Literature and culture in late medieval East Anglia

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LITERATURE AND CULTURE IN LATE MEDIEVAL EAST ANGLIA

DISSERTATION

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the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
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By

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CHAPTER I: AN INTRODUCTION TO
MEDIEVAL EAST ANGLIA

Albert Baugh points out in *A Literary History of England* that while Chaucer's poetry is often seen as the apogee of fourteenth-century English poetry, his works and those of other court poets represent only a small portion of the literature that was being written "from one end of the country to the other" (232). While Baugh's comment prefaces a discussion of the alliterative revival, that is, the literature of the North and West England of which the Gawain poet and Langland are the chief figures, it could well apply to another region which participated in the "intense literary activity" of the fourteenth century, and which was probably the most active region in the fifteenth century: East Anglia.

The boundaries which circumscribe this region are not clearly defined, but this study will focus on the shires of Norfolk and Suffolk, which, in addition to a small portion of southeastern Cambridgeshire, constitute the traditional limits of the diocese of Norwich. It should be noted that during the medieval period, however, reciprocal economic and cultural ties extended beyond the diocesan boundaries as far west as Peterborough, including the Fenlands,
Huntingdonshire, the Isle of Ely, all of Cambridgeshire, and southern Lincolnshire. I will occasionally draw on information about these areas as well.

East Anglian poets and dramatists of the late medieval period produced a considerable body of works. The plays assigned to this region by linguistic analyses comprise much of the extant medieval English drama and include important works such as the N-Town Cycle, The Castle of Perseverance, The Play of Mary Magdalene, and Mankind. According to similar analyses, the editors of The Handbook of Middle English have located the area of the East Midlands as the area of composition for twenty-six anonymous Middle English romances. While dialectal studies of the romances have not yet been able to pinpoint more precise locations—overlapping dialects make this task difficult—it has been suggested that a group of twenty-three tail-rhyme romances originated in East Anglia and that the poets of these works formed a "school . . . in the direct line of development of English literature, and prepared the way for Chaucer" (Trounce, "The English Tail-Rhyme Romances" III 47). Certainly Chaucer was well acquainted with the techniques of these tail-rhyme romances, which he parodied in "The Tale of Sir Thopas." Next in the direct line of descent of English poetry was East Anglian John Lydgate, the most influential poet of the fifteenth century. A monk at Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk,
Lydgate, a follower of Chaucer, wrote in a variety of genres for patrons of diverse social positions—-from kings to wealthy merchants. Other East Anglian poets were influenced by Lydgate and imitated his aureate style. These poets include John Metham, the author of several biblical legends and romances, of which only one survives; Osbern Bokenham and John Capgrave, both authors of saints' lives for influential East Anglian patrons. In addition, William Worcester, Sir John Fastolf's secretary, translated a number of classical works in the early humanist period. Finally, this brief survey of East Anglian literature may also include Malory's *Morte Darthur*, for recent evidence suggests that Malory was a land holder in Cambridgeshire and that the "French book" was perhaps obtained from Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales, whose primary residence was in Norfolk.

The works and authors referred to above are merely the most prominent to be included in a discussion of East Anglian literature. They bespeak a host of other works—some now part of the lost literature of medieval England—which issued forth from East Anglia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In spite of the number and quality of these works, no study to date has sought to explain in any detail the reason for this extensive literary activity as has been sought, as mentioned above, for the regional literature of the North and West of England. Nor has any
study sought to discover if the works produced in this area are interrelated in ways other than dialectally. Yet recent studies by anthropologist Victor Turner suggest that if a body of literary works is the product of a single cultural community, those works must be interrelated and reflect the world-view of that community. According to Turner, "Every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, and poetry, is an explanation and explication of life itself" (From Ritual to Theatre 13). I believe that East Anglia in the late medieval period did, in fact, comprise a such a community and also that the romances and drama written there directly reflect the popular ideology of the region.

The presumption which underlies this consideration of East Anglia as a cultural unit is that the shires of Norfolk and Suffolk were integrally connected in the later Middle Ages. It presumes that the term "East Anglia" is not simply a designation reflecting the region's early medieval history and one which therefore has no real significance for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. An examination of the social, economic, and historical background will demonstrate that there is ample authority for regarding the region as such a unit in the late medieval period. Such an examination will also help define the social milieu out of which the literature arose.
The religious organization of England for much of the medieval period maintained jurisdiction that largely coincides with the counties under discussion, and perhaps this jurisdiction is responsible for a more limited definition of the region than other factors would warrant. When the area was converted to Christianity in the seventh century, an early bishopric was established at Elmham, Norfolk, but that was later divided into the dioceses of Elmham and the lost site of Dommoc, areas corresponding to Norfolk and Suffolk, respectively. This dual ecclesiastical administration of East Anglia remained until the Viking invasions in the later tenth century, at which time both sees were destroyed. When Christianity returned to the region, a bishopric was reestablished at Elmham and remained there through the first few years of Norman rule. In 1072 the diocesan headquarters was moved to Thetford and then finally to its permanent location at Norwich in 1096, governing, as it had before, the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, and part of Cambridgeshire (Hunter-Blair 196).

Politically, the area of the East Angles was one of the ten separate Anglo-Saxon kingdoms south of the Humber in the year 600 and was bounded on the west by the kingdoms of the Mid-Angles and on the south by that of the East Saxons. The area was somewhat larger than the corresponding diocese. During the reign of Cnut, England was divided into four administrative areas governed by an earl, East
Anglia being sufficiently important—in spite of its relatively small area—to rate its own administrative chief (Hunter-Blair 102). Even after the Norman Conquest, the shires, particularly Norfolk and Suffolk, continued to act as a unit, with shire courts of the two counties held in conjunction. Furthermore, there are numerous official documents linking the shires in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Douglas 2). For the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, indeed even the sixteenth century, one of the clearest indications of the political unity of the two counties was the single sheriff, who, among his other duties, administered the shire elections and legal proceedings for the Crown in both Norfolk and Suffolk; he was usually a member of the Norfolk or Suffolk gentry. In 1571 a bill before Parliament proposing to divide the jurisdiction of the sheriff was defeated, perhaps because of "stubborn East Anglian conservatism, a witness to the tenacity of the links which joined the two counties" (MacCulloch 9).

According to Roger Virgoe, "Socially and politically East Anglia was not typical of the whole of England in the fifteenth century" (73). Just as some aspects of its political and religious organization date back to pre-Norman times, so too some facets of this region's unique social structure had their origins in the early Middle Ages. It is an often observed feature of the Domesday Book
entries that East Anglia contained a far greater percentage—roughly forty percent—of freemen or semi-freemen relative to the number of villeins and cottars than in other areas of the country (Bolton 23). This large proportion of freemen continued throughout the later Middle Ages and continued to leave its mark on the social structure and economy of this region.

Elsewhere in England, the numerous villeins were bound to the land and obligated to perform labor services on the lord's demesne—obligatory duties such as plowing and sowing fields, carting produce, and catching eels—and to pay a variety of rents, dues, and fines to the lord of the manor. While in some cases a villein might hold more land than a freeman, a larger portion of his income was preordained to such payments, and often he was hard pressed to maintain mere subsistence. An increasingly greater yield at harvest, which forced down the price of produce, and an inability to enforce customary laws of obligatory duties caused labor services to be commuted to dependable money payments. This trend toward commutation throughout England began in the mid-twelfth century but declined in the thirteenth for several reasons: land clearing and reclamation of Fenlands had reached their limits; reclamation soils, often poor, quickly lost fertility; and the population increased. Cultivating the demesne again became profitable as the demand for food outstripped the ability to produce
it. In this situation, high profits of marketing produce became more attractive than the commutation payments. The trend to commutation regained strength in the fourteenth century, but even then "serfdom was the lot of most people in the greater part of England" (Postan 165). But it was not the lot of most people in East Anglia, and the distinction between this region's social structure must have been evident to those who had occasion to travel through it or who had access to records which recorded such facts.

Several explanations for the distinct social structure of East Anglia have been offered by scholars. Most of these explanations see the situation in East Anglia as the result of conditions that existed before the Norman Conquest and attribute them to Danish, Anglo-Saxon, or even Frisian influence (Bolton 24). For example, a class of semi-free East Anglians, called "sokemen," owed allegiance to a lord but were not bound to the land as was the villein. This relationship is more akin to that existing in Germanic warrior societies between lord and retainer rather than like that in feudal societies between lord and vassal. The result was that the sokeman could live on the manor of one lord while owing allegiance to another at some distance from his agricultural holdings.

Not only was the status of most East Anglians different from the population in the rest of England, but the nature of land tenure was different as well. In much of
England, particularly in the Midlands and the South, the organization of the manor as texts have typically described it came much closer to being realized than it did in East Anglia. In this description, a lord's acreage is divided into two cultivated areas, one which supplies the lord directly with produce, the demesne, and the other, the common fields, worked by tenants--both villeins and freemen--to sustain themselves and to pay rents and other fees to the lord. The common fields, usually at least two or three per manor, and containing five hundred or more acres each, were apportioned to tenants in narrow strips in order that good and poor land be equally meted out and the areas allotted spread at considerable distances over the total area under plow. In the idealized manor, the tenants all lived in a single, nuclear village. Recent research, however, demonstrates that there were "a variety of manorial types" and that the manors of the traditional description presented here were few in number and probably were restricted to conservative Benedictine estates rather than held by secular lords (Postan 98-100).

Nowhere was the deviation from the idealized manor organization more evident than it was in East Anglia. Instead of having plot-strips spread across the open fields, a tenant's acreage was concentrated in a single area. Such an arrangement, in which a tenant's whole crop could be contained in one section of one field, may well
have necessitated more cooperation among East Anglian tenants than among tenants in other regions of the country. In the parcelled open-field system used in most of England, parts of the fields could be left fallow in the normal crop rotation or even returned to pasture or meadow without impairing the individual's yield; such a situation was not possible in East Anglia. In addition, some parts of East Anglia, the Brecklands and southeastern Cambridgeshire, instead of using a two- or three-field rotation system used an in-field/out-field rotation. While this method was shared with parts of Lincolnshire, its use in other parts of the country was limited (Darby 20).

The most striking feature of the Domesday Book, according to D.C. Douglas, is the complete "lack of coincidence between manor and village" in East Anglia, a feature which Douglas also notes was "permanent" throughout the late Middle Ages (Douglas 3). This unsystematic arrangement meant that several manors, four or five on the average, could have tenants residing in a single village, or conversely one village could contain several manors. Perhaps this organization had its roots in pre-Conquest social arrangements, for the method of assessing the Danegeld in East Anglia was by the village rather than by the amount of land under plow, the system used in the surrounding counties of Essex, Cambridgeshire, and Lincolnshire (Douglas 4). Villages such as Imingham and Aylsham
in Norfolk, both of which contained several manors, were much more numerous in East Anglia than were the single-manored villages such as Brancaster, Norfolk, an estate of Ramesy Abbey.

This division of the single East Anglian village among several manors may be the result of a partible inheritance system—as opposed to that of primogeniture—which East Anglia shared with Kent. There is abundant evidence of the effects of this system in the large proportion of free tenants holding fewer than five acres, as high as three-fourths of the total on some Suffolk manors (Postan 163). Division of property equally among heirs could lead to cooperative tenancy, but fragmentation of the land through sale or marriage was inevitable. This fragmentation meant that East Anglian freeholdings were not only typically small but that irregularly sized holdings occurred frequently. Although the unit of acreage seems to have been based on a twelve-acre measurement in Norfolk and a ten-acre measurement in Suffolk, plots of much smaller areas, including "roods" and "perches"—about one-hundredth of an acre were also recorded. This fragmentation, combined with other factors, such as the rapid reclamation or irregularly sized parcels in the fens, lead to a situation in which "by 1300 the regular tenemental units were of very little practical application" in East Anglia (Dodwell 64).
Perhaps the social and agricultural distinctions existing between East Anglian and other English regions grew less apparent in the thirteenth and especially in the fourteenth centuries as the tenurial system everywhere decayed, but certainly these distinctions were real and apparent. Their origins pre-dated the Conquest and remained essentially intact throughout the late medieval period. A sense of regional identity, which was certainly augmented by the social and agricultural organization, was also promoted by the gentry of East Anglia in the late Middle Ages. For them, the region was something of a closed society. Records of sixteenth-century marriages show that a majority of men of Suffolk gentry married local brides from within the county, but when they looked outside of their county for a spouse, they chose mates from Norfolk more often than they did from Essex or Cambridgeshire combined (MacCulloch 9). This social egocentricity is indicated at an even earlier date by a stained glass window formerly in St. Michael's Church, Cornisford, Norwich. Donated to the church in 1419 by Sir Thomas Erpingham, the window was made "in remembrance of all the Lords, Barons, Bannerets, and Knights, that have died without issue male in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, since the corona­tion of the noble King Edward the IIIId" (Blomefield IV 87-88; see also Virgoe 83). Finally, William Worcester, mentioned above, also wrote two antiquarian works, includ-
ing a now lost county history inaccurately titled *Agri Norfolcensis familiis antiquis*. Like the Erpingham window, it included a list of nobles and gentry from both Norfolk and Suffolk who had died without male heirs between 1327 and 1461 (McFarlane, "William Worcester" 216-17).

It seems to me that a culture which is able to produce a quantity of sophisticated artistic works is one that meets at least one of the following conditions: political stability, ideological fervor, or economic prosperity. Given the large body of extant literary texts referred to above, it is not surprising that in the Middle Ages East Anglia was further distinguished from much of the rest of England by its wealth. A ranking of tax assessments for 1334 indicates that for both lay and clerical wealth combined, Norfolk ranked third among all counties, Cambridgeshire fifth, Suffolk twelfth. Other counties neighboring the Wash region were also ranked among the richest, including the wealthiest area of England, the Holland section of Lincolnshire, just beyond the Norfolk border.

The general prosperity of East Anglia—Norfolk in the fourteenth century and Suffolk in the fifteenth—may be partially attributed to the production of wool and the manufacture of woolen textiles. The *Domesday Book* records some eighty thousand sheep in the region at the time it was compiled (Wilson 72), and evidence exists for a small
weaving industry during the Anglo-Saxon period (Simper 10). In Suffolk the sheep were evenly distributed throughout the county, with flocks of 100 or more found in almost every hundred, but the largest flocks of about one thousand were located in the northwest part of the county (Unwin 407). It is mainly in the western part of both counties where the considerable growth in sheep pasturage took place--all to meet the demands of growing markets, first in Flanders, then in Italy--in the last half of the thirteenth century and the first quarter of the fourteenth.

Although the amount of wool produced in East Anglia at this period was substantially less than that being produced in Lincolnshire and in Yorkshire, Fenland manors of monastic houses such as Ely, Peterborough, Ramsey, and Crowland, all of which border on the region, were major suppliers to Continental manufacturers. For example, Crowland Abbey estates increased the size of their flocks from about 4,000 in 1276 to 7,000 in 1313 (Miller 226), and between them Crowland and Peterborough had 16,300 sheep in pasture at the beginning of the fourteenth century (Power 35). In Suffolk, Bury St. Edmunds first began its entry into sheep farming at the late date of 1303-04, but entered on a large scale; and the hundred of Blackbourne could boast some 17,000 sheep in 1283.1 Although few records

1H.E. Hallam points out that of the twelve ecclesiastical manors and eighteen lay manors of the hundred, sheep were twice as numerous on the former, showing the typical
exist, peasant flocks must have been extensive, considering that even religious houses with enormous flocks, like Crowland, could produce only a small percentage of the total annual export.  

The profit from the wool was enormous if the quality of the clip was high, but most of the wool from East Anglia and the southern Lincolnshire fens was fairly low-grade. The mercantile handbook compiled by Francesco Pegolotti, an agent for the Bardi in England between 1317 and 1321, makes this difference clear. According to his manual, Langley Abbey in Norfolk, for example, produced eight sacks per year, valued at only seven marks each; Shouldham Abbey produced sixteen sacks, the best valued at 12 1/2 marks and some very inferior stuff at only three marks; and Crowland Abbey's thirty sacks were sold for twelve marks each.

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2Eileen Power suggests that "in the heyday of demesne farming peasant sheep flocks exceeded those of demesne, even though the more scientific farming of the latter may have produced the better wool" (p. 29). See also A.R. Bridbury, "Before the Black Death," p. 398.

3The religious foundations in England selling wool comprise only a part of Pegolotti's famous manual (258-69). Pegolotti catalogues only three institutions in all of Norfolk and Suffolk selling wool, while naming at least thirty-five in each of the counties of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, but major wool-producing abbeys, like Crowland, Peterborough, Ely, and Ramsey come within the East Anglian region and all would have had manors in Norfolk or Suffolk. The contribution of East Anglian wool to the profits of Fenland institutions should not be undervalued, nor should those to the general economic prosperity of the region made by secular lords and their tenants.
These figures should be compared to those for the Lindsey region of Lincolnshire, which produced the highest quality of wool. There we find that the Premonstratensian establishment at Bullington produced eighteen sacks per annum, its three grades of clip valued at nine and one-half, thirteen, and twenty-two marks, respectively. The Benedictine nunnery at Stanfield, producing twelve sacks per year, could command thirty marks for its best wool.

Although profits from the sale of wool were a boon to the East Anglian economy, sheep raising on a large scale was limited, as noted above, to the western reaches of the region, especially in the East Anglian Heights and the Breckland. Even in the Fenlands, cattle grazing was nearly as important as that of sheep, and dairy farming in both Norfolk and Suffolk provided an important source of revenue. Among the cash crops produced, barley, oats, rye, and peas were important in Norfolk, "one of the most highly arable counties in England," and similar crops were produced over the varied terrain of Suffolk, also "highly arable" (Hallam 46 and 52).

Produce and other goods from East Anglia found an important market at the internationally-known fair at St. Ives, but others scattered throughout the area had regional significance. East Anglia also had a sizable merchant marine and its share of important ports: Ipswich, Yarmouth, and King's Lynn. In 1334, Yarmouth's tax was the fourth
highest among provincial towns. Its prosperity at this
time was due to flourishing wine trade with Gascony and one
of the most important fishing fleets in northern Europe.
The annual herring fair, held from August to mid-November,
could attract five hundred ships from ports all over
northern Europe (Saul 77). King's Lynn was also one of
England's most important ports, connected with the Midlands
by way of the Great Ouse and Nene Rivers, by which it
brought grains and wool for export from as far away as
Coventry and Buckingham (Carus-Wilson 186 and fig. 68).4
While they were never the major wool ports like London or
Boston, Lynn and Yarmouth exports averaged 1200 and 1000
sacks, respectively, from 1297-1304 (Lloyd 123, Table
12).5 In addition, both ports were major centers for the
export of salt, an extremely profitable industry in the
fens and marshes in East Anglia where this important
commodity was obtained from evaporating tidal pools (Carus-
Wilson 187-88; and Saul 77).

4 Carus-Wilson writes, "That Lynn owed its importance
not a little to its excellent lines of communication by
water over a wide area is illustrated by a fourteenth-
century petition to Parliament urging that Lynn should be
made a staple port, on the ground that 'various streams ran
through the counties of Warwick, Leicester, Northampton,
Rutland, Bedford, Bucks., Huntingdonshire, and
Cambridgeshire, by which wool and other goods could be
conveyed more easily and cheaply to Lynn than to any other
port.' The petition was granted" (p.195).

5 The averages represent 4.5% and 3.6% of the total wool
export for the period; London and Boston combined accounted
for 58.7% of the total (Lloyd 123, Table 12).
At the beginning of the fourteenth century, then, the general impression of East Anglia is one of considerable prosperity fostered by important ports and locally produced commodities and crops. This prosperity reflects the culmination of the boom economy of the thirteenth century, but an examination of conditions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries reveals that continued affluence or growth in some sectors is, however, paralleled in others by reversals of economic fortune. Examples of the latter have often been cited as evidence of a general economic "stagnation tinged with gloom" (Bolton 208). But most historians now refrain from seeing a general crisis, and a few view the later Middle Ages as a period of growth for England's economy.6

East Anglia in the later Middle Ages fits fairly well into the pattern described. Its economy can--during the

6J.L. Bolton summarizes the majority view: "There was neither universal prosperity nor universal depression, nor did one class in society necessarily prosper whilst others went to the wall" (Bolton 209). However, most authors concerned with the medieval towns support the notion of a decline in urban prosperity, especially after the plague and into the fifteenth century (see Saul 75-76). Opposed to both of these positions in his seeing the late medieval period as one of prosperity both for the towns and the English economy in general is A.R. Bridbury, whose book Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages has met much opposition since its appearance in 1962. Nevertheless, Bridbury has reasserted his position in a persuasively argued article, "English Provincial Towns in the Later Middle Ages" (1981). Both Bridbury and Bolton agree that the picture of pervading gloom and decay in post-plague England painted by earlier historians was a repercussion of Tudor propaganda.
two centuries with which this study is concerned--be described as one of general prosperity with certain areas evidencing a considerable growth in wealth, while a few localities suffered usually temporary declines. As we have seen, the early fourteenth century represents a high point in sheep raising, but exports of wool began to fall in the second decade of the century as disputes between England and Flanders, hostilities between France and Flanders, and internal strife in the latter disrupted the wool trade with England. The sheep murrain of 1313-1317 also decreased productivity, as did the wet summers of 1315 and 1316. Wool growers would have also been hurt by the creation of a staple in 1313 at St. Omer, but certain English merchants certainly benefited from the creation of this monopoly, which effectively broke the primacy of Italian merchants in England. Nevertheless, both Lynn and Yarmouth suffered. Their combined export of about 2200 sacks per year, eight percent of the England's total wool trade, at the beginning of the fourteenth century had shrunk to less than five percent of the total by 1350. When the staple was on two occasions located in England, it was Norwich, connected with Yarmouth by the River Wensum, that was selected as a staple town, reflecting its importance as a regional commercial center.

7See Lloyd pp. 99-143 for a general discussion of the wool trade in the first third of the century and pp. 134-35 for Yarmouth and King's Lynn in particular. The data is
Yarmouth regained the wool trade they had enjoyed when exports rose again to near record levels in the 1340's. During the remainder of the century, Lynn seems to have continued to prosper, while Yarmouth began "a severe and protracted decline" (Saul 76) relative to other English towns. There seem to be several explanations. During the initial stages of the Hundred Years War, Yarmouth's merchant fleet was commandeered for the Crown, frequently without remuneration for the ships' owners. The requisition of its fleet contributed cause to Yarmouth's loss of domination of the herring industry to Continental competitors, who began to supply London markets. Another factor, and perhaps most important, was the deterioration of Yarmouth's harbor, which frequently silted up. Burdened with the cost of building defensive works during the war, Yarmouth no longer had the means to maintain the expensive dredging operations which were required. Although Hugh Fastolf, uncle of Sir John, was one of the few Yarmouth men who became rich during the war, his nephew's investments in the area were unprofitable by 1476.

Yarmouth apparently fits the stereotypic view of the late medieval town in decline and may be in fact one town derived from Lloyd's Table 12, p. 123, which reveals that the wool trade of Ipswich also declined.
for which that view may be accurate. King's Lynn suffered some economic dislocation, but fared much better than Yarmouth. The wine trade with France was disrupted and continued to decline throughout the later Middle Ages; whereas Lynn had imported hundreds of tuns of wine each year, the average had fallen to an only fifty-four tuns per annum by the 1490's. And the once profitable export of grain to the Scandinavian countries and the importation of timber, furs, and hawking birds had been seriously damaged by the growing monopolistic powers of the German Hanseatic merchants. When these merchants established a trading center at Lynn, which occasionally caused conflicts with the English populace, they helped the town avoid the predicament of Yarmouth. In addition, by the last decade of the fourteenth century the export of wool from Lynn had nearly returned to levels it had achieved in the first decade. The return to those levels combined with what was now the growing export of English cloth, suggests that in

8Bridbury, "English Provincial Towns," notes that both Yarmouth and Ipswich complained of damage by the sea and sought relief, as did many towns, from fee-farms and subsidies. Such petitions for relief have often been cited as evidence of decline, but Bridbury claims that the petitions were "a calculated, trumpet-tongued, and even perhaps, at times, a systematically concerted campaign to defraud the king"(16). Furthermore, most records of trade concern goods received from or destined for foreign markets and not internal trade, which probably increased in the fifteenth century. Consequently, the evidence for Yarmouth's decline must be viewed with some caution.
1400 Lynn's trade may have exceeded its trade of a century earlier, reflecting too England's late-century prosperity.

Norwich's importance as a provincial capitol and regional commercial center is indicated by its selection as one of the home staple towns in 1326-27, the only one in East Anglia. The importance of the staple, which necessitated all wool be sold or held in the designated towns, can be estimated by the feuding between Yarmouth and Norwich, culminating in 1331 when Yarmouth prevented vessels from traveling up the Wensum. A writ of Edward III was necessary to rectify matters in favor of--not surprisingly--Norwich (Blomefield III 81-2). Like most of the other staple towns, Norwich was also a center for the English cloth industry. By the early thirteenth century, "cloth production was the single most important industry in most English towns of any size" (Bolton 147), and East Anglian towns like Lynn and Norwich, with streams needed for fulling operations, would have been actively engaged in cloth manufacture. Although production declined during

9Several different mercantile factions wanted a staple somewhere, but each faction had a different idea of where it was to be located and how it was to be regulated. The home staple was reinstated in 1332-34, and again in 1353 until 1362, at which time the permanent Calais staple was established. In addition to Norwich, the original staple towns were London, Lincoln, York, Newcastle, Bristol, and Exeter (Powers 86-103).

10Dorothy Owen writes that fullers and wool-combers are mentioned as distinct trades in civic records of King's Lynn in the mid-thirteenth century and that some dyers and weavers are present at every period (58).
the century as competition from the efficient Flemish mills increased, English cloth production began to revive in the early fourteenth century. Norwich was the center for worsted cloth, named for the village in Norfolk where it purportedly originated. This medium-priced cloth accounted for 15-20 percent of English cloth exports by mid-century, averaging 12,000 bolts of cloth per year during the period 1350-61 (Bolton 199, 252). According to Blomefield, worsted production brought fame as well as prosperity to Norwich; he writes, "Great manufacture was carried on in this branch of business, in Edward Second and Edward Third's time, to which the prodigious increase and popularity of the city was then owing" (III 80). It also buoyed up the fortunes of Yarmouth, for that town, designated as Norwich's port, received about three-fourths of all the worsted destined for export (Bolton 252).

Towns in Norfolk were not the only ones to benefit from the revival of cloth, for 40 Suffolk villages register names that suggest involvement with the industry in 1327.

Several factors encouraged the revival. England in its ongoing hostilities with France, vied with that country for the support of Flanders, sometimes reducing wool exports as economic leverage; this decreased wool prices in England. In addition, cloth imports were reduced, creating a favorable conditions for native production. Also, both Edward II and Edward III needed money to support their wars; taxes levied on exports of wool for this purpose drove the prices up for foreign manufacturers, as did the creation of the staple, which increased transportation costs for foreign merchants. Finally, troops in the campaigns required sufficient clothing, which could be most dependably supplied by English looms (Bolton 198-99).
in particular Long Melford, Lavenham, Clare, and Kersey, the latter, like Worsted, giving its name to an inexpensive woolen (Bolton 201). These rural cloth-making villages in Suffolk experienced an unparalleled prosperity beginning at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries. But it was not until that time that cloth exports—compared to those of wool—were anything but meager contributions to the whole English economy.

During the intervening period East Anglians were witness to two cataclysmic events: the onset of the several visitations of the plague, beginning with the Black Death in December 1348, and the Peasant's Revolt of 1381. The latter, it is frequently acknowledged, was an event that had no lasting effect on the country as a whole, but resulted from the upheaval of both economic and social conditions brought upon by plague-induced depopulation. According to Augustus Jessop, "... hardly a town or village in East Anglia escaped the scourge" (204) of this epidemic. Considering that the population density of medieval East Anglia was greater than other regions of England, hence increasing the ease of transmission of the disease, Jessop's estimate that half—and perhaps "many more than half" (206)—succeeded may be accurate.12 For

12Jessop bases his conclusion on his examination two types of documents: (1) East Anglian manor court rolls, which record the deaths of landholders only, not their family members or hired labor which might have worked for the wealthier tenants; and (2) Registers of Institutions of
example, in the small parish of Hunstanton in north Norfolk, between the first occurrence of the pestilence near the end of March 1349 and October, 172 landholders of the manor died, seventy-four with no male heirs and nineteen with no living relatives, those too presumably swept away by the disease (Jessop 204). The East Anglian clergy was also decimated (Jessop 215 ff.). During the first year after its introduction, the plague claimed more than two-thirds of the benefices of the diocese. Over eight hundred parishes lost their priests, eighty-three lost them twice, and some lost three or more. Of the deaths of friars, there are no official records, but all of the Friars of Our Lady vacated—whether by death or otherwise—their residence in Norwich. The cloister offered no protection from the pestilence either: twenty-four abbeys or priories were left without their chief administrators, and all the Augustinian Canons at Heveringham, Norfolk, died, leaving their holdings deserted. The sparsely populated areas of East Anglia perhaps suffered least—so Jessop claims for the Isle of Ely (221 n.). And while three Cambridgeshire manors of Crowland Abbey lost half of their landholding tenants, other places in that county appear to have been untouched by the Black Death (Darby 16).

the diocese of Norwich, which record appointments of priests and heads of religious houses. Because these documents may not have been maintained with great accuracy during the worst of the crisis, they may not reveal the full severity of the Black Death.
Although during the height of the crisis in 1348-50, East Anglian fields went untilled, untended livestock roamed the countryside, and citizens preyed on the leavings of their neighbors (Jessop 233 ff.), within a few more years the rural economy had quickly "recovered along traditional lines" (Bolton 209) throughout the country. At the mid-point of the century, sufficient overpopulation in most areas left few permanent vacancies. Real changes do not seem to have begun until the 1370's, that is, after the pestilence had twice returned in epidemic proportions in 1361 and 1369. Depredations of the population had several effects. A smaller work force increased wages paid to hired help, which formed a significant proportion of the workers on the manoral demesne. While grain prices had been high since the Black Death, a bountiful harvest in 1375 reduced profits from the manoral farm, encouraging landlords to reduce or abandon demesne farming in favor of leasing parcels to tenants (Platt, Medieval England 127-29). Customary labor duties also were more frequently commuted for money rents as services ceased to be required on the shrinking demesne. The ready availability of land both on the demesne and among peasant holdings made easier its accumulation by the wealthy peasants of the villages—or so it would seem.

Christopher Dyer, however, points to the increased tenacity of landlords in collecting fees for land trans-
fers, in enforcing labor services on those tenants who still owed them, and in imposing other forms of arbitrary fees in manorial courts, concludes that "landlords defended their interests and incomes with vigour in a period of economic adversity" (30). But in so doing, the lords flamed opposition to their control, an opposition which had already become in some cases "open and self-conscious" in the decades after the Black Death (Dyer 30). Nor was open insurrection--even violence--against landlords without earlier precedence in East Anglia. Authoritarian constraints imposed by the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds sparked a rebellion in 1327-29 by the townspeople, who looted and burned the abbey church and other monastic property. Conspiring with a notorious gang of outlaws, burgesses of Bury abducted the abbot, spirited him off to the London criminal underground and eventually to a prison in the Brabant (Gottfried 222-31). This insurrection is not out of character with the often-noted increasing violence of the period and presages the events of 1381.13

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13McKisack writes, "The evidence at our disposal makes it abundantly plain that fourteenth-century England, for all its multiplicity of courts, statutes, and justices, was not a law-abiding country and that those responsible for the maintenance of order were faced with obstacles beyond their power to surmount" (203). Platt (Medieval England 111 and fig. 73) observes that most of the small, moated farmsteads, which seem to have proliferated in East Anglia from 1275 to 1325, indicate a need for protection, not just a simple aping of the building practices of the nobility. See also Hanawalt's Crime in East Anglia in the Fourteenth Century.
The widespread rebellion in East Anglia began in the second week of June 1381 in Suffolk. Among the prominent rebels was one Thomas Sampson of Harksted, a man with property in several locations, who forced Ipswich citizens to sack the house of a man executed by another mob. Sampson was also responsible for insurrection in three other towns; Richard II nevertheless pardoned him, presumably because of his social status (Powell 23). Like Sampson, John Philip of Brandon had accumulated considerable property, mostly in the decade before the rebellion, and during the same period had risen to the position of bailiff for his lord (Dyer 37). In Norfolk, Sir Roger Bacon was one of the leaders of forces that entered Norwich and Yarmouth. John Hanchach, owner of several manors in Cambridgeshire, seems to have led the rebellion in that county. His rancor was partly directed at Thomas Haselden, J.P., who was retained by the Duke of Lancaster as a steward on one of his Cambridgeshire manors. Hanchach looted and then destroyed two of Haselden's manors (Powell 44). Generally, members of the gentry figure more prominently as leaders of the uprising in East Anglia than they did in other parts of the country.

