

## THE EMERGING PATTERN of the Easter Play in England

*Alexandra F. Johnston*

Because the majority of the texts of biblical drama that have survived from the late Middle Ages in England are compiled in four manuscripts that contain episodes that cover the sweep of salvation history from Creation to Doomsday, we have come to think of this long sequence as the 'norm'. Recent scholarship has made clear that although the York Cycle and the Chester Cycle can be clearly identified as being conceived in such broad terms, the nature of the other two 'cycle' texts is less clear. Both the texts that we have come to call 'N.Town' and 'Towneley' are composite texts with episodes drawn from demonstrably different sources.<sup>1</sup> From evidence provided by the component parts of these collections, other surviving texts, and external evidence being uncovered by Records of Early English Drama, new and shorter sequences of biblical episodes are emerging. Their existence is deepening our understanding of the mimetic traditions of England in new ways.

Art critics have long contended that Gothic art is essentially episodic. Many years ago, Arnold Hauser stated the basic premise that has been used to analyse work as diverse as altar-pieces, cycle drama and the *Canterbury Tales*:

The basic form of Gothic art is juxtaposition. Whether the individual work is made up of several comparatively independent parts or is not analysable into such parts, whether it is a pictorial or a plastic, an epic or a dramatic representation, it is always the principle of expansion, not of concentration, of co-ordination, and not of subordination, of the open sequence and not of the closed geometric form, by which it is dominated. The beholder is, as it were, led through the stages and stations of a journey, and the picture of reality which it reveals is a panoramic survey, not a one-sided, unified representation dominated by a single point of view. In painting it is the 'continuous' method which is favoured; the drama strives to make the episodes as complete as possible and prefers, instead of the concentration of the action in a few decisive situations, frequent changes of scene, of the characters and the

motifs ... Gothic art leads the onlooker from one detail to another and causes him, as has been said to 'unravel' the successive parts of the work one after the other ...<sup>2</sup>

Such linearity informs the episodic structure of late medieval and early modern English drama. This is a commonplace in the study of the processional drama of the York Cycle or the Chester Cycle or the 'place and scaffold' configurations of the N.Town *Passion Play* but it is also true of series of plays that are designed not for spatial linearity but for temporal linearity. Temporal linearity lies at the heart of the English Easter Plays — a form that lies somewhere between liturgical celebration and mimetic representation.

Any attempt to deal with the phenomenon of the Easter Play in England must, first of all, acknowledge the difficulty presented by external evidence, especially in ecclesiastical records. It is often unclear whether a reference is to ritual or drama. The Protestant tract, *The Beehive of the Romish Church*, in describing the Good Friday customs of the late medieval church, underscores the fuzzy division between liturgical ceremony and mimesis that haunts any attempt to interpret the external evidence for Easter drama in English churches:

Yea, doe wee not see likewise, that vpon good Friday they haue a crucifixe, eyther of Wood or of Stone, which they lay downe softly vpon the grounde that euery body may come creeping to it, vpon handes and knees, and so kisse the feete of it, as men are accustomed to doe the Pope of Rome; And then they put him in the graue, till Easter: at which time they take him vp againe and sing, Resurrexit, non est hic, Alleluia: He is risen, hee is not heare: God be thanked. Yea and in some places they make the graue in a high place in the Church where men must goe vp many steppes, which are decked in blacke cloth from aboue to beneath and vpon euery step standeth a siluer candlesticke with a waxe candle burning in it, and there doe walke souldyers in harnesse, as bright as Saint George, which keep the graue, till the Priestes come and take him vp: & then commeth sodenly a flashe of fire, wherewith they are all afraide and fal downe: and then vpstarts the man, and they begin to sing Alleluia, on al hands, and then the clocke striketh eleuen.<sup>3</sup>

In the description, the deposition ceremony, the 'creeping to the Cross', and the burying of the Cross are all part of the liturgy for Good Friday but the Easter morning events are a curious blend of the liturgical and the

mimetic with costumed soldiers and a dramatic flash of fire to signify the Resurrection. However, the evidence of external references and of the surviving texts indicates that this blending of the liturgical and the mimetic is characteristic of English Easter drama, perhaps because this drama is associated exclusively with worshipping communities — religious houses, secular households that kept chapels, and parishes.

The Easter or 'Resurrection' Plays have the longest history of any vernacular biblical plays from the medieval and early modern period. Besides the four sequences in the 'cycle' manuscripts to which I will return, five texts survive that can be considered part of the tradition — the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *La Seinte Resurreccion*, the *Shrewsbury Fragments*, the Bodleian *Burial and Resurrection* (from Bodleian MS e museo 160), and the Protestant plays *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, and Nicholas Grimald's Latin *Christus Redivivus*. The last three plays, although very different from each other, are all now dated in the reign of Henry VIII about the same time that there is a remarkable rash of evidence from large parish churches of expenses and sometimes even receipts for 'Resurrection' Plays. All but the *Burial and Resurrection* are fragmentary but the general shape of each can be deduced from what remains. All pick up the biblical narrative after the death of Christ and follow the story conflated from Matthew 27–18, Mark 15–16, Luke 23–24, and John 19–20. The essential episodes are the scene of the Three Maries at the tomb (the *Quem Quaeritis* sequence) and the Appearance of Christ to Thomas. *La Seinte Resurreccion*, *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, and *Christus Redivivus* share with the corresponding sequences in the cycle plays a strong sense of the external hostile world of Pilate, Annas, and Caiphas, and the soldiers set to guard the tomb. Only *The Burial and Resurrection* confines the episodes to the Christian community and its pain that is turned to rejoicing. Of all these plays, also, *The Burial and Resurrection* is the only one that moves significantly away from the biblical narrative by including the Virgin at the Deposition (as in N.Town). It also shares with *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, in a parallel to the French tradition, considerable emphasis on the outpouring of Peter's remorse.<sup>4</sup>

