

The Macro Plays Revisited

The collection of play manuscripts made in East Anglia by Cox Macro in the eighteenth century and now in the Folger Library¹ is central to our knowledge of the early history of morality plays. Without it, our awareness of this genre, which has acquired much weight in recent critical history of the drama, would be very thin indeed. Even as things are we need to be conscious of how limited the available data about such plays actually is and to beware of generalisations about such plays. Comments on the prominence of the genre are not difficult to find, but their validity may well be brought into question.² The purpose of my paper is therefore to reassess the importance of this collection of fifteenth-century plays and to examine assumptions about the nature and currency of the morality play at this early period in its development. To an extent the word ‘morality’ is, like so many other critical terms, convenient shorthand invented retrospectively by scholars and critics to categorise a group of plays having some common features. But since this study will also take account of some French analogues it is appropriate to notice that the term *moralité* did have some currency in France in the fifteenth century, the key period upon which this discussion is centred. After 1500, as we shall have cause to notice, things changed very considerably.

In order to carry out this task it will be necessary to rely upon or summarize the work of many earlier scholars and it will not be possible here to examine them all in detail. However, I propose to approach the topic by first discussing some textual aspects of the three Macro plays, *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Mankind* and *Wisdom*, so as take account of how the scribes set about their work and to evaluate the relationship between their work and some other early play texts. I shall then raise some points of comparison with plays on the continent before turning to a consideration of what conclusions may be drawn from the survival of the

¹ MS V.a.354.

² See, for example, Robert Potter: ‘The medieval morality plays which flourished in England at the same time as the Corpus Christi cycles...’ *The English Morality Play: Origins, History and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 6; Richard Beadle: ‘a once-flourishing genre of vernacular drama’, ‘Monk Thomas Hyngham’s hand in the Macro Manuscript’ in Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper, (eds.), *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in Honour of A. I. Doyle* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), pp. 315-41(318). One might even, on this score question David Bevington’s characterisation of *Castle of Perseverance* as ‘the full-scale archetype of all later moralities’ *The Macro Plays* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972), p. vii. A more sceptical note is struck by John Wasson, ‘The Morality Play: Ancestor of Elizabethan Drama?’, *Comparative Drama* 13 (1979), 210-21 also in Clifford Davidson (ed.), *The Drama in the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo: The Medieval Institute), pp. 316-27.

three plays in the collection. In this way I hope to bring together two contexts which might help us to reassess the Macro plays: a bibliographical one and one based upon comparative criteria about genre.

I

It has been established that on linguistic grounds the three Macro plays have strong connections with East Anglia and that they are the work of different authors.³ Textually they offer a number of problems but it is clear that *Castle* is earlier than the other two by up to fifty years and that it was written down by a different scribe from the one who, it should now be accepted as axiomatic, wrote out both *Wisdom* and the larger portion of *Mankind*.⁴ In broad terms we can also see that the scribes engaged on these texts were largely following the same conventions for recording their work. This feature needs to be seen alongside the work of other scribes working on earlier play texts. Recurring characteristics are found in the convention of writing speakers' names in the right margin and of separating speeches by horizontal lines across the page. Stage directions appear irregularly but they are placed either across the page, justified to the left and sometimes separated by horizontal lines above and below like those separating speeches, or they are inserted in the margin to the right of the text. Other conventions show themselves less regularly in the use of rubrication for speech heads and stage directions and in the use of brackets to link rhymes, particularly when the verse is in complex stanzaic forms. Though we may assume these conventions, the adherence to some of them is rather intermittent. Nevertheless, such irregularities in themselves help to make up the textual profile and to make clear the purposes of those writing these texts and their manner of achieving them.

Let us look first of all at the stage directions in *Castle* and also at the management of the Latin quotations which are a significant feature of the text. In both cases some of them are

³ Mark Eccles, (ed.), *The Macro Plays*, EETS 262 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. xi, xxi and xxxviii.

⁴ David Bevington in his invaluable facsimile edition considered the scribes of *Mankind* and *Wisdom* as different: see his edition, *The Macro Plays*, p. xvii. In this he was supported by R. E. Alton in his review in *Review of English Studies* 28 (1977), 328-20. But the opposite view was sustained by Eccles (p. xvii), Norman Davis in his review of Bevington's facsimile in *Notes and Queries* (1975), 78-9 and on more substantial grounds including codicology, scribal practice, page enumeration and linguistic features by Richard Beadle, 'Monk Thomas Hyngham's hand in the Macro Manuscript'. The latter also gives particularly impressive evidence over the calligraphy.

incorporated into the main body of the text suggesting that they were in the copy text and that the scribe simply had to follow his exemplum line by line; but others of both kinds were apparently inserted after the main part of the text containing the dialogue was laid out. In this latter group there are distinct signs of some individual items being forced into inadequate space.

The stage directions are unevenly distributed in the text. The text is copied into three quires, the first two with sixteen leaves and the third having six. Most of the directions, 20 out of the total of 32, are concentrated in the second quire containing the assault of the devils on the castle with Humanum Genus inside, and his death. In the majority of cases their inclusion follows a pattern of placing them to the right of the text and to exploit spaces between other words and marks which have been put in first. This means that some of them are very cramped. The most conspicuous example is so long that the scribe had to write it in two lines and these are squeezed in very small writing above and below the horizontal line separating two speeches (l. 574). The pressure is all the worse because the direction 'Trumpe' was already in place immediately above.