Many of the victims of the East Anglian violence were perceived by the rebels as infringing on personal or economic freedom: government officials—justices, parliamentary representatives, tax collectors—and landlords, who
not infrequently had held such offices, often were singled out as targets. In Suffolk, for example, chaplain John Wrawe from Sudbury, led an attack into Essex on the manor of a corrupt M.P.¹⁴ From Essex Wrawe's troops turned back into Suffolk, apparently with a vendetta against John de Cavendish, a justice who had gained the enmity of the people for his precise enforcement of the Statute of Laborers. Looting his goods, hidden in the local church, was apparently not sufficient, for Wrawe and his troops moved on to Bury St. Edmunds, there to sack another house owned by Cavendish. Unlucky Cavendish was captured and beheaded by another band when the boat by which he was to escape was intentionally loosened from its mooring before he could board (Powell 13). Suffolk properties of the great lords were also selected as targets for mob action. Mettingham Castle, under the proprietorship of two knights, John Plays and Roger de Boys, was breached twice, once by a force of 500; and several manors of the Countess of Norfolk and the Earl of Suffolk were all sacked (Powell 24).

Nor was violence in East Anglia confined to rural areas. The arrival of John Wrawe at Bury rekindled hostilities in the ongoing conflict between the townspeople and the abbey. Its new abbot fled the town but was betrayed by

¹⁴According to Powell, some of the minor clergy, also required to pay the 1380 Poll Tax, were "eager partisans" (62), another distinction between the East Anglian rebels and those elsewhere.
his guide and captured at Newmarket. There he was seized and mocked in a savage parody of Buffeting of Jesus and finally beheaded. Other executions took place in Bury, and the townspeople removed valuables and extorted, then burned documents—a frequent tactic of the rebels—to eradicate proof of unfavorable conditions of servitude or trade restrictions enforced by the abbey. Elsewhere, citizens of Cambridge assaulted the house of the university beadle, sacked and burned Corpus Christi College, and looted valuables and documents from other institutions in the town. In Yarmouth, a troop of rebels opened the jail, released a felon, beheaded three Flemings, and then went on to loot the houses of M.P.'s, justices and tax collectors, including that of Hugh Fastolf.

The Peasants' Revolt in East Anglia was suppressed by the appearance of the Earl of Suffolk, William Ufford, with troops sent by Richard II, and by Henry Despenser, Bishop of Norwich, who alone seems to have offered organized resistance to the rebels during the height of the

15Powell takes at face value the account of events recorded by John Gosford, almoner of Bury in 1381 and later its abbot: "Quem apprehensum et quam plurimis injuriis laceratum perduxerunt ad novum mercatum, ubi per noctem sequentem obprobriis et convicis illudebant, quandoque enim coram ipso genuflectebant dicentes 'ave raby,' quandoque ei ciphum sine poculo propinabant, quandoque alapis eum cedentes dixerunt 'prophetiza quis est qui percussit te.' Sic que per totum noctis spatium fremebant et strideant dentibus super eum, sicut in nocte cene Iudaea gens perfida fecerat super Christum" (B.M. Cotton Claudius A. XII. fol. 132r, in Powell, Appendix II, p. 140).
crisis. Violence had ceased by the end of June, and although some of the leaders of the revolt were condemned, reactionary enforcement of labor statutes or other retributions against perpetrators by landlords seem to have been few (Tuck 203). The threat of renewed uprisings--some did occur in East Anglia within the next three years--prevented further taxation of the lower classes.

The eruption of violence in 1381 may be immediately attributed to the imposition of the third poll tax since 1377. But clearly the underlying impetus for the Peasant's Revolt lay in the antagonism between landlords trying to maintain their station at the expense of laborers and tenants, both of whom at this time more than at any other before felt the promise of financial gain within their grasp. That it was a revolt of "rising expectations" may be seen, according to Christopher Dyer (35), in the class of some of its leaders in East Anglia: knights, officials, and substantial villagers. These classes stood to gain the most in the economic expansion after the Black Death, that is, at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, when consolidation of land--if uninhibited--by the elite village families could proceed

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16Postan observes that during the late middle ages, the numbers of poor laborers declined (156) and that "improvements in the condition of the lowest category of villagers" were "unmistakable" (157), a position which Dyer (22) echoes. In East Anglia, with its typically small holdings, opportunity for economic advancement must have attracted much of the populace.
very easily. According to Colin Platt, it was the "ministerial class"—reeves, rent collectors, franklins, and so on—who most successfully acquired and managed land generated by the landowners' abandonment of demesne in favor of leasing (132).

The large landowners, facing low prices on agricultural products, low rent income, and high wages, were the only group to have suffered much during the later Middle Ages (Postan, Medieval Economy and Society 194). Postan's claim that peasant classes prospered while others, in general, declined must, however, be viewed with caution when discussing the fortunes of East Anglia, for "there was indeed no one English economy, but rather a whole series of regional economies" (Bolton 234). While the greater wealth of the country may have drifted south and west during the fifteenth century and East Anglia declined relative to Somerset and Dorset, the region still prospered. Much of this prosperity was due to increase in cloth manufacture and trade, for during the later Middle Ages, England ceased to be a major wool exporter and became instead rich on the profits of the more expensive finished product. The great boom in English cloth production came in the last two decades of the fourteenth century when

\[17\] According to Schofield, Maps 1 and 3, p. 506; but Bridbury ("English Provincial Towns," 20) claims that "the rank ordering of counties on the basis of single assessments [of 1334 and 1524] made for taxation purposes is inherently suspect" due to wide variations in assessment practices.
production more than doubled, going from fewer than 20,000 cloths to about 45,000 cloths per annum, as England replaced Flanders as the main supplier broadcloth to the Continent (Carus-Wilson, England's Export Trade 138-39; Bolton 290). And although exports, hampered by disruptions of European markets particularly about mid-fifteenth century, did not increase at a constant rate, the total volume had reached 80,000 cloths by 1500.

Most conspicuous for their spectacular economic growth were the cloth-producing towns along the Stour valley in Suffolk: Cavendish, Clare, Kersey, Long Melford, and Lavenham. Villagers in this area of East Anglia, according to Bridbury, found that they could augment their farming income by producing yarn and undersell their rivals in the older centers of production who depended exclusively on cloth for their livelihood (Economic Growth 46). A proximity to water for fulling mills along the Stour and its tributaries further enhanced the competitive edge, as did the near-by urban centers and ports: Hadleigh, Ipswich, and Sudbury, where newly-enlarged markets (Wilson 73) during the fifteenth century reflect the prosperity of the new industrial centers.18 Clothmaking probably played an

18Bridbury (Economic Growth, App. III, pp. 112-13), in presenting evidence for growth in urban economies in the later middle ages, calculates a growth ratio based on the tax assessments of 1334 and 1524. Although Bridbury considers any one comparison of returns suspect, taken together the ratios may show prosperity for the country's and East Anglia's towns. The following are the rates of
equally large role in the economy of fifteenth-century Norwich, where a quarter of all the admissions to the ranks of freemen of the town were members of the textile crafts (Bridbury, *Economic Growth* 49). A grant of "aulnage" by the Henry IV in 1409, renewed by Henry VI in 1448, which required all worsted cloth made in Norfolk to be sealed in Norwich for a halfpenny per cloth (Blomefield III 125), further ensured the town's position as the industrial and mercantile center of East Anglia.

Not all towns in East Anglia benefited from the expansion of the cloth industry. We have seen above that Yarmouth seems to have declined during the fifteenth century most, with London becoming more and more the great port of the Southeast. King's Lynn continued to prosper through the first quarter of the century as its fishing fleet ventured into the bountiful Norwegian and Icelandic waters by about 1412. A thriving trade with Iceland was curtailed by the Hanseatic merchants, who had exclusive trading rights in Norway and its territories. Lynn capitulated rather than jeopardize the opportunity to trade in the Baltic which the Hanseatic merchants allowed. What may have been good for Lynn was not felt to be so in other parts of the country, and a trade war with the Hanse

increase for selected towns in the region: Bury St. Edmunds, 8; Cambridge, 2; Hadleigh, 8; Ipswich, 4; King's Lynn, 3; Lavenham, 18; Norwich, 8; Peterborough, 1; and Yarmouth, 1.
beginning in 1449 severely curtailed Lynn's export business (Carus-Wilson, "Medieval Trade of the Ports of the Wash" 199-200). Normal trade did not begin to revive until the end of the Hundred Years' War in 1475.

The slack in exports for Lynn would have been countered by increasing shipments to English cities, especially London, which was a magnet for goods of all kinds produced in East Anglia. Furthermore, East Anglia had not been damaged by the Wars of the Roses as had other areas of the country. The towns wanted to maintain their independence and therefore refrained from getting embroiled in conflict. Although the magnates of East Anglia—the earls of Suffolk (the de la Poles), the dukes of Norfolk (the Mowbray's and John Howard) and Lancaster, and Lord Scales—could effect local communities and foment division among landowners—like the Pastons—along political lines (Haward 174 ff.), there were no battles or forced requisitions by armies of the York or Lancaster factions.

The early fourteenth century was a period when East Anglian landholders could profit from wool production and arable farming and merchants in the town began to enjoy reduced competition from foreigners. The century and a half after the Black Death was a period in which more people in East Anglia were better off or at least had more opportunity than they had before the pestilence. Even if export trade did decline at times and even if it can be
demonstrated that Yarmouth and perhaps other towns suffered, Platt concedes that individual standards of living need not have suffered (Medieval England 191). For rural citizens of East Anglia, land was more readily available and native markets were demanding more goods. At least, it can be affirmed that a fair portion of the population had improved its standard of living.

The prosperity of East Anglia is also suggested by its cultural achievements in the later Middle Ages. In late fourteenth-century Suffolk, George Unwin finds "an unmistakable indication of social development and of comparative economic prosperity" in the substantial multiplication of religious fraternities, especially in the western industrial towns; in the fifteenth century, these guilds "sprang up all over rural Suffolk" (Unwin 658). These religious guilds and, to a lesser degree, the craft guilds of the towns were responsible for organizing a variety of community projects.

In addition to performing charitable activities for the sick and destitute, the members of the guilds often

19Platt (The English Medieval Town, 130-32) observes that most of the wealth in the urban centers in the early sixteenth century was concentrated in hands of a few. Six percent of Norwich's taxable population, a population which comprised only 40% of the citizens of the town, was assessed at 40 pounds, a considerable amount. Platt estimates sixty percent of Norwich wealth belonged to only six percent of the population. At the same time in Lavenham, over eight percent of the wealth was possessed by just a few clothiers, notably the family of Thomas Spring, which had the highest tax assessment outside of London.
sponsored ecclesiastical building campaigns. The spacious churches at Long Melford and Lavenham in Suffolk testify to the prosperity of cloth-manufacturing towns along the Stour. In Norfolk, too, the parish churches in the Perpendicular style—"a style of middle-class prosperity" (Pevsner 37)—are notable for their size and number. In Norwich the large churches of St. Peter Mancroft, St. Stephen, St. Laurence, and St. Andrew indicate the building campaign undertaken by city burgesses in the fifteenth century in which many wooden structures were replaced by stone buildings (Bolton 252). The money spent on such structures in Norwich also evidence civic pride and parish rivalries, as do village churches elsewhere in East Anglia. For example, the contract between the mason and the parish officials in Helmingham, Suffolk, specifies that the new tower for the church be of the "brede, wydnesse and thicknesse of the stepyll of Framesden," and the door, windows, and buttresses "after the facion of the stepyll of Bramston," and the whole tower "as many fote heyer" than the steeples of those two neighboring parish churches as Helmingham's parishioners desired (Platt, Medieval England 141-42).

Ancillary industries developed to ornament and furnish the new buildings, and the products of these industries often exhibit features particular to East Anglia. Wood sculptors of East Anglia are particularly noted for their
elaborate chantry chapels and ingenious figured roof bosses, misericords, and especially bench-ends with poppy-head carvings (Gardner).20 Perhaps wood sculpting flourished in the region because the local stone is soft and a poor medium for carving. Although Norwich was a distribution center for the popular alabaster devotional figures, the stone was certainly quarried and probably worked elsewhere (Saunders 199). But at least some stone was sculpted by local artists, as is demonstrated by a series of forty-two fonts, of which only two examples may be found outside of Norfolk and Suffolk. Characteristically, these octagonal fonts depict the Seven Sacraments and the Crucifixion on the sides of the bowl, and other figures may be chiseled on the stem or base of the font (Stone 222-23). Blomefield (X 211-12) records that in 1468 a font of this type was made from stone purchased at Lynn and carted to East Dereham, Norfolk. There it was worked by a mason for ten pounds and then installed in the Church of St. Nicholas, the whole process costing more than twelve pounds and paid for by the subscriptions, contributions, or testamental bequests of the parishioners.

The lively fifteenth-century wood carving of East Anglia was related to an earlier style common to the minor

20Gardner (273) notes that the term "poppy" or "popey" is supposed to be derive from *puppis*, a poop. The OED finds that the word has the same forms as those for the poppy flower.
arts of the region and best exemplified in manuscript illuminations (Stone 151). Famous for their extraordinary richness and vigour and for their "drolleries," monsters and vignettes of medieval life, the products of this school—such as The Peterborough Psalter, The Gorleston Psalter, The St. Omer Psalter, and The Ormesby Psalter—have led scholars to refer to the first third of the fourteenth century as the "East Anglian Period" of English manuscript illumination. According to Eric G. Millar, "by the beginning of the fourteenth century the diocese of Norwich had become for the time being one of the greatest centers of book production that had existed in any country" (1). In spite of the quantity and quality of the books it produced, the school seems to have dissipated by 1340 and never revived, leaving a hiatus in significant painting until the fifteenth century. By then East Anglian painters had turned to other media: glass and wood. During the 1400's, East Anglian glaziers were among the best and busiest in late medieval England, and many fine examples remain of a fifteenth-century school of glasspainters centered around Norwich (Woodforde). The painting of figures on wood, especially of saints on the lower panels of the ornately carved East Anglian rood-screens, was a

21Recent scholarship (Marks 17-19) has discerned two styles in the illuminations: one, which seems to emanate from Norwich, with Italianate influence; the other from the Fenland abbey, without the Italian mannerisms.
distinctive feature of the region. At a time when the English nobility spent most of its money on its internecine wars and little money on panel painting and when prosperous merchants elsewhere in England appear "not to have extended patronage to painting" (Borenius and Tristram 36), the burgeoning of panel painting--of which many examples survive--testifies to the singular nature of East Anglian art and patronage.

Personal wealth and community pride only partially explain the enormous sums patrons lavished on illuminated psalters and churches and their ornaments. With those two factors must be coupled the nature of late medieval popular religion, which emphasized individual lay piety and the humanity of the Holy Family, chiefly realized in the Cult of the Virgin, who was especially important in the popular devotion of East Anglians. In addition to the other social and political factors melding the region into a unit, Mary seems to have been a religious figure who further fostered in the local population a sense their cultural identity and homogeneity.

This sense of homogeneity and the prestige of the Virgin were abetted by the regional prominence of St. Edmund, the East Anglian king who, in defense of his kingdom, was killed by the Danes in 870 and who was shortly thereafter regarded as a martyr (Hunter-Blair 71). Because of the veneration of this saint in the late medieval
period, the memory of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom he ruled created a potent sense of community and shared cultural heritage among East Anglians (see MacCulloch 7, and Matten). Lydgate even implores the saint to intercede with God on behalf of sinners as Edmund is "Our help, our socour, our mediatour most cheff, / As thou art king and prynce of this contre" (125 11. 25-26). But Lydgate's poems concerning the Virgin, including the 6000-line Life of Our Lady, bulk larger among his religious works than do poems about the patron of his monastery. In this emphasis, Lydgate, in fact, mirrored the special veneration accorded Mary at Bury St. Edmunds:

In the fifteenth century as in most of the preceding centuries much of the religious devotion, the energies, the literary and architectural arts, and financial resources of Bury were being directed toward worship of the Virgin (Gibson 72).

Because St. Edmund's regional significance and because of the monastery's extensive landholdings throughout East Anglia, Bury must have exerted a pervasive influence in its dedication to the Virgin.

But Bury was not the only center of Marian worship in East Anglia. Far more important was the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, east of King's Lynn in Norfolk. Although only the merest vestiges of the complex at Walsingham now remain, before the Reformation it was the major focal point for this cult in England and the second most important shrine in the country after that of Becket at Canterbury.
Based on the belief that the chapel there enclosed the house of the Annunciation, which had been miraculously transported from Nazareth by the spiritual aegis of the Virgin, Walsingham drew every monarch from Henry III to Henry VIII to northern Norfolk (Dickinson). Pilgrims streaming along "Walsingham Way" and stopping at Bury and other East Anglian shrines dedicated to Mary at Lynn, Woolpit, and Ipswich, to name the most important (see Bridgett 319-20), must have been a constant reminder to the local populace of the special favor in which they were held by the Virgin.

The devotion to the Virgin by East Anglians can be measured in part by the number of guilds dedicated to her. Of the nine hundred confraternities in Norfolk, one hundred and eighty-seven were guilds of Our Lady (Waterton Bk II 2); and in Norwich she was the most popular patron of both craft and religious guilds, the total greater than either those dedicated to Christ or to the Trinity (Tanner 83).

The persistent prominence of the Virgin in the lives of East Anglians acted perhaps as a stimulus to piety in general. Pious citizens of Norwich, for example, bequeathed chantries, memorial masses, provisions for pilgrimages, hospitals, hermits, and liturgical items in their wills, leading Norman Tanner to suggest that those wills were "significantly more religious than those from most other English towns" (138). The vigorous anti-Lollard
campaign conducted by the Bishop of Norwich from 1424 to 1431 provides further evidence of piety and religious conservatism as well. The persecutions conducted there seem to have been effective in eliminating open heresy from East Anglia (Lambert 262).

The same social classes, guilds, and fraternities responsible for the construction and adornment of the East Anglian parish churches were also the organizers of a considerable amount of dramatic activity, only partially represented by plays mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. In addition, the wealthy merchants, professionals, and country gentry that made up these pious groups employed scribes to make psalters, penitential manuals, and other religious reading matter; presumably, these literate East Anglians also sponsored the copying of romances and other secular works. We may take members of the Paston family as an example of a group in which both literary activities occurred. Presumably family members saw and supported the production of plays in Norfolk, for records of 1473 indicate that John Paston II had allowed his stablekeeper to act the parts of St. George, Robin Hood, and the Sheriff of Nottingham for three successive years in Norwich (Lancashire 183). The Paston library included, in addition to other secular works, romances by Chaucer, Lydgate, Hoccleve, as well as anonymous works, such as "Guy of Warwick," "Richard Coeur de Lion," "The Death of
Arthur," and one simply called "The Grene Knight." However, the Pastons, because of their prominence and the preservation of the family letters, constitute an exception to our knowledge about most wealthy East Anglians. What romances were they reading? How do those romances connect with the extant drama? How do both relate to the popular culture of East Anglia? These are questions to which the following chapters will attempt to provide answers.
CHAPTER II: MEDIEVAL READERS IN EAST ANGLIA

Margaret Deanesly, upon examination of 7578 English wills dated before 1526, was struck by the "extreme booklessness" of medieval England and the even more apparent dearth of books which were both vernacular and secular, such as chronicles and romances, which she found only among the collections of bibliophiles ("Vernacular Books" 349). Deanesly's assessment must be regarded with caution, however. For example, in 1530 the Bishop of Norwich complained of numerous heretical religious books, particularly copies of the vernacular Gospels, banned in 1408 by the Archbishop, "I am accombred with such as keepeth and readeth these erroneous books in English... I have done that lieth in me for the suppression of such persons; but it passeth my power or any spiritual man for to do it" (Adamson 43). Not only were religious texts in English plentiful within five years of the terminus ad quem of Deanesly's census, but the bishop found that these vernacular works had currency among the merchants of East Anglia, that is, among a class of people which was only moderately prosperous and modestly educated—the middle class. The bishop's complaint gains credence from Sir Thomas More's claim of 1533 that more than half the popula-
tion could read; albeit needing qualification, his estimate should not be dismissed.¹

Concerning her estimate of secular books, Deanesly’s conclusions must be even more carefully regarded. Her objective, to trace the development of and reaction to the Wycliffite English Bible, predisposed her to look most carefully for religious works, so no complete list of secular books appearing in the wills was made, nor were their numbers accurately recorded.² A more reliable gauge of the numbers of secular books is the early printings by Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde. Within two years of setting up shop in England (1476), Caxton had printed Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales and The Parliament of Foules; three poems by Lydgate, “Horse, Sheep, and Goose,” “The Temple of Glass,” and “The Churl and Bird”; and The Book of Courtesy, among other works which demonstrate the demand for secular books. Wynkyn de Worde, Caxton’s apprentice, began printing on his own just after Caxton’s death in 1491. By the end of the century, he had produced editions of The Canterbury Tales, Le Morte Darthur, as had Caxton, as well as Mandeville’s Travels, several poems by Lydgate, including The Seige of Thebes, and in 1500 two popular English

¹More’s statement is reported in H.S. Bennett, “Production and Dissemination,” p. 169.

²The total number of wills which bequeathed books of all types, 338 (Deanesly, “Vernacular Books,” p. 349), conflicts with the number she presented elsewhere, 600 (The Lollard Bible, Appex. I, p. 398).
romances, Sir Eglamowre and Bevis of Hamptoun in quarto (Bennett, English Books 12-13; Appex. I, 239-76). De Worde had printed at least fifteen similar romances by the end of his career in 1535. Costing only a few pence, these volumes would have readily lost their outer leaves and soon been discarded, a deterioration attested to by the extant copies, usually consisting of only one or two pages. According to H.S. Bennett, "Few forms of literature have been thumbed to pieces more completely than these slender quartos" (English Books 149). De Worde's considerable prosperity, in comparison to his contemporary and rival, Richard Pynson (Adamson 43), who had little interest in such works, indicate he must have been able to gauge popular taste well.

Clearly both Caxton and de Worde were good businessmen; they printed works which readers most often paid scribes to copy and which were most widely circulated in the advent of the printing press. English stationers had been printing vernacular works for fifty years by 1525, the last year from which Deanesly drew data from wills. Given the state to which many of these volumes must have deteriorated within the lives of their owners, it is not surprising that the wills evidence the "booklessness" which Deanesly found. There are additional reasons--which I will discuss below--why Deanesly's evaluation must be suspect, but suffice it to say now that her finding that only 338 of
the wills bequeathed any kind of book must grossly underestimate the numbers of readers and the numbers of books, both in print and in manuscript, in late medieval England. Furthermore, reading and possessing books may have been more common in certain regions of England than in others. One region which may have had a tendency to bookishness was East Anglia.

Most of the scholarship devoted to medieval book owners has concerned persons of royal or noble rank, and important church officials. A review of the salient points about books of the upper class is in order, for some of their attitudes about reading are reflected in the habits of readers of a lower station. According to Peter J. Lucas, "The gentry imitated the magnates in wanting to possess books, and in turn wealthy merchants imitated the gentry" ("English Literary Patronage" 241). At one end of the spectrum is the collection of Humphrey, Duke of Clarence (1391-1447), whose library exceeded one thousand volumes and was actively sought by Oxford University upon the duke's death. Another member of the royal household, John Duke of Bedford, was also an avid bibliophile and managed to purchase—or extort—the 843 volume royal library of France for a mere 300 Ls. (DNB).

But records of books among the magnates seldom indicate that individuals possessed more than a dozen volumes. Most of these were devotional texts: primers,
psalters, portiforia (portable breviaries), graduals, and missals were relatively common, especially from the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Individual Gospel books and religious tracts occur less frequently, while the whole New Testament or the Bible is rare. A saint's life or *Legenda Aurea* occurs sporadically among their possessions, as in the case of Lord Bardolf, who left to the church of Dennington, Suffolk, after the decease of his wife, his gradual and his legend (Nicolas I 236). In the fourteenth century, Latin predominates as the language of the devotional books, although all religious works—including the Bibles, gospels, psalters, legends, and some tracts—appear with considerable frequency in French. Before 1400 English religious books among the aristocracy are poorly represented, mainly confined to Rolle's psalter and a few early Wycliffite Bibles, but in the fifteenth century the numbers of these works in English, except for English Bibles, increased, becoming more popular than French renderings (Rosenthal 544).

Among secular works of instruction and literature, French continued to be the favored vernacular language

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3 Evaluation of the relative frequency of Latin as opposed to English as the language of religious books differs among various types of those texts. Deanesly writes that "primers before about 1380 were of course in Latin, and probably there were as many Latin as English primers throughout the [fourteenth and fifteenth centuries]" ("Vernacular Books," 356). More recently, A.I. Doyle has written that books of hours and devotions were "overwhelmingly in Latin" ("English Books in and Out of Court," 163).
among members of the English nobility until well into the fifteenth century. Even among the aristocracy in the court of Richard II, so often associated with the patronage of English works by Chaucer and Gower, French romances were the primary form of literary entertainment (Scattergood 34). The library of Thomas Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, at Pleshey, Essex, contained eighty-three volumes, including at least ten French romances, but only three religious books in English. Similarly, Guy de Beauchamp, grandson of Guy of Warwick, about whom the Anglo-Norman romance and its English metrical versions were composed, bequeathed forty-two books in his will, including nineteen romances, all in French (Scattergood 34-35; Coleman 18-19). Even toward the end of the fifteenth century we find that a preference for French texts persists. In 1481, about to embark on a naval assault on Scotland for Edward IV, John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, penned a list of books which he wished to take with him on the journey. All of the titles are French, in spite of contemporary printings of English translations (Collier 277).

Although the gentry, affluent professionals, and merchants of late medieval England imitated the nobility in their desire to possess books, the books they did acquire

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4Simon de Burley, tutor to Richard II, had ten romances, all in French but one, an otherwise unknown "liure de englys del forster & del sengler" (Coleman ; Scattergood 35-36). Richard himself also had a sizeable collection of French romances (Scattergood 32-33).
differed in several respects from those of the aristocracy. Sumptuous volumes, those of generous proportions and splendid illuminations, were the property only of the elite who could afford the purchase price. In addition, the lower knights and bourgeoisie preferred English rather than French or Latin for all types of reading matter; this preference is reflected in the increasing numbers of translations from French or Latin into English during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a growth which parallels the rapid expansion of English as the vernacular (Parkes 564-65).

Concerning the East Anglian upper-middle class, as is the case throughout the country, evidence in documents and manuscripts of their possessing books is much fuller in the fifteenth century than in the fourteenth, and Moore long ago showed the existence of a mid-century circle of readers who were actively patronizing the writing of both secular and religious works in East Anglia. Yet even among the upper echelons of this class, as, for example, in the person of Sir John Fastolf (1378-1459), to whom considerable wealth accrued as a result of his military exploits and administrative duties in France, the evidence is often uncertain. Fastolf was "a good deal more than literate" (McFarlane 44)

5Fastolf spent at least 6000 pounds on rebuilding Caister Castle and increased his holding in East Anglia fourfold. His wealth is discussed in McFarlane, "The Investment of Sir John Fastolf's Profits of War" and The Nobility of Later Medieval England, 33 and 36.
and had the perspicacity to employ as his secretary the early humanist author and translator William Worcester. A catalogue of Fastolf's books at Caister Castle in 1450 reveals the type of library one might expect of a knight who had spent thirty years in France, often shoulder to shoulder with the greatest men of the realm: all the volumes—works of classical learning, religious texts, chronicles, treatises on chivalry, and romances—are in French (Bennett, The Pastons 111).6 However, this list seems not to present all of Fastolf's books at Caister, for in 1462 John Paston I, a close friend who provided legal services to his East Anglian neighbor, produced an inventory of the goods at the castle. In that document Paston claims "no knowlech ner informacion" of certain items, including "bokes Frenshe, Latyn and English" reputed to have been in Sir John's chamber (Davis, Paston Letters (hereafter referred to as PL), I 109 and 110, n. 21). Reputed by whom we know not—perhaps by one of Fastolf's household or another close friend who wished to claim those volumes. At least to someone it seemed not incongruous to find English volumes among Fastolf's books, nor would they be incrongruous among the works produced by authors for whom Falstolf provided patronage.

6As a young man, Fastolf, from an old family originally seated at Yarmouth, Norfolk, may have been in the household of John, Duke of Bedford, the bibliophile.
When we consider books of the laity a rung below Fastolf, we are provided with a wealth of information in the letters of the Paston family. According to one fifteenth-century document, the family had been one of humble means as recently as John's grandfather, Clement (d. 1419). Clement, described as a "good pleyn husbond," for plowing his fields and driving his grain cart to market, "had in Paston a fyve skore or a vj skore acrys of lond at the most, and myche †er of bonde lond. . . 0pe Lyvelode ne maneris had he non. . ." (PL I xli-xlii).7 The family's fortune increased dramatically under Clement's son, William (1378-1444), who as a justice of various courts in Norfolk attained considerable power. William's last testament bequeaths no books (PL I 21-25), nor is there any evidence he was a patron of letters; however, his purchase of Gresham Manor from Sir Thomas Chaucer in 1427 may have been intended to identify himself and his family with more established, cultured, and literary gentry.

7To the transcription printed in Davis, I have silently substituted "p" for "y" and added abbreviated letters indicated by underscoring. This depiction of Clement and the added claim that his wife was a "bond womanne" may contain some element of truth. But the whole piece seeks to denigrate the Pastons, particularly William and his son John I, who enforced an agreement for the service of a bondman of Bromholm Priory. Clement did, by the time of his death, possess several tenements in the neighborhood of Paston, but the family's new social position may be indicated by its absence from records before Clement (Davis I xl-xli).
We have already encountered John Paston I (1421-1466). A letter dated 1461 written to John by his wife, Margaret, indicates that John travelled with his books—and occasionally misplaced them:

I haue sent to Jaferey Spyrlyng for the bokys bat ye sent to me fore, and he seyth pat he hathe none ther-of, for he seyth he lefte hem wyth yow when he wyth yow in the northe contré, for he seyth ye left hym behynd yow at Lynkcolne; he supposyth they be at Kaster.” (PL I 273)

John Paston II (1442-1479) can claim the title of family bibliophile. In a series of letters exchanged between John and family members in Norwich in November 1474 and January 1475, John attempts to get his mother to intercede for him in procuring the books of the estate of Sir James Gloys:

Item, as for the bookys bat weer Syr James, iff it lyke yow bat I maye haue them I ame not able to by them; but som-what woulde I gyffe, and the remenaunt, wyth a goode devowte herte by my trowthe I wyll prey for hys sowle. Wherffor iff it lyke yow by the next massenger ore karyere to sende hem, in a daye I shall have them dressyd heer; and iff any off them be claymyd here-afftre in feythe I wyll restoore it. (PL I 476)

Perhaps John believed that possession of the books, whatever works they may have included, would discourage

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8Gloyes had among his manuscripts ecclesiastical works necessary to fulfill his duties as chaplain for Margaret Paston and parson of Stokesby. An inventory of goods—perhaps stolen—of persons connected with Margaret Paston lists under his name a song book (20 d.); a psalter (6 s. 8 d.); a primer, that is a elementary prayer book (ii s.); a book of statutes (40 d.) and a Vitas Patrum (ii s.). But his tastes in literature evidently included works of a more popular nature. The list also includes a "boke of safistre," that is, a book of intentionally specious
heirs of Gloys' estate from taking the trouble to reclaim them, and those books--eventually forgotten--would accrue permanently to his library. The suggestion that they be delivered by the next courier is repeated in his next letter to Margaret:

Item, as for the bokes bat weere Syre James, God haue hys sowle, whycche it lykethe yow bat I shall have them, I beseche yow bat I maye have them hyddre by the next messenger; and iff I be goon, yit that they be deluyeryd to myn ostesse at pe George [Inn] at Powlys Warff [London], whycche wolle kepe them saffe, and bat it lyke yow to wryght to me whatt my peyne ore payment shall be for them. (PL I 477)

John's eagerness to have the books is evident in the more strident tone of this second appeal, now "beseeching" his mother for aid, making contingency plans for their safe delivery, and even offering to pay whatever price may be asked, this last in spite of personal finances strained by a four-hundred-mark payment necessary to redeem a mortgage on the Paston manor at Sporle. In another letter written on the same day (PL I 479), John II tried also to enlist his brother in his attempt to secure the collection.

John's perception of other readers' certain demand for Gloys' volumes, suggested by the insistent urgency of his

arguments (II 360)*[Or Sophistici Elenchi of Aristotle?]. In addition, a letter from John Paston III (1444-1504) to his brother John II indicated that the older brother had commanded Sir James to "deleyuer pe book of vii Sagys to my brodyr Water, and he hathe it" (I 576). The Seven Sages of Rome, a framed collection of both pious and comic tales, appeared in English as early as 1330 in the famous Auchinleck Ms. (see Derek Brewer, "The International Medieval Popular Comic Tale in England," pp. 143-44).
own efforts to obtain them, proved correct. Margaret, writing some two months after her son's initial plea, reported that "the best of alle and the fayrest ys cleymyd," but that the remainder could be purchased for twenty shillings.

