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**The Mural and the Morality Play: a suggested source for a Wall-
Painting at Oddington**

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The Mural and the Morality Play: a suggested source for a Wall-Painting at Oddington

By JOHN EDWARDS

The church of St Nicholas, Oddington (O.S. SP 235256) is a building of rubble masonry with a Cotswold stone roof, built at various dates from the 12th to the 15th centuries.¹ The original village was abandoned in the 18th century and was rebuilt on the higher, drier, ground where it now stands; the building, in the 19th century, of a new church in the middle of the new village caused St Nicholas to be left derelict from 1860, as a result of which even the roof fell in, the restoration of the church not beginning until 1912.² The uncovering of the wall-paintings took place in the following year.³ The principal wall-painting is a Doom, unusually situated at the west end of the north wall of the nave. It is on an heroic scale, being some 32 feet long and 15 feet high,⁴ and, thanks to the restoration of 1970, is well preserved considering the vicissitudes it must have undergone during the years of dereliction over and above the usual hazards to which all wall-paintings are subject. The present article is devoted to the wall-painting alongside and to the east of the Doom. It is surprising that this painting has not received more critical attention, since it conforms to no subject-matter known to the present writer, and presents its characters against a completely blank background. Its meaning is as enigmatic as that of the Doom is clear. It is of the same height as the Doom, and would be about 15 feet square were it not for its bottom left-hand corner being occupied by the glazed upper part of a blocked-up 15th-century doorway⁵ which appears to have existed before the painting was made (FIG. 1). It contains a multiplicity of figures, and in the hope of introducing some precision into the location of the present writer's suggested identifications of them, FIG. 2 has been prepared, consisting of the painting as it is now (1985), upon which have been superimposed fifteen zones into which the painting seems naturally to fall, each designated by a capital letter, which is subsequently used in the text as the reference to the appropriate zone.

The leading article about these paintings is still one published as long ago as 1926 by G. Reitlinger; it included an outline sketch.⁶ He dated the Doom as late 14th century and the other painting as somewhat later. He mentioned that the latter includes a jester haranguing a praying friar, who turns away from him (*P*); a woman in a fantastic headdress, accompanied by a winged demon with a human face, listening to the preaching of a fox in top boots (*Q*); an angel and a second fox (*K*); a merchant in a black cloak and fur hat (*B*); a knight in armour with a hound on a leash (*C*); a large figure, winged, crowned, and female, wearing a sort of flounced skirt (*M*); and elsewhere nuns and angels. As to interpretation, he thought that 'the figures . . . appear to have been grouped at hazard and probably at different periods'. The fox group (*Q*) and what he saw as the second fox and the angel (*K*) he felt 'are most likely allegorical of the temptations of the fleshly world'. The merchant (*B*), the knight (*C*) and the large figure (*M*) he said 'have a definitely 15th-century appearance', the costume of the merchant in particular being 'of the time of the Wars of the Roses'. Summing up, Reitlinger claimed that 'these fanciful subjects . . . emphasize the connection between the Oddington wall-paintings and illuminated manuscripts . . .'

W. Hobart Bird (1927)⁷ was in broad agreement with Reitlinger's identifications, but thought the large figure (*M*) to be an angel; he saw something superimposed over this Zone, but whatever



FIG. 1 The wall-paintings at the eastern end of the north wall of the nave at St Nicholas' Church, Oddington. Part of the Doom is seen on the left. Photograph: author, 1985.