But some directions are integrated into the body of the text. These read from left to right across the page aligned to the text's left edge. For example the direction at l. 1896 runs across the page and is separated from the text above and below it by horizontal lines. However, it is likely that as he transcribed the text, the scribe realised he needed to leave a space and then he went back and inserted the words of the direction using smaller letters. Such a theory might be backed up by the direction at l. 1009. This is at the beginning of a speech and the scribe first wrote the name of the speaker, Superbia, on the right. He may then have put in two horizontal lines for the direction and when he was ready he set about inserting the words of the direction. But he had too many words to fit into the horizontal space he had created and he chose to insert the last word of the direction which happened to be 'superbia', at the far right of the line above, the one already containing the speech head Superbia. Thus the two words 'Superbia' (speech head) and 'superbia' (last of stage direction) appear next to one another rather awkwardly. One might conclude from this that the content of some stage directions were not known in detail to the scribe as he laid out his work but that he had some indication in places that some directions would have to be inserted. Equally he might simply have wanted to get on with the main text and left consideration of this particular direction until later. But if this was the explanation it does not match his treatment of all the other stage directions.

There are many events in the play which might have been made clearer by a stage direction, but the incidence is uneven. However the directions that are found do show some persistent concerns. There are five concerned with music or musical sounds⁵ and nine which indicate a manner of speech, including the person addressed. For specific events there are three concerning the beating of the Sins, and two about fighting for a long time, these indicating that a measure of onstage invention was expected, or that it had happened and could not be recorded in detail. The largest group however concerns movement across the acting space from one location to another and those which instruct characters to ascend or descend from the raised stages for individual characters. It should be said that these may have existed to instruct the actors, but they also play some part for a reader who through them can imagine how the action might take place.

In general it looks as though the scribe used similar devices to fit in the Latin quotations as he did for the stage directions. The vast majority of these derive from the bible, but doubt about their purpose has often been expressed. They are spread unevenly throughout the play. The first quire of the manuscript contains only 7 such quotations; the second has 22; and the short third quire of 6 leaves has an impressive 27. Some of them are clearly meant to be spoken as they are integrated into the text by the rhyme schemes, as at ll. 1502/6, 1515/9 and 1528/32. But others are extra-metric even though they are incorporated into the body of the text.⁶ In some instances they may still have been designed to be part of the speeches. It is very difficult to decide, for example whether Pater, described as *sedens in trono* (l. 3560sd) or *in iudicio* (l. 3596sd), says the initial Latin lines at the head of a sequence of stanzas very near the end of the play when he is obviously meant to be making an impressive, if not terrifying authoritative speech (ll. 3560a, 3572a, 3596a, 3610a, 3623a and 3636a).⁷ In the circumstances of the action of the play as it reaches a dramatic climax, it might be very imposing if he did actually utter them. But some of the extra-metric additions are more separated from the dialogue by their position on the page and they may well have been intended as meditative additions or illustrations which support the doctrine embodied in the dialogue. This argues that whatever the relationship of the extant text may have been to performance, past or to come, the text has a distinctly reader-orientated purpose and one which, like so much surviving medieval material, plays included, was directed towards devotional activity and

⁵ Two of these are rubricated, but this is a rare feature in this manuscript. Both are for the trumpet: ll. 574sd and 646sd.

⁶ In eight of these there is a paragraph mark in the left margin preceding the quotation, and seven of these are clearly not meant to be spoken, the exception being the doubtful 3610a (see below).

⁷ Eccles and Bevington, who follows him, do not number these lines separately, implying that they were not spoken.

contemplation. Indeed one might suspect that the motive for making scribal copies was often more likely to be a devotional one than anything else.⁸ Nor is it apparent that we should expect that the motivation for making a copy would necessarily be a single one.

But whether that is true or not, there is no doubt that the scribe also sought to embellish the text by the insertion of additional items even if that meant inserting them in a compressed manner and using some ingenuity to do so. We note for example that these extra lines are often in smaller letters than the rest of the text in order to squeeze them in. A case in point occurs at l. 2020a where the nine-word Latin quotation has to be squeezed in below the rhyming last line of the tail-rhyme and to the right of the previous line. Here the compression is greater because the next line of dialogue begins a new speech and that requires a horizontal rule across the whole page with the speech head at the right hand end of it. It appears that there was an intention that such Latin quotations should appear on the right of the page if they are not in the main text, even if they have to be run into two lines near the margin (l. 3339a), if there is not enough room for the whole text and an ‘&c’ has to be used (l. 1696a), or if there has to be excessive use of conventional abbreviation marks (l. 3167 where 8 out of the 9 words are abbreviated).

The use of large brackets to indicate rhyme is common to many early play manuscripts including the extant texts of the mystery cycles, two of which, York and N Town, were copied in the fifteenth century. The scribe of *Castle* is consistent in his use of them throughout his text. He uses them to match rhymes and also to link together the shorter tail rhymes within the stanzaic form. It is difficult to decide upon the purpose of this conventional practice. The basic thirteen-line form used in the play may not have been very evident to the audience as they listened to it, and yet one cannot but suspect that at times the patterned arrangement of sounds might have been highly significant. There is also the ‘ear’ of the actor to be accounted for: as one performs the play rhyme structures probably help to structure speeches aurally as well as making it easier to tell when it is time for a new speaker. But we also need to bear in mind the possibility that the text was meant for readers not participating in a performance, reading for devotional purposes, perhaps. The indication of rhyme patterns might have been much more useful in such circumstances.

