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# "WHAT GRACE WE HAVE FUN"

**[An Examination into the Feasibility of Presenting  
Medieval Religious Drama to a Modern Provincial New  
Zealand Audience]**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis centres on the presentation, with appropriate music, of some medieval religious drama before a public audience at the Church of the Nativity, Blenheim on 23rd November, 1996. The three pieces - the Limoges Trope of the Shepherds at the Manger, the Fleury Play of Saint Nicholas and the Three Scholars, and the *Secunda Pastorum* from the Towneley (Wakefield) Cycle - were translated for the occasion into Modern English. The aim of the performance was to see how well members of a twentieth-century, provincial, New Zealand audience would respond to a type of drama outside their normal cultural experience.

The first two chapters of the thesis outline the considerable task of preparing for the presentation, covering such aspects as the background reading of scholarly views on medieval religious drama and especially on the chosen texts, the process of translation from Medieval Latin and Middle English, the choice of venue, the plays' characters and the selection of actors to portray them, the design of the set and the costumes, the acquiring of properties, the importance of music and the arrangements of the banns (advertising). Chapter III describes the actual performance, while Chapter IV attempts to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the project, discussing as a test case the gifts of the shepherds to the Christ-Child in the *Secunda Pastorum* with regard to scholarly interpretations, director's intentions and audience reactions.

The Conclusion points to the success of the project, but emphasises that a modern director of medieval religious drama needs to be aware constantly of a number of issues to be faced in presenting such plays: the place of scholarly opinion in relation to production practicalities, language change as it affects translation, and the advantages and drawbacks of adaptation to the tastes and pre-conceptions of twentieth-century audiences who may enjoy a limited understanding of medieval times. The thesis ends with the hope that considering these issues will encourage future undertakings, not prevent them.

The Appendices to the thesis include the writer's translations of the plays chosen for performance and the Commentator's script for the 23rd November presentation.

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*(By courtesy of Joan Bennett, Gillian Collins and Gilbert Leov)*

## *PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*

The subject of this thesis is a blend of the theoretical and the practical. The study desk has been balanced by stage furniture, the translator's constant scratchings-out by hammer and nails. Its pleasures have far outweighed its problems, and at no time has its undertaking, stretching over three years, been less than interesting.

The cast lists and acknowledgements in the programme for the 23rd November presentation (Appendix F) are evidence enough that the whole project depended on the support of many people. I am grateful to them all.

A number of organizations need a special mention - the Anglican Parish of Blenheim, the Blenheim Choral Society, Massey University's Department of English, the Marlborough Boys' College, the Marlborough Girls' College, and my sponsor, the Marlborough Repertory Society. I was encouraged both by their collective generosity with facilities, materials and expertise and by the continuing interest shown in proceedings by individuals from these groups.

But I owe a special debt of gratitude to two individuals. The first is my wife Gillian, whose enthusiasm for Middle English and incisive, positive approach have been a constant inspiration to me. And the second is my tutor Robert Neale, a scholar of high standards and unfailing courtesy. Any shortcomings in this thesis are my own.

# INTRODUCTION

This thesis has its roots in an interest in medieval religious drama which stretches back over forty years. I can clearly recall, for instance, seeing *Everyman* in a North London church in the mid-1950s, and buying, when it first came out and I was an undergraduate studying History, A.C.Cawley's *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* in the *Everyman* edition. Although my contact with medieval plays later became fitful [1], my interest in theatre - as reader, audience member, actor and director - continued. During recent years my studies at Massey University re-directed me towards the Middle Ages, and I began to ponder anew on medieval drama.

The provincial town in which I live, Blenheim, has a sound tradition of drama and operatic productions and choral concerts. Shakespeare is not unknown there, but I wondered if local people were aware of what was happening in the European dramatical world in the 500 years before his time. [2] From this speculation evolved a plan to present some medieval drama in the town, in order to discover how it would survive the centuries, how a twentieth-century provincial New Zealand audience would respond to it, and what would be necessary to bring text, actors and audience to a central point of accord and appreciation.

My general aims eventually materialized into the presentation of three pieces of medieval religious drama - the Limoges Trope of the Shepherds at the Manger, the Fleury Play of Saint Nicholas and the Three Scholars, and the Wakefield Master's *Secunda Pastorum* - which I had translated from Medieval Latin and Middle English. The performance took place at the Church of the Nativity, Blenheim on the evening of Saturday 23rd November, 1996, and included introductory material, music appropriate to the occasion and a commentary.

In its first two chapters, my thesis describes and explains the considerable preparation, stretching over two years, necessary for such an undertaking. The third chapter is an account of the performance itself with some impressions of its immediate impact, and the fourth, together with the conclusion, attempts an evaluation of the successes and failures of the total exercise, examining in particular the *Secunda Pastorum* shepherds' gifts to the Christ-Child, as some indication of the continuing issues

facing a modern presenter of medieval religious drama. The thesis appendices include my own translations of the plays and the Commentator's script.

The nature of my thesis invites departures from the customary approach of such researches. Firstly, my style entails an element of narrative, since I am describing an attempt to turn theory into practice. This process, I believe also, makes my translations and commentary script (Appendices A-E) especially significant to my argument. Secondly, I place some emphasis on the first person, with its appearance of self-centredness and its dangers of introspection. However, while there is some need to explain and evaluate in personal terms, I endeavour not to lose sight of the findings, sometimes contentious and always stimulating, of the large body of scholarship on matters literary, theoretical and practical which has been devoted to medieval religious drama. The 'I' of this thesis can be placed only in the company of the notable words and deeds of others.

## NOTES

[1] But it included seeing a selection of plays from the Wakefield Cycle at the Mermaid Theatre, London in 1965.

[2] In 1985 my wife and I played the Noahs in an excerpt, translated by her, from the Wakefield *Play of Noah* for the Marlborough Repertory Society, but the audience, perhaps in awe of the Scriptural topic, were bemused by the verbal and physical combat between the characters. This became a salutary experience, guiding my thoughts when I came to consider the place of comedy in my presentation.

# CHAPTER I

## PREPARATION - THE WORD

### A - BACKGROUND READING

Whenever moderns attempt to get to grips with medieval religious drama, the beginning tends to be with the word. One of my earlier - and continuing - tasks was to sample the findings of scholars on the subject in general and on my chosen texts in particular. M.C. Bradbrook, admittedly concerned with sixteenth-century interludes, makes a thoughtful point that the quality of a play **"must be recreated from all the data by scholarly insight before an act of sympathy can reclothe the lines with the depth of colour, movement, and vivacity that they ought to convey."** [1] This notion constantly served as a reminder that I must not only discover how others perceived the literary and dramatic worth of the material I had chosen, but also that I should glean from my reading useful information for my own processes of translation and play production. William Tydeman puts it, simply but effectively, **"Medieval plays were not designed as reading matter"** [2], and Richard Axton points to **"the life that is lost when a scribe reduces a play to written text."** [3]

One general impression which I gained was of the considerable change in attitude by scholars over the years to both the literary and the dramatic value of medieval religious plays. Up to the early twentieth century, the approach to such drama was antiquarian and condescending, as if nothing really counted before Shakespeare. So Katherine Bates could comprehensively dismiss the language of the Mystery Cycles as **"that most beggarly attire with which the vast idea is clothed upon"** [4], while Charles Mills Gayley deigned to call the *Secunda Pastorum* **"this little play"**, and his acknowledgement of it as **"English and alone, and a masterpiece"** [5] implied a severe judgement on everything else. Even scholars more sympathetic to the medieval drama were inclined to underestimate it. E.K. Chambers was prone to view it tidily as part of an evolutionary chain rising towards Shakespeare and undergoing, between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, a **"process of secularization"** [6] from church to open air, from priests to guilds. G.R. Owst's comprehensive interest in medieval civilization led him to examine Mystery Plays mainly for the influence of sermons on them [7]; thus his interest

in Gill's talking about the pot and the water (*Secunda Pastorum*, Lines 317-319) was not in any insight into the characters of either Gill or Mak or in any ironic comment on Mak's failed attempt at theft, but in its link with proverbs found in several homily books.

Yet it is easy to pour unnecessary scorn on these earlier scholars. They serve to remind us that while these plays were ambitious in scope, dealing with the Matter of Christianity from Creation to Judgement, they were also short, and so did not allow for the development of character complexity to which modern audiences are more accustomed. [8] And the earlier scholars often took an encyclopaedic approach to their subject which enables us to widen the scope of our own readings and conclusions. Thus Karl Young's criticised if respected collection of European religious plays helped to move me towards including Continental material in my programme. [9]

A standpoint critical of the literary merit of the medieval religious drama continued into the mid-twentieth century. Hardin Craig, for instance, writes of the *Secunda Pastorum* as **"a clever, farcical play that has come to stand erroneously in the popular mind as typical of mystery plays, possibly because critics are unwilling that mystery plays should be what they were, namely religious plays, and want them to be, as they were not, farces, comedies, and romantic dramas"** [10] - a thoughtful view, but over-stressing the farcical and underrating the religious as a stimulus to effective drama, which latter point Eleanor Prosser counters vigorously: **"As a result of modern prejudice, we have ignored the one key which can unlock the medieval mystery: the religion which was, indeed, its lifeblood"** [11], and so maintains that the didactic does not have to diminish the dramatic.

The essential and often complex link between drama and religion has been explored further. O.B.Hardison Jr., for instance, makes a strong case for the drama in religious ritual when he states that: **"Just as the Mass is a sacred drama encompassing all history and embodying in its structure the central pattern of Christian life on which all Christian drama must draw, the celebration of the Mass contains all elements necessary to secular performances."** [12] He explains, in addition, that the brevity of the Nativity episode in the *Secunda Pastorum* **"reveals not secularization but pious devotion to purity of source and tradition."** [13] So Hardison's arguments drew me back to the dynamic from which all three of my chosen dramatic pieces sprang, and which a modern scholar, whatever his attitude to religion, cannot ignore. If, too, its greater length and the greater amount of critical commentary on it lead in this thesis to a particular emphasis on the *Secunda Pastorum*, the other two pieces are worthy of respect, for their intention as well as for their dramatic, or potentially dramatic, qualities.

Other scholars, moreover, have seen other merits in the plays. Thus Glynne Wickham, criticizing those who are not prepared **"to credit medieval actors and technicians (and, by implication, playwrights also) with a mental age of more than seven"** [14], defends the plays' popularity and relative sophistication and argues for the amount of organization which must have gone into their performance. The impish critic A.P. Rossiter highlights the element of **"clashing comic contrasts"** [15] in the plays and pleads for a better knowledge of the *Prima* as well as the *Secunda Pastorum*. Such lively comments persuaded me that my chosen pieces deserved careful planning and an incessant openness to their dramatic possibilities

V.A. Kolve advances the discussion of the comic element in *Secunda Pastorum* by pointing out that Cycle dramatists on occasions **"invent a comic action simply in order to parallel the central action of the play, to honor and adumbrate that action by playing it twice, in different modes: Mak, Gill and a stolen sheep anticipate the true nativity adoration of Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus."** [16] This prompted me to appreciate the basic unity of the play, with the message of the Nativity providing the driving force which both counterpoints and illuminates the comedy of Mak and the shepherds, and which is far from being the tacked-on religious conclusion to, admittedly, the bulk of the action. When speaking of the Corpus Christi drama in general, Kolve introduces a sophisticated level of interpretation of its intent, **"to celebrate and elucidate, never, not even temporarily, to deceive ... . A lie disguised to tell the truth about reality, the drama was understood as significant play."** [17] Again, I recalled the need to have the dramatic and interpretative possibilities of the plays ever in mind, even if I did not accept the interpretations of all scholars.

The deliberations of Rosemary Woolf gave further insights into the *Secunda Pastorum*, particularly into the possibility that that Wakefield Master might have been familiar with French farces, of which *Maitre Pierre Pathelin* is the most noteworthy example. She persuaded me as well to increase my respect for the other two dramatic pieces in my programme with her arguments that liturgical plays never left the church but existed side by side with the Mysteries, and that they reached their highest point in the 12th century. Woolf summed it up with the comment that, as far as medieval English religious drama was concerned, **"it is change rather than progress that has to be described."** [18]

Even the demise of the Cycles has caused both scholarly debate and a measure of rehabilitation for them. If Rosemary Woolf restates the often-argued case for humanist,

Renaissance influences making the literary and aristocratic condemn them as crude, Father H.C.Gardiner argues forcefully that the Cycles' last days came "**not from any internal decay, but from an external force, the hostility of the Reformation.**" [19] At least both scholars mention the continuing popularity of the plays with local townspeople, especially in the north, in the second half of the sixteenth century, and the hostility to them, whether religious or literary, as more London based. In a sense, the Cycles were the victims of history as much as any lack of dramatic quality in them, and again I was being warned against approaching them with condescension..

While debate has continued on the literary merits of medieval religious drama, another general impression which I gained was that some scholars have made considerable advances in the understanding of the original conditions under which it was performed, and there has been a greater willingness to test its dramatic qualities by presenting plays for public performance, in or out of church. Thus, in the first instance, William Tydeman, citing Continental as well as English examples, can point to the ceremonial customs linked with Christmas tropes and to the presence of midwives in them [20], to the importance of *mansion*-staging which dominated the medieval period [21], to a civic desire - Lucerne and York are mentioned especially - for acting of a high standard in religious drama. [22] John C. Coldewey extends this last point by emphasising that "**many medieval plays were part of tremendous enterprises where civic or parish stakes were high. These enterprises drew pleasure, profit, and blessings upon their participants.**" [23] In a general defence of medieval acting standards, John R.Elliott Jr. contends that even in liturgical drama acting styles might have been "**less monochromatic than was once supposed.**" [24] I was to take pains with what I was attempting, and was to take nothing for granted.

Martial Rose, among others, makes the case for regional variations in the way the plays were presented. Although I did not come to follow it in every detail, Rose's cogent arguments for the Wakefield Cycle's being performed "**in one fixed locality, on a multiple stage, and in the round**" [25] helped to banish early any fleeting thought of presenting the *Secunda Pastorum* on a conventionally-perceived wheeled pageant. And Alan H. Nelson [26] took me even farther from pageant-wagons with his contention that, in the case of the Wakefield Cycle, the plays were staged very much as Martial Rose maintains, and that pageants were used chiefly for non-dramatic processions associated with the presentation - a point which Stanley J. Kahrl also makes in connexion with the *tableaux vivants* of Lincoln. [27]

And secondly, if scholars like Glynne Wickham and Martial Rose are theorists, they base many of their ideas on practice. Furthermore, in recent years there have been increasing numbers of productions of medieval religious drama, encouraged in part by a revival of interest in verse drama by dramatists like T.S.Eliot and Christopher Fry, and in part by the development of community plays, the nature of which has much in common with the production of the Cycles. Thus the 1951 Festival of Britain presentation of the York Cycle of plays by E.Martin Browne led to their becoming the focus of the triennial York Festival. I noted that they are presented in the ruins of Saint Mary's, a fixed site which John Marshall regrets "**bears such little resemblance to what is now known of the performance conditions in medieval and Tudor York.**" [28] The York Cycle has been presented elsewhere, such as at Leeds in 1975 and at Toronto in 1977 - and, indeed, some of the plays have been acted in the streets of York, as in 1992. Other significant presentations include a spectacular outdoor acting of *The Castle of Perseverance* at Toronto in 1979 and the evolving production of *The Mysteries* at the National Theatre in London between 1977 and 1985. The Canadian experiences in particular provide encouragement that people outside the bounds of England might appreciate the performance of such drama.

This reading about modern productions helped towards the making of some decisions for my presentation. For instance, Sheila Lindenbaum, reporting on the staging of the York Cycle at Toronto in 1977 [29], upholds the effectiveness of small pageant-wagons (measuring six feet by twelve feet), especially when the *platea* in front of them was exploited. Her argument is not only an interesting response to those scholars who have shown some reservations about the dimensions and practicability of pageant-wagons in such narrow areas as the streets of York, but also it bears some influence on the dimensions of my main set structure for the Saint Nicholas play and for the *Secunda Pastorum*. [30]

Delving into accounts of modern productions also raised a problem on which I had to reflect continually. How far should we adapt medieval religious drama to the assumptions and tastes of present-day audiences? Should we attempt to make any presentation as close to original acting conditions as possible, including using the original language? John Marshall is harsh on productions which allow "**an ill-conceived notion of audience expectation and response to obscure the nature and demands of a medieval text, leading to the compromise between authenticity and accessibility which rarely satisfies the interests of either**" [31], and is even harsher on attempts "**to achieve spurious relevance through acts of gimmickry.**" [32]

These are daunting words for someone planning to stage medieval religious plays in New Zealand and knowing that compromises must be made. Such a presentation faces hurdles enough, because of our country's remoteness from the European mainstream even in an age of communications technology, and its smaller population. In addition, although these problems are not restricted to New Zealand, fewer people study Latin in these times, and many are tempted to regard Middle English as a more foreign language than it really is; fewer people attend places of Christian worship regularly; we find lessening knowledge of the assumptions, religious, cultural and linguistic, on which these plays are based. If churches are the venues for such drama, there are fewer iconographical clues to reinforce the dramatic message, and certainly, in the South Pacific, no murals to be re-discovered under layers of zealous whitewash. [33] It is easy, then, for a would-be director here to shy away from turning a seemingly abstruse text into what could be equally abstruse action. But I took some small comfort from John R.Elliott Jr's wistful thought that "**We may wonder if the mysteries can ever be made to sound to our time as they sounded to theirs**" [34], and from his argument that if Middle English may do for select, academic audiences, translation - and whatever this may imply for adaptation - is needed for a wider appeal.

Moreover, I could take considerable encouragement from the many scholars who, as we have seen in these pages, have been prepared to study medieval religious drama in the context of original acting conditions, and further to attempt, in spite of considerable obstacles, performances of these plays, either adapted to modern tastes or as near to medieval practices as possible, which have proved stimulating to both scholars and the general public. I was heartened enough to continue with the important early task of translating my chosen texts from Medieval Latin and Middle English into a form of Modern English suitable to dramatic presentation in front of others.

Forward steps must still include avoiding potholes. If medieval drama studies tend to begin with the word, there is still a danger that they may end there, too. The study of the word must continue to be valued as, for example, the achievements of the Leeds Centre for Medieval Studies in publishing facsimiles and the REED scheme to publish all records of drama in the United Kingdom and Ireland attest. But, as we shall see later [35], there is an equal probability that earnest attempts to educate people in medieval significances - for instance, the shepherds' gifts to the Christ-Child in the *Secunda Pastorum* - can draw us back towards a narrowly literary approach to the plays. In medieval religious drama, word and action are, as much as elsewhere in the world of theatre, intertwined.

## B - TRANSLATION

As I have indicated, my reading of scholarly material on medieval religious drama was a great incentive in my work of translating the chosen texts into Modern English. There were occasions, however, when the translation preceded the background reading, as was the case for the Saint Nicholas play. The discussion of the texts in this part of the chapter appears in their order of performance: in fact, my dealings with the *Secunda Pastorum* began long before my work with the other pieces, and ended long after.

### 1. THE VOICE OF GOD FROM THE YORK "JUDGEMENT DAY"

Of the four translations which I attempted, this brief Middle English passage [36] was the freest, to the point of becoming a paraphrase. It was used as part of my introductory material, to suggest God's view of what people had done with His world. My references were from A.C.Cawley [37] and Peter Happé. [38] Although I took liberties with the wording and condensed the original material, I felt that the best way to create for this stage of my performance the atmosphere of sadness and of Christ's Sacrifice was to keep to the simple if measured metre of the original. The condensing led me to change the eight-line stanza with its rhyme scheme of ABABABAB to one of four lines rhyming ABAB, which allowed for more frequent pausing and for the audience to reflect on what God says.

### 2. THE CHRISTMAS TROPE

My source for the translation [39] of the Limoges Trope of the Shepherds at the Manger was Karl Young. [40] The Latin of the very brief text presented little difficulty, but I found that a heritage of my Anglican youth, a familiarity with the Authorised Version of the Bible and with the Book of Common Prayer, tended to channel the wording of my translation, so that "*pannis inuolutum*" naturally became "*wrapped in swaddling clothes*." Then, as the overall plan of the performance emerged, music came to be an important element in the presentation of the trope (as it was, of course, in the original), so that proportionally less time was spent in polishing my translation than was done with, say, the *Secunda Pastorum*.

### 3. THE PLAY OF SAINT NICHOLAS AND THE THREE SCHOLARS

During a 1995 course in Medieval Latin my tutor required from me a translation of this miracle play [41], which I attempted in verse. While shorter and less complex than the *Secunda Pastorum*, the Saint Nicholas play impressed me with one or two lighter touches in the characterization of both the old couple (the innkeeper and his wife) and the scholars and with the odd sly comment in the dialogue, the play on "*caro recens*" in Lines 58, 60 and 62, for example.

At this stage I did not entertain the idea of performing the play, but my tutor's suggestion on returning the exercise that it might be worth producing persuaded me eventually to add it to my programme. Moreover, when I began the admittedly limited background reading on the Saint Nicholas plays, some words of Charles Mills Gayley, an earlier scholar of whose work it is easy to be dismissive, increasingly impressed me. Dealing with the Fleury play's being performed by medieval schoolboys, he stated that the Latin was of the simplest sort **"such as youngsters could commit to memory with no feeling of resentment towards the charitable saint."** [42] Here was some confirmation of the lightness of touch when dealing with a serious topic which I had detected when translating the play, and, furthermore, his emphasis on youth led me to consider casting it with college pupils.

Once I had decided on presenting the play, I consulted (and used subsequently as my standard) the version of the text which appears in Karl Young. [43] The differences between my two sources proved minor, and mainly concerned with spelling variants of the same word - for instance, Harrington chooses "*hospitium*" rather than Young's "*hospicium*" in Line 4 - or with the directions which precede the stanzas of dialogue. Thus, just before Line 13 Young has "*omnes*" while Harrington writes "*Clerici*." One small difference of layout became apparent in Lines 37 to 44 where Harrington treats the old woman's inflammatory speech as one stanza when Young divides it into the more normal two quatrains. The comparison of the texts therefore led to a few virtually insignificant changes.

My verse translation kept to the original's basic quatrain stanza with its AABB rhyme scheme, as I felt that its pace was appropriate to its brief but eventful narrative. However, I departed from the Latin metre, especially in ending almost every line with a stressed, monosyllabic word ("*cause*" and "*shores*" in Lines 1 and 2 set the pattern), whereas the original employed polysyllabic words which, to those accustomed to English

cadences, would call to mind Byron's *Don Juan*. Again, Lines 1 and 2 supply good examples in "*litas*" and "*exteras*."