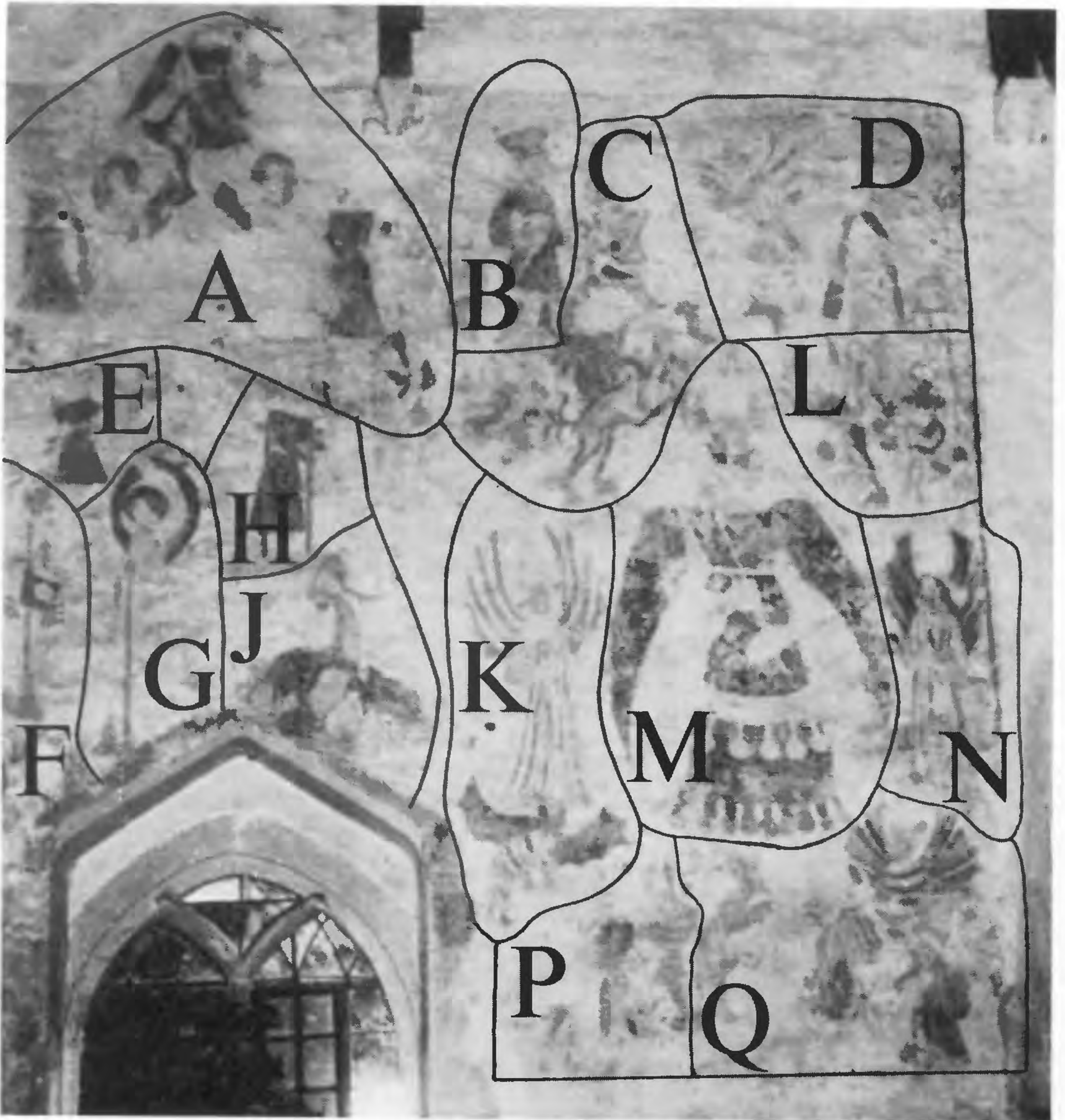


FIG. 2 The wall-painting, showing the zones into which it has been divided for the purposes of the present article. Photograph: author, 1985.

it was, it is no longer visible. He also mentioned a woman in a pillory (?*F*), a man above her whom he described as a 'magician?', and, further west, another figure with a woman above, and beyond these a man with a raised sword. All are now impossible to identify, though they may have been in *A* or might even have formed part of the eastern edge of the Doom. Hobart Bird offered no suggestion as to interpretation.