⁸ For such more complex motives for making the texts one might consider the presentation of the N Town cycle, including its layout, and the account of liturgical presence in the York cycle by Pamela M. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City*, (Cambridge: Brewer, forthcoming).

The copying of *Wisdom* and *Mankind* is the work of a different scribe who, we now assume, wrote out both texts. These two plays are different in scope and mode, and along with this it appears from the evidence of the handwriting and layout that the scribe was in different states of mind when he worked on the two texts. There may indeed have been some years separating his efforts. As it happens *Wisdom* is a more formal play and one directed to a different kind of audience, as well as being presented in a much more sophisticated dramatic mode than its counterpart; and the general appearance of this play in the Macro manuscript is tidier and more careful. The more even spacing between lines and words makes it seem that the scribe was working more circumspectly. It now appears that his exemplar may well have been that discernible to us by the fragmentary text of half the play in Bodleian MS Digby 133. Recent work by Milla Riggio has made this seem very likely, in that she shows that many characteristics of the Macro texts, such as spelling, errors copied, omissions, can only be explained by direct dependence. Her thesis replaces the earlier view that the interrelationship between the two texts could be accounted for by a lost common exemplar.⁹ The Macro scribe added very little in his version of the play, suggesting that he was indeed in a copying mode only: the differences seem mostly accidental, or possibly the result of minor difficulties presented by features of the Digby text.¹⁰ As far as *Mankind* is concerned the copy made by the scribe is distinctly less well presented and at times it shows signs of haste, and also of compression. For his section of *Mankind*, comprising all but the last four leaves, this principal scribe wrote an average of thirty-nine lines per page, whereas in the Macro *Wisdom* the average is twenty-six lines, the pages being of identical size. His collaborator working on the last pages of *Mankind* reduced the number of lines to twenty-six or twenty-seven.¹¹

With regard to stage directions these increase the impression that the *Mankind* text was produced rather hurriedly. Whether in English or Latin they are all inserted to the right of the text and are often placed in spaces rather untidily and sometimes tangled with the speech prefixes (as at ll. 477, 482 and 486). A further indication lies in a number of places where there are omissions to the body of the text and additional lines have had to be inserted in the margin (ll. 125-8, 201-2 and possibly 237) or at the bottom of the page (ll. 584-6).

⁹ The concept of the common exemplar was expressed in their edition by Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall, Jr., (eds.), *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and E Museo 160 EETS 183* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. lxvi-xvii. For the revised view see Milla Cozart Riggio, (ed.), *The Play of Wisdom: Its Texts and Contexts* (New York: AMS Press, 1998).

¹⁰ See for example Riggio's discussion of the omission of ll. 496 and 600 because they were in the margin of the Digby manuscript, *The Play of Wisdom*, p. 8.

¹¹ Eccles, *Macro Plays*, p. xxxvii. The secondary *Mankind* scribe wrote the last four pages (ll. 819-914).

Comparatively the Macro *Wisdom* is a much more orderly affair and the likelihood that the Digby text was the exemplar helps to explain this, for that too is carefully written. It is true, as we have noted, that the Macro scribe introduces some errors, but the quality of his exemplar in all probability helped in the production of a text of higher standard. The management of the stage directions is particularly interesting in that it shows the scribe planning for their inclusion. They are much more detailed in this text than in *Mankind*, a reflection of the elaborate performance objectives for *Wisdom*. The scribe follows the convention we have noted whereby the directions are inserted into the body of the text and aligned left, with a horizontal line above and below. But in several instances he allows for more than the space of one line of text for the insertion of bulky stage directions. This means that he might have had a good idea of the size of the direction to be inserted, and that there are fewer instances of the compression and overcrowding than are found in *Mankind*. Indeed it seems more likely that he is writing out the directions and then drawing the line underneath, rather than drawing two horizontal lines and then inserting the words in the manner we have noted for *Castle*. An indication of the method for the directions comes in the first page of the text which contains two large ones, the purpose of which is to describe the appearance of Wisdom (l.1sd) and then of Anima (l.16sd). In both cases the directions are embedded in the text and aligned left requiring 6 and 4 lines of copying respectively. They are evenly spaced within the lines and take up the whole space across the page, presumably to the right edge of the paper (there is some cropping). The horizontal line follows the first direction.¹² A further example of this neat planning comes for the processional and musical exit of Wisdom and Anima with due attention to the immediately following entry of Lucifer (l. 324sd). In some later instances we can conclude that the scribe was probably able to put in the direction and then draw the horizontal line underneath, though there is the caveat that there are places where there is a small overrun at the end of the last line of the direction. The scribe tolerates one or two words spilling into the right margin below the line as at l. 724sd where the last two words are *ba[g]* and *pyp[e]*, cut off by the cropping and with the second word below the horizontal line and at the same level as the following speech head *Wnderstondynge*. This phenomenon is even clearer at l. 752sd where there is no cropping and *pype* is on the right and below the horizontal line.

