THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH FARCE ON THE TOWNELEY CYCLE OF MYSTERY PLAYS

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Of the three or four main problems that confront the student of the Towneley cycle of English mystery plays, by far the most interesting and at the same time the most difficult of solution is that concerned with the many influences that went to their composition. It is true that the more obvious actual sources of most of the plays have by this time been fairly well determined, and the successive labors of Davidson, Hohlfeld, Pollard, Cady, Craig, and others have made possible at least a reasonably approximate estimate of the manner in which this important cycle as a whole was developed. Yet not a little remains to be done. For it is of that very group of plays which give Towneley its peculiar power and interest that we know the least concerning the influences which contributed to their making. Of the three now generally recognized stages in the evolution of the cycle (the liturgical stage, the York stage, and the Wakefield stage), it is the last period, when the "genius of Wakefield" placed the stamp of his originality upon the cycle, about which are in doubt. The peculiar status of this group of plays, concerning which we at once desire the most and possess the least knowledge, is readily apparent from a brief resumé of the special classes of sources to which the plays of the cycle are indebted.

The sources of Towneley divide themselves naturally, almost inevitably, into three main classes, corresponding, in a rough way, with the three main stages in the development of the cycle.

1 To the general school of opinion represented by Pollard belong also, allowing for minor differences, Bunzen, Gayley, and Chambers.
already referred to. These classes are: the religious sources, the York sources, and the secular sources. The religious sources comprise the following: liturgical plays, whose influence in the formation of the cycle was of course very important\(^2\); the liturgy itself, whose influence in this cycle is slight;\(^3\) the Vulgate, the most important of all the religious sources, since its influence is strongly felt in all but four plays and parts of five others;\(^4\) the Apocrypha, whose influence in Towneley is very slight;\(^5\) and, finally, other religious literature, including the Cursor Mundi, the Pricke of Conscience, the Northern Passion, the Speculum Christiani, and numerous Middle English prayers and lyrics.\(^6\) Of the religious sources the Vulgate and liturgical drama are by far the most important and considerable in their influence upon the formation of the cycle.

The second class of sources, the York plays, form for the most part a fairly clear-cut group. There is no doubt as to the direct borrowing of five plays from the York cycle, namely the plays of Pharaoh, The Doctors, The Harrowing of Hell, The Resurrection, and The Judgment (from the corresponding five plays in York, numbered 11, 20, 37, 38, 48). Furthermore, it is quite certain that parts of four others, The Offering of the Magi, The Flight into Egypt, The Conspiracy, and The Scourging, are derived from various parts of the York cycle.\(^7\) Finally, there are parts of eight other plays which show slight resemblance to York but upon which scholars are not agreed as to the influence of York upon Towneley.\(^8\) The York influence, then, is considerable and within limits beyond any question. It remains true, however, that except for one or two plays York did not add to Towneley much of distinct power or importance.

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\(^2\) Liturgical plays influenced parts of or the whole of plays 1–8, 10–16, 20–23, 25–32. Play 4 may be in part from the Mystère du Vei Testament. See Hugel, Julian, An Interpolation in the Towneley Abraham Play, MLN., XIV, 255.

\(^3\) The liturgy contributed in a very scattered manner to plays 1, 2, 3, 7, 11–14, 17–18, 22, 25–26.

\(^4\) The Vulgate contributed strongly to all but plays 7, 25, 30 and 32, and parts of plays 2, 3, 9; 12 and 13. Play 7 (probably a liturgical play) has not yet been traced to its source in the Vulgate.

\(^5\) The Apocryphal sources were influential only in plays 10, 23 and 25.

\(^6\) The Cursor Mundi influenced plays 7 and 32; The Pricke of Conscience, play 30 (beginning); The Northern Passion, plays 20, 22, 23, 28; the Speculum Christiani, play 18; Middle Eng. Prayers and Lyrics, plays 12, 17–19, 26–28, 30, 31. On this last influence see Taylor, G., C. Mod. Phil. V, 1–38.

\(^7\) Compare the conclusion of Hohlfeld, Bunzen, Pollard and Gayley on this class as well as on the liturgical class of sources.