The *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* (1935)⁸ and the leaflet now available in the church identified the preaching fox group (*Q*) and both regarded it as probably an attack on the friars.

A. Caiger-Smith (1963) mentioned the painting in the catalogue in his book, describing it as 'an obscure large subject. 14th century. (Not clear in detail)'.⁹ Though he does not mention this painting in the main body of his work, his phrase, in relation to the Doom, 'striped warder-like devils',¹⁰ could also be applied to some of the figures in the adjoining painting.

As a result of the wall-painting in question showing signs of having been treated since the last published description of it, whether in 1970 as mentioned in the plaque under the Doom or otherwise, some subjects have changed their character, while new ones have appeared, no doubt as a result of the modern methods of cleaning then used. Thus, what both Reitlinger and Hobart Bird saw as a second fox (*K*) has now become a striped creature, such as those referred to by Caiger-Smith, above, with black wings like a bat. Over the easternmost part of the glazed arch there is now a small human figure with what is most likely to be a large dog (*J*), and greater detail is now to be seen between the glazing and the top of that side of the painting, while in the top corner of the eastern side of the painting a new devil has appeared (*D*), with a new animal below him (*L*). What Reitlinger saw as a knight in armour with a hound is no longer easy to make out (*C*); the knight may even have been moved into the 'striped warder' category.

The present writer cannot accept Reitlinger's view that the Church authorities would have allowed the figures to have been grouped 'at hazard' and at different periods, since it would hardly have been appropriate for a wall inside a church to have been used by a variety of artists as a sort of pattern book over a long term of years. A first approach to the question of the interpretation of the painting is, naturally, to consider whether any of the usual subjects could be relevant, and it is interesting to note that Mrs Bardswell, Professor Tristram's collaborator, after mentioning that Tristram dated the painting as 15th century, had already put forward the theory in one of her unpublished notebooks¹¹ that the large figure (*M*) might be Pride in a painting of the Seven Deadly Sins. This was doubtless because Pride is usually shown sumptuously dressed, as at Brooke (Norfolk), and Hoxne (Suffolk).¹² Starting from this assumption, Mrs Bardswell deduced that he must be surrounded by the other Deadly Sins, and noted that 'men and women are urged to commit the various sins by devils in the form of animals, etc . . .', an interpretation difficult to accept in the present state of the painting. The standard iconography was that the Sins should be enacted in little Hell-mouths issuing from appropriate parts of the central figure's anatomy, as at Little Horwood (Bucks), while the convention that Pride should be standing over another Hell-mouth was so strong that Tristram had no hesitation about postulating one at Hoxne even though it was no longer to be seen. Yet at Oddington the supposed Pride is merely standing over the monk and jester (*P*) and the preaching fox (*Q*). Though some of those near *M* may be devils, most are not, and certainly none are enacting their roles in separate minor Hell-mouths proceeding from the body of the figure in that Zone. The identification of this person with Pride is understandable, but, though no doubt a vain character, there is no reason to suppose that he complies with the usual requirements for being the centre-piece of the Sins. It thus becomes equally impossible to sustain Mrs Bardswell's other proposition that, given the Seven Deadly Sins, the rest of the painting must be the Seven Acts of Mercy – and indeed she had herself prefixed this further identification with a question-mark. She must, however, be

credited with having sought an overall explanation, which is more than other commentators had been able to do.

Reitlinger suggested that further researches might establish a connection between the painting and illuminated manuscripts,¹³ so this has been pursued, though without much hope, since, as Caiger-Smith points out, 'only one set of paintings can clearly be associated with a parent manuscript still in existence . . . a series of . . . wood panels of the life of St. Cuthbert, in . . . Carlisle Cathedral.'¹⁴ In these less than encouraging circumstances, the present writer's investigations have revealed nothing approaching an interpretation of the painting as a whole, though interesting parallels can be drawn between just one Zone, the jester and the kneeling monk (*P*), and not only the *The Fool Hath Said* miniature in the Derby Psalter,¹⁵ but also with a miniature in a Book of Hours in the Bodleian¹⁶ showing the beheading of Archbishop Scrope in 1405. In the latter case, it is an odd coincidence that throughout the whole period with which this paper is concerned the Archbishops of York, of which Scrope was one, should have been the owners of the manor of Oddington.¹⁷ Both these cases cannot be right, and as in any event they leave the remaining fourteen Zones unexplained, illuminated manuscripts as a possible source do not seem helpful.

