glyde  
As werm wyckyd in kende  
tyþ a mayden in medyl-erth be born  
þou ffende I warn þe be-forn  
thorwe here þi hed xal be to-torn  
On wombe a-wey þou wende (2/343-48).

This direct reference to Mary is echoed in the N-town play of the Prophets, where RoboaB prophesies that men shall see "A clene mayde trede down foule satanas" (7/50).

There is one more mention of the Virgin in the N-town Fall of Man play when the Seraphim says to Adam and Eve, as he drives them from paradise:

here-in come ȝe no more  
Tyl a chylde of a mayd be born  
and upon þe rode rent and torn  
to-save all þat ȝe have forlorn  
your welth for to restore (2/373-77).

Here Christ is emphasized, as He should be, and thus Mary's subordinate role as mother of God is clearly and properly indicated. In the plays of the other cycles which correspond to the N-town play of the Creation of the World and Man and the Fall of Man (York, plays 2-6; Chester, 2/1-424; Towneley, 1/162-267), there are no references, direct or indirect, to the Virgin Mary.

In none of the plays dealing with Cain and Abel is there a reference to Mary. In the N-town play Abel forecasts the crucifixion
when he sees the lamb he will sacrifice as a figure of God's sacrifice:

and þer to þi grace grawnt þou me
throwh þi gret mercy
which in a lombys lyknes
þou xalt for mannys wyckydnes
OnyB ben offeryd in peynfulnes
and deyn ful dolfoly. (3/73-78)

The audience would probably have also understood in Cain and Abel something of the following significance, as described by St. Augustine:

"such was the founder of the earthly city [Cain]. He was also a figure of the Jews who slew Christ the Shepherd of the flock of men, prefigured by Abel the shepherd of sheep. . . ."32 The Cain and Abel plays may signify much about Christ, but they do not touch upon Mary—she is neither mentioned nor suggested in any of them.

The N-town Noah play (4) contains no reference to Mary, but uxor Noah is here entirely meek and obedient, qualities suggestive of Mary. It might be said that in this general way Noah's wife is in N-town presented as a contrast to Eve and a type of Mary. In the Deluge plays of the other three English cycles Noah's wife is recalcitrant and contests against her husband's, and God's, will, although she is finally persuaded to obey. There is no reference to Mary in the Deluge plays of either York (8 and 9) or Chester (3).

In the Towneley Deluge, however, uxor Noah swears twice by Mary, and Noah does so once (3/209, 220, 226). But the swearing is done in anger and is probably nothing more than the use of anachronism to make the contest between man and wife seem more real, more
local in time and place, to a medieval English audience. Possibly there is also some intention to point out a contrast between the obedience of Mary and disobedience of Noah's wife. But the Wakefield Master was more interested in drawing a parallel between uxor Noah and Eve. When Noah goes off to build the ark, his wife insists on spinning, as she does also when the flood waters are rising (3/236-38, 336-66), actions reminiscent of Eve's task after the fall. Moreover, Noah at one point calls his wife "begynnar of blunder" (3/406), a clear allusion to Eve. Although there is in the Towneley Deluge play some suggestion of a contrast between Noah's wife and Mary, there is no notable emphasis on the Virgin.

In the Abraham and Isaac plays of N-town (5), York (10), and Towneley (4) there are no references to the Virgin. In these three plays, and in Chester (4) as well, Isaac, as he carries the wood for his own sacrifice up the hill, is understood as a type of Christ carrying the cross. The Chester Expositor tells us this explicitly (4/465-76). The Towneley play, with its dramatic series of questions and delays, and its more complex and ambiguous characterization, best demonstrates the human difficulty of obeying God's commands. But only in the Chester play of the Sacrifice of Isaac is the Virgin Mary mentioned. Here she is referred to twice, once by the Expositor and once by Isaac. The Expositor, commenting upon God's promise to Abraham that his seed shall include kings and the Savior, says that
"for of his [Abraham's] kinde was our Lady, / and so also was he [Christ]" (4/207-08). Also, Isaac, encouraging Abraham to sacrifice him and thus obey God's will, says to his father: "Mary! father, God forbydd / but you doe your offringe" (4/315-16).

These references in Chester seem to be used specifically to strengthen Isaac's pleas for mercy. Medieval man looked to Mary as the mother of mercy, the primary mediator between sinful man and her judging Son's righteous anger. Thus Isaac, at the same time he encourages his father to obey God, by anachronistic allusion to Mary also asks him for mercy. With this in mind, we might see the Chester Isaac's speech in which he wishes his mother were with him as an allusion to the Virgin:

Wold God, my mother were here with me!
she wolde knele upon her knee,
praying you, father, if it might be,
for to save my life. (4/297-300)

But the references to Mary in the Chester Isaac play are used specifically to enhance Isaac's plea for mercy, and their role is far from large or significant.

In the N-town Moses play (6) occurs an obvious, conscious yoking together of the double purpose of this cycle: honoring the Virgin and conveying instruction. N-town is the only cycle which devotes an entire play to Moses and his exposition of the Ten Commandments. In Chester, God recites the Decalogue to Moses in the
first twenty-four lines of the play of Balaam and Balak (5). In Towneley, the Commandments appear in the Prophets play (7) and are spoken by Moses, first in the procession of four prophets. They are not recited in the Old Testament plays of the York cycle. The N-town Moses play divides naturally into two parts. In the first part (6/1-48) Moses is alone on Mount Horeb. He prays God to send mercy and to "enforme and teche us all \pi plesans" (6/14). Then Moses sees the burning bush and approaches it, and God gives him the tablets of the law, telling him to "Go forth and preche a-non let se / loke\-hou not ses nyght nor day" (6/45-46). In the second part of the play (6/49-194) Moses turns to the audience, addressing them as if they were the children of Israel (there is no stage direction, but this procedure would have been natural), gives a brief introduction of his intent (6/49-66), and then recites to the audience the Decalogue, giving a short exposition (one or two stanzas) of each law. The play concludes with his one-stanza exhortation that each of his auditors keep the Commandments "Wethyr \pat \hou do wake or slepe" (6/187-94).

In the Bible, Moses sees the burning bush on Mount Horeb when God tells him how to lead the Israelites from the subjection of pharaoh (Exodus iii. 2). However, he receives the Ten Commandments on Sinai after the Israelites have escaped the Egyptians (Exodus xx. 1-17). Thus the N-town playwright has altered the biblical narrative, making Moses see the burning bush on Sinai just before he
receives the Commandments. No other cycle so alters the biblical account. In the York (11) and Towneley (8) Pharaoh plays, the burning bush appears in its proper biblical setting and time. In the Chester play of Balaam and Balak, in which God gives Moses the Ten Commandments, there is no reference to the burning bush. Cameron and Kahrl call the burning bush the "familiar antetype of the Virgin." Chaucer explains the antetype in the following stanza from the "Prologue of The Prioress's Tale":

O mooder Mayde! o mayde Mooeder free!
O bush unbrent, brennynge in Moyses sighte,
That ravyshedest doun fro the Deitee,
Thurgh thy humblesse, the Goost that in th'alighte,
Of whos vertu, whan he thy herte lighte,
Conceyved was the Fadres sapience,
Help me to telle it in thy reverence! 36

This stanza makes it clear that the burning bush can be understood specifically as a figure of the Conception of Christ, an event heavily and uniquely emphasized in the N-town plays of the Prophets (7) and of the Salutation and Conception (11). Moses' vision of the burning bush which remained unburnt is also mentioned as a type of the Virgin in the Towneley First Shepherds Play (12/360-68).

The few scholars who have commented upon the Moses play of N-town are generally either amused or bemused by it. W. W. Greg condescends to show surprise that the play uses "the Burning Bush as the scene of the Lawgiving!" ("Problems," p. 381), P. E. Dustoor speaks of the "dragging in of the Burning-of-the-Bush incident. . . ." 37
Esther Swenson points out that the direction "Incipit Moyses" at the start of the play and the "Explicit Moyses" at the end indicate that the play stood alone as a separate unit; and she wonders whether the use of the burning bush in a play of the Laws may be "a confusion of the Exodus with a play of the Laws" (Inquiry, pp. 16-17). Timothy Fry, in attempting to impose his "Abuse of Power" theory on the N-town Old Testament plays, claims that the Moses play contains "notable references to the Redemption," but he fails to show why they are "notable." 38

Eleanor Prosser has shown that the N-town playwright in the first Passion play is willing to alter the Scriptural account for dramatic purposes, and I think we find the same method at work in the Moses play. 39 We may be surprised to find the burning bush at the scene of the Lawgiving, but it is not dragged in and it does not represent a confusion with the Exodus story. It is rather a purposeful compression of the Exodus account in order to bring together the devotional and instructional intents of the cycle. If we suppose for a minute that the N-town cycle is, as Craig and Cameron and Kahrl contend, the lost Lincoln cycle and that it was performed there, in the Minster Close, on St. Anne's Day in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, we can see clearly the dramatic effect of the Moses play. 40 The Virgin had been for centuries the patron saint of the city. The cathedral is dedicated to Mary, its high altar devoted to her. 41 The audience,
standing in the Close, has just seen the last-minute reprieve of Isaac, and then hears Moses, presented here as patriarch rather than prophet, call upon God to send His mercy soon:

I pray be lord with all my mende
to us incline bi mercy sone
bi gracyous lordchep let us fynde. (6/6-8)

Then Moses prays that God will:

enforme and teche us all bi plesans
in purenesse put us bat nevyr not fall
and grounde us in grace ffrom all grevauns. (6/14-16)

Immediately Moses and the audience see the burning bush (stage direction after line 16: Hic moyses videns rubrum ardentem admirande dicit), and Moses, in awe, can only say:

A mercy god what menyth 3on syte
A grene busch as fyre doth flame
and kepyth his colowre fayr and bryghte
Ffresch and grene with-owtyn blame
It fyguryth sum thynge of ryght gret fame
I kan not seyn what it may be. (6/17-22).

The audience, of course, knows that the bush figures the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Mercy, and they are hushed and reverent before this sign of their patron saint. Moses, as God orders him, removes his shoes to walk barefoot on the sacred ground. He then humbly asks God "what is your wyll lord • fayn wold I wete" (6/36). The audience at this point is also moved to humility, to devotion, to obedience to God's will.

It is just here, when the audience is ready to receive instruction, that the compression of the Exodus account occurs and God gives
Moses the tables of the Law, ordering him to preach them "all abowte" without ceasing "nyght nor day" (6/41-46). Moses then expresses complete obedience to God's will (6/47-48). Following this there is a Latin note in the manuscript, a reference to Deuteronomy vi, which is an exhortation to obedience. Moses' speech of the next two stanzas (6/49-66), his introduction to the Decalogue, is based upon the Deuteronomy passage. As he began this speech, he must have turned his attention from the sacred scene on the mountain to the assembled audience, and preached to them, as God ordered him to preach. The audience, already in a mood of devout humility and reverence, thus become the children of Israel to whom Moses preaches. Yet Moses preaches as an English and Christian priest to an English audience, not as the Old Testament patriarch. In giving the Ninth Command, for instance, he says:

\[
\begin{align*}
desyre not \overline{p}i \neyborys \ wyff \\
pow she be fayr and whyte as swan \\
And \overline{p}i \ wyff brown \ \tilt \ natt for than \\
\overline{p}i \ neyborys \ wyff \ \pou \ nevyr \ rejoyse. \\
\end{align*}
\]

V. A. Kolve asserts that the mystery cycles "compensated for the formal unimportance of the audience moment by staging the past as though it were largely identical with present time, thereby honoring its specific audience while seeking (among other things) to amend their lives."\(^{42}\)

The N-town Moses play exhibits this quality. At the start of the play the Old Testament Moses and the medieval audience are separate,
the one acting, the other watching. Moses cannot know what the burning bush figures because of his place in historical time; the audience can and does know. But when Moses faces the audience he involves them by preaching a medieval sermon, and the two historical points in time merge for the moment. God tells Moses on the mountain that "hoo so wyll have frenshipp of me / to my lawys loke þei lowte"
(6/42-43). As Moses concludes his exposition of the Laws, he tells the audience: "these lawys to lerne þou herke ful hynde / And godys grace xal be þi ffrend" (6/190-91). When he descends from his meeting with eternity, he gives the words of God to the medieval, perhaps to the Lincoln, audience. The compression of the Exodus account to include the incident of the burning bush at the scene of the Lawgiving is original and also effective, in terms of the audience and of the N-town cycle as a whole.

Only N-town (7) and Towneley (7) have plays of the Prophets. In Chester, a procession of six prophets is included in the play of Balaam and Balak (5/289-432), and in York there is no procession, although a character titled "Prologue" comments upon several prophecies of Christ at the start of the play of The Annunciation and Visit of Elizabeth to Mary (12/1-144). Given the position of these Prophets plays and scenes and their purpose, to link Old and New Testament plays and to announce the coming of Christ, it is natural to find in them references to and a certain emphasis upon the Virgin
Mary. The scene in York, because it begins the play on the mystery of Christ's conception, is least valuable for discussion here. Its significance is restricted to the play of which it is a part. The Towneley Processus Prophetarum (probably incomplete) precedes the plays of Pharaoh and of Caesar Augustus, and it contains only one passing reference to the Virgin, in the speech of Daniel (7/232).

In the Chester Prophets scene from the Balaam and Balak play three of the seven prophets (Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah) foretell the Virgin's role as mother of God. But the Chester Expositor, who comments upon each prophecy and then summarizes them all at the end of the scene (5/403-32), makes it clear that the interest of the scene lies entirely in prophesying of Christ. The Expositor states that:

Twoo speakes of his Incarnation,
an other of Christe passion,
the fourth of the resurrection. (5/413-15).

The fifth, he says, speaks of the Pentecost, "of his deede on whitson-day" (5/390), and the sixth of Christ's Nativity. The Expositor concludes by saying that "one man," Christ, "is prophesied here before" (5/431-32).

The N-town Prophets or Root of Jesse play is a unique procession of kings and prophets which emphasizes the Virgin much more than do the other Prophets plays and scenes. This interesting play might be called, after the words of Amon Rex in the concluding stanza,
a "genealogye" (7/131). The play's purpose is twofold: to emphasize the Virgin and to show, in the words of Jeremiah, "That god of his high benyvolens / of prest and kynge wyll take lynage" (7/35-36). The N-town Proclamation stanza is an accurate brief description of this play:

Off þe gentyl Jesse rote
þe seftnt pagent for sothe xal ben
out of þe which doth sprynge oure bote
as in prophecye we redyn and sen
Kyngys and prophetys with wordys fful sote
Schull prophesye al of a qwen
þe which xal staunch oure stryff and moote
And wynnen us welthe with-outyn wen
In hevyn to Abyde
ye xal prophecye of a mayde
All ffendys of here xal be Affrayde
here-sone xal save us be not dismayde
With hese woundys wyde. (Proclamation, 11/105-17).

This stanza emphasizes Mary, but not at the expense of emphasis on her son. It shows again that the proper way to honor Mary is to elaborate upon her subordinate role in the scheme of redemption.

Timothy Fry introduces a useless cavil in his discussion of this play when he says that:

Some critics have seen in this play only the predominance of the Marian element. In fact, the prophecies are said to foretell the birth of Mary and not of Christ. Cf. Swenson . . . , p. 17, and Hardin Craig . . . in Swenson. . . , p. 75. Part of Miss Swenson's proof for her contention rests on the Proclamation stanza for this play. She states . . . "It will be noted that the Prologue states that prophets shall proph-esy, not of Christ, but of a 'qwene the whiche xal staunche our stryff and moote'." If this is the case, then the Redemption must be attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary!!! The full quotation of the Proclamation stanza leaves no
doubt but that Christ is the Redeemer, and that if Mary's position is prominent, it is because of her Son. ...  

Miss Swenson's full statement is as follows:

It will be noted that the Prologue states that prophets shall prophesy, not of Christ, but of a "qwene the whiche xal staunche our stryff and moote"; and an examination of the prophecies will show that the emphasis lies upon the birth of the Virgin, and not of Christ. The introduction of thirteen kings, all of whom announce themselves as progenitors of Mary, shows this tendency, as well as the fact that there are no less than fifteen direct references to the Virgin in these prophecies.  

Swenson perhaps overstates her case, but she certainly is not confused about the identity of the Redeemer. She properly points out that the "emphasis" is upon the birth of the Virgin. She errs, however, when she says that all of the kings "announce themselves as progenitors of Mary," for all of them do not.

I would like to dwell upon this matter of how one honors the Virgin a bit longer, for it is important to my contention that the whole cycle is intended to honor her and that its form reflects this intention. I will argue this in detail shortly when I compare Giotto's Arena Chapel frescoes and the rest of the N-town cycle. For the moment, however, it will be instructive to observe the way the following thirteenth lyric, written in honor of the Virgin, accomplishes its purpose:

Nu pis fules singet hand maket hure blisse
and pat gres up bringet and leued pe ris;
of on ic wille singen pat is makeles,
pe king of halle kinges to moder he hire ches.
Heo his wit-uten sunne and wit-uten hore,
I-cumen of kinges cuinne of gesses more;
be louerd of monkinne of hire was yboren
to bringen us hut of Sunne, elles wue weren for-lore.

Gabriel hire grette and saide hire, 'aue!
Marie ful of grace, vre louer be uit þe,
þe frut of þire wombe ibleset mot id be.
þu sal go wit chide, for sout ic suget þe, '

and þare gretinke þat angle hauede ibrout,
he gon to bi-þenchen and meinde hire þout;
he saide to þen angle, 'hu may tiden þis?
of monnes y-mone nout y nout iuis. '

Mayden heo was uid childe & Maiden her biforen,
& maiden ar sot-hent hire chid was iboren;
Maiden and moder nas neuer non wimon boten he--
wel mitte he berigge of godes sune be.

I-blessed beo þat suete chid & þe moder ec,
& þe suete broste þat hire sone sec;
I-hered ibe þe time þat such chid uas iboren,
þat lesed al'of pine þat arre was for-lore. 46

The poet announces (11/3-4) that he will sing of the Virgin, and in this poem, as in the N-town Prophets play, Mary is emphasized as being of Jesse's stock, not Christ who is seen simply as the son of Mary. 47

It is also to be noted that the final two lines of the poem emphasize Christ, praising His Nativity. The proportion is clear. The poet has honored the Virgin by elaborating upon her subordinate role as mother of God, not by raising her in any way above Christ.

The N-town Prophets play consists of a procession of thirteen prophets, thirteen kings, and Radix Jesse, father of David the first king but who himself is neither king nor prophet. 48 Isaiah opens the
play with a speech of two octaves. He is followed by Radix Jesse, Dauyd Rex, and Jeremias propheta, each of whom has a speech of one octave. After Jeremiah, twelve kings and eleven prophets give alternately speeches of a single quatrain. Amon Rex, last in the procession, speaks also the concluding quatrain. The play is simple, straightforward, and nicely structured.

The first four speeches, those of Isaiah, Jesse, David and Jeremiah, give the major prophecies concerning the Virgin and Christ. Isaiah's opening speech establishes that he is a prophet filled with the influence of God (7/1-2); and he says "pleynly" by "spyryte of prophecie" (7/3):

\[
\text{pat a clene mayde thourgh meke obedyens}
\text{Shall bere a childe which xal do resystens}
\text{Ageyn foule Zabulon ]e devyl of helle}
\text{mанныs soule ageyn hym to defens}
\text{Opyn in ]e felde ]e fend he xal felle. (7/4-8).}
\]

We see here a fairly equal emphasis on Christ and the Virgin, and in lines 5-8 a clear prophecy of the Harrowing of Hell. In the second stanza of his speech Isaiah establishes himself as the start of Christ's "Sacerdotale lynage" (7/13), and he anticipates the joy that both men and angels will feel on "]at morn," the morning of Christ's Nativity (7/15-16).

Radix Jesse speaks the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 11. 1):
"Egregietur virga de radice jesse / Et flos de radice eius ascendet" (7/17-18). There is no attempt here to attribute Isaiah's words to
 Jesse; rather, Jesse speaks the prophecy which applies to him. And this is fitting, for the prophecy inspired development in art and literature of the genealogical tree of Christ of which Jesse is the root. Jesse states that at the top of the tree are found the Virgin and Christ:

A blyssyd braunch xal sprynge of me
That xal be swettere þan bawmys breth
Out of þat braunch in nazareth
A flowre xal blome of me jesse rote
The which by grace xal dystroye deth
and brynge mankinde to blysse most sote. (7/19-22)

The "blyssyd braunch" is Mary, the "flowre" is Christ. Following Jesse, Dauid Rex establishes himself as the first king in the line leading to Mary and Christ, but his emphasis is all on Mary:

Of Regall lyff xal come suche foyson
þat a clene mayde modyr xal be
Ageyns þe devellys fals illusyon
with regall power to make man fre. (7/27-30)

David's speech, and the Prophets play as a whole, establish Mary in the royal line of succession which begins with David. But the reference to her "regall power" is in N-town more than mere compliment or commonplace. Anne, Mary's mother, tells her in the Mary in the Temple play that "þe Aungel tolde us þe xulde be a qwen" (9/12). In the same play, an angel, praising Mary, tells her that she is repairer of the woe brought to man by Eve, and Queen of heaven and hell.
In 3our name Maria fflyve letterys we han
M. Mayde most mercyfull and mekest in mende
A. Auerte of þe Anguysch þat Adam began
R. Regina of regyon Reyneng with-owtyn ende
I. Innocent be Influens of Jesses kende
A. Aduocat most Autentyk 3our Antecer Anne
hefne and helle here kneys down bende
Whan þis holy name of 3ow is seyd Maria. (9/245-51).

In the Salutation and Conception play Gabriel gives great emphasis to Mary's royalty, and also explains her function in the scheme of things. She is, the angel says, "gentlylest of blood and hyest of kynrede / þat reynyth in erth in ony degr" (11/330-31).

Gabriel's final stanza is worth quoting in full:

I commende me on to 3ow þou trone of þe trinyte
O mekest mayde now þe modyr of jhesu
qwen of hefne • lady of erth • and empres of helle be þe
socour to All synful • þat wole to 3ow sew
Thour 3our body beryth þe babe • oure blysse xal renew
to 3ow modyr of mercy • most mekely I recomende
and as I began I ende • with an Ave new
Enjonyd hefne and erth • with þat I Ascende. (11/333-40)

Here are brought together Mary's meekness and her regal power, her function as bringer of mercy and restorer of bliss. Also, she is now Queen of Heaven, Lady of earth, and Empress of hell. She has, Gabriel indicates, repaired the rift between heaven and earth by reversing the disobedience of Eve and by bearing God into the world. She has returned harmony to the created universe. There are other references in the cycle to Mary's royalty. Christ, in the Resurrection play, tells Mary that "All þis werlde þat was forlorn / Shal wurchepe 3ou bothe evyn and morn" (35/1448-49), and Paul, in the play of
The Assumption of the Virgin, greets Mary with these words:

heyl incomparabil quen • goddis holy tron
of you spreng salvacyon • and alloure glorye
heyl mene for mankynde • and mendere of mys. (41/250-52)

In the same play, immediately before Mary's Assumption, Michael says to the apostles:

Hefne and erthe now injoye may ye
Ffor god throw mary is mad mannys frend. (41/492-93)

And, as Mary's Coronation occurs, God says to her:

Yow to worchepe moder • it likyth the hol trinyte
Wherfore I crowne you here • in this kyndam of glory
of alle my chosyn • thus schul ye clepyd be
qwen of hefne • and moder of mercy. (41/495-98)

Following the speech of Dauyd Rex in the N-town play of the Prophets Jeremias propheta speaks and brings together the prophecies of both Isaiah and David; he says that he is fully in accord with all that they say, and he affirms:

. . . pleynly be-forn þis Audyens
That god of his high benyvolens
of prest and kynge wyll take lynage. (7/34-36).