Studies of linguistic features by Beadle and Riggio point to further details of the interrelationship between the work of the Digby *Wisdom* scribe and that of the Macro scribe

¹² The second direction does not need a line as it is at the foot of the page.

of *Wisdom* and *Mankind*.¹³ That the principal *Mankind* scribe did in fact copy the Macro *Wisdom* text using the Digby *Wisdom* as exemplar is reflected in some of the linguistic forms he employs. Beadle concentrated upon the forms of the third person plural pronouns in *h-* or *the-*; the intervocalic *-d-* or *-th-* in words such as *father* and the initial consonant *y-* or *g-* in forms of the verb *give*. Each of these was in the process of change in the latter part of the fifteenth century. The Digby scribe usually shows the earlier usages: *er[e]* and *hem*; *fader* and *yeve* with occasional use of the later variations. The Macro scribe in *Mankind* prefers the later variations with some consistency: *per þem them*; *father* and *give*. But in his copying from the Digby *Wisdom* he is influenced by the Digby scribe and the forms are mixed, and this can be sustained in passages where the two texts can be closely compared.¹⁴

II

In this section of my paper I should like to shift the ground to consider some continental analogues to the English morality plays of the fifteenth century. Such an incursion risks credibility because of the sketchy nature of what has survived in the form of texts or records, but a consideration of the outline Chronology in the appendix gives some indications which are useful in considering contexts for the Macro plays.¹⁵ One must admit, however, that this list is inevitably somewhat eclectic and we may have lost a great deal that is unsuspected. The data incorporated in the list inevitably offers variable levels of certainty. Often what is known about a play is not very revealing about when it was originally created; and this is true of the surviving texts themselves, many of which are undated, as well as of performance records, where equally dating evidence is often scanty or non-existent. However, the list does point to certain distinct features particularly in relation to the periods when morality plays were apparently popular and to the kinds of interest in different linguistic groups. I shall look first at some of the morality-play characteristics and then at some bibliographical features of what has come down to us.

¹³ See notes 2 and 8 above; and Richard Beadle, 'The Scribal Problem in the Macro Manuscript', *English Language Notes* 21 (1984), 1-13 and 'Prolegomena to a Literary Geography of Later Medieval Norfolk', in F. Riddy (ed.), *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), 89-108.

¹⁴ For detailed line references and a tabulation see Riggio, pp. 15-7.

¹⁵ For bibliographical details of French examples see Louis Petit de Julleville, *Histoire du Théâtre en France: Répertoire du Théâtre Comique au Moyen Age* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1886); Halina Lewicka, *Le Recueil du British Museum* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1970); Werner Helmich, (ed.), *Moralités Françaises*, 3 vols, (Geneva: Slatkine, 1980), pp. IX-XV.

As the Chronology makes plain, there is no doubt that the surviving corpus of French morality plays far exceeds what is known of survivals from England, the Netherlands or the German-speaking area.

Though a very large number of the surviving Rhetoricians plays from the Netherlands use abstract characterisation and an allegorical mode very few identifiable as morality plays can be convincingly dated to the fifteenth century. The exception is *Elckerlijc*, from which *Everyman* was translated: it was printed at Delft in 1495 and a manuscript from before 1493-4 is also extant. In general the full development of this important, indeed dominating dramatic mode of the Rhetoricians plays took place in the sixteenth century and many of them were closely related to the particular political and religious circumstances which developed in the public affairs in the sixteenth century.¹⁶ There does not seem to have been an interest in the full-life scenario of some French plays or of production on such a grand scale. More often the Rhetoricians plays were related to a particular theme set for a competition. Though *Everyman* was popular enough to run into at least four printed versions in England there is not much sense that that the Rhetoricians' mode of allegorical drama had a direct influence in England.

The surviving information relating to plays in German is also apparently very limited for the fifteenth century. Hansjürgen Linke suggests that morality plays might have been associated with Shrovetide plays and he points to a series of seven performances at Lübeck from 1430 to 1496 with continuation into the sixteenth century. Only descriptive titles survive from these occasions but a typical one such as this is suggestive: 'Of Faithfulness and Truth wanting to die for one another' (1482). He also notices a 1448 morality play text from Erfurt of nearly 18,000 lines which is partly related to another fragment of a late fifteenth-century morality from Berlin.¹⁷ This compendious Erfurt play is concerned with Virtue and the Last Judgement, and its preoccupation with didacticism is illustrated in that it encompasses three parables from the New Testament. There are also two manuscript plays in Vienna whose subject matter may suggest close affinity with morality plays: from the first half of the

¹⁶ The catalogue of these plays makes clear their extent and variety: see W. M. H. Hummelen, *Repertorium van het Rederijksdrama (1500-1620)* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1968).

¹⁷ Hansjürgen Linke, 'A Survey of Medieval Drama and Theater in Germany', *Comparative Drama* 27 (1993), 17-53, and 'Die Komposition der Erfurter Moralität', in D. Huschenbett *et al.* (eds.), *Medium aevum deutsch: Beiträge zur deutschen Literatur des hohen und späten Mittelalters: Festschrift für Kurt Rum. Zum 65. Geburtstag* Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979), 215-36. See also Bernd Neumann, *Geistliches Schauspiel im Zeugnis der Zeit: Zur Aufführung mittelalterlicher religiöser Dramen im deutschen Sprachgebiet* 2 vols, (Munich: Artemis, 1987): Erfurt 2.836 [No. 3623], Berlin 2.829 [No. 3611/1]; Renate Schipke, 'Die Berliner Moralität: Ein unbekanntes Fragment aus dem Bestand der Berliner Staatsbibliothek', *Studien zum Buch- und Bibliothekswesen* 4 (1986), 36-45; and Carl Wehrmann, 'Fastnachtspiele der Patrizier in Lübeck', *Jahrbuch des Vereins für niederdeutsche Sprachforschung* 6 (1880), 3-5.