\(^8\) Towneley plays 10, 16, 17, 23, 26, 27, 29, 32.
On the whole, then, we are right in saying that the religious influence accounts in large measure for the first stage in the development of Towneley, the group of didactic or liturgical plays which make up the bulk of the cycle, though of inferior interest. The York influence accounts for the second stage, marked by imitation, comprising a less considerable group of plays, though of slightly more interest and worth.

There remains the third class of sources, namely the secular or profane sources. As I have already pointed out, it is this class about which least is known and most is desired. Of the group of plays containing material whose presence is due neither to the religious nor to the York influence, there are ten, namely: plays number 2 (the Garcia and Cain episode); 3 (Noah and his wife); 12 (the dinner of the shepherds and their attempt to sing); 13 (the farce of Mak the sheep-stealer); 16 (the bout between the soldiers and the women); 21 (the passion of Caiphas and the rough play of the torturers); 22 and 23 (the rough farce of the torturers); 24 (the dice scene); and 30 (Tutivillus and the demons). Of these ten, whose sources for the secular material must almost certainly be secular since the action is decidedly secular, we have clear sources for parts of only two plays, namely the First Shepherds’ Play and the play of The Judgment. In Prima Pastorum the farcical episode of the shepherds quarrelling over the imaginary sheep is almost certainly a dramatization of an English folk-tale, one version of which is found in Tale No. 1 of “The Merry Tales of the Mad Men of Gotham,” printed by W. Carew Hazlitt in his Shakespeare Jest Books. The reference to Moll and her Pitcher in the same play is to one of a multitude of tales about the Milkmaid and her Pitcher of Milk current throughout Europe and known to modern readers in La Fontaine’s fable of Perrette. Here again is an instance of the dramatist’s use of common property, property which must have been just as common to Englishmen as to Frenchmen. The play of The Judgment contains some satire on women which has been

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*The only other extant version may be seen in the same author’s “A Hundred Merry Tales” folio VIII. obverse, London, 1887. See Eaton, H. A., Mod. Lang. Notes XIV, 265-8. Another possible source for the secular material of this play (ll. 215-39) is a Middle English collection of “Grotesque Receipts”.

traced to the general class of Middle English Satires on women very accessible to the dramatist of the fourteenth century. The fact that the only sources so far found for these secular episodes are either English or the common property of Englishmen and others is of much importance in connection with the endeavor to find the sources for the remaining plays whose sources have till now remained unidentified. The ten plays above-mentioned, then, contain material, secular or farcical in nature, whose source has defied identification.

In the attempt to account for these farcical elements, all of which by the way are attributed to the one author (the genius of Wakefield) we should turn first of all to England itself. And upon examining the English drama of the period, we readily find parallels for seven of these ten scenes in either the cycle or non-cycle plays of England. These parallels may be conveniently tabulated as follows:

Towneley 2 = York 7; the Croxton play of The Sacrament.

" 3 = " 9; Chester 3; Newcastle.

" 12 = " 15; Chaster 7; Newcastle.

(Shearmen and Tailors')

" 13 = no parallel.

" 16 = ef. York 9; Towneley 13; Chester 3; Newcastle.

" 21 = York 31; Cornish.


" 24 = no parallel.

" 30 = no parallel.

With the sources substantially determined for all but ten plays (and it will be noted that these sources were either common property of all Europeans or definitely English in origin); and with English parallels found for the secular elements of seven of the Wakefield group of ten, there remain but three plays whose secular elements have hitherto found neither source nor parallel in England. These are: the farce in Secunda Pastorum, the dying scene in the play of The Talents, and the

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\[1\] Play 23 may also have been influenced by the same source.
Tutivillus scene in the play of *The Judgment*. Of these three, the farce of Mak—the sheep-stealer is far and away the most important; and if the source of this play could be determined, we should be justified in feeling that the secular influences in the Towneley cycle had been practically determined. It is to the consideration of supposed sources and parallels for this play that we may now direct our attention.