The prophets and kings succeeding Jeremiah summarize the major significances of Mary, each of which is developed in the cycle. Salamon rex, announcing that his temple is a figure of the Virgin, states her primary function, that she "xal be modyr of grett messy" (7/42). Ezekiel tells that his vision "Of a gate þat sperd was trewly / and no man but a prince myght þer-in go" (7/45-46) is also a figure of the Virgin, more specifically of her conception of Christ. 53 King
Roboas then states that "of oure kynrede ȝitt men xul se / A clene mayde trede down foule sathanas" (7/49-50), a common interpretation of the lines from Genesis and one which also occurs in the N-town Fall of Man play (2/345-48). Micheas propheta then draws the parallel between Eve and Mary, a parallel mentioned or alluded to several times in the cycle. In the Salutation and Conception play, for instance, Gabriel says to Mary:

> here pis name Eva • is turnyd Ave
> ȝat is to say with-owte sorwe ar þe now (11/219-20).

And in the Assumption play, Paul calls Mary "mendere of mys" (41/252). King Abias next tells that "all oure myrth comyth of a mayd" (7/58), and Ezechias rex says later that "A mayde be mekenes xal brynge mercy" (7/114). After Ezechias, Sophosas propheta states that "ȝat maydens byrth oure welth xal dresse" (7/118).

Thus the N-town Prophets play presents Mary as the second Eve, virgin mother of the Messiah, who through her meek obedience restores to man the bliss, mirth and glee which the disobedience of the first had lost for him. She is also the mother of mercy, the restorer of the wealth which Eve lost. All of these functions of Mary are mentioned, brought together, in the N-town play of the Prophets, and they are part of the complex view of Mary which the cycle as a whole presents in order to honor her. Not the least interesting thing that happens in the Marian and New Testament plays is the
development of Mary as human child, wife and mother, to complement her role as theotokos. There is in the cycle an attempt to balance her human and divine aspects.
Footnotes: Chapter I

28 St. Augustine says in The City of God (Book XV, Chapter VIII) that the one city descends "from the fratricide Cain, the other from Seth, who had been born to Adam instead of him whom his brother slew..."; and also (Book XV, Chapter I) that "of these two first parents of the human race, then, Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God." Basic Writings of Saint Augustine, Vol. II, ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York, 1948), 275-285.

Augustine's argument about the two cities is useful for understanding some things in the mystery cycles. Not only does the book contain much information about the typological and figural significance of certain biblical persons, things and events, but it also presents an influential and orderly exposition of the Christian view of history. Moreover, it is most often not highly technical theology and thus is readily translatable into popular terms. For these reasons, I use The City of God to help explain some things in the mystery cycles.

For instance, V. A. Kolve's view of what he calls "natural man" in the English cycles is not quite right for the Middle Ages; it is in some respects an imposition of more modern values on the cycles. Kolve contends that the characters in the mysteries (apart from the rulers, who are categorically evil) are natural men who tend either toward evil or toward good, and that those who tend toward evil, such as Noah's wife and the tortores, are not finally damned by the plays. But the division between good and evil men in the cycles is absolute. I doubt that anyone who watched the plays thought of Noah's wife as evil or tending toward it. St. Augustine says that "two men, good but not yet perfect, contend together, just as the wicked contend with the wicked, until the health of those who are under the treatment of grace attains final victory" (City of God, XV, V, p. 280). This adequately explains the contention of Noah and his wife in the Chester, York, and Towneley cycles. The language of contention can characterize the good as well as the wicked, but they remain nonetheless categorically good or evil. The Tortores, the soldiers in the plays of the Massacre of the Innocents, Cain, and Lucifer are all of the same party. St. Augustine gives us the framework to understand this when he says that "these brothers, Cain and Abel, were not both animated by the same earthly desires, nor did the murderer envy the other because he feared that, by both ruling, his own dominion would be curtailed--for Abel was not solicitous to rule in that which his brother built--he was moved by that diabolical, envious hatred with which the evil regard the good, for no other reason than because they are good while themselves are evil" (XV, V, p. 279).

I will also cite from the standard texts of the York Plays, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith, Oxford, 1885, and The Towneley Plays, ed. George England and Alfred W. Pollard, EETSES, LXXI, London, 1897. My use of Miss Block's edition of the Ludus Coventriae has been noted earlier. Hereafter, for simple citations I will refer to the cycles in the text as Chester, York, Towneley, or N-town. Citations will be to the play and line numbers, within the text.

The name Eva was often deliberately confused with the Latin interjection vae (woe), and ave was thus understood grammatically as a reversal of woe. Also, the contrast between Eve and Mary was used as part of the argument for the Immaculate Conception, although it is not clear to me that this controversial issue (in the Middle Ages) is referred to in N-town.

Hilda Graef (The Devotion to Our Lady, New York, 1963, p. 47) says that "this equation of Mary with Christ was helped by a new aspect of the ancient Mary-Eve parallel. In Christian antiquity this was applied only to the contrast between the disobedient and the obedient virgin. Now it was taken a step further: as Eve had been created as the helper of Adam, so Mary as the helper of Christ. This is plainly stated by the Benedictine Abbot Godfrey of Admont (d. 1165), who also has the erotic theme and works out Mary's relationship to the Trinity on the basis that all three divine Persons were her lovers."

This last point is of interest in regard to the N-town Salutation and Conception play where we find, after Mary agrees to be mother of Christ, this stage direction (following 1/292): "here þe holy gost descendit with iij bemys to our lady • the sone of þe godhed nest with iij bemys • to þe holy gost • the fadyr godly with iij bemys to þe sone • And so entre All thre to here bosom • and Mary seyth. . . ."

The City of God, Book XV, Chapter VII, pp. 283-84.

Hilda Graef (The Devotion to Our Lady, pp. 44-45) summarizes St. Bernard as follows: "as St Bernard says in the sermon on the Twelve Stars, Christ is indeed the one true Mediator, but men might be afraid of him, because he is also their God and their Judge. Hence they still need 'a mediator with that Mediator, and there is no one more efficacious than Mary'. For Mary is completely human and only sweet and gentle; she judges no one and therefore no one need be afraid of her."
The question of whether or not Horeb and Sinai are the same place has still not been settled. Also, in the York Pharaoh play Moses is (incorrectly) "Sett undir synay syde" (1.94), while Towneley eliminates the problem by putting him simply "Under thy  montayn syde" (1.94).


"The Origin of the Play of 'Moses and the Tables of the Law'," MLR, 19 (1924), 462.

"The Unity of the Ludus Coventriae," SP, 48 (1951), 541-43.


Although the Expositor says there are but six prophets (5/411), it seems to me that Balaam should be considered the seventh prophet; for he does, immediately before the speech of Isaiah, give his traditional prophecy of Christ (5/289-96).


"Inquiry," p. 17.


J. K. Bonnell, in "The Source in Art of the So-Called Prophets Play in the Hegge Collection," *PMLA*, XXIX (1914), pp. 337, 340, says that Jesse is the father of David, but that Jesse himself is neither king nor prophet.

Bonnell also points out that "it was natural that in the Middle Ages interpretative comment, playing somewhat upon words, should seek a mystic significance in the similarity between virga of Isaiah's prophecy and the word virgo" (note, p. 328).

In the N-town Assumption play, an angel tells Mary that "yowre blosme" shall resist the devil (41/134). Also, the York Prologue to the Annunciation play tells us that:

A wande sall brede of Jesse boure;
And of þis same also sais hee,
Upponne þat wande sall springe a floure,
Wher-on þe haly gast sall be,
To governe it with grete honoure.
That wande meynes vntill vs
þis mayden, even and morne,
And þe floure is Jesus,
þat of þat blyst bees borne (12/76-84).

Block, pp. xlvi-xlvii, finds in this anagram an "imitation of Lydgate's manner."

Anna Brownell Jameson, in her book *Legends of the Madonna as Represented in the Fine Arts* (London, 1909), p. xlv, points out that "the closed gate . . . taken from the prophecy of Ezekiel (xlv. 4)" is a symbol of the Virgin common in medieval art.
CHAPTER II

FORMAL UNITY OF THE N-TOWN CYCLE

We have seen that there is a unique emphasis on the Virgin Mary in three of the seven N-town Old Testament plays. In the play of the Creation of the World and Man and the Fall of Man (2), there are two direct prophecies of her coming. In the Moses play (6), the playwright purposely compresses the Exodus account to set together the burning bush, an antetype of the Virgin, and the giving of the Laws; thus, he accomplishes the double purpose of honoring the Virgin and giving instruction. The N-town Prophets play (7), a procession of kings and prophets unique among mystery cycles, accomplishes also a double purpose: to establish Christ's royal lineage through Mary, and to forecast the advent of Mary. Also, the genealogy of Anna and her issue, which occupies the final half of the concluding folio (fo. 37) of the Prophets play, leads naturally to the play of The Conception of Mary (8) immediately following, and is based upon the same chapter of the Legenda Aurea as that play. These Old Testament plays, especially the latter two, indicate the Marian emphasis of the cycle as a whole, and they prepare the audience for the Marian plays (8-13)
which follow. I have contended that this Marian emphasis in N-town is purposeful and that one major purpose of the whole cycle is to honor the Virgin Mary.

I will now illustrate this point in regard to the N-town Marian and New Testament plays by briefly discussing some suggestive comparisons with works of art from the English Middle Ages. Following this, I will draw a more extensive comparison between the N-town cycle and Giotto's Arena Chapel fresco cycle. I should add that, in researching later English medieval art for possible stylistic analogies with the N-town cycle, I have been guided consistently by one principle: I have looked for cyclic or sequential works which combine into a single scheme scenes from the early and later life of the Virgin and from the Infancy, Ministry, Passion and post-Resurrection divisions of the life of Christ; for such is the scheme found in the N-town Marian and New Testament plays. I have discovered nothing which matches this principle exactly, but one fourteenth century cycle of wall-paintings comes very close to it.

In English medieval art, the life of the Virgin is an important subject in embroidery, stained glass, illuminated manuscripts, sculpture and wall-paintings. The Pienza cope (c. 1317), an example of the famous Opus Anglicanum,

... is arranged in three tiers of arcading; in the lowest are figures of saints, with apostles in the spandrels of the arcade; in the next are scenes from the life of the
Virgin, . . . and in the uppermost are the Annunciation, and
the Death, Assumption, and Coronation of the Virgin. . . .

Also, in the cathedral of Saint-Bernard-de-Comminges, there are two
English copes, gifts of Pope Clement V in 1309, one of which has
scenes of the life of the Virgin, the other scenes of the Passion.

Scenes from the Virgin's life appear in stained glass windows at, for
example, Great Malvern Priory, York Minster, and the parish church
in Fairford, Gloucestershire. The Fairford glass (twenty-eight
windows; c. 1495-1505) is of some interest because the glass in the
Lady Chapel depicts scenes from the early life of the Virgin and the
Infancy of Christ. But these are tucked away, appropriately, in the
Lady Chapel, and there are no scenes which particularly honor the
Virgin in other parts of the church. Similarly, in the Benedictine
house of Ely the Lady Chapel (begun in 1321) contains a "life of the
Virgin told in sculpture. . . ."

Among English illuminated manuscripts there is none, so far as I can discover, which particularly
emphasizes the life of the Virgin or which combines into a single
scheme scenes from her life and scenes from the life of Christ,
although there are, of course, books of hours and Psalters which have
scenes from both.

It is among English wall-paintings of the thirteenth and four-
teenth centuries that one finds the clearest analogies to the N-town
cycle. Originally, there may have been dozens of parish churches
with cycles of wall-paintings which combined in some fashion scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin, but only a very few of these are extant, all much damaged. Of these, two stand out, because of the elaborateness of their schemes and because of their artistic merit. They are the cycles at the parish churches of Chalgrove (Oxfordshire) and Croughton (Northamptonshire). Both of these cycles, and especially that of Croughton, are worth consideration.

At Chalgrove Church, Oxfordshire, the north, south, and east walls of the chancel are decorated with three tiers of wall paintings (c. 1350). These divide into two subjects: scenes from the life of Christ, and scenes relating to the Death, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin (see Fig. 1). There are obvious and essential differences between the Chalgrove scheme and that of N-town. Chalgrove has no Joachim and Anna scenes, nothing from the early life of the Virgin; this cycle concentrates on the end of her life, and thereafter. Also, the scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin are not mixed in any way or presented together in linear manner; rather, they are separated, as the position of the Last Judgment, which ends the series on the life of Christ, clearly shows. The Chalgrove paintings are reminiscent of the two copes, mentioned above, in that there are actually two series, one devoted to Christ and one to the Virgin, facing each other. There is no attempt to bring the whole into a single narrative structure. However, the Chalgrove paintings do have the
Figure 1. —Mural Paintings in Chalgrove Church, Oxfordshire.
apparent major purpose of honoring the Virgin by presenting scenes from her life along with scenes from the life of Christ; and this is at least suggestive of what I contend happens in N-town.

At Croughton Church, Northamptonshire, the cycle of wall-paintings (c. 1310) consists of thirty-six scenes and depicts the life and death of the Virgin and the Infancy, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ. It also includes, over the chancel arch, a Last Judgment of the late fifteenth century; and, in what was originally the Lady Chapel, paintings of the Annunciation and of St. Anne and the Virgin. But these latter three paintings are not part of the original cycle (Tristram and James, pp. 185-86). The Croughton scheme, unlike Chalgrove, depicts the story of Joachim and Anna and the early life of the Virgin, as do the N-town cycle and the Arena Chapel frescoes. This similarity of subject was specifically noted by Tristram and James, in the most authoritative article on the Croughton murals (Tristram and James, pp. 184-85). The Croughton series, in contrast to N-town and the Arena Chapel cycle, contains no scenes from Christ's Ministry.

M. R. James describes the Croughton cycle as follows:

The life and Death of the Virgin and the Infancy of Christ are painted in three zones on the south wall of the south aisle. They begin with the uppermost zone and read from east to west. The Passion is in two zones on the wall of the north aisle, and reads from west to east. At the east end of the lower zone are two paintings (of St. Anne and the Virgin,
and of the Annunciation), which probably belong to a Lady Chapel at the east end of the aisle (Tristram and James, p. 186).

Following is a list of the scenes which make up the Croughton cycle.

South aisle, south wall: in three tiers, the life and death of the Virgin and the Infancy of Christ. Highest tier, reading from east to west:

1. The Rejection of Joachim's Offering
2. Fragment of a subject; perhaps the Annunciation to St. Anne
3. Meeting of Joachim and Anne at the Golden Gate (they embrace and kiss)
4. The Birth of the Virgin
5. The Presentation of the Virgin (she climbs the fifteen steps to the priest)
6. The Departure of the Virgin from Home
7. The Espousals of the Virgin and St. Joseph (Joseph holds what seems to be the flowering rod in his left hand)

Central tier (south aisle, south wall) reading from east to west:

"The space beneath the Rejection of St. Joachim's Offering, in the higher tier, is now blank, but must originally have been occupied by an Annunciation" (Tristram and James, Archaeologia, p. 188).

8. The Visitation (only the lower halves of the figures survive)
9. The Nativity
10. The Appearance of the Angel to the Shepherds
11. The Magi before Herod
12. The Adoration of the Magi
13. The Massacre of the Innocents
14. The Flight into Egypt
Lowest tier, east to west:

15. The Presentation in the Temple (ends Infancy of Christ series) -- much damaged

16. The death of the Virgin series begins with the Appearance of the Angel with the Palm -- much damaged

17. The Virgin giving the Palm to St. John

18. The Gathering of the Apostles -- much damaged

19. The Death of the Virgin -- almost entirely defaced

20. The Funeral of the Virgin, and the Miracle of the Jews -- much damaged

21. The Burial of the Virgin

22. The Assumption of the Virgin

"Beyond an intervening window is a blank space, probably once occupied by the Coronation of the Virgin" (Tristram, English Wall Painting, p. 163).

North aisle, north wall; in two tiers, the Passion of Christ. Upper tier, read from west to east:

1. The Entry into Jerusalem

2. The Last Supper

"After this is a vacant space extending over the top of the door. There seems to be room for either one or two scenes. The Washing of Feet and the Agony in the Garden are the most likely -- indeed, almost the only possible -- subjects to have filled it" (Tristram and James, Archaeologia, p. 193).

3. The Betrayal (Christ kissed by Judas)

4. The Trial before the High Priests

5. A badly damaged scene; probably the Mocking of Christ
7. The Carrying of the Cross
8. The Crucifixion

Lower tier, west to east:
9. The Deposition
10. The Entombment
11. The Harrowing of Hell—much damaged
12. The Resurrection—much damaged

"Probably the Resurrection filled the space up to the doorway which is situated here. East of the door might have been two scenes, either the Women at the Sepulchre and the Ascension, or the Ascension and the Pentecost" (Tristram and James, p. 195). Following this is the Lady Chapel with two scenes (St. Anne teaching the Virgin, and an Annunciation). Also, there is the Last Judgment over the chancel arch; but it is, as Tristram and James say, "of late (?) fifteenth-century date, and has nothing to do with our series" (p. 196).

One comparison of interest is that between the N-town Assumption of the Virgin play (41) and the Croughton scenes dealing with her Death. At Croughton, scenes 16 through 20 (south aisle, south wall, lowest tier) are painted continuously, with no division of one scene from another. The N-town Assumption play includes all of these scenes and a number of others; it is, in effect, a whole, albeit cursory, series detailing the Death, Assumption, and Coronation of the Virgin. The traditional scenes which this play represents are as follows: Mary receives the palm from the angel (41/107-09); Mary gives the palm to John (192-95); The Gathering of the Apostles (stage direction following 1.205); Dormition of the Virgin (270-71); Funeral of
the Virgin and Miracle of the Jews (343-420); Burial of the Virgin (421-35); Assumption of the Virgin (462-94); Coronation of the Virgin (495-98). Falling between the plays of the Pentecost and Doomsday, the Assumption play fills out the cycle very nicely by completing the Marian emphasis. I suggest that the N-town compiler selected it for just this reason.

In addition, close examination of the Croughton scenes of the Presentation of the Virgin and the Departure of the Virgin from Home (south aisle, south wall, highest tier) gives an interesting perspective on a "discrepancy" between two N-town plays that has been used as evidence of the "patchwork" nature of the cycle. K. S. Block, arguing that the "group of Mary plays from The Conception of Mary to The Trial of Joseph and Mary is not homogenous," states that:

... though the Betrothal play does not appear exactly in the form in which it is described in the Proclamation, where two pageants (and three stanzas) are assigned to it, there are significant discrepancies between it and the Contemplacio plays which precede and follow. In the Mary in the Temple play the Virgin is represented as left by her parents at the Temple and dwelling there. This also seems to be implied in the speech of Contemplacio at the close: 'Lo sofreynes here se have seyn / in pe temple of oure ladyes presentacion / she was nevyr occupayd in thyn�ys veyn / but Evyr besy in holy ocupacyon.' In Bonaventura's narrative, as in the Protevangelion and Nativity of Mary gospel, Mary is said to have lived in the Temple from her 3rd to her 14th year. At the opening of the Betrothal play, however, Mary is living at home with her parents... (pp. xxi-xxii).

And in regard to the same "discrepancy," W. W. Greg asserts that:

With regard to the "Marriage" it will be noticed that two Prologue plays correspond to a single play in the text. There
is reason to suppose that the latter has been considerably cut down as well as revised and interpolated, and there is satisfactory evidence both that it contains the remains of the plays described in the Prologue, and also that it has a different origin from its immediate predecessors. They, of course, leave Mary an inmate of the temple, whereas the present play, like the Prologue, makes her parents bring her to the temple, in response to the priest's summons, in her twelfth year ("Problems," pp. 383-84).

However, comparison of the appropriate N-town plays and Croughton scenes suggests that this "discrepancy" may be a convention, and thus not valid evidence of the fragmentary nature of N-town. Tristram and James, who compare the Croughton and N-town cycles on this point, conclude that it is a convention and that "one reason which made the artists break with the written story was that St. Anne is always represented as teaching the Virgin to read, and room for this had to be found in any popular presentation of the history." They conclude that "there is no doubt, . . . that the plays, like our painting, allowed for an interval spent at home between the sojourn in the temple and the espousals, though this was quite unwarrantable" (pp. 198-99).

Although the scenes painted at Croughton are in many ways analogous to the N-town Marian and New Testament plays, there are essential differences which do not occur in a comparison of N-town and Giotto's frescoes. Both N-town and the Arena Chapel give much fuller treatment to the Joachim and Anne story, and both depict the Presentation and the Watching of the Rods which lead to the Betrothal
of the Virgin to Joseph. This legend is merely suggested in the Croughton Espousals of the Virgin, which shows an indication of the flowering rod in Joseph's left hand as he stands at the altar with Mary (Tristram and James, p. 188). More important, the Croughton cycle does not clearly contain an Annunciation, a scene of great importance in both the Arena Chapel and the N-town cycles. Also, the Croughton scenes concerning the Death, Assumption, and Coronation (?) of the Virgin follow the scenes of Christ's Infancy, indicating that the lives of Christ and the Virgin have not really been merged into a single scheme but remain separated. The south wall honors the Virgin, the north wall, Christ. In addition, there are no scenes from Christ's Ministry at Croughton, while such scenes are an integral part of the Arena Chapel frescoes and the N-town cycle. Another important difference is that the original Croughton cycle had no Last Judgment, while this scene is essential to both the Arena Chapel and N-town.

Finally, there is no clear evidence that Croughton ever had scenes depicting Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalen, His Ascension, or the Pentecost, all of which appear in N-town and the Arena Chapel. These major differences between N-town and Giotto's cycle on the one hand, and the Croughton murals on the other, indicate that a more fruitful analogy can be drawn between N-town and Giotto's cycle than between N-town and the Croughton series.
Nevertheless, the Croughton cycle is English, like the N-town cycle; and its general form bears enough similarity to that of N-town to support my contention that the Marian plays of N-town were not merely added to the cycle because they were available, that they are part of a definite formal idea. Tristram and James, concluding their comparison of the Croughton and Arena Chapel cycles, state that "in technique, perhaps, Giotto and our Croughton paintings are separated by an enormous gulf; in the spirit actuating the work they are not so far apart" (p. 185). In making an analogy between N-town and Giotto's series, one thing I hope to show is that the "spirit actuating" is much the same in both works.

The inscription (now effaced) on the tomb of Enrico Scrovegni of Padua, builder of the Arena Chapel, once read in part as follows:

. . . Enrico Scrovegni, the knight,
Saves his honest soul; he respectfully makes. . . a feast.
For he solemnly dedicated the temple to the mother of God,
So that he would be blessed with eternal grace.
Divine virtue replaced the profane vices,
The heavenly joys which are superior replaced earthly ones.
When this place was solemnly dedicated to God,
That time of the years of the Lord was noted as follows:
In the year thirteen hundred and three, March brought
The Feast of the Virgin and Palm Sunday into conjunction.

Enrico Scrovegni built the Arena Chapel to atone for his father's sin of usury and to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary. To this end, he had Giotto paint in it the cycle of frescoes which depicts, mainly, the story of Joachim and Anne, the early life of the Virgin, and the life and Passion of Christ.
Cesare Gnudi, a modern student of Giotto, states that in the Arena Chapel Giotto "had to represent the great poem of the Redemption through the passion of God who has become man and through the dolorous human story of the Mother who becomes the mediator between mankind and divine grace." Gnudi further declares that everywhere in the Arena Chapel cycle there is clear evidence of the artist's desire to divide the scenes between the various walls and rows in accordance with the themes and sequence of the story he has to relate. Thus the first series in the upper row on the right wall comprises the theme of the Virgin's conception (the Anne and Joachim scenes); and the corresponding series in the upper row on the left wall deals with the nativity and youth of the Virgin Mary. Taken as a whole, the first two series, by placing the story and figure of the Virgin Mary with that of Christ, in the foreground, constitute the great prelude to the poem of the Redemption, which begins at the moment when God, represented on his throne in the centre of the end wall on the triumphal arch [in the lunette, above the Annunciation scenes], entrusts Gabriel with the mission of conveying to Mary the annunciation of her divine motherhood, and ends on the opposite wall with the Last Judgment.