If I emphasised the original's scholarly atmosphere in the opening stanzas with more formal expressions like "*learning's noble cause*" (Line 1) and "*higher tomes*" (Line 14), elsewhere I introduced more informal language. The old woman incites her husband to murder because "*we've got it made*" (Line 41), the old man refers to money as "*dough*" in Line 35 - though perhaps this is a slang term from not the character's or actors' youth but from mine - and he addresses the traveller-cum-saint as "*You are gentry, that's for sure*" (Line 54). Formality fittingly returns at the end with Saint Nicholas' use of words like "*contrite*" (Line 70) and "*implore*" (Line 76). So, one effect of my translation was to widen the range of formality in the dialogue, to help highlight the lighter touches which I saw in the play.

The overall simplicity of the language and the use of verse meant that the script presented little difficulty for the young cast to learn, although the very able actor playing the old man constantly turned Line 31's "*Come in, lads*" into a Battle-of-Britainish "*Come in, chaps*." Perhaps the influence of the language of my youth was greater than I thought. Also, if there was a scarcity of stage directions in the original, the skilled construction of the dialogue led easily to action, a quality shared with the *Secunda Pastorum* and appreciated by actors and director alike. After the performance, I added to the script stage directions and extra business which had developed during rehearsals.

#### 4. THE "SECUNDA PASTORUM"

The translation process for the Middle English *Secunda Pastorum* was more complicated, and not only because the play is far longer than the others. As my first step towards writing my own version I examined the editing, translating and adapting work of others. [44] The great scholarly interest in the cycles in general and the popularity of the *Secunda Pastorum* in particular afforded me greater scope for investigation than with the trope and the Saint Nicholas play. My great debt to the authorities whom I consulted is obvious, even when I presume to disagree with them. Also, the stage directions which I included at this point were based on their helpful suggestions as well as on the few Latin directions which survive in Huntingdon MS. HM1. The abilities of the experts made the translating task appear effortless, an impression which soon faded with experience.

My first difficulty was to formulate a basic approach to a work several centuries old. As we have seen, it is a problem which besets modern directors of medieval plays. Should I keep as close to the original as possible, seeking praise from the purist while confusing those whose knowledge of the times and language of Middle English is scant? Or, because my version was to be staged in Blenheim, should I adapt what is a drama script for the Wakefield Master's contemporaries to the perceptions and experiences of twentieth-century New Zealanders?

My initial approach was in direct contrast to the light-heartedness I adopted in translating the Fleury version of the Saint Nicholas play, in that I aimed for closeness to the original. I had examined Adrian Henri's admirable modern adaptation and abridgement of the Wakefield Mystery Plays for the Wakefield centenary celebrations of 1988, noting in his introductory remarks that his aim was to offer **"in no way an academic transcription, but an attempt to preserve the spirit of the medieval texts in an actable modern version."** [45] His Cain drives a tractor and the shepherds of the *Secunda Pastorum* become **"three lads from Pontefract"** who are fond of **"a bit of a bevvy."** [46] I recognized that this makes for more vibrant theatre, but I considered it debatable whether the spirit of the original text really is maintained by too great a departure from it - surely trying to work in references to farmbikes, freezing works and Marlborough drought conditions creates problems of its own.

So I embarked on a translation which was serviceable after its fashion, but strained at several points in rhyme and rhythm. The use of mid-line rhyme in the opening quatrain of each stanza had, in fact, disappeared altogether. I felt the need to draft some introductory remarks, fortunately long since abandoned. Typical of their confessional mood were the words: **"I have on occasion resorted to paraphrasing (Lines 28 and 101, for instance) or to employing imperfect rhyme (Lines 23 and 27) or even to changing the rhyme pattern (thus Lines 37 to 40 become aabb rather than the normal aaaa). .... Frequently I lose the rhythmic sense of the original."** The fourth stanza of the play (Lines 28 to 36) is a fair example of the clumsiness which I was trying to excuse:

*"And a liveried man with power these days,  
 Look out the fool who grieves or gainsays!  
 None dare reprove him, use what force he may;  
 And yet no-one believes anything that he says -  
 Not one letter.*

*He can take what's ours  
Boasting of his powers,  
And all with the support  
Of those socially better."*

I sent my translation (without the *apologia*) to my supervisor for a second opinion. Back came some useful suggestions for improving my text and a timely if gentle admonition that the Wakefield Master deserved a better response to his extraordinary rhyming powers. As a result I produced a second version which paid more attention to rhyme - even if mid-line rhyme did not re-appear [47] - and less to being literal, and which seemed to concede some ground to Adrian Henri. But my work was still basically more a translation than Henri's adaptation, which meant that even if the language became a little freer, there was no attempt to make the setting more up-to-date. A glance at the re-worked fourth stanza still reveals the highlighting of liveries and of the poor treatment of medieval peasants, even if the rhyme scheme and wording have altered:

*"Once a liveried man gets control these days,  
Watch out the fool who opposes his ways!  
You can't but put up with the tricks he plays;  
Yet no-one believes a thing that he says -  
Not one letter.  
He can take what's ours,  
He boasts and glowers,  
For he's backed by the powers  
Of the socially better."*

Throughout the play, moreover, there were still archaic elements in my language, showing that this was not a modern play. At the same time, the Northern English dialect disappeared, so that Mak's putting on a false accent when he first comes upon the shepherds provokes a comment on social classes and on snobbery rather than on "*sothren tothe*" (Line 215).

Furthermore, I reminded myself continually as I translated for the second time that my aim was to produce not just a translation but a dramatic script which I must use later to communicate with a New Zealand town audience. Paradoxically, this drove me back to the original text when I had completed this version, to check that my now greater freedom with the language had not caused me to stray from the Wakefield Master's handling of plot and characterization. For instance, Line 21, which reads in the original "*That men say is for the best; we fynde it contrary,*" had become the very different "*Cause our shoulders to sag, our wives to cry*", losing the grudging acknowledgement

by the First Shepherd that not everybody shares his bitter outlook on contemporary social developments. But I satisfied myself that my attempt both avoided a very awkward line to deal with and fitted in with the general sense of oppression in the rest of the stanza.

Another paradoxical consequence of this second version was that I retained the Latin used in Lines 266-267, whereas before I had translated everything into modern English. I saw the comic and ironic possibilities of Mac's imitating a priest, with devotional gestures supporting the words at this point. The Latin original also fitted my greater emphasis on rhyme patterns far better than my first English translation ("*Your hands I commend/To Pilate, O*"). I decided, however, to keep the Latin at this one point only, for a modern audience unaccustomed to a language which ordinary medieval people were prone to garble anyway.

This second translation was not without its blemishes and, moreover, would still demand my giving great thought to matters like movement, expression, tone and characterisation to enliven my literary toil. However, all the time I was aware that the original manuscript, while presenting me with the inevitable problems of bridging a considerable language gap, was inspiration enough in the process of turning word into drama. As J.W. Robinson comments of the Wakefield Master and the York Realist: "**Their scripts, particularly the former's, are as replete with implicit directions for actions as Shakespeare's.**" [48] Wherever I looked in the *Secunda Pastorum*, and not only in the Latin of Lines 266-267, there were clues for a director to exploit: the Third Shepherd's mistaking of the other two for ghosts (Lines 136-144) gives opportunity for broad comedy, even slapstick; the shepherds' meeting with the Christ-Child (Lines 710-754) is a skilful blend of theology and humour which can keep both directors and audience on their toes. And if the Angel sings angelically, how can we avoid thinking that the shepherds' musical efforts tend more towards the cacophonous? The Wakefield Master was, like the author of the Fleury Saint Nicholas play, a very crafty person.

Now it was time to consult a third opinion. I asked my wife, a perceptive student of Old and Middle English, to sit at the computer and to share reading my efforts aloud with me. This was useful for highlighting weak or inappropriate words and for examining both rhyme and the flow of dialogue. But its chief value lay in assessing the rhythm patterns of my translation, an aspect which I feared I had neglected in my desire to improve the rhyme. There was need also to examine closely those moments where characters shared lines and where I altered the number of feet in a group of lines for

special effect - in Lines 204-206, for instance, when Mak imitates the speech of his social superiors. As a result of this reading session I made a number of minor amendments.

At my wife's suggestion, we made a tape recording of the amended script, another valuable exercise in that there was more leisure to examine speech patterns and the impact of the language. The rewind button is an excellent invention. We were able to detect infelicities which had evaded our notice when we read from the computer - and it was significant to note that there were several such instances. I was able to play the tape again, to weed out even more weak expressions and to work on allusions which might confuse a modern audience. At this stage, for instance, the term "*liveried*" in Line 28 gave way to "*boss's*."

The next step I took with some trepidation. I invited three other people to join my wife and me in a play-reading of my efforts, followed by a discussion of the suitability of the material for production purposes. These were colleagues and friends with both an appreciation of literature and some experience in the theatre; nor were they sycophants. They coped very well with coming cold to the rhythm and vocabulary of the material, which was encouraging to me, and while they felt that my text had production potential, they made numerous and valuable suggestions for improving the language, which I was happy to incorporate into my text.

Some of these amendments were minor. Thus, Line 13 ("*Our arable land grows as much as a floor*") became "*Our arable land grows no more than a floor.*" Yet even this small change allows a careful listener to wonder whether it is the land or the floor doing the growing. An example of greater import was the group's unanimous reservation about my rendering of Lines 724-6:

*"Here, little Chap,  
Of our faith You're the top:  
I would drink of Your cup....."*

They felt that as well as a strained sense of rhyme, the passage displayed an obscurity which would puzzle a modern audience. Their comments forced me to look back at the original text and to realize that I had fallen prey to literalism, perhaps in an attempt to highlight medieval ideas of hierarchy and, in the reference to "*Your cup*", to emphasise the importance of the Mass in the religious practices of the Middle Ages. So I decided on another version:

*"Our Saviour You'll be,  
Your blood sets us free,  
Your light shines on me ....."*

The change from "*cup*" to "*blood*" made the meaning more accessible to twentieth-century ears while retaining resonances of my point about the importance of the Mass. The introduction of "*light*" also linked Line 726 with "*day-star*" in the next.

These several workings of the second version completed, I sent the script to my supervisor who considered that I had a reasonable base for a production. The rehearsal period, which started some months later, brought another spate of minor changes. Thus, in Line 49 "*sit on the grass*" became "*sit on a tussock*." As they got into their parts, the actors suggested changes which they felt would fit their characters better. Because our Angel was female, "*he*" became "*she*" between Lines 649 and 665. The First Shepherd's "*And bite on a turd*" [49] gave way to the more forceful "*Go bite on a turd*." The silliness, mine rather than the Wakefield Master's, of Line 404's "*Who's there by the door?*" revealed itself when Mak was standing outside his cottage and so unable to know exactly where Gill was inside. An alteration to "*Is anyone there?*" allowed Mak to add exasperation to his tone as Gill slowly made her way to the door.

Another improvement, concerning Line 560, came and went at the final rehearsal. To the Third Shepherd's asking about the identity of the godparents for the 'child', the actor playing Mak replied, "*God help them all*" instead of the script's "*Good luck to them all*." My instant reaction was to think how much better the actor's version was than mine and how it made more sense of the First Shepherd's response, "*That sounds odd to me*." However, the moment to comment passed, as I did not wish either to interrupt the actors at this stage of rehearsal or to burden Mak with a last-minute change. On the performance night Mak reverted to my words, to my regret.

One piece of translation, at the shepherds' discovery of Mak's and Gill's crime, worked unintentionally well. I had rendered the original "*Get weapon*" (Line 615) as "*Find some arms*", thinking that the First Shepherd was looking for something - a knife, perhaps - to coerce the miscreants. But all three shepherds, Mak and Gill took a different meaning from the line, believing that the shepherds were seeking some physical evidence whether the 'child' was human or not. Gill argued further that the next line ("*He was grabbed by an elf*") could be taken as an excuse which she offered when no human arms were found. Although my translation and assumption were literally correct, the cast's interpretation was persuasive, and changed for the better the intent of what seemed,

when I was translating, uncharacteristically violent words from the First Shepherd.

After the performance, I added, as I had done with the Saint Nicholas play, more stage directions to my script, to make some passages easier to comprehend, for example the frightening of the Third Shepherd by the other two and his relief at finding that they were not ghosts in Lines 136-144. The Third Shepherd's changes of mood I had suggested originally by dashes at Lines 137 and 140, but the need for a physical response (running away, then stopping) to some actions by the First and Second Shepherds enhanced the significance of Line 144's "*As my flight I'll spurn.*"

Furthermore, at this stage I asked some of my actors for their opinion of the script. I was curious to know how easy it had been to learn, how fluently and logically it held together. There were dangers in such a request. The positive reception to the final performance might have encouraged the cast to see everything in a rosy glow, or they might have been polite to my face and critical behind my back. The sense and sincerity of their responses allayed my fears.

All agreed that the rhythm and rhyme were a help in the learning of lines, although there were individual difficulties. Thus Mak found Line 202's "*great men's orders brings*" a tongue-twister. As this was the first specific criticism which I received, I went scurrying back to the original text to see how close my words were to the Wakefield Master's, as I did on other occasions. In this case it was clear that I was the creator of Mak's problem, partly because I had used the device of inversion to allow "*brings*" to rhyme with "*things*" at the end of the previous line. Mak also experienced difficulty with Line 207 ("*Why, who am I?*"), attempting different emphases on the words at different rehearsals. Neither this nor having Mak disdainfully move away from the shepherds relieved an unease which continued until beyond the performance, where the line was received well enough. I could defend myself by claiming that this time I was keeping to the original ("*Why, who be ich?*"), but my decision to abandon the notion of Mak's imitating "*sothren tothe*" had perhaps lessened the impact of the form "*ich*", and so weakened the whole line.

The young actor playing the Third Shepherd made the shrewd observation that his first comments (Lines 118-119) contained rhyming ("*Saint Nicholas*"/"*was*") which looked reasonable enough on paper but which was less effective vocally. In addition, he found that on some occasions it was hard to sustain a rhythmic flow where I had employed enjambement. He gave Lines 166-7 as an example:

*"I'll not gain riches if I stay*

***Tending fields."***

This persuasive point, accepted because I knew that the Third Shepherd was no mere sing-song deliverer of lines, was re-inforced when I noticed how much more skilfully the Wakefield Master, who also used enjambement there, handled this passage:

***"For yit lay my soper never on my stomake  
In feyldys."***

The actress playing Gill, while happy enough with the rhythm and rhyme as aids to learning, found the device of inversion an obstacle at times, as in Line 308 ("***By your scrawny neck you're more likely to swing***"). Once more I could claim that the original itself is inverted, but I concede the danger of using the device as a mere convenience for a rhyme scheme. Gill expressed some reservations, too, about Line 443 ("***And call out by the wall on Mary and John***"). I accept now that I should have kept to the original's "***cry***" rather than introduce "***call***", as it captures better the spirit of Gill's feigned childbirth. Further valid comments by Gill explored the grey area between translation and characterization. [50]

The business of translation, be it the *Secunda Pastorum* or anything else, should never be complete. The translator must remain dissatisfied, prepared either to keep working on his efforts or to acknowledge that others can do it better. In the case of drama texts, another sense of incompleteness, as my background reading has revealed, comes from the need to give the words their full significance in terms of action. This was the next major step in my project.

## NOTES

- [1] Quoted in Peter Happé's "A Guide to Criticism of Medieval English Theatre" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge, 1994), p.315.
- [2] William Tydeman, "An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle, p.1.
- [3] Richard Axton, *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1974), p.13.
- [4] Katherine Bates, *The English Religious Drama* (1893, reprinted Port Washington, 1966), p.169.
- [5] Charles Mills Gayley, *Plays of Our Forefathers* (London, 1908), p.182.
- [6] E.K.Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford, 1903), vol. II, p.147.
- [7] G.R.Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford, rev. ed. 1961), *passim*.
- [8] When my cast came to rehearse the *Secunda Pastorum*, they found that there were sudden jumps of mood and action and some confusion whether certain lines were better directed at the audience or at other characters - the first scene between Mak and Gill (Lines 296 to 344) is a good example.
- [9] Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford, 1933), *passim*.
- [10] Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1955), p.234.
- [11] Eleanor Prosser, *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays* (Stanford, 1961), p.18.
- [12] O.B.Hardison Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama* (Baltimore, 1965), p.79. We may consider also the drama implicit in the Bible and in works like Handel's *Messiah*.

[13] *ibid.*, p.251.

[14] Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300 to 1660*, vol. I (London, 1959), p.151.

[15] A.P.Rossiter, *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans* (London, 1950), p.80.

[16] V.A.Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (London, 1966), p.173. In Chapter II, Part A of this thesis where I discuss characterization in the *Secunda Pastorum*, I resist, for instance, presenting Mak as a symbol for the Devil, but Kolve's influence leads me to highlight the differences between the false and true nativities.

[17] *ibid.*, p.32. Indeed, Kolve's arguments that such drama "**was conceived as a game**" (p.14) have Chaucerian resonances about them.

[18] Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London, 1972), p.53. I grant that my first two pieces were Continental in origin, and that the *Secunda Pastorum* came last in the programme - but this was because it was longest and last written, not to fit some evolutionary thesis. Richard Axton, in *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages*, takes a wider look at non-ecclesiastical influences on medieval religious plays.

[19] Harold C.Gardiner, *Mysteries' End* (New Haven, 1946), p.xii.

[20] William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1978), pp.41-42.

[21] *ibid.*, p.57.

[22] *ibid.*, pp.202-204.

[23] John C. Coldewey, "Some Economic Aspects of the Late Medieval Drama" in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds. Marianne C. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey (Bloomington, 1989), p.97.

[24] John R.Elliott Jr., "Medieval Acting" in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds. Marianne C.Briscoe and John C.Coldewey, p.247.

[25] Martial Rose, *The Wakefield Mystery Plays* (London, 1961), p.26.

[26] Alan H. Nelson, "Some Configurations of Staging in Medieval English Drama", Chapter 7 of *Medieval English Drama*, eds. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago, 1972). However, I acknowledge Sheila Lindenbaum's defence of pageant-wagons - see **Note 29** below.

[27] Stanley J. Kahrl, "Medieval Staging and Performance" in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds. Marianne C. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey, pp.219-237.

[28] John Marshall, "Modern Productions of Medieval English Plays" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle, p.291. In fact, over the years these performances have caused controversy. The latest was in 1996 when a woman was chosen to play the part of God.

[29] Sheila Lindenbaum, "The York Cycle at Toronto: Staging and Performance Style" in *Medieval English Drama: a Casebook*, ed. Peter Happé (London, 1984), pp.200-211.

[30] See Chapter II, Part A of my thesis.

[31] John Marshall, "Modern Productions of Medieval English Plays", p.291.

[32] *ibid.*, p.297. I note, however, that Marshall defends the modern practice of having women play women's parts - see the section on "The Actors and Their Characters" in Chapter II, Part A of my thesis.

[33] See Chapter IV of my thesis for a further discussion on the value of iconography in studying medieval religious drama.

[34] John R. Elliott, Jr., *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage* (Toronto, 1989), p.139.

[35] See Chapter IV of this thesis.

[36] See Appendix A.

[37] A.C. Cawley, *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (London, 1956), pp.191-192.

[38] Peter Happé, *English Mystery Plays* (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp.632-633. As with Cawley, Happé uses British Library MS. Additional 35,290.

[39] See Appendix B for both the Latin original and my translation.

[40] Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, vol. II, p.4, where Young reproduces Paris Bibl. Nat., MS. lat. 887, Trop. Lemovicense saec. xi, fol. 9v.

[41] The text appeared on Pages 228-232 of K.P.Harrington's *Mediaeval Latin* (Chicago, 1962).

[42] Charles Mills Gayley, *Plays of Our Forefathers*, p.63. Gayley was also the first scholar to use the term 'the Wakefield Master.'

[43] Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, vol. II, pp.330-332. Young gives as his source Orleans, Bibl. de la Ville MS. 201(*olim* 178), Miscellanea Floriacensia, saec. xiii, pp.183-187. This Latin version I present with my translation in Appendix C.

[44] My principal sources at this stage were: A.C.Cawley (ed.), *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, Peter Happé (ed.), *English Mystery Plays*, Adrian Henri (adapt.), *The Wakefield Mysteries* (London, 1991) and Martial Rose (trans.), *The Wakefield Mystery Plays*. The final version of my translation appears in Appendix D.

[45] Adrian Henri, *The Wakefield Mysteries*, p.vi.

[46] *ibid.*, pp.48 and 49.

[47] At a later stage, I read Martin Stevens' and A.C. Cawley's persuasive argument - on Pages xxix to xxxi of the Introduction to *The Towneley Plays* (Oxford, 1994) - that the Wakefield stanza consisted of thirteen lines, rhyming ABABABABCDDDC, rather than of nine. However, I kept to the nine-line stanza, to allow me greater freedom in changing Middle English to a more modern idiom.

[48] J.W.Robinson, *Studies in Fifteenth-Century Stagecraft* (Kalamazoo, 1991), p.12.

[49] Burdened with the susceptibilities of my 1950s Anglican youth, I approached the Vicar of the Blenheim Anglican Parish about using "**turd**" in church. His amused understanding set my mind at rest.

[50] Discussed further in Chapter II, Part B of my thesis.

## CHAPTER II

### PREPARATION - THE ACTION

#### A - SELECTION AND ADAPTATION

##### 1. THE CONTENTS OF THE PERFORMANCE

When I first considered testing out the idea of the palatability of medieval religious drama to a modern New Zealand audience, I had only the *Secunda Pastorum* in mind. Then, thanks to my tutor's encouragement, I decided to add the Saint Nicholas play to the presentation. I included the Limoges Trope to give an audience some idea of drama developments in the Middle Ages, the subject matter also making an interesting comparison with that of the *Secunda Pastorum*. A final dramatic touch was the taping of the section of God's opening speech from the York *Judgement Day*, the aim of which was to underscore the mood of sadness in the first section of the programme. The presentation thus became European as well as English in scope.

The musical nature of the Limoges Trope and the fact that the combined playing times of the dramatic pieces would be barely an hour led me to add further music to the programme, even if the strict limits on my musical abilities would necessitate others' help with this aspect of the programme. The Marlborough Girls' College assisted with the Limoges Trope, while the Blenheim Choral Society agreed to contribute three items: the well-known Coventry Carol, the fourteenth-century German carol *Personent Hodie* and the fifteenth-century German hymn *Es Ist Ein Ros* by Michael Pretorius, the last incorporated into the *Secunda Pastorum*. This music helped to emphasise the European element in proceedings. Two more modern carols - *Good King Wenceslas* and *O Come All Ye Faithful* - allowed the audience to sing as well as to witness. There were other sundry items of music in connexion with the *Secunda Pastorum*.