In his seminal book *Christian Rite and Christian Drama*, O.B. Hardison made a useful distinction between plays that are based on narrative history and those that are based on the lyric tradition.<sup>5</sup> Four of these five plays are firmly based in the narrative tradition. Only *The Burial and Resurrection* mines the rich vein of affective piety so familiar in much late medieval lyric poetry and drama. In its emphasis on the

suffering of the community, especially the Virgin, it has more in common with the N.Town *Passion Play* than with the other Resurrection Plays. However, its structure places it firmly among the plays performed during the Easter festival. Two of the five plays, *The Burial and Resurrection* and the *Shrewsbury Fragments*, are divided between a portion of the play (ending with the Burial) that is to be played on Good Friday afternoon or Saturday and a second part (the *Quem Quaeritis* sequence and the Resurrection Appearances) that are to be played either later on Easter Day or on the Monday or Tuesday of Easter Week. *The Resurrection of Our Lord* also divides the play into two days but in a different way. The two non-English language plays, *La Seinte Resurreccion* and *Christus Redivivus*, are 'stand-alone' plays. *La Seinte Resurreccion* seems to have been performed either outside or in a large church or cathedral with a series of *sedes* arranged to enable the audience to follow the action with ease.<sup>6</sup> *Christus Redivivus* was written on classical principles probably for Brasenose College, Oxford, although the only evidence for its performance was in Augsburg in 1556.<sup>7</sup> It could easily be played in a college hall.

The external evidence for Resurrection Plays covers an equally long time span. Setting aside the Winchester evidence for the definitely liturgical *Quem Quaeritis* sequence recorded in the *Regularis Concordia* in the tenth century,<sup>8</sup> there are two external references to Easter dramatic events from the twelfth century, one of which may reflect a play similar to the contemporary *La Seinte Resurreccion*. Both these references come from narrative sources — one from the account of a vision of a monk of Eynsham Priory just west of Oxford and the other from Beverley in the East Riding of Yorkshire. The vision of the Monk of Eynsham ends with the comment that after he woke he attended what appears to have been a lengthy Resurrection Play in the context of the Easter services.<sup>9</sup> This probably refers to a liturgical event in the regular Easter Offices of the priory. However, the Beverley event involves the miraculous rescue of two boys from injury by St John of Beverley. The boys had climbed up high to see a performance of a Resurrection Play and had fallen, to no harm.<sup>10</sup>

Between 1321 and 1369, Lincoln Cathedral had a play identified as a play of St Thomas the Apostle during Easter Week. From 1383 to 1391, there is reference to a Resurrection Play in Easter Week. Since the episode of Doubting Thomas is a regular feature of Resurrection Plays it is quite possible that these references are all to the same play paid for by the Chapter annually.<sup>11</sup> Also during the fourteenth century, the prior of Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury, paid players twice on Easter, in

1364 and again in 1372. These entries, however, are only two among many other entertainment records in the prior's accounts paid for at almost any great feast and may not represent anything related to the Easter liturgical events themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence from Wells Cathedral in Somerset and Ripon Minster in Yorkshire from the first half of the fifteenth century is more compelling. In 1417–8 the cathedral accounts of Wells record payment for costumes for the Pilgrims *pro ludo in Ebdomada Pasche* — that is in Easter Week — indicating that there was an *Emmaus* play that may or may not have been attached to the liturgy later in the week after Easter. On the Continent, the traditional time for the *Emmaus* sequence, according to Young, was in the context of Vespers on Easter Monday.<sup>13</sup> The next year, expenses are recorded for what is possibly a liturgical *Quem Quaeritis* event at Easter matins. The records from Wells are silent for almost fifty years until 1470–1 when the Easter Play is mentioned again. This year they provide costumes, coifs, and dyed hemp wigs for the Maries for a play to be played *in nocte Pasche*, indicating that the event may have shifted from being a purely liturgical celebration to a more representational one detached from the liturgy.<sup>14</sup> Ripon Minster paid for fifteen *ministris ludentibus* at Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter in 1439–40 and 1447–8, and paid one Robert Brompton, chaplain, to write plays that year.<sup>15</sup> The accounts of St George's, Windsor, for 1449–50 record a payment for a costume for a player *in festo Pasche* along with other play expenses that may or may not be for the Easter Play.<sup>16</sup> A similar pattern to Wells and Ripon Minster appears in a smaller household — that of the Earls of Northumberland a hundred years later. In the statutes of the household customs the 'Chapel was specifically directed to perform the "Play of the Nativity uppon Christymes-Day in the morning", as well as the "Play of the Resurrection uppon Estur-Day in the Mornynge"'.<sup>17</sup> If a college can be considered a household, we may have yet another record of a similar event from much later in the fifteenth century. Magdalen College, Oxford, bought costumes *pro ludo in die pasche* in 1495–6. In 1509–10 they spent money on food for the *pueris ludentibus in die pasche* and in 1517–8 they bought wigs for the women, indicating that a *Quem Quaeritis* sequence was part of the play. That it was more than a simple liturgical event can be deduced from the payment in 1519–20 to a painter for work on a cross and a crown & *diligentia sua circa ludum die pasche*.<sup>18</sup>