Gnudi also speaks of the "dramatic tension of [Giotto's] images" and of the "dramatic poem depicted on the walls of the chapel." The analogy Gnudi implies between Giotto's fresco cycle and a narrative, dramatic poem is a fair one, and his more general analogy helps to justify my particular one.

The Arena Chapel of Padua, dedicated to the Annunciate Virgin, was actually consecrated on the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25) in 1305, and Giotto had probably finished his frescoes by that time.
(Stubblebine, pp. 72-73). Giotto honored the Virgin in his frescoe cycle by beginning it with scenes, probably based on the _Legenda Aurea_, representing the story of Joachim and Anne, and then the infancy and betrothal of the Virgin and the Annunciation, some fifteen scenes in all. The succeeding twenty-five scenes depict the infancy, ministry, passion and resurrection of Christ, and (covering the west wall of the chapel, above the entrance) the Last Judgment (see Figure 2).

Giotto's narrative is skilfully laid out. As one enters the chapel, he faces the triumphal arch on which are the scenes of God the Father dispatching Gabriel and of the Annunciation, the primary event honored (see Figures 3, 4 and 5). The narrative proceeds in three bands or tiers along the south and north walls, always from left to right on each wall, as one faces it, or from east to west on the south wall and from west to east on the north (see Figures 6 and 7). The uppermost band begins at the right of the Annunciato Virgin, and it contains six scenes from the life of Joachim and Anna, before the birth of Mary. One's eyes then pass across the Last Judgment to the top band on the north wall, which contains six scenes (west to east) from the early life of the Virgin, concluding with her return home after the betrothal. This leads naturally to the triumphal arch and the scenes of God the Father dispatching Gabriel and of the Annunciation itself, depicted in two scenes, one on either side of the arch. One's eyes follow in the
Figure 2. --A Key to Giotto's Frescoes.
Figure 3. -- God the Father Dispatching Gabriel. (Stubblebine, Illustration 21)

Figure 4. --
The Archangel Gabriel.
(Stubblebine, Illustration 22)

Figure 5. --
The Annunciatory Virgin.
(Stubblebine, Illustration 23)
Figure 6.—View Toward the Altar in the Arena Chapel.
(Stubblebine, Illustration 3)
Figure 7.--View Toward the Entrance in the Arena Chapel. (Stubblebine, Illustration 4)
direction indicated by Gabriel's intent gaze and outstretched arm and fingers, across the arch to the kneeling figure of the Virgin, waiting to receive the Word.

On the triumphal arch, in the frescoe immediately beneath that of the Annunciate Virgin, we find the scene of the Visitation or Visit to Elizabeth. From here one looks to the middle tier on the south wall, where he finds five scenes, proceeding east to west, representing Christ's infancy. Then one's eyes pass again across the Last Judgment to the middle tier of the north wall, where the sub-cycle depicting Christ's ministry begins with Christ disputing in the temple with the doctors. There are six scenes here, proceeding from west to east, ending at the triumphal arch with Christ expelling the merchants from the temple.

The story of the Passion of Christ begins with The Pact of Judas, on the triumphal arch beneath the Annunciate angel and across from the Visitation. A shadowy devil stands behind Judas, and one of its hands rests on the traitor's arm. Stubblebine notes that "since the Passion cycle in the lowest of the three registers hinges on this one act of evil, the scene serves to introduce that cycle, just as the Visitation led us into the cycle of the Infancy of Christ" (p. 85). Following The Pact are nine Passion scenes, five in the lowest row on the south wall, running east to west, and four in the lowest row on the north wall, running west to east. The last two scenes on the lowest
tier, north wall, are The Ascension and The Pentecost. Following this, one's eyes rest naturally at the same level on the triumphal arch, where he finds painted only two vaulted chambers. One then turns from east to west to leave the Arena Chapel and sees (what his eyes have already crossed numerous times) the enormous Last Judgment which covers the west wall of the Chapel.

The Marian and New Testament plays of the N-town cycle can be broken down into the same general sub-cycles as can Giotto's frescoe cycle: conception and early life of the Virgin (8-14); infancy of Christ (15-20); His ministry (21-25); His Passion (26-35); events after the Resurrection (36-41); and concluding all, a Doomsday play (42). The following table, which compares the Arena Chapel cycle and N-town in detail, should clarify the analogy (Table 1).

Several general conclusions can be drawn from the following comparative table. Both the Arena Chapel and N-town cycles combine into a single scheme events, often the same ones, from the life of the Virgin Mary and from the life of Christ. Moreover, in parts both rely on the same legendary or apocryphal matter--probably the Golden Legend in the scenes and plays on the conception and early life of Mary. In addition, both emphasize the Virgin by including a sub-cycle of her early life, leading to the Annunciation, with the sub-cycles of Christ's life, and by including scenes which honor her (such as the Pietà) in the Passion sequence. Similarities of detail in the two cycles are
Table 1. --Comparison of Arena Chapel and N-Town Cycles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arena Chapel</th>
<th>N-Town</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception and Early Life of the Virgin</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple</td>
<td>Scene 4, Joachim's sacrifice, not included in N-town. The other five scenes constitute play 8, which Miss Block titles The Conception of Mary (Barrenness of Anne).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Joachim Retiring to the Countryside</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The Annunciation to Anne</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The Sacrifice of Joachim</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The Vision of Joachim</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The Meeting at the Golden Gate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. The Birth of the Virgin</td>
<td>Not in N-town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple</td>
<td>N-town 9, Mary in the Temple (Events concerning the betrothal of the Virgin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The Presentation of the Rods</td>
<td>N-town 10, The Betrothal of Mary, contains all four of these scenes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The Watching of the Rods</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. The Betrothal of the Virgin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. The Virgin's Return Home</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(The Annunciation)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Annunciate Angel</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Annunciate Virgin</td>
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<td><strong>(Continued on next page)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Arena Chapel</td>
<td>N-Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Joseph's Return</td>
<td>13. The Visit to Elizabeth</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. The Visit to Elizabeth</td>
<td>(The Prologue of Summoner)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. The Trial of Joseph and Mary</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Infancy of Christ</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>17. The Nativity</td>
<td>15. The Birth of Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. The Adoration of the</td>
<td>16. The Adoration of the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shepherds</td>
<td>Shepherds</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. The Adoration of the</td>
<td>18. (&quot;17&quot; omitted in MS.) The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magi</td>
<td>Adoration of the Magi</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ministry of Christ</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20. The Flight into Egypt</td>
<td>20. The Massacre of the Innocents, The Death of Herod (also includes the Flight into Egypt)</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. The Massacre of the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Innocents</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. The Baptism of Christ</td>
<td>23. The Temptation</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Baptism (no number in MS., but following play numbered &quot;23&quot;)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. The Marriage at Cana</td>
<td>24. The Woman Taken in Adultery</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. The Raising of Lazarus</td>
<td>25. The Raising of Lazarus</td>
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Table 1. --Continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arena Chapel</th>
<th>N-Town</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministry of Christ (cont'd)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>26. The Entry into Jerusalem</td>
<td>(see under Passion)</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple</td>
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**Passion**

(Passion Play. I)


27. The Last Supper and The Conspiracy of the Jews and Judas (contains also the Washing of the Feet)

28. The Pact of Judas

29. The Last Supper

30. The Washing of the Feet

31. The Betrayal of Christ (The Kiss of Judas)

28. The Betrayal (The Passion Play. I ends with a Prologue of the Doctors, which has no MS. number)

(Passion Play. II)

32. Christ before Caiaphas

29. King Herod, the Trial of Christ before Annas and Caiaphas, Peter's Denial

30. The Death of Judas, The Trial of Christ before Pilate, The Trial of Christ before Herod

33. The Mocking of Christ


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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arena Chapel</th>
<th>N-Town</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passion (cont'd)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>34. The Road to Calvary</td>
<td>32. The Procession to Calvary, The Crucifixion</td>
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<tr>
<td>35. The Crucifixion</td>
<td>33. The Descent into Hell of Anima Christi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. The Pietà</td>
<td>34. The Embassy to Pilate of Joseph of Arimathea, The Episode of Longeaus, The Descent from the Cross and Burial, The Guarding of the Sepulchre (This play also includes The Pietà)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-Resurrection</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>37. The Resurrection (The Angel at the Tomb and the Noli Me Tangere, which occurs in N-town 37)</td>
<td>35. The Harrowing of Hell, The Resurrection and Appearance to the Virgin, The Compact of the Soldiers and Pilate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. The Announcement to the Three Maries</td>
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<tr>
<td>37. The Appearance to Mary Magdalen (includes the Noli Me Tangere)</td>
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<tr>
<td>38. The Ascension</td>
<td>39. The Ascension and the Choice of Matthias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. The Pentecost</td>
<td>40. The Day of Pentecost</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. The Last Judgment</td>
<td>41. The Assumption of the Virgin</td>
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<td>42. Doomsday</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
obviously most significant in the Marian scenes and plays, and
wherever else there is a Marien emphasis. Nevertheless, the simi­
liarity of general form in the two cycles is striking, especially when we
consider that schemes combining the lives of Christ and Mary into a
single narrative structure are unusual.

We know that the purpose of Giotto's frescoe cycle is to honor
the Virgin. The above comparison of the Arena Chapel and N-town
cycles offers, I believe, persuasive evidence that this is also a major
purpose of the N-town plays as a whole, that both Giotto and the N-town
compiler planned similar cycles and had comparable purposes in
mind. I think that Giotto's cycle of wall-paintings gives us a precedent
for considering the N-town cycle as a whole work of art, for assuming
that it was compiled according to a definite plan and that it does have
a kind of formal unity.

In the following chapter, which is primarily a study of the kiss
image in N-town, I will assume that the whole cycle does have at least
one major purpose, to honor the Virgin. And I will include, in the
relevant places, copies of some scenes from the Arena Chapel cycle,
for at certain points the frescoes enable us to visualize more clearly
the action of the plays. Also, the frescoes sometimes serve as a point
of departure for analysis of a play or scene, sometimes show where a
play is traditional or where it varies from tradition.
Footnotes: Chapter II

54 Block, p. xlv. Also, N-town at this point bears an interesting similarity to the early fourteenth century illuminated Queen Mary's Psalter, as the following description indicates: folios one through sixty-six contain "a long series of Old Testament scenes, from the Fall of Lucifer to the Death of Solomon," 223 drawings in all. "On fol. 67 verso is a full-page Tree of Jesse in a rectangular miniature. On fol. 68 are four miniatures representing the three Marys and the unusual subject of St Anne and her three husbands. . . ." Margaret Rickert, Painting in Britain in the Middle Ages (London: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 142.


56 Rickert, Painting in Britain, p. 211.

57 Evans, English Art, p. 33.

58 E. W. Tristram and M. R. James, Wall-Paintings in Croughton Church, Northamptonshire, " Archaeologia, 76 (1927), 197, 199, 203.

59 John Rothenstein, in his An Introduction to English Painting (5th rev. ed., 1965), p. 10, states that "a series of paintings which may be taken as typical of those which existed in hundreds of thirteenth and fourteenth century parish churches throughout the country are those. . . at All Saints', Croughton, Northamptonshire . . . ."

60 A. Craiger-Smith, in his English Medieval Mural Paintings (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 64, asserts that "a full sequence of these narrative pictures was extensive, and it is surprising that any has survived entire." He also points out that "the century following the Reformation brought an end to a pictorial tradition which must once have been the commonest of all the arts practised in medieval England--the art of mural painting. Many of the paintings were replaced, according to royal injunction, with 'profitable texts' in blackletter, a number of which are still visible today; others were plastered over; others were excised from the walls with hammers and chisels, or were desecrated by scratching with swords and sticks" (p. xiii). In addition, many were damaged during repairs in the nineteenth century and by the use of "unsuitable preservatives" in the
twentieth. And, according to Craiger-Smith, Great Britain, unlike Italy and France, provides no state grants for the "recovery and preservation" of medieval wall-paintings (p. 129).


62 The diagram is reproduced from Burges, p. 435.

63 Information on the Croughton paintings is drawn mainly from E. W. Tristram and M. R. James, "Wall-Paintings in Croughton Church, Northamptonshire," Archaeologia, 76 (1927), 179-204. Also useful, again, is Tristram's English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century, pp. 73-75, 162-65.

64 My list is based on those found in Tristram (pp. 162-65), and in Tristram and James (pp. 186-204).

65 Block (p. xii) and Cameron and Kahrl ("The N-Town Plays at Lincoln," p. 68) consider the play an "interpolation," which it may well be; but I am not certain precisely what they mean by that word and what it implies about the play and its position in the cycle. Block also points out (p. xix) that the "chief scribe" has apparently inserted at least one line in the Assumption play and that this, if accepted, "clinches all the other arguments in favour of that play's having formed part of the original compilation, not indeed as conceived by the composer of the prologue but as carried out in the present MS."


69 Stubblebine (p. 81) points out that "The Visitation is appropriate for a prominent position on the triumphal arch because it is so rich in symbolic allusion. When Elizabeth, as the mother-to-be of John the Baptist, visited the Virgin, who bore the Christ Child in her womb, two worlds met--the old represented by the prophets, of whom
the Baptist was the last, and the new represented by Christ, who brought the era of grace. In their embrace these two women bridge the gulf between the Old and the New Testaments—a fitting moment to be depicted just before the cycle of Christ's life commences."

Stubblebine (p. 85) says that this scene is out of sequence, that it should follow the Last Supper and the Washing of the Feet. However, Giotto's sequence is the same as that found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Giotto's purpose was really twofold: to honor specifically the Annunciate Virgin (Stubblebine, pp. 73, 80-81) and thus to gain mercy (her intercession) for the soul of Enrico Scrovegni, who built the chapel and commissioned the frescoes.
CHAPTER III

KISSES IN THE N-TOWN CYCLE

M. H. Dodds states that the second major purpose of the N-town cycle is to convey instruction (p. 87), and I will now turn to the didactic nature of the plays. Miss Block states in her "Introduction" (p. li) that characteristics of N-town are:

- the pithy short sermons put into the mouth of different characters: two from John the Baptist, one at the close of play 22 (p. 192) on repentance, and one as prologue to the Passion play (p. 229) on the dangers of overconfidence and despair; one from Peter in the Entry into Jerusalem, scene (p. 238) on the spiritually blind, lame, and dumb; one from Christ expounding the Eucharist (p. 254). To these may be added the ironic discourse of Lucifer, a "bounteuous lord" to "reward synners," at the opening of the Passion play (p. 225), and the exposition of the Commandments in the sixth play, which there is nothing to match in the Chester play in which the Commandments are recited.

Miss Block also points out (p. liii) that in the play of Christ and the Doctors, which is common to all of the English cycles, N-town alone adds to the discussion a number of "theological problems and paradoxes." She states that the questions raised—(a) the unity of the Trinity, (b) the distinction of the three persons, (c) the manner of the incarnation, (d) the reason for the choice of the second person, (e) the 'double birth' of Jesus, (f) the reasons for the marriage of Mary—were all theological commonplaces, but the writer deserves some credit for original ingenuity in collecting them.
The emphasis on instruction, at least as the word is narrowly understood, pervades the cycle.

But the didacticism of N-town is not mere sermonizing; it is often more artful and profound. The cycle's dramatic purpose is to show and to celebrate the truth, not tell it. V. A. Kolve states that one "intention and achievement" of medieval religious drama is to "celebrate man as loved by God" (The Play Called Corpus Christi, p. 270). A truer statement of the "intention and achievement" of N-town is that it celebrates God's mercy, the reparation of the rift between heaven and earth caused by Eve's disobedience. The N-town cycle celebrates the story of that reparation; more specifically, Mary's role in gaining reconciliation and accord.

If there is a sense in the whole of the N-town cycle of the movement from prosperity, to adversity, to new prosperity, there is also such a sense in many of the individual plays of the movement from joy, to sorrow, to new joy, or from mirth, to sorrow, to new mirth. This, of course, is in general and to a greater or lesser extent true of all of the mystery cycles. But there are some elements of the pattern which are unique to N-town or handled differently in it. Among them are those Marian plays and legends which occur in none of the other cycles; and of these the play Miss Block calls The Parliament of Heaven, The Salutation and Conception (11) is central to the idea of reconciliation as it works in N-town. In this play occurs the kiss of
reconciliation or peace between the allegorical figures Justice and Peace. This kiss is obviously important in its play, but I think it has ramifications beyond those limits. It is a significant occurrence of what might be called the central image of this cycle: the kiss. A study of the kisses that occur in N-town, and the dramatic uses of them, will reveal much about the particular ways in which this cycle presents its great theme of the reconciliation of God and man.

In Western culture the kiss has long been understood, in certain contexts, to signify reconciliation and accord. But to the medieval Christian it had added meanings, since greatly diluted if not altogether lost. According to Nicholas Perella, the exchange of kisses on the mouth among members of the congregation was from the early Christian centuries until the late Middle Ages a part of liturgical ceremony. This kiss was called the kiss of peace. Its origins are probably the Song of Songs ("Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth") and the New Testament references by Peter and Paul to the importance of the brethren greeting each other with kisses (Perella, pp. 12-14). The kiss of peace was associated with "the ideas of peace, union, and love," and it was also understood as a "mark of reconciliation and union following discord" (Perella, pp. 13, 15). An important reason for the kiss on the mouth was that it was "the expression of love and reconciliation and effected a union of spirits (breaths)" and also that the "very spirit (breath) that was emitted or exchanged in the real kiss
could figure as a symbolic vehicle for the immaterial Spirit (Breath) indwelling in the spiritualized bodies of the brethren" (Perella, p. 15).

Perella further maintains that "whenever the kiss image appears having Christian symbolic value, Christ and the Spirit are present" (p. 23).

For Philo Judaeus the kiss has significance in connection with his discussion of the divine Logos as the mediator and bond of all things, weaving together all parts of the universe, including contrarieties. It is this Logos that exercises a compelling force (love) that causes things... apparently inimical to each other and irreconcilable by nature to unite by way of a communion, an embrace and kiss of love" (Perella's summary, p. 15).

For St. Cyril of Jerusalem the Christian kiss is the "sign that our souls are mingled together, and have banished all wrongs... The kiss therefore is reconciliation, and for this reason holy..." (quoted in Perella, p. 24). And St. Augustine, discussing the place of the kiss in liturgical ceremony, states that:

After this is said: 'peace be with you'; and Christians kiss one another with a holy kiss. It is the sign of peace; as the lips make it known so let it be in our minds. That is to say, as your lips approach the lips of your brother, let not your heart withdraw from his (quoted in Perella, p. 24).

It is also interesting to note that the kiss of peace immediately preceded reception of the Host, the Corpus Christi, and that "the word Pax, which came to be used by itself to refer to the kiss of peace (osculum pacis), was also the term used in the early Latin Christian
centuries to refer to the unity of the ecclesia" (Perella, p. 25).

Thus the kiss is an immensely appropriate image or symbol for the Corpus Christi drama, combining as it does that term's double meaning as both Host and Church. Also, in the N-town cycle most of the kisses are given by the Virgin or are somehow suggestive of her; they act as dramatic images of her role as mediator, as reconciler of heaven and earth. Gabriel calls her, in the play of The Salutation and Conception (11), the "qwen of hefne · lady of erth · and empres of helle. . . " (11/335) who has "Enjonyd hefne and erth" (11/340).

Following is a list of the kisses which occur in N-town:

Abraham and Isaac (5)
5/25, Isaac kisses Abraham on the mouth
5/174, Abraham kisses Isaac on the mouth

Moses (6)
6/27, A spiritual kiss between God and Moses is possibly suggested here

The Conception of Mary (8)
8/54, Anne kisses Joachim three times
8/215, Joachim kisses Anne (probably on the mouth) at Jerusalem's golden gate

Mary in the Temple (9)
9/58-59 (and stage direction), Mary kisses her mother and father
9/258-59 (and stage direction), Mary kisses the earth

The Betrothal of Mary (10)
10/389, Anne asks Mary to kiss her
10/437-44, suggestion of a spiritual kiss

The Parliament of Heaven, The Salutation and Conception (11)
11/185-88 (and stage direction), The Four Daughters of God kiss
Joseph's Return (12)
12/185-88, Joseph asks to kiss Mary's feet; Mary tells him to kiss her on the mouth

The Visit to Elizabeth (13)
13/53, reference to a kiss of the Holy Ghost
Epilogue of Contemplacio (1.28), Contemplacio narrates that Mary kissed John the Baptist after he was born

The Trial of Joseph and Mary (14)
14/19-20, The first detractor says that he will kiss the second on the mouth

The Last Supper and the Conspiracy of the Jews and Judas (27)
27/649, Judas tells the Jews to take the man he will kiss
27/848 (and stage direction), Jesus kisses the disciples' feet

The Betrayal (28)
28/949, Angelus refers to the Parliament of Heaven
28/996 (and stage direction), the kiss of betrayal

The Procession to Calvary, The Crucifixion (32)
32/940-41, The Virgin kisses Christ's feet

The Burial (34)
34/1143-45, The Virgin kisses Christ's face

The Appearance to Mary Magdalen (37)
37/41, Mary Magdalen asks to kiss the risen Christ's feet
(He answers with the noli me tangere)

The Ascension and the Choice of Matthias (39)
39/1, Christ's "Pax vobis" may signify that some sense of a kiss is intended

The Day of Pentecost (40)
The action described in the opening stage direction (Spiritus sanctus descendat super eos) might have been understood as a kiss
Stage direction following 40/13, The disciples all kiss the earth

The Assumption of the Virgin (41)
Stage direction following 41/327, The two virgins who wash Mary's body also kiss it
41/423, Peter asks that all the disciples kiss Mary's body
The scenes during which Mary's soul leaves her body (41/275-319) and then rejoins it for the Assumption (41/462-500) in numerous ways suggest the idea of a kiss.

Of these kisses, that of central importance occurs in the Parliament of Heaven where, apparently, Truth, Justice, Mercy and Peace, the Four Daughters of God, all kiss each other (stage direction following 11/188: \textit{et hic osculabunt pariter omnes} ["and here they will all kiss in like manner"] ). Just as the fall of man (discord on earth, the rift between heaven and earth) was preceded by the fall of the bad angels (discord in heaven), so the start of the reparation of the fall (the conception of Christ; Harmony on earth within the Church, establishment of accord between heaven and earth) is to be preceded by the establishment of accord in heaven. It is this accord in heaven which the allegory of the Four Daughters of God dramatizes; their kiss is the image or symbol of that accord. The N-town cycle uses the idea that man was created to replace the fallen angels to fit him more firmly into the above scheme. The \textit{Virtutes} (members of the first or lowest triad of the orders of angels), in the prologue to the Parliament of Heaven, plead with God to:

\begin{quote}
... take man on to bi grace
le te bi mercy make hym with Aungelys dwelle
of locyfere to restore be place (11/47-48).
\end{quote}

In the play of The Fall of Man (2) Lucifer has said that he tempted Adam and Eve

\begin{quote}
ffor I am ful of gret envy
of wreth and wyckyd hate
\end{quote}
That man xulde leve above þe sky
where as sum tyme dwellyd I
and now I am cast to helle sty
streyte out at hevyn gate. (2/319-24)

Also, again in the Parliament of Heaven, Christ (Ffilius) instructs Gabriel, as part of his embassy to Mary, to "Sey here she xal restore / Of ȝow Aungellys þe grett Ruyne" (11/203-04). And just before that, God the Father tells Gabriel that "The name of þe mayd ffre / Is Mary þat xal Al Restore" (11/195-96). Mary is at the very center of this scheme, and the image of the kiss signifies the accord that comes to man, indeed to all creation, through her.

