ENCOURAGING MARRIAGE *IN FACIE ECCLESIAE:*
The Mary Play 'Betrothal'
and the Sarum *Ordo ad faciendum Sponsalia*

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> Here is þe holyest matremony þat evyr was in þis werd!/
> ... We all wole þis solempn dede record/
> Devowtly: *Alma chorus domini nunc pangat nomina summi*
> ('Now let the choir sing the gracious names of the highest Lord')
> *The Mary Play* from the *N.Town Manuscript* 904–7[1]

The Mary Play from the N.Town manuscript alone among medieval English plays dramatises 'The Betrothal' of the Mother of God.[2] The apocryphal narratives of Mary's early life[3] and the seminal *Legenda Aurea*[4] inform us that Mary and Joseph marry in the Temple of Jerusalem but of the actual ceremony nothing is said. It should not surprise that in the absence of any specific detail *The Mary Play* dramatist revisions Mary's wedding into a contemporary celebration and that this episode is considered suitable for incorporation into the N.Town Plays in which it has survived.[5] Medieval audiences were familiar with their own present time surfacing in dramatisations of biblical history. The Towneley *Mactatio Abel* features grumbles about priests profiting from tithes while in the Chester *Harrowing of Hell* the female innkeeper admits to having served short measures and adding ashes and herbs to the beer that she brewed to give it the illusion of being strong ale.[6] Through the appearance of the synchronic in a diachronic sweep of biblical history, medieval drama makes strikingly apparent the relevance of the scriptural narratives, church rituals and sacraments to the lives of the audience.

The synchronic surfaces in *The Mary Play* 'Betrothal' when Mary and Joseph marry in a contemporary church wedding ceremony. The sequence of '*Alma chorus*' with which the episode concludes is only one resonance of many between 'The Betrothal' ceremony and the *Ordo ad faciendum sponsalia* of the Sarum (Salisbury) Missal, the Use that by 1500 was dominant in England.[7] *The Mary Play's* reliance upon the liturgy for its dramatic techniques and stage business has long been recognised. Martial Rose notes that the Marian material is full of ritualistic action and Richard Axton argues that the singing of liturgical texts in this material is crucial to

its devotional effect.[8]   In its use of music and ritual from the medieval marriage liturgy the episode of Mary's marriage is no exception.

The object of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it interrogates the many correspondences between 'The Betrothal' and the Sarum marriage liturgy. Peter Meredith has questioned how apparent these would have been to an audience when service books usually gave only the vows in English although he does acknowledge that the play version is 'sufficiently similar to have the ring of truth and reality'.[9]   This paper contends that the setting, words, action, and music of the ceremony render it not merely sufficiently similar but rather identifiably so and in such a memorable way that, as Richard Rastall suggests, a deliberate reference to the marriage liturgy must be assumed.[10]   In exclaiming, 'Here is þe holyest matremony þat evyr was in þis werd!' Bishop Ysakar draws the audience's attention to the wedding through what David Mills terms the 'behold and see convention' where speeches 'point a verbal finger at the visual scene and urge a particular attitude or response upon the audience.[11]   In recognition of the emphasis and importance that *The Mary Play* dramatist places on Mary and Joseph's wedding, this paper also reflects upon what response might be desired from an audience that stands literally as witness to 'þis solempn dede' that they are instructed to 'record Devowtly' (904).

During the Middle Ages matrimony becomes increasingly subject to Church regulation and control. Canon law decreed who could and could not marry. A couple should not be related within four degrees[12] through either consanguinity (a blood tie) or affinity (a relationship created between someone's blood relations and the person with whom he or she has had sexual intercourse). The couple should freely give their consent to the union and, as established in Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, an indissoluble, licit marriage results there and then if consent is given in the present tense (*verba de presenti*).[13]   After the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) a pending marriage was required to be announced publicly (called the reading of the banns) with a suitable time being fixed beforehand in which any lawful impediment could be identified.[14]

The Church exerted less control, however, at the level of the actual wedding ceremony. It did stipulate when weddings might take place. As stated in the Sarum Missal, marriages were prohibited between Advent and Epiphany; Septuagesima (the third Sunday before Lent) up until Easter; the Monday of Rogation Week (the week before Ascension Day) until the day after Trinity Sunday.[15]   In effect, the Church proscribed weddings from taking place during December until 6 January and from

February to mid-June, depending on the date of Easter. From as early as the twelfth century the Church had a well-developed marriage liturgy with which to celebrate a marriage that commenced before the church door and continued inside where a nuptial mass was celebrated.[16] From the mid-fourteenth century the complete ceremony might take place within the church.