In addition to the negative evidence provided by the solitary case at Carlisle already mentioned, the present writer is not alone in regarding illuminated manuscripts as an unlikely inspiration for medieval wall-paintings, Miss E.C. Williams saying that 'modern opinion inclines strongly to the view that medieval artists found more inspiration in miracle plays than in illuminated manuscripts. Illustrated books were few and costly and not easily accessible to the humble craftsman, while the drama with its colour, grouping, and spirited action provided subjects which could readily be perpetuated on the walls of village churches.' Evidence for this has hitherto been confined to such subsidiary matters as she mentions, namely, 'the blackened face of one of the torturers at Pickering and the distorted features of the emperor at Little Missenden and Sporle; probably reproductions of the masks worn by the players.'¹⁸ This view was shared by Tristram, who also refers to the case of Little Missenden, and to researches into this idea by 'various writers, among whom we may mention Émile Mâle.'¹⁹ The latter confined himself, however, to mystery plays (that is, those directly concerned with scriptural stories only, performed by the various Guilds of a particular city), with but a passing reference to plays dealing with the Virtues and Vices.²⁰ There has never been any suggestion, however, that the subject-matter of Oddington is restricted to Biblical scenes. But there was another form of contemporary play, the morality play, the representation of which would not be inappropriate in a church, since such plays were themselves in the nature of sermons, and indeed the morality play *Mankind* actually started with one.²¹ As Dr Paula Neuss puts it, the morality play 'dramatises a battle between Virtues and Vices over the soul of mankind . . . the shape grace-fall-repentance is common to all moral plays.'²² This 'shape' accords with Reitlinger's 'temptations of the fleshly world', and suggests, along with the views of the authorities just quoted, that the most likely solution to the interpretation, having eliminated all the usual ones already considered, of the Oddington wall-painting might well lie in the direction of morality plays. This would involve, to account for the many ingredients in this painting, the proposition that the artist was given the ambitious commission of portraying nothing less than all the characters, and perhaps some of the incidents, of the play in question. This would, of course, go far beyond the marginal evidence for a connection between wall-paintings and contemporary drama which is all that, as indicated above, has been so far adduced by English writers. It is nevertheless hoped to show that there are sufficient resemblances between the contents of the painting and that of a particular play for this proposition to be within the bounds of possibility, though incapable of conclusive proof.

The quest for a morality play which would meet these requirements started from the assumption that its hero would correspond with the largest and most impressive figure in the wall-painting, unquestionably the one in *M*, who has already been considered as a candidate for the role of Pride, and who, despite Reitlinger, could just as well be a man. If a morality play should be the inspiration for this painting, he is a pointer towards the sort of play it could be, so that one with a hero, or perhaps anti-hero, to match his superbity is what is needed.

A morality play which has the necessary pre-requisites is *Magnificence*, by John Skelton (? 1460–1529);²³ its dating is in dispute among scholars, depending on whether they think it was written for the edification of Prince Henry, whose tutor Skelton was for a while, or for the young King Henry VIII, or whether it was a satire against Cardinal Wolsey. The earliest date suggested is in the 1490s, 'during Skelton's first experience at the Tudor Court',²⁴ while the latest is 1523.²⁵ The usual date put forward, from internal evidence which is not entirely unambiguous, is between 1515 and 1518.²⁶ A very material date, that of its first production, is unfortunately unknown.²⁷ Even the latest of these dates does not rule out the possibility of a wall-painting in the full, pre-Reformation sense from being executed at that time, since J.C. Wall refers to wall-paintings being the subject of gifts or bequests up to 1534.²⁸ Nor does the Church itself seem to have foreseen the Reformation, with the effects, among many others, it was likely to have on church wall-paintings; even so close to the Reformation as 1515, the Church is described by G.R. Elton as having 'the highest opinion of its independence, was incapable of reforming itself, and altogether failed to read the signs aright.'²⁹ Such a Church could therefore be expected to see nothing impolitic in allowing wall-paintings to continue to be commissioned at any time up to its last unreformed moment, about a dozen years after the last date on which *Magnificence* could have been written.