The kisses in the cycle which precede the celestial ones exchanged by the Four Daughters have significance within their plays but also prepare for the heavenly kiss and help establish the importance of the kiss image in the whole cycle.

The initial kisses of the N-town cycle occur in the Abraham and Isaac play (5). There are two of them, both exchanged by the principal characters. In the first (5/23-28), Abraham asks Isaac for a kiss, and Isaac replies that he will kiss his father on the mouth (this before God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son). In the second occurrence (5/174), Abraham kisses Isaac on the mouth, as a prelude to sacrificing him. These are the only kisses in the play, but after the angel has relieved the father and son of God's charge, Abraham says to Isaac: "now lete us tweyn sone ben of on A-corde" (5/251). The
words "of one accord" express an idea often iterated in the cycle, usually in reference to the Trinity, but sometimes related to the kiss and its unitive function. That the kisses exchanged by Abraham and Isaac are given on the mouth proves, I think, that they are to be understood as the kiss of peace, which is the very image of reconciliation and accord.

Kisses occur also in the York, Towneley, Northampton, and Brome Abraham plays. In York (10/229) there is but one kiss, which Abraham asks of Isaac as a sign of farewell before he kills his son. There is no indication that it is given on the mouth. In Towneley (4/278) Abraham kisses Isaac once, after his reprieve, as a token that Isaac will live. Here, also, there is no indication that it was given on the mouth. In the Northampton (Dublin) play, one kiss is exchanged (1. 256), just before the intended sacrifice, and again there is no sign that a kiss on the mouth is intended. In the Brome Abraham, however, Abraham and Isaac exchange at least three kisses, two certainly on the mouth, and these kisses are used with great dramatic effect. The first (11. 214-18) is given on the mouth by Abraham to Isaac, before the sacrifice, much as in the York and Northampton plays. The speech Abraham gives in these lines is interesting because it obviously associates the terms "breath," "blessing," and "kiss":

Now, Ysaac, wyth all my breth,
My blyssyng I geve be vpon thys lond,
And Godys also therto, iwys.
A, Ysaac, Ysaac, son, vp thow stond,
Thy fayere swete mowthe pat I may kys.

The second kiss (1.237), also given by Abraham, is used to emphasize Abraham's hesitation to kill his son. There is no indication that this is a kiss on the mouth. The third (11.346-47) is given by Abraham, on the mouth, after the angel brings reprieve; and, like the kiss in Towneley, it is a sign to Isaac that he will live: "An hundyrd tymys, my son fayer of hew, / For joy bi mouth now wyll I kys." One doubts that the full hundred kisses were exchanged on stage, or that Isaac (in this play) is too enthusiastic about receiving them.

The Brome play uses the kiss of peace with great dramatic effect, but I think the N-town Abraham play uses it at least as skilfully. Also, the N-town Abraham is the only cycle play in which Abraham and Isaac exchange a kiss on the mouth, and the only one in which there is more than one kiss. Furthermore, the N-town play emphasizes the kiss of peace in a way that Brome does not, for its first occurrence (5/23-28) precedes God's command, given through an angel, that Abraham sacrifice his son (5/77-88). This image of the accord and peace existing between father and son before the command must have made Abraham's responsibility seem all the more terrible to the audience. And the contrast between the easy accord of the first kiss of peace and the difficult and sad accord of the second (exchanged as Abraham prepares the sacrifice) must have rendered this second
kiss more solemn and impressive than any kiss in the other Abraham plays.

But the important points, for my purpose, are that the N-town Abraham play is the only one among the cycles which employs the kiss on the mouth, that this play uses more kisses than the comparable cycle plays, and that the unique use of the kiss of peace early in the play and before God's abrupt command, gives greater emphasis to the kiss than occurs in any other of the Abraham plays. This is the first use of an important image which recurs several times, with increasingly broad and varied significance, as the N-town cycle progresses.

It is possible that a kiss between God and Moses is suggested at the beginning of the N-town Moses play (6). Perella states that:

For Christian spirituality, Paul and Moses are understandably the great examples of souls privileged to have had a special encounter and union with God. Both are spoken of as great lovers of the Lord, and just as Bernard could speak of Paul's rapture as a kiss, so too the face-to-face meeting of Moses and God could become a kiss of union (p. 55).

God speaks to Moses in all of the English cycles, although N-town is the only cycle to devote an entire play to Moses and the giving of the Law (in Chester, God recites the Decalogue to Moses in the opening lines of the Balaam and Balak play [5]). But only in N-town is there any clear sense of what might be called a face-to-face meeting between God and Moses. This occurs when God says to Moses (after he has removed his shoes): "Come near Moses with me to mete" (6/37).
Hence, a kiss could have been clearly possible. St. Gregory the Great once described the same meeting as follows: "Quasi osculo oris sui osculabatur Moysen dominus, cum ei per fiduciam familiaris gratiae intellectum porrigeret" ("God kissed Moses by a kiss of his own mouth, as it were, when He would, through the assurance of intimate grace, extend understanding to him" [my translation]). This is obviously not a literal kiss; rather, the meeting is understood through the figure of a kiss.

The kiss next occurs in the N-town Conception of Mary (8), where four are exchanged, three of them in one instance. Of these kisses the fourth, that exchanged between Joachim and Anne before Jerusalem's golden gate, is of most obvious significance. No one who comments on this play has much of interest to say about it, except to discuss it briefly as part of the manuscript puzzle or to note that it is derived from one or another source. Yet is is, I think, artfully constructed and very moving drama. The kiss at the golden gate (by which Mary was conceived) is the central image of the play, the action towards which all else leads; thus, analysis of structure should reveal both the play's worth and the increasing significance of the kiss image within the framework of the whole cycle. Also, five scenes depicted in the Arena Chapel cycle are dramatized in this play (the source of both seems to be The Golden Legend), and reproductions of the Arena
Chapel scenes are included where they are relevant (Block, p. xlv; Stubblebine, p. 75).

The basic movements of The Conception of Mary play are: from sorrow and shame to joy, from exile to acceptance, from sad separation to joyful reunion, from barrenness to fertility. Also in the play are interesting references to the Trinity, and the idea of the accord of the Trinity is, I think, subtly suggested by some of the play's dialogue.

The N-town Conception of Mary play divides naturally into eight scenes, most of which correspond to traditional iconography. In the first scene (8/1-16), the high priest Ysakar introduces himself, explains the significance and gives the name of the feast about to be celebrated, the festum Encenniorum or feast of the dedication of the temple. In addition, Ysakar relates the important fact that it is his duty to despise the cursed (i.e., those who are barren) and to accept the sacrifice of the blessed. This is the priest whom Joachim, husband in a barren marriage, must face. The second scene (8/17-68) might be called the Parting of Joachim and Anne. Here husband and wife introduce themselves. Joachim is "a man in godys substancyall"; his name means "he hat to god is redy"; and he is called "Ryghtful" (8/21-25). Anne tells us that her name means "grace" (8/43). Joachim explains to Anne that he dreads sacrificing in the temple "bis tyme" because their marriage has been barren and thus the priest may have to "lyssspice" him (8/34-36). He fears that, because of this,
"grett slawndyr in þe tribus of vs xulde aryse" (8/37). Anne sympathizes with her mate and claims that the fault is in her (8/41-42), and she tries to hearten him by reminding him that "we wete not how gracious god wyl to us be" (8/44).

In addition, both of them hopefully agree that, should they have a child, it will be offered to the service of God. Joachim, assuming the child would naturally be male, asserts that if God will mercifully devise them a child "we xal offre it up in to þe temple to be goddyß man" (8/40). Anne, however, in a speech that shows skilful use of dramatic irony, reminds Joachim that they could have a female child (as of course they do):

A woman xulde bere crist þese profecyes haue we
if god send frute • and it be a mayd childe
with all reuerens I vow to his mageste
•sche xal be here foot mayd to mynster here most mylde.
(8/45-48)

The above-noted exchange between husband and wife is, in terms of this play, a deft humanizing touch, and it also illustrates what seems to me a general tendency of N-town to give women a larger role in the scheme of salvation than is usual.

Joachim, fully aware of the risks of shame and slander which he faces, nonetheless sets off to sacrifice at the temple; and he accords himself with God's will, difficult though it may be to accept: "Now lete be it as god wole þer is no more" (8/49). He also hopes that God's "grett mercy • vs meryer mut make" (8/52). Anne kisses him three
times (8/54), and she then speaks a line to him which effectively
describes the dramatic action of the play: "and bo ßat departe in sorwe
god make per metyng glad" (8/56). Next, Senior tribus informs
Joachim that all his kin are ready to approach the temple to sacrifice
with him (8/57-60); and Joachim makes his parting, plaintive speech
to Anne, concluding with the cry: "A Anne • Anne • Anne • god
scheeld us fro shame" (8/64). Anne, left alone, prays that God will
shield her husband from "shame and sorwe" until they meet again.
This of course does not happen, but when they do meet again at the
golden gate to exchange a single, ecstatic kiss, Joachim has passed
through sorrow and shame to achieve greater joy than he had at the
start.

The third scene (8/69-94) is that of the Expulsion of Joachim
from the Temple (see Figure 8). Here Joachim experiences the shame
he has feared so greatly, as the priest refuses his sacrifice (because
his marriage is barren) and excludes him from the temple (8/73-83).
The ceremony in the temple is Christian rather than Jewish in form,
as evidenced when the players sing the sequence "Benedicta sit beata
trinitas" (stage direction following 8/72), and by the final words of the
service:

Benedicat vos diuina maiestas et vna deitas
ככPater ככet fílius ככet spiritus sanctus (8/89-90).
(The chorus adds an "Amen.") Moreover, the sign of the cross is
then made (stage direction following 8/90), and the priest (I assume) blesses those allowed to sacrifice, thus emphasizing Joachim's exclusion, and closes by stating that the priests must remain in the temple "to servyn god in trinity" (8/94).

The fourth scene (8/95-183) is that of Joachim Moving into the Countryside (see Figure 9). Here Joachim reaches the full realization of his shame and sorrow:

Ffor hevynes I dare not go hom to my wyff
And amonge my neyborys • I dare not abyde ffor shame
A Anne • Anne • Anne • Al our joyes is turnyd to grame
Ffrom your blyssyd ffelacheppe I am now exilyd
and 3e here onys of pis fhowle fame
sorwe wyl sle 30w • to se me thus revlyd (8/97-102).

He has moved from a state of good reputation among his people, to shameful exile from the society he values most. And he makes again the plaintive cry of his earlier speech (8/64), repeating his wife's name three times. He does not now abridge his faith in God, but rather accepts what he thinks is His will: "but son god soferyth thyse • vs must sofron nede" (8/103). Then he approaches his shepherds, who ask why he is so sorrowful, and why Anne sits at home sewing. Joachim is struck with new grief at this reference to his wife, but the second shepherd assures him, much as Anne had earlier (8/56), that "Aftere grett sorwe mayster • evyr gret grace growyht" (8/117). Joachim then launches into a long lament in which he thanks God more for his misery than for his material prosperity, for God has said that
He is with those "pat in tribulacion be" (8/130). In a state of deep humility, he begs that God will "punchyth" him and spare his wife (8/133), and he then prostrates himself in prayer, asking God to remember his and Anne's vow to dedicate any child they might have to His service (8/135-37). He is left for the moment prostrate on the earth, in deep humility and prayer.

The fifth scene (8/139-46), a single short speech, shows Anne alone, perhaps supposed to be at home in her bedroom. It is apparent that she has remained "on stage" throughout the preceding scenes, although removed from the action. She begins by pleading with God for mercy ("A mercy lord mercy mercy mercy") and then asks Him "Why do ye thus to myn husband lord why why why" (8/141). She asks God to make her fruitful through His mercy, and she (like Joachim) promises to keep her vow to commit her child, should she bear one, to God's service. She complains that her "hert is ful of sorwe" and "most mekely" prays God to pity her and her husband and to relieve them of their sorrow. This scene does not occur in the apparent source of this play, The Golden Legend; nor (as far as I have discovered) does it occur in any other account of Mary's Conception. It is only in the N-town cycle that Anne appears, sorrowful, before Joachim's vision and without being visited by the angel who announces that she will conceive. This scene, then, establishes Anne's deep sorrow and spiritual fortitude (she will keep her vow); she, like Joachim, can do
Figure 8. --
The Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple.
(Stubblebine, Illustration 7)

Figure 9. --
Joachim Moving into the Countryside. (Stubblebine, Illustration 8)

Figure 10. --
Joachim's Vision.
(Stubblebine, Illustration 11)
the difficult work of maintaining faith during adversity, without supernatural aid.

The sixth scene (8/147-86) presents Joachim's Vision (see Figure 10). As Joachim lies prostrate on the ground, deep in prayer, an angel descends to him while heaven sings (stage direction after 8/146). Joachim senses a great light about him, "as al þe wert were fere" (8/148). Of course, as Giotto's fresco shows and as The Golden Legend relates, and as our play implies (the shepherds have not seen angel or light, or heard the singing [8/180-86]), this vision occurs to Joachim alone. The angel tells him (8/149-74) that God has noted his suffering and heard his prayers, and that Anne shall bear a blessed child to be named Mary. This child shall have five joys, be full of the Holy Ghost, and shall be offered to the temple in order to preserve her reputation. Also, just as she was born of a barren body, so shall she bear, "with-out nature" (8/170), Christ, who will save mankind. In token of all this, Joachim is to go to Jerusalem's golden gate, where he will meet his wife. The angel then departs to give Anne the same message "here sorwys to rebate" (8/174). Joachim now has passed instantly from his greatest sorrow to a greater joy: "my sorwe was nevyr so grett · but now my joy is more" (8/176). And now, rather than the plaintive cry of "A Anne · Anne · Anne ·", Joachim utters the unitive and joyful sentence: "A Anne blyssyd be þat body · of þe xal be bore" (8/178). Thus, the
three have become one, and later, with the meeting and the single kiss at the golden gate, Anne's three anxious kisses of leavetaking shall become one unitive kiss of love, and accord, and peace.

This threefold repetition of certain words and actions during the play's movement into sorrow changes, in at least two cases, to a single utterance or act after sorrow is transformed into joy. This merging of three into one, coupled with the already noted references to the Trinity, may be a technique for suggesting the mystery of the Trinity, the simultaneous distinction and unity of its persons. The N-town cycle often celebrates the mystery of the Trinity, intertwining it with other mysteries such as, in this play, the Immaculate Conception. Another example occurs in the Salutation and Conception play (11), where Mary conceives Christ by agency of all three persons of the Trinity, an idea not commonly met in the Middle Ages (Perella, p. 72).

In this cycle, moments of unity, accord, and peace are many times presented as reflections of the heavenly accord of the Trinity, and often the kiss is the image chosen to signify this. Émile Mâle writes that, for the medieval mystic, "time was a shadow of eternity," and this idea can be applied to those persons in the N-town cycle who represent the church: their actions in coming to earthly accord and peace by following the will of God, are shadows of the eternal accord and peace of the Trinity. Such, in this cycle, are
Abraham and Isaac, and Joachim and Anne, and, in the play of Joseph's Return (12), Joseph and Mary. In each of these instances a kiss on the mouth is exchanged, and in each case the exchange is unique to this cycle. Male also maintains that in the Middle Ages "symmetry was regarded as the expression of a mysterious inner harmony" (The Gothic Image, p. 9). In this play about Joachim and Anne there is great symmetry, great balancing of scenes and speeches and actions against one another. Thus, the play must have communicated to its audience a strong sense of what Male calls "a mysterious inner harmony," an aesthetic quality highly appropriate to the play's subject. It can also communicate this sense, I believe, to a sympathetic modern reader or auditor.

After the angel departs, Joachim says farewell to his simple herdsmen and proceeds joyfully to the golden gate accompanied by the shepherds' singing, which, they inform him, shall be "somery" that "a myle on your wey. Je xal here us syngere" (8/185-86). Joachim's new joy is almost complete.

In the seventh scene (8/187-210) the angel visits Anne to give her God's message (8/191-202; see Figure 11). God has, he tells her, heard her weeping and prayers. She is to go to the golden gate to meet Joachim, and then "in grett gladnes" return home. The angel tells Anne:
Figure 11.--The Annunciation to Anne. (Stubblebine, Illustration 9)

Figure 12.--The Meeting at the Golden Gate. (Stubblebine, Illustration 13)
Anne answers with a joyful speech, declaring that "All heffne and erthe mut blysse ȝow [God] for this" (8/204), a meaningful line when one remembers that it will be through her child that heaven and earth are reconciled. She then rushes off to the golden gate to meet Joachim, and the angel ascends again to heaven.

The eighth and final scene (8/211-26) presents the meeting and the kiss of Joachim and Anne before the golden gate (see Figure 12). Here Joachim gives his wife what he calls the kiss of cleanness: "Haue his kusse of clennesse and with ȝow it kepe" (8/215); and they turn homeward. Anne then says that "þer was nevyr joy sank in me so depe / now may we sey husband · god is to us gracious veryly" (8/217-18). These lines are heavy with a meaning eloquently expressed; for Anne has, through the kiss at the golden gate, conceived the Virgin Mary. This is certainly implied by Joachim's command that she keep the kiss with her, and by Anne's own words quoted above. Also, Perella (p. 73) explains that:

A late medieval legend proclaimed the Virgin herself to have been conceived not ex coito but by the way of a kiss—ex osculo. This legend is connected with the development of the idea (now Catholic dogma) of the Immaculate Conception, that is, the conception of the Virgin herself, privileged to be born without the stain of original sin. The salient features of the legend may be briefly stated. After twenty years of marriage, Joachim and Anne are still
childless. When his offering is refused by the high priest, Joachim retires in shame into solitude with his shepherds. However, an angel (Gabriel) announces first to him and then to Anne, who has remained in Jerusalem, that they are to have a child. Hastening homeward, Joachim meets Anne at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem, and there the two greet one another with a kiss. By that kiss the spotless Virgin was conceived.

Giotto’s fresco (Figure 12), which Perella says is the first depiction of the scene in the West (p. 73), shows the kiss at the golden gate as a kiss on the mouth. I think this must have been how it was presented in the N-town play, also; for the exchange of breaths, or souls, and the presence of God implied by the kiss on the mouth, seem necessary there. And we have seen that the kiss on the mouth appears in other plays of N-town, while the remaining English cycles do not mention it, perhaps because, as Perella says, such a kiss "had a much more intimate meaning in the Middle Ages than it does today; and this is probably the reason why, in the literature of love of that period, it as a subject is infrequently mentioned" (p. 74).

I find the N-town play of The Conception of Mary to be an eloquent, skillfully wrought, and interesting play. And it presents us with the mystery of the kiss by which Mary was conceived, a natural prelude to the celestial kisses exchanged in The Parliament of Heaven (11), which precede the conception of Christ.

In the Mary in the Temple play (9), Joachim and Anne fulfill their vow to God by dedicating Mary at the age of three to His service,
Mary is accepted into the temple when she astounds Episcopus by ascending its fifteen steps and reciting the appropriate psalm of degree (Psalms 119-133; also known as the Gradual Psalms or Song of Ascents) at each step. This play is largely built from traditional and commonplace elements, drawn from various sources. For my purposes, I wish to consider briefly the kisses (which seem to be original here) and the references to the Trinity which occur in this play, and the relations of both to Mary.

Joachim decides to bring Mary to the temple because her three years correspond to the number of persons of the Trinity: "The Age of mary oure dowtere is threes / for to thre personys and on god let us here present" (9/5-6). Once at the temple, he offers his daughter, not simply to God, but to the Trinity:

Now Ffadyr and sone and holy gost
on god and personys thre
we offre to be lorde of myghtys most
Oure dowtere bi servaunt evyr more to be,(9/41-44).

When Mary turns from her parents to the temple and priest, to begin (officially) her life of piety, she asks her parents to bless her; and both do so in the name of the Trinity (9/53, 55). Immediately following this the Virgin asks her parents to let her kiss them, asks their forgiveness for any wrongs she may have done them, and then kisses them (9/56-59 and stage direction). This kiss of leavetaking and accord (evidently original in this play) marks the point at which Mary
leaves behind her parents and childhood, and normal life. She comes from a peaceful and harmonious earthly life, to offer herself to the peace and unity of the Trinity.

The next references to the Trinity, and the second kiss, follow Mary's ascent of the fifteen steps or "grees" (9/84-143). Episcopus explains that, to do God's will, she must obey the rule of charity (9/156-57). He then explains what it means to love the Trinity and other Christians, and how one must do it:

- Love fadyr sone and holy gost
- Love god be fadyr ffor he gevyth myght
- Love god be sone ffor he gevyth wysdam þou wost
- Love god be holy gost ffor he gevyth love and lyght
- Three personys and on god þus love of ryght
- With all þin hert with all þi sowle with all þi mende
- And with all þe strenghtsis in þe be-dyght
- Pan love þin evyn crystyn as þi self with-owtyn ende.

(9/160-67).

The next to the last reference to the Trinity occurs when Episcopus blesses Mary in Its name, as he and the ministers leave her in the temple (9/199). The emphasis on the Trinity in this and other of the N-town plays is, in part, preparation for the Trinity's role as Mary's "lover" when she conceives Christ (stage direction following 11/292). Also, I believe that one purpose of N-town is to celebrate the mystery of the Trinity, as it relates to the scheme of salvation and the Virgin's role in that scheme.

The second kiss in the Mary in the Temple play occurs after priests, parents, and attendant virgins have left Mary alone in the
temple, where she is fed and taught by angels, as heaven sings. It, like the first kiss, seems to be original in this play. One angel salutes Mary with the following anagram:

In your name Maria, ffive letterys we han
M. Mayde most mercyfull and mekest in mende
A. Auerte of þe Anguysch þat Adam began
R. Regina of regyon Reyneng with-owtyn ende
I. Innocent be Influens of Jesse s kende
A. Aduocat most Autentyk þour Antecer Anna
hefne and helle here kneys down bende
Whan þis holy name of þow is seyd Maria (9/244-51).

Mary cannot understand why she should be praised so, and the angel informs her that she will have a second "salutacion" that shall, the angels say among themselves, exceed this one (9/254-55) and that "The deyte þat dede xal determyn and dyscus" (9/256; I think it proper to read this line as an allusion to the Parliament of Heaven).

The Virgin now senses the great destiny awaiting her, and in her next speech combines the ideas of kiss and Trinity:

I Crye þe mercy lorde and þin erthe Cus
recomendynge me to þat godhyd þat is tryne in trone.
(9/258-59).

She then kisses the earth (stage direction after 9/259), an obvious image of the reconciliation of heaven and earth, through her, that is to come. It is interesting to note that in the play of The Day of Pentecost, all of the disciples also kiss the earth (stage direction after 40/13). Mary then closes the play with a speech showing her concern for mercy and thus suggesting her future role as mediatrix:
Ffayn and I myth I wolde do pe dedys of mercy
Pore ffolk ffaryn god knowyth how
On hem evyr I haue gret pety. (9/273-75)

In the play of The Betrothal of Mary (10) one kiss definitely occurs and another, more mysterious one is, I think, suggested. Also through use of the legend of Joseph's flowering rod, the mystery of the Trinity is kept before the audience. This play, like the previous two, is in general composed of traditional elements from the story of the life of the Virgin. Following is a brief summary.