The programme had now extended itself into a list of items whose possible underlying unity might escape many members of a modern audience. With some misgivings I accepted the idea of having a Commentator for the evening. I had no desire either to make the proceedings overlong or to distract from the main emphasis on drama and

music. Moreover, once the first interesting or obscure point was glossed, it would require great self-discipline to stem the explanatory flow. After the script was written and rigorously edited, the Commentator would have to adhere to it strictly. [1] Indeed, as rehearsals progressed we inserted into the Saint Nicholas play a piece of business aimed at deflating explanatory pomposity. I decided to undertake the commentating rôle, with the thought that if the Commentary proved too lengthy on the night, I was in the best position to abridge it. The alternative of lengthy programme notes I dismissed as being no better. And a clinching argument for employing a Commentator is found in medieval practice; at the beginning of *Everyman*, for example, a Messenger outlines the story and explains the point of the play, at the end a Doctor moralizes on what has been presented. Shakespeare's *Henry V* also has a commentating character in Chorus.

## 2. THE ACTORS AND THEIR CHARACTERS

As in any drama performance, everything else comes to nothing if the actors fail to make an impact on the audience. I had to give serious thought as to who would bring the plays alive and how they would best do it. Fortunately, Marlborough is rich in amateur dramatic and musical talent, but even the best available would be dealing with material outside their usual range of experience.

The musical emphasis of the Limoges Trope and my plan to treat the Saint Nicholas play as if it were being performed by young medieval scholars provided firm guidelines for acting. I made a final decision to cast the latter with students as I knew, from a strong association with secondary school drama, that there was a particularly talented group available, and quick and amenable enough to prevent drama becoming farce. Before the presentation of both plays I arranged for the performers to process into their positions and to be introduced as monks and scholars: during the Saint Nicholas play, the deflationary business directed against the Commentator allowed the actor playing the old woman to become very briefly a monkish scholar. The third play would exercise me more.

The first consideration for the *Secunda Pastorum* - indicating another facet of the purism/adaptation debate - was to choose an overall style of acting. Were we to aim for a modern approach, looking for psychological depths in characters, or were we to go to the other extreme, acting as if we were medieval people self-consciously undertaking a play for religious devotion or community spirit rather than for any theatrical talent? I noted with interest Sheila Lindenbaum's comments on the range and unevenness of styles

at the 1977 performance of the York Cycle in Toronto [2], and quickly discarded both approaches, for the former demanded a search for something which, however much we might like to discover it, is not there, and the latter was based on the assumption that such plays were amateurishly presented, which, as I have argued earlier [3], has come under justifiable attack from scholars. In taking a middle course, I paid due attention to John R. Elliott Jr's sensible advice to modern actors undertaking the Mystery Plays to concentrate on projecting a powerful voice, on making bold use of gesture and on developing an ear for the rhythm of verse. Elliott claims also that such an approach makes the delivery of laments and prophecies more natural for the audience [4], and the *Secunda Pastorum* shepherds were to declaim a form of the latter after being awoken by the Angel.

My next task, to consider the actors best suited for the play, led me to reflect once more on the fifteenth-century York authorities' desire for "*discrete and able playeres ... sufficient in persoune and Conyng.*" [5] I looked for, and found, talented amateur actors - my membership of the Marlborough Repertory Society and the Blenheim Amateur Operatic Society and again my association with college drama were of considerable assistance - who were also good team members and quick to grasp what I was attempting to do. Two of them had joined the play-reading group which had earlier discussed my translation; all the major characters were to make valuable contributions to the fluency and logic of my script as rehearsals progressed. Indeed, in none of my plays could I detect the presence of acting of the Bottom-the-Weaver school.

One concession to the twentieth century that I was happy to make was the inclusion of females in the plays. William Tydeman is able to list the occasions, mainly on the Continent, when women participated in the medieval religious drama [6], but these were exceptions rather than the rule. Because of a well-established tradition, we can assume that the Coventry Carol lost none of its poignancy when sung by men playing women or that the Blessed Virgin Mary lost no respect if the actor was an apprentice. However, I concur with John Marshall's view that a production today of such plays with men playing women "**can actually distance a modern audience from a sense of shared experience.**" [7] From the actor's point of view, too, the Widow Twankey tradition might allow a modern male to extract more broad comedy from the rôle of Gill, but he might feel less comfortable playing the Blessed Virgin Mary. On the other hand, when I arranged for female students to play monks for the Limoges Trope and two of the scholars in the Saint Nicholas play, I acknowledged present-day sensibilities with humorous remarks in the Commentary.

There is a tendency for scholars to see some of the characters of the *Secunda Pastorum* in symbolic terms [8] - hence Jeffrey Helterman calls Mak "**Satan as Everyshepherd.**" [9] However, while I concede that there is little scope for depth of characterization in the parts of the Angel and of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that my choice of an overall acting style imposed some limits on character interpretation, the Wakefield Master has provided much for a director and actors to work on in his handling of Gill, Mak and the shepherds. They are clearly human beings with traits which any audience, medieval or modern, can recognize. Helterman indeed touches on this when he states that Mak "**is not a sinister figure disguised as a clown but rather a clown trying to borrow some dignity anywhere, even from Satan.**" [10] If the Wakefield Master has Mak weaving magic spells over the shepherds to prevent their waking, may it not appear to work simply because they are sound sleepers? The shepherds, too, operate as a group, yet an examination of the text reveals that they are individuals: the First Shepherd is older and more kindly [11], the Second anti-female, the Third young and more prone to hasty decisions. And Gill emerges as having more cunning and more lawbreaking stamina than Mak. The individuality of the *Secunda Pastorum's* five main characters developed further at rehearsal time.

### 3. THE CHOICE OF VENUE

My background reading on the venues for later medieval religious drama - where scholars have produced a bewildering array of arguments over pageants, processions, 'place and scaffold', 'theatre in the round', national and local trends and the like - convinced me of the sense of Alexandra F. Johnston's comment that "**The players and playwrights of the period were marvelously flexible, responding to the situation that was presented to them.**" [12] I was determined for all of us to be the same. However, one or two persuasive arguments caused me to think carefully before committing myself.

After reading, in Martial Rose's reconstruction of a possible performance of the Wakefield Cycle in the mid-fifteenth century, "**The presentation takes place on the common, in the market place, or in the quarry, but each year there is only one place of performance, and here the audience gathers from far and near to secure a seat in the raked, circular auditorium that surrounds 'the place'**" [13], I considered presenting the evening in the open air. There was an amphitheatre-like grassed area beside the local Repertory Theatre (see Photo 1) which tempted me. But after reflecting on practical matters like audibility, logistics, seating and the weather, I decided that we

would be better off indoors. Medieval presenters were more prepared to take a risk, while I had one chance only.

The next issue became 'to church or not to church.' Again, some telling if negative words of John R. Elliott Jr. took my notice: **"T.S.Eliot's observation that most twentieth-century audiences attend church dramas in the expectation of being virtuously bored forms a ... practical reason why most current producers tend to avoid staging the mysteries in church."** [14] The temptation here lay in the presentation of the *Secunda Pastorum* which could as easily be performed in a theatre or community hall. However, a church was the natural habitat for two of my three dramatic pieces, even if they were shorter, and I saw no need to subscribe to a move which was in danger of driving an unnecessary wedge between religion and humanity. I was aware, also, of the policy of the Blenheim Anglican Parish to open up its Church of the Nativity to cultural activities (see **Photo 2**) - and my presentation had obvious Christian associations, the often symbolic nature of which would benefit from being enacted in a building full of symbolism. The challenge was now on me to present my material in a way which exploited an ecclesiastical environment, yet which engaged the interests of churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike.

#### 4. THE SET, PROPERTIES AND COSTUMES

The choice of a church for the venue meant that any set or sets for my plays were required to have two important qualities, simplicity and movability. While it was possible to remove some furniture from the altar area (see **Photo 3**) where most of our acting was to take place, other items were fixed. The Church of the Nativity was also a busy place, and I knew months ahead that between our final rehearsal and the performance we would have to strike any set construction to allow for a wedding on the Saturday afternoon.

Fortunately only the Saint Nicholas play and the *Secunda Pastorum* needed anything, so I decided that we would use the same set for both pieces, as they both required humble and somewhat run-down buildings. William Tydeman, discussing the medieval *mansion*-convention, points out that our version of the play about Saint Nicholas and the three scholars **"treats the *platea* as the highway outside the inn, as well as depicting the inn's main room and bedroom."** [15], and this was the basic pattern which I followed. The space in front of the first row of pews and the forward section of the sanctuary, the communion rails having been removed, became our *platea*, and on the rear

sanctuary area where the altar table normally stood I planned to have a structure to represent the two rooms of the inn.

At first I wanted this structure to be divided for the presentation of the *Secunda Pastorum*, to become two separate locations, Mak's cottage and the stable at Bethlehem. I was strongly influenced by Martial Rose's specific point, as part of his general argument for a fixed locality and a multiple stage in late medieval Wakefield, that "**Mak's house is opposed to the manger; the shepherds pass from one to the other and even sleep on the green between the two mansions**" [16], and by what I saw as the pattern of contrasts in this play, such as the obvious one between the false and the true nativities. At one point my tutor raised the question of using one set for both locations, but my initial reaction was to reject the idea. However, as the possibility of using the church aisles for the shepherds' journey to Bethlehem became certainty, and as, towards the end of the *Secunda Pastorum*, some aspects of the idea of opposition and contrast gave way to that of accommodation, even for sheep-stealers and their accomplices, the need for two separate houses disappeared. Also, I took note later of Jeffrey Helterman's suggestion, which he sees as one means for a director to make clear to an audience the parallels between the Mak episode and the Nativity, that "**it is even possible that the same place is used for both scenes, so that Mak's cottage is transformed into the manger.**" [17] Stanley J. Kahrl puts it more definitely when he states: "**Every play added by the Wakefield Master can be played on a single stage.**" [18] As with the Saint Nicholas play, the area in front of the cottage-cum-manger was treated as the *platea*, to represent open fields.

Thus one construction, based on a model which I made (see **Photo 4**), finally served for three locations. It consisted of a number of rostra about 200 millimetres high, put together to give an acting area of about 12 square metres. Its 'L' shape, another departure from pageant-wagon influences, gave the impression of two rooms for the Saint Nicholas play's inn, and allowed the bedroom area where the scholars are murdered to become Gill's bed of false pain in the *Secunda Pastorum*. [19] The area was arranged at an angle to the audience, with the two rear sides criss-crossed with slats to represent the wooden framework of a house, most of which was backed with unmedieval polystyrene sheet painted as a cracked and sooty interior. A dark blue star-spangled curtain covered most of the upper half of one side, to represent the night sky. The house sides nearer the audience were open, to give an unobstructed view into the rooms, even if audience and casts had to imagine doors. [20]

The properties matched the simplicity of the set construction and surroundings. A pallet with blankets, a table with eating utensils (including a knife used for the murder of the scholars), stools and a broom were standard for both the Saint Nicholas and *Secunda Pastorum* plays, the latter requiring the addition of a cradle and a large carrot, the sole food in Mak's cottage and waved by him under the shepherds' noses. The general effect aimed for was rustic roughness and poverty. Staffs and crooks emphasised the functions of wandering scholars and shepherds, while the Third Shepherd was marked out by a horn round his neck and a large sixpence in his purse. A pile of animal skins, to give physical and moral significance to Lines 368-369, lay in the *platea* for the *Secunda Pastorum*. The gifts of the shepherds awaited them at the rear of the church as they processed to Bethlehem.

Two properties in the *Secunda Pastorum* represented living beings, cutouts of the stolen sheep and of the Christ-Child, in deliberately contrasting styles. The black and white sheep's 'Footrot Flats' look highlighted the comic and the false, while the flesh and gold tones of the haloed Babe was based on iconographical models like the Wilton Diptych from the end of the fourteenth century. I was conscious that the contrast would have to be enough for the audience to laugh at the sheep, then later to accept the Christ-Child as the shepherds did.

A modern director might be tempted to go along one of three paths with costuming: to choose the dress of New Testament times for historical accuracy, or to opt for medieval garb, or to adopt the avant-garde approach of modern dress - as in the National Theatre's production of *The Mysteries* between 1977 and 1985 - to emphasise relevance throughout the ages. I chose the medieval path. Although conscious of the danger that medieval costumes might alienate an audience by over-suggesting times past, I believed that as the total programme was advertised as drama and music of the Middle Ages and as all three dramatic pieces were written in the Middle Ages, my approach to dress was consistent as well as appropriate.

The generosity of the local Anglican parish overcame one obstacle with costuming - choir robes and cassocks made the monks of the Limoges Trope and the scholars of the Saint Nicholas play look suitably ecclesiastical. The poverty, spiritual as well as physical, of the old innkeeper and his wife contrasted with Saint Nicholas' long white gown and pectoral cross, hidden under a large cloak before he revealed his identity.

If contrasts in the *Secunda Pastorum* became in some ways more blurred thematically towards the end, they were maintained in the costumes. Naturally the three shepherds,

Mak and Gill were dressed as poorer people, Mak having a long-sleeved cloak, the capacity of which to hide stolen goods is mentioned in Line 396 of the play. By comparison, the Angel with her long robe and luminous wings and the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared worthy of the deepest respect. The latter's regal costume - crown, veil, white robe and blue mantle - again revealed iconographical influence such as the illumination 'Virgin and Child' in f.11 of the late thirteenth-century Northern English Psalter and Hymnal MS. Laud Lat. 5, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. [21] Rosemary Woolf succinctly expresses my aim for the last scene when she describes a pageant-wagon of the Annunciation appearing as "**a speaking picture.**" [22] An upshot of this clothing contrast was to underscore the developing thematic notion of accommodation, in that Mak, Gill and the shepherds appeared drawn together in their poverty and humanity.

## 5. THE MUSIC

Music was an important element in the performance, and was used in a variety of ways, just as Chaucer employed varied musical references in *The Miller's Tale*. For example, the singing of carols at the end of each half of the programme was an attempt to give the audience an active part in proceedings, and to allow the singers to follow the custom of taking parts, thus linking the singing with the drama which the audience had witnessed. The first two items of the valuable contribution by the Choral Society, the Coventry Carol and *Personent Hodie*, helped to create, respectively, an atmosphere of sadness and joy, and their third, *Es Ist Ein Ros*, marked a transition in the *Secunda Pastorum* from comedy to adoration, as the shepherds process to Bethlehem. The Marian content of the words in *Es Ist Ein Ros* also prepared actors and audience for the entrance of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Son. In the same play, Mak's caterwauling to his 'child' and the First Shepherd's poor imitation of the beautiful Angel's song not only provided comic contrasts but also confirmed the audience's impressions of the actors' characters.

The business of singing reflecting the character and moral worth of the singers brought me into collision with some scholars. The case of Mak was clear enough, but Richard Rastall, admittedly concerned with the Chester rather than with the Wakefield plays, argues that "**the singing of mortals ... is a positive means of identifying those who are instruments of the Divine Will**" [23], assessing the shepherds as both musical and keen discussers of the Angel's *Gloria*, as the Wakefield shepherds appear to be. Nan Cooke Carpenter contends that in the *Secunda Pastorum* music separates Mak from

"the very musical shepherds." [24] Without doubt we can draw comparisons between the quality of Mak's efforts and those of the shepherds, but we can easily do the same between shepherds and Angel, as Carpenter concedes. In thus making some distinction, for continuing comic purposes, between the Angel's clear notes and the First Shepherd's subsequent cruder attempts, I found an ally in V.A.Kolve. [25] Nor did I see any reason for comic characters to become momentary opera stars on the occasions when they sang together. So when I prepared a modern version of *Sumer is y-cumin in*, with a simple tune, for the shepherds to sing before the entrance of Mak, I planned it to be neither cacophonous nor professional, and when the shepherds repeated the song after visiting Bethlehem, the change was not to be in the quality of the singing but in a more joyful mood, in accord with the notion of the Christ-Child bringing a summer-like joy into a cold and empty world.

Crossing swords with scholars also became an aspect of my treatment of music for the Saint Nicholas play, in that I used none. Clyde W. Brockett pronounces that "**Music was a *sine qua non* whenever a play, spawned by the liturgy, appeared in connexion with the saint's feast**" [26], and Wace in his *Vie de Saint Nicholas* talks of clerks wishing "*De bien lirre, de bien chantier*" (Line 228) on such an occasion. My decision to rely on the spoken rather than the sung word was prompted by my choice of a young cast whose musical abilities, although not poor, were second to their acting talents, but principally by my desire to trace dramatic developments between the Limoges Trope, where I emphasised the musical element, and the *Secunda Pastorum*.

Indeed, the Limoges Trope provided an excellent opportunity for a display of musical talent in another way. The teachers and senior students of Marlborough Girls' College shared in a renewed worldwide interest in plainsong, and were enthusiastic enough to undertake the singing of the item and to write their own music, based on medieval models. They illustrated also in such participation the community aspect of later medieval religious drama, even if the Limoges Trope on which they worked preceded the Mystery Plays by some centuries.

My overall aim was to use music which had some connexion with the Middle Ages. The strength of that connexion was variable - weak, for instance, in the case of the audience carols, but much stronger for the Coventry Carol, contained in Coventry Corporation MS. A 97 and sung by the Choral Society in a version of the sixteenth-century three-part rather than the more popular nineteenth-century four-part arrangement. *Personent Hodie* was presented in an arrangement by Gustav Holst, but sung in Latin. Because the music for the Wakefield plays has not survived, I used the

*Gloria*, sung also in Latin, from the Chester Cycle (British Library MS. Harley 2124, fol. 42r).

## 6. THE BANNS

It was in the area of making the public aware of the performance, entitled the rather Dickensian *Christmas Past*, that medieval had to make way for modern. Instead of arranging proclamations through the streets perhaps a week before the event, I had to plan, with help from Arts Marlborough, a publicity strategy which eventually stretched over several months. I could not assume to have the wider community support which medieval presenters would have enjoyed: the traditional has become in our times the very rare.

The general public found out about the presentation through articles and advertisements in the *Marlborough Express* and through community notices on Radio Marlborough, all these spread over the month before the performance date. Copies of an A4-sized poster were displayed in such prominent places in Blenheim as the Public Library. A smaller version of this poster became the front page of the programme issued on the evening. [27]

But long before this stage I had to decide which particular groups I would target for more specialised publicity. To aim for those interested in the appropriate performing arts, I made approaches to the Picton Drama Club, the Marlborough Repertory Society (which had agreed to be my sponsor), the Blenheim Choral Society (which was taking part) and the Blenheim Amateur Operatic Society, and obtained space in their newsletters. Since I had to recognize that my performance might have more appeal to older people, I arranged for an item to be placed in the Marlborough Active Life 50s Onwards Newsletter. On the other hand, to foster some interest from the young, I wrote to the principals of the two local secondary schools, students from which were participating in the performance, inviting staff and students to the evening. Lastly, because of the religious content of the presentation, I contacted the local churches, whose members would be turning their thoughts to the message of Christmas. The A4 poster proved useful also in my approaches to all these groups. Nor was constant word of mouth neglected, perhaps the nearest method to that of the old Banns.

## B - REHEARSALS

The rehearsals followed the usual pattern of frustration, panic and discovery which marks any production. Although the musical rehearsals for the Limoges Trope were out of my hands, I needed two sessions with the four singers, to hear what progress they had made and to set some movement. As my translation indicates [28], the trope was to be presented twice, the first time chorally with the performers in a line facing the audience, the second with two 'shepherds' facing two 'midwives' and taking turns with what emerges as dialogue. In other words, singing and elementary acting were to replace singing alone. The venue for practising this piece was the music suite at Marlborough Girls' College. The Choral Society rehearsed their items as part of their normal weekly practice time.

The Saint Nicholas play was also rehearsed at Marlborough Girls' College, in two hard-working sessions in early and mid-November. The play was brief enough to be run through several times in a session, so keeping all actors gainfully employed. There was a sense of fun about the rehearsals, in keeping with the spirit I felt must have been present when the play was rehearsed in medieval times, even if some senior monk perhaps kept a sterner eye on proceedings. Two pieces of business in particular emerged in this preparation time: we agreed that, at the beginning of the play, the innkeeper's wife would be engaged in sweeping until she came out to get rid of the dust and then saw the scholars; and we decided to conclude with the stirring of the murdered scholars as if from sleep, but they rose from their bed only when the action of the play was over.

The *Secunda Pastorum* made more and greater demands. A production meeting for the main characters in mid-October included a reading of the play and discussion on how the actors saw their parts, after I had made a general plea for them to steer between the Keystone Cops and Stanislavsky in their acting style. Also I gave the cast the nine sections into which I had divided the play, explaining that not all actors would need to attend all rehearsals, at least at the beginning. For instance, my Sections III and V, Scenes 2 and 4 in A.C.Cawley's 1956 version of the play, required the participation of Mak and Gill only. At a second meeting a week later we read the play again and discussed characterization. I found out when people would be available, which enabled me to draw up a rehearsal schedule starting at the end of October and covering ten sessions. Rehearsal venues were the Marlborough Boys' College Hall and the Church of the Nativity. The actresses playing the Angel and the Blessed Virgin Mary attended practices later.

As with any director, I felt that all pieces should have had more rehearsals, but my background reading offered me some comfort. William Tydeman points out [29] that the 1574 records of the Coventry Coopers mention a preparation of four rehearsals, while the *Mons Passion* of 1501 required at least forty-eight - if for a text of about 35,000 lines. We were somewhere in between.

The practice period had its problems. The college venues were not ideal spots either in proportions or acoustics, and even when we were able to use the church, the furniture needed to be returned after each rehearsal, though the clergy were as co-operative as they were able. However, I often suspected that such problems applied to the Middle Ages as well. Again, Tydeman indicates that at Lincoln around 1479 a private house was used for rehearsals and at New Romney in 1560 the parish church [30], suggesting logistic difficulties similar to mine.

I acknowledge also that rehearsals posed problems for the actors. All of them, secondary students and adults alike, were responsible and busy people for whom attending practices would involve some sacrifice. Indeed, during the final week two of the students in the casts of the Saint Nicholas play and the *Secunda Pastorum* were away at a leadership camp, returning only in time for the Final Rehearsal on the evening before the performance. In addition, the actors had the added task of working with a script which at times wavered between the medieval and the modern, and which therefore made the learning of lines more difficult.