Within four years of his attempt at acquiring Sir James Gloys' books and John's own death in 1479, he drew up an inventory of his books, including seventeen manuscripts and one printed book (PL I 517-18). Several of the manuscripts seem to have their own histories. The first volume listed--containing "The Death of Arthur," "Guy of Warwick," "Richard Coeur de Lion," and a chronicle of England up to the reign of Edward III--Paston "had off myn ostesse at be George," presumably the same London inn hostess to whom he intended to entrust the Gloys' books. What sympathies this hostess had for John's acquisitions or how she came by this tome are matters for speculation. Perhaps an upper-middle-class innkeeper could read and may have acquired the book or may have received it as John hoped to receive Gloys' books, that is, as the leavings of an estate. On the other hand the book may simply have been left by a traveller, just as John Paston I had left books at Lincoln, and the hostess may simply have passed it on to a resident express-

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9The heading at the top of the paper suggests the list is to be limited to "Englysshe bokis," but several classical works including "a boke de Othea, text and glose," suggests that these works may not have been strictly translations.
ing interest in it. John's copy of *Troilus and Cressida* had previously been for ten years in the hands of one William Brandon¹⁰ who passed it on to one of the Wingfields, inlaws of the Duke of Suffolk, from whom John Paston had received it. Another compendium, including *The Parliament of Fowls*, a debate between Hope and Despair, a saint's life, and other poems, John II had himself loaned, probably to Sir John Middleton. Finally, a book of religious works inventoried by Paston was given to him by one Percyvall Robsart. The rest of the inventory includes a few translated works of Cicero, still in quires, four books displaying coats of arms, another chronicle, and a book of instruction for knights and tournament combat.

Although John was the most aggressive of the Pastons at acquiring books, other members of the family shared his interest in vernacular works. John III provided ten shillings for a London courier to sack up and convey to Norwich several articles left in the capital. These included-furred and satin garments and, John writes, "my wryghtyng box of sypresse, and my book of the metyng of the Dwke and of the Emperour" (*PL* I 592) left in London. John III, as his father had done when travelling from Lincoln to Norfolk, probably left this book and other cumbersome items

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¹⁰The last four letters of the surname are lost, but three William Brandons were prominent in East Anglian affairs in the fifteenth century.
as a matter of convenience or safety. And like his brother, John III's literary tastes included romances.

The possession of books was not limited to the male members of the family. Margaret Paston (d. 1505), the wife of Edmond Paston II (d. 1504), another son of John Paston I, owned a primer (PL II 615); and the wife of John III, Agnes (d. 1510), owned two prayer manuals, one of which she refers to as "grete," apparently a sumptuous volume in comparison with a lesser one "keuered with redde and having a siluer claspe" (PL II 616). It seems unlikely that the Paston women would have been unaffected by the secular works owned or read by the men in the family, and perhaps a converse influence may have been at work as well. Anne Paston (d. 1494-5), daughter of John I, owned a copy of Lydgate's Siege of Thebes, which she had loaned to the Earl of Arran, whom John III praises in terms which bespeak his own familiarity with works of the same type:

> Her-to, he is on the lyghtest, delyuerst, best spokyn, fayirest archer, deuowghtest, most perfyght and treuest to hys lady of all the knyghtys that euer I was aqweyntyd wyth. . . . (PL I 575)

How typical were the Pastons among the upper-middle class readers in East Anglia? Not very typical, but the difference between them and other men and women of the gentry and bourgeoisie were more in degree than in kind. Through the several generations, the men of the family pursued their early education under the tutelage of a
family chaplain (Bennett, *Pastons* 102-03), a common arrangement among the aristocracy as well, and then proceeded to one of the universities, usually Cambridge. Their university training ensured that they were better educated than most of the gentry and burgesses in the economic class we are considering. Clement had clearly seen the importance of educating his son William, "qwhych \( \hat{b} \)at he sett to scole, and oftyn he borowyd mony to fynd hym to scole; and after \( \hat{b} \)at he yede to [the Inns of] Courte wyth \( \hat{b} \)e helpe of Geoffrey Somerton hese uncle. . ." (PL I \( \_\_ \_ \)iii). John Paston I proceeded to the Inner Temple after matriculating at Trinity Hall and Peterhouse, Cambridge; two of his brothers, William II (1436-1496) and Clement II (1442-c. 1479) also attended Cambridge. Among the children of John I, Edmond (d. 1504) spent some time at Stapel Inn, London; Walter (c.1456-1479) took a B.A. at Oxford shortly before his death; and William III (b. 1459) was a student at Eton in 1478-79. Agnes Paston (d. 1479), wife of William I, involved herself in the education of her sons. In a memorandum of errands dated 1458, Agnes lists as one of her tasks:

To prey Grenefeld [tutor] to send me feythfully word by wrytyn who Clement Paston [II] hath do his deve re in lernyng. And if he hathe nought do well, nor wyll nought amend, prey hym that he wyll trewly belassch hym tyl he wyll amend. And so ded the last mayster, and \( \hat{b} \)e best that euer he had atte Caumberge. . . .for I had leuer he were fayr beryed than lost fore defaute. (PL 41)
Like Clement I some fifty years earlier, Agnes, and probably John as well, views the education of her son as absolutely indispensible. How else could the Pastons, particularly a younger son like Clement, advance themselves in civil or military duty, oversee the management of properties, and defend those properties from the claims and legal maneuvering of their enemies--of which there were not a few--without a solid education? Agnes knew of what she wrote; for like Margaret Paston (d. 1484), wife of John I, she shouldered much of the day-to-day family business and often became embroiled as much as the men in the more tumultuous events. Both women were apparently capable readers of English, and as we have already seen other women of the family possessed books of their own. John III also valued literacy in a prospective wife, a "Mistress Annes," to whom he wrote that he was "prowd that ye can reed Inglyshe, wherfor I prey yow aqweynt yow wyth thys my lewd hand" (PL I 590).11

The Pastons compare with other gentry of East Anglia in their desire for schooling and literacy. John Clopton of Long Melford, Suffolk, evidently shared the enthusiasm of his Norfolk neighbors for education, for he bequeathed to George Pallris 13 s. 4 d. yearly support for school at

11It seems reading was skill more often acquired than the ability to write; none of the letters of Agnes or Margaret can be proven to be autographs (Davis, "The Language of the Pastons" 120-21).
Cambridge and to each of his grandsons William and Robert Clopton the substantial sum of 12 d. weekly for their board at grammar school (P.C.C. Prob/11/11 (Reg. Horne 144r.)). Unlike John Paston II, however, Clopton left no record of his library, if in fact he had one. Only in his will, placed among the numerous bequests of money to churches, friaries, and hospitals—so typical of the piety evidenced in wills of the period—placed among the bequests of vestments, jewelry, silver plate to friends and relatives, do we find any suggestion of Clopton's attachment to books. John instructs that his "doughter Curson have my prymer whych was her moders" (P.C.C. Prob/11/11 (Reg. Horne 143r.)). This book, probably in English, clearly has sentimental value for the daughter, and no doubt for Clopton as well, it being only the second personal possession itemized in the first third of the will.12 Near the end of the will Clopton gives to one of his executors, Master William Pykenham, the only other book, a "bible in Englishe," bequeathed (P.C.C. Prob/11/11 (Reg. Horne 144r.)).13 These two books perhaps attest to the literacy

12Near the beginning of the will, John bequeaths his "best hors" to the parson of Long Melford, but this is not a personal gift as much as Clopton doing what was expected according to the "lawdabill custome of the towne" (P.C.C. Prob/11/11 (Reg. Horne 142r.).

13Pykenham, who studied at Cambridge and Oxford and was granted D.C.L. before 1465, held several benefices in Norfolk and Suffolk, and was collated as Archdeacon of Suffolk in 1472, a position which he held until his death in 1497. He had a sizeable library of books on canon and
of the Cloptons, but other evidence suggests a sensitivity for literature as well. First, in what is entirely uncharacteristic of similar legal documents, the prologue to Clopton's will draws upon several commonplaces of medieval literature:

In deī nominē amen by whome all kinges reine and all princīs have dominacion and every creature leveth I John Clopton knowing my selfe mortall remembring also and duly havyng in minde the Uncerteyne of this transitory liffe and that dethe is certeyne to one and to all mankind and the houre of it is moost uncerteyne willing therfore that dethe comyth sodenly as a thife fynd me not unpurveied to die therfore besheching the fader the sone and the holy gost of whom allmyghty Wisdome and grace procedith at this tyme to geve me grace and Wisdome to make my testament to the pleasure of god and my discharge of the goodes of foretune that he hathe gevin me and that it may take suche efforts to my merytte that whan I departe oute of this prison pilgremage and the vnstabull liff that I may come to the hevenly bliss where I may geve Laude hounor worship and praysing to my maker and Redeamer omnipotinte (P.C.C. Prob/11/11 (Reg. Horne 142r.)).

The allitative oxymoron "prison pilgremage" neatly sums up the motif which informs some of the most prominent medieval allegories, and the personification of death as a thief had a long history in sermon literature (Owst 532). Second, the Clopton chantry chapel in Long Melford Church was resplendent with writing painted on the walls, cornice, and ceiling timbers; the whole effect must have been that of an illuminated manuscript architecturally rendered. civil law and theology, all in Latin. That a scholar like Pykenham should receive an English Bible--still interdict at the date of Clopton's will--is surprising (Emden 464-65).
Although now much of the script is nearly illegible in some places, one can still see on the chapel's cornice, a carved "Vine of Life Scroll," some of the thirty-two stanzas from religious poems by John Lydgate (Sansbury 2, 6, and 10; and Trapp). A similar cornice exists in the Lady Chapel, the building of which Clopton had funded, and for which he ordered in his will that one hundred marks be spent for its "garnyshhyng" (P.C.C. Prob/11/11 (Reg. Horne 142r.)); no doubt this woodworking too was intended as a register for religious poetry, although no trace of such work can be seen.

The Cloptons, whose wealth was centered in the burgeoning cloth-producing towns of the Stour Valley, were a merchant family whose wealth and social position paralleled that of the Pastons. But there were country gentry not so great as the Cloptons or the Pastons. More typical of lesser-known East Anglian gentry is John Hopton of Blythburgh, Suffolk (c.1410-1478), who achieved his wealth "neither by birth, nor service, nor marriage" (Richmond 29), but by the unlikely demise of more than a few heirs to sixteen manors in Norfolk and Suffolk. Of Hopton's own schooling and that of his wife, we know nothing, but disbursements in 1452 and again in the 1460's for school supplies, tuition, and board at Brampton and Covehithe, Suffolk, for their children. They were "in no way unusual in wanting such schooling for their sons . . . it is what
we would expect of gentlefolk" but that they also paid for
the schooling of a boy of no apparent relation indicates
that Hopton and his wife simply "cared about education"
(Richmond 133-136). According to the will (1498) of John's
second wife, Thomasin (no will has been recorded for John),
family reading matter in the Hopton household included both
religious and secular works: a psalter, a mass book, a
"legenda sanctorum," a Life of Our Lady, and a volume of
Hoccleve's works—"my book of Englissh callid Ocliff"
(Richmond 125 and 131).14

We have seen that the men of the Paston family studied
at the university and frequently underwent legal training.
A similar course of education was not unusual for the
gentry and may have been rather more frequent in East
Anglia than elsewhere.15 But if the Pastons' schooling was
not unusual, it was not typical either. For typical
readers, education began with song schools for children,
both boys and girls,16 aged seven to ten and then perhaps

14Richmond (131, n. 108.) speculates that the Hoccleve
might have been Bodleian Library Ms. Digby 185.

15A petition seeking to limit the numbers of lawyers in
East Anglia was introduced in Parliament in 1455 (Richmond
181). According to the petition, some had income from
other sources, but most—perhaps younger sons of middle-
class families—did not. Of course, it was not unusual for
lawyers to move into the ranks of the country gentry, a
movement which had gained force in the early fourteenth
century (Denholm-Young 129).

16Parents unable to afford a private chaplain but who
owned property or who hoped for favorable marriage arrange-
ments for their daughters probably enrolled them at local
continued in grammar school. As Nicholas Orme has demonstrated in *English Schools in the Middle Ages*, this pre-university education was widely available. In Norfolk and Suffolk, Orme records, in addition to eleven schools for which the curriculum is unknown, three song and seventeen grammar schools existing before 1500 (Orme 293-325). In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, many schools were established in conjunction with colleges, chantry chapels, and religious guilds; but most numerous were the informal schools run by the local parish priest, his assistants, or by independent schoolmasters, and for very many of these schools no documentary evidence remains. For example, the town school of Bury St. Edmunds operated under the auspices of the monastery and the guild of St. Nicholas, but in 1370 several illicit schools were also operating in Bury, forcing the abbot to threaten the excommunication of schoolmasters operating outside the licenced institution (Leach and Hutton 310).

A demand for schooling and the availability of teachers, and not necessarily the exclusivity based on economic class of the monastery-sponsored school, which provided for song schools; some of these schools, including one at Boston in 1404, were taught by women (see Orme 54-55).

17 The religious orders provided some intramural schooling for secular students, such as Norwich Cathedral's "chapel boys" Ely Cathedral's "almonry boys" (Orme 243-47), but Orme's list excludes "schools kept by the religious orders for their novices, almonry boys, and choristers," which he acknowledges were of "considerable" importance (293).
the free education of forty poor scholars (Orme 148, 248), lead to the proliferation of unsanctioned schools in Bury. Similarly, bequests in wills, like that provided by John Clopton to "vertuous scholers" (P.C.C. Prob/11/11 (Reg. Horne 143v.)) and allowances stipulated in charters of chantries and guilds often provided for the education of the poor. Furthermore, because English landlords usually required bound tenants to secure permission and pay fines for the privilege of attending school (Orme 50), East Anglia, with its high percentage of freemen, may have been better educated than other regions of the country. Suffice it to say that schools in East Anglia in the later Middle Ages were attended by a fair number of children from the middle class or those who aspired to it. To their parents, an education was considered an important if not necessary accomplishment, a consideration made clear by the unusual painted-glass window, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, painted by an East Anglian glazier, which depicts a small boy, book in hand, escorted to school by his parents.18

The curriculum of the song schools was focused primarily on the primer, a text which included readings about the essential elements of faith and devotional

18Victoria and Albert Museum C.351-1937; see also Woodforde (Norwich School, 168), who notes that the scene of the boy, without a nimbus, and his richly gowned parents is not parallel in the lives of well-known boy saints.
pieces, such as the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ave Maria, matins, Hours of the Virgin, seven sacraments, and certain psalms. Because one of the purposes of education was to train boys to help the priest at mass, much of the instruction was aimed at teaching students Latin, but this apparently was at a rudimentary level, saving a finer appreciation of the language for the grammar school. In fact, the primer from the thirteenth century onward had been translated into English, a result of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) seeking to ensure that the parish clergy and the laity better understand the sacraments of confession and the mass (see Boyle; Orme, 62-63; and Shaw). Consequently, in the song schools, the primer also served as an ABC for the learning of English. The vernacular also seems to have been the instructional medium in the grammar schools, which were devoted to teaching Latin. About 1434, John Drury, a schoolmaster in Beccles, Suffolk, where a school had been located since at least 1396 (Leach and Hutton 337), composed treatises for school boys upon penitential and grammatical subjects. The latter, "intended . . . for those who had made some progress in Latin composition" (Meech 74), are--remarkably--explained in English, as is the penitential instruction.

In addition to those educational goals which were both pious and orthodox, the Lollards, who advocated the reading and study of the Bible in English by the laity, "provided a
powerful motive for learning to read" (Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy" 201) for certain East Anglians. The investigations and trials of Lollards by the Bishop of Norwich in the 1420's and 1430's revealed that heretical schools which included adult students were being conducted in his diocese. Richard Belward of Earsham, in southeastern Norfolk, was accused of keeping such a school at nearby Ditchingham in 1424. At the same time John Godsell, a parchment maker from Ditchingham, was interrogated for supplying illicit books to Belward. In 1429, the bishop's court sentenced Godsell himself and John Skylly to seven years imprisonment for keeping heretical schools. Through these schools, the Lollards made literacy more available for adults from previously unlettered ranks of society. Persons summoned before the bishop's court consisted mainly of craftsmen, like Godsell, and laborers (Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy" 202). Furthermore, women, who were active as readers and preachers of Lollard texts, were also tried (Aston, "Lollard Women Priests?" 53-55).

The leader of the Lollard movement in East Anglia, William White, before his execution in 1428, seems to have disseminated his ideas from those Norfolk villages into the Suffolk towns like Beccles, traveling all the way to Colchester. Investigations about illicit reading matter in Bury St. Edmunds in the southwestern reaches of the diocese further indicate a widespread advocacy of reading English
in East Anglia. The severity of Bishop Alnwick's punishments suppressed Lollard schools in East Anglia but did not eradicate them; rather it encouraged among the heretics an even more diligent secrecy than they had hitherto practiced. Such secret schooling must have been practiced until the sixteenth century, when, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the reform movement having gathered so much strength, and its reading matter proffered so openly that one of Alnwick's successors found it impossible to suppress.

The desire to emulate or ascend into higher ranks of society, the growth of administrative organization and bureaucracy in government and houses of the magnates and the gentry as well, the frequent extension of legal concerns into the lives of ordinary persons all served to stimulate the growth of literacy, which in the fourteenth and fifteenth century increasingly meant the ability to read English. Although the avenue to this goal may not have always been a direct one nor an easy one for the lowest classes, for the bourgeoisie and the gentry,

19 For White's movements and investigations in Bury, see Aston, "William White," passim.

20 On the secret meetings of Lollards, see Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy," 199-200. Most of the defendants in these trials claimed to be illiterate, but because one of the criteria for heresy was the ability to read, such a claim seems dubious and appeared so even to the prosecutors, who issued to the abjuring heretics lists of their transgressions written in English (Aston, "William White, 97).
schooling was available. Schools gravitated to the towns where clerks could readily find prospective students; and country schools, though limited by their isolation and by the servitude enforced upon the villagers, did find students. What then may have been the literacy rate among the laity? It appears to have been not far from Sir Thomas More's estimate of a number exceeding fifty percent. Of the nineteen lay witnesses to John Fastolf's will in the mid-fifteenth century, eight were described as "literate," meaning the ability to read some Latin. These included a schoolmaster, two merchants, a sailor, a husbandman, and an agricultural laborer (Orme 50).

The Latin literacy rate of the London merchant class from 1376 until 1476, averaging forty to forty-eight percent (Thrupp 155-57), equals that of the wider cross-section of the lay population witnessing Fastolf's will. In view of the fact that, as seen in the case of John Drury's school, the ability to read Latin included the ability to read English and in view of the educational opportunities provided by the song schools, the literacy rate in East Anglia may well have exceeded fifty percent.

Why then did Deanesly find so few wills which contained books? As I suggested above, there are several reasons in addition to the fragile nature of many early printed books. First, the literate population included people whose reading ability was only just functional, that
is, people who read or wrote only to the extent to which
repetitive, mundane transactions, such as keeping accounts,
required. This population, a subgroup of what M.B. Parkes
has termed "pragmatic" readers, would have been unlikely
donors of books. Second, many manuscripts must have been,
like early printed books, prone to disintegrate. Reading
matter seized in the investigations of Lollards was
regularly distinguished by ascending size, which corre­
sponds to an increasing rate of survival: "schedulae," "quaterni," and "libri," or "rollis," "quairis," and
"books," in Latin and English, respectively (Hudson 183).
Significantly, studies of extant Middle English romance
manuscripts show that this most popular form of recrea­
tional literature circulated in quires, and the survival of
these poems frequently depended on their being bound with
other types of reading matter into the more enduring
compendia volumes (see e.g., McSparran and Robinson; and
Robinson). The slighter quire manuscripts quickly disin­
tegrated. Anne Hudson cogently summarized the problem:

In fact, paradoxically, it may be that among
common readers (often those whose reading is
attached to one or two texts), it was the most
used and cherished writings—those that gave the
most instruction or pleasure, or most helped the
learning of letters—which proved the most ephem­
eral. . . . The investigator of popular literacy
is therefore at a perennial disadvantage ("Devo­
tional Literacy" 106).

Furthermore, in contrast to the generally held notion that
books were expensive and therefore typically itemized in
wills, some books were not expensive, and others that seem to have been so were not among testators' bequests. Romances in the libraries of Richard II and Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, were valued as low as six pence; in the 1390's the total value of four romance volumes in the stock of two bankrupt London grocers was only 11s. 4d.21 And John Paston II, who we know had a library which included tomes of some quality, bequeathed no books in his will (PL I 506-08); readers among the aristocracy passed on only a small portion of what must have been sizeable and attractive collections (see Rosenthal 546-47). Accordingly, testators placed too little value on some books or considered others of a popular nature inappropriate for itemization as they renounced the earthly and turned toward the eternal. Finally, after the rise of the Lollards, the possession of a book by certain people, particularly one in English, was grounds for suspicion of heresy. Apparently such orthodox texts as The Prick of Conscience, The Canterbury Tales, and The Life of Our Lady were evidence in one Lincolnshire trial in 1464. In the Norwich diocese, Robert Bert, a chaplain in Bury St. Edmunds, was accused of heresy in 1430 because of his copy of Dives and Pauper (Aston, "Lollardy and Literacy" 207-08; see also Hudson 182). The atmosphere

21See Parkes (563-64), who attributes the production of cheaper texts to the quickly written cursive script used in the later Middle Ages, a script which also made reading more attractive to the general population by reducing the number of abbreviations.
of suspicion and the viciousness with which the Norwich diocese dealt with Lollards must certainly have inhibited testators from mentioning nonreligious works in wills.

In spite of reasons for not including books among bequests, these documents still may provide researchers with valuable clues to late medieval reading habits. A thorough search of wills has not been undertaken since Miss Deanesly's study, perhaps because of the discouraging results she obtained. But the number of wills examined by her nevertheless represents only one-tenth of the number of surviving wills probated before 1500. Furthermore, other studies have found more books than did Miss Deanesly. According to Sylvia Thrupp, among the merchant class of London, "About 20 percent of the fifteenth-century wills of personal property mention a few books," only about half of those being liturgical or devotional (Thrupp 161).22 In addition, Peter J. Lucas has recently argued that new studies of wills and inventories "are required" (242) because such research can tell us not only raw statistical data about the title and numbers of books but also more valuable information about the relationships of book owners and literary patronage.

22For a recent study of the wills of the aristocracy, see Rosenthal (especially pp. 535-38), whose tabulated data shows that 18 percent of male peers and 48 percent of their wives bequeathed books.
Norman P. Tanner's book *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* has used the wills of Norwich citizens as its focus of study. Tanner found that the clergy of the city possessed mostly works of a liturgical or theological nature (41) and that only four percent of the laity bequeathed books (111). But Tanner admits that the books mentioned in the wills of the clergics "represent only a fraction of the books that they owned" (37). The low percentage of books among the wills of the laity may be explained by the broad spectrum of people included in this group: many are not persons of much wealth or property. An examination of East Anglian wills probated by the Consistory Court of Norwich and by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, now housed in the Public Record Offices of Norwich and of London, respectively, reveals that many wills are terse, *pro forma* documents and include few particulars about personal possessions.

The wills of the clergy of East Anglia frequently bequeath books. Sometimes the testators are cryptically silent about the titles of works they own, like Edmund Straunge, rector of Hedenham, Norfolk, who in 1372 left to one beneficiary "omnes libros meos" (L'Estrange 360). But most wills, when they refer to books at all, specify particular volumes. As would be expected, titles are almost always of a liturgical or devotional nature, with *portiforia* being the most commonly mentioned texts among
missals, ordinals, processionals, graduals. John Bury, rector at Swaffham Market, mentions eight books in his will (1431), including a missal, an ordinal, and two portiforia, both of which were already in the possession of the beneficiaries, one referred to a "magister" and the other, "capellanus" (N.C.C. Surflete 159v). Some fewer books had classical origins: Roger Medilton, rector of St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich, left (1374) to the Abbot of Cirencester "libros medicine et librum Boicii," that is Boethius; and John de Ufford, rector of Hingham, Norfolk, and also archdeacon of Suffolk, bequeathed two texts by Aristotle in 1375 (L'Estrange 371 and 377). Although these religious and classical texts were in Latin, such was not always the case. Henry Frenge, chaplain, left (1370) "unam librum vocatus Messeboke ad serviendum summo altari de Frenge" (L'Estrange 351).

Another work which frequently appears in the wills of East Anglian clergy is the Legend Aurea. William Bryun, whose will was probated in 1481, a chaplain in St. Stephen's Church, Norwich, was a man of some wealth and connections, had two books of legends among several other volumes. He directs his Legend Aurea "to be schenyd in some deske in þe qwer for them þat will rede within and

23John Bury is listed in Emden's book of Cambridge students, but in spite of Emden's intention of making a record "so far as has been ascertainable, of books owned," Bury's several books are not recorded.
lerne" (N.C.C. A.Caston 106v). Sir John Augere, rector of Southacre, Norfolk, includes this passage in his will (1485):

> Item lego Rechardi Wageoner meum portiforium sub condizione quod sit presbyter. Item lego eidem Rechardi meum Legendum scriptum in papiro, . . . i Legendam auream . . . sub condicione predictus (N.C.C. Norman 1v).

The legends, collections of saints lives and other narrative works keyed to the ecclesiastical year, were ostensibly for edification and the development of sermon material. However, the lively character of some of the contents of the legends, which approximates that of many romances, was surely a source of pleasure for the clergy. Evidence of popular secular works is very small, but an 1370 inventory of Ada de Stanton lists "unum librum de lege . . . et i par statutorum et i librum de romaunces." In 1451 John Stathe, a chaplain in Norwich, left to his son, also a chaplain in the same town, "unum librum scriptum cum Anglie vocatum Bevis de Hampstoun" (N.C.C. Broysard 113r), a popular metrical romance later printed by Wynkyn de Worde (see above). We can only surmise that such works were not as uncommon in the libraries of the clergy as the wills, which followed the dictates of decorum, would lead us to believe.

The types of religious books mentioned most frequently among the wills of the laity are similar to those of the clergy. Portiforia, psalters, missals and occur regularly,
as do devotional works. Sir Robert Norwich, described in his will (1443) as "armiger" and living at the time of making his testament with the prior of Norwich, bequeathed "unum librum de meditaciones Bernardi, Anselmi and etc. (N.C.C. Doke 5r). John Baret, a wealthy and influential citizen of Bury St. Edmunds, gave to Dame Joan Stoonys "my book of Ynglych and latin with diverse maters of good exortacions, wretyn in papir and closed with parchemy" (Tymms 35). And Norwich widow Margaret Purdans, to whom Baret refers in his will as "an oold love" (Tymms 36), leaves a work by Walter Hylton, presumably his Scale of Perfection, and another called Le Doctrine of the Herte (N.C.C. A Caston 163r and v). As with all types of books, these devotional works were often loaned to friends. Robert Cupper, a burgess of Yarmouth, gives his son a psalter, his best primer, and "a certain book called Stimulus Conscience, and which book is now in the custody of Agnes, wife of William Paston" (Harrod 327). Although legendaries are fewer than in the wills of the clergy, individual saints' lives appear more often. Margaret Purdans left an English life of St. Bridget (N.C.C. A.Caston 163v), and Isabelle Lyston of Norwich, widow of Sir Robert Lyston of Badingham, Suffolk, bequeathed (1492) "myn English boke of seynt Margaretes lyfe" to her daughter (N.C.C. Wolman 171v).
Lay testators who include religious books other than or in addition to the standard portiforia, psalters, and missals tended to include more secular books. In addition to his book of meditations, Sir Robert Norwich bequeathed a book of the household of the Duke of York; a chronicle poem which he referred to "unum parus quaternum papir de Regibus Anglie versificatum; and finally a book called "Hocclef," which may have contained that poet's secular works (N.C.C. Doke 5r-6v). John Baret gave to his cousin, a priest, his copy of Lydgate's poem The Siege of Thebes. Isabell Lyston includes a romance, "an Englyssh boke called Partonope," as the second volume bequested to her daughter (N.C.C. Wolman 171v). However, Roger Drury, Esq., of Hawsted, Suffolk, had a standard collection--if somewhat larger than average--of religious works in his library in 1493 (two primers, two unidentified books of Latin, and a massbook), but he also had two books by Lydgate (N.C.C. Cage 169r-170r). Only in one case have I found a will in which secular works comprise all the books bequested, and in that case it was the only book mentioned:

Also I desire that Joan, my wife, may have the ring called saphir, for the term of her life, and afterward, if no other directions given by me, may be sold, and the price distributed for my soul and those for whom I am bound. In like manner, I desire may be done with the book called Romance" (Harrod 321)

We have seen that the schools in East Anglia could provide education for much of the population and that the
rate of literacy, that is the ability to read English, was substantial in the region. An examination of some wills of East Anglian citizens indicates that the clerical possession of books was mostly but not entirely confined to religious texts, with a very frequent occurrence of narratives works like the *Legend Aurea*. The wills of the laity show a broader reading scope and include not only service books and devotional works, but also religious and secular narratives, such as saints' lives and romances. And it is in the these narratives, legends and romances, where the religious and the secular, the elite and the popular, seem to meet.
CHAPTER III: THE MIDDLE ENGLISH POPULAR ROMANCE
IN EAST ANGLIA

Part I: Some East Anglian Romance Manuscripts

We have seen in the last chapter that inventories and wills attest that at least some readers in East Anglia possessed manuscript copies of "popular" romances, works like Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwick, and Partonope. These romances may be termed "popular" because in addition to their being familiar to literate book owners like John Stathe, John Paston II, or Isabell Liston, they were narratives known at every level of society, stories disseminated orally by being read aloud to a circle of listeners--the standard reading practice of the period--or perhaps by the memorial recitations or even oral compositions of minstrels. The famous illuminated frontpiece of Cambridge Corpus Christi College Ms. 61, which depicts Chaucer standing in a pulpit reciting to an aristocratic audience, represents a form of entertainment taking place at fairs, festivals, marketplaces, in cottages as well as in manor houses throughout the country. These romances are further popular in the sense that they are not inherently works for the learned. Unlike the works of Chaucer and his followers, classical texts or ideas derived from those
texts are seldom alluded to: astrology, the Roman pantheon, Statius, Ovid, or Aristotle, for example, had little influence on the Middle English popular romance. In addition to the early printed editions of several romances, this genre's popularity is also suggested by the number of recurring texts in the ninety surviving romance manuscripts: among those most frequently preserved are Bevis, present in seven manuscripts; Guy in five; Partonope in six; the comparatively short King Robert of Sicily in ten; and Richard Coer de Lyon in nine.

Finally, references to the stories of romance heroes in other medieval works also attest to their popularity. Lists of names of famous knights occur in Richard and in Bevis, where Lancelot and Guy of Warwick are cited as exemplary dragon fighters, along with Wade, whose name is recorded here and elsewhere but whose story has perished (ll. 2597 ff.). Chaucer had thoroughly absorbed the popular tradition, as suggested by his parodic "Tale of Sir Thopas," and expected his audience to have known its heroes and to have laughed at the teller's inept catalogue:

   Men speken of romances of pryse,
   Of Horn Child and of Ypotys,
   Of Beves and of Sir Gy,
   Of Sir Lybeux and Pleyndamour.1

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1Fisher, p. 251, VII, 897-900. Ypotis is not a romance per se but a dialogue in which a child converts the Emperor of Rome to Christianity. Not only because child-heroes and conversions are familiar elements of romance, but because this dialogue occurs with Libeaus Desconus in some late manuscripts (Everett 446 ff.) and because Ypotis may be a
Deprecatory lists of romance characters appear in moral and religious works, but such enumerations further demonstrate the popularity of the romance. In an ubi sunt passage in The Parliament of the Three Ages, Elde points out the vanity of "the prowdeste in presse"--including Amadas, Ipomidon, Generides, and Sir Eglamore of Artois--in the face of death (Offord 11. 612-22). Similarly, William of Nassington (d. c. 1359) assails the "vayn carpynge" of the popular tales in the introduction to his Speculum Vitae:

I warn yow frust at the begynnyng,  
That I will make na vayn carpynge  
Of dedes of armys, ne of amours,  
As dus mynstralles and jeestours  
That makys carpyng in many a place  
Of Octovyane and of Isambrace  
And of many other jeestes,  
And namly when you come to festys.  
Ne of the lyfe of Buys of Hampton  
That was a knyght of grett renown;  
Ne of Sir Guye of Warwyke.  
All if it myght sum men lyke,  
I thinke my carpyng sall nott be,  
ffor that I hold bot vanite.2

form of the Greek word for knight, hippotes (Reiss 112), Chaucer's inept narrator may be expressing the popular understanding of the work, an expression which in turn perhaps endorsed that concept. John Paston's copy of the dialogue was contained in a thoroughly devout volume, although he called the work Chylde Ypotis, the word "chylde" suggesting an association with romance literature (PL I 517). Pleyndamour, although a character in the prose Tristan, does not figure in any other romance (see Reiss, 112; and Robinson's note to 1. 897, p. 740).