With the exhaustion of all known English parallels and sources for the farceal elements of Towneley (omitting merely the modern parallels to *Secunda Pastorum* which will be discussed later), we should naturally turn to the continent, and most particularly to France, where during a period of about 150 years, from about 1400 to 1550 or later, the type known as the farce flourished, for which we have approximately 150 extant specimens in addition to about 100 pieces of types allied to the farce. It was Jusserand who first noticed the resemblance between the farce in *Secunda Pastorum* and the incomparable French farce of *Maistre Pierre Pathelin*. But it remained for Dr. A. Banzer, about thirty years ago, to make a detailed comparison of the two works and claim *Pathelin* as the source of the farce of Mak.\(^\text{12}\) So far as I am aware, the claims of Dr. Banzer have never been openly challenged. Indeed, his conclusions, based in a very detailed comparison of the two plays, seem to have received neither approval nor rejection. That the way may be cleared for further investigation, it would seem desirable to examine Dr. Banzer’s theory with the care which it deserves, and so accord it either the approval or the rejection which every seriously proposed theory should receive.

For purposes of clearness, the plots of the two plays entire may be very concisely summarized before an examination of Banzer’s claims. The contents of the entire *Secunda Pastorum* are as follows:


\(^{13}\) *Die Farce Pathelin und ihre Nachahmungen, Zeit für neu. Sprachen u. Litt. X, 93–112.* See also *The Influence of French Farce upon Plays of John Heywood (Mod. Phil. II, 97–124)* by my colleague, Prof. Karl Young, to whom I am indebted for the suggestion of this study.
13. *Incipit Alia eorundem*. Three shepherds enter separately, each complaining: the 1st of the cold weather and the poverty of shepherds, the 2nd of the weather and the hardships of wedded life, the 3rd, of the world's bitterness, the floods, etc. The 1st and 2nd meet and are encountered by the 3rd; they all converse, then they sing, taking tenor, treble, and mean; Mak (the sheep-stealer) enters and is accused of being out to steal sheep; after Mak's comment on wedded life, the shepherds lie down to sleep, placing Mak between them; Mak rises, says a mock night-spell, and goes home with a stolen sheep; he and his wife Gyll put the sheep in the cradle, and Mak returns to the shepherds, who awake, waken Mak, and go off to count their sheep, promising to meet "at the crooked thorn." Mak goes home, Gyll grumbles, but they plot to escape detection; Gyll is to be ill in childbed, the sheep in the cradle is the new-born child, and Mak is to induce the shepherds to go away; the shepherds meet, realize their loss, and go to Mak's home to find the stolen sheep; after some search, they are about to leave, believing they were mistaken; but one shepherd, desiring to offer the baby a gift, discovers the trick; they toss Mak in a blanket; they lie down to rest; an angel bids them arise and announces Christ's birth; they discuss the angel's music and hasten to Bethlehem; they offer Christ a lot of cherries, a bird, and a ball; Mary promises to pray her Son to protect them, and they leave singing.

In like manner the main outlines of the farce of *Pathelin* are as follows: Pathelin (a poor lawyer) and Guillemette (his wife) lament their poverty and rags. Pathelin declares to Guillemette that he will secure cloth for them both with which to clothe themselves. He goes to the draper's shop and through flattery and a false promise to pay later succeeds in carrying off a bolt of fine cloth. Arrived home, Pathelin delights Guillemette with the cloth, and they plot to evade payment to the draper when he calls for the money. Pathelin gets in bed, with the cloth under his pillow, and is to feign serious illness. Guillemette receives the draper when he calls for the money, pretends Pathelin has been ill for six weeks, and begs the draper
not to disturb him. The draper is at first insistent, but when Pathelin gets out of bed and plays the part of the delirious patient, the draper is so non-plussed that he fears he has made a mistake and returns to his shop. Pathelin and Guillemette exult over their success, but the draper returns and insists once more on payment. This time Pathelin goes into a perfect tantrum, playing the witch, impersonating a priest, and talking a gibberish of Breton, Limousin, Picardy, Norman French, etc. Completely worn out, he is put to bed by the draper and Guillemette, and the draper leaves, hoodwinked for good.