However, not only was the attendance rate at rehearsals excellent, but the quality of work at them enhanced the public performance. I have mentioned already [31] the changes made to the *Secunda Pastorum* script and its interpretation, and the added business with the Commentator in the middle of the Saint Nicholas play. Another useful change emerging from rehearsals was the splitting up among the scholars of the fourth and sixth stanzas in the Saint Nicholas play instead of treating them chorally. It was also pleasing to see teamwork developing in the groups within the plays - the shepherds, Mak and Gill, the scholars, the old innkeeper and his wife. Individuals also brought new dimensions to their parts: Saint Nicholas grew in presence and moral purity, the Second Shepherd built up a sense of violence suppressed but ever lurking beneath the surface, to be tamed only in the presence of the Christ-Child. The actress playing Gill commented to me that she felt a strain with Lines 536 to 538, where she declared "*I'll eat this child*" if she was lying about Mak's stealing the sheep. It seemed to her a crass thing to blurt out, an admission of stupidity in a character who was quite cunning. But to me it appeared

comically natural enough delivered before a group of shepherds and a husband who were not noted for their intelligence. In fact, whether they realised it completely or not, the *Secunda Pastorum* actors were beginning to catch skilfully the feeling of vulnerable ordinariness which would make their characters bridge the centuries.

The sense of participation grew even further as costumes and properties appeared at the later stages of rehearsal. We drew all threads together at the Final Rehearsal (see **Photo 5**) in the Church of the Nativity on Friday 22nd November. Items which had been practised separately now came together; thus the *Secunda Pastorum* shepherds were able to time their procession to Bethlehem as the Blenheim Choral Society sang *Es Ist Ein Ros*. Groups were able to sort out logistics problems and to test volume and audibility in the performance venue. Perhaps the greatest advantage of this rehearsals lay in the opportunity for participants to see how many other individuals and groups were assisting with the production.

Because what we were doing was a rarity and not an established tradition, I indulged in one ploy. The members of the Choral Society rehearsed their items first and were given the opportunity to depart early. As they were to sit at the front of the audience for most of the performance and likely to be a significant part of it [32], I did not wish to give too much away to them, so that they would come fresh to what we were to present.

The Final Rehearsal proved of necessity untidy, but at least I was confident that people knew what they were doing. And I was moved to feel admiration for those who had to organize the movement and performance of the Cycle Plays through the streets of later medieval York.

## NOTES

- [1] In spite of this, I added two brief items on the night, but only to the end of the Commentary. See Chapter III of my thesis.
- [2] Sheila Lindenbaum, "The York Cycle at Toronto: Staging and Performance Style" in *Medieval English Drama - A Casebook*, ed. Peter Happé (London, 1984), *passim*.
- [3] See Chapter I, Part A of my thesis.
- [4] John R. Elliott Jr. in his chapter on acting in *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage* (Toronto, 1989).
- [5] From the York City Council's ordinance of 3rd April, 1476 - quoted on Page 203 of William Tydeman's *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1978) and touched on in Chapter I, Part A of my thesis.
- [6] William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*, pp.199-200.
- [7] John Marshall, "Modern Productions of Medieval English Plays" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge, 1994), p.309.
- [8] This is a consideration which surfaces at several points in my overall argument.
- [9] Jeffrey Helterman, *Symbolic Action in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* (Athens, 1981), p.95.
- [10] *ibid.*, p.109.
- [11] The survival of only one manuscript of the Wakefield Plays poses problems, as in the assigning of some lines to particular shepherds. For instance, I follow Peter Happé (*English Mystery Plays - Harmondsworth, 1975*) in putting the speech meting out a milder punishment to Mak (Lines 624-628) into the mouth of the First Shepherd. A.C. Cawley (*Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays - London, 1956*) gives these lines to the Third Shepherd, but I feel that they belong better to a First Shepherd as portrayed elsewhere in the play.

[12] Alexandra F. Johnston, "What If No Texts Survived? External Evidence for Early English Drama" in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds. Marianne C. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey (Bloomington, 1989), p. 12.

[13] Martial Rose, *The Wakefield Mystery Plays* (London, 1961), p. 41. Martin Stevens, in "The Staging of the Wakefield Plays" in *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 11 (1968), extends Rose's argument by making a strong case for the Goodybower quarry as a venue.

[14] John R. Elliott Jr., *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage*, p. 127.

[15] William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*, p. 59.

[16] Martial Rose, *The Wakefield Mystery Plays*, p. 30. J. W. Robinson takes a similar view in Chapter 4 of *Studies in Fifteenth Century Stagecraft* (Kalamazoo, 1991).

[17] Jeffrey Helterman, *Symbolic Action in the Plays of the Wakefield Master*, p. 112.

[18] Stanley J. Kahrl, "The Staging of Medieval English Plays" in *The Theatre of Medieval Europe*, ed. Eckehard Simon (Cambridge, 1991), p. 144.

[19] The comparison with the true Nativity did not extend to the Blessed Virgin Mary's giving birth before the audience, although I was aware that Nativity plays like that of the *Ludus Coventriae*, with its stage direction "*Hic dum Joseph est absens parit Maria filium unigenitum*", allow the opportunity. In our presentation, Mary made a quiet entrance carrying the Christ-Child as the shepherds processed to Bethlehem.

[20] Also, my translation omitted references to doors where the shepherds sleep in *Secunda Pastorum* (such as in Line 362), as I placed the actors so clearly in the open that there was no need to mime entrances. I concede that this may have obscured any association with the Parable of the Good Shepherd.

[21] The iconographical connexion was made even stronger by the actress playing the Blessed Virgin Mary. She inclined her head over the Christ-Child after the typically Gothic manner of the 'Virgin and Child' illumination mentioned in the text. The audience might not fully grasp the significance of all this, but they could acknowledge the love between Mother and Son. For a fuller discussion on the appreciation of medieval significances by modern audiences, see Chapter IV of my thesis.

[22] Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London, 1972), p.101.

[23] Richard Rastall, "'Alle Hefne Makyth Melody'" in *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. Paula Neuss (Cambridge, 1983), p.3.

[24] Nan Cooke Carpenter, "Music in the *Secunda Pastorum*", *Speculum* 26 (1951), p.697.

[25] On Page 170 of *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (London, 1966), V.A.Kolve mentions bad, therefore comic, imitation.

[26] Clyde W. Brockett, "Persona in *Cantilena* (St. Nicholas in Music in Medieval Drama)" in *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, 1986), p.11.

[27] See Appendix F.

[28] See Appendix B.

[29] William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*, pp.206-207.

[30] *ibid.*, p.207.

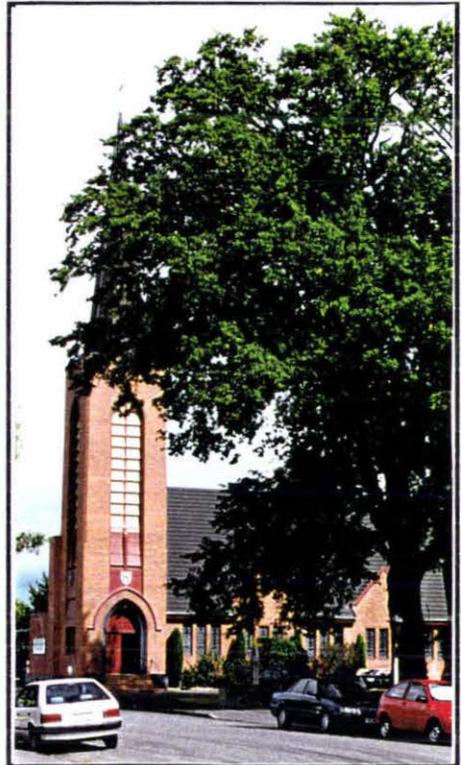
[31] See Chapter I, Part B and the "Contents of the Performance" section of the present chapter.

[32] At this stage, I naturally had no idea of audience numbers.

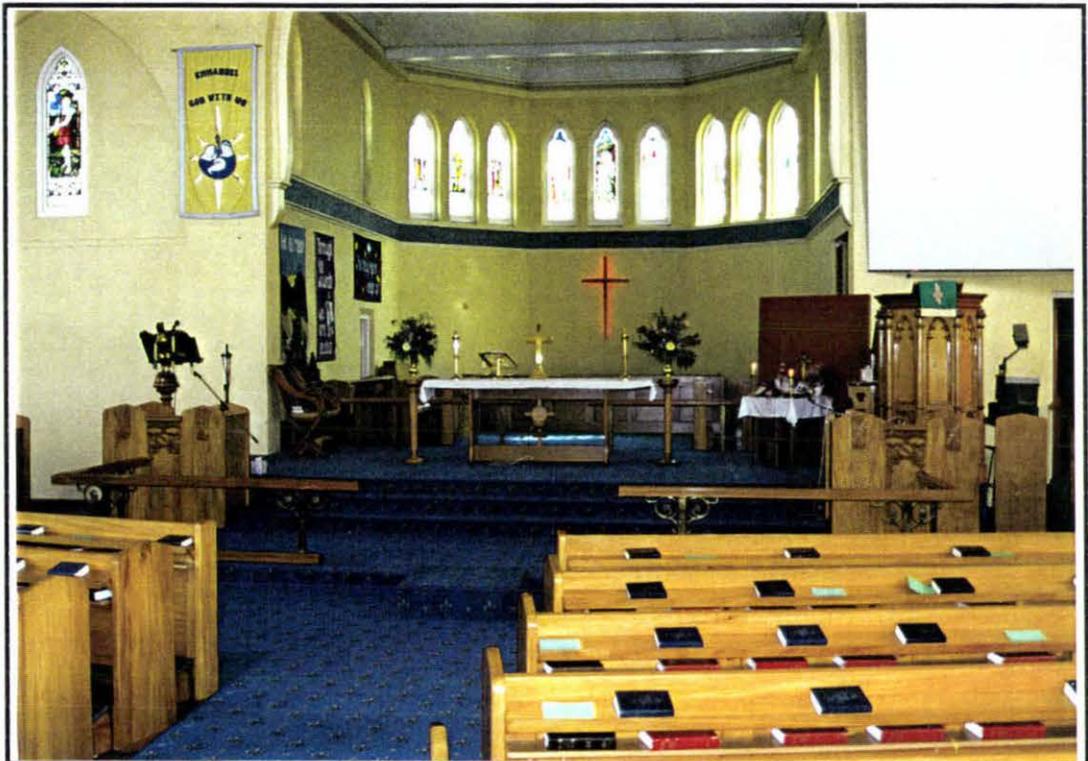
# PREPARATION



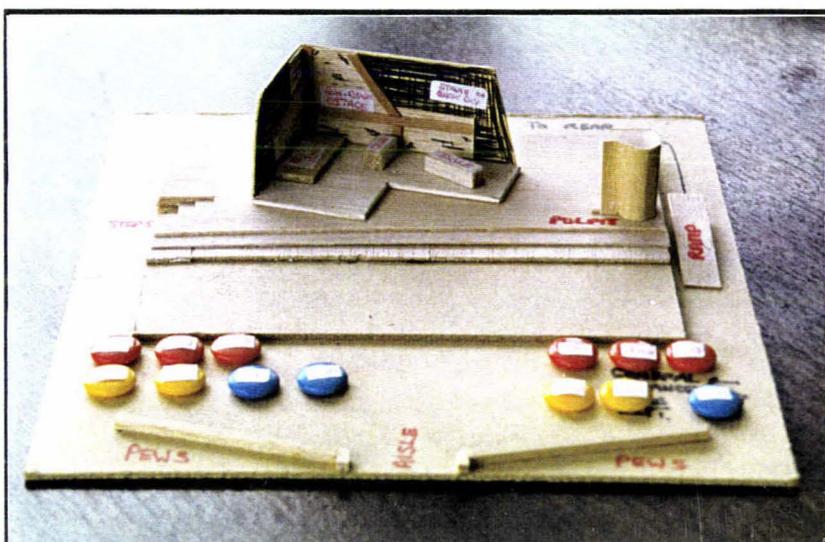
*Photo 1: A possible outdoor venue - near the Repertory Theatre*



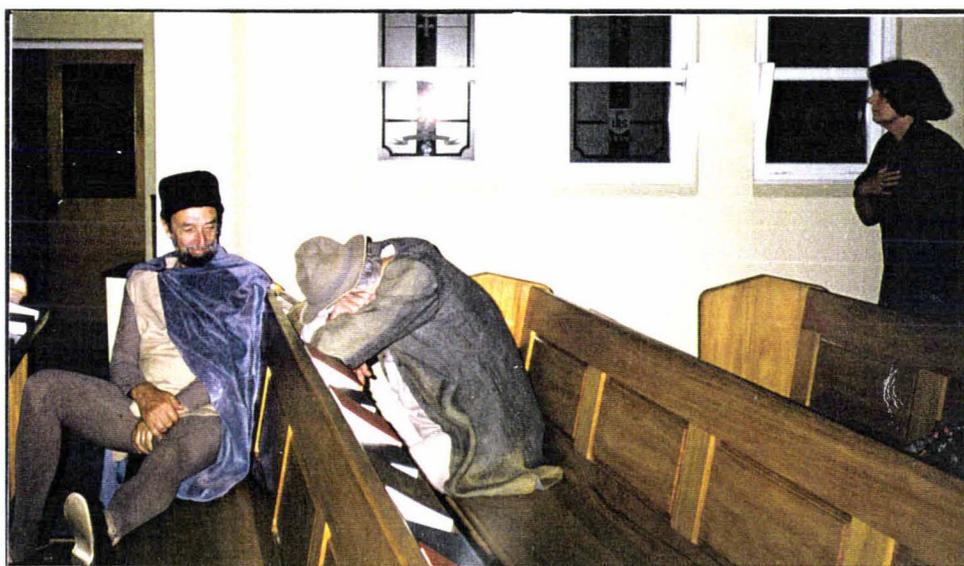
*Photo 2: The Church of the Nativity - the chosen venue*



*Photo 3: Interior of the Church of the Nativity - the acting area*



*Photo 4: Model of set design*



*Photo 5: Final rehearsals - a villain relaxes, a shepherd nods, and a properties assistant hurries*



*Photo 6: Members of the Blenheim Choral Society warm up before the performance*

## CHAPTER III

### PERFORMANCE

The day of the presentation, Saturday 23rd November, was fine enough for me to regret not performing outside - a late medieval Wakefield citizen would have been delighted with the weather, and thankful. At least in modern Blenheim none of us was required to leave our beds in the early hours of the morning. Nor was the day clouded by those last-minute panics which, experience has taught me, can tax a director.

The first members of the audience arrived at about 7.20 p.m., partners and parents of those who were taking part and who were now preparing (**see Photo 6**) in their different ways. As this was an unusual presentation for Blenheim, I was relying on such people to supply the core of an audience which I hoped would not be too small. A minimum figure that I held in mind to make our efforts worthwhile was 50. I was delighted therefore to see, in my frequent forays to the church's main entrance, the audience grow to about 200, ranging in age from small children to the elderly, but most of them middle-aged and older. In addition to the faithful partners and parents, they included local drama and music supporters, teachers, a small group of nuns, some pupils and a number of regular churchgoers. The presence of the Mayor of Marlborough, though not by specific invitation, made me reflect again that a significant factor in the performance of the Mystery Plays was civic pride. I concluded that my 'banns' had been proclaimed in the right places. [1]

The presentation started just before 8.05. Many members of the audience confessed to me later that they did not know what to expect, which reminded me of T.S.Eliot's observation that most modern audiences attend church drama to be virtuously bored [2], but people were generous in their approach from the outset. A good round of applause greeted the Blenheim Choral Society and me as we entered. Since virtuous boredom was far from my intention, I was pleased with the excellent reception to the stripping-of-academicals routine [3] which moved proceedings away from the atmosphere of my deliberately engineered and stuffily delivered opening remarks. Much depended in the evening upon the audience's not compartmentalizing the comic and the serious, and I felt that between us we had made a reasonable start.

But serious matter was still to be present, and it was the task of the Blenheim Choral Society to take the audience back to the sad mood of the Coventry Carol. Controlled singing, with due attention to variety in volume, conveyed well both the suffering of the innocent children - I had explained to the audience that the idea of parents and children would thread itself through the performance - and the rage of Herod. The sombre mood continued with the York *Judgement Day's* Voice of God filling the church with a hurt Father's response to His erring creatures. The use of a tape here, of microphones discreetly placed at the edges of the main acting area and of two stage lights in addition to the normal church lighting was our concession to the technological impulses of the modern world. It could be argued also that the absence of a visible actor to play God was another departure from medieval tradition.

My comments at this stage that the visible part of God in the 1996 production at York of its Mystery Plays was taken by a woman provoked a spontaneous round of good-natured applause from certain members of the audience, which aided the transition to my next point, that the furore stirred up at York by this casting decision proved not only the renewed interest in recent years in these old plays but the willingness of some people to adapt them, sometimes in the face of opposition, to the modern world. Without my being able to claim that it was all the result of brilliant planning, the blurring of the borderline between comic and serious, so important for the presenting of the *Secunda Pastorum* in the latter half of the programme, was progressing satisfactorily.

The references to God took me to an important point in my commentary, the religious drama's connexion with the liturgy of the Church, and to the group from the Marlborough Girls' College. The audience appreciated the humour of the female 'monks', being prepared to accept the cheating to which I owned up in my commentary and which, here and elsewhere, I had considered carefully when preparing for this evening, and they responded to the beautiful singing of the young women's own musical version of the Limoges Trope with enthusiastic applause. The repeating of their singing, with basic part-taking and movement added (**see Photo 7**), was effective enough to allay the misgivings which I entertained - and which I have still - about its over-simplification of a centuries-spanning development. It emerged that an additional value of this part of the programme lay in its preparing the way for the longer shepherds' play in the second half of the evening.

At this point I used the bridging device of introducing a procession of scholar-monks on their way to rehearse a play. As they proceeded around the church and down the central aisle, I was able to comment on the development of Biblical and non-Biblical,

including saints', plays in church over the next two or three centuries and on Saint Nicholas, about whom the scholar-monks' play was written. Just before its performance, the Blenheim Choral Society sang *Personent Hodie* as arranged by Gustav Holst. The Society handled the Latin of the original with a confidence which I knew many members did not feel, and caught well its mood of joyfulness and celebration.

The play about Saint Nicholas and the three scholars (**see Photos 8-10**) was acted capably by students from the Marlborough Girls' and Boys' Colleges. They were audible and word perfect and kept intelligently to the plan of clear, simple acting on which we had agreed. Nobody could fail to grasp the cheeky innocence of the scholars or the saintly power of Saint Nicholas or the equally-shared villainy of the older couple. So, the audience were able to follow the internal action while appreciating that here were young medieval schoolboys putting on a performance which must have been to them some relief from their usual rigid monastic routine. Also, the audience enjoyed the external ploy of my interrupting the mime of the scholars' murder with quasi-learned comments and of the old woman's leaving the acting area to reprove me. The cast deserved the very good round of applause which they received at the end of the play.

The first part of the performance ended at about 8.35 p.m. after a lively singing of *Good King Wenceslas* by the audience, an act of revision and participation. In my pre-carol commentary I asked them to follow the custom of 'taking the parts' of king and page and so tied it in with the origins of medieval religious drama.

The second part started at 8.45 p.m. with a reading of Luke 2, verses 8-20 ("***And there were shepherds ....***") by the Vicar of the Blenheim Anglican Parish. This was no mere mark of politeness towards our hosts, for the spiritedly reverent delivery, from a person with some experience in music and the theatre, linked the Scriptural narrative to the more comically fleshed-out *Secunda Pastorum* a little later. Between the reading and the play I gave a commentary, containing enough generalizations to make a medieval drama specialist squirm, on Mystery Plays and on the Wakefield Master.

By now I was feeling some concern which I hoped did not become evident to the audience. Naturally I was anxious that the *Secunda Pastorum*, the climax of our presentation, should succeed. Secondly, in my commentary I had invited those members of the audience who felt so disposed to join the shepherds near the end of the play as they journeyed, down the central aisle of the church, to Bethlehem. Even though, knowing that New Zealanders can be shy, I had arranged half-a-dozen 'plants', somehow I had convinced myself, logically or otherwise, that a reasonable response to my offer

would act as a measure of success for the whole evening's proceedings. My invitation had another danger. If I hoped to blur the distinction between comic and serious during the evening, I was now caught in a no-man's-land between two commonly perceived attitudes. Would some members of the audience interpret my invitation as a plea for religious commitment when I was asking them to participate in the *drama* of the occasion? In my commentary I attempted a light-hearted approach by distancing myself from Billy Graham, but I was sure that the issue went deeper. My preparatory reading had given me warning of the problem: in 1947 E. Martin Browne saw the potential for a clash between the sacred and the secular when he wrote that **"religious drama is attempting to combine two human activities, each strong in its own right and set in its own ways. It is trying to express in terms of the art of the theatre the experience of religion."** [4] Moreover, I was conscious that my background reading had at one point persuaded me to blur the distinction between ritual and drama. Had I now forced myself to plead unlogically for a separation of the unseparable? [5]

I soon forgot my apprehensions with the masterly treatment of the *Secunda Pastorum's* opening stanzas by the First Shepherd. Entering from the back of the church, he immediately engaged the audience's attention with his resonant delivery and his conveying of the mood of complaint while obviously enjoying the moaning. His need for the fellowship of the other shepherds allowed the audience to see much of the shepherds' ensuing verbal abuse of one another as basically good-humoured. The First Shepherd earned a round of applause at the conclusion of his soliloquy, indicating that the audience was in step with the actor. I felt that the Second and Third Shepherds (indeed, Mak and Gill as well) were equally deserving of applause for their opening speeches, but, as people associated with the theatre know, often the action moves on before the audience has time to respond.

The Second Shepherd, also entering from the rear of the audience, expertly caught his character's suppressed violence and anti-female mood, achieving the right comic level of it all, and being assisted by the First Shepherd's unseen reactions to his words. As I watched the youthful Third Shepherd make an accomplished start and interact well with the other two, I reflected, not for the first time, on how brilliantly the Wakefield Master has portrayed three individuals who differ in age, position, outlook and experience (**see Photo 11**), and yet are comrades enough in their inequalities to enjoy singing together. My choice of a modern adaptation of *Sumer is y-cumin in* for their song was helped by the humour of their clumsy attempts to ward off the cold and to dance.