2Cited by G.R. Owst (13), who also notes that in view of the worthy deeds that romance heroes often performed, it is "somewhat strange, therefore, to find what singularly little use is made in actual sermons of this material," an anomaly which he attributes to the antipathy held by the religious toward minstrels and by their "natural prefer-
To these lists may be added that which begins the *Cursor Mundi*, where the introduction seeks to differentiate that work from its secular rivals (Morris 11. 1-20). The conclusion to be drawn—if such passages are not just conventional, and our other evidence suggests they are not—must be that some writers of religious works believed their audience was all too familiar with romance narratives.

In addition to the documents cited in the previous chapter, manuscripts and artistic representations provide further confirmation of the popularity of this type of narrative in East Anglia. The provenance of several romance manuscripts has been located in East Anglia on the basis of the dialect and orthography of their contents or of their early ownership. Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ms. Ii.4.9, a religious miscellany, contains a version of the often-copied *King Robert of Sicily*. This poem, like the other twenty-three items in the volume, exhibits the characteristic and idiosyncratic dialect features of Norfolk;  

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3The poem precedes a prose life of St. Edward, another exemplary royal personage. For the contents of the ms., see *Catalogue of Mss. Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, III, 448-50; and Guddat-Figge, 100-102.

4The dialect of the main scribe, responsible for all but about ten of the 197 folios of the volume, has been pinpointed as one of West Norfolk by Angus McIntosh (44-45). For other discussions of Norfolk dialectology see also Jacob Bennett; Norman Davis, "The Language of the Pastons";
furthermore, the place-name "Worsted" and several penned names claiming ownership\(^5\) on the last folio also localize the origin of the manuscript.\(^6\) Another Cambridge manuscript, Trinity College Ms. 0.5.2, is a composite volume containing only three items: the romance Generides and two of Lydgate's works, The Troy Book and The Siege of Thebes. The manuscript was owned by a prominent Norfolk family, the Thwaites, who perhaps came to possess it through marriage with another more prominent family, the Knyvetts. The more richly illuminated Generides existed independently of the Troy-Thebes section, although both manuscripts were copied about the same time (perhaps c. 1475), probably in the same hand, but not bound together until about 1490 (the date of the Thwaites-Knyvett union), at which time the whole was decorated with some sixty coats of arms representing both

and Parkes and Beadle (III, 54, n. 59; III, 55).

\(^5\)Foster (EETS 147, 13) reads the names Sir William Trew, John Cuttyng, and Robert Hawe on the last page of the volume. According to a note on the flyleaf, when the volume was rebacked in 1920 a fragment of a document relating to Norwich and Sedgeford, c. 1300, was removed from beneath the bookplate.

\(^6\)Before 1520, a fragmentary copy of Robert of Sicily was pasted onto the binding of B.L. Ms. Add. 34801, a volume which "was probably written in the time of and possibly for, John Mowbray, Earl Marshall 1405, and Duke of Norfolk, 1424" (Catalogue of Additions, 1894-99, 91) according to the armorial devices contained therein. While this fragment of the poem does not exhibit distinctive Norfolk dialect features, it is among a group of closely related versions of the poem which include Cambridge Lib. Ms. II.4.9 (Hornstein, "King Robert of Sicily: A New Ms.," esp. p. 458).
families, but with a preponderance of those of the Knyvetts.7

Although the composite Bodleian Ms. Laud Misc. 108 is connected with the West Midlands, its copy of Havelok the Dane, like Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ii.4.9, is rendered in an uncorrupted dialect of western Norfolk. That poem's companion piece in the Laud Ms., King Horn, copied by the same scribe, although containing "numerous ingredients carried over from a text from somewhere far to the south of Norfolk," also contains "undoubtedly East Anglian forms" (McIntosh 36). The Laud Ms. Havelok dates from the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century (Guddat-Figge 282); the only other copy of the poem--a fragmentary one in Cambridge Univ. Lib. Add. 4407, Art. 19--dates from the fifteenth century (Guddat-Figge 89) and has precisely the same dialect (McIntosh 36). Not only does Havelok seem to have been circulating in Norfolk for

7For a description of the manuscripts see James, The Western Manuscripts of the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: A Descriptive Catalogue, III 298-300; and Guddat-Figge 87-89. See Pearsall, "Notes on the Manuscript of Generides," for a discussion of the heraldry, ownership, and date. It might also be noted that Edmund Knyvett (d. 1546; DNB) married Jane Bourchier (d. 1561), heir of John, Lord Berners, who translated French romances into English, and through whom the Knyvetts came into possession of Berners' estates at Ashwellthorpe. Edmund's great nephew married the daughter of the earl of Derby, which perhaps explains how bibliophile Sir Thomas Knyvett of Ashwellthorpe (c. 1539-1618), grandson of Edmund and Jane, came to possess a large collection of secular lyrics and popular romances, the famous Findern Ms., which originated and circulated in Derbyshire (Blomefield, I, 379; and V, 152-155; Beadle and Owen, vii).
more than a century, it also appears to have been, as Derek Pearsall has argued, an influential poem as well, its popular romance stylistic devices drawn upon by John Capgrave for his *Life of St. Katherine* (c. 1445).

Unlike most other romance manuscripts, B.L. Egerton 2862 contains no religious or didactic works but is strictly a volume of popular romances, seven in all: *Kynge Richard*, *Bevous of Hampton*, *Sir Degare*, *Florence and Blanchefloure*, *The Batell of Troye*, *Amis and Amylion*, and *Sir Egleamoure*. Studies of the dialect of two poems, *Kynge Richard* and *Sir Degare*, reveal a dialect compatible with that of southeastern Suffolk, near Ipswich, and several inscriptions throughout the manuscript, for example, "Thomas Waker of lyttel belinge" (f. 49v) or "By me Thomas" (f. 127r), establish a connection with Little Bealings, Suffolk.

Finally, perhaps we should include here Gonville and Caius College Ms. 175, an early fifteenth-century compilation which contains, in addition to a *Life of Saint Katherine* and two devotional works, four romances: *Kynge Richard, Bevous of Hampton, Sir Degare, Florence and Blanchefloure, The Batell of Troye, Amis and Amylion, and Sir Egleamoure*. For the description and contents of the manuscript, see *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years 1906-1910*, 238-40; and Guddat-Figge, 182-84.

Degare and Egleamoure are fragments. For the description and contents of the manuscript, see *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years 1906-1910*, 238-40; and Guddat-Figge, 182-84.

See Jacobs 88; in the same manuscript, *Amis and Amiloun* also exhibits East Anglian forms, e.g. the word "crowd" in the compound "crowd-wain," where the first element, meaning "wheelbarrow," is particular to the region (Davis, "The Language of the Pastons," 133).
Richard, Sir Ysumbras, Bevis of Hampton, and the unique copy of Athelston (James, Manuscripts of Gonville and Caius College 199-201; Guddat-Figge 82-83). Athelston, according to the complicated argument of its editor, originated as an Anglo-Norman at Bury St. Edmunds, since it concerns, in part, the miraculous birth of the saint. It was then translated into the Middle English of the King's Lynn area and later rewritten in a more general southeast Midlands version represented in the Caius Ms. (Trounce, "Tail-Rhyme Romances" 2, 189; and Athelston 51-52). Although the particulars of Trounce's argument may not be quite accurate, recent analysis of language of the manuscript indicates it was produced by a scribe trained in Lincolnshire (McIntosh et al. I 63). The fact that this volume was given to the Cambridge by the University Librarian, William Moore (1590-1659; DNB), who was born and received his early education at Gissing, Norfolk, makes some earlier connection with the region more plausible.

Additional evidence from manuscripts may identify still more of the romances which comprised the reading matter of medieval East Anglians. Two other candidates are Longleat House Ms. 257 and B.L. Harley 2386. Longleat House Ms. 257, containing a prose rendering of Ipomidon (Guddat-Figge 235-37), has been attributed to the house of Austin Canons at Hempton, near Fakenham, Norfolk, on the basis of a single cryptic place-name (Manly and Rickert
342). The second manuscript, B.L. Harley 2386, is really two volumes bound together. The first part, containing historical pieces in Latin which relate to Norwich, has also led some scholars to attribute the second, containing an imperfect version of *Amis* and *Amiloun*, to a Norfolk scribe (Hudson 69), but other locations as disparate as Hereford and Devon have also been suggested (Ward and Herbert I, 677, see also 202-03; Seymour 186-87). A more accurate determination of the provenance of the second part of this manuscript and of that of the Longleat House Ms. as well—indeed, that of most of the extant romance manuscripts—rests primarily on continued studies of manuscripts and documents, such as wills and inventories, combined with dialect analysis.10

Further information about the currency of individual romances in East Anglia may be supplied by their representation in medieval art. For example, the will of Alicia Langham of Snailwell, Suffolk, dated 1448, contains the following bequest: "*Item lego Edeue filie mee optimam armilausam seu collobium et unum pannum depictum cum historia Roberti Regis Cesilie*" (Tymms 12). The evidence of artistic representations of romances need not always be so indirect. Of course, the inappropriateness of secular

10The publication of the work, now completed, by M.L. Samuels and Angus McIntosh on the geographical distribution of Middle English dialects will greatly facilitate such studies.
subject matter and the depredations of several reform movements preclude us from finding much in ecclesiastical settings, but occasionally church furnishings do indeed suggest the popularity of romances. The roof bosses of the Bauchun Chapel, Norwich Cathedral, are the case in point. Here, thirty-two figured sculptures depict the romance Le Bone Florence of Rome, one of a group of widespread stories about a persecuted maiden. Although it may be objected that these bosses give such emphasis to the legendary version of the tale by including a Miracle of the Virgin so as to disqualify them as representing the romance, they nevertheless prove the compelling appeal of stories of this type. I believe further that the Marian

11Outside of East Anglia, misericords illustrate scenes from the romances of Alexander, Tristram and Iseult, and Sir Yvain (Stone 188). Other secular works apparently provided the subjects for some of the famous East Anglian woodcarvings: Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale," on a misericord at Ely Cathedral; Mandeville's Travels for a benchend at Dennington Church (the famous Skiapod; see Agate ill. 30) and for a misericord at Norwich Cathedral ("men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders"; see Whittingham 9, S30).

12For descriptions of the bosses see James, "The Sculptured Bosses"; and Whittingham. For a discussion of the romance, of which the Bauchun bosses depict the "Crescentia" version and include a Miracle of the Virgin, see Heffernan 3-17; Hornstein, "Eustace-Constance-Florence-Griselda Legends," 120-22 and 131-32; and McSparran, Octovian, 54-55.

13Almost contemporaneous with the bosses are the eight wall paintings in the choir of Eton College Chapel, which relate essentially the same version of the story, derived from Vincent of Beauvais' Speculum Historiale (James and Tristram 23-26 and Plates I, V-XII; Lyte 87-94). Because Eton students regularly proceeded to Cambridge for further studies, there was a strong tie with the university and
emphasis, while making the romance compatible with sacred subject matter of the bosses which adorn the nave, transepts and cloister of the cathedral, coincides with a similar emphasis in other romances circulating in East Anglia, and indeed with other genres of East Anglian literature. I will return to this point below.

By the various means I have suggested above, at least fifteen popular romances can be solidly located as works known to readers in Norfolk and Suffolk. Of course, the appearance of all but one of these romances in manuscripts, either preserved or documented, must qualify the popularity we can ascribe to these particular works; we cannot say with absolute certainty each was known at all levels of East Anglian society. In fact, both the manuscripts and the documents indicate for the written versions of the romances a fairly limited audience, one confined to the upper and upper-middle classes. As might befit a rich gentry family like the Thwaites or the Knyvetts, the large (440 x 305 mm.) vellum manuscript containing Generides, Trinity College 0.5.2, is generously but not lavishly decorated with numerous heraldic devices, five elaborate pictures touched with gold-leaf, and capital letters from

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therefore with East Anglia. James (1-2) suggests that although the first reference to painters at work at the college is 1478-79 that work on the murals of the nave may have begun a few years before that date. Perhaps William Paston III, a student at Eton 1478-79, saw the newly painted murals before he left.
which extend up and down into the margins floral tendrils, sometimes one-third of the length of the column. In comparison, Cambridge Univ. Lib. II.4.9 is about half the size of the Trinity volume and contains only a single multicolored drawing (68v.), but this paper manuscript (240 x 170 mm.) nevertheless has substantial bottom margins and rubricated, sometimes elaborate capitals and Latin phrases. While clearly more modest than the Trinity Ms., the Cambridge Ms. was not a haphazard product.

Upon opening the Egerton Ms., the first impression is of a compilation still more mundane than Cambridge II.4.9. There is little in the way of decoration due to absence of rubrication until some tentative and clumsy coloring appears in the penultimate item, Amis and Amiloun, at which point the textual format also changes from single columns with generous margins to comparatively cramped double columns. Nevertheless, its larger format (275 x 165 mm., trimmed considerably at the top), its vellum leaves, its unusual running title at the top of each page, show it to have been "obviously produced with some care . . . . possibly made by a professional scribe for some patron or wealthy customer" (Mehl 258-59). Taking all features of book production into consideration, then, the Egerton Ms. and Cambridge Univ. Lib. II.4.9 are comparable, moderately
expensive romance manuscripts. We could certainly expect them to be owned by someone like Isabel Lyston, a landholder and wife of knighted gentry, who possessed considerable personal property, including her copy of Partonope. And, if John Paston's "Grete Boke" on chivalric conduct is indicative of the quality of his literary volumes, then his romance manuscripts would also appear similar to the Egerton and Cambridge Univ. Lib. Mss. Perhaps too, John Stathe's Bevis of Hampton belongs among this group as well; at least the considerable number of silver rosaries he possessed and his silver baselard suggest that he was a man of some wealth. A volume of medium quality was within his reach (N.C.C.: Stathe (Brosyard 113r-113v)).

Of these romances at least we can say that they appealed to East Anglians in the upper but not necessarily the highest levels of regional society. But according to contemporary references to minstrels and textual features

14 Although more ornate than either of these manuscripts, Cambridge Trinity 0.5.2 pales when compared to the enormous (570 x 395 mm.), lavishly illuminated Vernon Ms. (see A.I. Doyle, ed., The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Eng. Poet. A.1). All three of these East Anglian volumes are more costly productions than several other romance manuscripts I have examined, for example the important but plain and cramped B.L. Cotton Caligula A.II.

15 The embellishment by the main scribe of the "Grete Boke" (B.L. Ms. Lansdowne 285) consisted mainly of coloring capitals, loops, paragraph marks, brackets, and filling in bland lines with red and blue ink, but there are also several large colored, foliated initials. For a description of this ms. and the details of its production, see Lester, esp. 18-19.
which suggest oral transmission, the Middle English romances were probably at some point disseminated to their audience by oral recitation. The oral recitation may have preceded the written compositions or depended on and been contemporaneous with them, but in either case the romance stories were probably available to persons of considerably more humble means than our upscale manuscripts suggest. According to Derek Pearsall, "One must insist on the range of possible audiences that need to be adduced for medieval English Romance" ("Middle English Romance and its Audiences" 43), a range which must qualify the genre as part of the popular culture of East Anglia. Furthermore, there is evidence of an abiding interest in the romance, as we have seen in the case of Havelok, and which I believe is reinforced by the fact that most romance manuscripts, including nearly all discussed here, are products of the fifteenth century when the sophisticated works of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate would have been competing for manuscript space. As has been pointed out above, this popularity is underscored by the demand for early printed copies.

What can be said of these romances that in some way ties them together? Only two of the romances, John  

16To recapitulate, the romances under consideration are Amis and Amiloun; Bevis of Hampton; Le Bone Florence of Rome; Death of Arthur; Florence and Blanceflour; Generides; The Green Knight; Guy of Warwick; Havelok the Dane; King Horn; Partonope of Blois; Richard, Couer de Lion; Robert of Sicily; The Seige of Troye; Sir Degarre; and Sir Eglamour of Artois.
Paston's copy of *The Death of Arthur* and *The Green Knight*, are connected with the romance cycles like those of Arthur or Charlemagne. If Paston's *The Death of Arthur* was in fact the *Morte Arthure*, it would be the only alliterative poem among the group; but just as his *Green Knight* was probably more closely related to the South Midlands tail-rhyme poem of that name than to the northwestern *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and its alliterative tradition, the Arthur poem probably reflected a more southerly or south-eastern version, now lost (see Newstead, "Arthurian Legends" 44-46, 51-53, 57-58). Because none of the poems are from the Northwest (Newstead, "General" 13-16), they tend to differ, sometimes more, sometimes less, from poems composed in that region just as *The Green Knight* differs from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

The alliterative romances of the north-west are certainly on a higher social and literary plane than their non-alliterative counterparts in the south-east, and a romance like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* clearly anticipates an audience that will appreciate complex descriptions of aristocratic pursuits such as hunting and dalliance. The popular romances, by contrast, usually pass over such things with vaguely superlative noises, their view of aristocratic pursuits being that visible from the tradesmen's entrance (Pearsall, "Middle English Romance and Its Audiences" 43).

I say "differ more or less" because some of our poems tend to the aristocratic, particularly *Generides* and *Partonope of Blois*, both of which show an interest in courtly manners and the influence of Chaucer (Pearsall, "The English Romance in the Fifteenth Century" 67-68 and 70-71). On the
other hand, Havelok presents a Breugelian picture of commercial Lincoln; and the poem's hero, who at one point boasts, "Ful wel kan ich dishes swilen" (1. 919), proves himself better than other men by winning a distinctly plebeian type of contest: putting the shot (1040-66). Four of the poems (The Green Knight, Amis, Eglamour, and Florence) exist wholly in tail-rhyme stanzas, three (Bevis, Guy, and Richard) in a combination of tail-rhyme and couplets, one in rhyme-royal (Generides), and the rest in couplets. The number of tail-rhyme poems among romances familiar to East Anglian readers is consistent with Trounce's ("The English Tail-Rhyme Romances") identification of the Southeast Midlands as an area important for their production and dissemination. 17

Part II: The Themes of Some Romances

Known in East Anglia

The fifteen poems comprise a fairly heterogeneous group, and to treat even a majority of them in any more than a superficial way proposes an unwieldy project. Consequently, I have chosen five--Amis and Amiloun, Bevis of Hampton, Le Bone Florence of Rome, Partonope of Blois,

17 Pearsall, like most critics, rejects Trounce's attempt to herd the tail-rhyme romances into East Anglia, and finds that "the tradition is centered in the east-midlands but shifts northwards towards the end of the [fourteenth] century, closely pursued by Chaucer's ridicule" ("Development," 108-09; see also my n. 10 above). Guddat-Figge (52-54) points out that most of the major romance manuscripts are from the Southeast and only three manuscripts contain both tail-rhyme and alliterate romances.
and King Robert of Sicily--on which to focus my attention in this chapter. Bevis and Partonope were chosen primarily because wills give an idea of the circumstances of readers of these romances. The same ability to link a specific romance with a particular individual lies behind the choice of Florence. King Robert was selected because it appears so often and because the version presented in Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ms. Ii.4.9 is specifically a Norfolk poem and can be compared against other versions of the romance. And I have included Amis and Amiloun because one of its manuscripts, B.L. Egerton 2862, has specific connections with the Ipswich area of Suffolk, and because the poem itself was composed in the East Midlands (Newstead, "General" 13) and evidences some vocabulary items endemic to Norfolk (Trounce, "The English Tail-Rhyme Romances" 2, 45; see also n. 9 above).

These five romances fairly well span the classifications proposed by Dieter Mehl: Amis is one of the shorter romances; King Robert and Florence are homiletic romances; and Bevis and Partonope are verse novels. Similarly, these works represent several of the types in J. Burke Severs' A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500, which is organized on a considerably modified version of the trois materes. According to that classification scheme, Bevis belongs to the group of romances derived from English legends, Florence to a group of widespread stories about
calumniated heroines, Partonope to composite courtly romances, and Amis and King Robert to didactic legends.

The selected romances, then, are a heterogeneous group according to the criteria of length and the traditional "matters". But in spite of the apparent diversity of these five romances, I believe they share an ideological conservatism which is expressed thematically in their treatment of religion, justice, and the family; in their endorsement of the virtues of loyalty, chastity, and piety; and in their tendency to honor the Virgin. While these themes, which have long histories by the late medieval period, are not exclusive to East Anglian literature, a comparison with some romances from the Northwest indicates distinct regional differences, differences which I will return to later in the chapter. For now, suffice it to say that because readers had a choice in the type of works included in manuscripts—they could be acquired as ready-made volumes, compiled by the reader, or compiled by a scribe according to instructions—the poems contained therein provide an indication of the type of reading matter their audience preferred. If in fact literary East Anglia in the later Middle Ages constituted a homogeneous literary culture, then these romances, at once a product of and perpetuator of that culture, should help provide an understanding of that culture.
The piety urged in many of the English romances has often been acknowledged (e.g., Mehl 17-20, Reiss 155), and the poems selected here present no exceptions. Often referred to as "homiletic" romances, Le Bone Florence of Rome and Robert of Sicily present exemplary characters whose devotion to God—whether innate or learned—is to be imitated. Robert of Sicily is by far the shortest of these romances, only 374 verses in the Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ms. Ii.4.9, and also the most patently moralistic. It might even be argued that Robert was not read as a romance because it contains no military encounters or love relationships, because the manuscript contains no other secular works, and because the poem usually appears with legendary material and devotional tales (Mehl 124). But other compendia manuscripts that include religious works group the poem among popular romances; for example, in another Cambridge manuscript, Univ. Lib. Ms. Ff.2.38, King Robert appears as the eighth poem in a series of nine almost consecutive romances. Furthermore, the poem itself relies on the romance tradition in establishing Robert's character and the milieu in which the story is to take place:

Neuer mane woste hyme aferde;  
He was kynge of gret honour,  
And clepyd he was a conquerowre;  
In all thys warlde ne w as hys pere,  
Kynge ne dewke, ferre nor nere.  
Of chyvalrye he was the floure.  
(11. 10-15)
But a good knight is also a humble knight, and here, Robert, deceived by pride in his own power and accomplishments, fails. At evensong he hears the Magnificat, and a priest translates for him the Latin *Deposuit potentes de cede et exaltatit humiles*, an idea he immediately rejects:

This wers is ful unestable.
What man hathe suche powere
To brynge me lowe in daunger?
I ame flowre of alle chyvalrye,
My enemyes to dystroye;
Ther is no man nor wyghte in londe
That may me ayene withstande
Thane is this a songe of nowth.

(11. 50-57)

When Robert subsequently falls asleep, an angel, who has assumed a physical form identical to the that of the king, takes his place. What follows is a series of events intended to humble Robert, who stubbornly and at times wrathfully insists he is the King of Sicily. Since his former subjects cannot recognize him, he seems a fool for his persistent claim, and the angel-king appropriately institutes Robert as his court fool with a peculiar cross-shaped tonsure and ordains that an ape should be Robert's counselor and a hound his food taster. Although humiliated and dehumanized, a condition which mirrors his spiritual poverty, Robert nevertheless fails to perceive his "gret unbuxumnes":

The aungel axid euery day:
"Fool, art þou kynge? þou me saye!"
Robert seyd: "bat it xal be knowe, 
I ame kynge, if I be lowe."
(11. 191-94)

Only after a desperate attempt to elicit recognition from his brothers, the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope, is met with contempt does Robert resign himself to his low condition and acknowledge his "trespas" and cry for mercy in a rhetorically artful and emotional prayer, which Mehl (124) has likened to penitential lyrics. In this prayer Robert not only acknowledges his sin, saying that because of the adulation of conqueror, "... I had pride, / As ðe aungel þat fro Joye dede glyde" (11. 279-80), but he also now embraces his present statues and becomes, in effect, a fool for Christ. To the angel's question, "What art þou?" Robert replies:

Syr, a fool, þat wot I welle,  
And more and a fool, if it may be;  
Kepe I noone oþer dignite.  
(11. 318-20)

Robert, granted mercy and restored to his temporal estate, from that point forth "louyd god and holy chyrche / And euer he plyed good dedys to werche" (11. 349-50).

Robert's spiritual exile, humiliation and eventual restoration presents a narrative pattern similar to that in our other romances. Except perhaps for Partonope, the main characters' eventual success after hardships depends upon their devotion to God. This is certainly the case in Le Bone Florence of Rome, the unique copy of which appears in Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ff.2.38, just before Robert of Sicily
and just after *Guy of Warwick*. Between these two poems, *Florence* provides an intermediate step between the martial interest in *Guy* and the lack of battle scenes in the moral *Robert*.

The first half of *Florence* narrates the military repercussions of the heroine's refusal, supported by her father the Emperor of Rome, to marry the January-like Emperor of Constantinople, Sir Garcy. As Mehl (141) has pointed out, comic descriptions of Garcy (ll. 94-104) and Florence's equally comic rejection of her suitor (ll. 243-49) seem to promise a fabliau, not a pious romance. But the comic tone of these passages is mitigated by the rapaciousness of the old warrior's lust, and it seems incorrect to say that the first section of the romance is "irrelevant to the moral purpose" of the second (Heffernan 17-18). Just as the sin of pride motivated the action in *King Robert*, so lust is repeatedly the primary characteristic of Garcy and later antagonists in *Florence*. Furthermore, the morality of the main characters is established in the first half of the poem. In the palace where Florence and her father live, the walls are "peyntyd wythynne and ouer" with "the dedly synnes sevyn" (ll. 329-30), thereby solidly

18In her edition of the poem, Carol Heffernan places the original composition of *Florence* in the Northeast Midlands about 1450; the version in Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ff.2.38. is more northern and later, about 1500 (Heffernan 41). More recently, LALME finds the dialect of the manuscript, in the hand of a single scribe, to be that of Leicestershire (McIntosh et al. I 67).
placing the Romans at the moral center of the romance; Darcy's palace has nothing of the kind. And Florence's father as the Emperor of Rome lends a special sanctity to their cause by his occasional prayers to and oaths in the name of God or Saint Peter (ll. 405, 514, 620, 694) and by the pope's officiation at his burial (ll. 868-70) after he is killed by his adversary. In addition, Sir Emere, the hero of the story and eventual emperor, is introduced as a good Christian knight; he hears of the siege of Rome from a "wery palmer" (l. 430) and arms himself with a shield on which are painted a black lion, to show that he was "ferse and felle," and a white dove, signifying "That he was full of knyghthedd, / And mekenes at that tyde" (ll. 425-27).

Superficially, Emere's shield can be taken as a token of the dichotomy which critics have found in the structure of Le Bone Florence of Rome. The poet's interest in the first half is clearly in "full doughty men" and "Gode olde fyghtyng" (ll. 680-81) in which "Hedys hopped vndur hors fete, / As haylestones done in þe strete" (ll. 640-41). Nevertheless, as I have suggested, the poet achieved some accommodation of the military interest of the first half to the moral interests of the second.

Briefly summarized, five episodes comprise the action of the second half of the poem. First, Florence is abducted by her brother-in-law, Sir Myles, who beats her and twice tries to rape her. She is then rescued by a good
knight; but after repulsing another rape attempt by the knight's steward, who seeks his revenge by killing the knight's daughter and blaming Florence, the knight banishes innocent Florence. Traveling alone, Florence next bargains for the service of a thief about to go the gallows; the thief immediately collaborates with a burgess in an attempt to rob the heroine. When they are thwarted, they sell Florence to a sea captain who intends to make her his wife. On board his ship, Florence is accosted by all the sailors and manages to avoid another rape attempt by the captain when a miraculous storm founders the boat and she escapes. Finally, she makes her way to a nunnery where the reputation of her healing powers brings together the principle characters of this half of the poem.

The impetus for the ordeal is Florence's vow of chastity made in response to a false report of Emere's death:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Furste } & \text{ben was my fadur slayne,} \\
\text{And now my lorde ys fro me tane,} \\
\text{Y wyll loue no ma,} \\
\text{But hym } & \text{bat boght me on } \text{be rode,} \\
\text{Wyth hys swete precyus blode,} \\
\text{To hym Y } & \text{wyll me ta.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(11. 1102-07)

The oath obliges her to more than abstinence; the words suggest the language of a woman entering religious orders: in effect, Florence becomes a handmaid of God. In the string of unfortunate events that follow she is able to adhere to her vows, and in so doing, according to Heffernan
(22-23), Florence specifically exemplifies the virtue of castitas, sustained by those of pietas and fortitudo.19 The last enables her to fight the steward by hitting him in the face with a stone and to maintain a "mylde mode" (l. 1510) in spite of her Sir Myles' threats. But it is her piety as demonstrated in her prayers that most frequently preserves her chastity and her life. When Sir Myles assaults her, Florence prays "To God and Mary feyre and free" (l. 1440), and both times "Hys lykyng vanyscht all awaye, / Thorow þe myght of Mary mylde" (1499-1500). Later when she is attacked by the mariner, Florence again invokes the aid of the Virgin:

In hys armes he can hur folde,  
Hur rybbes crakyd as þey breke wolde,  
In struglynge can they stryve.  
Sche seyde, "Lady Mary free,  
Now thou haue mercy on me,  
Thou faylyst me neyvr at nede.  
Here my errande as pou well mae,  
That Y take no schame today,  
Nor lose my maydynhede."
(11. 1849-57)

A sudden storm founders the boat, and Florence—who steps from the ship onto a rock—escapes, appropriately, to the safety of the nunnery, where bells miraculously ring at her approach. Again, her delivery is attributed to the Virgin, "Mary bryght, / That safe and sownde broght hur ryght / Vnto the roche of stone" (11. 1915-17).

19Heffernan defines pietas as "the conviction that God in his justness will protect those who live in Christian virtue" and fortitudo as "the sure knowledge that [one's] conduct is consistent with the commands of God" (22-23).
Florence's virtuousness maintained throughout her hardships brings this romance close to hagiography, as other commentators on the poem have pointed out (e.g., Hornstein, "Eustace-Constance-Florence-Griselda Legends" 132; Pearsall, "Development" 110). In fact, the ringing of the bells on her approach to the nunnery is a recurrent motif in saints lives, and it is at that point, as Mehl (143) notes, that miracles begin to happen through Florence's agency. We have already seen that through her prayers and her vow of chastity Florence is closely associated with the Virgin, the paragon of female sanctity; other details of the poem suggest that she is to be taken as a type of Mary. First, Florence's beauty—literally radiant—"has something celestial about it" (Mehl 142; see ll. 36, 1708-09, 1666-69). More significantly, in several places she is described as a "maydyn free, / That ys whyte as lylly flowre" (ll. 900-01; see also 1343, 1538). Second, at the beginning of the poem she is characterized as being "boçe meke and mylde" (l. 32) and throughout as a "maiden mylde." Under other circumstances such descriptions could be dismissed as clichés; but here the evidence of her vow of chastity, her prayers to the Virgin, and the miraculous intercessions to preserve it does not support a merely stereotypical usage. Perhaps most important in the analogous relationship with the Virgin is Florence's intercession first for Sir Miles, who had been imprisoned for
his several acts of treachery in the first part of the poem, and then for the thief about to be executed. Finally, at the conclusion of the poem, her mercy leads her both to forgive and heal those who have brought her grief, a very strong Marian motif.

The East Anglian version of Le Bone Florence of Rome as represented in the Bauchun Chapel roof bosses follows the Miracle of the Virgin tradition of Vincent of Beauvais' Speculum Historiale more closely than does the second part of the romance or the closely related story in the Gesta Romanorum, the primary differences being that the Miracle has only two persecutors and that the Virgin appears to Florence and provides her with curative herbs.20 The general outlines of the story were familiar in Norwich, at least through Vincent's work. And perhaps the Gesta Romanorum, which with its many romance-like tales that frequently provided the subject matter for homilies (Owst 14-16), helped to popularize the tale in East Anglia. Because Florence was composed in tail-rhyme—a verse form which had its greatest popularity in the East Midlands of

20 For a discussion of the various types and origins of the different versions of the Florence legend, as distinguished from other persecuted women legends, see Heffernan (3-17). Unfortunately, Heffernan's distinctions between the several different types of the Florence story are not detailed. Printed translations in James, "Bauchun Chapel" and Lyte are synopses, and I have been unable to locate a copy of the story Miracle in Vincent or in the Gesta Romanorum.
England—the romance itself or a version very similar to it may have been known in East Anglia.