It is at the end of the fifteenth century that the evidence of parish Easter Plays begins to accumulate from substantial parishes all over the

country. Some come from the first surviving churchwardens' accounts but a significant number, especially from the Thames Valley, come from parishes whose accounts survive from long before the first reference to an Easter Play. From the external evidence as well as the two surviving texts that may represent the parish tradition — *The Burial and Resurrection* and *The Resurrection of Our Lord* — the period just before and during the Henrician reforms seems to have been the time these plays were written and performed. Only six accounts survive from St Saviour's parish in Dartmouth in Devon but the first one (from 1494–5) records a payment for 'payntyng of the clothes for the play on Ester day'.<sup>19</sup> Records of a Resurrection Play at Kingston upon Thames in Surrey begin in 1509–10 but there is little detail about the event.<sup>20</sup> The next year another Resurrection Play is recorded up-river at Henley in Oxfordshire when there is evidence of a *lusum resurrectionis & processionem* in the Sunday in the octave of Easter (Low Sunday).<sup>21</sup> Thame, also in Oxfordshire, had a Resurrection Play from 1515 performed in the church, which earned the parish a tidy profit every year. Evidence of payment for bread and ale for both the Tuesday in Holy Week and the Tuesday after Easter suggest a rehearsal in one week and a performance after the feast.<sup>22</sup> In 1522–3 the parish church in Rye, Sussex, made a coat for 'hym that in playing represented the part of almighty god'. A stage was built for the performance and in 1525–6 'plates' were bought for the play of the Resurrection indicating that the Emmaus meal or the meal in the upper room was one of the episodes in the play.<sup>23</sup> The last external evidence for a parish Easter event comes from St Martin-in-the-Fields, Westminster, from 1556–7 and reads simply 'Item paide to the players vppon Ester Daye in the morenge xvjd'.<sup>24</sup> Although this could indicate any kind of play, it is most likely to have been a Marian liturgical revival rather than the kind of parish historical plays that we have been identifying in the early decades of the sixteenth century.

The fullest accounts of a parish Resurrection Play come from St Laurence, Reading, beginning in 1507. St Laurence is one of the three ancient parishes in Reading and its churchwardens' books, surviving from 1498, are among the most detailed of the early sixteenth-century accounts. They record the life of a wealthy parish with a rich liturgical tradition. It supported a choir<sup>25</sup> (an unusual practice in English parish churches) and possessed an organ as early as 1505<sup>26</sup> that was substantially rebuilt in 1511–12 (89). The music of the parish continued to have a national reputation as late as 1557–8 when expenses were paid for the 'syngyng man

a base yat was sent for to westmynster' (286). They maintained a special walkway called the 'procession way', which contained a gate possibly allowing the parish into the adjacent precinct of Reading Abbey in the course of their ceremonies. Several inventories are included in the churchwardens' book that provide rare detailed information about the possessions of a major parish church just before the Reformation (41–73). Playmaking and other kinds of celebration were part of the life of the parish. It is one of our major sources for evidence of the summer festivals with its Hock gatherings, King Play, Robin Hood play, and Morris-dance troupe. It also had a rich tradition of single-episode biblical plays played during the summer festivals.<sup>27</sup>

The Easter observances at St Laurence began with the singing of the Passion on Palm Sunday. After the palm procession, it was the custom to have the entire Passion narrative from Matthew sung in three dramatic parts by the clerks — the treble to sing the part of the crowd, the mean to sing narration, and bass to sing the part of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> We know that St Laurence followed this practice from a regular entry in the accounts for wine or other refreshments for the performers including the late entry of a coat of motley made for John Brown 'that sang the mean' in 1535–6 (197–8) in the same entry as the payment for the Palm Sunday wine. Five late entries between 1540 and 1547 record payments to a man who 'plaid the prophet' on Palm Sunday. Three times the undersexton, a man called Loreman, is named as the performer.<sup>29</sup> This is a familiar insertion into the procession sequence when a performer sang the Old Testament prophetic lesson after the Gospel at the first 'station' of the procession.<sup>30</sup> Many London churches had elaborate additions to this liturgical practice with a choir of bearded and costumed performers playing the rôle of the Prophets.<sup>31</sup> St Laurence seems never to have had a fully developed sequence of prophets and it may be that the part of the Prophet had been taken by one of the choir-members as part of his regular duties before 1540.

We know that the parish mounted an Easter Play on Easter Monday performed on a trestle stage in the church that may have used the permanent Easter Sepulchre as part of the staging. In 1507–8, one William is paid 'for caryng and recaryng of bordes to the church for the pageant of the passion of ester Monday' (35). A similar entry appears the next year 'for the pagaeant on Estyr Monday' (74). In 1510–1, someone is paid for carrying boards on Easter Monday with no specification of a play (85). Over twenty years later, in 1533–4 as the Henrician reforms began to take

effect, a man called Labourne was paid half a mark ‘for refourmyng the resurreccion play’ (194) and two years later 9s 10d for making another copy and binding it (202). Labourne does not appear anywhere else in the Reading records. He is called ‘mr’ in the first entry but ‘sir’ in the second indicating that he may have been in orders. The last mention of the Easter Plays is in 1537–8 when the parish makes a profit of 23s 2d ‘at the ffirst play in Easter weke’ and 9s 2d at the ‘Second play’ (208). No reference to biblical drama in Reading appears after this year.

What is less certain in the Reading Easter celebration is how mimetic were the liturgical ceremonies from Good Friday to Easter morning. We have no indication of what the parish of St Laurence used to represent the body of Christ but it was either a reserved host or a simple cross. No special statue like the one with a cavity for the host used in St Alphege, London Wall,<sup>32</sup> or elaborate crucifix appears in the inventories. We do know that the priest wore a special red silk chasuble with a narrow cross embroidered on it for the Good Friday service (67). Red was the normal liturgical colour in England for Good Friday.<sup>33</sup> The items that appear regularly in the accounts that refer to the events between the ‘burial’ on Good Friday and Easter matins are payments for ‘watching’, for coals and for incense.