Although equipped with the ritual to perform weddings and actively encouraging that they be solemnised *in facie ecclesiae* or in the face or presence of the Church, a church ceremony was not essential to create a full and licit marriage between two readily consenting individuals free to marry. Many took the Church at its word and marriages were contracted in a variety of locations. Richard Helmholz's study of medieval marriage litigation reveals some very interesting locations for a wedding ceremony: under an ash tree, in a garden, in a storehouse, in a field, a blacksmith's shop, in a kitchen, by an oak tree, in the alehouse, on the King's Highway, and even in bed.[17] An impromptu and unwitnessed wedding whose existence could later be denied suited those who wished to make a quick getaway from a spouse who turned out to be less than ideal, or those who had simply had a subsequent better offer. For the Church courts, however, clandestine weddings caused much spiritual concern and administrative labour. Between 1300 and 1500 records of ecclesiastical court proceedings suggest that the majority of matrimonial cases arose through the efforts of abandoned spouses to enforce marriage contracts that became litigious precisely because the marriage was neither publicly announced nor witnessed.[18]

In the Middle Ages Mary is used by some as a marital exemplar *par excellence* specifically to raise the profile of the institution of marriage. The fourteenth-century work of spiritual guidance, *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, states that through Mary's participation in this human relationship marriage

> is a staate of grete worþinesse. For God hymself wolde be bore of a wif, þat was of þe maide Marie, wherefore þe maide Marie made a mantel of mariage wher-vnder Goddes sone was conceyued and borne. Vnder þat mantel was hiled from þe deuel þe pryuete and þe counseil of oure raunsom and of oure helþe, & þerfore þan scholde men worschipe it moche and clenliche & honestliche kepe it for þe holynesse þer-of.[19]

Her participation raises the profile and status of marriage, an institution that had been considered by some as coming a poor third to virginity since in the next life, according to St. Jerome, virgins will reap a hundredfold reward, chaste widows a sixtyfold, and the married a mere thirtyfold.[20] *The Book of Vices and Virtues* promotes Mary's marriage as a tool that was used to bring about man's salvation, and as such the institution should be revered and marital relationships faithfully maintained. Dramatising Mary's wedding on stage is able to do much more than simply raise the profile of marriage *per se*. As observed by Meg Twycross, one feature of medieval plays is that they work particularly effectively as a mnemonic device and leave the viewer with a 'vividly memorable image for future use'.[21] Through its performance techniques 'The Betrothal' recalls to mind the ritual of solemnising marriage in church and is instructive in the importance of its taking place *in facie ecclesiae* to an audience whose own marriage celebrations were often other than the Church desired.

In contrast to weddings that took place in pubs, under trees, or in bed, 'The Betrothal' impresses upon its audience that Mary and Joseph's wedding takes place in a sacred location, is publicly witnessed, and officially blessed. Although Mary goes 'Into þe tempyl a spowse to wedde' (612), that is, into the Temple of Jerusalem in which she has spent her childhood from the age of three, a medieval audience may readily have transposed the wedding to their own contemporary setting. This is evinced in the stained glass of the Betrothal window in St Mary's Parish Church, Fairford, in Gloucestershire (c.1500–1517).[22] In the Fairford glass Mary and Joseph are depicted marrying in a medieval English church complete with floor tiles and stained glass windows, before a crowd of onlookers (see PLATE 1). In performing 'The Betrothal' as part of *The Mary Play* and within the context of the N.Town Plays, it is likely that the Temple of Jerusalem was represented on a single platform or structure.[23] This could be transformed readily through the use of props into a setting analogous to a medieval church interior replete with an altar. Guild records testify that in the pageant of the Purification of Our Lady that also takes place in the Temple of Jerusalem, just such a transformation did indeed occur. The 1571/2 records of the Chester Smiths, Cutlers, and Plumbers evince that the guild paid 'to the clarke for lone of a cope an Altercloth & Tunecle xd'[24] for their *Purification* play. Tapers or candles and incense were all part of the Coventry Weavers' stage expenditure for

Plate 1: The Marriage of Joseph and Mary: St Mary's, Fairford, c. 1500–1517
Photo: © Sue Niebrzydowski
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their *Purification* play between 1541 and 1558, to which was added in the second half of the sixteenth century the fee for James Hewett to play the regal or small, portable organ.[25] Collectively candles, incense, ecclesiastical vestments and the use of music could recreate the sights, sounds and smells of a plausible, contemporary church interior. Given the lack of evidence about staging *The Mary Play*, Peter Meredith proposes that it 'is as likely to have been performed indoors as out, and the main central scaffold could easily be the rood screen and loft of a church, or the screen and gallery of a medieval hall'.[26] The verisimilitude of a church interior would enhance the solemnity of proceedings while a medieval hall is a location associated also with weddings. It is the place to which the wealthy retire for their wedding feasts as in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* where the newly weds dine on the dais in the Great Hall in front of all of their guests.[27]