The Marian emphasis of *Le Bone Florence of Rome* is similar to that in the Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ms. II.4.9 version of *Robert of Sicily*. Although this Robert presents essentially the same story as in other manuscript copies, which all have prayers by Robert to the Virgin to act as intercessor, its moral conclusion is the only one among the several copies I have examined that specifically includes devotion to the Virgin as part of the duties of a pious Christian:

> In hys kyndome let vs bene hye,  
> Eueremore to be above,  
> Where is Joye and euer loue,  
> And graunt vs euer for his godhed  
> To repent of owre mysdede,  
> Thorugh prayr of mayd Marie  
> That is so ful of curtesye,  
> Comfort vs, whane we hens wende  
> In to pat blysse pat hath none ende!  
>
> (ll. 366-74)

Although acknowledging a religious inclination in *Bevis of Hampton*, critics seldom place it in the class of pious romances like *King Robert of Sicily* or *Le Bone Florence of Rome*. But Lee C. Ramsey goes too far in claiming that for *Bevis*

21There are ten, of which one is a fragment and another a very brief abridgement. In addition to the Norfolk ms., I have consulted three of the remaining eight mss.: Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ms. Ff.2.38 and Cambridge Caius and Gonville College Ms. 174, both printed in Horstmann (421-31) and Oxford Bodleian Ms. Eng. Poet. A.1 (Vernon) in *Middle English Metrical Romances* ed. by W.H.French and C.B. Hale (N.Y.: Prentice-Hall, 1930), pp. 931-946.
"Christianity is just a polite excuse for battles actually fought in defense of self and personal prerogatives. . . . There is nothing humble or Christian about him" (66).

Such a claim is at odds with what we know about one of the fifteenth-century readers of Bevis, the Norwich priest John Stathe, whose personal devotion is confirmed by contents of his will. Furthermore, such a claim is at odds with the frequently expressed piety of the protagonists and the latent Marianism of the romance. The characters' eventual achievement of their goals—however worldly—comes by virtue of their piety and heavenly assistance, which complement their worldly virtues. Their piety is something more than simply "a praiseworthy quality that sustains public renown" (Crane 64).

This success and piety are combined most pointedly in the English hero, Bevis, who like other protagonists we have encountered, endures exile and is humbled. Deprived of his rightful inheritance of the earldom of Southampton by a wicked mother who conspires to have his father killed, the seven-year-old Bevis is sold to merchants who present him to the Saracen King Ermin. In the king's household, young Bevis proves his mettle and falls in love with the king's daughter, Josian. The action of the romance concerns Bevis' nearly life-long struggle both ultimately to repatriate his lands and to marry Josian, two goals complicated by a second exile from England.
The narrator in all of the manuscripts of Bevis conspicuously comments on the actions of the characters—cursing, praising or praying as circumstances require; his allegiances are not in doubt. In some of the manuscripts, including the East Anglian Egerton Ms., the narrator also immediately depicts the crusading Bevis as a force for enlarging Christian dominion and thereby makes the poem from the outset one attuned to religious as well as heroic virtues:

\[
\text{Y wole zow singe} \\
\text{Of a kniʒt þat hʒte Beuoun} \\
\text{Pat was Ɵord of Southhamptoun} \\
\text{Wiþ  때문이다} \\
\text{He was a stalwrpe man} \\
\text{And manye kyngdomes wan} \\
\text{To goddys lawes} \\
\text{He was þe beste þat com in felde} \\
\text{And most wan wiþ spere and sheld} \\
\text{Be hys dawes.} \\
\]

(Egerton 11. 3-12)

Bevis' own Christian convictions are inherent in much the same way his chivalric prowess is; during his enfances his inclinations are appropriate for a youth of noble blood, but he lacks instruction. Bevis rejects King Ermin's offer to become heir to the Saracen kingdom:

"For gode!" quēþ Beues, "þat i nolde \\
For al þe seluer ne al þe golde, \\
Þat is ynder heuene liʒt, \\
Ne for þe doʒtər, þat is so briʒt: \\
I nolde for-sake in none manere

22I have used the text of the Auchinleck Ms. Bevis except where it diverges substantially from the Egerton Ms. It is worth noting that the linguistic analysis of the poly-dialectal Auchinleck Ms. shows that its Bevis was copied by a scribe trained in Essex (McIntosh et al. I).
Iesu, ḷat bouȝte me so dere.  
(11. 561-66)

Immediately after this exchange, the boy demonstrates his ignorance of basic Christian tenets when, riding to his first battle, he must be told by a Saracen companion the significance of that particular day, Christmas Day. But in the following battle which pits Saracens against this lone Christian, Bevis’ success proves the power of his untutored faith more than matches that of heathen belief. By the time the narrator endows Bevis with the epithet “the cristene kniȝt” (1. 1011), he fully embodies the requisite virtues. 23

Just as Florence enlisted divine help to protect her, so Bevis repeatedly overcomes obstacles and enemies through the assistance of God and the Virgin. After his Christmas Day encounter with the Saracens, Bevis takes it upon himself to battle a murderous boar, and at evensong, with the outcome of the encounter still in doubt, a lull in the fighting allows Bevis time to pray “To god and Mari, is moder dere” (1. 804). Like his later human adversaries, who the narrator compares to boars, Bevis is able to defeat

23Two manuscripts of Bevis, Auchinleck and Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ff.2.38, have passages in which Bevis destroys the idols in a heathen temple and kills the priest and all the worshipers. Of course, the military foundations of chivalry and Christian ideals were at odds, and the zest with which Bevis dispatches the pagans seems to cause the narrator of the Cambridge Ms. some concern, “To sle them he thoght no harme” (11. 1283-1399: 242). This episode is suppressed in the Egerton Ms.
the animal "Pourz godes grace & is vertv" (l. 812). It is also God's grace (l. 1544) that enables Bevis to slay a host of fiendish serpents, including a "fleyng adder" (l. 1547), while incarcerated in a deep, hell-like prison. Nevertheless, Bevis remains confined for "Seue ȝer in peines grete, / Lite idroke & lasse iete" (ll. 1569-70) until he offers to Christ and Mary (ll. 1577-78) a psalm-like prayer for deliverance:

To Iesu Crist he made is pleint & to his moder, seinte Marie, Reuliche he gan to hem crie: "Lord," a seide, "heuene king, Schepere of erbe & alle þing: What haue ich so mech misgilt, Pat bow sext & þolen wîlt, Pat þe weperwines & þe fo Schel þe seruaunt do þis wo? Ich bedde þe, lord, for þe pite, Pat þow haue merci on me And zeue grace, hennes to gange Or sone be drawen oper an-hange!" (ll. 1579-88)

As if to demonstrate the immediacy of its power, the prayer enrages the jailor, whose intended malice toward Bevis leads to his own death and Bevis' escape through a series of tricks. Bevis attributes his delivery to "godes grace & min engyn" (l. 2003). Numerous oaths invoking Jesus, Mary, St. John, St. Martin, and so forth, are not spoken in vain; rather they remind the audience that for Bevis and his allies the heavenly host is always near at hand. Furthermore, the protagonists' participation in three of the Holy Sacraments— their marriage (ll. 3475-77), Bevis' confession to the patriarch of Jerusalem (ll. 1959-64), and Josian's
baptism by the Bishop of Cologne (l. 2583-90) -- place them squarely within the conventional piety of the Church.

Piety for Bevis also takes precedence over love. At the beginning of their relationship, Josian demands that Bevis become her lover. Properly chaste, he refuses politely, but his weak excuse is tantamount to rejection and Josian insults him. The rift is mended only when Josian acknowledges her misdeed and converts to Christianity:

And ich wile riȝt now to mede
Min false godes al for-sake
And cristendom for þe loue take!

(11. 1194-96)

A kiss and nothing more signals their reconciliation. Because the patriarch of Jerusalem instructs Bevis to marry only a virgin (11. 1967-69), Josian's chastity becomes an important issue later in the romance.

As critics have noted, Bevis' famous combat with the dragon of Cologne (11. 2597-2910), a passage not found in the Anglo-Norman versions of the poem, strongly asserts the "Englishness" of the hero (Crane 60, Weiss 71), who in fact spends little of his life in his native country. While the boar hunt of his childhood may have been intended as an allusion to Arthurian legend, in the dragon fight Bevis is compared to Lancelot and to specifically English heroes:

Swich bataile dede neuer non
Cristene man of flesch ne bon,
Of a dragoun þer be side,
Pat Beues slouȝ þer in þat tide,
Saue sire Launcelet de Lake,
He fauzt wiþ a fur drake,
And Wade dede also,
& neuer kniþtes boute þai to
& Giþ a Warwik, ich vnder-stonde,
Slouþ a dragoun in Norp-Homberlonde.
(11. 2599-2608)

As this passage suggests by placing Bevis among other "Cristene" men of comparable valor, the whole interpolation is imbued with religious significance, representing a confrontation of good and evil in the battle of the Christian knight and fiendish dragon.24 The Auchinleck Ms. copy of Bevis makes explicit the yoking of these patriotic and religious sentiments when the hero calls upon "sein Gorge, our leuedi kniþt" (1. 2817). Clearly, Bevis is meant to be identified with the England's patron saint, who in 1344, that is within a few years of the compilation of the Auchinleck Ms., became the patron saint of the Order of the Garter, for which the dragon fight was adopted as an emblem (Kellogg and Steele 11). Like the hagiographic Le Bone Florence of Rome, the dragon fight episode in Bevis closely resembles a saint's legend in that a portentous dream proceeds the combat (11. 2683-90) and ringing bells accom-

24The poem explains the origins of the dragon at some length. It is the incarnation of one of two kings who, to the detriment of their kingdoms, fought for twenty-four years, and

Par fore hii deide in dedli sinne
And helle pine þai gan hem winne.
After in a lite while
þai be-come dragouns vile.
(11. 2621-24).
panying the victory procession led by the Bishop of Cologne--an uncle of Bevis (Mehl 216).

Another literary rendering of St. George and The Dragon, Red Cross Knight's battle in Book I of Spenser's The Faerie Queene, in many of its details comes very close to that in Bevis of Hampton, closer than the legend in Jacobus de Voragine's Golden Legend, which is often mentioned as one of Spenser's sources. As in Spenser's rendering of the legend, Bevis is miraculously saved on two occasions by a healing well attended by a virgin:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Panne bere in pat place,} \\
\text{As it befelle prouz goddys grace,} \\
\text{A welle þer was off watyr cleer,} \\
\text{Penne was þe well off gret vertu} \\
\text{Porwz þe myzt off swete Ihesu;} \\
\text{A vyrgyne hadde wonyd in londe,} \\
\text{Was fful off grace of goddys sonde;} \\
\text{And had hur bathed in þat welle ryzt} \\
\text{Pat þe dragoun hadde no myzt.} \\
\text{Whanne sere Bevis was war of þis} \\
\text{In hys herte he was glad, iwyys.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Egerton 11. 33-46)

According to Judith Weiss, the virgin is "subtly" equated with Mary (72), but this understates the presence of Marian interest in the episode. In the passage above, we see that by virtue of the miraculous waters in which she has bathed, the virgin at the well wards off the dragon, makes it powerless. More strongly suggestive of Marianism is the phrase "fful off grace," the same words with which the archangel addresses the Mary at the Annunciation and made familiar in the Magnificat. The Auchinleck Ms. identifica-
tion of the virgin and Mary is even more emphatic than the Egerton Ms. In that early version of the poem, Bevis dreams of a combat with a king "bat was wod" (l. 2685); he sees himself sorely wounded, but in anticipation of actual event, "a virgine / Him brouzte out of al is pine (ll. 2689-90). During the dragon fight, Bevis prays to God "And to Marie, his moder dere" (l. 2868); the effect of the prayer on the dragon compares with that produced by the virgin at the well: "Pat herde þe dragoun, þer a stod, / And fleþ awei, ase he wer wod (ll. 2869-70).25

The allusions to the Virgin in Bevis' dragon fight are not isolated references confined to the interpolated episode. In fact, they complement the treatment of Bevis' love and intended wife, Josian, throughout the poem. Early in the romance, Bevis suffers wounds in a battle; but Josian, like the virgin of the dragon episode and the heroine of Le Bone Florence of Rome, has a special knowledge of medicines and heals him with a "good oyniment" (Egerton l. 716) and "riche baþes" (l. 732). In a later episode, two lions corner Josian in a cave, but just as in

25It is curious that the earliest version of Bevis, the one in the Auchinleck Ms. has the most explicit references to the Virgin. One explanation may be that the St. George legend was not well known in the 1330's when that copy was produced, necessitating more baldly drawn parallels. After the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the Golden Legend became well-known in England (Kellogg and Steele II), recognition of the parallels may have become automatic. An alternative explanation may be the influence of Lollard iconoclasts.
the fable of the unicorn subdued by a virgin—a tale allegorized by Honorius of Autun as a story of the Incarnation (Male 39-40)—the animals become docile in her presence:

But bey ne myzt do hur no shame,
For pe kind of Lyouns, y-wys,
A kynes douzter, bat maide is,
Kinges douzter, quene and maide both,
Pe lyouns myzt doo hur noo wroth
(11. 2390-94)

Not only is she able to pacify the lions, but the appositive phrases describing Josian strongly suggest Marian epithets. In addition to these special abilities, Josian, like Florence, at one point acts as an intercessor, saving the life of Acopart the giant (11. 2545-46).

After she converts to Christianity, the preservation of Josian's virginity also becomes an important issue in the poem. During Bevis' imprisonment, Josian's father forces her to marry; but a magic ring, which she swears to wear "be god aboue" (1. 1473), will protect her virginity. Later in the romance, Josian is accosted by another lustful knight who intends to have his will with her; Josian pleads but appears to acquiesce to his desires:

"For charite," she seide,
"I have sworn, certis, myn othe,
Pat y ne shal for lef ne lothe,
Pez i schoide lese me lif,
Boute ich were a spoused wif;
Zif y ou wilt me me spouse and wedde,
Panne I wille with the go to bedde.
(Egerton 11. 3163-69)
But this is a ruse. On their wedding night, Josian
pretends coyness and diverts her husband long enough to
make a slip knot out of a towel and then

Aboute his nekke zhe hit b rew
And on þe raile þre zhe drew;
Be þe nekke zhe hap þim vp tizt
& let him so'ride al þe nizt.
(11. 3221-24)

Like Florence who repulsed the steward with a stone, Josian
also can also rely on her own "engyn" to defend herself.
However much Josian--and Florence too--may be intended to
remind us of the Virgin or virgin saints, realistic acts
like these, performed with cunning and desperation and
without recourse to divine assistance, remind the reader of
the essential humanity of these heroines.

The romance world in which Josian and Florence operate
is one suffused with the divine, one in which the miracu-
lous is imminent--in short, the now "discarded" medieval
world view. Such a world view also pervades Amis and
Amiloun, like Le Bone Florence of Rome, a romance which is
closely connected to a hagiographic legend, and like Bevis
of Hampton, a romance related to an Anglo-Norman poem
(Leach xiv-xxxii). MacEdward Leach acknowledges that in
both the Middle English poem and the Anglo-Norman work
"almost every aspect of life in the poems is touched by the
Church," yet his insistence on the "pagan and primitive"
folk motifs in the romance leads to a denial of the reli-
gious character of the Amis and Amiloun: "...these poems
are not religious poems; their purpose is not to glorify the Church and the Christian virtues" (xxv). Of course, the folk elements are indisputably there; but it seems likely that the medieval readers valued Amis and Amiloun as much for the "sentence" of its religious content as for the "solace" of those elements. In addition, it may even be argued that some the folk motifs had even been brought within the Christian ken.

The four manuscripts which contain the romance provide some indication of how Amis was perceived. British Library Ms. Harley 2386, a commonplace book, places it between Mandeville's Travels and some household accounts (Guddat-Figge 202-03). The Egerton Ms., as we have seen, contains only romances; but given the exemplary piety expressed in Bevis of Hampton, a categorization of the manuscript as "secular" must be qualified. Other manuscripts treat the poem more conclusively as a religious poem. The Auchinleck Ms. places it among homiletic works, including poems about Mary Magdalene and St. Anne which directly follow Amis (Mehl 111; Guddat-Figge 122). Finally, in Oxford Bodleian Ms. Douce 326, the poem is referred to as a vita.27

26Folk motifs are numerous in the romances; in those discussed in this chapter, the longest two, Bevis of Hampton and Partonope of Blois, are particularly indebted to folk elements. See Gerald Bordman, "Motif-Index of the English Metrical Romances."

27According to Guddat-Figge, the Douce Ms. "must have been very closely associated at a very early stage" (268) with Oxford Bodleian Lib. Ms. Rawlinson Poetry 34, which
The pious nature of the romance is suggested by the narrator's and characters' liberal use of avowals and adjurations in the name of God, Jesus Christ, or a number of saints. But divine intervention at crucial points in the story, as well as other details, make it clear that the religious nature of the poem is not superficial. The sons of two barons, Amis and Amiloun, are conceived on the same day—a circumstance which implies Christian miracle more than folk marvel. They first meet at a fortnight-long feast, provided "Al for Ihesu Cristes sake" (Egerton 1. 68) by the duke of the country, into whose household they are admitted. They become fast friends and pledge an oath of friendship, the central event of the romance, commemorated by Amiloun's presenting one of two identical gold cups to Amis. The pact, as symbolized by the cups, seems to be made within the view of the Divine:

For godes loue, heuen king;  
Lete neuer bis coupe fro pe,  
Bot loke her-on & benk on me,  
(11. 321-23)

During the action of the remainder of the romance, the oath of friendship draws Amis and Amiloun into a conflict between their pledged obligations to each other and those they owe to God. The sequence of events is begun by Belisaunt, the duke's daughter, who entraps Amis into a love affair; at first he resists her advances because——

contains a version of Sir Degarre and several saints lives and didactic poems (Guddat-Figge 267-68).
among other reasons—of the immorality of this unchaste love, asserting that they would "for þat sinne / Wretþi god þer-to (l. 605-06). Of course, their affair is discovered. Guilty of the charges, Amis nevertheless must swear to and prove his innocence in an ordeal, a trial by combat, but he knows a "forsworn man schal neuer spede" (l. 1102), an implicit acknowledgment that God does not favor those who lie. He seeks the aid of his sworn brother, and the two men plan a deception: Amiloun will secretly substitute himself in place of his look-alike friend in order to circumvent the oath. This dodge, however, is an attempt to circumvent God's judgment as well; consequently, on his way to fight the duel with Amis' accuser, Amiloun receives a dire warning:

Com a voice fram heuen adoun,  
Þat noman herd bot he,  
& sayd, "Pou kniȝt, sir Amiloun,  
God, þat suffred passioun,  
Sent þe bode bi me;  
Zif þou þis bataile vnderfong,  
Þou schalt haue an euentour strong

Fouler mesel nas neuer non  
In þe world, þan þou schal be!"  
(l. 1250-1261)

Amiloun, giving priority to the worldly oath of friendship instead of the heavenly command, has God's vengeance visited upon him. He contracts leprosy as the voice warned, and in addition—like Robert of Sicily—is forced out of his castle into a life of poverty and itinerant begging.
Amiloun's sufferings are eventually assuaged when Amis renders himself to God's will, as he should have in the ordeal. Eventually reunited, Amis and the leprous Amiloun dream that an angel reveals the cure of Amiloun's disease: a bath in the blood of Amis' two children. Amis considers the deed a "dedli sinne" (1. 2247), but for the sake of his sworn brother he decides to carry out the sacrifice, which the poet renders in an affectively piteous manner. On Christmas night while other members of the household are in church, Amis, with knife in hand, deliberates over his innocent children "Bat god hap boug't so dere!" (1. 2289) and finally resolves to commit the deed in an emotional and pious outcry:

"O, certes," he seyd, "nay! To help mi brober now at pis nede, God graunt me per-to wele to spede, & Mari, bat best may!"

(11. 2301-04)

Amis further demonstrates his faith and piety when he attempts to assuage his friend's remorse for sacrifice; he says to Amiloun, "\'Be now stille; / Ihesu, when it is his wille, / May send me childer mo'"(11. 2335-37), a thought shortly thereafter echoed by Belisaunt (11. 2391-94). Of course, Amiloun is miraculously healed by the blood bath, but a greater event in the romance is the revival of Amis' children, greater because it was prompted not by angelic direction, but by the efficacy of Amis' own prayer:

... to his chapel he gan gon,
In roumance as ze may here,
And for he had his children sloop
To Jesu Crist he made his mon
And besought him wip rewful chere
Pat he shuld shild him fram schame pat day,
& Mari, his moder, pat best may;
& Ihesu Crist, in pat stede
Welle he herd pat kniztes bede
Prouz pe be seching of his moder dere
And graunted him his priaire.

(Egerton 11. 2354-64)

This miracle of the intercession of the Virgin—which, occurs only in the East Anglian Egerton Ms.—is a response to Amis' new-found piety which does not circumvent God's will but surrenders to it and seeks His forgiveness.

Amis and Amiloun is a finely crafted poem. It is not episodic like Bevis of Hampton or Le Bone Florence of Rome but presents a structurally unified action and demonstrates a deft sense of dramatic detail and a range of tone. To claim then that the religious aspects of the poem are not fundamentally important seems to slight the poet's considerable skills. Rather, like Le Bone Florence of Rome and King Robert of Sicily, Amis and Amiloun presents a thoroughly didactic message by adapting folk elements to a religious purpose. If, as Leach claims, the romance does not glorify the Church per se (Leach xxv), it certainly does extol the power and benefice of Our Lady and certain Christian virtues, especially chastity. Dean Baldwin finds the moral theme of the story to be that loyalty is an imperfect substitute for faith and God's grace (Baldwin 353-65). But the poem does not denigrate loyalty; rather, it only questions the priorities by which characters
determine their allegiances. And it is in establishing those priorities where Amis and Amiloun fail because their first loyalty before any worldly bond must be to God.

Observance of that loyalty constitutes Christian piety, a topic with which we have been dealing throughout this chapter. But piety is not strictly a religious concern, as Heffernan's explanation makes clear. She cites Thomas Aquinas, who considers pietas a form of the virtue justice:

Since honoring a debt towards someone else is a function of justice generally, a specific kind of justice arises wherever there is a specific basis for indebtedness to any person. This is the case in regard to anyone who, in the natural course of things, is a source of our life and its development... piety is the response towards those sources.

(Heffernan 15, citing Summa Theologica, II-II, Q. 101, Art. III.)

Take as it is expressed in a variety of relationships in Amis and Amiloun. At one point in the romance, Amiloun's nephew, Amoraunt, who has accompanied, even carried his diseased uncle, refuses an offer of employment in the household of Amis, who has still not discovered the identity of the leper. Amis' speculation concerning his determination to remain with the leper represents a paradigm of the conditions of loyalty:

"Par aventour, be gode man hab biforn
Holpen him at his nede,
Ober be child is of his blod yborn,
Ober he hab him obes sworn
His liif wip him to lede."
This theme of loyalty and indebtedness reverberates throughout the poem, not just in the central sworn oath between Amis and Amiloun. For example, it was noted above that Amis at first refuses the advances of Belisaunt because it would anger God; in addition, he adds that if "y ded mi lord þis deshonour, / þan were ich an iuel traitour" (11. 607-08) because of the good will and generosity his host has shown toward him. Belisaunt coerces Amis into the love affair, so that they secretly "pliȝt hem trewþes boþe to" (1. 668). The vow, because it leads to an illicit love affair with Belisaunt, conflicts with loyalty owed to his temporal lord, and, because it leads to his sexual incontinence, puts Amis in a tenuous position with God. Similarly, and more clearly, Amiloun's wife violates not only the vow of marriage, a holy sacrament, in expelling Amiloun from his castle and taking a lover, she also lacks charity by forcing the sick man to beg elsewhere for his sustenance.

The conflicting loyalties in Amis and Amiloun remind us of social-personal conflicts which are said to be a major distinction between the French romances of Chretien and the English metrical romances. Perhaps in that respect Amis comes closer to the early French romances than do our other selected romances. But certainly the theme of
loyalty itself is a major one in *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and in *Bevis of Hampton*. The discussion of this theme need not detain us, for its literary roots are old, and it is treated extensively in medieval literature. Nevertheless, some mention needs to be made because the romances which East Anglians were reading were clearly preoccupied both with the religious and non-religious varieties of *pietas* and its opposite, treachery. A few examples will suffice. In *Bevis*, the traditional uncle-nephew bond is particularly strong. Sabre saves Bevis from his vicious mother by a trick; when the deception is discovered, the young boy Bevis intercedes at his own risk to save his uncle from the mother's reprisal. Later in the romance, Josian and Bevis are separated for seven years, during which time Sabre and Josian together search for Bevis; their dedication both to one another and to Bevis is demonstrated by the poverty they endure, Josian forced to make her living as a minstrel. *Le Bone Florence of Rome* provides several examples of violations of *pietas*. In relationships of blood, Sir Myles is among the most treacherous; he is guilty of abandoning his brother, Sir Emere, on the battlefield, inventing the report of his death, and abducting and assaulting Florence, who had previously forgiven his wickedness. On the other hand, the relationship between Florence and her father is a close one; he defends her
choice not to marry at the cost of his own life, and when he is killed, Florence is truly grief-stricken.

This affection of parents for their children, which constitutes part of the reciprocal bonds of loyalty, is also presented in Amis and Amiloun. In this romance, the parents tenderly bid farewell to their sons and

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\`Pai zaue her childer her blisceing} \\
& \text{& bi\textcolor{red}{\text{s}}ou\textcolor{red}{\text{z}}t Ihesu, heuen king,} \\
& \text{He schuld scheld hem from care.}
\end{align*}
\]

(11. 128-30)

This expectation of proper familial relations established early in the romance makes the climatic scene, in which Amis sacrifices his own children, all the more poignant.

Oaths and familial bonds of loyalty also figure prominently in the last of the selected romances, Partonope of Blois. But in many respects, Partonope is different from the other four romances previously discussed. Whereas Robert of Sicily, Le Bone Florence of Rome, Bevis of Hampton, and Amis and Amiloun all appear to have been composed in the fourteenth century, Partonope is a later composition, perhaps the second quarter of the fifteenth-century (Pearsall, "The English Romance in the Fifteenth Century" 66). Like our other poems, earlier Continental analogues of Partonope exist (Hornstein, "Miscellaneous Romance" 150), but Partonope is much more indebted to the spirit of Continental romances than the other English ones. The love element figures more integrally here as the impetus for the action, not simply as in Bevis as an
accident of the hero's military pursuits. The characters are also more reflectively conscious about their love relationships, which borrow their sentiment in part from *amour courtois*. And unlike any of the other poems, the narrator of *Partonope* frequently intrudes, complaining in Petrarchan fashion about his unrequited love and expatiating on the nature of women. The treatment of narrator's voice, as Derek Pearsall notes, owes much to Chaucer and Gower, a debt which firmly places *Partonope* within a movement of "fifteenth-century verse-romance towards a greater sophistication and a more self-consciously 'literary' mode of treatment and address" (Pearsall, "English Romance in the Fifteenth Century" 67).

In this 12,000 line romance, Partonope, young son of the Earl of Blois and nephew of King Clovis of France, becomes separated from a hunting party. He wanders to a river where he boards a magic vessel that transports him to a marvelous castle in a faery land ruled over by an invisible queen, Melior. Partonope and Melior become lovers and agree to marry, but Melior cannot become visible for two and a half years. She insists that Partonope not try to see her, for to do so would cause his death and she would loose her reputation. He, of course, swears on several occasions that he has no intention of attempting to see his lover, in spite of his desire to do just that. When he surreptitiously gains sight of her with a magic
lantern, all her powers are destroyed. Despondent over Partonope's betrayal, Melior rejects him. The rest of the romance, about half the poem, concerns the attempts of Melior's sister, Urake, to reunite the two lovers at a tournament at which Melior will choose a husband.

As I remarked above, Partonope of Blois shares with our other poems a concern with the theme of *pietas*, but it is most like *Amis* and *Amiloun* because in both poems sworn oaths are the central events. Although this theme is presented as an aspect of the feudal politics of the poem, as when defeated armies swear to Clovis

That they shulde hym bere feyth and trowþe,
And In hym shall neuer be slowþe
Fownden, but in trowþe here honowre
Euer he wolle safe . . .  
(11. 4810-13),

it figures most prominently in the love story. On two occasions Partonope returns to France, and both times he swears to Melior or her agents to comply with the taboo imposed on his love. However, on the first return, Partonope reveals his love to his mother who plots with Clovis because, she says,

þys ys, me brynketh, a mervelowse ffoly.
Off hyr he hath alle maner plesawnce
Pus ys he broghte in be deuellys dawnce.  
(11. 5085-87)

Under the influence of a magic potion, Partonope betroths himself to Clovis' materialistic niece in violation of the pledge of faithfulness he has already made to Melior (11. 2393-94). But his mother's plot fails; Partonope decries
her duplicity and returns to Melior, to whom he confesses his failings. However, distressed over the "care he had broghte / Hys moder, and eke þe kynge of Fraunce" (ll. 5503-04), Partonope returns again to his native country. This time the forces aligned against Partonope's faery love are much more persuasive than his mother's magic drink: with subtle psychological maneuvering, the Bishop of Paris gets Partonope to confess his illicit love and counsels him not to remain chaste but to see her "aboue all þynge" (l. 5793). Of course, his mother immediately springs to hand with the magic lantern.

A number of complications make some actions of the characters morally ambiguous. First, Partonope appears to be dealing with a faery, and the danger to his soul is real. The betrayal by his mother and Clovis is prompted by a loving concern for him; Partonope's affection and sense of obligation to them are responses to the traditional familial nurturing (ll. 2364-2372 and as above 5503-04) similar to that expressed in Amis and Amiloun. Second, Partonope breaks his oath to Melior twice, later admitting his willful complicity in what he calls his "hye treson" (l. 6091), "'Alas,' þoþte he, 'howe un-gracyously / To my loue have I gouerned me!'" (ll. 6432-33). But Partonope's affair with Melior also evidences a lack of gracious self-governance, a fault which the Bishop makes explicit in his
sermon to Partonope (ll. 5700-5727), concluding with this caveat:

Loke none erthely loue yow e suppryse,
Leste þer-wyth ye be so blente,
That ye breke hys comawndemente.
Lyethe not longe in dedely Synne,
Yeff þer be eny nowe þat ye be ynne.
(ll. 5723-27)

So although his behavior may be ungracious according to the rules of one mode of conduct, his liaison with Melior violates another more important one. From this viewpoint, the calamity which Partonope provokes appears deserved and the overall moral unambiguous.

Melior's character is a complex one because although she uses magic, she is not, in fact, a faery; rather, as professed early in her relationship with Partonope, she is a pious Christian:

For soþe I am
Borne and broghte for-þe a trewe crysten woman,
And my lefe ys fully In Crystes lore

I truste In Cryste þat was borne of Marye,

Þat ys euer and shalle be myne entente
Fully to kepe hys commawndemente.
(ll. 1887-1900)

Later, after Partonope has disgraced her, she further explains that as the daughter of Emperor of Constantinople, she had progressed through all the learning of the Seven Arts, medicine, and divinity by the age of fifteen, after which she turned to necromancy and performed marvels "By þe wytte þat Gode haþe sente me" (l. 5966). For whatever
reason she conceals herself, Melior's invisibility permits her tryst with Partonope. It symbolizes the secret and illicit love; when the spell is broken, the queen's subjects see her and realize—to her shame—that she is unchaste. She says, "Thus shall openly be knowe my shame," and asks rhetorically, "who ys causer of my blame?" (11. 5999-6000). She presumes it is Partonope, but clearly she is culpable because magic powers provide temporal not eternal solace; when she complains to Partonope, she unwittingly reveals her own attachment to secular concerns and things, "Ye haue rafte me my wordely blys" (1. 6045).

Melior and Partonope are like other characters in some of the romances discussed above. Like King Robert of Sicily, Amis and Amiloun, and to a lesser extent Bevis and Josian, they are essentially pious Christians who err and are chastened by God. That His favor rests on Melior is made explicit in Partonope when, at the tournament to select her husband, she is compared to the Virgin:

\begin{verbatim}
The cristens \bat\ chose were for \be\ degre
Speke myche \bing\ of hir grete beaute,
And seide \bene\ was neuer sene be-forne
In erth so faire a creature borne,
Safe only she \bat\ was modir and maide,
With whome \be\ trentyte was so wele paide,
He deyned to sende his blessed sone
\be\ holy goste in hir to wone.
\end{verbatim}

(11. 11468-75)

Irony? Probably not, because preceding this a minor female character has defined some aspects of feminine comportment:

\begin{verbatim}
God forbede \bat\ cruelte or vengeaunce
In any woman founde shall be;
\end{verbatim}
In compliance with this admonition, Melior has forgiven Partonope, has believed "That he hadde tresspassed litell or ellles nought" (1. 10726).