fifteenth century, 'Contempt for the World', and from the second half 'The Play of Death and the Last Judgement'.¹⁸

With regard to the French plays there is one important difficulty, in that they are very diverse and that the meaning of *moralité* seems to have been both variable and compendious. An illustration of this is found in the Tours bookseller's list dating from 1490-1500 to which Graham Runnalls has drawn attention. Here there are 34 plays classed as *mystères* and 18 as *moralités*, but, as Runnalls notes, three plays from the former group which happen to have survived would be considered as morality plays today, and a further seven of the titles listed as *mystères* appear to deal with typical morality-play topics.¹⁹ Runnalls also identifies an instance at Mons where The Amiens Passion was taken over and adapted and given a morality-play mode by the invention of a character called Humain Lignage who was inserted at various expository moments.²⁰ It has also been pointed out that there is not really a hard and fast line of discrimination between the *moralités* and the *sotties* which were popular at this time.²¹ Indeed one may suggest that some of the *moralités* ought to be seen in the context of the thematic objectives and entertainment characteristics of the latter.

The range of material in the French plays is remarkable and it is clear that the *moralités* had a number of different functions. Three of the longest and most impressive may be grouped together as whole life plays which tended to be written on a large scale and with very ambitious performance characteristics. *L'Homme Pecheur*, which is known to have been performed at Tours in the fifteenth century as well as being printed in 1508 by Antoine Vérard, who probably had links with the Tours bookseller mentioned above, gives the story of a human character from birth to death and beyond, made in God's image but subject to sin. The religious objective is to demonstrate the way to salvation and everything about the play is directed to this end including directly didactic material designed to benefit the audience spiritually. The allegorical structure is elaborate and perhaps the most impressive element in it is the spectacle of the trees of Vices and Virtues. These are large enough for people to be

¹⁸ Neumann, *Geistliches Schauspiel im Zeugnis der Zeit*, 2.866 [Nos. 3686 and 3688].

¹⁹ Graham Runnalls, 'The Catalogue of the Tours Book-seller and Late Medieval French Drama', *Le Moyen Français* 11 (1982), 112-28. The three extant '*mystères*' manifestly *moralités* are *Bien advisé, mal advisé, L'Homme Pecheur*, and *Le mauvais riche*. See also Graham Runnalls, 'The Catalogue of the Tours Bookseller and Antoine Vérard', *Pluteus* 2 (1984), 163-75.

²⁰ Graham Runnalls, 'La Passion de Mons (1501): étude sur le texte et sur le rapports avec la *Passion* d'Amiens (1500)', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 80 (2002), 1143-88.

²¹ Charles Mazouer, *Le théâtre français du moyen âge* (Paris: Ceres, 1998), p. 244. For consideration of the relationship between *moralités*, the *sotties* and the farces, see Alan E. Knight, *Aspects of Genre in Late Medieval French Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 41-92.

positioned in the branches.²² This aspect is both a mode of thinking as well as a means of structuring the stage space and encoding meaning within it.

An interest in spectacle is also a feature of the other two large scale plays, *Bien advisé*, *mal advisé*, and *L'Homme Just et L'Homme Mondain*. In these plays the human representative is divided into contrasted characterisations and the actions of the plays are arranged accordingly as is the development of allegorical interpretation. In the first of these the acting area appears to contain the heavenly throne and to be divided into the *chemin de salvation* and the *chemin de perdition* containing the wheel of Fortune. *L'Homme Just et L'Homme Mondain* is related textually to both the other plays and it is especially rich in stage directions as the two protagonists visit the locations of vices and virtues. The scope of all three plays requires a very considerable amount of resources of money and material. We have already noted that the *moralités* may have owed something to the *sotties*, but there is also the possibility of a debt to the *mystères* especially in this matter of large-scale performance. For in the *mystères* a strong sense of place was developed having the principal characters often associated with a specific place within the acting area. The dramatic method here depended upon exploiting the contrasts this set up and the traffic between such locations. It seems to me that the authors of the *moralités* were able to build on this for the purposes of allegory. One might also hazard that the dates of the earliest *mystères* do seem to precede the *moralités*.

But the creators of *moralités* were also able to apply their methods to other kinds of material albeit that the intention was less for salvation and the next world but something which aimed at a more specific context, and the possible remedies applicable. As is apparent from the Chronology, even in the first half of the fifteenth century dramatists were using their work to draw attention to topical and disturbing issues. To some extent this is propaganda theatre bringing pressure to bear on such things as taxes (*Mestier*, *Marchandise*, *le Berger*, *le Temps et les Gens*) and treaties (*Povre Commun*), as well as to the need to reform abuses within the Church, in this case well before the Reformation (*Le Concil de Basle*). *Moralité nouvelle de la Croix Faubin* allows labourers and people from vineyards to complain about being exploited.²³ Instead of the urge to convert the audience, therefore, by subjecting it to preaching and the advocacy of the need for personal improvement, the *moralités* became quite early in their history a means of protest and a voice of discontent even if in the same breath

²² Peter Happé, 'Staging *L'Omme Pecheur* and *The Castle of Perseverance*', *Comparative Drama* 30 (1996), pp. 377-94.