'The Betrothal' is witnessed by an on-stage audience comprising the suitors who were unsuccessful for her hand, Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne, the officiating bishop and of course, the playgoers. In this respect it follows the advice given in 1400 by John Mirk, the Augustinian canon of Lilleshall in Shropshire, to,

> ... come and wytnes brynge
> To stonde by at here weddynge;
> So openlyche at the chyrche dore
> Lete hem eyther wedde othere.
>
> *Instructions to Parish Priests* 204–7[28]

In being witnessed the union's existence and validity cannot be changed later.

For the actual wedding celebration, the dramatist borrows from the Sarum *Ordo ad faciendum sponsalia*. The Sarum rite uses the Mass of the Holy Trinity (normally used on Whitsunday and Trinity Sunday) as its nuptial Mass[29] and, as in Sarum so 'The Betrothal' ceremony contains sequences or hymns belonging to the Mass of the Holy Trinity. The wedding commences with *Benedicta sit beata Trinitas* ('Blessed be the Holy Trinity'), the sequence for the Commemoration of the Holy Trinity and concludes with the Pentecost hymn *Alma chorus domini nunc pangat nomina summi* ('Now let the choir sing the gracious names of the highest Lord' – after 906).[30] The audience witnesses a wedding whose solemn ritual is as clearly introduced and concluded as if it were taking place in their local church. That a male plays the part of Mary may have been neither as

distracting nor detrimental to verisimilitude as might first be thought. The rôle of Mary would have been performed by a pre-pubertal male actor who, Richard Rastall suggests, could be as old as seventeen or eighteen and already possess the acting experience that would enable him to convey with dignity and command 'her' shyness and reluctant obedience to marry.[31]

The Sarum rite begins with the couple consenting to the union by saying 'I will':

> N. wilt though have this woman to thy wedded wife, wilt thou love her, and honour her, keep her and guard her, in health and in sickness, as a husband should a wife, and forsaking all others on account of her, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

> The man shall answer 'I will'.

> Then the priest shall say unto the woman, N. wilt thou take this man to thy wedded husband, wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in health and in sickness, as a wife should a husband, and forsaking all others on account of him, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

> The woman shall answer 'I will'.[32]

The Mary Play presents a close rendition of what it is to which a man consents, when the bishop asks Joseph 'wole ȝe haue þis maydon to ȝour wyff / And here honour and kepe as ȝe howe to do?' (875–6). Joseph's first response is every bride's nightmare, 'Nay, sere so mote I thryff!' (877) and one that might readily encourage the same nervous laughs and gasps from the watching 'congregation' should such a reply be given at a genuine wedding. Reminded that it is God's will, Joseph acquiesces stating 'to performe his wyl I bow' (811). Although he does not state 'I will' Joseph can be understood to promise to perform God's will toward Mary; precisely the loving, honouring, keeping, guarding, and forsaking of all others that is encompassed in the man's consent. The audience will see later Joseph's practical application of this vow when he rents 'a lytyl praty hous' and goes to 'laboryn in fer countré / With trewth to maynteyn oure householde so' (1032, 1040–1).

When Mary replies to the question of consent asked by the bishop, 'wole ȝe haue þis man / and hym to kepyn as ȝour lyff?' (887–8), her response is not 'I will' but rather 'In þe tenderest wyse, fadyr, as I kan, /

And with all my wyttys fyff' (889–90). Although in the affirmative, Mary's vow too is different from Sarum in that she promises to take Joseph as her husband most tenderly and with all her five senses. This phrase is heard in an earlier episode of *The Mary Play*. As a young child in the Temple, Mary prays to God to be allowed, once in her lifetime, to see the lady who will bear God's son, in order that she 'may serve here with my wyttys fyve' (524). Peter Meredith explains that the phrase is a greatly contracted translation of the *oculos*, *linguam*, *manus*, *pedes*, *genua* ('eyes, tongue, hands, feet, knees') with which Mary promises to serve the yet unknown Mother of God in the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*,[33] another source of *The Mary Play*.[34] In the wedding ceremony, however, the referent of Mary's promise to have, keep and serve with her 'wyttys fyve' is Joseph himself. What she does not promise is to obey him, for such a promise from the key component in God's salvific schema who was also revered as Queen of Heaven and Intercessor would be problematic. Her vow of service and fidelity to Joseph, however, recognises key facets of a woman's role in an earthly marital relationship while not compromising the status held by the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven.