The entry of the villain was a testing moment, for while the very competent actor playing Mak used his very expressive face to catch the the moods of the crafty if none-too-intelligent smalltime crook well, in rehearsals he had experienced difficulties with his lines. He was courageously returning to drama after an absence of some years. However, his concerns and my fears were groundless on the night, the prompt having nothing to do. His first scene with the shepherds moved at a good pace to its climax of his stealing the sheep - the audience enjoyed the two-dimensional nature of the beast as well as the subsequent scenes where Mak and his wife (**see Photo 12**) debate what to do with it. The actress playing Gill skilfully conveyed her drink-assisted laziness, hypocrisy and sleazy cunning, and showed that Gill has more backbone than Mak. As with the other cast members, she handled adeptly the lines which called for direct address to the audience (and which had caused some problems in rehearsal), drawing out the required responses of sympathy mixed with scorn, particularly to those remarks which reflect the age-old 'battle of the sexes.'

Another piece of comedy which called for a direct response from the audience worked effectively on the night. My changing of the First Shepherd's direct reference to England in Line 353 of the original to something with a Kiwi flavour depended on my actor's making his change of body language and accent obvious without reducing it to silliness. His booming "*Kia ora*" and reference to MMP made the audience see the point quickly, and the Wakefield Master could claim success also, for causing us, director and cast, to work at topicality here and to enter into the spirit of his humour without risking an accusation of gimmickry. [6]

By this stage the cast members had not only established themselves as individuals but also were working smoothly together through the discoveries and deceptions of the plot. A good instance of teamwork was Gill's pleading in Lines 536 to 538:

*"If you I beguiled,  
Then I'll eat this child  
Lying in the cradle."*

The audience were now used to the ironies implicit in the identity of the 'child', and they appreciated both Gill's delivery of lines about which the actress had earlier expressed reservations and the explosive reaction, in facial expression, gesture and movement, of Mak and the shepherds, the former frightened that Gill's crassness might have given the game away, the latter horrified by a threat of cannibalism.

The cast achieved a good comic build-up to the discovery of the sheep and to Mak's being tossed in a blanket, which business was done behind the cottage, out of view of the

audience who were amused at items of Mak's clothing flying up in the air. Now a new challenge faced the cast, the need to change the mood of the play without abandoning all the comic elements. The beautiful singing of the Angel (see **Photo 13**) led the audience into the Biblical narrative, but the shepherds managed to keep a sense of comedy (as I believe that the Wakefield Master intended them to do, through his skilled maintaining of humorous elements in the latter part of the stanzas where the First and Third Shepherds address the Babe) in the midst of their sincere reverence for a winningly dignified Virgin Mary [7] and the Christ-Child. The basing of Mother and Son upon iconographical models helped to contrast them with the shepherds, while using a cutout for the Christ-Child invited the audience to compare Him with that other 'child', the sheep.

My concerns about the procession of gift-bearing shepherds and audience members also proved groundless. The shepherds opened the way to participation by showing individual members their gifts as they moved down the central aisle, during which the Blenheim Choral Society remained in their seats at the front of the audience to sing the English version of the 15th-century German hymn to the Virgin *Es Ist Ein Ros*. About 15 people, including the Mayor, a nun, children, some drama people and two academics, joined the procession, the rear of which was brought up by Mak and Gill, come, for all their devious ways, to pay their respects to the Holy Family. The group's diversity of interests, I felt, caught the community spirit of such medieval drama. The number of audience participants was large enough to be pleasing, but not overwhelming enough to cause me problems where to put them when they arrived at the front. They stood at the side of the main acting area, as if companions to the shepherds.

Even as they presented their gifts to the Christ-Child (see **Photo 14**), the First and Third Shepherds kept up an air of clumsy enthusiasm, balanced by the Second Shepherd's intensity as if his earlier proneness to violence was now controlled by true worship. And a repetition of *Sumer is y-cumin in* instead of something more liturgical seemed to work as reflecting the now joyful atmosphere as the shepherds return to their redeemed if ordinary world. The cast of *Secunda Pastorum* richly deserved the prolonged applause which greeted them at the play's end.

The evening ended at 9.35 p.m. after my re-robing into academics, the concluding remarks of the commentary and the enthusiastic singing by everyone of *O Come All Ye Faithful*. To the last part of the commentary I added two items: firstly, as we had thought that evening of the suffering of children, I announced that any surplus in the collection plate placed at the back of the church would go to the work of the Save the Children Fund in Zaire, the response to which was positive enough for me later to send a

cheque for \$410 to that organization; secondly, after mulling it over during the last days of rehearsal, I felt that the last line of *Everyman* ("***Amen, say ye, for saint charity***" [8]) would make an appropriate signing-off for the presentation.

I would like to think that the evening was a success, a tribute to dedicated teamwork onstage and off. Certainly comments made to me in the months after the performance indicate that the audience enjoyed it. While the efforts of all performers received praise, people mentioned in particular the singing of the 'monks'. A letter to the *Marlborough Express* also highlighted the procession of shepherds and audience in the *Secunda Pastorum* as "**a very moving occasion**" which "**reflected the true spirit of a very special evening**", and I must admit that a part of the evening which had given me some concern instead filled me with pride.

The presentation was not without its mishaps. A lack of light in the body of the church in the first half, even allowing for a fine early summer evening, made it difficult for some members of the audience to read the words of *Good King Wenceslas*; the broom broke as the old woman was using it in the Saint Nicholas play, but the actress covered up adroitly; the *Secunda Pastorum* Angel, scorning mundane notions of time, wore a watch; in the same play's blanket-tossing episode, Mak's hat sailed up behind the cottage and landed inside it. The audience were in the mood to cope with what were, after all, minor hitches in an otherwise well-controlled performance. Medieval religious drama and music had survived exposure to an appreciative modern New Zealand audience

## NOTES

[1] The audience also appeared free of the potential menace decreed against in the Wakefield Roll for 1556, that "*no man goe armed to disturb the playe or hinder the procession*" on pain of a fine of 6/8d.

[2] I have already made reference to T.S.Eliot's remark in Chapter II, Part A of this thesis.

[3] Several references in the present chapter depend upon a perusal of Appendix E.

[4] Quoted on Page 76 of *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage* by John R.Elliott Jr. (Toronto, 1989).

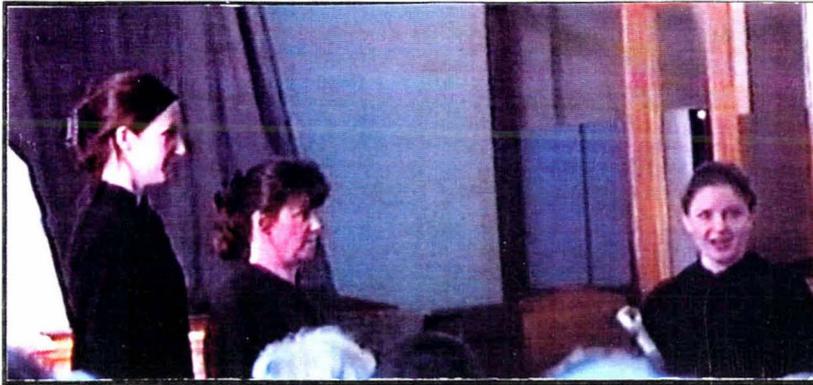
[5] See in particular my discussion of O.B.Hardison Jr's arguments in Chapter I, Part A of this thesis.

[6] See John Marshall's strictures on "**acts of gimmickry**", discussed in Chapter I, Part A of this thesis.

[7] The Angel was one of the quartet of 'monks' in the presentation of the Limoges Trope, and the Blessed Virgin Mary had already appeared as the innkeeper's wife in the Saint Nicholas play.

[8] I have added this quotation to Appendix E.

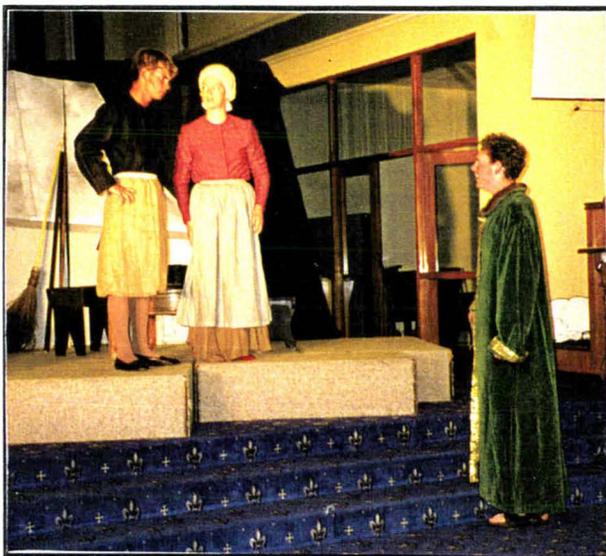
# PERFORMANCE



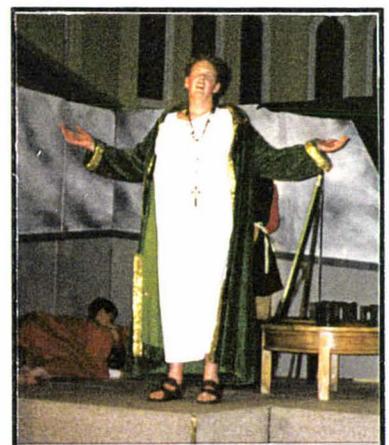
*Photo 7: The Trope - singing monks in action*



*Photo 8: The Saint Nicholas play - the scholars approach the innkeeper and his wife*



*Photo 9: The Saint Nicholas play - the old couple welcome St. Nicholas*



*Photo 10: Saint Nicholas pleads to Heaven*



*Photo 11: "The Secunda Pastorum"  
- the three shepherds*

*Photo 12: Gill and Mak*



*Photo 13: The "Gloria"-singing angel*

*Photo 14: The shepherds  
greet the Blessed Virgin  
Mary and Christ-Child*



## CHAPTER IV

### EVALUATION

The feeling captured by all the performers and passed on to the audience on 23rd November is difficult to subject to analysis. People's reactions, spoken and written, over the next few months indicated that others appreciated what we were trying to achieve. Many people told me that it was an unusual experience to see medieval drama performed in Blenheim, and that they were glad to have had the opportunity to attend. I was more than happy with the choice of venue and its absence of a post-Renaissance proscenium arch which can distance an audience from a play. The clarity of both actors and singers and the modern design of the Church of the Nativity lent no support to John Marshall's comment that putting on such drama as the *Secunda Pastorum* in a church leads to an **"acoustic tendency ... to jumble and distort the spoken English."** [1]

Also, the participation of the various organizations and individuals in the project went a long way to reflect the community spirit present in the preparations for the later medieval Mystery Plays, and which was helped by the active attendance at the performance of the Mayor of the Marlborough District. In addition, there was considerable inter-group co-operation, and not only in the donation of equipment, facilities and skills: my membership of the Choral Society, for instance, enabled me to inform the group at practices how other aspects of the programme were progressing, and to get and give a sense of the presentation taking shape. However, in the months after the performance, when the afterglow had dimmed, I felt that there were aspects of the evening which, in spite of our efforts, required re-consideration.

There are, first of all, some things which worked well enough on the night but which still cause me concern. Audience members told me after the performance that they appreciated having a Commentator to hold the programme together, and I am aware that medieval audiences were used to having deeper matters spelled out to them by Expositors or Doctors or by the characters of the main action, such as the *Secunda Pastorum* shepherds who wax theological after the Angel has appeared to them. But the Commentator of my performance was a modern intrusion, however much considered necessary. If I were to put on a similar presentation again, I would consider retaining the Commentator, but rather as a figure of the Middle Ages, still bridging the centuries but

closer to the characters of the plays and more obviously part of the dramatic action. His/her effective bridging of past and present would be a new challenge.

Another area which has caused me some further and careful reflection is the amateur nature of the 23rd November performance. Amateur drama does not need to imply incapability, nor did it on the night, but none of us participants was a professional, able to bring to the performance a fuller range of skills than can people for whom this was not a career. At least performances of religious plays in the Middle Ages were largely, if not completely, amateur, and so it was appropriate to use for our evening local talent with whom the audience could identify. Moreover, I am glad that we abandoned at an early stage the notion of performing the *Secunda Pastorum* as if we were medieval people acting parts, and even if I emphasised the monkishly youthful nature of the cast in the Saint Nicholas play, I did not encourage them to let the medieval acting situation override the drama of what they presented - in both plays, the dangers of appearing amateurish in the worst sense of the word might have been considerably greater.

There are, however, more definite reservations which I have about our evening. In the earlier stages of this project I saw myself primarily as the translator of certain Latin and Middle English dramatic works which eventually would be presented to an audience. As matters progressed, I realized that the business of working on medieval texts for a modern audience did not allow me to maintain the passive rôle which that somewhat compartmentalized viewpoint implied. In fact, I became in several ways a playwright myself. My previous experiences as actor and director should have helped me to grasp this earlier than I did, and then aspects of the production like my sometimes stilted approach to dramatic dialogue might have improved faster.

One continuing, nagging reservation concerns my handling of the Limoges Trope. The passage of some centuries and a singular lack of evidence to the contrary might excuse my simplistic interpretation of an early phase in the development of medieval religious drama, and I had clearly linked it to the church liturgy from which that drama sprang, but I feel more uneasy about the trope than I do about, say, introducing a Maori phrase into the *Secunda Pastorum*. At least there the Wakefield Master has given a definite lead for humour which may span time and continents - and perhaps he has helped me, if less directly, to come to some terms with the Limoges Trope, in that the *Secunda Pastorum* and the Saint Nicholas play were pieces with obvious dramatic intent and content, to which my theatrical experiences could respond. The more limited dramatic scope of the Limoges Trope moved me towards expanding my approach and trying, by repetition, division of the music and basic movement, to explain a process as much as to

present a short piece set in its own space. In the last resort, reducing years, perhaps centuries, of development to two minutes of performance and commentary has left me with a sense of giddiness.

However, my head is clear enough to recognize that some lines in the second and third pieces may have missed their mark. For example, the Third Scholar in the Saint Nicholas play delivers, in Lines 23-24, some wheedling and comically hopeful words to the old man and his wife:

*"Perhaps if kindness you have done,  
The Lord will give you both a son."*

There was no audience reaction to this speech, even though the two aged characters glanced disbelievingly at each other. Perhaps the youth of the actors and the absence of stage make-up told against its success; more likely, the audience were not able to apprehend it as a cheeky, perhaps parodic reference to Abraham and Sarah, or to Elizabeth and Zachariah, which medieval monkish and young scholars might well have enjoyed.

Two other instances concern lines in the *Secunda Pastorum* with which actors had experienced difficulties of either delivery or characterization. Mak's "*Why, who am I?*" on Line 207 earned a laugh at the performance [2] because of his pathetic attempt to play the gentleman before shepherds who know him well enough. But would people be able to grasp that one answer to the question might be "*the Devil*"? Admittedly, in the Commentary I had warned the audience that it was possible to view Mak as a diabolical figure, even if we were not going to present him that way. But a director surely should not diminish the possibilities of interpretation. Another moment, discussed earlier [3], where comic richness might have obscured theological intent happens when Gill protests her innocence of theft by offering to eat her child (Lines 536-538). How far would the audience see this as a parody of the Mass and of the words "*This is My body*"?

These three examples have an important thread in common, the understanding of theological concepts in a less religious age. Other instances abound, and I wonder even if the second singing of my version of *Sumer is ycumin in* at the end of the *Secunda Pastorum* would have been enjoyed at the performance rather as a reminder of the shepherds' humour-provoking simplicity than as a cheerful expression of the Good News. John Marshall asserts that "**a production of medieval religious drama must treat its audience as intelligent Christian adults, whether they are or not.**" [4] However, this may be too courageous a statement for New Zealand, the 1990s and a different cultural situation to that in which the plays were first presented. I explore the matter further when

I discuss below the gifts of the *Secunda Pastorum* shepherds in the context of visual and verbal symbolism.

Yet I missed a classical allusion in my translation of the Saint Nicholas play. Line 5 became "*Still the sun bedecks the sky*" when the Latin original is "*Iam sol equos tenet in litore.*" The clear reference to the chariot of Helios, surely appropriate for the patron saint of scholars who would learn much from the Graeco-Roman world, deserves better. I would now most probably translate it "*Now the sun rides past the sky*" and replace "*But*" with "*And*" at the beginning of the next line, which proves again that the translator's task is never complete. But here also I could be proposing a change for personal satisfaction as much as for audience comprehension.

Overall, I wonder if the programme lacked a basic unity. Had I included too much in my desire to make the evening of reasonable length? There was certainly a meandering of mood from sadness to joyfulness in the first half of the presentation, the stressing, perhaps unnecessarily, of a subsidiary theme of parents and children, and the addition of the Saint Nicholas material. Again there are times when I wonder if I gave too much prominence to the *Secunda Pastorum*. It might have been better to keep more strictly to one theme such as the shepherds and the Nativity. I am left with the feeling that I invited guests to a rare meal and in some way overfed them. All I can claim is that no-one has complained to me yet of indigestion. On the other hand, a purist might judge that the fare was too light, avoiding a proper attention to weightier matters like Buffeting, Crucifixion and Harrowing of Hell which would have been served, along with more cheerful offerings, to the citizens of later medieval York or Wakefield within a short time-span. But dealing with Saint Nicholas as well as with the Nativity was appropriate to the Christian Season, and to the thoughts of New Zealanders in general, whatever their beliefs.

*A TEST CASE FOR AUDIENCE AWARENESS: THE GIFTS OF THE SHEPHERDS IN THE "SECUNDA PASTORUM"*

The problems which beset an attempt to produce medieval religious drama in modern times are well summed up in the gifts which the adoring shepherds present to the Christ-Child at the end of the *Secunda Pastorum*. We may suspend our disbelief enough to refrain from asking where they obtained their gifts, but we cannot avoid wondering why the Wakefield Master chose to put cherries, a bird and a ball into their hands.

Scholars have been quick to attribute great significance to the gifts, agreeing that, whatever comic view we may take of the shepherds elsewhere in the play and of their parody here of the Adoration of the Magi, what they carry to the Christ-Child must be taken seriously. Arnold Williams asks: "**Are the comic gifts of the shepherds really comic? These are poor men ... what they have they give joyously.**" [5] John Gardner, who asks us to take the shepherds themselves more seriously, stating that: "**Each ... calls to mind a specific aspect of the Trinity**" [6], extends this idea to the ball which he sees as a symbol for God the Father and to the bird which is, indeed, a traditional symbol for the Holy Ghost. The cherries he associates with mid-winter fertility, the Babe Himself.

The linking of the shepherds' gifts with the Trinity and allied aspects of the Godhead is a popular pre-occupation with other scholars. Lawrence J. Ross, for instance, considers, among other things, that cherries at Christmas show God's power to transform Nature, while the bird could stand for spiritual man as well as for the Holy Ghost and even could direct people's minds towards the Crucifixion. [7] Eugene B. Cantelupe and Richard Griffith argue that the gifts are part of a comprehensive iconographical system linking for the largely illiterate medieval faithful "**the visible sign with the invisible truth.**" [8] Thus they cite examples from the work of fifteenth-century artists like Carlo Crivelli and the Master of the Death of the Virgin to associate cherries both with mid-winter fertility and birth and with resurrection; Fra Angelico's *Annalena Madonna* has the Christ-Child holding the cross-crested ball of sovereignty, and Cantelupe and Griffith point out the obvious connexion between royalty and tennis in the Middle Ages. Jeffrey Helterman is able to see the gifts in a different light, as signs that the Birth of Christ has the power to change the shepherds' attitudes to life. [9] The Second Shepherd, for example, who earlier has talked of shackled roosters in his tirade against marriage, now presents to the Babe a bird as a symbol of freedom and enlightenment.

However, a director might have considerable difficulty in making Helterman's interpretation of the bird as freedom effective on stage. The logical and practical thing to do is to put the bird in a cage for the Second Shepherd to carry [10], which would thwart Helterman's point. A possible solution might be to have the Second Shepherd present his gift to the Christ-Child with the Blessed Virgin Mary as intermediary: she could then release, or mime releasing, the bird. But this might appear to demean the gift. We thus must be aware of a tension between a bookish interpretation and the practicalities of production.

As we have seen before, another problem area for a modern director is the extent to which a modern audience (even, I suspect, those religiously attuned), seeing the play for the first time would be aware of the varied religious implications of the shepherds' gifts. In this respect medieval audiences, although less educated, were at an advantage. Even if it is unlikely that fifteenth-century citizens of Wakefield would be familiar with the works of Crivelli or of Fra Angelico, several other scholars [11] besides Cantelupe and Griffith have argued vigorously for visual influences (psalters, church windows, sculpture, architectural decoration and murals - many of which have fallen to the ravages of time and history), backing up the message of Scripture, liturgy and sermon, on audience expectations of what they might see in the plays. Lawrence J. Ross, while not averse to interpreting the shepherds' gifts in symbolic terms, makes the perceptive point regarding modern scholarly approaches that understanding need not come **"only through a process of critical abstraction from the completed whole."** [12]

In addition to underestimating the abilities of, and opportunities for, medieval audiences to grasp significances, we might assume too much knowledge in modern ones. Indeed, many members of a modern audience would lack the specialist perceptions of scholars and their opportunities to reflect at the study desk on matters such as symbolism. Moreover, while I concede that Eleanor Prosser is perhaps too harsh in regarding interpretative studies of the *Secunda Pastorum* as often **"a game played for the sheer delight of the game"** [13], there is a distinct danger that such studies of a text may distract the scholar from considering the need of a director to make an immediate impact when words are turned into dramatic action.

My production of the *Secunda Pastorum* merely confirmed these problems. I attempted to create an atmosphere whereby the audience might appreciate the importance of the shepherds' gifts: by the singing of the symbol-laden *Es Ist Ein Ros* during the procession to Bethlehem, and by the shepherds' showing to members of the audience the gifts they were about to bestow on the Christ-Child. But when, as the Third

Shepherd asked the Babe to use his gift for tennis, the audience laughed, I believe that it was more at the absurd notion of One so young playing such a game than at the Third Shepherd's commentary, unconscious or otherwise, on the aptness of a royal sport for Christ the King. Thus the comic enthusiasm of the shepherds' presenting seemingly simple gifts came across to the audience, but the symbolic significance of it all was most probably lost.