²³ These and other social dimensions are further elaborated by Mazouer, *Le théâtre français du moyen âge*, pp. 256-8.

they proclaimed loyalty to church and state. Such was the particularity of interest in these plays that as far as the French survivals are concerned we cannot view the genre as being solely a medium for religious instruction and spiritual experience, even if some of these characteristics of the spiritual mode are traceable elsewhere.

This diversity of objectives also raises the question of theatricality in another form and one which is a significant aspect of the allegorical mode which is an essential aspect of morality plays. The experience they convey in the theatre involves an appreciation of allegory in many different forms and the response may be based upon spectacle as we have seen: but it is also a matter of invention and ingenuity and there are many morality plays where the recognition of the significance and appropriateness of the allegorical devices is an important part of the entertainment. To this extent these plays may be regarded as a game even though the clever devices incorporated within the plays are to be seen as ways of enticing attention to didactic objectives. A case in point is *La Condemnation de Banquet* by Nicholas de La Chesnaye.²⁴ This was printed by Antoine Vérard in 1507 and is thought to have been written a few years earlier. The allegory shows how the abuses of overeating are dangerous and it begins with a sermon in which the Doctor attacks gluttony. The structure of the plot dependent upon an allegorical concept involves three meals at the houses of Disner, Soupper and Banquet attended by Bonne Compagnie and her friends. These diners are subjected to increasing adversities as the level of indulgence increases. Eventually Banquet, whose feast induces the worst excesses, is subject to a trial at which he is condemned. Alan Knight has pointed out that although Banquet is not a human character, he becomes more personalized as the play proceeds even to the point of repenting his misdeeds and confessing them to a priest.²⁵ It strikes me that making Diet the executioner is a particularly appropriate conclusion and which neatly clinches the allegory. Such an ingenuity is a reminder that although allegory benefited from its development in the drama, there being many advantages in this particular genre, it actually appeared extensively in other literary forms.

Turning to bibliographical matters we find that conventions of layout were developed for the early French plays, whether *moralités* or *mystères* do seem to precede the *moralités*, and significantly for our purpose these were different from those manifested in the Macro plays and elsewhere in the English drama. Usually the speech heads were centred and the stage directions were indented so as to start about halfway across the page and continue into

²⁴ Ed. by Jelle Koopmans and Paul Verhuyck (Geneva: Droz, 1991).

²⁵ *Aspects of Genre*, p. 112.

the right margin. Often these, which also included the directions for Pauses, were marked by pilcrows. Usually there was no punctuation in the modern sense. This practice in the handwritten texts apparently became the norm and when the printing of plays began these scribal conventions were taken over. The stage directions were often neatly aligned into blocks of text beginning at the centre of the page and extending into the right margin. There was one further development: it became the usual practice, if the page size allowed as it does in folio, to print the speeches in two columns. It should be noted that the development of printed drama seems to have occurred rather earlier and on a larger scale than in England.

The *Manuscrit La Vallière*, a late sixteenth-century collection of early texts, provides an interesting pointer since, as the modern editor makes plain, the scribe chose a deliberately archaic form of writing and presentation and in doing so he resumed the established layout conventions of the fifteenth-century scribes and printers.²⁶ It is apparent, also, that similar conventions were in use in the Netherlands. *Trou moet Blijcken*, the collection of mostly sixteenth-century plays from the Rhetoricians chamber at Haarlem called the Pelican, makes quite clear that broadly speaking the scribes were following the same layout.²⁷ It must be admitted that evidence of early Dutch practice is elusive. All the plays in the *Trou moet Blijcken* collection were copied after 1595. However the layout of the fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Bliscapen* the cycle of plays about Our Lady, is generally similar in layout to the French style.²⁸

III

In relation to the Macro plays several things emerge from the comparison with continental drama. One is to question whether in the Netherlands or the German-speaking area the word ‘flourishing’ really is helpful for the fifteenth century and it doesn’t seem to do much for what was going on in England. If we set aside the Macro three we are left with *Pride of Life*, and *Nature* and we could also take into account the lost *Pater Noster Plays* from

²⁶ *Manuscrit La Vallière. Fac-similé integral du manuscrit 24341 de la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris*, ed. Werner Helmich (Geneva: Slatkine, 1972), p. VI.

²⁷ See for example the facsimile for the early play *De Wellustige Mensch* in *Trou Moet Blijcken* ed. Wim Hüsken, B. A. M. Ramakers and Frans A. M. Schaars, 8 vols. (Assen: Quarto, 1992-), vol. 1, fols. 88r-106r.

²⁸ For details of the manuscripts and their dating see W. H. Beuken, (ed.), *Die Eerste Bliscap van Maria en Die Sevenste Bliscap van Onser Vrouwen* (Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink/Noorduijn, 1973), pp. 18-19.