The Fairford glass depicts Joseph standing on the priest's right and Mary on his left at the moment in which Joseph takes hold of Mary's left hand. The Sarum Missal explains the woman's place on the left is a result of her formation out of a rib from Adam's left side.[35] This gesture, known as 'handfasting', occurs when the priest transfers the woman from her father's keeping into the legal power of the husband. During handfasting a second exchange of vows in the vernacular between the couple takes place:

> I N. take the N. to my weddyd wyfe, to have & to holde fro this day forward, for better for wurs, for rycher, for porer, in sykenesse & in helth, tyll deth vs depart, yf holy Church will it ordeyn: & therto I plyght the my trouth (*manum retrahendo* – 'withdrawing his hand').

> I N. take the N. to my weddyd husbonde, to have & to holde fro this day forward, for better for wurs, for rycher, for porer, in sykenesse & in helth, to be bonoure & buxum, in bed & at borde, tyll deth vs depart, yf holy Church will it ordeyn: & therto I plyght the my trouth (*manum retrahendo* — 'withdrawing her hand').[36]

In *The Mary Play* Joseph's vow is performed in some detail:

> *Episcopus* (*et idem Joseph*) ('The Bishop, and likewise Joseph')
> Sey þan after me: Here I take þe, Mary to wyff ...
> To hauyn, to holdyn ... as God his wyll with us wyl make ...

> And as longe as bethwen us ... lestyght oure lyff ...
> To loue ȝow as myselff ... my trewth I ȝow take.
> *nunc ad Mariam*, *sic dicens* ('now to Mary, saying as follows')

<div align="right">883–7</div>

As indicated in the stage directions the performance replicates the repetition of the celebrant's words by the male voice, and the alternation between male and female responses as found in the wedding service. Indeed, the copyist who incorporated *The Mary Play* into the N.Town Plays has gone so far as to indicate the repetition of phrases by using the 'tick and comma' mark ⸲ in the middle of the line to mark a pause or break to allow repetition to occur.[37]   In performance nothing could be more appropriate than for Mary to stand on Joseph's left, for them to   clasp hands and then withdraw their hands on completion of the vow, thus incorporating the gesture of handfasting in 'The Betrothal'.

A striking similarity exists between Joseph's vow made at the moment of handfasting and the man's response in the Sarum liturgy. Joseph's 'I take þe Mary, for my wife' replicates the opening of the male vow as found in Sarum. In addition, his promise to 'have and hold' Mary, that is, to take over the authority and care of her from her parents, is a phrase found verbatim in the liturgy. In what appears to be an echo of 'yf holy Church will it ordeyn', Mary and Joseph's wedding is sanctioned by the authority of God, 'as God his wyll with us wyl make'. 'The Betrothal' includes the promise made by all husbands, that Joseph would remain with his wife until separated by death 'And as longe as bethwen us ... lestyght oure lyff'. This promise would be confirms Joseph's role as Mary's protector and therefore presents little problem doctrinally. Joseph's promise concludes with 'my trewth I ȝow take', a close version of '& therto I plyght my trouth'.

In deference to Mary's chastity that remains unaltered even in marriage, the dramatist is required to be more creative in his use of the woman's vow in handfasting and there is greater discrepancy between the woman's response and that given by Mary. Much of the female vow in the *Sarum* liturgy in which the woman promises to be 'bonoure & buxum, in bed & at borde', gentle and obedient in bed and at board (at table), until death separates them, is highly inappropriate for Mary and Joseph for their marriage was recognised to have been chaste. Thomas Aquinas explains in the *Summa Theologiae* how this was understood, 'Afterwards, when she had taken a husband, the acceptable thing to do in those days, she with her husband took a vow of virginity'.[38] In order to circumvent the difficulty of

tying Mary to any promise of obedience at bed and at board, 'The Betrothal' omits any statement by Mary, partial or otherwise, that recalls the content of this second vow. Instead Mary's response 'In þe tenderest wyse, fadyr, as I kan, / And with all my wyttys fyff' (889–90) serves both as her answer to the first vow of consent *and* as her answer to the vow that would normally accompany the handfasting. In so doing Mary promises Joseph love, honour, and service in all ways but sexual.