Here the resemblance to the Mak farce ends, for the ensuing story of the draper’s shepherd, who retains Pathelin to defend him against the draper and who beats Pathelin out of his fee by implicitly following the lawyer’s injunction always to say “‘baa’” to any question asked of him by anyone whatsoever, finds no place in the English masterpiece. A tabular view of the contents of the two plays will show the extent of the parallel more clearly, particularly the absence from Secunda Pastorum of the entire second part of Pathelin:

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<tr>
<th>Secunda Pastorum</th>
<th>Pathelin</th>
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<td>ll. 1-171—Laments of three shepherds</td>
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<td>172-189—Preparation for song</td>
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<td>1-1006—First part of Pathelin</td>
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<td>190-628—The Mak farce</td>
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<td>629-637—Preparation for sleep</td>
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<td>637-754—The angel’s announcement and the adoration</td>
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Banzer’s argument rests largely on the striking parallel between the main action of the two farces, supported also by numerous parallels in small details. In his own words: “Die Ähnlichkeit zwischen der alten Farce Pathelin und der vorliegenden Stück liegt hier in der geschichteten Weise mit der die Nachforschungen nach dem entwendeten Gut vereitelt werden sollen und in der Ausführung derselben. Wir finden auch in den kleinen Charakterzügen auffallende Übereinstimmung.” Then follows a list of detailed parallels which we may summarize succinctly as follows, the material within the brackets being additions of my own:

(1) Pathelin and Guillemette lament the state of the household (11. 1-4 and 29-32)
Mak complains about the cares of his family and their maintenance (11. 237-8 and 244-6)

(2) Pathelin is glad over his cloth, and Guillemette is so astonished she knows not whether to believe him or not (11. 352-5) [and ff].
Mak is also glad over his booty, and Gyll is likewise astonished (11. 305-6; 309-14; 316; 324)

(3) Both Guillemette and Gyll becomes anxious and think of the punishment to befall them, but they are both calmed (Path. 11. 357; 361; 362-3; 377-81; 481-90. Sec. Pas. 11. 315-22; 325-31)

(4) Both Guillemette and Gyll finally lend their aid and agree upon the plan to fool the victims and save themselves (Path. 11. 460-70; 496-7. Sec. Pas. 11. 332-8; 442-6)

(5) Both the women promise to do their best (Path. 11. 478-9 493-5. Sec. Pas. 11. 431-4; 447-8)
Here the rôles are interchanged, Gyll going to bed as does Pathelin, Mak receiving the shepherds as Guillemette receives the merchant.

(6) Mak asks the shepherds to speak low and finally tries to touch their souls with pity. So Guillemette with the merchant (Path. 11. 512-21; 598-9; 672-3. Sec. Pas. 11. 519-20; 528-9; 531-3; 539-40) [484-6]

(7) Gyll and Pathelin are both restless in bed (Path. 11. 610-13; 616-19 etc. Sec. Pas. 11. 525-7; 530; 534-8)

(8) Both the shepherds and the merchants are too convinced of the fact of the deed to leave at once (Path. 11. 654–6. Sec. Pas. 1. 541)

(9) Pathelin at last succeeds in shaking the merchant’s conviction, just as Gyll makes the shepherds want to atone for their trespass [Path. 706–31] (Sec. Pas. 544–54)

Banzre then concludes that the “Dialog, Aufbau, Handlung, und die Zeichnung von Gyll und den Schäfern,” point unmistakably to Pathelin as the original, and even adds to this conclusion the striking statement that because of this proved relationship the English miracle plays rest upon French originals. He admits the absence from Secunda Pastorum of the entire second part of Pathelin, and he admits the difference between the two caused by the mixing of the rôles, Gyll taking Pathelin’s part, and Mak that of Guilemette. He assumes that there is no difficulty in placing Pathelin early enough (1388–92) to allow of its being the source of Secunda Pastorum, and he accounts for the absence of characteristic scenes from Pathelin by supposing either that the author of the English play used an earlier and simpler version than we now possess, or that he feared he would be digressing too far from the liturgical story if he used more farcical material. He admits, however, that there is no ground for omitting the delirium scenes.