The First Shepherd's gift of cherries also posed its own problems. The date of the production allowed us to obtain newly-ripe Marlborough cherries, just as medieval English performances of the play at the Feast of Corpus Christi or thereabouts would have permitted the use of fresh fruit. But how many of my audience would have been able not only to change hemispheres but also to adjust from the 'here-and-now' of the early summer of performance (medieval and modern) to the bleak season of the play's setting, and so to grasp the ideas of mid-winter fertility or of the overturning of Nature? The cherries can too easily become a convenient gift which evokes no special associations for twentieth-century audiences. [14]

Friends urged me to be satisfied with what this gift-presenting episode of the *Secunda Pastorum* in fact achieved, one persuasively arguing that there is no need for the audience to understand everything on the spot and that some people would mull over significances later, in moments of Wordsworthian tranquillity. But I am unsure still that I managed to resolve all the tensions here between medieval play and modern audience, or indeed between modern scholarship and a presentation for the general public. Nor am I convinced that adding to the Commentary would have helped: the production was centred on drama and music, not on a lecture. If I offered the *Secunda Pastorum* again, this episode, among others, would require deeper thought.

## NOTES

- [1] John Marshall, "Modern Productions of Medieval English Plays" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge, 1994), p.302.
- [2] See Chapter I, Part B of my thesis where I discuss the actor playing Mak's unease with the delivery of the line.
- [3] See Chapter II, Part B for the concerns of the actress playing Gill about her character and these lines, and Chapter III for a brief account of their reception as comedy at the performance.
- [4] John Marshall, "Modern Productions of Medieval English Plays", p.297.
- [5] Arnold Williams, "The Comic in the Cycles" in *Medieval Drama*, ed. Neville Denny (London, 1973), p.118.
- [6] John Gardner, *The Construction of the Wakefield Cycle* (Carbondale, 1974), p.92.
- [7] Lawrence J. Ross, "Symbol and Structure in the *Secunda Pastorum*" in *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual*, eds. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago, 1972), pp.177-211. I notice from a brief study of iconography that in the illustration in Bodleian Library MS. Digby 227, f.113v (part of the Abingdon Missal) God the Father, looking down on the Crucifixion, has just released a dove which is alighting on the Cross.
- [8] Eugene B. Cantelupe and Richard Griffith, "The Gifts of the Shepherds in the Wakefield *Secunda Pastorum*", *Medieval Studies* 28 (1966), p.329.
- [9] Jeffrey Helterman, *Symbolic Action in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* (Athens, Georgia, 1981), p.114.
- [10] My production had a birdcage with no bird inside.

[11] For example, M.D.Anderson in *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge, 1963) and Patrick J. Collins, "Narrative Biblical Cycles in Medieval Art and Drama" in *The Drama of the Middle Ages*, eds. Clifford Davidson, C.J.Gianakaris and John H.Stroupe (New York, 1982). Sometimes the influence may have been from drama rather than upon it.

[12] Lawrence J.Ross, "Symbol and Structure in the *Secunda Pastorum*", p.203.

[13] Eleanor Prosser, *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays: a Re-Evaluation* (Stanford, 1961), p.195.

[14] I acknowledge that the use of cherries could be an obvious argument for flexibility and relevance - using seasonal and regional produce - in a performance, but I still maintain that a modern audience, in the brief moments of the acting out of this episode, does not have the time or cast of mind to appreciate its many interpretative layers. Admittedly, the shepherds make much of the cold conditions at the beginning of the play, but has the audience not been led to other things by now, to distract it from pondering on mid-winter fertility?

## CONCLUSION

The experiences which I have outlined in this thesis have led me to conclude that presenting items of medieval religious drama to a modern provincial New Zealand audience is not only feasible but also may lead to cultural [1] profit and to a considerable amount of pleasure. While in a multi-cultural society we should respect the *mores* of others, there should be occasions when we take pride in the achievements of our European ancestors. In addition, we citizens of Aotearoa/New Zealand might reflect that, like the tears of Rangi, the sadness of God at the opening of the York *Judgement Day* is another facet, bridging both centuries and races, of the human quest for what is beyond often frail humanity.

All those who participated in any way can take pride also in their responses to the project. It was pleasing to note the audience's size, range in age and interests, and willingness to be involved in proceedings at the presentation on 23rd November. Those attending were prepared, moreover, to accept readily the place of comedy in the serious matter. [2] And the co-operation of individuals and groups in putting on this performance, so often chronicled in this thesis, reflected a community spirit which the citizens of later medieval York or Wakefield would have understood. All of which would suggest that elsewhere in New Zealand, and not only in the university centres, there could be some positive and surely exploitable curiosity about a little-known aspect of our culture, a curiosity which is rarely satisfied in this country.

Yet a director cannot afford to let a temporary sense of success lull him into complacency: the price of presenting medieval religious drama to a modern New Zealand audience is some form of eternal vigilance. First we have to recognize that in the act of turning word into action, background reading may assist us only so far. As my consideration of scholarly views on the gifts of the *Secunda Pastorum* shepherds to the Christ-Child has attempted to show, the study desk and the undeniably valuable intellectual process can lead still to the postulation of significances of which audiences, actors, and even playwrights, may be unaware, and to assumptions at odds with the demands of stagecraft practicalities. At least the gap between word and action has been narrowed considerably by the greater body of reading which deals in recent years with

medieval acting conditions, and which chronicles and assesses modern revivals of medieval religious drama, whether they be in Leeds or Toronto or wherever.

Secondly, we have to be aware that although these plays have timeless elements in their texts and situations - friendship, trust, goodness, villainy, alcohol, and unhappiness with partners, with bosses and with the weather are still with us - and although the skills of playwrights allow words to flow into action, the language of the plays has been subject over the centuries to a constant change which will continue within and well beyond the times and experiences of a twentieth-century translator. A second glance at my use of the word "*dough*" in Line 35 of the Saint Nicholas play to hark back to "*argenti copia*" of Line 34 of the original provides a good illustration. As well as indicating that we are in border country between translation and paraphrase, as no mention of money occurs in the original's Line 35, the "*dough*" of this 1990s version is a common colloquial expression of the 1940s and 1950s which, although it could be part of the passive vocabulary of a present-day young person, may be hard to comprehend in the none-too-distant future. We may therefore remind ourselves that no translation of an older work will last for ever, but we may hope that succeeding generations, whether in New Zealand or elsewhere, will be moved to attempt regular renewals of translations, in spite of the undeniable obstacles of expense and of a more limited public demand.

However, a third important issue arises when we ponder the further implications of linguistic adaptation. Certain directors of recent years have gone a very long way to modernize the cycles [3], but I have come to the conclusion that we need not go so far down that path. We should be able to preserve the linguistic flavour of the past - and attention to the demands of rhythm and rhyme will assist [4] - while updating aspects of a play's language, for some people will be intrigued by the age of such drama as much as by what it says to our generation. Thus, a medieval proverb [5] which the Wakefield Master puts into Line 229 of the *Secunda Pastorum* and which Peter Happé [6] renders as "*Seldom lyys the dewell dede by the gate*" needs some adjustment for modern ears unused to it. My translation ("*It's seldom the Devil is not on the go*") retains the idea of the Devil, however much I have shied away from diabolical interpretations of Mak's character, but places him in the timeless context of being ever ready to deceive people, which Mak does, Devil or not. So, a laudable concern for a language which is significant to modern times needs to be balanced by a concern to recognize the past. Linguistically, this may lead to a wobbling between ancient and modern, as I concede happens at some points in my translations, but it also encourages alertness.

Nor does the question of adaptation stop at language. Some modern directors of medieval religious drama have incurred the wrath of scholars [7] for updating costuming and employing technology far beyond the resources of the Middle Ages. [8] But if we are to attempt to reach a wider audience than a privileged academic few who might appreciate hearing what we think Middle English is like and who could debate learnedly on the importance of masks in presenting medieval religious drama, then we must concede to the inevitability of adaptation. The cause of pristine purity also ignores the basic point that the *Secunda Pastorum* and, to a lesser extent, the Saint Nicholas play are themselves adaptations, with jokes about childbearing in old age, diatribes against social injustices, and uses of saints' names as oaths in times before sainthood was earned. And Horbury was far nearer to Wakefield than to Bethlehem. [9]

Yet the modern director, espousing the cause of adaptation in order to make a bridge between plays and audience, may well have to be alert to making a form of elitist assumption about that audience. It would be foolish to believe that such drama is going to have the width of appeal that we would like, because of the tastes and temper of the times, and so, as my discussion of the Banns indicates, although the general public was made aware that the plays were to be presented, I knew that I must rely for the bulk of the audience on the groups which the advertising particularly targeted.

A would-be director faces a fourth issue when he considers in more depth the taste and temper of the times in relation to those who are motivated enough to attend a performance. A modern audience might be more prone than their medieval counterparts to see some tension between drama and religion. [10] Also, as we have seen often enough, pertly pious hopes about child-bearing in old age, mangled Latin prayers, parodically cannibalistic references to the Body of Christ, the *Secunda Pastorum* shepherds' knowledge of Old Testament prophecy - all could be beyond the full comprehension of many twentieth-century and post-Reformation New Zealanders, however thoughtful and sympathetic they are. But the director should not be dismayed, for the realization that his audience may not understand all that his reading and exploring of dramatic possibilities have led him to desire is as true of a production of *Waiting for Godot* as of the *Secunda Pastorum*. The hope of the director for both plays should be that, whatever he perceives as the pre-conceptions or limitations of his audience, individuals from it - how many, he will never know - might have their consciousness aroused through the dramatic experience, perhaps even to a point beyond anything that he has planned.

And, at the last, a modern would-be director of medieval religious drama, operating half a world away from its point of origin, needs to display two other important characteristics. One is obstinacy, a determination, whatever reasonable compromises and necessary changes he has made at the time of preparation, to adhere finally to his plan of action, in spite of any reservations about scholars or audiences. The other, an unlikely companion, is that nagging sense of dissatisfaction which has surfaced at several points in these pages. Indeed, we may suggest that any such attempt as mine to span the centuries must end with an admission that more dramatic avenues, medieval or modern, need to be explored, and in an idiom which needs to be as subject to change as language ever is. But dissatisfaction is of value only if it leads to a resolution to give the present the opportunity to appreciate the treasures of the past. Let the shepherds of the *Secunda Pastorum*, departing from Bethlehem, be our torchbearers in this quest for enlightenment as they close their play and this thesis:

- "1S. *What grace we have fun!*  
2S. *Come forth; now are we won!*  
3S. *To sing are we bun:*  
*Let take on loft."*

## NOTES

[1] I use the word 'cultural' in its widest sense here, to embrace the religious aspect which would appeal more to some members of an audience.

[2] Changes of attitude in Blenheim over recent years on this issue are discussed in **Note 2** of my Introduction.

[3] See Chapter I, Part B for a discussion of Adrian Henri's production of the Wakefield Cycle in 1988.

[4] I acknowledge that this has drawbacks as well as advantages. For instance, Lines 209-210 of the *Secunda Pastorum* contain inversion clumsily employed by me to achieve a rhyme pattern:

"2S. *But, Mak, from your comments, for sainthood you long*

3S. *He's more like a target for Old Nick's sharp prong."*

I discuss further the drawbacks of using inversion at the end of Chapter I, Part B. At the same time, such devices can help to produce an atmosphere of quaintness, to remind an audience that these are not modern plays.

[5] Medieval literature abounds in proverbs, whose rendition into modern idiom is another challenge for a translator. The example discussed here occurs also, in a slightly different form, in Robert Henryson's *Moral Fables (The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadger)*, Line 2063 where the dealer exclaims, "*Heir lysis the Deuyll ... deid in ane dyke."*

[6] On Page 274 of *English Mystery Plays* (Harmondsworth, 1975).

[7] See Chapter I, Part A for a fuller discussion of John Marshall's views on gimmickry and unfortunate compromises.

[8] However, William Tydeman shows how sophisticated medieval play presenters could be, in Chapter 6 of *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1978).

[9] Horbury is mentioned in Line 455 of the *Secunda Pastorum*.

[10] Note especially the comment of E.Martin Browne quoted in Chapter III. It must be admitted that not all medieval citizens were happy to accept the admixture of drama and religion, as the views of clerics like Aelred of Rievaulx, Robert Grosseteste and Robert Mannyng make clear.

# APPENDIX A

ADAPTATION OF THE FIRST PART OF GOD'S OPENING SPEECH  
FROM THE YORK "JUDGEMENT DAY" [British Library MS. Additional  
35, 290.]

- 1        *When first this world I gladly made -  
Wind and waters, flowers and trees,  
Beasts and birds and light and shade -  
Great My delight in all of these.*
- 5        *When from the dust I bade Man rise,  
I gave him power himself to know,  
And put him into Paradise,  
A heavenly place on Earth below.*
- 9        *"Look to the tree of good and ill,"  
I warned my dearest creature so,  
"And shun its fruit, obey My will."  
His greed, alas, brought pain and woe.*
- 13       *So to the world My Son I sent;  
His body hung upon the Tree.  
For human sin His life was spent -  
Man, you have gained so much from Me.*

## APPENDIX B

THE LIMOGES TROPE OF THE SHEPHERDS AT THE MANGER [Paris  
Bibl. Nat., MS lat. 887, Trop. Lemovicense saec. xi, fol. 9v.]

### A - ORIGINAL

#### Ad Dominicam Missam

- 1 *Quem queritis in presepe, pastores, dicite?*
- 2 *Saluatorem Christum Dominum, infantem pannis inuolutum, secundum sermonem angelicum.*
- 3 *Adest hic paruulus cum Maria matre sua, de qua dudum uaticinando Isaias dixerat propheta: Ecce uirgo concipiet et pariet filium; et nunc euntes dicite quia natus est.*
- 4 *Alleluia, alleluia! Iam uere scimus Christum natum in terris, de quo canite omnes cum propheta, dicentes:*
- 5 **Psalmus:** *Puer natus est.*

## B - TRANSLATION

1        *Whom do you seek in the manger, shepherds, say?*

2        *The Lord Christ the Saviour, the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, as the angels told (us).*

3        *The little One is here with Mary His mother, of whom the prophet Isaiah said long ago: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son"; and now, as you go, speak (out) that He is born.*

4        *Alleluia, alleluia! Now we know in truth that Christ is born on earth, of Whom let all sing with the prophet, saying:*

5        **The psalm: A boy is born.**

**[Chanted twice - first time: four performers, in straight line, chant everything,  
second time: two 'shepherds' half face two 'midwives' and  
chant verses 2 and 4, and 'midwives' chant verses 1 and 3, as dialogue]**

## APPENDIX C

THE FLEURY PLAY OF SAINT NICHOLAS AND THE THREE SCHOLARS [Orleans, Bibl. de la Ville MS. 201 (*olim* 178), Miscellanea Floriacensia, saec. xiii, pp.183-187.]

### A - ORIGINAL

- 1 [Primus Clericus:] *Nos quos causa discendi literas  
apud gentes transmisit exeras,  
dum sol adhuc extendit radium,  
perquiramus nobis hospicium.*
- 5 Secundus Clericus: *Iam sol equos tenet in litore,  
quos ad presens merget sub equore.  
Nec est nota nobis hec patria;  
ergo queri debent hospicia.*
- 9 Tercius Clericus: *Senem quemdam maturum moribus  
hic habemus coram luminibus;  
forsan, nostris compulsus precibus,  
erit hospes nobis hospitibus.*
- Insimul omnes ad Senem dicant:**
- 13 *Hospes care, querendo studia  
huc relictâ uenimus patria;  
nobis ergo prestes hospicium  
dum durabit hoc noctis spacium.*
- 17 Senex: *Hospitetur uos factor omnium,  
nam non dabo uobis hospicium;  
nam nec mea in hoc utilitas,  
nec est ad hoc nunc op[p]ortunitas.*

21 **Clerici ad Uetulam:** *Per te, cara, sit impetrabile  
quod rogamus, etsi non utile.  
Forsan propter hoc beneficium  
uobis Deus donabit puerum.*

25 **Mulier ad Senem:** *Nos his dare, coniux, hospicium,  
qui sic uagant querendo studium,  
sola saltem compellat karitas;  
nec est dampnum, nec est utilitas.*

29 **Senex:** *Acquiescam tuo consilio,  
et dignabor istos hospicio.*

**Senex ad Clericos:** *Accedatis, scolares, igitur;  
quod rogastis uobis conceditur.*

**Senex, Clericis dormientibus:**

33 *Nonne uides quanta marsupia?  
Est in illis argenti copia;  
hec a nobis absque infamia  
possideri posset pecunia.*

37 **Vetula:** *Paupertatis onus sustulimus,  
mi marite, quamdiu uiximus;  
hos si morti donare uolumus,  
paupertatem uitare possumus.*

41 *Euagines ergo iam gladium,  
namque potes morte iacencium  
esse diues quamdiu uixeris;  
atque sciet nemo quod feceris.*

45 **Nicholaus:** *Peregrinus, fessus itinere,  
ultra modo non possum tendere;  
huius ergo per noctis spacium  
michi prestes, precor, hospicium.*

49 **Senex ad Mulierem:** *An dignabor istum [h]ospicio,  
cara coniux, tuo consilio?*

**Vetula:** *Hunc persona commendat nimium,  
et est dignum ut des hospicium.*

53 **Senex:** *Peregrine, accede propius.  
Uir uideris nimis egregius;  
si uis, dabo tibi comedere;  
quidquam uoles temptabo querere.*

**Nicholaus ad Mensam:**

57 *Nichil ex his possum comedere;  
carnem uellem recentem edere.*

**Senex:** *Dabo tibi carnem quam habeo,  
namque carne recente careo.*

61 **Nicholaus:** *Nunc dixisti plane mendacium;  
carnem habes recentem nimium;  
et hanc habes magna nequicia,  
quam mactari fecit pecunia.*

**Senex et Mulier dixerunt:**

65 *Miserere nostri, te petimus,  
nam te sanctum Dei cognouimus.  
Nostrum scelus abhominabile  
non est tamen incondonabile.*

69 **Nicholaus:** *Mortuorum afferte corpora,  
et contrita sint uestra pectora.  
Hi resurgent per Dei gratiam;  
et uos flendo queratis ueniam.*

**Oracio Sancti Nicholai:**

73 *Pie Deus, cuius sunt omnia,  
celum, tellus, aer et maria,  
ut resurgant isti precipias,  
et hos ad te clamantes audias.*

**Et post omnis chorus dicat *Te Deum laudamus.***

**B - TRANSLATION**

**[Three foreign scholars draw near an inn]**

**[First Scholar:]**

1            *We, whom learning's noble cause  
Has sent towards these foreign shores,  
Ere the sun is past its best  
Need to find a place to rest.*

5    **Second Scholar:** *Still the sun bedecks the sky,  
But the evening will be nigh;  
We don't know these foreign strands,  
We need help at someone's hands.*

**[The Old Man, an innkeeper, emerges from the inn]**

9    **Third Scholar:** *Here we have before our eyes  
Some old man, and he looks wise;  
Perhaps he'll listen to our pleas,  
Give us food and drink and ease.*

**All three scholars speak together to the Old Man:**

13	<i>Honoured host, we left our homes</i>	<b>Scholar 1</b>
	<i>To study learning's higher tomes;</i>	"
	<i>Give us lodging here, we pray,</i>	<b>Scholar 2</b>
	<i>We'll be leaving the next day.</i>	<b>Scholar 3, in amended form.</b>

17   **Old Man:** *May the Lord provide your needs!  
I'm not the man to do good deeds;  
It's too late to be that kind,  
And no profit will I find.*

**[The Old Woman comes out from sweeping the inn rooms]**

**The Scholars to the Old Woman:**

- 21                    *Kindly lady, give us aid,  
                          Though no profit you'll have made;  
                          Perhaps if kindness you have done,  
                          The Lord will give you both a son.*
- Scholar 1**  
**Scholar 2**  
**Scholar 3**  
"                    , in amended form.

**The Wife to the Old Man:**

- 25                    *Husband, open up our home,  
                          These poor scholars mustn't roam,  
                          For charity it's worth the deed;  
                          While there's no profit, great's their need.*

- 29    **The Old Man:** *I'll let them in on your advice,  
                          And I'll be so very nice.*

**The Old Man to the Scholars:**

*Come in, lads, you're welcome here,  
We'll treat you right, so have no fear.*

**[The scholars enter, eat, then settle down to sleep in the bedroom]**

**The Old Man as the Scholars sleep:**

- 33                    *My word, aren't their purses fat,  
                          Silver pennies and all that!  
                          How we came by so much dough -  
                          Well, our neighbours needn't know.*

**The Old Woman:**

- 37                    *Husband, all our lives, you know,  
                          We've had nothing much to show:  
                          I won't be a pauper's wife  
                          If those lads depart this life.*

- 41                    *Husband mine, we've got it made*

**[She takes a knife from the inn table]**

*When you now draw out your blade.  
We'll both be free from any need:  
Who's to know we've done the deed?*

[The Old Man and his wife mime the murder of the scholars, while the Commentator talks learnedly to the audience. The Old Woman leaves the inn to rebuke the Commentator thus: "Let the play do its work, master." They bow to each other and the Old Woman returns to the play]

**Nicholas [arriving in disguise and calling at the inn door]:**

45            *A stranger, weary from the road,  
I cannot further bear my load.  
Give me lodging here, I plead;  
One night's rest will serve my need.*

**The Old Man to his Wife:**

49            *Is he worth the lodging, spouse?  
Shall we take him in our house?*

**The Old Woman:**

*He's a worthy man, I say,  
So in our home you let him stay.*

53    **The Old Man:** *Stranger, come within our door:*

*You are gentry, that's for sure:  
Enter in and rest yourself,*

**[Nicholas enters the inn]**

*I'll find food from off the shelf.*

**Nicholas at the table:**

57            *Nothing here I wish to eat;  
My desire is for fresh meat.*

**Old Man:**

*I'll give you all the food that's here,  
But there's no fresh meat, I fear.*

**Nicholas [standing and revealing his identity]:**

61            *Now your mouth is full of lies,  
For this house fresh meat supplies.  
It was gained through dreadful sin,  
Through avarice which you let in.*

**The Old Man and his Wife said [kneeling]:**

65            *For your mercy is our plea,  
                  O holy man of God, we see  
                  Great is our sin and great our fall,  
                  To Him we kneel Who pardons all.*

69    **Nicholas:** *Bring the bodies of the slain,  
                  Be contrite of heart again.  
                  God's Grace will bestow new life;  
                  Cry for pardon, man and wife.*

**[The Old Man and his wife go to the bedroom]****The prayer of Saint Nicholas [who stretches out his arms]:**

73            *Maker of all, O Lord most high,  
                  Air and seas and earth and sky,  
                  Command the dead to rise once more,  
                  And hear us as we Thee implore:*

**[The scholars awake, as if from sleep]**

**And then the whole chorus says:** *We praise Thee, O God ..... .*

## APPENDIX D

### TRANSLATION OF "SECUNDA PASTORUM" [Huntingdon MS. HM1.]

1S = First Shepherd

2S = Second Shepherd

3S = Third Shepherd

M = Mak

G = Gill

A = Angel

BVM = Blessed Virgin Mary

#### [Scene 1, open fields near Bethlehem.]

1S. *Lord, this is cold weather, and I'm thinly wrapped.  
I'm nearly numb, so long have I napped;  
My legs give way, my fingers are chapped.  
This is not as I'd wish it, for I'm all lapped  
5 In sorrow.*

*In storms and tempest,  
From the east or the west,  
Woe to him without rest*

9 *Midday or morrow.*

*But we humble shepherds who walk the moor  
Work hard to keep the wolf from the door.  
As it stands, no wonder that we're poor,  
Our arable land grows no more than a floor.*

14 *For then*

*We're so lamed,  
Over-taxed and maimed,  
We are hand-tamed*

18 *By these bosses' men.*

*Our Lady curse those who won't let us lie!  
These lord-bound men with their heads held high  
Cause our shoulders to sag, our wives to cry.  
We're bondsmen oppressed till it's time to die.*

23 *They're alive*

To hold us well under,  
 Our goods they plunder;  
 It would be great wonder  
 27 If we ever thrive.