Following the handfasting, the marriage liturgy indicates that the man give the woman a ring that is then blessed. Medieval wedding rings could either be a plain band or set with a gemstone, usually a cabochon setting. A gold ring was given by those who could afford it as its incorruptible nature was considered symbolic of the permanent tie of marriage, while for the less well off, wire and pewter ones were available.[39] In 'The Betrothal' Joseph gives Mary a ring in the following exchange:

> *Episcopus*
> Joseph, with þis ryng now wedde þi wyff,
> And be here hand now þu here take.
>
> *Joseph*
> Sere, with þis rynge I wedde here ryff,
> And take here now here for my make.   891–4

Comparison between 'The Betrothal' and the Sarum marriage liturgy is fruitful once more. In Sarum the ring is blessed,

> … do thou, O Lord, send thy blessing upon this ring, that she who shall wear it may be armed with the strength of heavenly defence, and that it may be profitable unto her eternal salvation.

> Bless, O Lord, this ring which we bless in thy holy name; that whosoever she be that shall wear it, may abide in thy peace, and continue in thy will, and live, and increase, and grow old in thy love; and let the length of her days be multiplied.[40]

The ring is then placed upon the woman's finger in a symbolic gesture:

> The man shall take it [the ring] in his right hand and with his three principal fingers, holding the right hand of the bride with his left hand, and shall say, after the priest, 'With thy ryng I the wedde and thys gold and siluer I the geue; and wyth my body I the worscype, and wyth all my worldly catell [*chattels*] I the honore.[41]

The ring blessings that pray for heavenly defence and spiritual profit for its wearer along with peace, fertility, and a long life lived in God's will and love are as appropriate to the Virgin Mary as to any woman. In full view of the audience, Joseph gives Mary a ring as a visible token of their marriage. His response accompanying this ritual, 'with þis rynge', is a recognisable echo of the words of the liturgy but the associations of this ritual are problematic because the giving of a ring symbolises both the giving of the man's body and his goods to his wife. The latter would pose little problem for Mary and Joseph and indeed Joseph leave Mary after their marriage to work to pay the rent on their home but the former would be out of place in their chaste union. The playwright circumvents this difficulty by ignoring the specific words of the liturgy and eliding the significance of this moment by stating an uncontroversial truism: the ring is a symbol of the fact that Mary and Joseph's marriage. Joseph is concerned that the ring-giving is 'ryff' or openly done, yet another public demonstration of their marriage since then, as now, a ring served as the only visible symbol of a woman's married status.

It is possible in a play so fond of liturgical gesture that as Joseph gives Mary the ring, he does so in the manner as described in the liturgy,

> Then shall the bridegroom place the ring upon the thumb of the bride, saying, 'In the name of the Father', then upon the second finger, saying, 'and of the Son', then upon the third finger, saying 'and of the Holy Ghost'; then upon the fourth finger, saying 'Amen', and there let him leave it ...[42]

Should the actor playing Joseph leave the ring on Mary's fourth finger this would bear the significance of lying upon the vein that was believed to run from the finger to the heart with the band itself signifying the affection that they should always share. Medieval audiences might even expect a ring to be used as a prop. Europe boasted more than one of the actual ring with which Mary and Joseph had married. Mary's wedding ring of onyx or amethyst and bearing a representation of the flowers that budded from Joseph's rod when selected as her husband by this miraculous sign, held pride of place in the Cathedral of Perugia, built especially to house this relic[43] while another was kept at Chiusi in Tuscany.[44] Closer to home, Mary is shown wearing a ring with a magnificent sapphire embroidered onto the orphrey of a dalmatic made between 1415 and 1435 for Whalley Abbey, in Lancashire.

After the ring giving the couple might take Holy Communion and are then brought before the altar steps where they prostrate themselves in prayer and are blessed. If neither has been previously married and blessed a pall or canopy is held above them by four clerks in surplices. As early as 1287 the synodal statutes of Bishop Quinel of Exeter stipulated that every parish church should contain a nuptial veil or canopy.[45] Canopies were used in the Corpus Christi procession. The Coventry Smiths' Account of 1502 record the existence of 'a canopy of Sylke brodoryd with gold with ij Sydes of the same for the precession'.[46] *The Mary Play* dramatist makes clear that Joseph 'haue be maydon evyr' (752) and is not previously married as stated in some apocryphal narratives.[47] It is not inconceivable that such a canopy is used as a prop in their blessing. Unusually, Mary alone falls to her knees to be blessed, 'To haue ȝour blyssyng, fadyr, I falle ȝow before' (914). This feature may be in recognition of Joseph's advanced years the result of which he bemoans have made him 'so agyd and so olde / Þat both myn leggys gyn to folde' and have left him 'ny almost lame' (799–801). It is further indication of Mary's obedience to God's will as it recalls her previous gesture of kneeling, *et genuflectet ad Deum* ('and she shall kneel to God', 294) when Mary is offered as a child into the service of the Temple and she accepts this role. On kneeling in 'The Betrothal' Mary is blessed in the name of the Trinity, *In nomine Patris et Filij et Spiritus Sancti* ('in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Ghost', 916). The ceremony is brought to a close by the singing of the sequence *Alma Chorus*.