It may be best to begin consideration of this play by setting out a list of its eighteen characters in an order which allows not merely a summary of their roles to be given, but also provides an outline of the plot, as follows:-

Magnificence	A wealthy prince who rules justly so long as he pursues a policy of moderation in everything.
Measure	His chief minister who, until dismissed, embodies and executes that policy.
(Wealthful) Felicity Liberty	Turncoat courtiers, who help in the policy of moderation until Measure's dismissal, when they join Magnificence's evil counsellors.
Fancy Counterfeit Countenance Crafty Conveyance Cloaked Collusion Courtly Abusion Folly	Evil counsellors of Magnificence, who bring about, first, the dismissal of Measure, and then the downfall and ruination of Magnificence himself.
Adversity Poverty	The embodiments of Magnificence's condition after his downfall.
Despair Mischief	Tempters who reduce the fallen Magnificence to the point of suicide.

Good Hope	The rescuers of Magnificence, who secure his repentance and restore him to something like the status quo.
Redress	
Circumspection	
Perseverance	

With the foregoing in mind, it is now possible to consider in what ways there are resemblances between the play and the wall-painting. To save repetition in each individual case, they should all be read as if prefixed with the caveat that each example can be no more than a suggestion (though, it is hoped, a reasonable one), which cannot, in the nature of things, now be capable of absolute proof. Moreover, it will be suggested that not all the Zones contain 'portraits' of particular characters, since sometimes the representation will be symbolic; there are of course no actual foxes or angels in *Magnificence*. The list is as follows:

i. *Magnificence*, the eponymous hero of the play, is much the sort of character one would expect to be the embodiment of Pride, to carry a sceptre, and to choose to wear the showy robe portrayed in *M*; lines 903–906 of the play refer to the fashion being to wear a 'gowne so wyde / That he may hyde / His dame and his syre / Within his slyve.'³⁰ As Magnificence himself says:

Nor Cesar July, that no man myght withstande,
Were never halfe so rychely as I am drest. (lines 1482, 3)

It is also significant that, after his downfall, one of the losses he mourns is 'my ryche abylement' (line 2059). In the speech, just quoted, in which he puts down Julius Caesar, who was one of the Nine Worthies, he also compares himself, to their great disadvantage, to three more of them, – Alexander the Great, Arthur, and Charlemagne, together with a number of others equally famous, or, like Nero, notorious, thereby indicating a pride going beyond a mere liking for luxurious clothes. The other important attribute of Magnificence is his great riches: 'I have Welth at wyll', he says (line 1458). In this connection, the band round the skirts of his robe, about a foot above the floor in the wall-painting, may be relevant, since the five seal-like objects hanging from it are reminiscent of the money-bags suspended from the waist of the usurer representing Avarice in Hell in the 12th-century wall-painting in the church at Chaldon, Surrey.³¹

This, however is to describe Magnificence after he has succumbed to the blandishments of evil counsellors. At the beginning of the play he is the model prince, ready to submit all his actions to the advice and approval of Measure, his chief minister, and who stands for moderation in everything. As the prince says in the early part of the play: 'Measure and I wyll never be devyded' (line 186). Felicity and Liberty are introduced to him by Measure, and Magnificence in turn commits them both to Measure's tutelege.