The sepulchre watch would have followed the liturgy described so scathingly in *The Beehive of the Romish Church* in which the representation of the body of Christ was laid in a sepulchre located in the chancel of the church. The St Laurence sepulchre was a wooden structure. 33s 4d were collected for a new sepulchre from members of the parish in what seem to be memorial gifts in 1498–9. The new sepulchre was not built until 1511–12 when £4 12s 4d was paid to Water Barton ‘to the new Sepulchre’ (89). Two pounds of glue was also bought that year ‘to the sepulchre’ (91) indicating that Barton delivered the carved wood in pieces to be assembled in its place. Charles Kerry in his account of the parish says that the sepulchre was located ‘on the north side of the choir beneath the middle arch of the arcade’.<sup>34</sup> The next year a frame was provided for the sepulchre light which was recreated as a ‘loft’ for the light (95). One of the regular payments in the accounts is for a ‘nail’ or ‘spike’ to the sepulchre which was probably used to secure the elaborate cloths listed in the detailed inventories that were either draped over the sepulchre or hung as a curtain. One is described as ‘an awter cloth of Crymson & tawny velwett ymbrowdred with ffloures of gold & for the nether parte of the same Crymson Saten & cloth of bawdekyn for the Sepulchre Awter’ (55).



Another is described as a 'sepulchre Cloth of right Crymson Saten imbrowdered with Imagerye with a frontall of panys conteynyng in length iiij yardes of the gifte of mr Richard Smyth with ij<sup>o</sup> clothes of lawnde for the Sepulchre.' (57). A third entry lists two other altar cloths with red crosses for Lent, and curtains (55). One of these cloths was mended and rebound in 1520–1 (137), and in 1544–5 silk points are bought for the sepulchre (238).

The task of watching the Easter sepulchre normally fell to the clerk or the sexton. Pamela Sheingorn has suggested that it was necessary to set a watch because of the danger from the burning candles;<sup>35</sup> Eamon Duffy suggests the pyx in which the sacrament was buried was extremely valuable.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the reason, a watch was set in St Laurence and paid for every year from the time the accounts begin until the accession of Edward VI. Duffy suggests the coals were to warm the watchers<sup>37</sup> but they are referred to in 1503–4 as 'colyes on Ester eveyn', in 1504–7 as 'Colys on ester evyn to be halowyd', and in 1512–3 as 'to make the halowid fyer'.<sup>38</sup> In 1520–1, among the Easter expenses is payment for a 'fire pan' (137). It seems clear that the coals were used as they were in the neighbouring parish of St Giles<sup>39</sup> to ignite the new fire with which the Resurrection candles (especially the great Paschal candle) were lit on Easter morning.<sup>40</sup> The incense frequently specified 'on Easter eve' was probably mixed with the coals as part of the ritual.

This much we can deduce for certain from the records about the events that took place in St Laurence, Reading, between Good Friday and Easter morning. But what happened on Easter morning? The work of Philip Butterworth will help us to unravel some of the puzzle. In 1506–7, the wardens record a payment of 2½d to Sybil Darling, the widow of a prominent parishioner who died that year, for a combination of nails for the sepulchre with 'rosyn to the resurreccyon pley' (29). Butterworth states that 'one of the simplest methods of producing an effect of lightning is to cast a powder such as rosin into or over a flame to produce a flash of fire'.<sup>41</sup> When we combine the reference to *rosyn* with the other equipment for creating fire such as the fire-pan, we can deduce that the moment of Resurrection was marked at St Laurence, as it was in the ceremony described in *The Beehive of the Romish Church*, with a flash of light.

Two other pieces of evidence may indicate a more elaborate mimetic presentation of Easter morning. The clerk who wrote the St Laurence accounts seems to have proceeded with all due deliberation through the year. We can be reasonably sure, therefore, that the expenses that are

clustered with the normal Easter entries have relevance to the events during the Easter period. In 1522–3 there appears the following set of entries:

<u>Item</u> payd for makeng of the playeres garmentes	vijd
<u>Item</u> payd for xj li of wex for the paschall & makeng yerof	ixs vijd
<u>Item</u> for a quart of bastaard	iiijd
<u>Item</u> payd to willziam wey for sir willziam's hors hyer	vs
<u>Item</u> payd to Roger Iohnson for stevens hors gyre	xvjd
<u>Item</u> payd to Iohn paynter for makeyng of geyr for the play	iijs iiijd
<u>Item</u> payd for waatchyng the Sepulcre	viijd
	(149)

Setting aside the two references to horse hire that may have nothing to do with the Easter celebration, these entries are suggestive. Three concern normal Easter liturgical functions — the creation of the Pascal candle, the wine for the Prophets, and the Sepulchre watch. But two refer directly to costumes and painted ‘gear’ — presumably a set of some kind or props. No other play entries appear for that year — not even a king-play entry. It is hard not to associate the players and their gear with the Easter events.

The second suggestive entry is in the last version of the inventory of the possessions of the parish dated that same year: the red chasuble for Good Friday is linked with the phrase ‘& all thapparaelles for good ffryday’ (67). A ‘+’ appears in the margin against this item and another appears farther down the page against another entry that appears to have been left out, indicating that the items belong together. That entry reads ‘Item for a Cotte for Mary Magdeleyn of Cloth of gold’. There is no assurance that the ‘apparel’ for Good Friday is anything more than a complete set of vestments for the officiating clergy. Nor is there any assurance that the coat for Mary Magdalene is a costume for a human being. It is perfectly possible that it is a costume for a statue. All the play gear provided in 1522–3 could have been for the play in the week after Easter. Nevertheless, the entries are suggestive — not only of a greater embellishment of the Good Friday ceremony but of the Easter Morning celebration too. Mary Magdalene plays a prominent part in the first Resurrection Appearance episodes and it is possible that the costumes and gear were for a ‘Resurrection’ play similar to those that appear in the contemporary play texts. The evidence from Reading may well be that of an episodic play made linear not through space but through time as the mimetic events follow the sequence of the liturgical offices of Easter.