Once the boss's man gets control these days,  
 Watch out the fool who opposes his ways!  
 You can't but put up with the tricks he plays;  
 Yet no-one believes a thing that he says -  
 32 Not one letter.  
 He can take what's ours,  
 He boasts and glowers,  
 For he's backed by the powers  
 36 Of the socially better.

A peacock-proud servant blusters so:  
 "Your cart and your plough are what you owe,"  
 And I must obey before he'll go.  
 We live in anger, pain and woe,  
 41 By night and day.  
 He'll play deaf to my plea  
 That it's ruined I'll be;  
 And it's hanging for me  
 45 If I dare say "Nay."

But it does me good, as I walk here alone,  
 To talk of this world in mutter and moan.  
 I'll go off to my sheep and attend anon,  
 There sit on a tussock or perhaps on a stone.  
 50 Very soon,  
 I think, praise be,  
 There'll be company,  
 Good friends to me,  
 54 Before it's noon.

**[Enter 2nd Shepherd]**

2S. *Lord bless us all, what does all this mean?  
Why goes the world thus? The like we've not seen.  
Lord, cruel's the weather, and the wind's so keen,  
My eyes are watering, the frost's so mean -*

59

*That's no lie.**Now in dry, now in wet,**Now in snow, now in sleet;**My shoes are freezing to my feet -*

63

*Life's not easy.**But as far as I ken and life's happenings go,**We poor married men suffer much woe:**We gain sorrow on sorrow; it's ever so.**Silly Cottle, our hen, both to and fro*

68

*She cackles;**If she starts to croak,**To groan or cluck,**It's woe for our cock,*

72

*As he's in her shackles.**These men that are wed can't do all they will;**Whenever hard pressed, they're sighing still.**God knows they are led full hard and ill;**In bower or bed their mouths they still.*

77

*For now**My duty I've found,**I'll not utter a sound;**Sad the man marriage-bound,*

81

*He must keep his vow.**But now late in our lives - a mystery to me,**That I think my heart breaks such horrors to see;**Yet I can't change whatever must be -**Some men will have two wives, and some men three*

86

*In store;*

- And some moan who have any,  
 But a pound for a penny:  
 The wretch who has many,  
 90 His pain is sore.*
- But, young men, as for wooing, by God Who you bought,  
 Be wary of wedding, keep this as a thought:  
 "If I'd known"'s an expression whose value is nought.  
 Constant sharp sorrows has marriage oft brought,  
 95 And grief,  
 With a sharp shower;  
 You can catch in an hour  
 A harvest so sour  
 99 As long as your life.*
- For, as true as the Word, I've one as my wife  
 As rough as a briar, as sharp as a knife.  
 She's browed like a bristle, with a face full of strife;  
 If she once wets her whistle she can sing like a fife  
 104 Many a tune.  
 She's as huge as a whale,  
 She's a gallon of gall;  
 To escape from her thrall  
 108 I'd jump over the moon.*
- 1S.** *God save the audience! You've wax in your ear.*  
**2S.** *The Devil take those who bring up the rear!  
 Is Daw anywhere?*
- 1S.** *In the fields over there  
 I hear him now. He's approaching here. [Tooting of horn.]  
 113 Not far.  
 Stand still.*
- 2S.** *Why?*  
**1S.** *He's coming, think I.*  
**2S.** *He'll tell us a lie, [First two shepherds hide.]  
 117 Unless we take care.*

**[Enter 3rd Shepherd]**

3S. *Christ's cross speed me, and Saint Nicholas!*  
*I need the help, it's worse than it was.*  
*As I keep my eyes open and watch the world pass,*  
*It's always fearful and brittle as glass*  
 122 *And it drifts.*  
*The world's sinking low,*  
*And nightmares grow,*  
*Now in weal, now in woe,*  
 126 *And everything shifts.*

*Not since Noah's days were such floods seen,*  
*Rough winds and rain and storms so keen:*  
*Folk fearing and doubting, that's how it's been.*  
*God turn all to good! I say as I mean*  
 131 *And ponder:*  
*These floods they drown*  
*Both field and town,*  
*And carry all down;*  
 135 *Small wonder.*

*We who walk at night our flocks to keep*  
*See startling sights while others sleep -*  
*My heart's a'flutter, I see rogues peep.*  
*You're two monsters, I'll give my sheep*  
 140 *A turn -*  
*But full ill I meant*  
*As on field I went,*  
*I'll gladly repent*  
 144 *As my flight I'll spurn.*

**[First two shepherds make  
ghost noises, at which the  
third starts to run away,  
but stops when he hears  
the others laugh.]**

*God save you, sir, and master mine,*  
*I'd like a drink and I'd like to dine.*  
 1S. *Christ's curse, you knave, you lazy swine.*  
 2S. *Hang on now, boy, and stop that whine.*  
 149 *We've had our food.*

- 153 *Ill luck to you, mate!  
 Though the fool came late,  
 Yet he's in a state  
 To dine - if he could.*
- 158 **3S.** *Such servants like me, we slave and sweat,  
 And my teeth are sore when dry bread I've ate.  
 While masters nod, we toil in the wet  
 And they're slow to give what we should get.  
 It's true:  
 Both lady and sire,  
 When we've run in the mire,  
 Cut our terms of hire,  
 162 And the pay's still due.*
- 167 *Yet I promise, master, for what you outlay  
 I'll work according to my pay,  
 Some time for work, more time for play.  
 I'll not gain riches if I stay  
 Tending fields.  
 I'll lose no sleep,  
 My strength I'll keep;  
 For a bargain cheap  
 171 Poorly yields.*
- 176 **1S.** *You're a poor lad for a lass to woo,  
 A man whose coins are very few.*
- 176 **2S.** *Peace, boy, I've said, no more to-do  
 Or, by Heaven's King, I'll set on you.  
 And our sheep?  
 Your lies we'd scorn.*
- 180 **3S.** *But this very morn  
 They were in the corn,  
 As men rose from sleep.*

- Their pasture's good, they can't go wrong.*
- 185    1S. *That's right. For sure, these nights are long.*  
           *Before we go, I'd like a song.*
- 2S. *I agree with you, it'll help us along.*
- 3S. *I'll join in.*
- 1S. *The tenor I'll try.*
- 2S. *In the middle stay I.*
- 3S. *Me the treble on high.*
- 189           *Let's begin.*

**[They sing (twice) as they try to keep warm and then to dance:**

*"Summer is a comin' in,  
 Listen to the cuckoo.  
 Green springs up in field and wood;  
 Nature wakes, the sun feels good.  
 'Cuckoo! Cuckoo!'  
 It thrills us through and through." ]*

**[Then Mak enters with a cloak covering his tunic]**

- M. *Now, seven-named Lord of more stars in the skies  
           Than I can count, what destiny lies  
           In wait for me? Life's one bad surprise.  
           Take me to Heaven, where no child cries*
- 194           *Without stopping.*
- 1S. *Who's whining out there?*
- M. *I'm just beating the air,  
           For life's that unfair -*
- 198           *Ill fortune I'm copping.*
- 2S. *Mak, where have you been? Tell us your tidings.*
- 3S. *Is that Mak here? Then watch your belongings.*
- [He takes Mak's cloak from him]**
- M. *What! Now I'm past these paltry things,  
           I'm one who great men's orders brings.*
- 203           *No lie.*

- Uncouth fellows, go away,  
 Close to you I will not stay,  
 More respect for me, I pray.  
 207 Why, who am I?
- 1S. Why are you so uppish? Mak, you do wrong.  
 2S. But, Mak, from your comments, for sainthood you long.  
 3S. He's more like a target for Old Nick's sharp prong!  
 M. I'll lay a complaint: you'll be whipped hard and long,  
 212 My word!  
 I'll see to your fall.
- 1S. Oh, Mak, is that all?  
 Stop that snobbish drawl,  
 216 Go bite on a turd.
- 2S. Mak, what the Devil, to a hiding I'll treat you.  
 3S. Mak, don't you know me? By God, I could beat you.  
 M. God save you all three. I hoped that I'd meet you.  
 You're a fair company.
- 1S. Should we as friends greet you?  
 211 2S. You're up to no good!  
 For late as you go,  
 Men in the know  
 Could drag you down low  
 225 For stealing food.
- M. I'm as true as steel, as all men should know  
 But I'm feeling a sickness - that's laying me low.  
 My belly's on fire, so I trudge to and fro.  
 3S. It's seldom the Devil is not on the go.  
 230 M. Therefore,  
 I'm so sore and ill  
 If I stay stone-still;  
 I've not eaten my fill  
 234 This month or more.

1S. *And how's your wife, Mak? How does she go?*

M. *By the Cross, she sprawls by the fire's glow,  
With a house full of kids. She drinks, you know.  
For that's all the business she can show  
And do.*

239

*She's running to fat:  
Each year - fancy that -  
She brings forth a brat,  
And, in some years, two.*

243

*If I weren't so humble, were richer by far,  
Still empty the larder and emptied the jar.  
What a foul woman, if you should come near;  
There's no-one who faces a worse one than her,  
No knave.           **[Second Shepherd pulls a face]***

248

*Will you hear what I proffer?  
To give all in my coffer  
Tomorrow to offer  
A prayer at her grave.*

252

2S. *There's none, I think, so tired in the shire;  
I'd sleep though I get much less for my hire.*

3S. *I'm cold and naked, so I want a fire.*

1S. *I'm weary and knackered, and covered in mire -  
But stand to.*

257

2S. *No, I'll bed nearby,  
I must sleep, no lie.*

3S. *As worn out am I  
As any of you.*

261

*But come here, Mak. Put your head down there.*

**[Mak lies down between two shepherds]**

M. *That'll put a stop to you whispering pair,  
For sure.*

264

*From my top to my toe,  
"Manus tuas commendo,   **[He makes the sign of the Cross]**  
Pontio Pilato."*

268

*Christ's Cross I implore.*

**[Mak rises once the shepherds have settled to sleep]**

273 *Now's the time for one who's out in the cold  
To stalk right secretly into the fold  
To set to work deftly and not be too bold,  
For dearly he'll pay if his deed should be told  
In the end.*

*It's the time to speed,  
Good planning I need.  
I have to succeed  
277 For I've little to spend.*

282 *There's a magic circle as round as a moon,  
Till I've done what I want, although it be noon.  
Lie as still as stone until I've got done,  
And around your heads I'll weave a cocoon  
Of magic:*

*"High over your heads my hand I raise.  
Out go your eyes, on nothing gaze."  
I must do this to stop my days                   **[To audience]**  
286 Being tragic.*

291 *O Lord, they sleep hard **[snoring]** - that you can hear.  
Though I'm no shepherd, as one I'll appear.  
Though the sheep are frightened, I'll come near.  
Don't run, lovely sheep. Now luck is here,  
Gone sorrow.                   **[Mak grabs a sheep]***

*A fat sheep, I say,  
Good fleece, I'll lay.  
I'll repay when I may,  
295 Now I'll borrow.                   **[He goes home with the sheep]***

[Scene 2 / Mak's cottage]

M. *Now, Gill, are you in there? Give us some light.*

G. *Who's making a din at this time of night?*

*I'm busy spinning; do you think I might*

[She is sprawled on the bed drinking and gets up reluctantly]

*Earn money for nothing? Curse all in sight.*

300 *You see* [To audience]

*A housewife, like others,*

*We're all slaves and mothers,*

*Whom everyone bothers.*

304 *No pay here for me.*

M. *Wife, open the door! Do you see what I bring?*

G. *Well, you draw the latch, Master-can't-do-a-thing.*

M. *Do I wait at the door for the dawn birds to sing?*

[Gill opens the door and sees what Mak has brought]

G. *By your scrawny neck you're more likely to swing.*

309 M. *Give way!*

*I'm worth something yet,*

*By my wits I can get*

*More than others who sweat*

313 *All the long day.*

*So it happened to me, Gill; good luck came my way.*

G. *It's a blot on us all if you hang the next day.*

M. *From far closer calls, love, I've got clean away.*

G. *"So oft goes the pot to the water," they say,*

318 *"At last*

*It gets broken."*

M. *What you betoken,*

*Let it never be spoken!*

322 *Come and help fast.*

*I wish it were skinned, for I'm ready to eat.*

*At no time this year have I so craved for meat.*

**G.** *If they come before killing, and hear the thing bleat -*

**M.** *Lord, then I'll be taken; I'm in a cold sweat!*

**[Mak puts the sheep down]**

**327** *Go bar*

*The door.*

**G.** *Yes, Mak.*

*If they come at your back -*

**M.** *They'll knock me, the whole pack,*

**331** *To the floor.*

**G.** *I've worked out a plan, since you haven't got one.*

*Here shall we hide it, until they are gone,*

*In my cradle. Wait on. Just let me alone,*

*And I'll lie in the bed here, and give out a groan.*

**336** **M.** *Go on,*

*I'll tell them alright*

*You gave birth this night.*

**G.** *That day was bright*

**340** *I was born.*

*This was a good ruse, a fair line I've cast.*

*A woman's advice holds good at the last.*

*I don't know who's spying; return to them fast.*

**M.** *When they wake, if I'm absent, we'll feel a cold blast.*

**[Mak leaves the cottage and returns to the shepherds in .....**

**Scene 3 / the open fields]**

**345** *I'll sleep*

*Like this company.*

*I'll trip in secretly;*

*They'll not think it's me*

**349** *Who took their sheep.*

**[He lies down and shortly the shepherds begin to stir]**

1S. *"The crumpet of doom", grab hold of my hand,  
 "Judas, O Lordie", I scarcely can stand.  
 My foot's gone to sleep and my head's none too grand;  
 I dreamt we'd been taken to some distant land.*

**[Says, in exaggerated New Zealand accent:**

*Kia ora. How would ya be?*

*Howzit goin'? MMP.]*

354 2S. *Really?  
 O Lord, I've slept well,  
 I'm fresh as an eel,  
 As light I feel*

358 *As a leaf on a tree.*

3S. *Blessings to all here! I'm all of a shake,  
 My heart's in my mouth, for goodness sake!  
 What's all this din? It makes my ears ache.  
 I'll go for a look. Hark, fellows, awake.*

363 *We were four.  
 Where did Mak go?*

1S. *We were up before you.*

367 2S. *I swear by God, though,  
 He stayed here for sure.*

3S. *I thought he was wrapped up inside that wolfskin.*

1S. *Some dress like that now - without and within.*

3S. *In the midst of our sleep, a notion crept in  
 That Mak trapped a sheep without making a din.*

372 2S. *Be still!  
 This dream says you're mad,*

**[The shepherds see Mak]**

*By God, you've been had.*

376 1S. *God makes good from bad,  
 If that be His Will.*

2S. *Rise, Mak, for shame! You're too long abed.*

M. *Now He be among us Who rose from the dead.*

*What's this? By St James, I feel weak in the head.*

*Where am I? What's happening? My neck's like a lead*

381 *Lump. [The shepherds help Mak to rise]*

*Thanks. During the night*

*I dreamed up a sight*

*That my heart took fright*

385 *And started to thump.*

*I saw Gill in labour, the pains were so bad,*

*And well-nigh at dawn she gave birth to a lad*

*To add to our brood. I can't be that glad;*

*There's more trouble in store than ever I had.*

390 *Oh, my head!*

*Kids everywhere*

*(To Hell with them there),*

*I'm plunged in despair -*

394 *And there's not enough bread.*

*Let me go home to Gill - I think that I ought.*

*You can look up my sleeve, to see I took nought;*

*I'd hate to upset you, remove from you aught.*

3S. *Go on, ill luck have you! Now we'd better sort*

399 *This morn*

*What we've got in our care.*

1S. *I'll go ahead, there*

*Let us meet.*

2S. *Where?*

403 3S. *At the crooked thorn.*

**[Scene 4, Mak's cottage]**

M. *Is anyone there? How long must I wait?*

G. *Who's making that din? It's ever so late.*

M. *Ah, Gill, how's it going? It's me - Mak - your mate.*

G. *O now we'll end up in a dangerous state,*

408 *Lord Guile!*

**[Gill lets Mak into the cottage]**

- He makes such a roar,  
 His throat must be sore,  
 I can't do any more  
 412 Work for a while.
- M. Just listen to all the excuses she makes. **[To audience]**  
 After five minutes' work she swears her back aches.
- G. Who comes and who goes? Who wanders or wakes?  
 What makes me so hoarse? Who brews and who bakes?  
 417 I declare,  
 It's sad to behold  
 Now in hot, now in cold,  
 Wretched the household  
 421 With no woman there.
- But how did you go with those shepherds, eh Mak?  
 M. The last words I heard from them as I turned back,  
 They'd check their sheep numbers, the whole of the pack.  
 I think they'll be angry to find out their lack,  
 426 You'll see.  
 But however the game,  
 It's me that they'll blame,  
 They'll cry "Mak, for shame!"  
 430 And curse me.
- You must stick to your promise.
- G. *I'll do as I said.*  
 I'll cover it up here in my cradle-bed.  
**[She tucks up the sheep]**  
 In worse things by far I've outrun where you led.  
 I'll lie down at once. Cover me.
- M. *Rest your head. [He helps her roughly]*
- 435 G. Watch out!  
 If Coll and his lot  
 Come charging in hot -
- M. A hanging we've got,  
 439 If they see his snout!

- G. *Listen out for their call, they'll be on us soon.  
Get everything ready and sing on your own;  
You sing a lullaby, I'll give a groan  
And call out by the wall on Mary and John,  
444 In pain.  
Get going fast.  
When you hear them at last;  
If I've made a poor cast,  
448 Never trust me again.*

[Scene 5 - the crooked thorn]

- 3S. *Good morning, Coll, you're awake and seem hot.*  
1S. *I wish I was dead. We've made a bad blot -  
We're short of a sheep.*  
3S. *God grant we were not!*  
2S. *Who'd do us such insult? We're in a bad spot.*  
453 1S. *A hellhound.  
I've searched with my dogs  
All Horbury copse,  
And, of fifteen hogs,  
457 Only one ewe I found*
- 3S. *Now listen to me: by St Thomas of Kent,  
Either Mak or his Gill is on trouble bent.*  
1S. *Peace, man, be still. I saw when he went.  
You're slandering the man; you ought to repent  
462 At speed.*
- 2S. *It's plain as the sun,  
When all's said and done,  
I'd say Mak's the one  
466 Who did this same deed.*
- 3S. *Well then, let's go there as fast as the light.  
I won't stop for food till he's given a fright.*  
1S. *And I'll take no drink till we've got him in sight.*  
2S. *We'll pin him down then, try to run as he might  
471 From his wrong.*

*One thing I swear:  
It's my earnest prayer  
That his throat'll lack air  
475 Before long.*

**[The shepherds approach Mak's cottage - he sees them coming and runs inside]**

**[Scene 6 / Mak's cottage]**

3S. *Did you hear such a singing? They must like to croon.*

1S. *I've never heard bawling so far out of tune.  
Call to him.*

2S. *Master Mak, open up, and right soon.*

M. *Who's that calling out, as if it was noon  
480 Here and now?  
Who's there, I say?*

3S. *I wish it was day.*

M. *Well then, go away,  
484 Or stop that row.*

*There's a sick woman here, she's in some distress;  
I wish all the world she could suffer far less.*

G. *Go somewhere else. When you roar and you press,  
489 For sweet Jesu's sake, then my head's in a mess,  
That's true.*

1S. *Tell us, Mak, if you can,  
How is it, man?*

M. *You've come to town?  
493 How is it with you?*

**[Mak lets the shepherds into the cottage]**

*You've run in the mire, and are still steaming wet,  
So I'll make you a fire and down you all set.*

**[The shepherds see the cradle]**

*I'd hire a nurse. Do you three recall yet  
498 My dream? This is it. My reckoning I've met  
In season*

502 *I've got kids, as you knew,  
More than a few;  
But we drink what we brew,  
So men reason.*

*Before you go, eat with us. You're very tired.*

2S. *Your drink and your food won't give what's desired.*

M. *What's wrong with you, sirs?*

3S. *The sheep we're required  
To look after have gone. We're sure to be fired.*

507 M. *Have a drink.*

*Oh, if I'd been there,  
To lighten your care -*

511 1S. *Some believe that you were,  
That's what some of us think.*

2S. *Yes, some folks believe that a thief you could be.*

3S. *Either you or your wife, and so say we three.*

516 M. *If you really suspect either poor Gill or me,  
Come, search through our house, and then you may see  
For yourselves.*

*If I had a sheep now,  
A calf or a cow -  
And Gill laid here low -*

520 *Empty shelves.*

**[The shepherds search the cottage]**

*As I'm honest and true, to God do I pray  
That this is the first meal that I'll eat today. [Holds up large carrot]*

525 1S. *Mak, on my life, you be careful, I say:  
He learned to steal early who couldn't say nay.*