On conclusion of the ceremony, Mary leaves her parents to begin her new life as a married woman. Before she departs, in a very human moment, she asks for her parents' blessing. Joachim prays that God will guide her wherever she travels. Anne reminds her daughter that she 'Be lowe and buxhum, meke and mylde, / Sad and sobyr and nothyng wylde' (966–7). Her advice that Mary be 'buxhum' echoes the promise made by the woman in handfasting that she will be 'bonoure & buxum at bed and at board'. Although Mary did not vow such obedience Anne recalls for the audience the kind of commonplace advice that one imagines was given to young brides. Indeed, advice very similar to that of Saint Anne is given by the narrator of the verse narrative 'How the Good Wijf Tauȝht Hir Douȝtir'.[48] In this text of marital instruction the narrator advises the young girl that to her husband a wife should 'Meekely þou him answere' and be 'Fair of speech ... gladde, & of mylde mood ... and be not of cheer to wielde' (41, 45, 58). Mary demonstrates her patient obedience and mild manner towards her new husband in accepting that he must leave her

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immediately after the wedding to prepare a home for her while she 'xal here abyde ȝour aȝen-comynge, / And on my sawtere-book I xal rede' (996-7). 'The Betrothal' episode closes with this vision of marital harmony and the young wife promising to occupy herself with spiritually instructive reading.

Through his use of music and Latin, props, and the incorporation of many ritual gestures and words of the Sarum *Ordo ad faciendum sponsalia*, the *Mary Play* dramatist invites the audience to attend and celebrate the most spiritually significant wedding in Christian history. Certainly the celibate nature of Mary and Joseph's marriage necessitates that the female vows in particular appear in truncated form. Their judicious reworking, however, was not intended to mask the apparent fact of Mary and Joseph participating in a medieval wedding ceremony *in facie ecclesiae*, presided over by a Bishop, in full view of Mary's parents and a crowd of onlookers that includes the off-stage spectators. The 'solempn dede' of the wedding scene reinforces upon an audience already accustomed to Mary for guidance, that a wedding celebrated publicly before witnesses and in the presence of the Church is worthy of the Mother of God and so is to be recommended to all.

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NOTES

1. *The Mary Play from the N.Town Manuscript* edited by Peter Meredith (London: Longman, 1987).

2. I have followed Peter Meredith in calling the episode of Mary and Joseph's wedding 'The Betrothal'.

3. For Marian apocrypha see the 'Protevangelion' and the 'Pseudo-Matthew' in *The Apocryphal New Testament: a collection of Apocryphal Christian literature in an English translation* translated and edited J.K. Elliott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and the 'Evangelium' in *Evangelia Apocrypha* edited Constantinus Tischendorf (Leipzig: Avenarius and Medessolin, 1853) 92–105.

4. See Jacobus de Voragine *Legenda aurea vulgo historia lombardica dicta* edited Johan Georg Theodor Graesse (Leipzig: Arnold, 1846) 585–95; Jacobus de Voragine *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* translated W. Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton UP, 1993) *2* 149–157.

5. *The N.Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D 8* edited by Stephen Spector, 2 vols *EETS SS 11* and *12* (1991). Peter Meredith's edition of *The Mary Play* (see note

1) is his reconstruction of what survives of *The Mary Play* before it was incorporated into the N.Town Plays.

6. *The Towneley Plays* edited by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, 2 vols *EETS SS 13* and *14* (1994) *1* 12–25; The *Chester Mystery Cycle* edited R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, 2 vols, *EETS SS 3* and 9 (1974, 1986) *2* 275, note 276.

7. R. N. Swanson *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215–c.1515* (Cambridge UP, 1995) 95. However, the York Use was dominant in the North even in 1500.

8. Martial Rose 'The Staging of the Hegge Plays' in *Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 16: Medieval Drama* edited Neville Denny (London: Arnold, 1973) 204–5; Richard Axton *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1974) 172.

9. Meredith *Mary Play* 104, note 883.

10. Richard Rastall *The Heaven Singing: Music in Early English Religious Drama* 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996, reprint 1999) *1* 286.