And it is here that a new pattern of mimetic tradition seems to be emerging. There obviously were and continued to be liturgical embellishments of the Easter services, but some, as we know from the evidence of Barking Abbey near London, were not the familiar liturgical inclusion of the *Quem Quaeritis* passages chanted by the clergy at Easter matins. At Barking, during the rule of Lady Katherine of Sutton, for example, the Easter liturgical events consisted of a ritual Harrowing of Hell in which the entire convent took part followed by the 'resurrection' of the Host from the tomb and its ceremonial return to the altar.<sup>42</sup> When mention is made of liturgical embellishments, therefore, we cannot assume a simple *Quem Quaeritis* or even a *Peregrini*. Similarly when we have evidence of the supplying of a costume for Mary Magdalene (as in the will of Agnes Burton in Taunton, Somerset in 1503–4)<sup>43</sup> we should not assume that this is necessarily for a strictly liturgical event. If there is an emerging pattern — and the pattern is by no means 'set' — it seems to me to have more components than simply a long-standing liturgical practice and then, in the sixteenth century, parish plays springing up that may be historical in their approach (as in *The Resurrection of Our Lord*) or lyrical (as *The Death and Burial*). There are too many references where *ludentibus* are hired by religious houses, cathedral chapters, or private household chapels to perform at Easter. Surely a strictly liturgical sequence would be taken by members of the convent or cathedral chapter themselves as part of the festive ritual. It is far more likely that these hired players were performing, from quite an early date, Easter Plays based on the scriptural story that were not embedded in the liturgy. In the pre-1500 payment to players at Easter, it seems to me that we have something between the liturgical observance and the sixteenth-century parish drama. Indeed, I would suggest that here we have the pattern on which the later parish drama was modelled — representational plays based on the scriptural narrative taking place within substantial ecclesiastical or secular households — those that kept 'chapels'.

I would like to suggest that the *Shrewsbury Fragments* provide us with an important fourteenth-century witness to what might be called 'extra-liturgical' drama. The *Fragments* have been associated with Lichfield Cathedral although, heretofore, no one has been able to suggest how or why this should be.<sup>44</sup> However, the evidence from the cathedrals of Wells and Ripon Minster and the much later chapel of the Earls of Northumberland speak to a tradition of retaining specially skilled performers, be they secular actors or especially gifted singing brothers, to

provide extra liturgical presentations based on the historic scriptural texts rather than the liturgy around the great feasts of Christmas and Easter within a cathedral chapter. It has long been noted that this macaronic text is a single actor's part for a Christmas Play and two Easter Plays — a *Quem Quaeritis* sequence with Easter Day but the *Emmaus* play is headed *Feria secunda in ebdomada Pasche* or the Monday of Easter Week. Furthermore a line is drawn after line 71 of the *Emmaus* episode after Christ has broken the bread. Similar lines in the rest of the MS indicate the end of an episode.<sup>45</sup> The subsequent lines seem to be the beginning of a *Thomas* play that could possibly have been played later in the week. The *Shrewsbury Fragments* are neither purely liturgical nor purely narrative. The fact that much music is involved argues for a medium that falls somewhere between pure liturgy and an historical recounting of biblical events. This text and the matching references from ecclesiastical records may represent one version of the English Easter play tradition that is neither purely liturgical nor purely historical but something in between that served as a model for the sixteenth-century texts.

In these texts, *The Burial and Resurrection* and *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, we have two very different plays written about the same time on the events from the Deposition to the Resurrection. Both are designed to be played in two parts. There the similarity ends. We do not know where *The Resurrection of Our Lord* comes from but the most recent editors of *The Burial and Resurrection* have located it by the dialect in south-east Yorkshire.<sup>46</sup> The rubric at the beginning of *The Burial and Resurrection* reads:

This is a play to be played<sub>e</sub>, on part on gud-Friday after-none, &  
þe other part op<sub>e</sub>n Ester-day after the resurrectione, In the  
morowe.<sup>47</sup>

The play has the fewest episodes of any sequence on the Resurrection. In part one Mary the Virgin dominates the scene with her mourning. The body of Christ is taken from the cross and she continues her laments as the body is given to her and she cradles it on her lap. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus then take it and bury it. Here the first day ends. The second day contains the actual Resurrection and the visit of the Maries. Mary Magdalene now becomes the central mourning figure as the events marking her relationship with Christ are recalled. Similarly Peter mourns his denial in an echo of the French tradition. The Risen Christ appears to

them all and the play ends with a hymn without carrying the story further to the later Resurrection Appearances.

*The Resurrection of Our Lord* is fragmentary at the beginning but it has a running title of 'The first dayes playe' from the conversation between Pilate and the Centurion through the Resurrection itself which is accompanied by a gunpowder explosion and the Appearance to the Maries until the speech by the 'doctor' (here called 'Appendix') after the soldiers have been bribed to say that the body was stolen. The second day in this text, then, is devoted to a non-scriptural Appearance to Peter (partly lost from the text) that deals with Peter's remorse. Appendix is rather apologetic for the inclusion of an Appearance not attested to in the Gospels but rather in Acts and in the Epistles of Paul. This sequence is followed by the Road to Emmaus during which Christ delivers a sermon laced with quotations from the Old Testament. Luke and Cleophas then report back to the rest of the disciples and the play ends with the episode of Doubting Thomas.

These two plays make a fascinating contrast. *The Burial and Resurrection* is in the lyric tradition of affective piety. The Virgin speaking to Mary Magdalene refers to the body of Christ on the cross as 'his ymage of pitee' (l. 796). The playwright has stripped away all the scriptural details of the external world. This is the community of the faithful mourning its loss and receiving the great gift of the assurance of the Resurrection. At the end the rubric says that the hymn *Scimus Christum* or another Easter hymn is to be sung, whether by just the cast or by the congregation as well, as in the continental liturgical sequences, is unclear. In an epilogue the figure of John commends the audience to Christ. This clearly Catholic play stands within the tradition that we have been tracing.