So much for Banzre’s claims. While there is at first glance much plausibility in these claims, closer examination reveals their insecure basis. There are three decisive reasons for opposing the above conclusions, almost any one of which is sufficient of itself, but all of which taken together afford irrefutable evidence, it seems to me, for rejecting Pathelin as the source for Secunda Pastorum. These reasons are:

(1) A careful comparison of the above table of parallels, supplemented by a comparison of the characters and the tone of the two farces, reveals numerous striking differences, all of which cannot reasonably be accounted for if the English author were influenced by Pathelin. In the first place, some of Banzre’s parallels are more apparent than real. Numbers 2, 5, and

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15 Ibid., p. 110.
16 Ibid., p. 111.
17 Ibid., p. 111.
6 are good parallels. Number 3 is good except that Guillemette really questions Pathelin longer than Gyll does Mak. Number 4 affords a parallel, except that Pathelin proposes the plan in the one case and Gyll in the other, thus interchanging the rôles. Following number 5 is another interchange of rôles, Mak and Guillemette respectively receiving the victims. Numbers 7 and 9 indicate parallels, though in number 7 Pathelin carries the business much farther, and in number 9 it takes Pathelin longer to convince the draper than it does Gyll. In number 8 there is no indication that the shepherds are convinced of the facts as is the draper, though there is some parallel. Finally, in number 1 Mak complains not so much of family cares as of his wife. Furthermore, he wants food, whereas Pathelin and his wife want clothes especially. These differences are too significant to be passed by, especially (1) the comparative meagerness of development in Secunda Pastorum, where one would expect fuller development if Pathelin were the original, and (2) the interchange of rôles. Furthermore, the absence on any extended scale of the capital delirium scenes, the absence of any hint whatever of the second part of Pathelin, which would afford the very best of “shepherd” material for a play, and the complete reversal of the conclusion (the draper failing where the shepherds succeed)—these and numerous minor differences in characterization argue against any close relation between the two.

(2) The late date of Pathelin is, so far as our knowledge now goes, an insurmountable obstacle. According to the consensus of opinion, Pathelin can hardly be earlier than 1450. Present-day conservative opinion is perhaps best represented in the following words of Petit de Julleville: “La date de ce chef-d’oeuvre est... facile a fixer. Pathelin dut voir le jour vers 1470. Avant cette époque, il n’en est pas question et le nom est inconnue; a partir de cette date, Pathelin est nommé partout et il est fait sans cesse allusion.” On the other hand, no one has ventured to place Secunda Pastorum later than about 1420. Around 1400 would be a more conservative estimate. And until

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10 See, especially, an article by Traver, Hope, on *The Relation of musical terms in the Woodkirk Shepherds Plays to the dates of their composition* in *MLN* 29, 1–4. This writer places Sec. Post. at about 1460 “or a little later.”
we have evidence that *Secunda Pastorum* was very much later, or that *Pathelin*, in this or some earlier form, was very much earlier, it would seem impossible to admit that *Pathelin* influenced the English farce.

(3) The fact that practically all of the other farcical elements in the Towneley cycle have either English sources or English parallels, and that we possess in a late English form an English folk-tale much nearer to *Secunda Pastorum* than is *Pathelin*, makes an English origin for the play much more likely than a French origin. I have pointed out that all but three of the ten farcical passages in Towneley have either English sources or parallels. Moreover, two of these passages are dramatized folk-tales current in England. May the farce of Mak not likewise be a dramatization of an earlier form of *Archie Armstrong’s Aith*, identical with the Mak farce except for the conclusion? This supposition is strongly supported by still another parallel recently discovered by Prof. A. S. Cook and described by him in *Modern Philology*, XIV, 11–15. In this case it is Thomas Armstrong, an actual character living in the latter half of the eighteenth century, to whom is attributed the same trick in concealing the theft of a pig as Mak attempted with the sheep, namely, hiding it in a cradle. Whether the trick was actually perpetrated or whether it is a case of some old folk-tale getting itself attached to an individual, matters little. We have here the episode embodied in two forms in England itself, and the probability is more than a reasonable one that the farce of Mak is based upon just such native material as we have before us in modern form.