11. David Mills '"Look at Me when I'm Speaking to You": The "Behold and See" Convention in Medieval Drama' *METh 7:1* (1985) 4–12, at 5.

12. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume 1 (Nicaea 1 – Lateran 5)* edited Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990) 256–7.

13. James Brundage *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 264.

14. Tanner *Decrees* 258.

15. *The Sarum Missal in English* translated Frederick Warren, 2 vols (London: Alexander Moring, 1911) *2* 143–4. All quotations from the Sarum Missal are from this translation.

16. Marriage liturgies have survived in many documents as listed in *Missale ad usum insignis Ecclesiae Eboracensis* edited William G. Henderson (Surtees Society 63; Durham: Surtees Society, 1874) Appendix 4.

17. Richard Helmholz *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge UP, 1974) 29.

18. See Helmholz *Marriage Litigation*, 27–30; M. Sheehan 'The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-century England: Evidence from an Ely Register' *Medieval Studies 33* (1971) 228–63, and C. Donahue Jr 'Female Plaintiffs in Marriages Cases in the Court of York in the Later Middle Ages: What Can We Learn from the Number?' in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England* edited by Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) 166–83.

19. *The Book of Vices and Virtues: a fourteenth-century English translation of the 'Somme Le Roi' of Lorens d'Orleans* edited by W. Nelson Francis *EETS OS 217* (1942) 246.

20. St. Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* translated and quoted in Pierre J. Payer *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (University of Toronto Press, 1993) 170. Jerome explains that this ranking scheme arises from an exegesis of Matthew 13:8 'Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty'.

21. Meg Twycross 'Beyond the Picture Theory: Image and Activity in Medieval Drama' in *Word and Image 4* (1988) 589–617, at 591.

22. H. Wayment *The Stained Glass of the Church of St. Mary, Fairford, Gloucestershire* (Society of Antiquaries, Occasional Paper NS 5; Society of Antiquaries, London: 1984) 2; Sarah Brown, in *Life, Death and Art: the medieval stained glass of Fairford Parish Church* edited Sarah Brown and Lindsay MacDonald (Stroud: Sutton, 1997) confirms Wayment's proposal of 'a date of c.1500–17 for the scheme' (67).

23. Critics of the N.Town Plays concur that the Marian section of the cycle required a fixed stage production involving multiple playing places. Alan Nelson conceives of one *locus* that he terms the 'heaven complex' that includes a temple with an altar and the fifteen steps of the 'Presentation of Mary' as quoted in *N.Town Play* edited Spector *EETS SS 11*, Appendices 2 and 3, 544–9. Peter Meredith argues for a combination of five locations in total within *The Mary Play*: the Temple, Heaven, the houses of Joachim and Anne, Mary and Joseph, and Elizabeth and Zacharias, presented as five scaffolds bordering a playing place; Meredith *Mary Play*, 20.

24. *REED: Chester* edited by Lawrence M. Clopper (University of Toronto Press, 1979) 91.

25. *REED: Coventry* edited R.W. Ingram (University of Toronto Press, 1981) 156, 206, 208 and 210.

26. Meredith *Mary Play* 20.

27. 'The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell' in *Middle English Verse Romances* edited by Donald B. Sands (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986) 340.

28. John Myrc *Instructions for Parish Priests* edited by Edward Peacock *EETS OS 31* (1868).

29. Meredith *Mary Play* 103, note 874 and 104, note 907. See also Joannes Vriend *The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Medieval Drama of England* (Purmerend: J. Muusses, 1928) 58, note 1.

30. Rastall *The Heaven Singing* 289.

31. Rastall *The Heaven Singing* 309, 310–11, 314. Mary's age at marriage is given to be either twelve or fourteen.

32. The Latin reads:

> *N. vis habere hanc mulierem in sponsam, et eam diligere et honorare, tenere et custodire sanam et infirmam sicut sponsus debet sponsam; et omnes alias propter eam dimittere; et illi soli adhaerere, quamdiu vita utriusque vestrum duraverit?*
>
> *Respondeat: Volo.*
>
> *Item sacerdos ad mulierem.*
>
> *N. vis habere hunc virum in sponsum, et illi obedire et servire, et eum diligere et honorare, ac custodire sanum et infirmum sicut sponsa debet sponsum; et omnes alios propter eum dimittere; et illi soli adhaerere, quamdiu vita utriusque vestrum duraverit?*
>
> *Respondeat: Volo.*

from *Missale ad Usum Insignis et Praeclarae Ecclesiae Sarum* edited Francis Henry Dickinson (Oxford and London: Parker Society, 1861–1883, republished 1969) *Ordo Sponsalium* column 831.