However, so, in a very real way, does the Protestant *The Resurrection of Our Lord*. In fact, the action of this play is closer to the Resurrection sequences in the cycle MSS with its inclusion of the outside world, its careful use of Scripture and its inclusion of the Resurrection Appearances. What is strikingly different is its theology and the strange way the piece is divided in two in a manner that does not follow the ritual observance of the sequence from Deposition to Resurrection Appearances. Anna J. Mill in her entry on this play in *A Manual of Writings in Middle English 1050-1500* says:

The writer is saturated with the doctrines of Wyclif and gives evidence of reading Tindale's New Testament and in the works of the Continental Reformers. But even with some readjustments of

dates, the restrained and unpolemical tone of the fragments would seem to rule out any ascription to the militant John Bale, for which the editors would fain have discovered documentation. The *Resurrection*, still dramatically in the medieval tradition, forms a link between the mystery cycles and the late Bible plays of Bale and his followers.<sup>48</sup>

The Protestantism of the writer may have determined the way the episodes are split, with the Resurrection itself on Day 1, and the long and cerebral portrayals of the Resurrection Appearances on Day 2, perhaps in conscious defiance of the liturgical pattern. It is also possible that the play that, even in its truncated form, runs to 1321 lines, was not played over Easter weekend but on two days during Easter Week. Nevertheless, this play is firmly in the tradition and reminds us that Protestant writers, especially in the early days of the Reformation in England, used the drama as a vehicle for disseminating their interpretations of the Gospel message.

The two plays that stand outside the tradition of dividing the episodes between two days are the earliest and the latest. The twelfth-century *La Sainte Resurreccion* survives to us only as a fragment of about 360 lines but there is sufficient information in the surviving stage directions to get a sense of what the complete play contained. It seems to have dealt with all the biblical episodes from the Deposition to the Commissioning in Galilee since provision is made for a Galilee *sedes*. If what remains is any indication of what was once dramatised, we have lost one of the most fascinating versions of the story. In the few short scenes we have two unique interpretations. Longinus having pierced Christ's side, received his sight, and testified to Christ's divinity, is promptly thrown in jail where he is still languishing when the fragment ends; and Nicodemus, in a highly sophisticated bit of characterisation, refuses to help Joseph of Arimathea with the burial until he is assured by Pilate that no harm will come to him if he takes part in this act of charity. The manuscript breaks off at the setting of the guard. At the other end of our time period, Nicholas Grimald's *Christus Redivivus*, despite its classical form, presents a straightforward set of episodes. The mourning voices of the community are changed into formal classical choruses and much of the action (such as the Emmaus sequence) is reported, not portrayed. Interestingly, Grimald did actually provide a scene (albeit very short) for the Harrowing of Hell. Written from a Protestant perspective for a school performance, this play combines the native and classical traditions with a clearly didactic purpose.

But we do have, as well, dramatisations of the Easter sequence embedded in the so-called 'cycle' texts. The two civic plays — York and Chester — present the material in a straightforward way. What makes their sequences from Deposition to Doubting Thomas essentially different from the shorter plays we have been discussing is the intervention after the Burial and before the Resurrection of the plays on the Harrowing of Hell. This episode, that can be argued to be essential to the sweeping pattern of salvation history that both these collections depict, interrupts the biblical/liturgical flow. Nevertheless, both cycles depict the episodes we have been discussing. York has separate pageants for the *Resurrection*, the *Appearance to Mary Magdalene*, the *Road to Emmaus* and the *Incredulity of Thomas*. They follow one another in the orderly pattern one expects from the York text. After the *Harrowing*, Chester picks up the biblical sequence in the *Resurrection* play that tells the story of the events of Friday to Sunday from the setting of the guards by Pilate to a special separate Appearance to Peter reminiscent of the French tradition. The next play covers the Resurrection Appearances from Emmaus to Doubting Thomas. Together these two plays cover the material of the Easter Plays briefly and episodically. Though having clear affinities with the plays we have been discussing, the York and Chester versions sit well within the larger sequence of episodes depicting salvation history.

In both N.Town and Towneley the situation is somewhat different. Both these 'cycles' are compilations, editions that seem to have gathered biblical plays from many sources and created from the episodes the semblance of 'Creation to Doomsday' sequences. However, it is possible to discern in each of them, as Peter Meredith has so successfully done with the *Mary Play* embedded in the N.Town manuscript, the shape of the original component parts. In his discussion of N.Town in the *Cambridge Companion*, Alan Fletcher remarks of *Passion Play 2*, 'It has no distinct ending, probably because the original ending of the play contained in the *Passion Play* exemplar was suppressed in the process of dovetailing it with the pageant material'.<sup>49</sup> Finding the proper ending point has been a real challenge in performance. In the text he prepared for the Toronto production of the *Passion Play* in 1981,<sup>50</sup> Stanley J. Kahrl chose the end of the Appearance to Mary Magdalene (fol. 201). Spector notes that after the end of the Mary Magdalene sequence 'Remainder of fol. 201' filled with scribbles. Amen Amen appears at right opposite 99, and Explicit is written under the final Latin line'.<sup>51</sup> Folio 201<sup>v</sup> is blank. The Emmaus

episode begins on fol. 202 with the heading *hic incipit aparicio cleophe et luce*.

The original finale of the *Passion Play* that would probably have matched the didactic statements of the ‘mediating’ figures who open both segments of the play has clearly been lost in the editorial process. However, it is clear that the pageant that follows is a self-contained and complete ‘Easter Play’ that might have been played by a parish during Easter Week to supplement the liturgical celebrations of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It lacks the actual Resurrection sequence but neatly and succinctly presents the rest of the episodes. It begins with the *Peregrini* sequence, but then moves back to the gathered disciples with the pilgrims telling their news. Thomas enters in despair to be persuaded by the Appearance of Christ and the command to feel the wounds. The play ends with a forty-line formal declaration by Thomas rehearsing the manifestations of the Resurrection. Each of the first three eight-line stanzas ends with the Latin *Quod mortuus et sepultus nunc resurrexit*. The last stanza ends with a ringing and direct address to the audience:

Truste wel Jesu Cryst, þe Jewys kyllyd the same;  
 The fende hath he feryd, oure feyth þat evyr avexit.  
 To hevyn 3ow brynge, and saue 3ow all in–same  
 That *mortuus et sepultus iterum resurrexit*.                      Amen.<sup>52</sup>

Like many of the separate ‘pageants’ in the N.Town manuscript, this play has a sense of completeness that does not depend on the surrounding episodes for its rhetorical or dramatic impact.