If, however, we cannot admit *Pathelin* to be the source of *Secunda Pastorum*, may there not be some other French farce or at least some farcical material which might have served as a source or at least be a parallel? To satisfy myself whether this could be true, I have made a careful examination, first, of the complete *Répertoire du Théâtre Comique en France au Moyen Age* (1886) of Petit de Julleville, and second, of the same author’s *Les Mystères* (2 vols. 1880), in both cases with an eye to

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21 See the article by Kölling, E., in the England–Pollard edition of the Towneley plays, p. XXXI.
any farcical material containing either shepherd scenes similar
to that in Secunda Pastorum or non-shepherd scenes with plots
similar to those of Secunda Pastorum and Pathelin. Furthermore, I have examined the texts themselves of those plays
whose analysis in the above répertoires gave any promise of
such parallels being found. The results of this examination
were surprisingly meagre.

Of 253 extant moralités, farces, sotties, monologues and
sermons joyeux listed by Petit de Julleville only ten contain
matter that is at all reminiscent of the farcical material in
Secunda Pastorum or Prima Pastorum. These ten pieces are
distributed as follows: moralités, 4 (P. deJ. nos. 21, 24, 48, 58);
farces and sotties, 3 (P. deJ. nos. 74, 135, 150); monologues and
sermons joyeux, 3 (P. deJ. nos. 215, 221, 230). There is no
indication of any parallel in the list of non-extant pieces, in
the surviving notes on stage representations of comic drama,
or in the list of non-dramatic pieces excluded from the other
lists. In the same author’s analyses of French mystères there
are found in the long list of plays: none of the 12th or 13th
century, only one of the 14th (vol. II, 254–5), only ten in the
15th century (II, 362–3; 388; 401–4; 408; 412; 417; 430; 433,
436; 436; 495; 513), and none in the 16th which contain ma-
terial of a farcical nature resembling that in the Towneley
shepherd plays.

An examination of the above-cited passages leads quickly to
the conclusion that outside of the imitations of Pathelin itself,
which of course come still later than Pathelin, there is nothing
in French medieval drama in the slightest degree approaching
the plot structure of the Mak farce. Furthermore, there is
no one of the above-cited resemblances to incidents in Secunda
Pastorum which cannot be duplicated in other English cycle or
non-cycle plays. The conclusion seems irresistible that, if we
are to find the source of the farcical material in the Wakefield
group of the Towneley plays, we are not likely to find it in

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22 The main collections and separate texts examined are as follows: Jacob.
P. L., Recueil de Farces, Sotties et Moralités du XVe siècle (1859); Fournier
Ed., Le Théâtre français avant la Renaissance (1872); Violet le Duc, E.,
Ancien théâtre français (1854); the texts of the Société des Anciens Textes
français (for the mystères, particularly).
23 Owing to the requirements of space a detailed examination of this dra-
matic material is reserved for a separate article which I hope to publish in
the near future.
French farce or, for that matter, in any other form of French drama. We are likely to find it, not on French soil, but in England itself where the sources for the rest of the cycle material have been found.

Neither source nor satisfactory parallel to Play 13 has yet been discovered outside of England. Of the other two plays, for whose farcical elements we still lack sources or parallels (Plays 24 and 30) a brief word may be said in conclusion. It is possible that French parallels or even sources may yet be found for the farcical elements in these plays. Certain it is that parallels exist in the dramatic literature of Germany practically contemporary with the Towneley cycle. It is doubtful, however, if there could have been any intimate connection between the respective plays in question. And even though this should be the case, the farcical material is of so slight an importance compared with that in the remaining eight plays of the cycle, for all of which we have English parallels, that the establishment of any relationship would not affect seriously the general conclusion that, for the secular sources of the Towneley plays we must look to the literature and life of the English people themselves.

Note:—This paper was already in type when Dr. A. C. Baugh's interesting article on The Mak Story appeared in Modern Philology, April, 1918, pp. 169 ff. His discovery of a fifteenth century Italian analogue in the forty-second novella of Le Porretane by Giovanni Sacadino degli Arlenti, though first published in 1483 and probably not composed before 1475, confirms my own conclusions regarding the literary connections between the Mak farce and the farce of Pathethia. In his own words (p. 172): “If then, as we believe, the incident can lay claim to no historical foundation, we are forced to conclude that it belongs to the province of folklore.” Thus the English Mak story, the French farce, and the Italian novella are simply, so far as our present interest is concerned, separate and varied embodiments of a common theme of European folklore—the adoption of a trick to conceal a theft.

For this information I am primarily indebted to an excellent unpublished study by Miss Sarah M. Beach.