York and Beverley, the former dealing with Vices and Virtues²⁹ There is also Thomas Chaundler's *Liber Apologeticus*, a manuscript Latin play of 1457-61 which seems to have been designed for an academic audience in England, and which undoubtedly matches some aspects of the morality plays in English at an interesting moment in the fifteenth century. These include the exercise of free will and the important doctrine that penitence makes forgiveness possible.³⁰

From the data assembled here about the French plays it does look as though there were two distinctive strands: the large-scale whole life plays and the plays pointed at distinctive social or political issues which may or may not have had strong religious overtones. This leaves out of account the vigorous *sottie* tradition towards the end of the century which may have had some effect in terms of social issues. We should note too that the printing of play texts in France, particularly in the work of Antoine Vérard must have played a vital role in the dissemination of an awareness of the possibilities of dramatic writing and this is patently true of plays in the morality-play modes as it is of other genres such as the *sotties* and the *mystères*.³¹

If, however, we apply this to the English moralities it is apparent that *Castle* must have been rather early to have been influenced by known possible French models; it would be equally possible to argue the other way for English influence on the French. Though from a bibliographical point of view the Banns may have been separate from the main text,³² there is the possibility that this text might have been used by itinerant players. But the problem of how to stage this play on an *ad hoc* basis remains substantial in spite of Richard Southern's well-known proposal.³³ *Wisdom* and *Mankind* might just be seen as having some similarity with the French social plays, but there are weighty differences concerning the obvious individuality and independence of both these English plays. For example *Mankind* is an odd mixture clerical/academic thinking with a mode of performance and some circumstantial detail suggesting a company on the road, whether learned or not. On the other hand *Wisdom* is apparently designed for a deliberately expensive presentation with spectacular costumes and accessories and a requirement for sustained dance items. Along with these go the distinctive

²⁹ A. F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, *REED York* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1982).

³⁰ One of the most interesting aspects of this play is that its modern editor has pointed out that the author avoids the sacramental system and ecclesiastical observances, and that it is humanist in stance: see Doris Enright-Clark Shoukri, *Liber Apologeticus de Omni Statu Humanae Naturae* (London and New York: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1974), pp. 16-17.

³¹ For examples of Vérard's printing of plays see Nos. 13, 60, 88, 108, 115 and 120 in John MacFarlane, *Antoine Vérard* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1900).

³² Jacob Bennett, *The Castle of Perseverance: Redactions, Place and Date*, *Medieval Studies* 24 (1967), 141-52

³³ Richard Southern, *Medieval Theatre in the Round* (London: Faber, 1972).

subject matter concerned with mysticism as well as the possibility that there is an identifiable female context for ideas and/or performance.³⁴ Even if we suppose that there were other plays like them, neither of the plays seems to match very well the social preoccupations of some French plays, nor is there a distinctively sustained air of protest in the two plays and they hardly fit with the anticlerical satire which is to be found in other non-dramatic writings of the period perhaps following Chaucer's lead. Indeed, to take the argument further, there is a marked change in subject and theatrical method in the English allegorical plays in the sixteenth century where two features are relevant to what we have been investigating for the fifteenth century. On the one hand there was the development of the political interlude which I believe we can see emerging quickly and effectively in the wake of Skelton's *Magnyfycence* which was probably written about 1518, but not published until 1530 under the auspices of John Rastell, a very political person. This publication is followed within a very few years by the work of John Heywood and John Bale. At the same time the modes of presenting allegorical drama became more diversified.

The bibliographical aspects discussed here suggest that the English conventions for recording plays were different from those on the continent, and also that they were developed by the first half of the fifteenth century, and may go back as far as the *Interludium de Clerico et Puella* in the first quarter of the thirteenth century.³⁵ As far as the Macro texts were concerned we can see that the scribes were recording the play to meet the needs of actors in all probability, but more emphatically for the use of readers. This latter might have been a process by which the reader imagined a performance, but the presence of Latin quotations, whether carefully or hastily embodied in the texts of all three plays but either way clearly seen as important by the two scribes involved, suggests that the reading envisaged was a contemplative one in that the quotations themselves added something to what was to be enacted. David Parry, noticing that the Latin quotations introduced different ideas from the text they were joined to, suggested that the scribe was in two minds about their exact relevance.³⁶

This brings us back to the question of why the Macro scribes wrote down the plays, a question which it is impossible to answer comprehensively since such motivation would

³⁴ Besides the possibility that the female protagonist might suggest a performance in a nunnery, Riggio also adduces the context of educated women in East Anglia: see also Gail Murray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1989).

³⁵ T. H. Howard-Hill, 'The Evolution of the Form of Plays in English During the Renaissance', *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990), 112-45 (114).

³⁶ David Parry, 'A Margin of Error: The Problems of the Marginalia in *Castle of Perseverance*', in Alexandra F. Johnston, (ed.), *Editing Early English Drama: Special Problems and New Directions* (New York: AMS Press, 1987), pp. 33-64 (42).

almost certainly be multi-layered. For *Castle* there is some indication that the surviving text is the result of different redactions.³⁷ This is backed by paper evidence from Stephen Spector who notices that the third quire is on different paper from the first two quires and that this part of the manuscript contains the Debate of the Four Daughters, an episode which is not anticipated in the Banns.³⁸

Mankind and *Wisdom* leave us with a different bibliographical problem: one which intriguingly states something and leaves something for speculation. Why did the same scribe, named Hyngham and presumably located at Bury St Edmunds, write down these two plays? They were not bound together originally but the pages are numbered in the same eccentric way.³⁹ We have seen that the hurry or pressure manifested in the one is not matched in the other, and yet there was a comparable effort in copying down the two, even if the two writing tasks may have been separated by a considerable period of time. Perhaps this scribe was indeed a collector of plays in East Anglia, an area which we have come to see was rich in a variety of dramatic activities, but if he was, these two specimens are intriguingly different and we do not know what else he might have included in such an enterprise.