To tease out the possible editorial changes in the Towneley sequence is more of a challenge. However, the editors of both the 1885 edition of York and the 1994 edition of Towneley have suggested how possibly two Easter Plays have been fitted into the sequence to create a manuscript that has the sweep of episodes from Creation to Doomsday. Lucy Toulmin Smith carefully noted what she considered to be the parallels between the York and Towneley texts. The Resurrection sequence (Play 38, produced by the Carpenters in York) is one of the plays generally recognised as having been ‘borrowed’ from the metropolitan cycle by the compilers of the manuscript from the West Riding. Smith notes as she comes to the end of the Carpenter’s pageant ‘Seventy–six lines follow this in Towneley, on the subject of York 39; they are not parallel’.<sup>53</sup> Play 39, the Winedrawers lyrical *Appearance to Mary Magdalene*, indeed does not



parallel the straightforward narrative version of the Appearance that ends the Towneley sequence: the editors of the new edition comment:

The Towneley play of 'Thomas of Indie', a corrected title in the manuscript which appears again in the rubricated explicit, is of course misnamed in that the Thomas episode takes up only a little more than half of its narrative. The Towneley version resembles most clearly in general outline the gospel narrative of St. John, in which Mary Magdalene goes directly to the Apostles, followed by Christ's Appearance before the Ten and then, a week later, before the Eleven (with Thomas); see John xx.18–29. Towneley 28, therefore, picks up directly from the end of Play 26, the Resurrection, when Mary Magdalene prepares for her meeting with the apostles. Play 27 is, consequently, an intruder in the narrative sequence, though some editorial effort seems to have been made to assimilate it (see 457–69). The opening scene of the play between Mary Magdalene and the Apostles (1–64) is linked to the Resurrection Play by virtue of the stanza form, the 6-line tail-rhyme stanza, which however rhymes aabcca in this play as contrasted with the uniform aaabab rhyme in the earlier play.<sup>54</sup>

Put together, the sequence Play 26: 580, and Play 28 represents an Easter Play beginning with the last event on Easter and then taking the events of the post-Easter period as they appear in John — with the strange anomaly of the presence of Paul amongst the Disciples. Play 27 (the *Peregrini*) then can be seen as a 'stand-alone' Easter Play on this episode to be played on Easter Monday as a supplement to the liturgy of the day. Thus as the Towneley compilers gathered together the episodes necessary to create their Creation to Doomsday sequence, they seem to have borrowed, possibly from a parish or from one of the many ecclesiastical households in Yorkshire, two separate plays in the Easter Play tradition.

When we put together the surviving texts, however fragmentary, with the external evidence, we can, I believe, perceive a pattern in the occurrence of the Easter Plays. As we have seen, evidence for a separate 'Resurrection' play exists only in ecclesiastical records — the records of monastic houses, cathedral chapters, private chapels, and parishes. Separate dramatisations of the sacred story from the Death of Christ to his final Appearances seems always to have been associated with a worshipping community. Interestingly enough the Passion Plays' longer episodic biblical sequences, that add the trials, the beating and

humiliation, and the Crucifixion itself to the material presented, seem to have been produced, as in New Romney in Kent, by more secular sponsors. The most common form of English Resurrection Play seems to be one that has close connections with Easter liturgical practice but has moved away from the services themselves to present the story in dramatic form while maintaining the liturgical rhythm — the sense of temporal linearity — of the festival.

The line between liturgy and mimesis especially in the records evidence, remains blurred but, as the rhetoric of *The Beehive of the Romish Church* makes clear, the connection between the liturgy and playacting in the minds of the Puritans was clear. After a long description of the gestures of the Mass itself the writer thunders, 'In suerite, Christe hath not done any thing in his death & passion, but they do play and counterfeite the same after him so trimly and liuely, that no player nor iuggler is able to do it better'.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps we should accept the ambiguities for what they are and allow the rich commingling of celebration and representation, as yet unchallenged by Reformation and Counter Reformation, 'show forth' the religious and mimetic sensibilities of the Easter season.

University of Toronto

## NOTES

1. For a discussion of the nature of these two manuscripts see *The N.Town Play* edited Stephen Spector *EETS SS 11* (1991) 1 13–29; Alan Fletcher 'The N.Town plays' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Literature* edited Richard Beadle (Cambridge UP, 1994) 163–188; *The Towneley Plays* edited Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley *EETS SS 14* (1994) 1 22–32; Peter Meredith 'The Towneley cycle' in *The Cambridge Companion* 134–162.
2. From Charles Muscatine *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1964) 167–8, citing Arnold Hauser *The Social History of Art* translated Stanley Godman (Knopf, New York, 1952) 1 272–3; see also Dagobert Frey *Gotik und Renaissance* (Fisher, Augsburg, 1929) 38.
3. Phillips van Marnix *The beehive of the romish church* translated George Gilpin (London, 1598): STC 17445, 206–v.
4. See, for example, K. Janet Ritch 'A Critical Edition of Eloi du Mont's *La Resurrection du Jesuschrist*' (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Toronto, 1995).