Abysakar episcopus announces that by law all damsels of fourteen years or more must be married. Joachim and Anne take Mary to the temple (she is now fourteen), where she seems to refuse obedience to the law as she states the basic dramatic conflict set up and resolved by the play: "A-gens pe lawe wyl I nevyr be / but mannys ffelachep xal nevyr folwe me" (10/36-37). The bishop asks God's aid, calls a council of the old and the wise, and prays for divine guidance. An angel tells him to call in David's kinsmen, each of them to carry with him a white rod. The man whose rod flowers when offered at the altar should wed the Virgin. The generations of David come, the old, reluctant, and celibate Joseph among them:

I haue be maydon evyr and evyr more wele ben
I chaungyd not set of all my long lyff
and now to be maryed sum man wold wen
it is a straunge thynge. An old man to take a songe wyff.
(10/179-82).
All except Joseph offer their rods; none blossoms. Joseph hides at the back of the group but is finally discovered and ordered to present his rod, which he at first claims to have lost. He offers his white rod; it flowers (10/256). Episcopus congratulates the aged Joseph on his good fortune in gaining a young maiden to wed; Joseph is not so sure: "An old man may nevyr thryff / With a yonge wyff so god me saue" (10/278-79). But he and Mary agree "bat in bedde we xul nevyr mete" (10/295), and they are married. Mary kisses her mother goodbye (10/389), and then, while Joseph is finding a house for them, she sits alone studying her Psalter. Joseph returns to take her to their new home, and then he departs to labor in a far country for nine months, leaving Mary alone with the three maidsens Episcopus has assigned to safeguard her reputation. The play ends with Mary praying that God will preserve her chastity.

The appearance of the dove on the flowering rod and the reference by Episcopus to it as "De holy gost" (10/300), and the singing, as in play 8, of the "Benedicta sit beata trinitas" (stage direction at 10/300-01) and then the "Alma chorus domini" (10/334), another hymn in honor of the Trinity, give clear emphasis to the Trinity and Its continuing involvement in the story of Mary's life. I assume that a dove appears when Episcopus says we see the Holy Ghost sitting on a bough because this is a traditional part of the legend, as indicated by Giotto's fresco depicting this scene (see Figure 13). The first kiss,
which Anne asks of her daughter, is simply a kiss of leavetaking which keeps the image of the kiss before the audience (10/389).

The second kiss, or what I claim should be in some sense understood as a kiss, occurs after Joseph has gone to find a house and left Mary alone, studying her Psalter (10/421-56). Mary states that, because she is now both maid and wife, "of hefne and erthe and all pat beryth lyff / I am most bound to ȝow lord i-wys" (10/426-27). The words "hefne and erthe" suggest again her role in the reconciliation of the two, and the rest of the stanza states her position, the proper one, in regard to creation and God. She then asks that God dispose her to prayer so that she can say the holy Psalms of David, the Psalter, "bat I may preyse the my god þer with" (10/432).
Throughout the rest of this speech, Mary praises the efficacy of saying David's Psalms as a way to "see" God and gain mercy. She says that the "song of psalmus is goddys dete" (10/437), God's song, and that man may not fail of God's mercy who "hath be preysenge of god evyr in his mowtke" (10/444). Also, she says that the book of David's Psalms is "Swetter to say than Any ony" (10/446), sweeter to say than "any honey." These lines contain what I think is the suggestion of a spiritual kiss (it may be that such a kiss could not be "shown"). To have the praises of God ever in one's mouth is, in a mystical sense, to engage in a spiritual kiss, a union, with Him. That the Psalms are sweeter to say than honey suggests the Song of Songs ("Thy lips drip as the honeycomb, my spouse: / Honey and milk are under thy tongue" [4:11]), the ultimate source of nuptial and sexual symbolic language to describe unity with God. This is the Betrothal play, and Mary has just been wed. But this wedding with Joseph enables her, paradoxically, to remain chaste, to remain ready to be God's spouse. Joseph and Mary do not exchange a kiss of betrothal at their ceremony. But here, while the Virgin has the praises of God in her mouth, and while she meditates upon God's song, she is engaging in a kind of mystical kiss of betrothal with God. Mary is here the Church as bride-seeking unity with the bridegroom; she is also the individual soul delighting in the kiss of her proper Lover.
These are the ways medieval exegetes interpreted the Song of Songs: the lover is Church or individual soul or both (Perella, pp. 38-39). Also, it is well to note here, I think, what St. Augustine says in The City of God concerning David and the Psalms:

In the progress of the city of God through the ages, therefore, David first reigned in the earthly Jerusalem as a shadow of that which was to come. Now David was a man skilled in songs, who dearly loved musical harmony, not with a vulgar delight, but with a believing disposition, and by it served his God, who is the true God, by the mystical representation of a great thing. For the rational and well-ordered concord of diverse sounds in harmonious variety suggests the compact unity of the well-ordered city. 85

The "well-ordered city" is certainly the Church.

As she completes her praises of the Psalms, Mary again (cf. 9/273-75) states her desire that God should be merciful (10/450-52), again suggesting her future role as special pleader for sinful mankind before the judging God. The Virgin ends this speech with her only reference to a specific Psalm:

I haue seyd sum of my sawtere and here I am at pis holy psalme in depe
Benedixisti domine terram tuam
In this holy labore · lord me spede (10/453-56).

The Psalm she begins to cite is, as Timothy Fry points out ("Unity," p. 547), the eighty-fourth (eighty-fifth in The King James Version), on which the allegory of the Four Daughters of God, dramatized in the play immediately following this one, is based. Mary's reference to this Psalm must also be considered a reference to the allegory and
to the great kiss of reconciliation in which it culminates, the kiss in eternity of which the reconciliation of heaven and earth in time, the Incarnation, is a shadow. In this context, the "holy labore" she speaks of is the great destiny that awaits her, the grand beginning of which is dramatized in the next play, The Parliament of Heaven, The Salutation and Conception.

I wish first to consider the title of play 11. According to Block it is "The Parliament of Heaven, The Salutation and Conception"—unwieldy and somewhat misleading at best. Contemplacio encouraged such a cumbersome title at the end of his Prologue to the Betrothal play (10), where he asks patience of his audience and tells them that:

The parlament of hefne sone xal ʒe se and how goddys sone com man xal he  
And how þe salutacion Aftere xal be. . . . (Prologue/14-16)

But the Incarnation is the central event, the great action which all of play 11 is designed to emphasize. Further, it is an event dramatized by no other English cycle. Thus I will, in agreement with S. B. Hemingway, refer to play 11 by the brief and accurate title, The Incarnation.

Those critics who have made more than a cursory remark about the N-town Incarnation play have concentrated almost entirely on the scene depicting the Parliament of Heaven or Debate of the Four Daughters of God, a unique occurrence of this scene in the Corpus Christi cycles. Even in discussing this, they have been concerned
with it as it relates to manuscript problems or as an example of one of
the most popular allegories of the Middle Ages—just concerns, but
not necessarily, in a study of the N-town cycle, the most important
ones. A. W. Pollard even reprints just the Parliament scene, as one
of his "excerpts," and omits the rest of the play. My particular
interest here is the grand kiss of reconciliation and peace exchanged
by the Four Daughters of God (stage direction after 11/188). This
kiss could be considered the structural axis of the Incarnation play.
For one thing, it occurs after line 188, near the quantitative center of
this 340 line play. More importantly, it marks the end of the play's
upward curve (from earth to heaven; from Contemplacio to the angels
to the Four Daughters and the Trinity) and the beginning of its down­
ward curve (from heaven to earth; from the Trinity to Gabriel to
Mary, and then from the Trinity to Mary). Moreover, the kiss is the
image of the accord in heaven, illustrated by the reconciliation of the
Daughters, which must and does precede the first moment of the
reconciliation of heaven and earth, the Incarnation. Because of the
structural significance of the kiss of the Four Daughters, and because
this interesting and important play has not received the critical
attention it merits, I think a brief structural analysis of the play is in
order.

The Incarnation play divides into three main parts: 1) the
Prologue, clearly part of the action of the play, where we ascend from
earth to heaven (11/1-48); 2) the events in heaven, including the Parliament, the Council of the Trinity, and the dispatching of Gabriel (11/49-216); 3) the events on earth, including the Salutation, Incarnation, and Gabriel's farewell to Mary (11/217-340).

The play opens with a Prologue (11/1-48) spoken by Contemplacio and the Virtutes, one of the three orders of angels making up the first hierarchy (11/37-38). There has been some speculation about the purpose and nature of this Prologue, but its major purposes, to state the desire of men and angels for man's restoration and to raise the action by degrees to the plane of heaven, seem clear. In the first stanza (11/1-8) Contemplacio speaks more or less as a medieval priest. He admits man's worthiness to lie endlessly in hell, but prays to God to remember that then His mercy would perish and reminds Him of the "prayer seyd by Ysaie."

In stanzas two and three (11/9-24) Contemplacio speaks, in effect, as Isaiah, paraphrasing his "prayour" (Isaiah 64:1) by asking: "wolde god·pou woldyst breke þin hefne myghtye / and com down here in to erth" (11/9-10). In stanza four, Contemplacio paraphrases Jeremiah (Jeremiah 9:1; Lamentations 2:13), again begging mercy of God and adding that Adam's contrition was "As gret as þe·se" (11/29). Contemplacio's plea, and that of mankind and the prophets, ends with the cry: "Gracyous lord · Gracyous lord · Gracyous lord come downe" (11/32).
Stanzas five and six are spoken by the Virtutes, whose office it is to present the prayers of Patriarchs and prophets to God (11/35-36), and this they do: "For man to pin hy mageste / Mercy • mercy • mercy we crye" (11/39-40). They also beg that God will free mankind from the devil's malice, and through His mercy bring man to dwell with the angels "of locyfere to restore pe place" (11/48). The Prologue ascends from medieval priest to prophets to angels, all pleading that God will show mercy to man. We are thus prepared for God's entrance, which occurs at this point.

God the Father ("Pater"), in a short speech (11/49-56), indicates clearly, much as He does in the longer opening speech of the Towneley Annunciation play, that the "tyme is come of reconcilia-cion" (11/52). He has heard the prophets, His contrite creatures, and His angels. Reconciliation is at hand; the time of discord is at an end. At this point Veritas, or Truth, speaks up against saving man, and the debate of the Four Daughters of God begins, Truth and Justice arguing against, Mercy and Peace for, his salvation.

The literary history of the allegory of the Four Daughters of God has been explored in detail in two studies by Hope Traver. The earlier of these (which is most relevant to N-town), moreover, has been accurately summarized by Samuel C. Chew in his work 'The Virtues Reconciled: An Iconographic Study' (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Pr., 1947), pp. 35-47, and by S. B. Hemingway in his
English Nativity Plays, pp. 239-42. Thus, only the briefest review of this history is necessary here.

The allegory probably originated in the eleventh century, and it derives from figurative readings of Psalm 85:10-11: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven." Following centuries produced many versions of the Four Daughters allegory, but the N-town rendition is in the line of development represented by the ensuing three: an influential eleventh century sermon on the Annunciation by St. Bernard of Clairvaux; the first two chapters of the thirteenth century (c. 1274) Meditationes Vitae Christi, which generally follow St. Bernard's sermon; Nicholas Love's early fifteenth century (c. 1410) Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ, an abridgement-translation of the Meditationes.

The allegory appears only in N-town among the English cycles, but it is also dramatized at length in the moral play The Castle of Perseverance. This fact, and the supposition that the Castle was written and produced in the area of Lincoln, has been used to support the argument that N-town is the lost Lincoln cycle, although the most recent editor of the Castle attributes the play to Norfolk. The N-town Parliament is not really very similar, except in general outline, to the versions in St. Bernard's sermon, the Meditationes, and
Love's Mirror. The version of the allegory in the Castle of Perseverance is closer to that of N-town than these others, but the similarity remains general here, also. On the whole the differences between the two extended English dramatic versions seem to me more instructive than their similarities.

Modern commentators usually assume that the Parliament of Heaven occurs in the mind of God. However that may be, the unknown author of the Meditationes tells us simply that he recounts the allegory so that "we can imagine what may have happened in heaven." Wherever the allegory appears, this is its general purpose. But in N-town it is also appropriate for other reasons. An allegory which so heavily emphasizes mercy and reconciliation is fitting in a cycle which so heavily emphasizes the life of the Virgin, the figure of mercy and reconciliation on earth. Hope Traver states that Mariolatry is a natural development from three causes: (1) a tendency to conceive and worship the ideal woman; (2) the desire for symmetry, for a new Eve to counterbalance Christ as the new Adam; (3) the longing for an intercessor whose interest would be for mercy without the necessity for thought of justice" ("The Four Daughters of God: A Mirror of Changing Doctrine," p. 61).

Throughout N-town, where Mary appears she is the ideal woman of the Christian Middle Ages: humble, devout, faithful, chaste, charitable, merciful, and above all perfect in obedience to God's will. Also, she is consistently seen as the new Eve; the idea is suggested as early as the Fall of Man play (2/345-46, 373-77). As I have
indicated, the Marian dramas of N-town which precede the Incarnation play have begun to emphasize her mercy, an emphasis which flowers in the Incarnation play. More particular themes resonate here also, such as those of reconciliation, unity, and accord.

In the N-town scene of the Parliament of Heaven, Truth, Justice, and Mercy dispute about whether or not man should be saved, while Peace, appropriately, acts as peacemaker between them, convincing them to abide by God's solution of their argument. The lengths of the Virtues' speeches are balanced: Truth, Justice, and Peace each speak twenty-two lines, while Mercy, who prevails, speaks thirty lines.

After God the Father states that the time of reconciliation is at hand (11/49-56), Truth speaks up against the salvation of man (11/57-72). She addresses God, arguing that He should not save Adam because, when Adam committed the first sin, God said he would "deye and go to hell." Salvation is impossible because "twey contraries must not to-gedyr dwelle." The truth, she tells Father, shall last forever; thus Adam, His creature, must lie in hell throughout eternity. God's second daughter, Mercy, then addresses Him and attempts to contradict Truth's argument (11/73-88). The "Ffadyr of mercy," says Mercy, should save man because he grieves fully for his sin and because "All hefne and erthe crye ffor mercy"; and mercy should allow of no exception. Truth, she admits, has
existed endlessly, but the Father has endlessly said that He kept mercy for man. God should, then, bid "bat helle bownde bat hatyth" Him to cease keeping man, whom God loves.

At this point Justice speaks to Mercy, arguing against her and agreeing with Truth (11/89-104). Man offended Him who is endless, says Justice; thus, man must suffer endlessly. Also, Justice asserts, man forsook his Creator and chose the devil as his master: "xulde he be savyd • nay nay nay." Man had the abominable presumption to wish to be as wise as God, and God's righteousness is without limits. Thus, man should suffer endlessly; he has no reasonable argument. Justice then asks a leading question which, unbeknownst to her, forecasts the actual solution of the debate: "whoo myght thanne thens hym borwe." Mercy now speaks again, asserting that her sister Justice is too vengeful (11/105-12). Endless God, she says, who is merciful above all His works, can restore endless sin. Although man forsook God by sin, he never forsook Him by faith; although man's presumption was great, Justice must remember also his frailty. Learn, if you will, God's lore: that His mercy is endless.

Peace then speaks for the first time (11/113-128). She sympathizes with Mercy's position, but she transcends the debate to act as mediator among the three disputants. It would become you, sisters, she says, to cease your debate, for there should be no dissension among Virtues. The Peace of God surpasses all knowledge
or wit. Truth and Justice speak wisely, but Mercy's words please me more; for if God and man remain divided, then I Peace may not endure. Therefore, to reconcile and unite heaven and earth, you should accord that God in His high wisdom shall judge this case. This seems most fitting to me; it would be a pity if man's soul were to perish, or we to be divided.

Truth, Justice, and Mercy all consent to Peace's suggestion (11/129-34), and Peace then announces the approach of God: "Here is god now · here is vnyte / hefne and erth is plesyd with pesos"

(11/135-36). Of particular interest here is the note of reconciliation. God (here, the Son) is "vnyte," and heaven and earth together are pleased with Peace. Perella (p. 13) refers to the connection, in early and medieval Christianity, between "the kiss and the ideas of peace, union, and love." He also states (p. 25) that the "word Pax, which came to be used by itself to refer to the kiss of peace (osculum pacis), was also the term used in the early Latin Christian centuries to refer to the unity of the ecclesia." The N-town Incarnation play is suffused with "the ideas of peace, union, and love," ideas which are gathered up in the kiss of the virtues, the image of them all. Peace's lines quoted above look directly forward to that kiss.

The Son then has a speech of two stanzas (11/137-52). He tells the Virtues that, had Adam not died, Truth and Justice would have perished, and that a second death is necessary to preserve Mercy and
Peace: "So tweyn dethis must be ȝow fowre to cherisch." (These lines imply that the Son is the second Adam and thus help establish the need for Mary, the second Eve, to complete the symmetry.) The Son continues: he who shall die must have no iniquity so that "helle may holde hym be no lawe." His death, for man's death, shall be redemption. The Son then orders the Virtues to seek throughout "All hefne and erth" to find a creature of great enough virtue to give himself to the required second death. Truth, Justice, and Mercy then report (11/153-64) that in all of heaven and earth they can find no one of sufficient virtue, and Peace declares (11/165-68) that he who gave this counsel must also give comfort in this case. So the Son calls a counsel of the Trinity to decide which of the three Persons "xal man restore" (11/169-72). In this counsel (11/173-84) Pater determines that the Son, who in wisdom made man and allowed the temptation, should decide the issue. The Son asserts that since humankind began in His wisdom, He should become both God and man in order to save man. The Holy Ghost then concludes the counsel of the Trinity, emphasizing the unity and accord of the Trinity: "I love to ȝour lover xal ȝow lede / þis is þe Assent of oure vnyte."

The Holy Ghost's use of the language of human love is picked up immediately by Mercy, in the lines she speaks preceding the Four Daughters' kiss of reconciliation: "Now is þe loveday mad of us fowre fynialy / now may we leve in pes • as we were wonte"
(11/185-86). The slightly erotic language employed by Mercy and the Holy Ghost, coupled with the Spirit's emphasis on unity and accord and Mercy's reference to peace, establishes the proper mood for the kiss. Perella notes that "the most adequate language [Western] mystics have fashioned...to describe their experience of union reverts to the imagery of bold human love" (p. 34), and the word "peace," as previously noted, can by itself suggest a kiss. Mercy now quotes Psalm 85:10: "Misericordia et veritas obviauerunt sibi / Justicia et pax osculate sunt" (11/187-88); and the Four Daughters all kiss each other (stage direction after 11/188: et hic osculabunt pariter omnes) and are thus reconciled (all four of the Virtues exchange kisses in Castle of Perseverance, 1.3519, also). The image of the kiss sums up the unity and accord which exists in heaven; now it remains for these qualities to be shadowed on earth, thus effecting the reconciliation of heaven and earth.

Following the kiss of the Virtues, the Trinity dispatch Gabriel to inform Mary of her role in the scheme of salvation (11/189-212). Gabriel is to tell Mary that she is without woe and full of grace, and that "she xal restore / of gow Aungellys be grett Ruyne." He is also to tell her that the Holy Ghost will "werke al this," that, as a sign, her "bareyn cosyn Elyzabeth is / Qwyk with childe..." and that nothing is impossible to God. The Trinity anticipate a certain hesitance from her. Gabriel then proceeds to earth, greets Mary,
and states that "here pis name Eva is turnyd Ave / pat is to say with-owte sorwe ar ʒe now" (11/219-20). And thus, Mary is seen as the second Eve, to counterbalance Christ as second Adam.

In the dialogue which follows (11/221-84), Gabriel communicates to Mary, mostly in answers to her questions, the points which the Trinity have asked him to deliver to her (all of these points, except the idea that she shall restore the ruin of the angels, implied in 11/269-76, are based on Luke 1:28-38). Gabriel also asks Mary to assent to the Incarnation--an interesting point since she is the first of the chosen ones, in this cycle, who has been asked to assent to God's will rather than abruptly commanded to do so or else made to suffer before that will is made clear. In none of the other English cycles, nor in Luke, does Gabriel ask Mary to agree to the Incarnation. In N-town, Gabriel tells her that all the spirits in heaven, the good and true men on earth, and the chosen souls in hell, are waiting for her to give her "Assent to the incarnacion" (11/280).

Mary's hesitation to give her assent derives only from her meekness and from her consternation at being visited by an angel in the form of a man, not from any real doubt as to what she should do; and Gabriel's insistently persuasive argument, so masterfully emphasized by his "lytle restynge" and silence at one point (stage direction following 11/260), allows her to agree to become mother of God and yet remain meek. The whole psychology of the exchange
between Gabriel and Mary in N-town partakes of the nature of an exchange between an earthly lover and his beloved. One might rather say that this psychology, in a general way, is like that earthly kind found in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, where Pandarus acts as a go-between, speaking to Criseyde for Troilus. This, I think is an extension of the fact that, to a medieval Christian, the language of bold human love could so easily, and without thought of blasphemy, be used to describe the mystical union, the most intimate of relations with the Deity. At any rate, Mary can now answer:

With All mekenes I clyne to bis A-corde
Bowynge down my face with All benyngntyte
Se here be hand-mayden of oure lorde
Aftyr pi worde - be it don to me. (11/285-88)

Gabriel then thanks the Virgin for her answer and calls her "Je lanterne off lyght" (11/292), a line which seems to be a cue for the staging of the Incarnation, which follows immediately, to begin.

The stage direction after 11/292 reads thus:

here be holy gost discendit with iij bemys to our lady - the sone of pe godhed nest with iij bemys - to pe holy gost - the fadyr godly with iij bemys to pe sone - And so entre All thre to here bosom - and Mary seyth. . . .

Gabriel's references to Mary as a "lanterne off lyght" may also be a clue, although not a fully illuminating one, as to how this cryptic stage direction was followed out on stage. However this may be, the stage direction does indicate clearly that in this cycle Mary conceives by agency of the Trinity, not by that of one Person.
After the Incarnation, there is another dialogue between Mary and Gabriel, mostly devoted to their farewells (11/293-340). Mary notes that Christ is formed in her "havyng Al schappe of chyldly carnalyte / Evyn Al at onys..." (295-96); and she indicates that Eve's curse has been reversed when she notes that she has become God's mother:

With-owte peyne in Fflesche and bon
Thus conceyved nevyr woman non
pat evyr was beynge in pis lyff. (11/300-302)

The Virgin then comments on the joy and bliss she feels, thanks Gabriel, notes that she wishes to see Elizabeth, and blesses the Trinity (11/305-12); and she and Gabriel exchange farewells (11/313-28).

Gabriel concludes the Incarnation play with a speech (11/329-40) which draws together its important themes and emphasizes Mary's significance in God's plan and her consequent nobility or royalty, a matter already established in the Prophets play. He notes her relation to the Trinity and her meekness; and he salutes her as the unifier of previously discordant creation: "qwen of hefne - lady of erth - and empres of helle be 3e." He also re-emphasizes her role as bearer of mercy to mankind, a role now more fully realized after the predominance of Mercy in the Four Daughters' debate:

socour to All synful - pat wole to Jow sew
Thour Jowr body beryth pe babe - our e blysse xal renew
to Jow modyr of mercy - most mekely I recomende.

(11/336-38)
Gabriel then ends by pointing to the major theme of this play, that of which the kiss of the Daughters is an image, the reconciliation of heaven and earth: "and as I began I ende with An Ave new / Enjonyd hefne and erth with pat I Ascende."

A kiss, and a very interesting one, occurs also in the next play, that of Joseph's Return (12). The scene of Joseph's Return is enacted in all of the English cycles (Chester, The Nativity [6]; York, Joseph's Trouble About Mary [13]; Towneley, Annunciation [10]), and as well in the Coventry Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors. But, as Eleanor Prosser points out, the N-town Joseph is "the only one to kneel, the only one to offer to kiss Mary's feet, the only one to be reconciled with a kiss" (Drama and Religion, p. 101). The dramatic force and significance of this kiss is, I think, more profound than other readers have noticed. It is, for one thing, the earthly kiss of reconciliation which follows the heavenly kiss of reconciliation exchanged by the Four Daughters of God; it is a kiss which must be viewed in the context of previous kisses in this cycle, kisses which establish accord, reconcile debates, express human affection, act as the image of holy, unifying love, and signify the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit among those who kiss. In the play of Joseph's Return all of these ideas cluster about Mary, as she compels Joseph to rise and exchange with her a kiss on the mouth, a
kiss of peace (12/186-88). It is a bold and effective dramatic image.