ii. *Felicity and Liberty*, or Wealthful Felicity, to give the former his full name as revealed in line 23, might well be the two figures who stand on either side of Magnificence, one in *K* and the other in *N*. A precedent for winged figures not necessarily being angels is provided by the representation of Virgo in an illustration in the Calendar included in the St. Alban's Psalter,³² so perhaps their wings are meant to symbolise that the qualities they personify can indeed be heavenly if governed by moderation, or Measure. As Felicity puts it: 'For Myschefe wyll mayster us yf Measure us forsake.' (line 154). Neuss comments: 'This is both a maxim and a prophecy of what will actually happen to Magnificence in the play. The sequence wilfulness-loss of prosperity-poverty-evil ('mischief' = 'evil' in Tudor English) . . . enables Skelton to move from examination of a thesis to a moral conclusion.'³³

iii. *Measure and Courtly Abusion*. The happy state of affairs whereby the prince's actions are all determined by Measure does not last, and, corrupted by evil counsellors, Fancy, Counterfeit Countenance, Crafty Conveyance, Cloaked Collusion, Courtly Abusion, and Folly, Magnificence is duped into expelling Measure, who has not only been abandoned by Felicity and Liberty but has been sufficiently simple-minded to leave the pressing of his case to the dubious arts of Cloaked Collusion. When the final breach takes place between the prince and Measure, culminating in Measure's dismissal, he is last seen with Courtly Abusion saying to him: 'Hens, thou haynyarde! Out of the dores fast!' (line 1725). The figures in *P*, hitherto regarded as a kneeling monk and a jester (a profession characterised by being strikingly dressed) are now suggested for Measure and Courtly Abusion, the former brought to his knees after his expulsion from Magnificence's presence, his plain attire, appropriate to his character, being aptly contrasted with that of Courtly Abusion, who in the play is dressed, as Neuss points out, 'in a parody of the latest fashion: Afro-style haircut; high-laced boots; very full sleeves'.³⁴

iv. *Counterfeit Countenance*. As to the characters in *Q*, the preaching fox and his strange congregation, they could well be the symbolic embodiment of the references by Counterfeit Countenance, in a speech devoted to the description of all manner of counterfeits, to the following forms of it which have a particular relevance to *Q*:-

Counterfet prechyng, and believe the contrary; . . . (line 466)

Counterfet holynes is called ypocrysy; . . . (line 469)

Counterfet worshyp outwarde men may se; . . . (line 473)

For sermons to be satirised by one of the evil characters might well have had an ironical place in a morality play, since they were themselves in the nature of homilies 'intended to correct the vices of the audience.'³⁵

The exploits of the fox were a frequent subject of medieval art, new examples of which are still being discovered, such as the panel-painting of c. 1375 on the outside of the backs of some of the choir-stalls at Gloucester Cathedral, published as recently as 1976.³⁶ The fox-saga has been definitively described and analysed in Dr K. Varty's *Reynard the Fox* (1967). Originating in the late 12th century as the villainous hero of an animal epic, 'gradually . . . the light-hearted, quick-moving stories of the first writers gave way to heavier, moralising allegory. Renard became the personification of hypocrisy [see line 469, *Magnificence*, above], deceit, and evil, a symbol of sin, the Devil in disguise.'³⁷ Moreover, 'one of the commonest roles played by Renard . . . to gull his intended prey . . . is that of the holy man.'³⁸ The fox in *Q* has something on his head which can only be a mitre, but even this is not unusual in representations of him in this role, and a number of examples can be found in the illustrations to Varty.³⁹ The fox preaching to geese is one of the most frequent fox-themes in all media, and is not confined to this country – there is a wall-painting of it, c. 1500, at Ottestrup, in Denmark, where, as it happens, there is also, as at Oddington, a painting of the Doom.⁴⁰ Representations of foxes preaching to humans are much rarer, but even so, Varty provides an example, analogous to that at Oddington, from Holy Trinity Church, St Austell, in Cornwall, in the form of a carved wooden panel which includes not merely the preaching fox but also a woman of whom Varty says: 'to judge by the high hat and voluminous dress of this woman . . . she is very wealthy and a welcome addition to [the fox's] flock.'⁴¹ This could certainly be a description of the woman in *Q*; her headdress has been the subject of comment by Reitlinger, while her dress anticipates the Victorian bustle. 'Ridicule of fashion, very frequent in medieval satirical literature', Varty says, 'is included in the ridicule of women.'⁴²