In spite of its sophisticated literary tendencies, its concern with magic, and its eroticism, Partonope advocates the same fundamental piety--particularly Christian piety--as do the other poems discussed here. Although its conclusion bears some similarity to those of the other poems, it is less emphatically religious or moralistic. We find that Partonope and Melior are--as if to emphasize their previous immorality--"Knytte to-geder in Goddes lawe" (1. 12163) as king and queen, and live in "Ioy and welthe with plesaunce" (1. 12146). Bevis and Josian are eventu­ally wedded and live twenty years "wip out treie & tene" (1. 4588). Having provided their loyal comrades and heirs with lands or advantageous marriages, they rule Josian's native country until they die in each others' arms. But for them a religious house is founded, and they are enshrined in a gold tomb in a marble chapel. In Amis and Amiloun, the sworn brothers retake Amiloun's land, punish his wife by installing her in a hut on a diet of bread and water, and cede his dominion to his nephew so that he may live out his days with Amis. The two knights die on the same day and, as in Bevis, an abbey is raised for both of
them--but here "for her eldres also," in keeping with the emphasis on familial relations--and they are buried together, "Pe blisse of huyn þey haue to mede, / þat lasteþ euer moo" (11. 2507-08). The action of Le Bone Florence of Rome concludes with Sir Emere consigning all of Florence's confessed persecutors to a fiery execution and rewarding the good knight who spared Florence's life. She leaves the convent to marry Sir Emere who consequently becomes Emperor of Rome, and together they beget a child and successor; "Then the emperowre and hys wyfe, / In yoye and blysse þey lad þer lyfe" (11. 2170-71). A moral which emphasizes the pietas theme closes the poem:

> Forby schulde men and women als,  
> Them bethynke or þey be false,  
> Hyt makythy so fowle an ende.  
> (11. 2176-78)

Only King Robert of Sicily is substantially different, for it alone has no love story and therefore no marriage. Robert, reinstated as king, lives two years before an angel reveals to him his impending death, the news of which encourages him to have his miraculous story written for posterity. But it too ends with a didactic message.

What is curious about these poems--with their persistent piety, their praise of Christian virtues, their near-saintly heroes and heroines, their homiletic even didactic conclusions--is the focus, in the conclusions especially but also elsewhere, on the temporal world. On the one hand, all of the antagonists, like Florence's tormentors or
Amiloun's wife, receive a just reward: they are judged and punished, imprisoned or put to death. While their ultimate fate at Judgment may be implied—those in Florence are cast into a "grete fyre"—those they have abused find a revenge in the here and now. On the other hand, and this seems more remarkable, all the protagonists achieve their goals and gain worldly success—power, riches, marriage, sexual gratification, progeny, joy, and so forth. Although they presumably remain devout Christians, none of them becomes an anchoress or a hermit or dies fighting Saracens like their counterparts in strictly hagiographic literature.28 Furthermore, characters such as Florence and Josian, who are at times realistically portrayed with very human responses to their situations, remind us that the protagonists in these romances are not, after all, saints. No matter how arduous their ordeals, how pious they remain, how often they benefit from God's grace or Mary's intercession, or how close their actions parallel those of saints, their immediate goals—and rewards—are those of the world. Nevertheless, all the poems, even Partonope and Bevis, are infused not simply with Christian beliefs but with didactic messages or exemplary actions aimed at encouraging a lay audience to greater piety. For example, even given Bevis'
worldly virtues, his courage, his strength, his cleverness, his self-reliance, one is left with the impression that Bevis achieves his goals because of God's grace and his Christian virtues, his piety, his fortitude, and his chastity, and his attention to the common sacraments of the Church.

The major themes of these romances had a long history by the fourteenth century and the fifteenth centuries, when most of these poems were written and copied. For example, loyalty, fortitude, and deference to God often figure prominently in earlier medieval saints lives and epic narratives. Old English Juliana and Beowulf, among others, spring to mind. And it is true too that the themes of these romances are pervasive in other contemporary literature; the themes of honor, family relationships, justice are developed extensively in Chaucer, for example. In short, I am not claiming them to be exclusive to East Anglian romances. Rather, I believe, first, that the serious treatment of some of these themes, when compared to their comic treatment in other works, reflects a conservative East Anglian ideology, and, second, that East Anglian romances present an emphasis different from the regional romances of, at least, Northwest England.

For example, the military ordeal in Amis and Amiloun is treated seriously by the poet as a means of rendering God's judgment concerning the guilt or innocence of the
combatants. The disguise by which the heroes try to circumvent that judgment is forbidden by a voice from Heaven, and Amiloun contracts leprosy as a consequence of God's warning. The religious ordeal also figures prominently in Athelstan, proving the innocence of a family accused of treason and even precipitating the miraculous birth of St. Edmund. Yet the ordeal in general was viewed skeptically by Pope Innocent III at the beginning of the thirteenth century (Bloomfield 553-55). At about the same time Gottfried von Strassburg thoroughly ridiculed the literary convention in his Tristan: when Isolde's doctored oath is apparently accepted by God, it proves "His great virtue is as pliant as a windblown sleeve" (248). Similarly, Gottfried parodies the dragon combat and efficacy of well of grace, both of which the poet of Bevis of Hampton treats in a sincere manner. In the German romance, Tristan runs from the wounded dragon (160), and instead of recovering in "watyr cleer" as does Bevis, Tristan falls into a "bog" (165), where he lies until Isolde rescues him.

Not only do these East Anglian romances present some attitudes which antedate those expressed in Gottfried's influential masterpiece, but a comparison with English romances from the North and Northwest provides evidence of a different emphasis as well. According to Mehl (99), the blend of courtly, popular, and religious elements in romances from the North is "noticeably different from that
Similarly, I believe the Gawain poems, which for the most part have their provenance in the North and West, show less interest in the themes that have been adduced for the East Anglian romances and more interest in displaying the activities and manners of courtly society, and in registering anticlerical and political protests.

Unlike the romances of East Anglia, piety and moral issues are not the center of the poets' interests in these poems. The first half of The Awtyrs of Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn is an explicitly homiletic piece in which the spirit of Guenever's mother, risen from Hell where it has been confined for breaking a solemn vow, apparently of marriage or chastity (ll. 190-200), exhorts the queen and Gawain to be meek, to pity the poor, and to be mindful of their misdeeds. Yet the second half of the poem neglects this didactic message almost entirely, describing in elaborate detail a combat between Gawain and a disgruntled knight suing for the return of lands unjustly appropriated by King Arthur. Another Gawain poem, the Carle of Carlile begins with Arthur commanding a mass, but the initial interest of the poem is a catalogue of knights and a hunt in which they are engaged and which the narrator describes

29This poem appears in several fifteenth-century manuscripts, including the Lincoln Cathedral Thornton Ms. Its provenance appears to be near Carlisle (Newstead, "Arthurian Legends" 63).
The poem concludes with the carle, returned to normal proportions, establishing a chantry chapel, but the bulk of the romance is concerned more with Gawain's courtesy and reputation as a lover than with pious acts. Unlike Partonope or Le Bone Florence of Rome, this poem, in fact, seems to condone the dubious morality amour courtois when the carle makes his daughter available to Gawain for the night, an invitation to which Gawain, the famous lover, of course, readily accepts.

Anticlericism also seems to be a feature of these Northern poems not found in the East Anglian romances. During the hunt at the beginning of the Carle of Carlile, Gawain, Kay and Bishop Bodwin are separated from the other knights and opt to spend a night in the carle's castle, which proves to be a marvelous adventure. Gawain's courtesy to the giant carle is met with a equally gracious response. But the bishop is shown to be just as mean-spirited as Kay when he prevents the carle's horse from feeding (ll. 265-70). The carle gives the bishop a buffet and rebukes him:

He saith, "By the clergye I sett nothing,
Nor yet by thy miter, nor by thy ringe;"
It fitteth a clarke to be curteous and free,
By the conning of his clergy.

(11. 269-72)

In effect, the carle rather than the bishop is the moral center of the romance. A similar criticism is aimed at religious persons and institutions by the King of Mann, who, in The Turke and Gowin, rails against the church because of the discrepancy he finds between what clergy advocates in its sermons and how its members actually behave (11. 153-60). This anticlericism contrasts sharply with the positive presentation of the clergy in Partonope and especially in Athelston, where the Archbishop of Canterbury, not the king, is the real hero.

Familial affection and loyalty, which are exemplified so prominently in the East Anglian romances, receive almost no attention in the Northwestern poems because the chivalric and courtly activities of the noble knight, the focus of the latter poems, is antithetical to such themes. Often, we find the major characters making oaths--not to be brothers as in Amis and Amiloun or Athelston--but simply as a pretext for a series of adventures, as in The Turke and Gowin or The Avowyng of King Arthur, Sir Gawan, Sir Kaye, and Sir Bawdewyn of Bretan. In the latter, all of the

31 The Turke and Gowin, composed about 1500 in the North or Northwest, is another Gawain romance preserved in the Percy Folio (Newstead, "Arthurian Legends" 58-60).

32 This poem was composed about 1425 in the North and later copied in the West Midlands; it is contained in a manuscript which also contains The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the
oaths except Bawdewyn's commit the speakers to chivalric activities: Arthur to hunt a boar, Kay to guard the forest, and Gawain to guard the tarn. The Bawdewyn episode extols the charitable provisioning of the needy, but it also presents some strongly antifeminist sentiments, quite unlike anything in East Anglian romances, which in fact tend to elevate the position of women by likening them, as we have seen, to the Virgin.

A definitive statement about the nature of the romances read by East Anglians relative to other English or continental romances would entail an extensive comparative study of those other romances and their manuscripts, a task which is beyond the limits of the present work. This preliminary study nevertheless suggests that the late medieval East Anglian romances advocate a conservative religious and social ideology differing in their thematic emphasis from romances being written in other parts of England. Their tendency to emphasize the maintenance of the proper, pious relationships among the laity, religious leaders, and God. They also appear to take quite seriously certain conventions which by the fifteenth century had already been regarded as dubious. Furthermore, we have seen that romances familiar to East Anglians tend to focus on the Virgin and that the manuscripts of Robert of Sicily, Amis and Amiloun, and the Bauchun Chapel roof bosses Terne Wathelyne (Newstead, "Arthurian Legends" 61-62).
depicting the legendary version of *Le Bone Florence of Rome* are explicitly more Marian than versions of the same works produced elsewhere. Perhaps as a corollary to this emphasis on the Virgin, these romances have a pronounced emphasis on chastity, a middle-class virtue quite unlike that of the upper-class *amour courtois* depicted in the Northern Gawain romances.

According to Crane, *Bevis of Hampton* and its Anglo-Norman analogue were poems which extolled the viewpoint of the elite nobility, poems in which "faith sustains baronial desires" (101) of the thirteenth century. But *Bevis* and the poems like it discussed in this chapter must have "had some important bearing" (Mehl 211) for East Anglian readers of the fifteenth century, who, as we have seen, were clearly not of the nobility. I think these romances appealed to them for a number of reasons. First, the affluent owner of the Egerton Ms., or a priest of some means like John Stathe, or a property-owning widow like Isabell Lyston saw his or her own worldly success reflected and justified in works like *Amis* and *Amiloun, Bevis of Hampton* or *Partonope*, respectively. Second, these romances appealed because they reinforced conservative religious values when, as discussed in the preceding chapters, East Anglian heretics were not only active but actively persecuted as well. The heretics were perceived as real threat to the very fabric of the East Anglian community, and it is
no wonder that those people who had achieved some affluence or some status within that community sought popular texts which confirmed their own beliefs about that community. Finally, at the center of East Anglian religious devotion, and indeed much of the cultural life of the region, was the Virgin Mary. This East Anglian Marian veneration, too, was clearly reflected in the romances which were shaped to exalt her, an exaltation which is even more clearly present in East Anglian popular drama, to which I now turn.
CHAPTER IV: THE POPULAR DRAMA OF MEDIEVAL EAST ANGLIA

Part I: Provenance and Popularity

Identifying the particular dramatic works of East Anglia is a simpler task than gleaning the corresponding romances from the numerous manuscripts. There are fewer manuscripts with which to deal and those manuscripts, on the whole, now present fewer problems of provenance than do those of the romances. The York and Chester cycles were civic productions, and ample documentary evidence leaves no question about the long-standing localization of those texts. The home of the mystery cycle in the Towneley Ms., however, has given rise to debate. Although the West Riding town of Wakefield is referred to twice in the manuscript, scholars have been dissuaded by meager external evidence and a prejudice against a relatively small community like Wakefield to produce so complex an event as a cycle.1 Nevertheless, linguistic evidence and the borrowing of five plays from the York cycle at least make a Yorkshire origin for the manuscript almost certain.

Other than the three Northern cycles and a handful of dramatic works or fragments from other regions, the

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1 Stevens (95-109) has recently reviewed the arguments and strongly advocates Wakefield as home of the plays.
remainder of manuscripts containing Middle English drama derive from East Anglia. And the plays and fragments contained in those represent a substantial portion—perhaps one-third—of all the extant medieval drama. Bodleian Ms. Digby 133 is a seventeenth-century compilation of scientific tracts and four late medieval plays: The Conversion of St. Paul and Mary Magdalene; The Killing of the Children, and the incomplete Wisdom. According to the editors of the recent Early English Text Society edition of these plays, all present an East Midlands dialect with sometimes more, sometimes fewer distinctively East Anglian features and, as in the case of The Conversion of St. Paul and particularly Mary Magdalene, even more specifically Norfolk (Baker et al. xix, xxxvi, lvi, and lxviii). Paleographic analysis and studies of the water marks suggest that Wisdom was copied in the last decade of the fifteenth century and the other plays in the first quarter of the next century, although textual evidence suggests that all four of the plays were copied from pre-existing exemplars, that of Mary Magdalene being another fifteenth-century text (Baker et al. xl). Three of the plays of Digby 133, The Conversion of St. Paul, Mary Magdalene, and Wisdom, have the name "Myles Blomefylde" or his initials inscribed in them. Blomefylde (1525-1603; DNB), a native of Bury St. Edmunds and a student at Cambridge, eventually settled in Chelmsford, just across the Suffolk border in
Essex. An enthusiastic book collector, Blomefylde also performed the duties of churchwarden in Chelmsford and so was responsible for keeping the accounts, including receipts and disbursements concerning the parish dramatic activities.

Another native of Bury, Cox Macro (1683-1767; DNB) also collected books, and among his collection were three plays now bound together with other manuscripts in Folger Library Ms. V a. 354. The complete text of Wisdom is nearly identical in dialect and orthography to corresponding lines in Bodleian Ms. Digby 133 (Eccles xxx-xxxii). In his edition of the Macro plays, Mark Eccles asserts that the Macro and Digby manuscripts represent independent copies of Wisdom; however, the editors of the fragment present a convincing response to his argument and conclude that "both were copied from a common exemplar" (Baker et al. lxvi), although the Macro text was copied some thirty years before that in the Digby manuscript, that is, 1465-1470 (Eccles xxx). Approximately contemporary with the Macro Wisdom and in the hand of the same scribe, Mankind refers to several towns in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and to Bury St. Edmunds, making it consistent with an East Anglian provenance. In addition, both Wisdom and Mankind conclude with a claim of ownership by a monk named Thomas Hyngham, for which documentary sources have supplied one prospective candidate from Norwich (Eccles xxviii).
Although *The Castle of Perseverance* refers to Canwick in Lincolnshire, "evidence from vocabulary, phonology, and accidence is consistent" with that of a scribe from Norfolk (Eccles xi). The date of this play has been placed as early as the last decade of the fourteenth century, but opinion holds for a date in the first quarter of the fifteenth (Eccles x-xi).

The collection of dramatic pieces edited by Norman Davis in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* contains six works which have their provenance in East Anglia. *The Norwich Grocers' Play*, the Biblical story of the creation of Eve from the expulsion from the Garden of Paradise, survives in two forms, one a fragment, the other complete. These are entries copied from the lost record book of the Norwich Grocers' Guild for the years 1533 and 1565, respectively. Davis asserts that "not much in the language is distinctive," but goes on to list several features shared with other East Anglian works (xxxviii); nothing contradicts the linguistic evidence of the texts and other excerpts from the *Grocers' Book* (xxxii-xxxvi) that the play was performed in Norwich. *The Play of the Sacrament* is contained in a the Dublin Trinity College Ms. F.4.20, a compilation of a variety of sixteenth and seventeenth century works. Claims for Irish scribal practices are "not convincing" (Davis lxxix), but the language resembles that of other Norfolk texts, a fact consistent with the textual references to
Croxton--the name of several towns in East Anglia--and Babwell Mill near Bury St. Edmunds (Davis lxxxiv-lxxxv). *Dux Moraud* is a fragment of an incest drama written in a hand of the second quarter of the fifteenth century (Davis ci), a date which agrees with the linguistic assessment of the text (Davis cxi). According to Davis, "The strongly East Anglian character of the language of the play is consonant with the Norfolk-Suffolk origin of the parchment roll on which it is written" (cxi). Another fragment of a play contains verses in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and English but too small a sample of the latter to make any conclusions about the dialect. However, the parchment roll on which the play was copied (B.L. Add. Roll 63481 B) displays accounts of Rickinghall Manor in Suffolk, a property of the abbey at Bury (Davis cxiv-cxv). In addition, we may include here a fragment (c. 1475) of a Robin Hood play, the only secular drama as opposed to pageant among extant texts from East Anglia. Although there are no spellings in the text which definitely localize the text in East Anglian, none suggest a provenance elsewhere. Furthermore, the manuscript is closely connected with the letters of the Paston family, and it is likely that John Paston II saw or knew of the play (Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and the Winchester Dialogue: Facsimiles* 76; for the text see Greg 120-21).

Two commonplace books from East Anglia also contain dramatic works. The more important of the two is the Brome
Hall Ms. (Yale Univ. Lib.), which contains, in addition to several religious works and household accounts, *The Brome Abraham and Isaac*. In the fifteenth century Brome Hall in north Suffolk, and another manor nearby at Stuston were the property of the Cornwallis family, and many of the accounts concern the second manor. Several of those accounts are in the hand of Robert Melton, a steward and executor for the family in the latter part of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Davis lx). In another hand, the scribe responsible for the Abraham and Isaac probably copied that work in the earlier history of the manuscript, clearly working from a pre-existing copy. According to Davis, the language of the play is "fully in keeping with the association of the manuscript with northern Suffolk" (lxx).

Davis' *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* includes two speeches—one by a character that names itself "Delyght" and the other an epilogue to a play—excerpted from the commonplace book of Robert Reynes of Acle, Norfolk.

2The hand of the professional scribe, the one responsible for all the literary entries scattered throughout the book, records the receipt of payment date May 1, 1492, for his work, and the watermarks all date from 1465-75; the accounts written by Melton date from 1499 to 1508. The book has been edited by Lucy Toulmin Smith (*The Boke of Brome: A Common-place Book of the Fifteenth Century* Trubner, 1886), but the edition has many errors. See Kahrl, "The Brome Hall Commonplace Book," 159-60; and Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays*, xl.

3That the entire manuscript came from Acle, about eight miles east of Norwich, "cannot seriously be doubted" (Louis 24), and "there is no reason to suppose the whole . . . is not written in one hand" (Louis 7).
However, now the whole manuscript, Bodleian Ms. Tanner 407, has been edited by Cameron Louis, thus making available one of the two fragments, one of three quatrains and the other of nine couplets, apparently spoken by characters in Nine Worthies Pageants, both of which Davis noted (cxxi) but did not print. The four pieces are all too short to make specific assessments of linguistic origin, but of the first two Davis writes that they "could well be East Anglian" (cxxxiv), and I can find nothing in the Worthies' speeches to suggest a radically different provenance. Many of the entries in the book are dated 1470-75, but some extend its active use until the end of the century (Louis 26-27).

Reynes, a small-property owner, held the positions of churchreeve and alderman of the parish Guild of St. Edmund and a participant in the Guild of St. Anne. Apparently in the performance of his duties for the first office, he purchased vestments for the clergy and recorded the cost of making a battlement for the steeple, both at considerable expense to the parish (Louis 174-75). In these records, he seems to perform some of the duties normally assigned to the churchwarden, who was often responsible for recording the disbursements and receipts concerning parish dramatic activities. If he was in fact churchwarden, the epilogue for the play is a completely appropriate piece for inclusion in his book. In the epilogue, the speaker thanks the audience for its patience, excuses the actors for any
lapses in presentation, and then concludes with the following:

We pray zou alle in Goddys name
To drynke ar ze pas.
Ffor an ale is here ordeyned be a comely assent
For alle maner of people bat apperyn here þis day.
Vnto Holy Chirch to ben incressemment,
All that excedith þe costis of oure play.

(Louis 273)

It seems probable that Reyens recorded the speech as a model for his own parish's church-ale play. The two Worthies passages also suggest a person on the lookout for dramatic material; as Louis notes, some grammatical oddities in the three speeches of the first fragment suggest Reyens was "trying to assemble a Nine Worthies pageant from various sources until he came across the complete one" (Louis 433). If indeed these speeches were intended for entertainment in the Guild of St. Anne, Robert Reyens was pretty thoroughly involved in dramatic activity in Acle.

In addition to the York, Towneley and Chester cycles which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter there remains to be discussed the N-Town Cycle, which linguistic analysis has localized as a written mostly by a scribes from Norfolk. I have postponed discussion of this most important East Anglian dramatic manuscript until this point.

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4The Worthies speeches occur on the recto and verso of the last leaf in quire two of the manuscript. This quire includes, in addition to the pageant speeches, The Trinubium of St. Anne, The Life of St. Anne, and two Miracles of the Virgin. See Louis 11 and 437.
because it points out, perhaps more clearly than the Macro or Digby manuscripts, certain questions concerning the popularity of the plays discussed here and certain unavoidable methodological problems of which one must be cognizant.

"N-Town" is now the most commonly used designation for the composite cycle of plays in B.L. Ms. Cotton Vespasian D. VIII. The present name derives from the Proclamation, speeches advertising and describing the subject of the plays to be performed in "N.town," where "N." is the Latin abbreviation for nomen and at which point the speaker was to supply the appropriate town name. Formerly referred to as the Ludus Coventriae, the result of a mistaken and long discredited attribution to the Coventry civic cycle (Block xxxvii-xli), the origin of plays in the N-Town manuscript is still a matter of scholarly debate. Because they were not apparently productions of craft guilds for a civic Corpus Christi cycle like those at York and Chester, there is no explicit manuscript notation which might correlate with extant city or guild documents. Lincoln has been advocated as the home of the the N-Town cycle (Craig 265-80; also Cameron and Kahril 68), but the dialect of the scribe who compiled the manuscript is now, as I indicated above, recognized as East Anglian. In their work for the Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English, Angus McIntosh and Michael Samuels have "assigned the main scribe to the
neighborhood of Harling in south-central Norfolk, and the minor scribes not far from there" (Spector 26; see also McIntosh et al. 219). As a result of this pinpoint localization, some critics have suggested that the "N" in "N-Town" stands for "Norwich" instead of nomen, a proposition given further credibility by the appearance in the manuscript of the town name Hassingham, a village about ten miles from Norwich. Gail Gibson has proposed Bury St. Edmunds as the origin of the cycle. As we have seen, several other East Anglian drama manuscripts have been connected with this great abbey town, and Gibson adduces a wealth of circumstantial evidence which points to Bury.

Although the language of the scribes of the N-Town codex may clearly be that of Norfolk, that fact does not guarantee that the plays were indeed originally written in that county. As mentioned above, the Wakefield cycle borrowed five plays from the York cycle. Among East Anglian works, the Brome Ms. play of Abraham and Isaac is related to the distant Chester cycle play on the same subject, may even be its exemplar (Severs 150-51). But literary influence also works in the other direction as well. According to M.B. Parkes and Richard Beadle:

Some of the most widely disseminated later Middle English texts survive in copies made by scribes brought up or trained in Norfolk and Suffolk, intended for specifically local use in the area of production. . . . The translation of predominantly northern devotional texts, at least, was a commonplace or even
routine activity for many East Anglian scribes. (55)

Among some of the texts so translated are works by Walter Hilton, Nicholas Love, and Richard Rolle, *The Northern Passion, The Prick of Conscience, The Speculum Vitae*, and also *Piers Plowman* from the West Midlands. Given this kind of dialectal translation, it may be that some parts of the N-Town cycle, indeed, derived from Lincoln, where the records of dramatic activities more closely parallel the subjects of the N-Town cycle plays.

The possibility that some of the plays represented in the N-Town cycle, or for that matter any of the corpus of East Anglian drama, were originally crafted outside the region does not diminish the importance of these texts for the study of East Anglian literature. From one point of view, a posited selection process underlying the choice of plays may even enhance their value. The N-Town cycle, as mentioned above, is a collection of plays in which the Marian group (plays 8-11 and 13 in Block), the first

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5 To this list may be added the exceptional "translation" in Cambridge Univ. Lib. Ms. Gg.4.27 (c. 1420) of *Troilus and Cressida, The Canterbury Tales, The Legend of the Good Women*, and *The Parliament of Fowls*; this East Anglian manuscript is "the only surviving example of a fifteenth century attempt to collect Chaucer's major poetical works in one volume" (Parkes and Beadle III, 1).

6 Richard Rastall's attempts to match the liturgical portions of the N-Town cycle with local liturgies in East Anglia seems to acknowledge that as far as localizing the origin of the cycle, that of the dialect may be a moot issue.
Passion Play, and the Assumption of the Virgin were separate and self-contained plays interpolated into the cycle perhaps superceding existing plays. The process may have been—albeit in a much larger and more complex undertaking—something like what we have seen with Robert Reyens' attempt to collect a Nine Worthies Pageant in his commonplace book.

We have been conditioned when in the presence of a dramatic text to presuppose the performance of that text, but for the medieval period this is not a safe assumption. The question which must now be addressed is were these plays ever staged before a local audience? Generally, the language of the manuscripts suggests that at some point of transmission all were intended for performance in East Anglia. Having the plays in the local dialect would be "of great practical advantage" in "making a text intelligible to its intended reader at first glance," especially if the text were "designed for reading aloud in public" (McIntosh et al. 29). A drama text immediately accessible to actors, especially those learning parts, or to their prompters and auditors would be invaluable if not indispensable.

Aside from the linguistic features, the evidence for dramatic performance varies with each play. Whether the entire N-Town cycle was ever performed is not known, but

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7Meredith and Kahrl vii; see also the introduction to Meredith's edited text of The Mary Play, From the N.town Manuscript 1-5.
the Proclamation which precedes the plays in the manuscript suggests that a cycle, differing in a number of respects from the extant cycle, was intended to be staged in various towns by traveling players. Parts of the extant cycle may have been performed. After the main scribe compiled the cycle but before 1525, another writer, whom Meredith and Kahl call Reviser B, made changes, sometimes extensive, in the manuscript; in the Nativity and Resurrection play sequences these alterations were "always in the direction of a prompt-copy, suggesting that these groups of plays were produced separately" (xxiv; see also xxvii, note 6).

Proclamations or "banns" similar in intent to that in the N-Town cycle also occur in The Castle of Perseverance and The Play of the Sacrament; the latter specifies Croxton, the name of several towns in East Anglia, as the site of the performance. The manuscript of the Castle is a fair copy but concludes with a famous diagram in English of its elaborate staging in the round and some rather specific costuming instructions, both of which suggest the play was considered a theatrical production and not simply read as a devotional work. Its companion in the Macro Ms., Mankind, also seems to have been a traveling production; and the lines preceding the entrance of the devil Titivillus, a favorite with the spectators, make no sense read out of the context of dramatic performance, "We xall gäber mony onto, / Ellys þer xall no man hym se" (168/128-29). It seems
very likely that some of the plays in the Digby Ms. associated with Miles Blomefield were performed in Chelmsford, Essex, in the early 1560's, that is, some considerable time after they were copied earlier in the sixteenth century or in the later part of the fifteenth (Baker et al. xv). The only other play about which there is some evidence of performance is the fragmentary Robin Hood. In a letter dated April 1473--roughly contemporary with the Robin Hood fragment--John Paston II complains of being deserted by his servants, including one W. Woode, a stablekeeper, whom Paston "kepyd...thys iii yere to playe Seynt Jorge and Robynhod and the shryff of Notyngham" (PL I 461), perhaps referring also to the annual dramatic Norwich pageant of the St. George Riding (note Chambers; Galloway xxvii). Norwich also had at least an abbreviated series of cycle plays, and these included the Norwich Grocers' Play, its performance sometimes preceded by Creation and Fall of Angels plays and sometimes not--perhaps as an entirely independent performance; two alternative prologues to the play provide for these contingencies. Records of the costumes possessed by the Grocers' Guild indicate the play was performed in 1565 (Galloway 52-53); and the earlier fragmentary version probably performed about in 1534, when accounts show payments made for actors and other services in connection with the play (Davis Non-Cycle Plays, xxxiv; see also Dutka 110-111; Nelson 133).
The banns which precede the *The Play of the Sacrament*, *The Castle of Perseverance*, and the N-Town cycle remind us that certain elements of individual plays, even specific speeches and lines, are shared with other in East Anglian dramatic works. For example, the debate of the Four Daughters of God in the *Castle* is similar to that in the N-Town *Mary Play*, both of which are unique in English drama. Similarly, the allegorical figure Death appears in morality play and in N-Town *Death of Herod*. In addition, the *Castle* and *Mary Magdalene* both share numerous elements of staging and fundamental sense of dramatic conception. The list of similarities could go on, but suffice it to say that the plays that have been adduced as East Anglian show an awareness of each other, which suggests that they were indeed performed, perhaps in numerous locations in Norfolk and Suffolk.

Nevertheless, for some plays and fragments from East Anglia, no textual or documentary evidence exists to confirm performances in the region. In fact, in the case of the Brome Hall Ms. of *Abraham and Isaac*, the placement of the stage directions in the body of the text, for example, argues against it. Although perhaps copied from the text of a theatrical production, this *Abraham and Isaac* appears to have been "collected for purposes of meditation" (Kahrl, "The Brome Hall Ms." 159).
These existing manuscripts represent only a very small fraction of the late medieval dramatic activity in East Anglia. According to John Wasson, local documents from Norfolk and Suffolk "indicate the pervasiveness of dramatic and related activities--both professional and amateur--in East Anglia" (x). Much of this dramatic activity consisted of folk drama, such as Robin Hood plays at May Day festivals, Plough Plays, and Sword Dances. The religious drama of the type preserved in the manuscripts was "reserved mainly for the rich and important towns" (Wasson xiii); yet this impression may be just the result of absent or vague records. If we are to believe the silence of the records then we must accept that, for example, East Dereham, a town which lavished money on painted-glass windows for its church, never saw a medieval play (Wasson 4); that Hadleigh's town players, although visiting neighboring towns and traveling even to London and Canterbury, never played in their own community (Wasson 162); and that Bury produced only "meager" dramatic activities (Wasson 147). Similarly, the records seldom

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8The same conclusion was drawn by Robert Wright (34). Wasson's collection excludes the extensive records of Norwich, covered by the R.E.E.D. volume edited by Galloway for the period 1540-1642; Joanna Dutka is currently working on the volume for the earlier period. For an early survey of medieval drama in Norfolk, see Bolingbroke.

9Wasson xiv; for an example see the fifteenth-century records for Snettisham, northeast of King's Lynn, 86-89. For description of the folk plays see Chambers I 160-204.
indicate what was played, and the medieval Latin and English nomenclature for plays and players is notoriously ambiguous (Wasson xvi-xvii; Kahr1, Traditions 31-32, 100). It seems reasonable that at least some of the many references to "mynstrals" or "games" listed in the records for Norfolk and Suffolk refer to pious dramatic presentations, and Wasson's rather extreme conclusions seem to be contradicted by the extant plays, which were almost surely part of a widespread non-civic dramatic activity.

Where the records are fullest, there is evidence of considerable religious drama. King's Lynn had a St. Thomas play at the early date of 1384/85. As we have seen above, Norwich had at least a proto-cycle, for which important religious guilds may have been responsible by the middle of the fifteenth century.10 Other towns had plays at the feast of Corpus Christi, including Bury, Bungay, Ipswich, and Lynn. Many towns often took their "games" to other locations, and some of the more important towns served as local dramatic centers to which neighboring communities contributed assistance—certainly a financial boon which perhaps more importantly evoked a sense of community spirit (Wright 32-33). In addition, it is clear that professional

10 Joanna Dutka (112) cautiously advances this idea; Nelson's claim (131) that a letter in the Paston correspondence, likening actions of the Duke of Suffolk to "Herrod in Corpus Crysty play" (PL II 426), leads to the inference "that the Norwich plays were called by the name of their proper festival in the fifteenth century" is without basis.
troops, sponsored by the lords of the realm toured the region (see Wasson, Appendices I and II).