Prosser's emphasis on the N-town Joseph play and her conclusion that it is the "most effective of the Joseph plays" is, I think, by and large appropriate (Drama and Religion, p. 102; she ignores the fact that there are really only two Joseph plays, those in the York and N-town cycles. In the other cycles, and in the Coventry pageant, Joseph's Return is a scene within a larger play). She also shows clearly that this Joseph play is not "unnecessarily coarse and vulgar" (p. 96), that Joseph's meanness in the first one-half of the play increases the dramatic effectiveness of his conversion from the Old Law to the New: "the more sinful Joseph is made, the greater the miracle" (p. 102). Martin Stevens, speaking of the Towneley Annunciation play, points out that:

The Virgin Birth has ever been the central mystery of the Catholic religion. To the practical and mundane spectator of the medieval drama it became compellingly real as he perceived it through the sensations of his own kind, the fallible and very mortal Joseph. With the help of some divine intervention on the open stage, Joseph thus becomes the first convert of Christ and the first true mortal believer. The erstwhile doubt of Joseph, under these dramatic circumstances, becomes something much more than a jest on the May and January theme. Also, Erich Auerbach asserts that in the medieval Biblical drama "all the heights and depths of stylistic expression find their morally or aesthetically established right to exist; and hence there is no basis for
a separation of the sublime from the low and everyday, for they are indissolubly connected in Christ's very life and suffering" (Mimesis, p. 158). Thus, contentions such as that of Sister M. P. Forrest that the N-town play of Joseph's Return does "violence to the reverence of the other St. Anne's Day Plays" are, I think, untenable.

The kiss in the N-town Return of Joseph play is, in part, a dramatic image of the reconciliation of low and high styles, of the humble and the sublime. Mary, we know from the Incarnation play, is Queen of heaven, earth, and hell; Joseph is only himself, a man with obviously human fears and passions. Mary is ever ready to do God's will; Joseph, here as in the Betrothal play, must first be persuaded to do what he thinks unnatural (to wed at all; to believe his wife is pregnant without human agency). The kiss is also, on the human level, the sign of the reconciliation of husband and wife after the most trying time possible in their marriage. The play derives its ultimate tenderness from this. In addition, the kiss on the mouth exchanged by Joseph and Mary is the salutation and acceptance by the true faith of its "first true mortal believer." It is, like the kiss on the mouth exchanged by Abraham and Isaac, a sign of reconciliation. It is, like the kiss on the mouth exchanged by Joachim and Anne before the golden gate, a kiss between parents-to-be of a holy child, who are re-united after painful separation to do God's will in relation to that child. Moreover, it is the earthly shadow of the kisses of
reconciliation exchanged in eternity by the Four Daughters of God.

And it is more yet.

Eleanor Prosser says the kiss between Joseph and Mary shows that "the playwright is learning the value of dramatic signs" (p. 101). I believe he had already learned this value. The kiss, as shown, relates to earlier kisses in the cycle; furthermore, it is not the first given on the mouth (although it is the last, except for the parody of the kiss of peace enacted between the detractors in play 14 [11. 19-20], The Trial of Joseph and Mary). Does it, then, suggest or relate to later kisses in this cycle? And, if so, for what purpose?

I would like to note first the immediate circumstances of this kiss. Joseph, having just been told by the angel that Mary is indeed bearing the Son of God, is humble and contrite, and also joyful:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Alas for joy I qwedyr and qwake} \\
\text{Alas what hap now was this} \\
\text{A mercy mercy my jentyl make} \\
\text{mercy I haue seyd al Amys} \\
\text{All pat I haue seyd here I for-sake} \\
\text{Your swete fete now let me kys. (12/180-86)}
\end{align*}
\]

On stage, Joseph has kneeled before Mary, perhaps touched her feet with his hands, and asked to (or announced that he will) kiss her feet. But she does not desire such a humble posture or gesture, and she answers:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nay lette be my fete not po se take} \\
\text{my mowthe se may kys i-wys} \\
\text{and welcom on to me. (12/186-88)}
\end{align*}
\]
It is not for him to kiss her feet; the events transpiring are for his sake, as representative of men who are to be saved. Throughout the play Joseph has stood wavering at the very moment when the Old Law will be superseded by the New Law. Now that moment has passed. Joseph (and, I think, the audience) is welcomed by the Mother of Mercy. Mary raises him and they exchange a kiss on the mouth. Between them is Christ; at their lips, as they mingle breaths, is the Holy Spirit.

This scene of Joseph's humble kneeling, his desire to kiss Mary's feet, her refusal and their subsequent kiss on the lips, suggests other, later scenes in the N-town cycle. In the next play, for instance, that of the Visit to Elizabeth, Mary blesses Elizabeth's house, as she and Joseph approach it, in the name of the Trinity: "now ā blyssyd trynitet • be in þis hous" (13/48). Elizabeth then makes the following speech to Mary:

A-non as I herd of ȝow þis holy gretynge mekest mayden and þe modyr of god mary be ȝour breth þe holy gost vs was inspyrynge þat þe childe in my body enjoyd gretly And turnyd down on his knes • to oure god reverently whom ȝe bere in ȝour body þis veryly I ken ffulfyllyd with þe holy gost þus: lowde I cry blyssyd be þou A-monge All women.(13/51-58).

The idea that John the Baptist, while in Elizabeth's womb, kneeled to Christ, also yet unborn, when the two great mothers met, is a commonplace of Christian iconography, although the idea occurs only
in N-town among the English cycles. John the Baptist, last of the prophets, here bows to the establisher of the New Law, and thus the image signifies the Old Law giving way to the New. Elizabeth's speech combines the idea of a kiss ("be your brethren," etc.) with the image of John the Baptist, a man-to-be, kneeling before Christ (and Mary).

In addition, in the play of the Last Supper, Mary Magdalen, like Joseph a sinner who begs mercy and is converted, kneels before Christ to anoint His "holy fote" (27/485). Prosser observes that Magdalen's anointing of Christ's feet during the Last Supper is unprecedented (p. 119). She also notes, in her discussion of the kiss exchanged by Joseph and Mary in the play of Joseph's Return, that "the audience could not miss the symbolic action associated with the repentant Magdalene" (p. 99). It is also possible, although the text gives no indication of it, that Magdalen here kisses Christ's feet; in Luke's account of this event, Christ says that the repentant woman "since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet" (Luke 7:45). Later in this same play, Christ kneels, then washes and kisses His disciples' feet (stage direction after 27/848: "here jhesus wasshyth his dyscipulys feet by and by and whypyth hem And kyssyth hem mekely and sythym settyth hym down pus seyng"). I should note that none of the gospel accounts says that Christ kisses His disciples' feet during the footwashing at the Last Supper, and that none of the other English cycles specifies such an action. The two images of kneeling
humbly to the feet of another, at least one of them including a kiss (kisses), are brought together in the play of the Last Supper in what seems to be a highly original way. In the one, a repentant sinner kneels to Christ's feet; in the other, Christ kneels and kisses the feet of His mortal disciples.

Another instance of this image occurs in the Crucifixion play, where the Virgin Mary kisses Christ's feet after His death but before He has been taken down from the cross (32/939-46). Thus Christ's Mother, appropriately, does not kneel to the ground to kiss His feet. This kiss occurs in no other cycle. In the N-town Burial play, the Virgin holds the body of the dead Christ in her lap and kisses Him once again, this time on the face (34/1140-51; stage direction following 34/1139). This is the sole enactment of the Pietà among the English cycles. This kiss, also, occurs in no other cycle. The image recurs in The Appearance to Mary Magdalen, with the enacting of the noli me tangere scene (37/38-43). Here, Mary Magdalen kneels and begs to kiss the risen Christ's "holy feet," but He denies her wish because He has not yet ascended to His Father (her desire to kiss His feet is stated also in the Towneley Resurrection play, 26/588-89).

Again, in the play of The Day of Pentecost (40), the opening stage direction tells us that the disciples kneel and that the Holy Spirit descends upon them (I would imagine as a dove hovering above them). And then, all of the disciples, still kneeling, kiss the earth (stage direction following 40/13: "Et omnes osculant terram").
In the Return of Joseph play, the regal Virgin, Mother of God, bids Joseph, the humble and natural man, to rise from before her feet and kiss her mouth. In the play of the Last Supper, Christ, God in the form of man, kneels before His very human disciples to wash and to kiss their feet. Men are raised up, God humbles Himself. The image of kneeling and kissing, in its various aspects, occurs in many parts of the N-town cycle; and it shows, celebrates, God's great act of mercy: first He raised man to the firm hope of spiritual and eternal regeneration, then He humbled Himself before man to ensure this firm hope. There is, I think, nothing coincidental or merely odd about the raising up of Joseph and the consequent kiss on the mouth exchanged by Joseph and Mary in the Return of Joseph play. The only other fully mortal creature who dares to stand to kiss the face of either Mary or Christ is Judas, when he gives the Kiss of Betrayal. **In the N-town Betrayal play, Judas strides arrogantly up to Christ, faces Him, and says:**

Welcome jhesu my mayster dere  
I haue þe sowth in many A place  
I am ful glad I fynd þe here  
For I wyst neyvr wher þou wace. (28/993-96)

The stage direction immediately following tells us that "here judas kyssyth jhesus and A-noon Alle þe jewys come A-bowth hym and ley handys on hym. . . ." When we set the N-town kiss of betrayal within the context of the other kisses in the cycle, kisses which express holy
or human love or both, the great sense of horror and revulsion it must have aroused in the audience becomes strikingly clear. The following statement by Perella, including his translation of a passage of St. Ambrose, indicates the significance of this perverted kiss to medieval Christians:

That Judas betrayed his master with a kiss was accounted by Christians a betrayal of the kiss itself as well as of the Lord. Precisely because the kiss was so sacred and sacramental a sign of the love, peace, and unity that should reign among men, especially among the brethren, the kiss of Judas has struck Christians as an act of unspeakable perversion. . . . Ambrose supplies us with an early and forceful text. It is a sign of the profound impression the act had upon him that he recalls it in the context of a eulogy of man's body, in particular of the mouth, which is praised as the instrument of speech, but even more as the organ for the kiss by which man gives expression to peace and love: "Hence the Lord, condemning His betrayer as a species of monstrosity, says: 'Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?' That is to say, changing the emblem of love into a sign of betrayal and a revelation of unfaithfulness, are you employing this pledge of peace for the purpose of cruelty? And thus by the oracular voice of God reproof is given to him who by a bestial conjunction of lips bestows a sentence of death rather than a covenant of love" (pp. 28-29).

Giotto's Arena Chapel fresco depicting the kiss of betrayal (see Figure 14) shows, I think, the way in which the N-town playwright (or any medieval playwright) would have wanted this scene to look when staged. I would like here to quote Perella once again, for his description of Giotto's fresco and its significance might easily be applied to the N-town scene:
The most eloquent testimony to the extraordinary place the great betrayal has had in the minds of men is to be found in Christian iconography, which has over and over depicted the scene in a way that accentuates the sense of abhorrence and the idea of division caused by that kiss. Its definitive treatment is perhaps in the justly celebrated fresco by Giotto. As Judas carries out his embrace and kiss, the folds of his cloak are being wrapped around Christ so that the two figures seem to be merging into one. But at the same time, the painter has made Judas appear as the very species of monstrosity that Ambrose spoke of, "who by a bestial conjunction of lips" belies the union which is suggested by his embrace and is normally signified by the kiss (p. 29).

Giotto's fresco, showing Judas face to face with Christ and about to kiss Him, suggests also that the kiss of betrayal was given on the mouth. This, I think, is the way it must have been enacted in the N-town cycle. The Proclamation which precedes the cycle
(although it may have little relevance to this part of it) specifies that "Judas pat traytour be-for grete pres / xal kys his mouth and hym be-tray" (11. 325-26). Moreover, if the kiss of betrayal were a kiss on the mouth, it would stand in greater contrast to other such kisses in this cycle, especially those exchanged by Joachim and Anne before the golden gate and by Joseph and Mary as they are reconciled. In addition, a kiss on the mouth would further emphasize, indeed be the very image of, Judas's arrogance, or better, his presumption, especially when contrasted with the scene during the Last Supper where Christ kisses His disciples' feet (27/848). Also in the play of the Last Supper, Christ, while standing with the Host before Judas, says: "Myn body to be I wolde not denye / Sythyn fou wylt presume ber-upon" (27/774-75). Judas's presumption in giving the kiss of betrayal is equal to his presumption in accepting the Host.

Prosser, discussing the above scene from the Last Supper, asserts that "at this point in the play Judas's role is complete, for it is his decision to betray, not the kiss of betrayal itself, which is at issue" (p. 140; by "play" she means the whole of the Passion Play. I). Prosser gives a fine analysis of the symbolic value of Mary Magdalen and of the importance of penitence doctrine in this "play"; but I think the kiss of betrayal is also at issue here. The kiss is, after all, the image, the summing up and actualizing of, the betrayal. It follows Magdalen's kneeling and anointing of Christ's feet, and Christ's
kneeling and washing and kissing of His disciples' feet. Prosser says
that Magdalen is "the symbol of the penitent, the symbol of love, the
symbol of the redeeming power of Christ's mercy" and that "she is
our norm, against which we have judged the conspirators, against
which we shall judge Judas" (pp. 132, 135). Surely, given this line of
thought, the kiss of betrayal is essential to oppose the previous image
of Magdalen kneeling to Christ's feet, just as Judas's presumption in
standing arrogantly before Christ and kissing Him on the mouth
contrasts with Christ's humble kneeling and kissing of the disciples'
feet. The kiss of betrayal is, I think, very much at issue here.

The presentation of the kiss of betrayal itself in N-town does not
differ significantly from enactments of the kiss in the York, Chester,
or Towneley cycles. It is quite possible that in each case it is a kiss
on the mouth; and the scene is, like the noli me tangere, a common-
place of Christian iconography. But one of the strengths of the N-town
cycle is that, because of its greater emphasis on kisses, such
traditional scenes involving the idea of a kiss are more fully realized
and more fully unified with other elements of Christian history in
which kisses play a part. At least, repetition of the kiss image is one
of the important methods used in N-town to establish dramatic unity
among the parts of this history. Although the presentations of the
kiss of betrayal may not differ, there is at least one significant differ-
ence in the ways the different cycles prepare for it in the scenes of
the agony and the betrayal.
According to Luke (22:43) an angel appears to Christ during the agony in the garden to strengthen Him. In the Chester play of Christ's Betrayal (15) the angel does not appear. In the York play of The Agony and The Betrayal, the angel does appear, but his speech is a simple expansion of Luke's statement that the angel strengthened Christ (28/112-22). The Towneley play of the Conspiracy, however, does something more interesting with this scene. Here, the Trinity, rather than an angel, strengthens Christ (I have no idea how this might have been staged), and it does so by briefly narrating the fall of man and the necessity for Christ's birth through a spotless maiden (in order to counterbalance Eve's sin), and then promising the Harrowing of Hell and the salvation of mankind (20/528-55). This speech is similar to the longer one given by God in the Towneley Annunciation play (10/1-76). Thus, the Trinity strengthens Christ by reminding Him of God's original plan as expressed at the start of the Annunciation play. Something like this happens also in the N-town Betrayal play. During the agony in the garden, the angel appears to Christ and makes the following speech:

Heyl bothe god and man in dede  
The ffadyr hath sent þe þis present  
He bad þat þou xuldyst not drede  
But fulfylle his intent  
As þe parlement of hefne hath ment  
þat mannys sowle xal now redemyd be  
Ffrom hefne to herd lord þou wore sent  
þat dede Appendyth on-to þe. (28/945-52)
The words "be parlement of hefne" must, I think, refer back to the debate of the Four Daughters of God, their kiss of reconciliation, and the council of the Trinity, all of which occur in that part of the Incarnation play (11) which is entitled The Parliament of Heaven and which precedes and gives the rationale for the Annunciation and Incarnation scenes. Furthermore, the angel's "Ffrom hefne to herd lord þou wore sent" is a clear reference to the Incarnation. The reference to the "parlement of hefne," coming a mere forty-seven lines before Judas's treacherous kiss, suggests an intended contrast between the kiss of betrayal and the sacred kiss of reconciliation and accord exchanged by the Four Daughters. And, possibly, the angel's reference to the Incarnation suggests a more subtle contrast between Judas's kiss and what might have been considered the most sacred of kisses, the Incarnation itself, the celestial kiss by which Christ became one with the Church (Perella, note, p. 291).

The N-town kiss of betrayal is, I think, clearly contrasted to other kisses in the cycle which express human love, holy love, or both. Judas's kiss is the very image of his betrayal of his human bond with Christ as man and of his spiritual bond with Christ as God. The N-town kiss of betrayal is thus a full realization of the bestiality, presumption, and horror of Judas's damnable act.

In the N-town Crucifixion play, two unusual actions occur. In the first, the Virgin runs to and then embraces the cross (stage
direction following 32/833). In the second, the Virgin kisses her son's feet, just after He has died on the cross (32/939-46). Giotto's fresco depicting the crucifixion (see Figure 15) reveals the reason the first action is unusual: in the fresco it is Mary Magdalen, not the Virgin, who kneels before the crucified Savior's feet, as if about to kiss them. This, as far as I can determine, is the usual treatment of the action, when it occurs, in the visual arts. Neither action, apparently, is presented in the other English cycles. The N-town Crucifixion play, then, includes two impressive actions not found in the other English cycles and has assigned the one appropriate to Magdalen to the Virgin. This was done primarily, I think, for the sake of honoring the Virgin. It may be worth noting that this is the first time in the cycle that Mary has kissed her son. Waldo F. McNeir points out that it is only in the N-town Crucifixion play that "the pathos of Mary's situation is developed so as to command our chief attention, with the result that her role acquires an independent interest apart from her Christocentric status." 99

It is interesting in this play that we have two planctus spoken by the Virgin at the foot of the cross. The first (32/810-45, including speeches by Magdalen and St. John) is, in terms of setting, fairly typical. Present, as in Giotto's scene, are the Virgin, the three Maries, and John (stage direction following 32/769). There is, in this lament of the Virgin, some very moving poetry. For instance,
the Virgin speaks one quatrain that, in its combination of intense emotion and careful diction, is worthy of King Lear in his most painful moments:

A my sovereyn lord why whylt þou not speke
to me þat am þi modyr • in peyn for þi wrong
A hert hert why whylt þou not breke
þat I were out of þis sorwe so stronge. (32/818-21)

Also during this first scene of the Virgin at the cross, Christ tells His mother that His death should not displease her: "And for to suffre Al þis for man • I was born of the / to þe blys þat man had lost • man A- þen to restore" (32/832-33); and Mary's grieved maternal and human response is to rise, run forward and embrace the cross: "her oure lady xal ryse and renne and halse þe crosse" (stage
direction following 32/833). Our sympathies, our attention, at this point must lie with Mary—in this moment doctrine cannot assuage or replace true and proper human feeling. The Virgin here is purely a mother, grieving that she is to outlive her son:

I pray now Alle let me ben here
and hang me up here on his tre
be my frend and sone hat is so dere
ffor per he is per wold I be.(32/838-41)

At this point, John and the three Maries take the Virgin away from the cross (stage direction following 32/845), but not, I think, off stage. Then follows a scene (32/846-90) curing which Cayaphas, Annas, and Pilate come down from Pilate's scaffold to view the crucified Christ, and then leave again. Also, the Jews again ridicule Christ and offer Him "eygil and galle" to drink. There is no stage direction following 32/890, but evidently the Jews exit and St. John and the Virgin, alone, come forward to the cross once again. Christ now says His final words and dies (32/891-98), and then the Virgin begins the second of her laments at the foot of the cross.

This final scene of the N-town Crucifixion play is really an extended débat between John and Mary. John tries to convince the Virgin that she should be merry because her son's death allows for the salvation of mankind. Mary, although affected by John's argument, cannot fully accept what McNeir calls "the paradox of the 'Blissful Passion'" (Passion Plays, p. 626). She agrees to leave this doleful scene, but allows herself a final speech of lament, kisses Christ's
feet, and then casts herself upon the ground:

Now stythe I must parte hym fro
3it lete me kysse or that I go
his blyssyd ffeyt pat sufferyn wo
naylid on pis tre
So cruelly with grett dyspyte
þus • shamfully was nevyr man dyghte
þerfore in peyn myn hert is pyghte
al joye departyth fro me. (32/939-46)

And the succeeding stage direction: "hic quasi seminor tua cadat
prona in terram. ..."

One reason for the inclusion of this scene of the Virgin and St. John alone at the foot of the cross is to honor the Virgin by showing the fifth of what are called the seven sorrows of the Virgin. The fifth sorrow is the crucifixion, with only the Virgin and St. John present.100 The N-town cycle is the only English cycle to include all of the seven joys and seven sorrows of the Virgin. Following is a list of these joys and sorrows with identification of the places where they occur in the cycle. The seven joys are: the Annunciation (Incarnation play, 11/217-92); the Visit to Elizabeth (play 13); the Nativity (play 15); the Adoration of the Magi (the seventeenth play, marked "18" in the MS); the Presentation in the Temple (the Purification play--the eighteenth play, marked "19" in the MS); Christ found by his mother (Christ and the Doctors, 21/257-72); the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin (The Assumption of the Virgin, 41/462-94 and 41/495-98).101 The seven sorrows of the Virgin are: Simeon's prophecy of Christ's
passion and the great sorrow it will bring Mary (The Purification, 19/81-90); the Flight into Egypt (The Massacre of the Innocents, 20/73-88); Christ lost by his Mother (Christ with the Doctors, 21/201-32); the Betrayal of Christ (The Betrayal--Mary learns of the event and expresses her sorrow in the final scene of the play, 28/1041-84); the Crucifixion, with St. John and the Virgin only present (The Crucifixion, 32/891-962--it is during this scene that Mary kisses Christ's feet); the Deposition from the cross (The Burial, stage direction following 34/1139 and 34/1140-55--this scene could also be called the Pieta and during it Mary kisses the dead Christ's face); the Ascension when the Virgin is left on earth (play 39, The Ascension--Mary has no lines in this play, but the opening stage direction--"hic incipit Ascensio domini nostri • cum maria et undecim discipulis..."

--tells us that she is present).

K. S. Block, in her edition of the N-town cycle, maintains that folios 184 and 185, which contain the last word of Christ and the scene with Mary and John alone at the cross, are interpolated. She also suggests that "the compiler was himself the writer of this link passage." Her evidence for inferring that these folios are interpolated is, mainly, that they are of different paper than the rest of the T quire. 102 I cannot judge whether these folios are interpolated, but I do think that one reason for the inclusion of the scene is to fill out the seven sorrows of the Virgin. This might also be a partial explanation
for the inclusion of the Purification play (19) between the Adoration of the Magi and the Massacre of the Innocents. Block argues that the Purification play is an interpolation where it occurs because it breaks "the continuity" of the Magi and Massacre plays (p. xxvii). This may or may not be so. But the Purification play does contain the first of the Virgin's sorrows, Simeon's Prophecy, and this may be one reason why it precedes the Massacre of the Innocents, which presents the second of her sorrows, the Flight into Egypt. It seems clear to me that the desire to include the seven joys and seven sorrows of the Virgin is one principle of selection operative in this cycle, one of the means for unifying it; this principle is of course subordinate to, and a consequence of, the major purpose of honoring the Virgin. The desire to include the joys and sorrows explains, in part, the inclusion of the Assumption play (41), which presents the last of the Virgin's joys, and it in part explains the presence of Mary in the deposition scene of the Burial play (34), to which I will now turn.