5. O.B. Hardison *Christian Rite and Christian Drama* (Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1965) 262.
6. *Medieval Drama* edited David Bevington (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1975) 122.
7. *The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald* edited and translated L.R. Merrill (Yale UP, New Haven, 1925) 61–2.
8. See Karl Young *The Drama of the Medieval Church* 2 vols (Oxford UP, 1933) 1 249–50.
9. Bodleian MS Selden Supra 66, fols 5<sup>v</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>.
10. Diana Wyatt *Performance and Ceremonial in Beverley Before 1642* (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation: University of York, 1983) 412–3.
11. See *Records of Plays and Players in Lincolnshire 1300–1585* edited Stanley J. Kahrl (Malone Society Collections 8: Oxford, 1969 for 1974) 24–5.
12. Canterbury: Cathedral Archives, Treasurer's Account Book, LPL: MS 242 fols 129<sup>v</sup> and 159<sup>v</sup>. I am grateful to James Gibson, the editor of the *REED* edition of the Kent records for allowing me access to his unpublished research.
13. Young *Drama of the Medieval Church* 1 458.
14. *Records of Early English Drama: Somerset including Bath* edited James Stokes with Robert Alexander (Toronto UP, 1996) 248–9, translation 838.
15. From a private letter from Professor Barbara Palmer, the editor of the *REED* edition for the West Riding of Yorkshire. See also Ian Lancashire *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain* (Toronto UP, 1983) 1340.
16. Accounts of St George's Chapel Royal: xv 34 44. The accounts for that year include payments for a play at the time of the Founder's Feast and it is unclear if any of the playmaking items beyond the single costume are related to the Easter event.
17. Suzanne Westfall *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990) 28.
18. Magdalen College *Computi* MC2 1490–1510 MC Arch., fol.41<sup>v</sup>; MC3 1510–30 fols 126 and 141<sup>v</sup>. I am grateful to John Elliot, the editor of the *REED* edition of the Oxford University records, for allowing me access to his unpublished research.
19. *Records of Early English Drama: Devon* edited John Wasson (Toronto UP, 1986) 62.

ALEXANDRA F. JOHNSON

20. Surrey Record Office KG2/2/1 page 16; I am grateful to Sally-Beth MacLean, the editor of the *REED* edition of the Surrey records, for allowing me access to her unpublished research.
21. Oxfordshire Archives, MSS DD Henley A V/3, fol.27<sup>v</sup>
22. Oxfordshire Archives, MSS DD Thame c.5, fols 73<sup>v</sup> and b.2.
23. Sussex Record Office St Mary's Churchwardens' Accounts Rye 147/1, fol.50<sup>v</sup>. I am grateful to Cameron Louis, the editor of the *REED* edition of the Sussex records for allowing me access to his unpublished research.
24. *St Martin-in-the-Fields: The Accounts of the Churchwardens 1526-1603* edited John V. Kitto (Simkin, Marshall, Kent, and Hamilton, London, 1901) 165.
25. I have deduced this from the money spent on albs and amices for children. Peter le Huray in *Music and the Reformation in England 1549-1660* (Cambridge UP, 1978) discusses the state of music in parish churches just before the Reformation in his first chapter.
26. Berkshire Record Office D/P 97 5/2, page 22. All subsequent page references to this book appear in the body of the text.
27. See my 'Summer Festivals in the Thames Valley Counties' in *Custom, Culture and Community in the later Middle Ages* edited Thomas Pettitt and Leif Søndergård (Odense UP, 1994), and with Sally-Beth MacLean 'Reformation and Resistance in the Thames/Severn Parishes: the Dramatic Witness' in *The Parish in English Life* edited Kumin, Gibbs, and French (Manchester UP, 1997).
28. Eamon Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale UP, New Haven and New York, 1992) 26.
29. Duffy *Stripping of the Altars* 222, 226, and 242.
30. Henry John Feasey *Ancient Holy Week Ceremonial* (Baker, London, 1897) 75. He tells us the *Sarum Processionale* specifies 'an acolyte in the guise of a prophet'.
31. See Mary C. Erler 'Palm Sunday Prophets and Processions and the Eucharistic Controversy' *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 (1995) 58-81.
32. Pamela Sheingorn *The Easter Sepulchre in England* (Early Drama, Art and Music 5: Medieval Institute Publications, Kalamazoo, 1987) 221.
33. William St John Hope and E.G. Cuthbert F. Atchley *English Liturgical Colours* (SPCK, London, 1918) 85.
34. Kerry 41.

35. Sheingorn *Easter Sepulchre* 57.
36. Duffy *Stripping of the Altars* 30.
37. Duffy *Stripping of the Altars* 30.
38. See pages 16, 21, 25, 29, 93.
39. Berkshire Record Office, D/P 96 5?1.
40. Feasey *Ancient Holy Week Ceremonial* 182–3.
41. Philip Butterworth *Theatre of Fire: Special Effects in Early English and Scottish Theatre* (Society for Theatre Research, London, 1998) 37.
42. Young *Drama of the Medieval Church* 164–8.
43. *Records of Early English Drama: Somerset including Bath* edited James Stokes with Robert Alexander (Toronto UP, 1996) 227.
44. *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments* edited Norman Davis *EETS SS 1* (1970) 22.
45. Davies *Non-Cycle Plays* 6.
46. *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and e Museo 160* edited Donald C. Baker and others, *EETS OS 283* (1982) 131–3.
47. *Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and E Museo 160* 142.
48. *A Manual of Writings in Middle English 1050–1500 5* edited Albert Hartung, and others (Academy of Arts and Science, New Haven, Connecticut, 1975), no 22, 1355.
49. Fletcher *N.Town Plays* 171.
50. Stanley J. Kahrl and Alexandra F. Johnston *The N.Town Plays: A Modernisation* (forthcoming 1999) 229.
51. Spector *N.Town Play* ed 1 369.
52. Spector *N.Town Play* ed 1 381–2.
53. *York Plays* edited Lucy Toulmin Smith (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1885) 420.
54. *Towneley Plays* edited Stevens and Cawley 617.
55. *Beehive* 206.