We also know that religious guilds were sometimes involved with dramatic productions. The Guild Certificates for 1389 show that the Bury Guild of Corpus Christi performed an "interludum," on its feast day (Lancashire 92; Westlake 225). The guild of the Holy Trinity at Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire, performed "in a field" a St. George play, which was perhaps closer to a saint's play than to the folk Mummers Plays in which St. George often figures (Chambers I 205-227) because the guild priest was paid for his services as director (Worthan 25; Westlake 64).11 The commonplace book of Robert of Acle further indicates that the guilds of relatively small communities might be engaged in dramatic activities for which there is only scant testimony. The possibility of guild participation is important because they were so numerous. In Norfolk alone, before the Reformation, there were probably more than a thousand guilds (Firth 167-68); and if only a

11A rather elaborate play-like event took place in Norwich on the day of the St. George Riding, which like the Bassingbourn play, also included a St. Margaret and a "conflict" with the dragon (see Nelson 122). The St. George Guild included parish priests and the bishops of Norwich among its members suggesting that the play was closer to the Legenda Aurea account than the folk plays. The fifteenth century mural of the dragon fight in St. Gregory Church, Norwich, perhaps depicts what this pageant looked like. According to David Galloway, "No other town in England was so linked in the popular imagination with the saint's name (xxviii)."
fraction of those were responsible for any kind of drama, the number could have been substantial. Furthermore, as Stanley Kahr1 has recently argued, guild priests, like the one at Bassingbourne, must have been responsible for writing religious drama performed at the important community events ("Secular Life" 99-102).

In summary, religious drama seems to have been available to a great portion of the population of East Anglia, and so in one respect constitutes a "popular" literature like the Middle English romances. Furthermore, like the romances, it satisfies another criterion in its appeal "to all levels of the population, regardless of class" (Kahr1, "Secular Life" 88). Although the secular Robin Hood play obviously conforms to this criterion, the other plays may seem problematic, but an examination of any of the East Anglian drama would put to rest any doubts about its popular appeal.12 The allegorical moral play Wisdom, the most literary and "scrupulously didactic" (Jones 251) of all the East Anglian plays, is full of eye-appealing pageantry and elaborate costuming, enough so to suggest to Mark Eccles that the play "may have been

12In the Robin Hood play, the hero, like Havelok the Dane, participates in popular sports: putting the shot and wrestling. Records of dramatization of medieval romances are very sparse, yet tournaments often involved elaborate play-like qualities (See Lancashire 173-74). In 1440 a play of Sir Eglamour of Artois was performed at St. Albans (Lancashire 258), and a Robert of Sicily play was staged in Lincoln in 1452/53 (Kahr1, Records of Lincolnshire 31).
presented by the men and women of a town or guild for a general audience" (xxxv). The N-Town cycle has often been characterized as the most learned of the four cycles, yet it is "neither erudite nor abstruse" (Stevens 213), and a recent production of an abbreviated version of this cycle at Toronto proved broad appeal. For other plays, such as The Play of the Sacrament, The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind, and Mary Magdalene, the appeal to popular taste is readily discernible.

Finally, it should be noted that these plays are unique among surviving corpus of medieval English drama. There is nothing like the Castle or Mary Magdalene, for example, among surviving texts, nor do documents from other areas record anything even remotely similar to the scope and form of these works. Even the N-Town cycle stands apart from the others three English cycles in its organization, and as we shall see, in its main thematic concern. It now remains to be seen how these East Anglian plays as a group evidence (1) the popular ideology of East Anglia and consequently (2) how they relate to the concerns we have seen in the popular romances read by East Anglians. It is to these issues which I now turn.

Part II: Some Themes in East Anglian Drama

Central to any discussion of East Anglian drama must be the N-Town cycle with its unique foregrounding of the
role of the Virgin. Of the three other extant cycles, only York's pays more than scant attention to the Virgin outside of the Nativity sequence. The Cornish plays pretty clearly have the Cross as their focus (see Halliday), and Travis has recently argued that the Chester Cycle "is designed as a sequential experience which begins as it ends--by meditating upon the meaning of the image of the Body of Christ" (xv).

The York Cycle does include plays about the death, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin and also presents her miraculous appearance to Thomas of India. The miracle is unique among surviving dramatic works, but N-Town's five-hundred-line Assumption Play, a major interpolation in the manuscript, covers the other events of the Virgin's final days and her crowning as the Queen of Heaven. However, the plays which depict the life of Mary up to the Annunciation--that is, the wholly apocryphal events of her conception, her presentation in the Temple, her betrothal--and the trial of Mary and Joseph (plays 8-10 and 14 as numbered in the manuscript) are unparalleled in the other cycles. Furthermore, N-Town's pageants 8-14 comprise a series of scenes which were integrated from the previously existing proto-cycle represented in the Proclamation and another play, itself a composite, to form a self-contained
Mary Play within the cycle. This integration of plays added several scenes about Mary to the proto cycle not accounted for in the Proclamation.

In adding this material, the playwright was augmenting the importance of the Virgin's role already evident in the proto cycle. For example, the Proclamation promises Play 7 to be a dramatic rendition of the Jesse Tree, a common artistic subject which normally presents the royal genealogy of the Christ. But in the N-Town Proclamation, the Virgin is as much the subject as her son:

Kynys and prophetys with wordys fful sote  
Schull prophesye al of a qwen  
Pe which xal staunch oure stryff and moote  
And wynnen us welthe with-outyn wen  
In hevyn to Abyde  
They xal prophecye of a mayde  
All ffendys of here xal be Affrayde.15

The preponderance of lines in the Proclamation about the Virgin compared to those referring to the Son accurately reflects the bias of the play itself, a bias markedly different from the Chester or Wakefield prophet episodes

13See Peter Meridith's explanation of how the embedded play was assembled (The Mary Play 1-4); for the sources used by the playwright, see 14-18.

14Artistic representations of the Tree of Jesse with both prophets and kings, as in the N-Town play, occur at Chartres and Sainte-Chapelle. In the late medieval period, the Virgin often became the tree's most prominent figure, appearing in a flower at its summit, the infant Jesus in her arms (see Male 166 n. 1).

15Block 4/109-114. All citations from the play will be from Block's edition, citing first the page number and then the line number.
(lacking in York). Similar tendencies may be found in other Old Testament plays in the cycle. Among the New Testament series, N-Town's Proclamation describes Pageant 33 (Ms. no. 35) as a play dramatizing the Harrowing of Hell and the Resurrection, followed by a scene in which Jesus appears to his mother "and comfortyth all here care" (13/430). This apocryphal scene, without parallel in the other English cycles, presents with considerable tenderness the joy of mother and son reunited. Like the Jesse Tree Pageant, this play from the early form of the cycle exalts Mary, making her coequally responsible for the salvation of humankind. Jesus says to Mary:

All þis werlde þat was forlorn
Shal wurchepe þou bothe eyvn and morn
Ffor had I not of þow be born
Man had be lost in helle.16

Not only the language of the speech but also the "startling centrality" (Woolf 279) of the scene, immediately following the Resurrection, here elevates the Virgin of the proto cycle to a position of parity with the Son. Therefore, in adding the plays concerning Mary's youth and the Assumption Play, the playwright was following the tenor of the existing plays. So harmonious are the accretions to the text represented in the Proclamation that a single author-compiler has been postulated for the extant cycle (Woolf

16Block 321/1448-51. The same idea occurs in the Parliament of Heaven at the point where the Father suggests Mary as the vessel of the Incarnation, "The name of pe mayd ffre / Is Mary pat xal Al Restore" (103/195-96).
309-10), and Martin Stevens' recent book lucidly demonstrates that the story of Mary parallels and supports that of Jesus, making the N-Town cycle "the first 'double-plot' play on the English stage" (211).

Several themes which we have seen to be important in both the romances and the other plays from East Anglia also figure prominently in the N-Town cycle, particularly in the Mary Play. As in Amis and Amiloun, one of the main concerns here is the pledging of troth or making vows and keeping them, and therefore one's honor, in the face of conflicting obligations imposed by family, community, or religious institution. The first episode of the Mary Play is a dramatization of the apocryphal story of the Conception of the Virgin. Although pious and charitable, both Joachym and Anne fear the censure of the chief priest, who may take their barrenness as a token of God's curse and subsequently reject their tithe. Both Anne and Joachym make oaths to yield up any child to the devotion of God; Joachym says:

> But bis I avow to God with all be mekenes I can
> Zyff of his mercy he woie a childe us devyse
> We xal offre it up in to be temple to be goddys man

(64/37-40)

Anne, citing the prophecies of a woman bearing a Savior, is more attuned to future events:

> 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 her most mylde.

(64/46-49)
Joachym fears the "shame" which the religio-social community would impose; he explains, "Than grett slawndyr in þe tribus of us xulde aryse" (64/37). When the priest does reject his offering, he seeks the protective isolation of the meek, his shepherds (significantly "pastors" in the ms.), because "among my neyborys I dare not abyde ffor shame" (66/98). Joachym, like Robert of Sicily, is "werse þan an hownde" (67/126), but unlike Robert, Joachym quickly recognizes the truth of the Magnificat, "The meke god lyftyth up þe proude over throwyht" (67/115), and recognizes that the shame, the reversal of fortune, the chastening, is in fact a token of god's love and that he is in a close bond with God (67/129). In a prayer, Joachym tells God to "Haue mende on oure a-vow" (68/137), referring to his oath with Anne to dedicate their child to the Temple, a vow which Anne also reiterates (68/144). God mercifully alleviates their earthly suffering with the Conception, an event revealed to Joachym and Anne indepen-

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17 The Legenda Aurea, a source which the Mary Play follows rather closely in the Conception scenes, also emphasizes Joachym's shame; but while the playwright only suggests the injustice of this condemnation, the angel in the Legenda states that the reproach for barrenness was "wrongfully cast" upon Joachym and Anne (522).

18 The type of story, a reversal of fortune, the importance of the same line from the Magnificat, and the parallelism of the comparison to the state of a hound, objectified in the romance, suggest that the author of the Mary Play may have had the romance of Robert of Sicily, or perhaps a dramatic rendition of it in mind when writing this scene.
dently by an angel. The joyous reunion of Anne and Joachym culminates the scene and proves the truth of the second pastor and the angel: after great sorrow come grace and gladness (67/117, 70/200).

The Presentation of Mary in the Temple at the age of three follows next in the Mary Play. Adhering to the vows they have previously made, Joachym and Anne take Mary to the temple where the child, meek and obedient, accedes to her parents wishes:

Fadyr and modyr if it plesyng to zow be
Ze han mad żour a-vow so sothly wôle I
To be goddyń chast seruaunt whil lyff is in me
(72/17-19)

The chief priest accepts Mary after she proves her worth by miraculously reciting the fifteen Gradual Psalms as she ascends the steps of the Temple. Clearly, giving up their daughter is an irrevocable sacrifice to which they are already bound (73/45), but they are relieved when their obligation is fulfilled and Mary is content with her placement (79/207).

Mary spends the next eleven years in the Temple, ministered to by allegorical characters who function as priests and maidens of the Temple. At fourteen the maidens of the Temple are ordered to marry in order to fulfill God's instruction to be fruitful, a directive which of course conflicts with Mary's own vow. Confronting the bishop, she summarizes the story of Joachym's and Anne's shame, their vow (84/58), and her own obligation:
When I was to be temple brought
And Offerde up to god above
Ther hestyd I as myn hert thought
To serve my god with hertyly love.
Clennesse and chastyte myn hert owth
Erthely creature nevyr may shoue.

Confronted with seemingly irreconcilable positions, the characters find resolution to the issue only through the intervention of an angel, who instructs the convocation of men from the line of David, including Joseph, to present themselves as prospective husbands.

Like Joachym, Joseph's sense of honor argues against his appearance at the betrothal ceremony: he recognizes the truth in adages about January-May marriages, "An old man may nevyr thryff / With a yonge wyff so god me saue" (91/278-79). He complains that he is "aschamyd to be seyn" (88/202) and when, after comic attempts to avoid offering his rod at the altar, he is rebuked for his reluctance, he says, "To come þer in trowth me thynkyht shame" (89/236), punning on "trowth," for indeed, he comes unwittingly to plight his troth. When Joseph's rod miraculously flowers, he continues to protest the imposed marriage, but accedes at the bishop's instruction and acknowledges that "Azens my God not do I may" (91/289). Of course, Joseph and Mary make their own vows to remain celibate, a decision which still violates the commandment which caused the conflict at the beginning of the Betrothal of Mary.
The apparent deviation reminds the audience that Mary is not subject to the same laws as everyone else. It also sets up the scene of Joseph's doubts and the Trial of Joseph and Mary, another play unique to the N-Town cycle and a subject not widely treated elsewhere, but not an episode in the immediately preceding series of the Mary Play. Among all the plays in the composite N-Town cycle, The Trial of Joseph and Mary appeals most to popular tastes, combining elements of moral plays, fabliau-romances, and miracles of the Virgin. The play begins with a monologue by a summoner, akin in spirit and method to Chaucer's summoner, seeking to extort payment from the audience, its members particularized in a catalogue of comic names. Then two detractors, Backbiter and Slander, scurrilously speculate upon Mary's pregnancy in view of her "vow with man nevyr to melle / but to leve chast and clene virgine" (125/45-46), and attribute it to Joseph's own unbridled lust or the natural inclination of "such a longe damesel of bewte bryght" of "a longe man to haue deylght" (126/60-61). In either case, Mary and Joseph are disgraced not only by their apparent incontinence but also because Mary has violated her sacred vow of dedication to God. The bishop, who identifies Mary as "a sybbe of myn owyn blood"

19Woolf (384 n. 48) notes that John Lydgate's Life of Our Lady shows a particular interest in the trial, making the event one of her fifteen sorrows and her vindication one of her fifteen joys.
(126/80) suffers the ignominy of their sneering, lewd innuendoes as well because he accepts the prima facie evidence:

Alas Mary what hast bou wrought
I am aschamyd evyn for bi sake
How hast bou chaungyd þin holy thought
Dude old Joseph with strenght þe take
Or hast þou chosyn another make
By whom þou art þus brougt in schame
Telle me who hath wrought þis wrake
How has þou lost þin holy name.

(129/169-76)

Of course, both Joseph and Mary deny the accusations. However, as a consequence of their denials, as in romances like Amis and Amiloun and Athelston where the determination of truth must be placed in God's hands, both protagonists are in turn forced to undergo a trial by ordeal, here drinking a purgative, a "botel of goddys vengeauns" (130/201), and walking seven times around the altar. Amid more crude conjecture by the detractors and the summoner, Joseph, like the bishop in this play and Joachym in the Mary Play, fears for his reputation and prays to God to "help me fro werldly schame / Abowte þis awtere to kepe þis fame" (131/244). One of the two Doctors of the Law, attesting to the efficacy of the ordeal, entreats Mary to confess by appealing to her sense of honor:

With Goddys hyȝ myght loke þou jape

If god with vengeauns set on þe his syse
Not only þoy but all þi kyn is schamyd
Bettyr it is to telle þe trewth devyse

(132/280-87)
Appropriately less concerned with her worldly esteem, Mary follows Joseph's example and, like him, is exonerated when the purgative has no effect—a proof of innocence which also proves the truth of the virgin birth.

Like the Egerton Ms. version of *Amis and Amiloun*, the N-Town Trial of Joseph and Mary concludes with a Miracle of the Virgin. When one of the detractors accuses the bishop of "sum fals wyle" (134/323) in order to protect his kin from shame, the prelate orders the man to drink the potion for all of his defamatory remarks. Suspecting the drink to be impotent, the detractor readily consents; but upon drinking from the bottle he is immediately convulsed by pain. The miracle is worked when he prays to the virgin, "Mercy good Mary I do me repent / Of my cursyd and ffals language" (134/333-34).

Tender affection marks the relationship of the protagonists in the N-Town cycle just as they do in the romances *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and *Amis and Amiloun*. This is nowhere more apparent than in the Mary Play, where the loves of Joachym and Anne for one another, their love for Mary, and her reciprocal love for them becomes a didactic model of familial relationships. In the Conception episode, for example, in order to assuage Joachym's anxiety over the impending rite in the Temple, Anna readily blames herself for their barrenness, "Iwys swete husband be fawte is in me" (64/42). Joachym's departure, like the later
joyful reunion, is an emotional one; Anna kisses her husband three times "with syghys ful sad" and, alone, cannot "sees of wepynge" (65/54, 68) until his return. During his self-imposed exile among the "pastors," Joachym laments the separation from his wife whom he seems to imagine in his presence, "From zour blyssyd felacheppe I am now exilyd" (66/100). And just as Anne had previously accepted the blame for their plight, now Joachym's prayers are fraught with expressions of self-sacrifice, "Punchyth me Lorde, and spare my blyssyd wyff Anne" (68/133). All of this is in sharp contrast to the misogynistic literature collected by the Wife of Bath's fifth husband and to the antifeminism noted in one of the Northwestern Gawain romances discussed in the preceding chapter.

The episodes of Mary in the Temple and the Betrothal of Mary--episodes which represent rites of passage and reorientations of relationships--demonstrate that Joachym and Anne are as fully devoted to their daughter as they are to one another. Upon her entry to the Temple, Mary requires their blessing (73/52, 54); and just as the parents of Amis and Amiloun blessed their children upon their entry into the service of the duke, so here too do Joachym and Anna comply, performing her request with liturgical solemnity. The Betrothal includes a protracted series of farewell speeches (94-95/370-408), replete with
more of their blessings (94/383-86), their admonitions (94/392-95), and their wishes of God's grace (95/400).

In addition to demonstrating Mary's affection for her parents, these scenes also portray her humility and obedience. Before Joachym and Anne place Mary in the Temple, they ask their daughter if she is willing to wholly consign her life to chastity and to God. Her response suggests that she complies because her duty lies in fulfilling her parents earlier oath:

Fadyr and modyr if it plesyng to zow be
Ze han mad zour avow so sothly wole I
To be goddy's chast seruaunt whil lyff is in me

Later, she supplicates to her parents for forgiveness from any act which might have angered them (73-74/58-59), an act which is patently inconceivable. Joachym's response to Mary makes manifest the didactic nature of the familial relationships presented in the Mary Play:

A ho had evyr suche a chylde
Nevyr creature zit ṭat evyr was bore
Sche is so gracyous sche is so mylde
So xulde childyr to fadyr and modyr evyr more

The duties of kin and prescribed behavior also figure in other plays in the N-Town cycle. As Rosemary Woolf (119) points out, Adam and Eve consider themselves both responsible for the Fall of Man, and Eve's cry, "My husband is lost because of me" (28/385) sounds similar to Anne's self-accusatory tone in the Conception Play (64/42); certainly there is little of the anti-feminist rhetoric
that we find, for example, in the York cycle. According to Martin Stevens, the N-Town Cain and Abel Play, like other Old Testament plays in the cycle, concerns the theme of fatherhood (187,196) in presenting Abel and Cain as, respectively, the pious, obedient son and the irreverent, disloyal son. However, the issue may be a larger one, for the Noah Play in the N-Town cycle, unlike any of the other cycles, avoids characterizing Noah’s wife as a disbelieving termagant who engages in bouts of fisticuffs with her husband. Rather, in her long speech at the beginning of the play, she appears as an obedient and devout spouse, fully responsible, along with her husband, for the moral rectitude of her children:

On to us tweyn it doth longe  
Hem to teche in all degre  
Synne to forsakyn and werkys wronge  
Therefore fere for loue of me  
Enforme hem wele evyr amonge  
Synne to forsake and varyte  
And vertu to folwe bat bei fonge  
Our lord god to plese.  
(36/40-48)

The sons of Noah and their wivcs each echo their parents' dedication to the virtuous life. To underscore the proper familial relations exemplified in the Noah play, the playwright has introduced the antithesis of this exemplary family in the intrusive episode of the killing of Cain. The Noah Play, as well as other plays of the N-Town cycle, emphasizes those allegiances and vows which bind kin, as well as the love, concern, obedience, and self-sacrifice
which properly accompany those bonds. Those allegiances and their attendant qualities are perfectly exemplified in the relations of the protagonists of the Mary Play as well, and, as in the Noah Play, are intended to mirror the proper harmony between God and the individual human.

As we have seen, the Noah Play stresses the obligation of parents to provide for their children a proper education, but the theme of education figures in other parts of the cycle as well, particularly in the Mary Play. When Mary enters the Temple as a conventual at age three, she miraculously recites and interprets the lessons of the fifteen Gradual Psalms (75-77), after which the bishop teaches her the two Commandments of the New Testament and makes clear that Mary will be occupied primarily with learning:

\[
\text{Ther been sefne prestys in dede} \\
\text{To schryve, to teche, and to mynystryn to the} \\
\text{To lerne þe goddys lawys, and scrypture to rede.} \\
\text{(78/189-91)}
\]

By the time Mary is fourteen, that is at the time of her betrothal, she is able to confound the high priest just as Melior, the Mary-like heroine of Partonope of Blois discussed in the last chapter, was able to confute her masters by the age of fifteen.20 But whereas Melior turns

\[
\text{Melior states that "God gaffe me grace to lerne" (1. 5919) the arts and sciences, and} \\
\text{After this I lerned Diuinite,} \\
\text{To knowe þe personys of þe trinite} \\
\text{By þen I was xv. yere of age,} \\
\text{My masters, þat were boþe wyse and sage,} \\
\text{In all the vii. artys I dyd hem passe.} \\
\text{(11. 5928-32)}
\]
to necromancy, Mary "was neyvr occapyed in thyngys veyn /
But evyr besy in holy ocupacyon" (81/3-4); and whereas Melior was simply learned, Mary is wise beyond her years, a point made by both Joachym (72/26) and the bishop (85/79). It is fitting that the author has portrayed Mary as learned and wise in the cycle in which the story of her life comprises a prominent subplot in the story of her Son, for upon her entry into the Temple, the bishop exhorts her to "Love God the Son, for he gevyth wysdam" (77/162). In fact, Kathleen Ashley has persuasive argued that the theme of learning and wisdom "permeates the cycle" (127).

A similar theme is the central focus of the East Anglian allegorical play *Wisdom*. The play follows the typical morality structure, depicting first the innocence, then the temptation and corruption, and finally the penance of the central character; but instead of a single representative Mankind figure, the play presents the soul of man, Anima, whose eternal salvation or damnation depends on the susceptibility of her three "mights"--Mind, Will, and Understanding--to the specious reasoning of Lucifer. Opposed to Lucifer is Wysdom, who appears royalty garbed with crown, orb and scepter. As in the N-Town cycle, the quality of wisdom is one of the attributes of the Son, and in this play Wysdom himself makes the identification:

```
. wysdom ys prpyrly
Applyede to pe Sune by resune
```
And also yt fallyt to hym specyally
Bycause of hys hye generacyon
(11. 9-12)

But Wysdom is a figure of ambiguous gender. The stage
directions refer to a royal hood furred with ermine
"hawynge abouwt hys neke"; and the relationship between
Anima, "a mayde," and Wysdom is clearly intended to be that
between a long-devoted lover and the object of her desire:

From my yougthe thys haue I sowte
To haue to my spowse most specyally,
For a louer of youwr schappe am I wrowte
Aboue all hele and bewty pat euer was sowght
I haue louyde Wysdom as for my lyght
For all goodnes wyth hym is broughte.
(11. 18-23)

However, in a recent paper, Milla Riggio has argued that
the Wysdom-Christ figure has been "feminized," and is thus
in accord with the traditional image of Wisdom, based on
vulgate texts of Ecclesiasticus (1:9-10) and the Wisdom of
Solomon (7:29,26). In fact, in his first speech Wysdom
calls himself "Wyffe of eche chose sowle" (1. 15).
Furthermore, according to Professor Riggio, English
translations of Henry Suso's Orologium Sapientiae, the
source of the first sixty-five lines of Wysdom, are
sometimes accompanied by paintings of Wisdom providing a
sheltering mantel for Long Life, Riches, and Honor (see
Wysdom 11. 36-37). These representations are patterned
after windows and illuminations depicting the Virgin
providing her protective mantel for donors. A further
reference to this image occurs late in the play. Wysdom
emphasizes to Anima the need for contrition and reconciliation with God by confession to cleanse the soul; he then advises Anima to "Go prey yowr modyr Chyrche of her proteccyon" (11. 988), which again, appears to allude to the Virgin because of her role as Mother of the Church. Although Wysdom can not be thought of as a Marian play like the N-Town cycle, the ambiguous gender of Wysdom echoes the N-Town's distribution of wisdom to both Mary and the Son, and the protective roles of Wysdom and Mother Church appear to support this latent Marianism.

Mankind, another morality play in the Macro Ms., appears to appeal more to popular tastes because of the vulgarities performed by its comic characters Mischief, Nowadays, New Gyse, and Nought as they try to tempt Mankind into sin and therefore into the grasp of the devil Titivillus. Mercy here portrays not one of the Daughters of God as in the N-Town Parliament of Heaven but a spiritual father to whom Mankind eventually turns. But Mercy's salvation is obtained as much through the intercession of the Virgin as it is through God:

\[ I\ haue\ be\ þe\ very\ mene\ for\ your\ restytucyon.\ 
\textit{Mercy\ ys\ my\ name,\ þat\ mornyth\ for\ your\ offence.}\ 
\textit{Dyverte\ not\ yowrsylffe\ in\ tyme\ of\ temtacyon,}\ 
\textit{Pat\ ze\ may\ be\ acceptable\ to\ Gode\ at\ your\ goyng\ hence.}\ 
\textit{Pe\ grett\ mercy\ of\ Gode,\ þat\ ys\ of\ most\ preemmynce,}\ 
\textit{Be\ medyacyon\ of\ Owr\ Lady\ þat\ ys\ ever\ habundante}\ 
\textit{To\ þe\ synfull\ creature\ þat\ wyl\ repent\ his\ neclygence.}\ 
\text{(11. 17-23)}\]
This importance which Mercy attributes to the Virgin at the beginning of the play is affirmed much later, after Mankind, apparently lost to the forces of evil, leaves with his riotous companions. Mercy, nearly disconsolate over the instability of Mankind's allegiance, addresses the Virgin in the most sustained and emotional prayer in the play:

O goode Lady and Moþer of mercy, haue pety and compassyon
Of þe wrechyndes of Mankynde, þat ys so wanton and so frayll
Lett mercy excede justyce, dere Moþer, amytt þis supplycacyon,
Equyte to be leyde onparty and mercy to prevayll.

A, wyth þes cursyde caytyfs, and I may, he xall not long indure.
I, Mercy, hys father gostly, wyll proceede forth and do my propyrte.
Lady, helpe! Pis maner of lyuynge ys a detestabull plesure.

(11. 756-766)

Of course, the prayer is effective and brings about Mankind's return and the recognition of his sins, the only obstacle to Mankind's redemption being his obstinate if temporary refusal to accept mercy. Although the male figure of Mercy plays the central role in Mankind's salvation, the whole play works much like a miracle of the Virgin, Mercy's prayer to her being the key element in redeeming a soul.

Although Mercy at one point urges Mankind to become "Cristys owyn knight" (1. 229), the play, like Wysdom, owes little of its inspiration to romance. The first play in
the Macro Ms., however, *The Castle of Perseverance*, has considerably greater affinities with the popular romance. In the first speech, World invokes the milieu of chivalric feudalism in which the action of the play is to be comprehended, "Buske zou, bolde bachelerys, vndyr my baner to abyde / Where bryth basnetys be bateryd and backys ar schent" (11. 161-62), and in cataloguing the states which comprise his domain, he suggests the exotic allure and epic expansiveness of romances like *Bevis of Hampton*. In the action that follows, World and his principal allies, Flesh, Belial, and the Bad Angel and the Seven Deadly sins, vie with the Good Angel for the allegiance of Mankind and promise him, in return for his "seruyse," fame, honor, political power, riches, and a paramour (e.g., see 11. 575-83). Mankind succumbs to the temptations of the World and plights his troth in an enactment of the formal oath of fealty:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Zys, Werld, and þerto here myn honde} \\
\text{To forsake God and hys seruyse.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{What schuld I recknen of domysday} \\
\text{So þat I be ryche and of gret aray?} \\
\text{I schal make mery whyl I may,} \\
\text{And þerto here my trewthe.}
\end{align*}
\]

(11. 597-609)

Eventually, Penitence come to the aid of the Good Angel and pricks Mankind with his lance of conscience. Returning to

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21Davenport (107-09) finds "epic intention" in the before-birth to after-death story of Mankind and in the battle between allegorized battle between good and evil.
God's service, Mankind retreats into the safety of the Castle of Perseverance, there to be protected by the Seven Virtues, addressed by the Good Angel as "ladys" and "paramourys" (ll. 2024-25). As envisioned in the speeches of the forces of evil, the spirited seige of the castle that ensues is intended to resemble those in romances: heraldic banners unfurl, and lances splinter on contact with shields in the rush of battle. But while the action of the seige itself may be very lively, the army of the "dynge Duke þat deyed on rode" (ll. 1995) fight most effectively with fusillades of "fayre roses."

Not only does the atmosphere of The Castle of Perseverance owe more to romance than the other works in the Macro Ms., but it is also more apparently suffused with Marianism. In an earlier now lost form, the play may well have contained a Miracle of the Virgin, for as E.K. Chambers (English Literature 55) pointed out the banns, which promise that "oure lofly Ladi" (l. 124) will intercede for Mankind, do not square with the play, where no intercession takes place. In fact, there is no direct reference to the Virgin until nearly half the drama has played, when Chastity, for whom Mary was the model, urges Mankind to "move þe to maydyn Marye" (ll. 1629), who,

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22 Neither do the banns mention the debate of the Four Daughters of God. It is worth noting that the speeches of the Daughters are more formal and less dramatic than those by most other speakers.
because of her steadfast virtue, was worthy to be the mother of God: "Porwe gostly grace sche was worthy, / And al for sche was chaste (11. 1635-36). When Mankind does actually enter the Castle, Meekness, who represents another prominent Marian attribute, identifies the Castle with the Virgin:

\[ \text{Hys castel is of so qweynt a gynne} \\
\text{Pat whoso euere holde hym berinne} \\
\text{He schal neuere fallyn in dedly synne;} \\
\text{It is be Castel of Perseueranse} \\
\text{Now blyssyd be Oure Lady, of heuene Emperes!} \]

(11. 1702-06)

Although the connection is somewhat obscured in the text by intervening stage directions (11. 1705a and b), the juxtaposition of the name of the structure and the devout expression of gratitude for the Castle makes the necessary figural link, which of course already had a long history by the fifteenth century (Owst 77-78, Cornelius 37-48). 23 In addition, the Castle, like Mary, is "ful of grace" (1. 1596, also 1. 1556), and the Virtues of the Castle themselves are likened to Mary by Mankind, who calls them "lelys" (1. 1668), the emblematic flower of the Virgin.

Although neither a complete play nor an allegory, the East Anglian Dux Moraud, like The Castle of Perseverance, also appears to have been a Miracle of the Virgin, and as such would be the only surviving example of the type in

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23 In support of the Castle as a drama appealing to a fondness for the romance, Owst writes, "Secular romances might conceivably have suggest the likelihood of [the castle's] popularity with sermon audiences . . ." (77).
English. The fragment presents the lines of only one character, a duke, who after having an incestuous relationship with his daughter, persuades the girl to kill her mother who has discovered their illicit affair. The girl complies, but overcome by grief and anger, she kills the father as well. In analogues of the play described by Constance Hieatt, the girl, a hopeless sinner, repents and is saved by the Virgin.

The last East Anglian play which I wish to treat at length, Mary Magdalene, like Dux Moraud, has as the focus of the play a sensational sinner who repents and finds grace. This saint's play is perhaps the most immediately accessible drama from East Anglia and the one which most closely resembles the episodic structure, panoramic scope, and appeal of late medieval romances like Bevis of Hampton or Le Bone Florence of Rome. In brief, the action depicts the life of Mary over a span of some thirty years, from her initial fall into sin, to her repentance and association with Jesus and her subsequent apostolic career converting heathens until her anchoritic life preceding her death. Grafted on to this dramatized saint's life derived from biblical and legendary history are other generic modes, including farce, passion play, and—in the assault on Mary

24Incestuous relationships, either real or desired, between a father and his daughter also occur in some Middle English popular romances, including Sir Degarré, a fragment of which occurs in the East Anglian Egerton Ms.
by the unholy triune the World the Flesh and the Devil--
allegory. Its generic diversity, its elaborate staging
requirements, and its variety of poetic forms qualify Mary
Magdalene as "the culmination of late medieval East Anglian
popular drama" (Baker et al. xlvii).

Over the last two decades scholarship has sought to
correct the idea of the play as simply haphazard work bound
together by the singular presence of the heroine. For
example, John Velz has cogently argued that the dramatist's
main theme in Mary Magdalene is that of "true sovereignty
of God which the play repeatedly contrasts with false
claims to dominion made by men" (32). The play begins with
a series of boasting speeches by forces opposed to Jesus--
Caesar, Herod, and Pilate--and those seeking the fall of
Mary--the World, the Flesh, and Satan. The first of these
boasts, Caesar's claim "That of heven and hell chyff rewlar
am I, / To wos magnyfycens non stondyt egalll (11. 4-5) is
typical in its short-sighted devotion to worldly things and
its impious sense of self-omnipotence.