The deposition from the cross and the entombment of Christ are the last scenes of the N-town Burial play (34/1140-75). The stage direction following 34/1139 clearly sets the scene for the deposition: "here joseph and nychodemus takyn cryst of pe cros on on o ledyr and pe tother on An-other leddy and qwan is had down joseph leyth hym in oure ladys lappe. seyng pe knytys turnyng heme. . . ." Giotto's fresco depicting this scene (see Figure 16) shows the Virgin sitting
with Christ's shoulders on her lap, her arm behind His neck, her
mournful face close to His. This, I imagine, is the way the scene
was presented on stage. A notable difference between the two
representations is that in N-town, apparently, only Joseph of
Arimathea and Nichodemus accompany the Virgin, while Giotto's
fresco shows John, the three Maries, and others, in addition.
Giotto's rendering is the traditional one, as indicated by the following
excerpt from the account of the deposition in the Meditations on the
Life of Christ:

The Lady supports the head and shoulders in her lap, the
Magdalen the feet at which she had formerly found so much
grace. The others stand about, all making a great bewailing
over Him: all most bitterly bewail Him, as for a first-
born son. 104
In the N-town play, as Joseph lays Christ across the Virgin's lap he tells her to "kysse hym now onys · e er he go" (34/1143), and Mary responds as follows:

A Mercy Mercy myn owyn son so dere
pi blody face now I must kysse
pi face is pale with-owtyn chere
of meche joy now xal I mysse. . . (34/1144-47).

Waldo. McNeir points out that "the use of the Pieta theme, with the Virgin holding the body of her dead son across her knees, is a striking detail. Only in this cycle is Mary present here" (Passion Plays, p. 627). This scene is usually thought to suggest a saddening contrast with the Nativity, where Mary joyfully held the infant Jesus on her lap. 105 But the Virgin's kiss, within the play primarily a sign of her grief and pity, might remind us of the other time in the N-town cycle when she kisses one of the holy family on the face. Near the end of the Return of Joseph play (12), she raises Joseph to his feet and welcomes him to her with a joyous kiss on the mouth; here, in the Burial play, she bids final farewell to her son by inclining her head to kiss him, mournfully, on the face. These two kisses are far separated in time, for audience or reader, and perhaps the contrast would go unnoted. Nevertheless, considering the two kiss images together emphasizes the sorrow and finality of the second kiss. Moreover, we see that the two kiss images define, in a sense, the Virgin's position as mediator between God and man: she raises Joseph to his feet to kiss him; she inclines her head to kiss Christ.
This scene also represents, as I have argued, the sixth of the Virgin's seven sorrows, the deposition from the cross. As the references above to Giotto's fresco and the Meditations on the Life of Christ indicate, traditional representations of this scene, when the Pietà theme is used, include many other persons, such as John and the three Mariæ, than are found in the N-town version. But the N-town Burial play, by excluding all but the three characters from the scene, gives greater (and, effectively, quieter) emphasis to the Virgin's sorrow. The dramatist has centered all attention on the Virgin alone with her dead son, on the kiss, and on her moving expression of sorrow following the kiss:

\[\text{bara was nevyr modyr ßat sey this} \\
\text{so here sone dyspoyled ß with ßo gret wo} \\
\text{and my dere chylde nevyr dede A-myß} \\
\text{A mercy fadyr of hefne ß it xulde be so. (34/1148-51)}\]

The kiss image occurs also in the N-town plays of the Day of Pentecost (40) and the Assumption of the Virgin (41). It is possible, moreover, that the idea of a kiss is operative in the Ascension play, which Jesus opens with the words "\(\text{PAx vobis} \cdot \text{Amonge zow pes.} \ldots\)" (39/1; these are the words Christ speaks in Luke 24:36, and also in the Chester and Towneley Ascension plays). This greeting, as we have seen, was the standard one given with the Kiss of Peace in liturgical ceremony. I have already noted (in the discussion above of the Return of Joseph play) the possible significance of the scene in the
Pentecost play where the disciples, kneeling, all bow down to kiss the earth (stage direction following 40/13). Yet to be discussed, then, are the last two instances of the kiss image in the cycle, those found in the Assumption play.

This is the penultimate play of the cycle, preceding, of course, the Doomsday play (42). The N-town Assumption play is an interpolation, but it is also part of the original compilation of the manuscript. W. W. Greg, in fact, speculates, on the basis of his metrical analysis of the play, that it may have been written expressly for this cycle (Problems, p. 373). But the important point for my purposes is that the play is appropriate, even essential, to the cycle as it exists, which would be incomplete without it. For one thing, an Assumption play is necessary to complete the life of the Virgin, the telling of which is an important purpose of N-town. In addition, this play completes the presentation of the seven joys and seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary, in that it contains the seventh and greatest joy, the Assumption and Coronation (41/462-98). Moreover, there are the two uses of the kiss image. In the first, which occurs after the Virgin's death, the two virgins attendant upon Mary kiss her body as they wash it in preparation for the funeral (stage direction following 41/327). In the second, the apostles kiss her body just before they place it in the sepulchre (41/421-24).
Neither use of the kiss has, so far as I can see, obvious connections with other kisses in the cycle. I would point out, however, that in the only other extant English cycle plays on the end of the Virgin's life, those of the York cycle, no kisses occur. Furthermore, no kisses are included in the account of the Assumption found in the Golden Legend, which was surely a major source used in the composition of the N-town play. I would also note that the kisses here do present a parallel with the N-town Burial play. Just as there Mary kissed Christ immediately before He was entombed, here the apostles kiss her body immediately before it is entombed. The parallel is subtle and may not have been intended, but it is nonetheless there. And it, like other such parallels I have pointed to, suggests the Virgin's intermediate position between God and man. The kiss image, as used in the N-town Assumption play, is an additional detail making the play appropriate to the cycle. One other detail which makes the play appropriate to the cycle is that, near the conclusion, the angel Michael makes a statement which concisely sums up the greatest reason for honoring the Virgin:

    Hefne and erthe now injoye may ye  
    Ffor god throw mary is mad mannys frend. (41/492-93)

This statement, whether intended to do so or not, does give us in small what seems to be the definitive and unique purpose of the N-town cycle. It is not the only purpose; among other things, the fact that this play is followed by a Doomsday play shows that. But it
is the purpose that so differentiates this cycle from the others. Heaven and earth are again in harmony; God has again become man's friend. The means for accomplishing this has been the Virgin Mary. The N-town cycle honors the Virgin for her role in Christian history.
Footnotes: Chapter III


73 The references are: Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 16:20; II Corinthians 13:12; I Thessalonians 5:26; I Peter 5:14. Paul refers to the "holy kiss," Peter to a "kiss of love"; but these are the same kiss and custom. "The holy kiss is a kiss of love (charity)" (Perella, note 4, p. 275).

74 As, for instance, in the play of Joseph's Return, where Joseph and Mary are reconciled by a kiss of peace (12/185-92). One of several examples of this idea applied to the Trinity (where it is commonplace) occurs in the Parliament of Heaven, when Spiritus Sanctus says to Christ: "I love to ʒ your lover xal ʒow lede / pis is þe Assent of our e vnyte" (11/183-84). A parody of this accord of the Trinity occurs in The Woman Taken in Adultery, when the Phariseus, planning to capture the unfortunate woman, says to his fellows: "let us thre werke by on Assent" (24/82).


76 Davis, pp. 43-57.

77 Gregory is quoted in Perella, pp. 290-91 (note 14).

78 It does not occur in pseudo-Bonaventura's Meditations on the Life of Christ, the Protevangelium of James, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the Gospel of the Birth of Mary; nor does it occur in Lydgate's Life of Our Lady.


80 Timothy Fry states that "the compiler of the Ludus Coventriae believed in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The strongest proof is in the fact that he uses the 'kiss of cleanness,'
which derives from the apocryphal Protevangelium of James and was once used as proof of the doctrine" ("Unity," note, p. 545). He does not say who so used it.

81 Contemplacio (the expositor who introduces, comments upon, and concludes plays 8 to 13) seems unsure of this point. In his introduction to these plays (p. 62) he states that: "This matere here made is of be modyr of mercy / how be joachym And Anne was here concepcion. . ." (11.9-10). Then, after the conclusion of play 8, he states that:

Sovereynes 3e han sen shewyd sow be-fore
Of Joachym and Anne here botherys holy metynge
How our lady was consevvid and how she was bore
We passe ovyr 3at breffnes of tyme consydenyng
(11/1-4, p. 71)

This could be read to mean that the audience has seen the holy meeting of Joachim and Anne, how the Virgin was conceived; the "passe ovyr 3at" would thus refer only to "how she was bore," a commonplace scene in the visual arts which is not enacted here.

82 Sister M. Patricia Forrest, "Apocryphal Sources of the St. Anne's Day Plays," M&H, XVII (1966), 47; Block, p. xlv.

83 The kiss does not occur in the Meditations on the Life of Christ, Lydgate's Life of Our Lady, the Golden Legend, Love's Mirror; nor does it occur in any of the apocryphal legends listed by Sister M. P. Forrest ("Apocryphal Sources of the St. Anne's Day Plays," pp. 40-41, 44-45).

84 Forrest, p. 48.


86 English Nativity Plays (1909; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 71. This is the title Hemingway uses in his text of the play; he refers to the play by other titles in other places.


88 W. W. Greg ("Problems," pp. 381-82 and note) asserts that "of Contemplatio's four stanzas, the first two should be spoken by the Angels and the second two by the Archangels." But Sister M. P. Forrest argues more convincingly that "the compiler probably
intended Contemplacio to speak the lines as the manuscript provides. The expositor here assumes the voices of the 'Patryarchys and prophetys' referred to, rather than those of the Angels and Archangels, whose voices were implicitly included with those of the Virtues, fellow members of the 'fyrst ierarchie' of celestial spirits."

And she further maintains that Contemplacio speaks as an "advocate for fallen man" ("The Role of the Expositor Contemplacio in the St. Anne's Day Plays of the Hegge Cycle," MS, 28 (1966), 69, 70).


90 Mark Eccles, ed. The Macro Plays, EETS, 262 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), xi. Eccles also asserts (p. xxii) that the N-town cycle was "probably acted in Norfolk during the fifteenth century..."


92 Joseph does kneel in the Coventry Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors (Hardin Craig, ed. Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, p. 6).

Prosser says (p. 90) that she has considered five Joseph plays, but in her chapter on them she mentions only four.

93 I must disagree, in part, with Prosser's analysis of Joseph and thus of the play. She states that "by modern standards, Joseph's Return is indeed unnecessarily coarse and distasteful." I have to wonder what modern standards she refers to; they are, at least, none that I share. She also states that, in the first one-half of the play, Joseph is a "mean-tempered, foul-minded brute" (p. 96). That he is in the first part of the play "mean-tempered" is undeniable, but a "foul-minded brute"? In addition, I cannot agree with Prosser's too exclusive emphasis on Joseph's sin and, thus, the importance of his repentance. The idea is certainly in the play, but his simple and understandable doubt is, it seems to me, as heavily emphasized.


95 "Apocryphal Sources of the St. Anne's Day Plays," M&H, 17 (1966), 49.
In the Towneley Visitation play, Elizabeth tells Mary that:
A selcouth thyng is me betyde,
The chyld makys Ioy, as any byrd,
That I in body bere. (11. 40-42)

In Contemplacio's Epilogue to this play, he narrates that
Mary remained with Elizabeth until after John was born and that she
kissed John when she left (p. 122, 1. 28).

Stubblebine states that "when Elizabeth, as the mother-to-be
of John the Baptist, visited the Virgin, who bore the Christ Child in
her womb, two worlds met—the old represented by the prophets, of
whom the Baptist was the last, and the new represented by Christ,
who brought the era of grace. In their embrace these two women
bridge the gulf between the Old and the New Testaments—a fitting
moment to be depicted just before the cycle of Christ's life com-
mences" (Giotto: the Arena Chapel Frescoes, p. 81).

As far as I can discover, the phrase "the parlement of hefne"
occurs but twice in the English cycles, both times in N-town. The
first instance is in the Contemplacio link between the Mary in the
Temple (9) and Betrothal of Mary (10) plays (p. 82, 1. 14), where it
clearly refers to the Incarnation play:

hath pacyens with vs we be-sech 3ow her
And in short spas
The parlement of hefne sone xal 3e-se
and how goddys sone com man xal he
And how be salutacion Aftere xal be
be goddys holy gras. (11/11-17)

"The Corpus Christi Passion Plays as Dramatic Art," SP,

Anna Brownell Jameson, Legends of the Madonna as
seven sorrows and seven joys of the Virgin, which follows in the text,
is also taken from p. 62 of this work.

It should be remembered that the number 17 was accidentally
omitted in the numbering of plays in the MS.

Note, p. 303. She says here that "this and the following
folio (185) are interpolated in this quire, being of different paper.
The writing on them is firmer and more regular." But on p. xxxv of
her Introduction, she states that ff. 184, 185, and 186 are interpolated.
Cameron and Kahrl maintain that the "quires of paper in the
manuscript vary as they would vary if one scribe were simply taking up a different quire of paper each time he filled up the quire before him, inserting at the appropriate places in the cycle the additional Marian plays on the earlier life of the Virgin, the Passion plays, and the Assumption play in manuscripts already available to him" ("The N-town Plays at Lincoln," pp. 63-64). But I fail to understand how this could be the case with the folios under discussion here.

In the York cycle, the Purification play (XLI) occurs between the Emmaus and Incredulity of Thomas plays, where it definitely should not be. L. T. Smith observes in a note on the play (p. 432), that "the play should, rightly, have been numbered XVIII and have been placed between the Adoration and the Flight into Egypt." This is the position of the Purification play in N-town. It seems to be the right place.


Stubblebine, Giotto: The Arena Chapel Frescoes, p. 87.

The "knytys" mentioned in the stage direction following 34/1139 perhaps are present on stage, but certainly in the background.

W. W. Greg (Problems, pp. 372-73) gives the clearest summary of the evidence that the Assumption play is interpolated yet at the same time part of the original compilation. The play, he says, is:

written in a different hand from the rest of the manuscript.

It is also written upon an independent quire of quite different paper, which is inserted in the middle of what is now the last quire of the codex. Previous to the insertion, 'Doomsday' followed quite regularly upon 'Pentecost.' The present arrangement, however, dates from the original make-up of the manuscript, for the 'Assumption' takes its place in the consecutive numbering indicated by the original scribe by means of large red numerals placed in the margins. Greg also notes that the Assumption play is not mentioned in the Proclamation, and his metrical analysis of the play suggests to him that "the play was written in imitation of the stanzaic forms found elsewhere in the cycle by one whose powers of composition were inadequate to the task of forcing his matter into so exacting a metre."

Block (p. xix) argues that the original scribe who put together the MS also inserted a line in the Assumption play, on f. 217v, and this, she says, "clinches all the other arguments in favour of that play's having formed part of the original compilation. . . ."
Block, p. xix. She notes, however, that the playwright probably used the Latin version, rather than Caxton's translation.
CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters offer, I believe, persuasive evidence that the N-town cycle can legitimately be viewed as a unified work of art designed primarily to honor the Virgin Mary and to move the audience to lead more devoutly Christian lives. In Chapter I, I pointed out a unique Marian emphasis in three of the N-town Old Testament plays. In the Fall of Man play (2) Mary is alluded to. In the Moses play (6), the dramatist breaks scriptural tradition to present the "familiar antetype" of the Virgin, the burning bush. In the Prophets or Root of Jesse play (7), Mary's advent is prophesied as often as that of Christ during the unique procession of kings and prophets. In Chapter II, I showed that the form of the whole cycle, excluding the Old Testament plays, has historical precedents in the cycles of wall-paintings at the parish churches of Chalgrove and Croughton, and especially in the fresco cycle of Giotto which adorns the walls of the Arena Chapel at Padua. In Chapter III, I demonstrated that the recurrent dramatic image of the kiss, often connected with Mary, is used to give unity of imagery to the cycle. If we imagine that the cycle was presented as a piece, on some sort of fixed stage, we can see another kind of unity in it; for the role of Mary, played
perhaps by a single actor, would then have been a plum indeed. And this continuity of role would have added immensely to the sense of unity already perceived in the cycle.

As for the didactic purpose of the cycle, much of this, I think, would have been accomplished through the role of Mary. Some students of literature feel that to say a work is didactic is also to say that it is dull art of a low order. This may at times prove true, but it is no necessary consequence of didacticism, as long as we do not limit the term to mean mere hackneyed sermonizing. Werner Jaeger, discussing classical Greek poetry, supplies a needed corrective to this view when he says that "the educational content and the artistic form of a work of art affect each other reciprocally, and in fact spring from the same root." Jaeger also states that "the aesthetic effect of style, structure, and form in every sense is conditioned and inter-penetrated by its intellectual and spiritual content." Finally, he asserts that "poetry cannot be really educative unless it is rooted in the depths of the human soul, unless it embodies a moral belief, a high ardour of the spirit, a broad and compelling ideal of humanity." Mary, and all of the citizens of the City of God who appear in the medieval cycle plays, offer us, in Christian terms, this "broad and compelling ideal of humanity"; in the presentation of this ideal lies the profound didacticism of the N-town cycle.

Some of my conclusions may be debatable. But if we suppose
for just an instant that the so-called "patchwork" quality of the physical manuscript of N-town is not there, that the seemingly insoluble problems of the manuscript have, along with the Proclamation, disappeared, then I think that most readers would have no compunctions about finding in the N-town cycle the kind of unity and design which I find in it. Perhaps we should remember that medieval men found a similar kind of unity and design in other works of art, such as the cathedral, and in the patchwork, fragmented quality of their earthly lives as well.

I might also add my belief that the compiler of N-town, an educated medieval Christian, could not have set about his work without realizing the profound devotional and instructional nature of the task. He must have felt, I think, something of what Chaucer felt composing the following stanza from the "Prologue of the Prioress's Tale":

My konnyng is so wayk, o blisful Queene,
For to declare thy grete worthynesse
That I ne may the weighte nat susteene;
But as a child of twelf month oold, or lesse,
That kan unnethes any word expresse,
Right so fare I, and therfore I yow preye,
Gydeth my song that I shal of yow seye. 110
Footnotes: Conclusion


APPENDIX

NOTES ON THE MANUSCRIPT AND ITS PROVENANCE

The manuscript of the N-town mystery cycle (Cotton Vespasian D. viii, in the British Museum Library) is a volume of quarto size (measuring 8" x 5-1/2") having 225 leaves. The date 1468 occurs at the end of the Purification play (fo. 100v), but since this is an interpolated play that date may apply specifically to it rather than to the whole cycle (Block, p. xv). However, most scholars agree that 1468 is a roughly accurate date for the compilation of the N-town cycle. Seven kinds of paper appear in the manuscript, and an eighth and later kind was added as a flyleaf, evidently at about the time, 1629, the book was acquired for the Cotton collection. The quires of paper in the manuscript vary "as they would vary if one scribe were simply taking up a different quire of paper each time he filled up the quire before him. . . . "

Most of the N-town manuscript is written in a single, good, fifteenth century hand. This chief scribe also added a number of notes at the bottom of some of the folios. These notes consist of

Three genealogies, of Adam to Noah (ff. 16v et seq.), of Noah to Abraham (ff. 21 et seq.), of the Virgin Mary (fo. 37); the measurements of Noah's ark (fo. 24); a list of the five
Anas of scriptural importance (fo. 37v) and three dates of the ecclesiastical calendar (fo. 74v). The genealogies are in liturgical script, the note on the dates and on the Annas in smaller bookhand, and the genealogies are handsomely rubricated, one part of that of Mary being entirely in red (Block, p. xxxvii).

These notes are of some importance, for they are part of the evidence from which Miss Block infers that the N-town cycle is "of ecclesiastical and not of civic origin" (p. xxxvii). Also, they seem to be the major evidence supporting W. W. Greg's conclusion that this manuscript "was written, not for purposes of acting, but of private reading."

Miss Block sees, aside from the hand of the chief scribe, three other significant handwritings in Cotton Vespasian D. viii. First is that in the interpolated quire E (ff. 51, 52) which contains "the conversation between Joseph and his kinsmen" in the Betrothal of Mary play. This hand, says Miss Block, is "decidedly later" than that of the scribe. A second hand wrote the interpolated folios 95, 96 in the Magi play, and the interpolated folio 112, the opening of the Baptism play; and a third hand wrote the entire Assumption play (ff. 213-222). These latter two hands, according to Miss Block, are of the same time as that of the chief scribe, who has made corrections in the Assumption play and rubricated the entire manuscript (Block, pp. xvi-xvii).

Various other hands have made minor corrections in the manuscript and added a few stage directions to it (Block, p. xviii),
and many blank pages of the manuscript have been used for what Miss Block calls "idle scribbling--attempts at copying the MS. writing, signatures, stray phrases, mostly in sixteenth century hands.

It would appear that it fell early into irreverent schoolboy hands. . . " (p. xxxvi). Also, several names are among the scribblings in the text, but none seems to be significant. However, some inscriptions and signatures in the N-town manuscript are important to any attempt to determine the provenance and history of the manuscript. These include Richard James' inscription on the flyleaf, the two signatures of Robert Hegge (ff. 10, 164), and the title of the plays as given in the text (fo. 1).

One of the most vexing and yet intriguing problems of this cycle presents itself before one has a chance to turn the flyleaf of Cotton Vespasian D. viii to look at its contents. For there, the title Ludus Coventriae, in the seventeenth century hand of Richard James, is wrongly assigned to the N-town plays (Block, p. xxxvii). This deceptively simple problem is in my opinion very far from being satisfactorily solved, and its ramifications are great enough that a review of its history and of attempts to solve it, and a clear statement of some of its possible (but largely ignored) implications, will be worthwhile. In the absence of any clear or necessary evidence of what town the cycle belonged to, the problem ought to be kept open.

The mistaken ascription of the N-town plays to Coventry seems
to have originated with Richard James, Sir Robert Bruce Cotton's librarian at the time, supposedly 1629, when the manuscript was added to the Cotton collection (Block, p. xxxvii). On the flyleaf at the beginning of Cotton Vespasian D. viii James made the following notation:

\[
\text{Elenchus contentorum in hoc codice [Vespasian D. viii, added in a later hand] Contenta novi testamenti scenice expressa et actitata olim per monachos sive fratres mendicantes • vulgo dicitur hic liber Ludus Coventriae • sive ludus corporis Christi • scribitur metris Anglicanis.} \]

This note is said to be misleading in three ways: the description of contents is inaccurate in that it omits mention of Old Testament plays (although James does not say he is describing the whole of the contents); the note gave "sanction to the baseless idea, . . . that mystery plays were acted by 'monks' or 'friars'"; and there exists no evidence to connect this cycle with Coventry. Indeed, the dialect of the plays as we have them seems to be "an East Anglian variety of east Midland," which would exclude them from Warwickshire altogether.

Thomas Smith, who made up the 1969 Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecæ Cottonianæ, evidently saw two of James' supposed errors, for he does not mention Coventry and he does refer to the Old Testament plays:

\[
\text{Vespasian, D. viii. A Collection of plays, in old English metre: i.e. Dramata sacra, in quibus exhibentur historiae veteris & N. Testamenti, introductis quasi in} \]
However, it does seem odd that Smith, while not referring to Coventry, keeps the idea that the plays were acted by mendicant friars.