G. *I'm ill.  
Go, thieves, from our home,  
And leave us alone.*

529 M. *Just hear her groan;  
Show some good will.*

- G. *Out, thieves, from my child! Mak, show them the door.*
- M. *The suffering she's been through should make your hearts sore.  
You do wrong, I warn you, to act thus before  
A woman so tired; I refuse to say more.*
- 534 G. *Ouch, my middle!  
I pray God so mild,  
If you I beguiled,  
Then I'll eat this child*
- 538 *Lying in the cradle.*
- M. *Peace, woman, for God's sake, no more of that row!  
You drum at my brain, and you're creasing my brow.*
- 2S. *Our sheep must be dead. Have you searched high and low?*
- 3S. *And found nothing at all; we'd better go now.*
- 543 *Curse it, mates,  
It's got me beat -  
I can find no meat  
For people to eat,*
- 547 *Just two empty plates.*
- Nothing else that has breath, if it be tame or wild,*
- [Third shepherd moves towards cradle, then holds his nose]**
- Save what's in this cradle - that smells pretty soiled.*
- G. *No, so God bless me, I've joy of this child.*
- 1S. *We've made a mistake; I think we're beguiled.*
- 552 2S. *We've been done.  
Mak, Our Lady give joy,  
Is your child a boy?*
- M. *Any lord might enjoy*
- 556 *This child as his son.*
- [Mak is anxious to keep the shepherds away from the cradle]**
- On waking he snatches, a wonder to see.*
- 3S. *Good wishes to him, all power to his knee.  
Have you chosen his godparents ? Who would they be?*
- M. *Good luck to them all.*
- 1S. *That sounds odd to me.*
- 561 M. *God bless them all:*

- Parkin, Gib Waller too;  
There's John Horne who  
Made such a to-do,  
565 The one who's so tall.*
- 2S.** *Mak, let us be friends, for we're all at one.*  
**M.** *I make no more comment; amends I have none.  
Goodbye to you all - [Aside] hurry up and be gone!  
[The shepherds leave the cottage]*
- 3S.** *Fair words there may be, but love there is none  
570 This year.*
- 1S.** *Did you give the lad aught?*  
**2S.** *Of money I'm short.*  
**3S.** *A gift's worth a thought,  
574 Wait for me here.*
- [He returns to the cottage]**
- Mak, don't be upset, I've come back to the lad.*  
**M.** *No, that's a great shame, your manners are bad.*  
**3S.** *Your child, the young day-star, he won't be so sad,  
For here you are, Mak, to make the boy glad,  
579 Sixpence from me. [Mak takes the money]*
- M.** *Go away, he's sleeping.*  
**3S.** *No, he's peeping.*  
**M.** *He'll soon be weeping.  
583 Just clear off, see?*
- [The other shepherds return to the cottage]**
- 3S.** *Just let me kiss him, I'll lift the cloth out. [He looks at the sheep]  
What the Devil is this? He's got a long snout.*  
**1S.** *The lad's badly marked. We're prying about.*  
**2S.** *What's been badly spun so comes badly out.  
588 Mak's son! [He recognises the sheep]  
He looks like our sheep.*
- 3S.** *Gib, let's have a peep. [He picks it up]*  
**1S.** *Trust Nature to creep  
592 Where it can't run.*

- 2S. *I think we've been done by Mak's cunning trick!  
It's a real swindle -*
- 3S. *It made us look thick!  
Let's burn this foul witch, tie her up double quick;  
She ought to be hanged. Take her off to the nick.  
And you too.  
Look how they swaddle  
His feet in the middle.  
Horned lads in a cradle -*
- 597
- 601 *That's something new.*
- M. *Peace, I say, all of you, stop beating the air.  
I'm the lad's father: my wife bore him there.*
- 2S. *What devil's name has he? Look at Mak's heir.*
- 1S. *Leave off from all that. Here's sorrow and care  
And pity.*
- 606
- G. *A lovely child he  
To sit on my knee,  
My darling I see,  
I love you, my pretty.*
- 610
- 3S. *There's a mark on his ear, to me that's a sign.*
- M. *His nose has been broken, this poor lad of mine.  
The priest says the Devil has marked him, the Swine.*
- 1S. *Now stop your lies, Mak, for your life's on the line.  
Find some arms.*
- 615
- G. *He was grabbed by an elf -  
I saw it myself;  
When the clock struck twelve  
Bewitched with charms.*
- 619
- 3S. *You're the best pair of rascals the world ever bred.*
- 2S. *Since they keep to their story, let's leave them dead.*
- [Mak grovels at the shepherds' feet]**
- M. *If I trespass again, you can cut off my head.  
Please show us some mercy.*
- 1S. *Let's do this instead:*
- 624 *For our loss*

*We won't curse or swear,  
Quarrel or care.  
This fellow right there*

628 *In a blanket we'll toss. [They take Mak behind the cottage]*  
[After they have dealt with him, the shepherds return to .....

**Scene 7 / the open fields]**

1S. *O Lordy, I'm sore and I'm ready to drop.  
I'm aching for rest, from my toes to my top.*

2S. *I keep counting sheep - will my brain never stop?  
And into my bed I'm ready to hop.*

633 3S. *And me.  
Lie down by this rail.*

1S. *What a marvellous tale!*

3S. *It'll keep us in ale .....*

637 *Now let be.*

**[The shepherds sleep. An Angel sings *Gloria in excelsis Deo* and says:]**

A. *Rise, gentle herdsman, for now He is born  
To save all the children of Adam forlorn  
And buy back a world by the Devil so torn.  
God stands as your friend on this fine Christmas morn.*

642 *It's no fable.  
In Bethlehem see  
Where lies He*

*In a crib, poorly,  
646 In the beasts' stable.*

**[The shepherds awake at the singing and kneel towards the Angel]**

1S. *That's the loveliest voice that I ever did hear,*

**[They all three rise slowly after the Angel departs]**

*A marvel to speak of, though I'm full of fear.*

2S. *She spoke of God's Son, the message was clear.  
As if lit from the sun our own fields appear,*

651 *I swear.*

- 3S. *A child, did she say,  
In Bethlehem lay?*
- 1S. *By that star's bright ray*
- 655 *Let's seek Him there.*
- 2S. *Say, what was her song? Did you hear how she sang it,  
Three breves to a long?*
- 3S. *Yes, surely she trilled it:  
And not a note wrong, the voice clear and perfect.*
- 1S. *She wants us to sing just the way that she sang it -*
- 660 *And I can.*
- 2S. *Let's hear how you croon;  
Can you bark at the moon?*
- 3S. *Shut up, have done!*
- 664 1S. *Listen, man. [The First Shepherd sings]*
- 2S. *To Bethlehem she told us to hurry along.  
But I'm a bit worried we've tarried too long.*
- 3S. *Be merry, not sad - and let mirth be our song!  
Long-lasting joy and salvation from wrong*
- 669 *And great bliss.*
- 1S. *Let's get ourselves thither,  
Whatever the bother:  
That Child and His mother*
- 673 *Let's not miss.*
- 2S. *We find out by prophecy - let up your din*
- [The First Shepherd has kept on singing] -**
- Of David, Isaiah, and more of that kin -  
These learned men told us that to a virgin  
Should He come and be born, to conquer our sin,*
- 678 *And relieve  
Mankind from woe,  
Isaiah said so:  
"A virgin, lo,  
A child shall conceive."*
- 682

3S. *Let us rejoice and be glad in this day  
And praise His great power as we go on our way.  
Lord, I would be happy for ever and ay,  
If I kneel on my knees and have something to say*  
687 *To that Child.  
But the angel said  
In a crib He was laid,  
So poorly arrayed,*  
691 *Both meek and mild.*

1S. *Patriarchs and prophets of days long ago  
Awaited the birth of this Child here below.  
They're all of them dead, in the earth they're laid low.  
Before morning comes, we'll look at Him, though.*  
696 *And behold,  
When I see Him and kneel,  
Full well I shall feel  
The words, true as steel,*  
700 *Of prophets of old.*

*And to poor folks like us He chose to appear,  
To find us out first, bring this news to our ear.*

2S. *Come on now, let's go, His birthplace is near.*

3S. *I'm ready and willing; let all of us here  
Go to that One.*  
705

*Lord, if Your will be -  
Though we're simple, all three -*

*Thus answer our plea*

709 *To comfort Your Son.*

**[The shepherds proceed to .....**

### **Scene 8 / the stable at Bethlehem, to the Virgin and Christ-Child]**

1S. *Hail, comely and clean; hail, young Child.  
Hail, Creator, born of a mother so mild.  
You have cursed, as I know, the Devil so wild:  
The deceiver of men is himself beguiled.*  
714 *Lo, He is merry,*

**[The First Shepherd peers closer at the Christ-Child]**

- He is laughing, my sweeting!*  
*This is a fine meeting.*  
*My promise I'm keeping:*  
 718 *Here, have a cherry.*
- 2S. *Hail, sovereign Saviour, for us You have sought.*  
*Hail, noble Child, Who has wondrous things wrought.*  
*Hail, full of favour, Who made all things of nought.*  
*I kneel and revere. A bird I have brought,*  
 723 *Here You are.*  
*Our Saviour You'll be,*  
*Your blood sets us free,*  
*Your light shines on me,*  
 727 *Little day-star.*
- 3S. *Hail, darling dear, God with us indeed.*  
*To have You close by me in all things I plead.*  
*Hail, sweet is Your cheer. Yet my heart will bleed*  
*To see You lie here in the greatest of need,*  
 732 *With no pennies.*  
*Put out Your hand:*  
*Here's a ball, nothing grand,*  
*Just for fun, understand?*  
 736 *Use it for tennis.*
- BVM.**  
*The Father of heaven, God omnipotent,*  
*The Maker of all things, His Son has sent.*  
*He called me by name, favoured me as was meant.*  
*I conceived through God's might and His clear intent;*  
 741 *And now He is born.*  
*May He help you from woe,*  
*I shall pray He does so.*  
*Proclaim as you go,*  
 745 *And remember this morn.*

1S. *Farewell, our lady, so fair to behold,  
With your Child in your arms.*

2S. *But He lies very cold.  
All's well, tiny Lord, now we go to the fold.*

3S. *In truth, so already it seems to be told  
As a story.*

750

1S. *What grace we've found.*

2S. *We'll tell it around.*

3S. *Let joy abound:  
Let's sing His glory.*

**[The shepherds depart singing "Summer is a comin' in."]**

## APPENDIX E

### COMMENTATOR'S SCRIPT FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF "CHRISTMAS PAST" - 23RD NOVEMBER, 1996

#### First Part

[Enter the members of the Blenheim Choral Society, to take up their seats.]

[Commentator, clad in academics, enters. Coughs over-politely, to gain attention of audience.]

*Good evening. Welcome to this very brief look into the religious drama and music of, for many of us, our medieval European ancestors. When I use the term 'medieval', I mean that very dynamic period between, say, 400 and 1500 A.D. We shall be concentrating on events in the Christian Calendar connected in some way with Christmas. An idea which will thread through our performances concerns children and parents.*

*Now, I wonder what your motives are in being here tonight. You may be interested in drama or music, or both, you may be a church member, you may be a relative or supporter of the participants so ably helping me out.*

*And my motive in being here? I'm doing my homework. The plays which you see tonight I've translated from Medieval Latin and Middle English. This is part of my progress towards an M.A. in Medieval Studies from Massey University.*

*Which will probably persuade you that there's serious matter in tonight's programme, and there is, but I want you to relax. [Enter robed attendant.] I'll not pretend that study isn't hard and at times frustrating, but why shouldn't the results of it involve a little fun? [Commentator takes off academic gown and hands to attendant. Mutual bowing.] So, if you see or hear anything which pleases you, don't be shy - applaud. [Commentator takes off jacket and hands to attendant. Mutual bowing. Attendant exits.] And if something amuses you, don't hold back - laugh or applaud or both. My researches have convinced me that medieval people could mix laughter and worship in*

*a way that some later ages forgot. There'll also be an opportunity or two for you to join in proceedings. Again, don't be shy.*

*Because music's an essential part of medieval drama, I'm going to ask my friends from the Blenheim Choral Society to sing now for us the well-known Coventry Carol. It was indeed part of a medieval religious play and the version to be sung goes back to those early days. The mood of the carol is sad as it recalls Herod's Slaughter of the Innocents. We're concerned here with hurt children.*

**[Choral Society sings Coventry Carol.]**

*Thank you, choir.*

**[After Choral Society returns to seats, taped thunder and Voice of God - from York Judgement Day.]**

*The Voice of God, from a play about the Judgement performed in the English city of York perhaps five hundred years ago. In New Zealand terms, that's a little after, a strong oral tradition tells us, the main body of Maori ancestors came to these shores. What we heard were the words of a hurt Father. The mood is sad as was that of the Coventry Carol.*

*By the way, if you'd visited York in June of this year you'd have had a chance to see some medieval religious plays. They've been revived quite regularly now for nearly half a century. But this year for the first time the part of God was taken by a woman. That set the cat among the pigeons! God the Father to God the Parent - too politically correct for some. Yet what it really shows is that these plays can say something to us today, that people are serious about reviving them, that they allow adaptation to the modern situation. And that's another good reason, besides, I hope, enjoyment, why we're here tonight.*

*But whether it's God the Father or God the Parent, we cannot ignore the fact that God is at the centre of much medieval drama. Indeed, it was out of Christian worship that this drama grew. Let's go back five hundred years from our York Voice of God, to about a thousand years after the birth of Christ.*

**[Enter group of senior music students from Marlborough Girls' College.]**

*We see entering a group of monks from that time. They've come into church to worship at Christmas, to celebrate the birth of the Saving Child, a matter of joy compared with the sadness we've noted so far. O.K. - I've cheated. I've followed this year's York example and enlisted the help of a teacher and music students from the Marlborough Girls' College. It won't be the last time we cheat this evening. They're going to sing a little plainsong, the music of the services, for us. These clever young women have written the music themselves.*

**[Plainsong.]**

*Then a psalm would follow. Now they **[Commentator indicating singers]** sang about the shepherds' worshipping of the Christ-Child. They'll sing it again. Notice how differently they treat it this time.*

**[Trope.]**

*You've just witnessed our first play. Did you notice how the singers changed positions, and shared the singing? One group was the shepherds, the other what medieval tradition regarded as the midwives. People are taking parts.*

*Thank you, brothers.*

**[Procession of scholars from the back of the central aisle.]**

*Look, here comes another group, some young monkish scholars on their way to rehearse a play in honour of their patron saint. It'll be performed on his feast day, and, like our first play, in church. It would've been sung, but we're not going to do that. The Latin script, about hurt young people, was written down in France probably some time in the 13th century. And yes, I've cheated again concerning the sexes - I'm being helped here by students from the Girls' and Boys' Colleges.*

*And who is these young people's patron saint? Fourth-century bishop, St. Nicholas, patron of children, travellers, sailors, merchants and thieves as well as scholars. You see, some plays in church became over the next centuries a little longer and dealt with stories both in and outside the Bible. It seems, too, that some of the play organizers saw opportunities to use scenery, costumes and properties.*

*While the scholars prepare for their rehearsal, the Choral Society's going to give us another carol, from mid-14th-century Germany. We've cheated yet again here, as the arrangement's by Gustav Holst, but to make up, we're keeping to the original Latin. The carol talks more than once about young voices singing out the Christmas story.*

**[Choral Society sings *Personent Hodie*.]**

*Thank you, choir.*

*As our young monks' play opens, three scholars are seeking rest as they travel to study in foreign lands. They come near an inn .....*

**[Performance of St. Nicholas play.]**

*Then all sing the Te Deum and the service goes on.*

*Thank you, young scholars.*

*Spare a thought for St Nicholas. His feast day is soon - 6th December. So he's near Christmas and, because of our modern perception of Santa Claus, the jolly fat man in the red suit, very much part of it, and so very much to do with children.*

*To bring the first part of our evening to an end, let's sing a carol together. Appropriately, it's about a medieval saint and a young person performing a good deed. Now let's do what we normally do when we sing Good King Wenceslas, higher voices tackling the page's lines and deeper voices the king's. But this time let's reflect that, in taking parts, we're copying what those monks of our first play did with the Christmas Story about a thousand years ago. When we've finished the carol, there'll be an interval of ten minutes. The words of the carol are on your programme.*

**[All sing *Good King Wenceslas*.]**

**[Blenheim Choral Society and Commentator file out.]**

## Second Part

### [Blenheim Choral Society and Commentator file in.]

*And now we return to drama and to the Christmas story. These next words will be familiar to you all.*

### [Reading of Luke 2, verses 8 to 20.]

*Some time in the 15th century, a writer of plays - we call him the Wakefield Master (Wakefield is in Yorkshire) - took this part of the Nativity story, looked a little closer at the shepherds and portrayed them in a way that his contemporaries would understand. The result was an acknowledged masterpiece - yes, people could write great plays before William Shakespeare came along. It is known as the Second Shepherds' Pageant or Secunda Pastorum. In fact, the Wakefield Master wrote two plays about the shepherds, but the second is better known.*

*This play was part of a cycle (known as the Wakefield or Towneley Cycle) which told the whole Christian story, from Creation to Judgement. Other towns and cities, like York (remember the Voice of God from York's Judgement play?) and Chester, had similar plays - they were called Miracles or Mysteries. We're going to present it in church, but it was most likely performed outdoors. Scholars argue about whether such plays were performed at one spot only or on carts (pageants), at various places round a town. Certainly by now, lay people were more involved in putting them on.*

*This play - about a false child and a Saving Child - has an intriguing blend of the serious and the comic about it. Listen to the Bethlehem shepherds-cum-15th-century Englishmen moan about their lives - is there something 'modern' and familiar about their moaning? Watch out for Mak, the sheep stealer: is he just a medieval smalltime crook - that's the way we're playing him here - or can we see him as the Devil? Listen out also for a reference to New Zealand, naturally mine and not the Wakefield Master's.*

*And here's another chance for you to join in. Towards the end of the play, when the shepherds make their way to Bethlehem, and when the Blenheim Choral Society sings the 15th-century German carol There Is a Rose, if you wish to leave your seat and join the shepherds, feel free to do so. Calm down. This is no mission, I'm no Billy Graham, there's no commitment. Just become one of the players for a little while. Medieval drama, I believe, was about participation.*

*And now to those fields near Bethlehem on a cold winter's night .....*

**[Performance of *Secunda Pastorum*.]**

*Thank you, actors and choir - and participating audience.*

*Don't think that the reference to New Zealand's cheating - I hope that it captures the spirit of a joke about the First Shepherd's dreaming of England. **[Attendant returns with Commentator's coat and academics. Mutual bowing and putting on.]** It's a tribute to the Wakefield Master who's given us such wonderful material to work on.*

*So now we must return to our own wise world of mass starvation, terrorism and Telebingo. To help us bridge the centuries, let's sing the familiar carol O Come All Ye Faithful - again, it's one where we often leave some lines to lighter voices, thus we're taking parts. The words are on your programme. Thank you for being with us this evening. Goodnight, and the Compliments of the coming Season to you all. "Amen, say ye, for saint charity."*

**[Singing of *O Come All Ye Faithful*, after which the Blenheim Choral Society and the Commentator depart.]**

# CHRISTMAS PAST



A SELECTION OF SHORT PLAYS  
(IN MODERN ENGLISH) AND  
MUSIC FROM THE MIDDLE AGES,  
WITH CHRISTMAS IN MIND

CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY,  
BLENHEIM

8 P.M. SATURDAY, 23RD  
NOVEMBER

COLLECTION PLATE AT THE DOOR

PRESENTED BY BRIAN COLLINS, WITH  
THE BLENHEIM CHORAL SOCIETY  
STUDENTS AND STAFF OF THE MARLBOROUGH GIRLS' AND  
BOYS' COLLEGES  
MEMBERS OF THE MARLBOROUGH REPERTORY SOCIETY

SPONSORED BY THE MARLBOROUGH REPERTORY SOCIETY

## FIRST PART

1. The Coventry Carol - Blenheim Choral Society (conductor - Cherry Taylor).
2. The Voice of God - Robert Neale, Massey University.
3. Plainson/Trope - Marlborough Girls' College Senior Music Students.  
Katie Ellena Amanda Oliver  
Kirsten Clark Nicola Robinson
4. Carol: *Personent Hodie* - Blenheim Choral Society.
5. *Saint Nicholas and the Three Scholars* - Students from the Marlborough Boys' and Girls' Colleges.  
First Scholar - Jo Phillips Innkeeper - Sam Meikle  
Second Scholar - Kate McNamara His Wife - Bridget McNamara  
Third Scholar - Tim Meikle Saint Nicholas - Locky Yeoman
6. Audience Carol: *Good King Wenceslas* (accompanist - Hilary Youngman).  
Good King Wenceslas looked out On the feast of Stephen  
When the snow lay round about, Deep and crisp and even;  
Brightly shone the moon that night, Though the frost was cruel,  
When a poor man came in sight, Gath'ring winter fuel.  
  
"Hither, page, and stand by me, If thou know'st it, telling -  
Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?"  
"Sire, he lives a good league hence, Underneath the mountain,  
Right against the forest fence, By Saint Agnes' fountain."  
  
"Bring me flesh, and bring me wine! Bring me pine logs hither!  
Thou and I will see him dine When we bear them thither."  
Page and monarch forth they went, Forth they went together,  
Through the rude wind's wild lament And the bitter weather.  
  
"Sire, the night is darker now, And the wind blows stronger,  
Fails my heart, I know not how, I can go no longer."  
"Mark my footsteps, good my page, Tread thou in them boldly:  
Thou shalt find the winter's rage Freeze thy blood less coldly."

## APPENDIX F

PROGRAMME FOR PERFORMANCE OF "CHRISTMAS PAST"  
23RD NOVEMBER, 1996

In his master's steps he trod, Where the snow lay dinted;  
 Heat was in the very sod Which the saint had printed.  
 Therefore, Christian men, be sure, Wealth or rank possessing,  
 Ye who now will bless the poor Shall yourselves find blessing.

**SECOND PART**

7. Reading of Luke 2, verses 8 to 20 - Richard Ellena.

8. *The Second Shepherds' Pageant.*

First Shepherd - Norman Fletcher    Second Shepherd - Alister Williams  
 Third Shepherd - Dan Musgrove    Mak - David Nightingale  
 Gill - Trish Holden    Angel - Katie Ellena  
 Blessed Virgin Mary - Bridget McNamara

9. Audience Carol: *O Come All Ye Faithful.*

O come all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant!  
 O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem!  
 Come and behold Him, born the King of angels:  
 O come let us adore Him [Three times.].  
 Christ the Lord.

God of God, Light of light,  
 Lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb.  
 Very God, begotten, not created:  
 O come .....

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation!  
 Sing, all ye citizens of Heaven above,  
 "Glory to God in the highest!"  
 O come .....

The Blenheim Choral Society presents  
*Christmas with Love Transcending*  
 Wesley Centre - Saturday 30th November at 8 p.m.  
 Sunday 1st December at 2 p.m.  
 \$10 adults, \$7 students and senior citizens. Also family rates. Tickets from  
 Blenheim Bookworld, and door sales.

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