Among these boasts is also one by Mary's father,
Cyrus, who asserts to the audience his dominion over
Magdalene Castle, Jerusalem and Bethany. But to take Cyrus
as somehow aligned with the antagonists because of his
boast, as does Theresa Coletti, misinterprets the charac-
ter. Theatrical necessity was part of the dramatist's
motivation. By presenting a favorite type of speech--
similar examples of boasting occur in the Northern cycle plays and the N-Town cycle—the audience's attention may be quickly redirected across the playing area from the first scene at the scaffold of Caesar to the Castle. The speech also serves to place the heroine in the world of the aristocracy, which prefigures her coronation and enthronement among the royal hierarchy of heaven at the end of the play. Similarly, the Deadly Sins who besiege Magdalene castle are "knythtes so stowth" (1.373), and Herod is warned of the advent of "a myty duke" that will "rewle all Israell" (11. 180-81).

But the speech clearly indicates that Cyrus, unlike the other boasters in the play, recognizes that limits to his dominion are posed by his mortality and more importantly of his debt to God. While still in good health and grateful for his own material well-being, he magnanimously divides his properties among his three children to ensure their ease after his death. The immediate impetus for this action is the strong bonds of familial loyalty and concern tenderly displayed in this scene, preoccupations which are indeed very like those expressed in the romance Amis and Amiloun and in the Mary Play as well. Cyrus is clearly thankful, "I have her a sone bat is ful trew to me / No

25Another version of the legend presents Mary as the Whore of Babylon, but the Legenda Aurea (355) and Osbern Bokenham's Legendys of Hooly Wummen (147) version of the story follow the more popular tradition.
comlyar creatur of Goddys creacyon" (11. 65-66), but he seems to extend the same deep-felt affection to his two daughters in language distinguished by its aureate terms as very different in tone from his earlier boasting:

Bey haue fulfyllyd my hart wyth consolacyon.
Here is a coleccyon of cyrcumstance--
To my cognysshon nevyr swych anothyr,
As be demonstracyon knett in contynens,
Save alonly m y  lady bat was þer mother!
(11. 74-78)

The children respond to their parent's "giftys ryall" with deep gratitude, in each case emphasizing that his generosity frees them from worldly labor and necessity. And in each case the gift is received as a benefit of God's benevolence as well, for Lazarus prays to be granted the grace to be an obedient son, Mary exclaims in the name of the "God of pes" her appreciation, and Martha predicts that Cyrus' "grete jentylnes / So mekly to meyntyn us" indicates that her father will be "In blysse, to se þat Lordys face,
/ Whan ye xal hens passe!" (11. 105-09). The scene ends with the father ordering a celebratory banquet with wine and spiced foods, and when we next see Cyrus, he is sick to death and calling on God to be his guide (11. 265-76).

Cyrus is, then, portrayed as pious toward God and loving to his children, for whom he has provided not a life

26David Bevington (692) provides the following gloss of this difficult passage: "Here's a state of affairs revealing constancy bound together by mutual affection; I never knew any other such (paragons of virtue), except my wife, who was their mother."
of worldly pleasures but rather one that enables them to disengage from worldly cares. Such an environment seems precisely suited to the contemplative life which Mary, as opposed to the traditionally active life of her sister Martha, inclines after her repentance and which she finally achieves near the end of the play. The familial relationship presented is a model one and mirrors the ideal relationship between God the Father and those devoted to him. The two apparently contradictory attitudes which Cyrus displays in his first speech parallel two aspects of the Divinity: one of power and might, the other of charity and grace. Both the siblings lamenting over their father's death (11. 277-97) and Martha and Mary's perturbation over Lazarus' death are further signs of their familial loyalty and their piety as well. Like the characters in *Amis and Amiloun*, the three make a pact never to separate, "We will natt deseyr, whattso befalle!" (1. 302).

Of course, Mary does succumb to the treachery of the allied forces of evil, specifically first to a female figure of Lechery in the company of the Bad Angel, Pride. Lechery gains entrance to Magdalene Castle not by direct assault as her companion "knights" attempt but rather by guileful flattery of Mary's beauty, a gambit which Satan likens to the Greeks' conquest of Troy (1. 368). At this point, Mary descends from her castle--with its trustworthy companionship and its abundant sustenance--into the world
with its false friendship and merely material sustenance. Without the spiritual defenses the castle provides, she slips into moral confusion. She has already mistaken Lechery for her "hartes leche" (l. 461) and now the tavern-keeper her "grom of blisse" (l. 489), both epithets for Christ. Her slide into depravity continues until in a dream the Good Angel admonishes her to "Remembyr the on mercy; make thy sowle clyre!" (l. 600), at which point she repents and receives Jesus' absolution (l. 676-77).

At the point of her conversion, Mary asserts the blessedness of Jesus' "berth of that pat peur verginne!" (l. 679), and in so doing makes explicit a parallelism—or perhaps more accurately, a counterpoint—between the heroine and the Virgin. The dramatist seems to exploit fully the traditional contrast of sinful and sinning Mary Magdalene, who achieves sainthood, and the incorruptible Virgin Mary, who was immaculate at conception. As we have already seen, Mary Magdalene, like the Virgin, is of noble lineage, and both Marys are imbued with a celestial beauty. Lechery's compliments fit the traditional image of Mary, "Bryter þan the bornyd is your bemys of bewté / Most

27Coletti argues that all of the feasting in the play contrasts the merely corporal sustenance with true spiritual sustenance provided by Christ. I agree in all respects but one, that the feast of Cyrus' family in the second scene of the play is not to be likened to the other worldly feasts.
debonarius with your aungelly delicitel" (11. 443-44).

That character's initial address to Mary,

Heyl, lady most lavdabyl of alyauvns!
Heyl, oryent as þe sonne in hys reflexitel
Myche pepul be comfortyd by your benyng afyavuns.
(11. 440-42)

ironically parodies similar language lauding the Virgin and also unwittingly prefigures Mary's own beatification. This passage which praises her beauty and suggests for Mary Magdalene the intercessory function of the Virgin is echoed by the gallant of the tavern scene, Curiosity, who calls Mary his "daysyys iee" (1. 515), a flower which in Chaucer's Legend of Good Women has mariological associations (Kiser 47-48).

Later in the play, after Jesus has ascended into heaven, he appears on his scaffold and utters ode to his mother a seventeen-line (11. 1349-65) replete with Marian epithets. However, before the speech ends Jesus makes an abrupt change of subject as he remembers the "kendnesse" (1. 1366) received from Mary Magdalene. Surely the juxtaposition of the two Marys in the mind of Jesus is not accidental. Furthermore, the dramatist went beyond his sources in emphasizing the similarity between the miraculous revival of the queen of Marseille and the miracle of the Virgin presented in Le Bone Florence of Rome. As in the romance, the queen, along with her newborn son, is left for dead on a rock by fearful sailors on a storm-tossed ship; but the infant is miraculously maintained by his dead
mother's milk, and the queen herself eventually revives. The *Legenda Aurea* (360) version of the story attributes all the miracles to Mary Magdalene and makes no mention of the Virgin, but the play presents the King of Marseille as thanking "that puer vergyn" (l. 1895) as much as Mary Magdalene:

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Now have I my wif and my chyld both!
I thank ytt Mavdleyn and Ower Lady,
And evyr shall do, wythowtyn othe.
(11. 1912-14)
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Even the revived queen thinks first of the Virgin in expressing her gratitude, "O virgo salutata, for ower savacyion! / O pulcra et casta, cum of nobyll alyavns!" (11. 1900-01). A few lines later the king addresses Mary in words which precisely parallel those of the Annunciation: "Heyll be thou, Mary! Ower Lord is wyth the!" (l. 1939).

The intentional conflation of the two Marys by the playwright continues in the remainder of *Mary Magdalene*. As an anchoress, Mary dedicates herself to the "reverens of Ower Blyssyd Lady" (l. 1998) and at the end of her life is sustained by manna from heaven, which she obtains by being carried by angels up to heaven at the seven ordinal hours, a situation which closely parallels the treatment of the young Virgin in the *M-Town cycle Mary in the Temple* (80/228-241). Finally, Mary is "Inhansyd in heven above wergynns!" (l. 2022) when, like the Virgin but without precedence in the *Legenda Aurea*, she is received into
heaven's aristocracy with a triumphal coronation (11. 2073-76).

The continuous presence in thought if not in character of the Virgin in a play ostensibly about Mary Magdalene, who is clearly to be identified with the Virgin, goes far in confirming my earlier argument about Cyrus and the importance of the familial ties. As Clifford Davidson has recently remarked, Magdalene Castle "may instantly be recognized as the familiar Castle of Virtue intended to be seen as a sign of the defense which the soul adapts or builds for itself against vices" (80). But, as noted above, scholarship has long recognized the castle as a symbol for the Virgin, an identification derived from an exegetical reading of Luke 10:38 which narrates the story of Jesus' entry into the house of Martha and Mary, "Intravit Jesus in quoddam castellum." Exegesis took this to symbolize the Incarnation and the "castellum" as its vessel, the Virgin.28 Given the identification of Mary Magdalene with the Virgin demonstrated throughout the play, it seems that the castle of Cyrus and his family, as suggested by the biblical narrative, is fully operative in Mary Magdalene. Consequently, it makes Cyrus impossible to take as a evil man, but rather makes him more of the

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28See Cornelius 37-48 for a discussion of the Virgin as a Castle; see esp. p. 47, where the attribution and allegory in Mirk's Festial, a popular sermon collection, is quoted at length.
archetype of the "good father" and presents the familial harmony which exists between Cyrus, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary Magdalene as one which mirrors the harmony of heaven.

The allusions to the Virgin in the Mary Magdalene play are remarkable not so much because they occur--the two Marys were often to demonstrate contrasting lives which take different paths to the similar heavenly destiny--but because they occur with such persistence throughout the play. The playwright deliberately sought to elevate the status of Mary Magdalene by constantly juxtaposing her with the Virgin, a testimony to the reverence with which the dramatist--and perhaps the audience too--held the Virgin.

I say "perhaps" because we cannot assume that every member of the audience accepted the near primacy of the Virgin or other matters of doctrine which constituted the popular religion of the day. In fact, several of the plays discussed here perhaps argue against a uniform audience and system of beliefs, for in some respects they are conversion plays in which the main character, who has rejected Christ by wantonly abandoning himself or herself to sin, returns to the fold. Two other East Anglian plays which have not been discussed, The Conversion of St. Paul and The Croxton Play of the Sacrament, are more typically termed conversion plays because both concern heathens who persecute Christ, either through his disciples or in His body as the Host, and later accept the new faith. Indeed, because of the
negligible Jewish population in England in the later Middle Ages and because of an orthodox insistence on the physical presence of Christ in the Host, The Croxton Play of the Sacrament may well be, as Cecilia Cutts argued, an anti-Lollard play. Indeed, Mary Magdalene and the N-Town cycle too are plays in which the transubstantiation of the Eucharist figures prominently. And perhaps the Castle of Perseverance, written in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, that is while Lollard beliefs were openly advocated in East Anglia, may owe to the placation of heretical tendencies among some of its audiences the excision of the miracle of the Virgin suggested in the banns.

The East Anglian plays in which the Virgin figures prominently may well have been part of the popular offensive against heretics. In 1410, about the time the Legenda Aurea was achieving widespread use in England, Archbishop Arundel ordered the translation of Meditationes Vitae Christi in order to counter Lollard heresies; he thereby made available an important source for the life of the Virgin in Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Life of Christ (Cutts 53, n. 14; Meredith 14-15). As we have seen in Chapter Two, heretical ideas and books were still the concern of the Bishop of Norwich in the first quarter of the sixteenth century when some of the play texts were copied. It seems possible at least that the plays represent an alternative to the coercive and ultimately ineffec-
tive attempts by the orthodox powers in the diocese to force East Anglia Lollards to abandon their heretical notions.

Furthermore, the plays, like the popular romances of East Anglia, seem to advocate conservative ideas of allegiance, honor, and the importance of the family within the larger thematic concern with Marianism, which in the period under discussion, also reflected a conservative rather than liberal religious ideology. Consequently, not only do the plays identify and seek to correct perceived errors within the community, they also promote the values shared by the people who wrote, sponsored, and supported them.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Scholars have devoted little attention to East Anglian cultural history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because the region was—and still is relative to the rest of the country—sparsely populated and has offered little material for investigation.¹ Bypassed by the industrial revolution, this essentially rural and agricultural region, isolated from the mainstream of English life, has in modern times been regarded as something of a cultural backwater. This attitude about modern East Anglia may have been extended to the Middle Ages by readers of Chaucer's Reeve's Tale, where the character of the Norfolk reeve and the environs of Cambridge come off as coarse reflections of the miller and Oxford (J.A.W. Bennett 115).

However, Chaucer's joke, while certainly indicating an awareness of regional differences, obscures the real situation in medieval East Anglia. Far from being sparsely populated, East Anglia, relative to the rest of the country, was then densely populated; and though primarily agricultural, in this way it differed not at all from the rest of the country. In addition, it had a more fluid

¹For this observation, I thank Dr. Paul Smith of The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield.
social structure: fewer tenants were bound to the land, and more freemen rented or owned the land they worked. Opportunities for small holders to acquire more land and move from subsistence to commodity production for the market, and consequently to move up the social ladder, were considerable. The extensive and violent events in East Anglia during the Peasant's Revolt surely reflect not a Marxist revolution of the proletariat but rather a very capitalistic revolt fueled by rising expectations. In addition to profiting from some of the best arable land in the country, East Anglia's wool production, then cloth production, kept not just the major towns prosperous but also some villages in the countryside. Opportunities for advancement also existed for the merchants and tradesmen in the towns. Though the Hundred Years War may have affected trade with France, the Low Countries, or the Hanseatic Baltic, domestic trade increased markedly. This upward movement led to an increase in the of the professional class and the merchants as well. Both the Pastons and Springs of Lavenham rose from obscure and apparently humble origins to positions of wealth and influence within a generation. If the economic environment of East Anglia was somewhat fluid, it was also, in general, thriving.

This buoyant economy may have been a contributing cause to the proliferation of religious guilds in the
fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These guilds were the centers of civic activities in the rural parishes and in the larger towns. Guilds sometimes became an extension of the local government as did the Holy Trinity Guild at Wisbech, and the St. George Guild at Norwich (Westlake 104-98, 116-19), both of which were also responsible for some kind of performance commemorating their respective dedications. In the general dissolution of fraternal organizations in 1547, the civic functions of Wisbech Holy Trinity Guild were simply transferred to the town corporation: repair of the shores and dikes (Wisbech is a fenland town), distributing alms to the poor, and keeping the local school (Westlake 108). A similar phenomenon occurred in Louth, Lincolnshire, where the chantry endowment was diverted to the school, and its governors become the ruling body of the town (Kahrl, "Medieval Drama in Louth" 132). In the smaller towns and villages, the guild played a large part in establishing and maintaining a community's identity and served as a focal point for its activities, as at Bardwell, Suffolk, where most of the parishioners belonged to the guild of St. Peter.

20Of the twenty-five counties represented in extant guild returns of 1389, Norfolk (164), Lincolnshire (123), Cambridgeshire (60), and Suffolk (39) lead the list in numbers of these organizations. In spite of the denser population of the eastern counties, the numbers "are out of all proportion to those that survive from other parts" (Westlake 38).
Furthermore, the guilds, like the plays of East Anglia, were conservative. Although they frequently raised funds for repairs or adornments to the fabric of the building and often devoted part of their collections to charitable or civic works, the primary function of the guilds was to provide ceremonial or devotional furnishings for the church and vestments for its priest. Consequently, the guilds' aims were immediately connected with the most important religious observances of the community, and their annual feasts were celebrations of their communal dedication.

Although the guild returns for 1389 show "not a single hint anywhere that the teachings of Wycliffe and others had ever been heard of by the gild-brethren" (Westlake 43), some people in East Anglia were certainly aware of those teachings by the end of the century. As we have seen, according to the records of the trials and investigations conducted in the two counties, Lollard doctrines, particularly those espoused by William White, were fairly widespread in Norfolk and Suffolk in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But the number of such actions only partially indicates the seriousness of the situation, for the "East Anglian Lollards seem to have adhered on the whole to the extremer forms of heretical belief" (Thomson 125). In addition to the common Lollard repudiation of the Eucharist, veneration of images, and the usefulness of
pilgrimages, the East Anglian heretics also asserted that prayer "ought to be made to God alone, and not to the saints" (Thomson 127), a position which clearly denies the intercessory role of the Virgin, perhaps even nullifying her established position next to God in the heavenly hierarchy. Also, not only did the heretics tried in Norwich repudiate the Eucharist, they denounced all of the sacraments, thereby showing their disdain for the office of the priest as well. Among the non-doctrinal beliefs, a few opposed oath-taking and others admitted a disapproval of the ringing of church bells, which among other precepts showed a "tendency to Puritanism" among these Lollards (Thomson 129). Some of these heretical beliefs may have gained credibility by the discussion of similar matters at Cambridge. While Oxford may have been the early center of Wycliffite ideas and the north central Midlands the most active region in spreading unorthodox views, especially in fifteenth-century Cambridge the real presence at the Sacrament was a still a controversial issue (Bevington, Tudor Drama 39).

The publicly espoused Lollard views were met with rapacious ardor by the bishop of Norwich in the second and third decades of the fifteenth century. Though it must have been fairly general throughout the region, subsequent Lollard activity appears not to have concerned diocesan officials during the rest of the century, when heretics
were still being actively pursued and prosecuted in other regions of the country. However, active campaigns against heretical practices and ideas appear to have concerned those local communities which supported the drama of East Anglia. *The Conversion of St. Paul,* *Mary Magdalene,* *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament,* and *Dux Moraud* are all conversion plays, perhaps aimed as much at persuading Lollard sympathizers to cease their heretical notions as much as attempting to incorporate non-believers or back-sliding Christians. The emphasis on the Holy Sacrament in the *N-Town Cycle,* *Mary Magdalene,* and the Croxton play suggests that the debate that was engaging the scholars at Cambridge had been taken up at local and popular levels. The conservative sponsors of those plays decidedly affirmed their belief in the orthodox versions of the Eucharist, the other sacraments, and the importance of the priest.

Lollard ideas, then, were not only a threat to the Church in general but also to the local communities which found their solidity in the guild and the church. As we have seen, East Anglia, especially the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, had a self-perceived identity, fostered by the singular religious nature of the boundaries of the diocese of Norwich and by the joint administration and political integration of the two counties. Lollardy represented a threat to the religious identity of the whole of East Anglia, not just the local communities, in its protesta-
tions against pilgrimages and images, for the whole region, by virtue of the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham's power to draw pilgrims from all over Europe as well as Britain, was more thoroughly devoted to and aware of the cult of the Virgin than any other region in England. The passing of pilgrims through the counties destined for Walsingham and their stopping at Bury St. Edmunds or still more local shrines was a constant reminder to the inhabitants of the favor with which the Virgin held their region. The Lollards' disdain of pilgrimages, shines, and images struck at the social fabric that unified the community, for in calling Walsingham "Falsingham" (Thomson 126) they discredited the Virgin.

The popular literature of East Anglia reflects exactly the majority popular cultural disposition toward celebrating and defending the Virgin. This is most obvious in the dramatic works of East Anglia, for although some of the plays are concerned with the efficacy of the Holy Sacrament or conversions, it is the Virgin who figures most prominently as a focal point. Both the Castle of Perseverance and Dux Moraud may well have been dramatized miracles of the Virgin. The Mary Magdalene play does present a miracle of the Virgin, and is, indeed, almost as much a play about the Virgin as it is a play about the Magdalene. Furthermore, the prominence accorded to the Virgin in the N-Town cycle, a prominence unlike any other English religious
drama outside of East Anglia, is further enhanced by the pre-existence, and presumably performance, of an earlier independent Mary Play, about her early life, and an Assumption play.

The N-Town manuscript was being compiled at nearly the same time as the York cycle register (1463-1476), and a examination of the northern civic cycle indicates a diminution of the role of the Virgin. The main scribe of the York manuscript normally left blank leaves for entering at a future date the text of a play which he did not have but which he expected to receive. Yet he left no room for the Purification Play, which was later added out of sequence to the manuscript, or for the Funeral of the Virgin, for which no text now exists (Beadle, *York Plays* 10-12, 27, and 435). Furthermore, the mayor and civic authorities of York, who had long been responsible for the penultimate play of the cycle, the Coronation of the Virgin, and who thereby sought to identify the corporation with her (Davidson, *Creation to Doom* 163 and 174), had recently given up control of the play to the hostlers, a change represented in the York register. Finally, the manuscript copies of the York Death of the Virgin, the Assumption, and the Coronation are distinguished by an absence of the alterations, additions, and marginalia which characterize most of the other plays in the register (Beadle, *York Plays* 459-461). Although this absence of emendations can be explained in variety of
ways, it does seem as though York civic authorities paid little attention to these Marian plays after they were recorded. All of the evidence suggests that even in the fifteenth century, nearly a hundred years before Reformation pressures brought the suspension of the York Marian plays, the compilers of the York and N-Town cycles already represent diverging treatments of the Virgin, the former decreasing her emphasis by expunging certain apocryphal and legendary material, the latter elevating her role by augmenting the cycle with that same kind of material.

Like the drama, some East Anglian versions of popular romances foreground the role of the Virgin more than do copies from other areas. Unlike several other variants of Robert of Sicily, the conclusion of the East Anglian text insists on the efficacy of the intercessory function of Mary. Similarly, the Egerton Ms. version of Amis and Amiloun is distinguished from other versions of the poem by its unique miracle of the Virgin which resolves the seemingly immoral and heinous infanticide. Le Bone Florence of Rome presents several miracles prompted by appeals to the Virgin, but in the version of the legend depicted on the roof bosses of the Bauchun Chapel in Norwich Cathedral, the Virgin also appears in person, providing the heroine with the means to expose the villainy inflicted upon her. Although the Egerton Ms. copy of Bevis of Hampton presents no greater Marian interest than
other manuscripts of the poem, the distinct Marian allusions made in Bevis' fight with the dragon and throughout the poem in descriptions of the heroine, Josian, harmonize with the Marian tenor of the other romances and the drama. Furthermore, in their piety and meekness in the face of constant tribulations, and in their tenacious devotion to chastity, both Josian and Florence represent types of the Virgin. Although Melior in *Partonope of Blois*, a poem for which no specifically East Anglian text has yet been identified, is in no way virginal, she, like the other two heroines, is attributed with a radiant beauty like that of the Virgin, and, like the Mary in the N-Town cycle, displays a supernatural force of intellect.

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when Lollard tenets were widely disseminated if not always openly advocated in East Anglia, the Marianism of the plays and romances can only be viewed as strongly conservative. This conservatism is, in addition, a quality of the other themes which figure prominently in both the literature of East Anglia. Maintaining obligations and allegiances—whether established by formal oaths or implicit within social and religious conventions—owed by one person to another or by the individual to God, and maintaining the proper priority among those obligations and allegiances are behaviors which all these works strongly affirm. They encourage by example the piety of the individual, express-
ing in prayers devotion to the God and the saints and in observance of the sacraments, sacraments which Lollards rejected. They also urge a caring, respectful, harmonious, and devoted love among family members, a relationship, which, at least in the later middle ages, found its archetype in the Holy Family. Although East Anglia can lay no exclusive claim to these traditional themes which were pervasive in medieval literature, their appearance in East Anglian drama, for example, in the Mary Play of the N-Town cycle or the even later Mary Magdalene, reflects the conservative nature of the patrons for which they were copied, written, and performed. These themes concerning the family are also closely related to the worship of the Virgin, for at the center of the image of the Holy Family was the figure of Mary. In fact, even the interest in education, another theme which concerned medieval writers, which we have seen in Partonope, in the N-Town cycle, and in documents of East Anglians can perhaps be attributed to Marianism. Certainly the depictions of St. Anne teaching the Virgin to read and those of the Annunciation were among the most popular iconographical subjects in the later middle ages. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Lady Chapel at Long Melford, Suffolk, where wooden figures of the Annunciation depict Mary with an open book, became the parish school after the Reformation.
In short, in many of the popular romances and much of the drama available to and written for East Anglians, the Virgin Mary, whether present as an active force or represented in type by another character who has been endowed with a number of Marian qualities, occupies a central, pivotal role. Furthermore, some of the themes of the literature, though common in earlier medieval works, seem to be connected with the Virgin. The preeminence of Mary in these literary works is thoroughly in keeping with the special devotion with which East Anglians appear to have worshiped the Virgin and with the special affection which they believed she held for them. This reciprocal relationship and that devotion seem to have been part of the impetus for the unique literature of late medieval East Anglia.

This conservative and Marian-oriented literature, which both asserts and promotes the values of a middle-class audience, is an element in an ongoing series of events that anthropologist Victor Turner has called a "social drama." Briefly, the social drama consists of four phases: (1) the breach, in which a transgression of conventions brings forth latent antagonisms; (2) the crisis, in which the situation escalates; (3) the redressive phase, in which representatives of the status quo seek to restore peace through judicial or religious institutions; and (4) the last phase, in which dissidents are
reintegrated back into the community or a recognition of irreparable differences, which may result in a succession and exodus of the minority group.3

It is difficult to locate a specific breach in East Anglia as the point from which all subsequent phases of the social drama emanate because, of course, the Lollard activity in the Eastern counties belonged to the larger dissident movement begun by Wycliffe and his followers at Oxford. The events in East Anglia might even be considered part of the expanding crisis for the English church. The movement in East Anglia seems to have been an issue of concern from an early point, for in 1401 in London the first Lollard executed for heresy was William Sawtry from East Anglia (Jacob 95). Records of the Norwich heresy trials in the 1420's and 1430's (see Chapter 2) suggest that certain physical attacks on sacred subjects, including stealing and burning images, particularly William White's tearing down and burning a standing cross at Loddon (Aston, "William White's Lollard Followers" 95-96), may have been viewed as pivotal, symbolic events by the opposed groups. The trials themselves constituted part of the redressive phase of the process in which the diocese of Norwich brought forth all of its legal and coercive means to suppress the growing movement. Some heretics were con-

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3Turner's description of the social drama is repeated in a number of his works, including Dramas, Fields and Metaphors (38-42) and From Ritual to Theatre (10).
demned and martyred, an extreme form of the final phase, but others abjured their beliefs and—subsequent to various penalties—were apparently reintegrated back into the community.

As we have seen, the successors to Bishop Alnwick did not need to pursue heretical activities in the diocese until the beginning of the next century. But the situation after the persecutions seems similar to that earlier in the century. Concerning the apparent calm in the first decades of the century following Sawtry's execution and the lack of participation of East Anglians in the Oldcastle Rebellion in 1414, John Thomson believes that "although it is possible that the authorities could have destroyed existing groups of heretics and that new communities of them could have been established later, this would appear less probable than would a continuing tradition of underground heresy" (117). Such a situation can also be postulated for the remainder of the fifteenth century. Although proceedings against heretics took place in Ely, Cambridge (1457), and Bury St. Edmunds (1438)—the latter two towns seemingly the center of some dramatic activity—it was not until the first decade of the sixteenth century that numerous investigations, trials, and executions were again conducted in the Norwich diocese (Thomson 132-36).

The situation in East Anglia at the end of the Middle Ages is similar to that described by Turner in his analysis
of the Icelandic *Njal's Saga*. Turner sees this most famous medieval Icelandic work as a record of several social dramas, in which the redressive machinery, both informal and formal, that is the *Althing* and the Fifth Court, was insufficient to handle the crisis, which brought two diametrically opposed groups into open conflict. Similarly, the well-entrenched East Anglian Lollard movement could only be "transiently contained" (Turner, "An Anthropological Approach to the Icelandic Saga" 370) by the machinery of the religious courts. Even the Reformation did not succeed in reconciling the extremism of the East Anglian non-conformists, for Puritanism, to which the East Anglian Lollards tended, took a strong hold in the region, and it too was vigorously attacked by the conservative elements. But whereas the East Anglian Lollards had no place to go and no way physically to secede from the dominant culture, at least some of their descendants did. The exodus of the Puritans, going first to the Lowlands and then to New England, represents the schismatic possibility inherent in the final phase of the social drama. That "nearly two-thirds of the early settlers around Massachusetts Bay came from the eastern counties" of England is evident in the place-names and the dialect of the region.\(^4\) But the

\(^4\)Baugh and Cable 344. Of course, religion was not the only factor in the colonizing movement of East Anglians. In his discussion of Suffolk, Alan Everitt writes, "Though we must beware of simplifying the causes behind the emigration to America, which were largely due to agricultural and
factionalism erupted again into violence in the Civil War, and men from East Anglia, through the Eastern Association and in the person of Cromwell, a resident of Huntingdonshire, played major roles. It was through the aegis of the Eastern Association that so much of the church furnishings were destroyed, including the unparalleled sculptural program of the Life and Legends of the Virgin in Ely's Lady Chapel, an act in the ongoing social drama of East Anglia.

The events I have briefly described seem to corroborate by extrapolation the opposition in the later medieval period of two groups of East Anglians, one representing the status quo and realizing, in part, its sense of cultural community in the worship of the Virgin, and another group which vehemently denied the basic religious beliefs and cultural expressions of the other. We can also see the popular literary works that have been discussed here as part of the social drama's redressive phase, which "has the most to do with the genesis and sustenance of cultural genres, both 'high' and 'folk,' oral and literate" (Turner, From Ritual to Theatre 74-75). According to Turner, "The industrial distress, there can be little doubt that a passionate desire to establish the divine commonwealth was also present" (12).

The Eastern Association, composed of Puritan organizations from Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdon, Essex, Lincolnshire, Hertfordshire, shows very clearly a regional awareness: "It was primarily in terms of the Association that East Anglians thought, only secondarily in terms of the counties or the country at large" (Everitt 28).
stage drama, when it is meant to do more than entertain—though entertainment is always one of its vital aims—is a metacommentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context" (From Ritual to Theatre 107). The Croxton Play of the Sacrament and The Conversion of St. Paul are the dramas most explicitly concerned with heresy and conversion to orthodox views and the integration of the individual into the Christian community. Other plays, like the Brome Sacrifice of Isaac, deal with the issue more indirectly and generally, emphasizing the necessity of obeying God's will, which for the medieval East Anglian was most thoroughly expressed in the teachings of the Church. The N-Town cycle which, in its focus on Mary, particularly in the various trials and examinations she undergoes, presents conflicting attitudes or doubts about her conception, her life, and the virgin birth, not only steadfastly reaffirms the Church's precepts and the popular views, but more importantly exalts her position.

The popular romances too may be included as part of the complex of artifacts which "portray the characteristic conflicts" (Turner, Ritual to Theatre 11) of medieval East Anglian society. In addition to the drama, according to Turner, there are "innumerable genres of cultural performance" (Ritual to Theatre 13), including art, serious and light reading, and poetry. And we can see in the romances,
as I have pointed out above, the same concern as expressed in the drama with the themes of obedience, loyalty, family, and the Virgin—a reflex of the same self-justifying, self-affirming conservatism.

I believe other works which are not popular might well be adduced in demonstrating the tendencies of East Anglian literature. Among these, for example, would certainly be the romance of Amoryus and Cleopes, a retelling of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, written by John Metham for Sir Miles Stapelton. This neglected comic and ironic work, borrows from Chaucer's Troilus and Creseida and Lydgate's Troy Book (Craig xvii), but also adds a spirited dragon fight, like that of Bevis or St. George. The author reverts in the last of the four books of the poem to a still more characteristic, tendentious East Anglian mode, when a "holy ermyt" prays to the Virgin in order to revive the protagonists from death. She saves them from damnation, and they awaken, singing a hymn to the Virgin, and convert to Christianity. In addition to Amoryus and Cleopes, works by Lydgate, Bokenham, and Capgrave deserve to be considered. In fact, it is not surprising that Margery Kempe, who early in her Book recounts a vision in which she becomes a servant to the Holy Family and on numerous occasions in the biography assumes the role of intercessor, is a native of King's Lynn. In living her life in imitation of the Virgin and in imitation of saints,
lives she had thoroughly absorbed, Margery completes the reciprocal process of the East Anglian social drama. According to Turner, "message and rhetoric [of cultural performances] feed back into the latent process structure of the social drama. . . . Life now becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now perform their lives" (Ritual to Theatre 107-08).

Perhaps now the will of Margaret Lyston, with its copy of Partonope and a life of St. Margaret, and the will of the priest John Stathe, which included a Bevis of Hampton in addition to several religious works, make greater sense. For the two popular romances, not at all impious or frivolous works, are thoroughly consonant with the values of culture in which these two people lived. It was a society which valued, in the face of a challenge to its most basic tenets, its sense of the community united in faith and in the veneration of the Virgin.
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