33. *S.R.E. Cardinalis Bonaventura Opera Omnia* edited by A.C. Peltier, 15 vols (Paris: no publisher, 1864–1871) volume 12 (1868).

34. Meredith Mary Play 98, note 524. The phrase appears in chapter 3 of the Meditationes Vitae Christi, a prose work attributed during the Middle Ages to Saint Bonaventure. In chapter 3 Mary's life in the Temple and her seven prayers to God are described. Her fifth prayer is to be allowed to see the virgin who will bear God's son and the complete petition reads as follows:

> *Quinto petebam, ut faceret me videre tempus, in quo esset nata illa beatissima Virgo, quae debebat Filium Dei parere; et ut conservaret oculos meos, ut possem eam videre; linguam, ut possem eam laudare; manus, ut possem ei servire; pedes, ut possem ire ad servitium suum; genua ut possem adorare Dei Filium in gremio suo.*

The *Meditationes* was translated into Middle English by the Carthusian Nicholas Love;

> þe fift peticion I made to god, þat he wolde let me se þe tyme in þe whech þat blessed maiden shold be born, þat shuld conceyue & bere goddus son; & þat he wolde kepe myn eyene þat I miȝt se hire. Min eres, þat I miȝt here hire speke. My tonge, þat I miȝt praise hire. Myn handes, that I miȝt serue hire wiþ. Myn fete þat I miȝt goo to hir seruice, & myn kneene, with þe whech I miȝt honoure & wirchip goddus son in hire barme.

Nicholas Love *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesu Christ: a critical edition based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686* edited Michael G. Sargent (New York and London: Garland, 1992) 19.

35. Warren *Sarum Missal* 144.

36. The vernacular is given in Dickinson *Missale ad Usum … Sarum* columns 831–2.

37. Meredith *Mary Play* 104, note 883. For the 'tick and comma' symbol, see *The N. Town Plays: A facsimile of British Library MS Cotton Vespasian D VIII* edited Peter Meredith and Stanley J. Kahrl (Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimiles 4; Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1977) xxi-xxii.

38. *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, Question 28, article 4. The Latin text reads:

> *Postmodum vero, accepto sponso, secundum quod mores illius temporis exigebant, simul cum eo voteum virginitatis emisit.*

Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiæ Volume 51: Our Lady* edited and translated Thomas R. Heath (London: Blackfriars with Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1969) 54-5.

39. Geoff Egan and Frances Pritchard *Dress Accessories c.1150–1450: Finds from Excavations in London* (London: HMSO, 1991) 327, 331–2.

40. The Latin reads:

> *tu, Domine, mitte bene✠dictionem tuam super hunc anulum; ut quae illum gestaverit sit armata virtute caelestis defensionis, et proficiat illi ad aeternam salutem.*
>
> *Benedic, Domine, hunc anulum quem nos in tuo sancto nomine benedicimus; ut quaecunque eum portaverit, in tua pace consistat, et in tua voluntate permaneat, et in amore tuo vivat et crescat et senescat, et multiplicetur in longitudinem dierum.*

41. The Latin instruction that accompanies the vow reads:

> *quem vir accipiat manu sua dextera cum tribus principalibus digitis, a manu sua sinistra tenens dexteram sponsae; docente sacerdote, dicat.*

Dickinson *Missale ad Usum … Sarum* columns 832, 833. Translation Warren *Sarum Missal 2* 147.

42. The Latin instruction that accompanies the vow reads:

> *Et tunc proferat sponsus anulum pollici sponsae dicens, In nomine Patris; ad secundum digitum, et Filii; ad tertium digitum, et Spiritus Sancti, ad quartum digitum, Amen.*

Dickinson *Missale ad Usum … Sarum* column 833. Translation Warren *Sarum Missal* 147–8.

43. R. Wilberforce Starr *The Wedding Ring: Its History and Mystery* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1896) 27–8. The *Evangelium* states that Joseph's staff flowered as a sign that he had been selected as Mary's husband in a manner indebted to Numbers 16: 4–9.

44. Marina Warner *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1976, reprint 1988) 294.

45. Colin Platt *The Parish Churches of Medieval England* (London: Chancellor Press, 1995) 28.

46. Ingram *REED: Coventry* 98.

47. Joseph's previous marriage by which he has sons is mentioned in both the *Protevangelion* and the *Pseudo-Matthew* but was excised from the *Evangelium* when the West stopped teaching about his former marriage.

48. *The Babees Book* edited by Frederick J. Furnivall *EETS OS 32* (1868) 36–47.