Sir William Dugdale, in his *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656, p. 116), picks up James' misleading statements, and because Dugdale claims to have some of his information from eye-witnesses (and also because he is, as Miss Block says [p. xl], "a careful antiquary"), they were accepted subsequently by other scholars. Following is the passage from Dugdale:

Before the suppression of the Monasteries their City [i.e., Coventry] was very famous for the pageants that were play'd therein, upon Corpus Christi day; which occasioning very great confluence of people thither from far and near was of no small benefit thereto; which pageants being acted with mighty state and reverence by the friers of this house [i.e., the Grey Friars] had Theaters for several scenes, very large and high, placed upon wheels and drawn to all the eminent parts of the City for the better advantage of Spectators: And contain'd the story of the New Testament, composed into old English Rithme, as appeareth by an antient MS. intituled Ludus Corporis Christi or Ludus Coventriæ [a note in the margin here gives the reference: "In bibl. Cotton, sub effigie Vesp. D. 9" (so apparently by a slip for viii)]. I have been told by some old people who in their younger days were eye-witnesses of these pageants so acted that the yearly confluence of people to see that show was extraordinary great. 11

We see here James' three supposed errors repeated: the identification of the plays with Coventry, the claim that they were acted by friars,
mention of the New Testament plays alone. Also, Dugdale adds
what looks like an error of his own when he calls the manuscript
"Vesp. D. 9," although there is some reason to think that this may
not be an error. I will return to this point shortly.

James Orchard Halliwell, in his edition of the N-town cycle
done for the Shakespeare Society, quotes the above passage from
Dugdale, and then, in a note, he cites the passage "as it stands in the
original MS. of Dugdale's work." I reproduce this note here
because of what I consider significant differences between it and the
printed version:

Before the suppression of the monasteries, this cite was
very famous for the pageants that were play'd therein upon
Corpus Christi day. These pageants were acted with
mighty state and reverence by the friers of this house,
and conteyned the story of the New Testament which was
composed into old English rime. The theatres for the
several scenes were very large and high; and, being
placed upon wheeles, were drawne to all the eminent places
of the cite, for the better advantage of the spectators.
In that incomparable library belonging to Sir Thomas
Cotton, there is yet one of the bookes which perteyned to
this pageant, entitled Ludus Corporis Christi, or Ludus
Coventriæ. I myselfe have spoke with some old people
who had, in their younger yeares, bin eyewitnesses of
these pageants soe acted; from whom I have bin told that
the confluence of people from farr and neare to see that shew
was extraordinary great, and yielded noe small advantage
to this cite. (Halliwell, p. x)

There are two important differences between the passages. In the
manuscript passage, the assertion that the Coventry pageants
"conteyned the story of the New Testament" is not presented as
inference based upon observation of the Cotton manuscript of the N-town cycle, as it is in the printed passage. Second, in his original reference to the Cotton manuscript, Dugdale says that it is "one of the bookes which perteyned to this pageant"; he does not say that it contains or is the whole of the Coventry plays. In regard to the first difference, I might point out that Hardin Craig's work on the two extant pageants from the true Coventry cycle (not the N-town plays) has shown that there were in fact no Old Testament plays at Coventry; thus Dugdale might have gained that information from the "eyewitnesses" he refers to rather than from the notation on the Cotton manuscript. 15

Before proceeding, I would like to turn back to Robert Hegge, from whose library the N-town plays were acquired in 1629, the year of Hegge's death, by Richard James. Of Hegge's relationship to the manuscript nothing is known beyond the facts that he once owned it and that his signature appears twice in it. Also, it is possibly significant that he and Richard James were both members of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. The first signature appears on fo. 10, above the beginning of the first play, and once read "Robert Hegge, Dunelmensis"; but "having been cut away with the margin, the Christian name is now indecipherable" (Block, p. xxxvi). The second signature appears on fo. 164, "the outside sheet of the S and T quires," that is, the sheet before the start of "The Passion Play. II."
At the top of fo. 164 is written "In nomine Dei. Amen," and in the middle "ego R. H. Dunelmensis possideo," while beneath this is an inscription in Greek (Block, pp. xxxvi-vii). Fo. 164 is otherwise blank and "shows signs of having been at some time an outside leaf" (Block, p. xxxviii [note]).

In regard to Richard James' assertion on the flyleaf of the manuscript that the contents are New Testament scenes ("novi testamenti scenice"), Miss Block asks: "is it possible that this mistake has any connexion with the fact that R. Hegge's second signature is found on a blank folio preceding the second Passion group which shows signs of having been at some time an outside leaf?" (Block, p. xxxviii [note]). Also, in regard to Dugdale's apparent slip in describing the manuscript as "Vesp. D. 9" instead of the correct Vesp. D. viii, she again wonders whether or not "this is... connected with the separate existence of the Passion plays" (Block, p. xxxix [note]). Furthermore, we should remember that the classification Vespasian D. viii was not contained in James' original notation on the flyleaf but was added to it, following the phrase "in hoc codice," in a later hand (Block, p. xxxvii). One clear implication of this evidence is that the N-town plays may have been divided into two manuscripts, each signed by Hegge, when James acquired them in 1629; and they may have been still divided when Dugdale looked at them sometime before 1656, the year his Antiquities of Warwickshire was first published.
Assuming for the moment that this was so, we can establish 1696 as a termius ad quern for the binding of the divided manuscript into one book; for, as we have seen, Thomas Smith's Cotton Library Catalogue, published in that year, contains the first statement that Vespasian D. viii holds 'historiae veteris & N. Testamenti,' stories of the Old and New Testaments. Thus there is, I think, some evidence to suggest that the manuscript we have today led a divided existence for some years in the seventeenth century, and also that the descriptions of James and Dugdale are a good deal more accurate than has hitherto been supposed. If we can admit their possible accuracy on this point, then I think we ought to reconsider whether they are accurate in their contentions that the plays to which they refer were acted by monks or mendicant friars and that they were acted at Coventry.

Thomas Sharp, in his Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries, Anciently performed at Coventry, by the Trading Companies of that City, published in 1825, is the first to note that the N-town cycle was "no part of the Plays or Pageants exhibited by the Trading Companies of the City." In addition, Sharp does not deny that the plays were acted by the Coventry Gray Friars, although he does express doubt concerning the evidence for this: "a solitary mention in one MS. not older than the beginning of Charles I's reign of Henry VII's visit to the city in 1492 'to see the Plays acted by the Grey Friars'." Halliwell in his edition of the N-town cycle says
much the same thing, carefully pointing out that "the principal authority for its appropriation to this body [the Gray Friars of Coventry] is contained in the...memorandum on the flyleaf of the manuscript in the handwriting of Dr. Richard James..." (Halliwell, p. vi). Halliwell further states that although he could find no authority for James' statement that this book was commonly reported to be (vulgo dicitur) the play of Coventry (Ludus Coventriae), he still cannot doubt the attribution:

for what object could James—a man who was, most probably, uninterested about the subject of the manuscript, and inserted the account...as Cotton's librarian, according to his usual custom—have had in making a misrepresentation? (Halliwell, pp. vii-viii).

Halliwell also notes that the last leaf or leaves of Cotton Vespasian D. viii, which are now missing (and which may have contained at least the conclusion of the incomplete Doomsday play), may have been present when James wrote his description and that possibly "a colophon supplied him with his information" (Halliwell, p. viii).

W. W. Greg more reasonably suggests that James' inscription may have been based on a tradition which he acquired with the manuscript, "presumably from Robert Hegge of Durham...who has left his name in the manuscript, and who, like James, was a member of Corpus Christi College, Oxford" (Problems, p. 365 [note]). At any rate, it is not unreasonable to think that James did have a source for his information, and that the information applied specifically to the
manuscript which he had before him, a manuscript which may have
been classified Cotton Vespasian D. 9 and which may indeed have
contained only New Testament plays.

Hardin Craig explains that James' attribution of the plays to
Coventry was a "natural" mistake for two reasons: the Cotton manu-
script was "the only manuscript of the kind as yet discovered and
brought into notice," and Coventry was famous "for the mystery plays
performed there until 1580" (ERD, p. 239). He says in other words
that James merely assumed that these were the Coventry plays
because this was the only manuscript of Corpus Christi plays he knew
of, and because the Coventry plays were the most famous of them.
This is a convenient theory and, for want of facts, perhaps as good as
any, although the conjectures of Halliwell and Greg are more interest-
ing. Of James' assertion that the plays he had before him were acted
by monks or mendicant friars, Craig says: "he (James) gave sanction
to the baseless idea, destined to live on for centuries, that mystery
plays were acted by 'monks' or 'friars' " (ERD, p. 238). 18 This may
have been the effect of James' statement, but it is not what he said.
James, of course, referred only to the specific group of plays con-
tained in the manuscript which lay before him. Also, Miss Block says
that her examination of the manuscript "gives much to support the
theory that the MS. represents a selection from the repertory of a
body of ecclesiastical actors" (p. xxxiv). She refers here to the often
noted ecclesiastical and learned nature of this cycle; but this nature could have resulted if the scribe who wrote out the extant manuscript was a man in religious orders, as may have been the case with the Towneley plays. The N-town scribe, however, is better called a compiler, since he originally compiled the cycle, wrote some parts of it himself, made numerous corrections throughout, and attempted to unify it in terms of stagecraft at least.

Craig goes on to say that Dugdale's "famous statement, almost that of an eyewitness" is based upon James' errors, and he then describes the one piece of evidence, from Humphrey Wanley's compilation of the Coventry manuscript Annals, that most weakens the possibility that the N-town plays, or some of them, were performed by the Coventry Gray Friars:

There are in existence a considerable number of versions of the Coventry manuscript Annals. . . . One of the British Museum manuscripts, Harl. 6388, suggests the explanation of Dugdale's error. The manuscript was made by Humphrey Wanley in 1690 on the basis of eight versions of the manuscript Annals. Wanley says that in 1492 the King and Queen came to Coventry 'to see the plays at the Gray Friars', by which he means at the Grey Friar's Church, for there was abundant space in front of the church for the presentation of the pageants. There was a station there for the pageants and the record merely means that Henry VII and his queen saw the Corpus Christi plays there just as Queen Margaret, wife of Henry VI, had seen the same municipal plays at a station in Earl Street in 1456. The Annals that misled Dugdale had said 'by the Grey Friars', meaning at the Grey Friars' Church (ERD, pp. 240-41).

In addition, it should be noted that the Coventry Gray Friars' house
"was dissolved in 1538," while the plays of the Coventry civic cycle were "only finally 'laid down' in 1580"; and thus the "old people" to whom Dugdale refers probably remembered the craft plays and not any performances of the Franciscans (Block, p. xxxix).

The reference in Wanley's compilation of the Coventry manuscript Annals is, as Miss Block says, "clearly to the place and not the actors," and it seems to eliminate the possibility that any of the N-town plays might have been acted by the Gray Friars of Coventry. It does not, however, eliminate the possibility that at least some of the plays were, as James states, "expressed and acted by monks or mendicant friars." Also, in regard to whether or not Wanley's "at" entirely confutes Dugdale's "by," it is well to keep in mind Miss Block's final comment on the problem:

Yet it might perhaps still be questioned whether Dugdale, a careful antiquary, who would have access to the MSS. used by Wanley, having also a personal connexion with Coventry, and living nearly three-quarters of a century nearer the time, could have been misled, by an ambiguous entry and confused local tradition, into the invention of the acting of the Grey Friars (Block, p. xl).

There is obviously too little evidence to support a contention that the N-town plays were acted by the Gray Friars of Coventry, or by some other group of monks or mendicant friars as suggested by Richard James and Thomas Smith. However, it seems best not to dismiss entirely the possibility that there may be truth of some sort in this old and persistent tradition.
There is also little direct evidence of any sort for attributing the N-town cycle to a particular town. What seems to be the best clue, James' assertion that the cycle is the Ludus Coventriae, is either erroneous or else true in some sense that we do not or, for lack of evidence, perhaps cannot understand. The one certain thing we do know is that the N-town cycle is unrelated to the Coventry civic cycle, of which late redactions of two plays are extant. Another piece of evidence indicates that N-town may have been a touring play, acted at various towns by a strolling group of players; this is the well-known statement which concludes the Proclamation or banns of the cycle:

A sunday next ye bat we may
At vy of ye belle we gynne oure play
In N. towne wherfore we pray
That god now be goure Spede.

Of this puzzling statement E. K. Chambers gives the following opinion:

"N. towne" might of course fit either Norwich, which, however, had craft plays, or Northampton, where we have no clear record of plays. But I suspect that N. merely stands, as it does in the Marriage Service, for Nomen, and that the Ludus, like the [Croxton play of the] Sacrament, was a touring play.

The idea that N-town was a "touring play" remains viable, although there is only the one piece of evidence to suggest it. Moreover, the fact that the Proclamation which prefaces this cycle does not in many instances fit the plays which make it up weakens the "touring play" theory; for it is possible that the banns describe an earlier, rather different version of the cycle than that which we have. If this is the
case, then the above theory must be considered almost wholly irrelevant to the extant text. 23

Another possible theory might be based on W. W. Greg's argument that the N-town cycle was written "not for purposes of acting, but of private reading" (Problems, p. 399). If so, then we might assume that the cycle may have been compiled to be studied as an example of the Corpus Christi genre. Miss Block's inference that schoolboys once used the manuscript lends some support to this (Block, p. xxxvi). We might also recall here Block's suggestion that James used the title *Ludus Coventriae* generically, to describe the kind of drama which this cycle is, and that furthermore the Elizabethan title written on the manuscript (fo. 1) is "The Plaie called Corpus Christi" (Block, p. xl). If we assume for the moment that all these points are true, then we could also explain the name "N. towne" found at the end of the Proclamation; for such a cycle as this one—a compilation of individual plays, parts of cycles, and one or possibly two small whole cycles, never acted in its entirety and intended to be read—would have been acted at no town, or, being thought of as an example of the genre, at any town and thus at "N. towne."

The theory that N-town was a "touring play" has not been refuted, and, although there is only the one piece of evidence to suggest it, even those who might be expected to be most hostile to it have found ways to make the idea compatible with their own. This one piece of
evidence is, however, as W. W. Greg says, "the only suggestion of a locality in the plays themselves," and for this reason Greg refers to the cycle as "the N-Town plays" (Problems, pp. 366-67). Greg's reasoning on this point, as on many others, is sound, for he contradicts no evidence and his conclusion is suggested by the manuscript. Thus, I follow him in calling this cycle the N-town plays or cycle. Hardin Craig, in attempting to eliminate this possible objection (the "touring play" theory) to accepting N-town as the lost Lincoln cycle, points out that "a similar lack of definite location appears in the manuscript of The Castle of Perseverance, also believed on good grounds to be a Lincoln play" and that in The Book of Margery Kempe Lynn, Margery's birthplace, is "repeatedly written as "N. " In addition, Craig suggests that the possibility that the plays were acted sometimes at towns other than their home "would not affect their connexion with Lincoln" (ERD, pp. 279-80). However, Mark Eccles has contradicted Craig's first point, the analogy between N-town and The Castle, by arguing that The Castle probably belonged to Norfolk rather than to Lincoln.24

Kenneth Cameron and Stanley Kahrl pursue Craig's last point and find evidence in the manuscript which perhaps supports it by suggesting that the name "Worlych," on fo. 207r, the only proper name which "appears against a character in the entire cycle," belongs to a Lincolnshire family. Cameron and Kahrl identify this particular
"Worlych" as one William Worleyge of Weston, whose will, probated in 1540, "included a bequest to 'oure mother churche of Lincoln' "; and they claim that this "indicates that either the cycle, or part of it, was presented in places other than in Lincoln (and the 'N-Town' of the Banns suggests this) or that citizens of towns a day's journey from Lincoln could involve themselves in the plays."25

Greg's statement that the reference in the banns to "N. towne" is "the only suggestion of a locality in the plays themselves" is perhaps not entirely true, for the dialect in which the plays are written gives some direction here. Most scholars agree that the dialect of the N-town plays is Northeast Midland, although the evidence of dialect does not necessarily point, as Hardin Craig would have it, "straight to Lincoln" (ERD, p. 266). Max Kramer believes that an older "kernel cycle" underlies the extant cycle, and that the older cycle originated in southern England but was expanded and revised in the Northeast Midlands.26 Bernard Ten Brink asserts that "the language of these mysteries...shows for the most part a coloring which points rather to the northeast of the Midlands than to the neighborhood of Coventry."27 E. K. Chambers, in The Mediaeval Stage, offers "no opinion" on the dialect of the plays (II, p. 421). W. W. Greg states only that the dialect of this cycle is "of a much more easterly type" than that of Coventry. Greg also asserts that the manuscript is "clearly the work of an East-Anglian scribe," but he does not develop
the point (Problems, p. 366). Chambers, in his later work, does offer an opinion on the dialect of the plays, claiming it is "an East Anglian variety of east Midland," but he also gives no evidence to support the claim.

Harold Whitehall, who studied the dialect of N-town for the Middle English Dictionary, states the following conclusions:

1. In its present form, the Hegge cycle MS. is obviously of mixed dialect. 2. It is possible to see clearly that the mixture contains a Central or South East Midland layer (probably from northern East Anglia), and a Northern or extreme North East Midland layer (probably from Lincolnshire). 3. All the internal evidences point to the latter as the original dialectical stratum and to the former as being the result of copying. 4. If you possess other, non-linguistic evidence for an original North Lincolnshire provenience of the original, you would be perfectly safe in assuming that the present version is either a Norfolk derivative of the original or a derivative version made by a scribe trained in or around Norfolk.

It would be interesting to see these inferences argued in detail, but that has not been done. As I see it, the available dialect evidence indicates clearly only that Cotton Vespasian D. viii was probably written by a scribe from either the North-East Midland, or Central Midland, or South-East Midland areas. Dialect evidence cannot be safely used to locate the N-town cycle in a particular town.
Footnotes: Appendix

1 Block, "Introduction," p. xi.

2 Hardin Craig, for instance, says that "because the date 1468 appears in the scribe's hand on the play of the Purification, the manuscript has very properly been thought to have been written at that time or about that time" (ERD, p. 242). W. W. Greg states that there is no reason to doubt that this [1468] is actually the date of writing" (Problems, p. 370).

3 Miss Block says that "the interpolated quire E has the Pitcher watermark of the pot d'étain type (Les Filigranes, No. 12498 or 12501), not found, according to M. Briquet, before the last decade of the fifteenth century." She also points out in a footnote that Mind, Will and Understanding "in the Macro MS. is written on paper bearing a Pot watermark" (p. xi). But Mark Eccles, in his recent edition of The Macro Plays for the Early English Text Society, points out that the watermarks in Mind, Will and Understanding [Wisdom] resemble "Briquet's nos. 12476-80, used in France in 1471 and later. This watermark appears in a later form on two leaves which were added to the manuscript of Ludus Coventriae" ("Introduction," p. xxvii). Thus the papers are not so similar as Block's observation might imply.


5 Craig, ERD, p. 242. Block (p. xv) and Greg (Problems, p. 370) also agree with this judgment.

6 Problems, p. 399.

7 Miss Block points out that some of these names, as well as a motto, occur also, probably by coincidence, "among the scribblings in the Chester plays (MS. Add. 10305, ff. 55 and 111)" (p. xxxvi).

8 Quoted in Block, pp. xxxix-xl. The statement within brackets is Miss Block's.

9 Craig, ERD, pp. 239-40.

10 Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages, p. 47. If the dialect of the N-town plays is in fact East Anglian, this
would militate against Hardin Craig's desire to claim these as the Lincoln plays. I will consider this point in more detail later in the chapter.

11 Quoted in Block, pp. xxxviii-ix. The statements within brackets are Miss Block's.

12 Miss Block says that "the fact that Dugdale follows James in omitting the Old Testament plays shows that he had not examined the MS. Vesp. D. viii for himself" (p. xxxix). This is in any case true, for whatever Dugdale did examine, if anything, it was not a MS classified exactly as that above.


14 So that differences between the two passages may be easily seen, they are typed side-by-side below, the printed version on the left and the MS version on the right.

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**Before the suppression of the Monasteries their City [i.e. Coventry] was very famous for the pageants that were play'd therein, upon Corpus Christi day; which occasioning very great confluence of people thither from far and near was of no small benefit thereto; which pageants being acted with mighty state and reverence by the friers of this house [i.e. the Grey Friars] had Theaters for several scenes, very large and high, placed upon wheels and drawn to all the eminent parts of the City for the better advantage of Spectators: And contain'd the story of the New Testament which was composed into old English rime. The theatres for the several scenes were very large and high; and, being placed upon wheeles, were drawne to all the eminent places of the cittye, for the better advantage of the spectators. In that incomparable library belonging to Sir Thomas Cotton, there is yet one of the bookes which pertaind to this pageant, entitled *Ludus Corporis Christi*, or *Ludus Coventriae*. I myselfe have spoke with some old people who had, in their younger**
slip for viii)]. I have been told by some old people who in their younger years were eyewitnesses of these pageants so acted that the yearly confluence of people to see that show was extraordinarily great.

yeares, bin eyewitnesses of these pageants soe acted; from whom I have bin told that the confluence of people from farr and neare to see that shew was extraordinary great, and yielded noe small advantage to this cittye.

15 Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, EETSES, 87, 2nd ed. (London, 1957), pp. xviii-xix. Also, Craig is mistaken here when he says (p. xix) that "Dugdale is the earliest authority for the belief that the Coventry Corpus Christi play told the story of both Old and New Testaments." Craig was evidently looking at the 1730 rev. ed. of Dugdale's book, where the Old Testament is mentioned, rather than the 1656 original where it is not.

16 Quoted in ERD, p. 240.

17 Quoted in Block, p. xxxix.

18 But friars did perform vernacular drama. V.A. Kolve quotes the work of an anonymous poet of the 14th or 15th century which satirizes the friars for doing so (The Play Called Corpus Christi [Stanford, 1966], p. 29).


20 See Block, pp. xxxiii, xxxv. See also Cameron and Kahrl, "The N-Town Plays at Lincoln," p. 64, for the suggestion that the N-town compiler "has created transitional dramatic scenes that will connect separate pageants into coherent, cinematic action."

21 Hardin Craig, Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, 2nd ed., EETSES, 87, London, 1957. There are no striking similarities between these plays and their N-town counterparts. There are, however, some interesting general structural similarities between N-town and what is known of the Coventry civic cycle. There were but ten plays in the true Coventry cycle, none on Old Testament subjects, and most containing many episodes rather than the usual one. For instance, Craig tells us that the "lost pageant of the smiths was, as the records show, a full-length Passion play that extended from the Entry into Jerusalem at least as far as the Crucifixion" and that the "lost cappers' pageant, . . . was a play of the Resurrection that extended from the Setting of the Watch to the Peregrini" (ERD, p. 288).
There is a not dissimilar merging of scenes in the N-town "Passion Play. I" and "Passion Play. II" (Block's titles). Craig also states that the wealthy mercers' company probably presented the play of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, an important subject at Coventry, and that the Mercers' company "seems to have been a fraternity in honour of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Craig also gives evidence indicating that "there was a pageant of the Assumption in the [Coventry] Corpus Christi procession" (ERD, pp. 288-89). The mercers were, so far as is known, one of only two crafts which presented plays on single subjects, the other being the drapers (Doomsday). N-town has a very good, independent Assumption play which might have originated in conditions such as those described above. I mention this as an observation, not as an argument.

22 English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages, p. 47.

23 W. W. Greg argues that "the cycle as we have it was never meant for performance. It is easy to show that the cycle first took its present shape in the extant manuscript, and the marginal notes and genealogies clearly prove this to have been prepared for literary and not for theatrical use. The numerals dividing plays, . . are no evidence of representation, but . . merely . . introduce some sort of correspondence with the Prologue. On the other hand it is exceedingly difficult to determine how far the amalgamation of heterogeneous material was first effected in the existing manuscript. But in any case it is only to the constituent portions of the cycle, whether united in 1468 or at an earlier period, that the question of representation can . . apply" ("Review of Swenson's Inquiry," The Library, I [Series 4, 1920-21], 182-84).

24 The Macro Plays, p. xi.

25 "Staging the N-Town Cycle," Theatre Notebook, XXI, 3 (Spring, 1967), 133-34.

26 Kramer's book is Die Sprache und Heimat des sogenannten Ludus Coventriae (Halle, 1892). I have not had access to this book, and the matter in my text is paraphrased from Esther Swenson's Inquiry, p. 2.


28 English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages, p. 47.
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