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³⁷ Jacob Bennett's disintegrative theories have not been sustained by later editors, but Eccles conceded that that a different poet may have written the Banns. See Bennett, *The Castle of Perseverance: Redactions, Place and Date*, pp. 141-52; and Eccles, *The Macro Plays*, p. xviii.

³⁸ Stephen Spector, 'Paper Evidence and the Genesis of *The Macro Plays*', *Medievalia* 5 (1979), pp. 217-32.

³⁹ Beadle notes that the leaf numbering is eccentrically continued beyond the central gathering in both manuscripts, 'Monk Thomas Hyngham's hand in the Macro Manuscript', pp. 321-2.

Appendix

CHRONOLOGY

[*French* **Dutch** German **ENGLISH**]

1300

1330-2 *Le Jeux de pelerinage de vie humaine* Perf. 1330-32 and
revised 1350. MS (Cohen)

1350

c.1350 **THE PRIDE OF LIFE** Facs. of lost MS

1378 **YORK PATER NOSTER PLAY** [Lost]

1380-1420 *Le Jeux des sept pechie mortel et des sept vertus.*
MS (Cohen)

1400

1400-25 **CASTLE OF PERSEVERANCE** MS

1426, 1431 *Le Cueur et les cinq sens* Perf. Paris [Lost]

1426 *Jour Saint-Anthoine* MS Perf. Paris 1426

1427 *Le Chastement du Monde* Alain Chartier MS
Perf. Paris 1427

1430 untitled performed at Lübeck; [Lost]

- 1432 *Le Concil de Basle ?* Georges Chastellain MS Frag.
- 1435 *Povre Commun* Michault Taillevent.
- 1439 *Bien advisé, Mal advisé*, Perf. 1439 at Rennes.
Printed before 1499.
- 1448 Erfurter Moralität
- By 1450 Verachtung Der Welt Vienna MS
- 1450**
- 15 cent. *Excellence, Science, Paris et Peuple* MS
- 15 cent. *Marchandise et Mestier, Pou d'acquest, le Temps qui court et Grosse
Despense* Printed 16 cent. (BM Recueil 59)
- c.1450 *Mestier, Marchandise, le Berger, le Temps et les Gens*
mid 15 cent. MS (La Vallière)
- c.1450 *Mieulx-que-devant* Printed (BM Recueil 57)
- 1450 *Reguard, Venus, Armonie, Musicque, Reticricque et Ruid Entendement* Frag
MS mid 15 cent.
- 1457-61 **LIBER APOLOGETICUS** MS [Latin, written in England]
- 1461 *Le Bien Public* MS (Chantilly) Performed c. 1461
- 1462 *La Terre et la Fortune* Perf. Draguignan [Lost]
- 1465-70 **MANKIND** MS
- 1466 Van der olden werlt... perf. At Lübeck: [Lost]
- 1466-8 *L'Alliance de Foy et Loyalté* MS (Cohen)
- 1468 *La Paix de Peronne* George Chastellain
Perf. Château d'Aire [Lost]
- 1469 **BEVERLEY PATER NOSTER PLAY** [Lost]
- 1470 *Argent* Jazme Oliou MS [Laurenzia-Ashburnham]
- 1476 *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain* Simon Bougouin. Perf. 1476 at
Tarascon. Printed Vérard 1508
- 1480-90 **WISDOM** MSS
- c.1480 *Bien Mondain, Honneur Spirituel, Pouvoir temporal et la Femme* printed Lyon
(BM Recueil 55)
- 1480 *Le Petit le Grant, Justice, Conseill et Paris* MS
- 1480 Van der truwe unde warheyte perf. at Lübeck: [Lost]
- 1482 Van der Leve...ene juncfruwe de was genomet de love perf. at Lübeck: [Lost]

- 1483 *Moralité* Guillaume de Gamaches Perf. Beauvais [Lost]
- 1484 Van der rechtverdicheyt perf. at Lübeck: [Lost]
- 1485 *L'Aigneau de France* [Trep]
- 1486 Van der Warheyt... perf. at Lübeck: [Lost]
- 1488 *Moralité nouvelle de la Croix Faubin* MS Frag.
- c.1488 *Aulcun, Cognoissance, Malice, Puissance, Auctorité et Maleureté* MS
- 1489 *Le Debat du Corps et del'Ane* Perf Amiens [Lost]
- 1490 *Les Septs Veruts et lee Sept Pechés Mortels*
Perf. Paris [Lost]
- 1492 *Pouvre Peuple* 1492 MS
- 1493-4 **Elckerlijc** MS. Printed 1495, 1501, 1525
- 1494 *L'Omme Pecheur* Perf. before 1494 at Tours and 1508. Printed Vérard c.1494
- 1495 De leve vorwynt alle dynck perf. at Lübeck: [Lost]
- 1495-1500 **EVERYMAN**. Printed 1510-19
- 1496 **NATURE** Henry Medwall. Printed 1530-4
- Late 15 cent. Berliner Moralität frag. Linked with 1448 above
- By 1500 Spiel vom Sterben und jüngsten Gericht Vienna MS
- 1500**
- c.1500 *Honneur des Dames* André de la Vigne. Printed, Paris
- c.1500 *Le Procés que a fait Misericorde contre Justice* Printed
- 1503-5 *La Condemnation de Banquets* Nicholas de La Chesnaye. Printed Vérard 1507
- c.1505 *La Chair, Le Monde et Le Diable* Printed c.1530
Perf. Nancy 1520