As to the devil with the branched tail who is squatting in the foreground of *Q*, he might appropriately be Titivullus; Skelton had this devil in mind, specifically mentioning him in line 1268, in a passage in which Folly is showing off his command of foolery. This devil's job was to collect words stolen from God by clerics who were too lazy to read the church services in full, and also to collect all idle chatter from the congregation,⁴³ so that he might well have been fully occupied at a service conducted by a fox. Reitlinger thought this devil had wings, but it has hitherto appeared to the present writer more as if he had a dorsal fin; it is however now suggested that in the original painting Titivullus was carrying the sack he traditionally used for his collections and which was transformed into wings by a 'restorer' who did not realise who the devil was.

There may well be a second devil in *Q*, the outline of whose head either peers over the top of the woman's headdress, or whose striped body, similar to those of the devils in the doom, merges with it, thus resembling the misericord at Minster-in-Thamet, in Kent, where a devil is peering between the horns of a large twin-peaked headdress worn by a woman; 'all forms of women's finery were considered as snares of the Devil, but the twin-peaked headdresses were worst of all.'⁴⁴

All in all, it is suggested that the various forms of counterfeiting being carried out in *Q* would comply with the exacting standards of Counterfeit Countenance; satisfactory though it would be to be able to argue that Countenance *was* the fox, there is no textual warrant for this, so that in this case the connection between the wall-painting and the play can only be a symbolic one, as opposed to what could be an actual portrait in the case of Magnificence, for example.

v. *Cloaked Collusion*. One has to assume that the wall-painting was easier to decipher 60 years ago when Reitlinger and Hobart Bird saw a man in a black cloak and fur hat, probably in *B*, since no long cloak is now visible. Cloaked Collusion has already been mentioned as one of those who led Magnificence astray, not least by acting as Measure's false friend, and thus being largely to blame for depriving Magnificence of the benefit of Measure's advice. Collusion not only has the name 'Cloaked', but wears a cloak (lines 601–609) too, as well as some sort of headgear which, in the stage direction following line 748, is referred to as a biretta. The man in *B* can still be seen as wearing some substantial sort of headgear, and, accepting the assurance of Reitlinger and Hobart Bird that he once had a cloak, too, it is difficult to see what more the artist could have done to depict this character. The fact that Reitlinger describes the merchant in *B* as dressed in the style of the Wars of the Roses, while the play cannot have been written before the 1490s, need occasion no difficulty, since, slightly to adapt a dictum of Fr. Mathew, 'Details of dress characteristic of [a particular period] can only prove the date of the pattern-book from which they were derived and such sketchbooks were probably in use for decades.'⁴⁵

vi. *Fancy and Crafty Conveyance*. Again, both Reitlinger and Hobart Bird identified a knight in armour with a hound on a leash, and this has been assigned to *C*, although the difficulty of identifying the knight and his hound nowadays has already been mentioned. In the play, Cloaked Collusion, having been introduced by Counterfeit Countenance to Fancy and Crafty Conveyance, comments: 'Here is a leysse of ratches to renne an hare!' (line 586), 'ratches' being hunting-dogs.⁴⁶ In the painting as it now is, there is another hound to be seen, which has been placed in *L*, whose inclined attitude mirrors that of the one in *C*. The suggestion in relation to Fancy and Crafty Conveyance is that the artist has chosen to portray them as the hunting-dogs to which Cloaked Collusion compared them, and to paint them in such positions as to show that, like the devils on either side of Pride's head at Raunds, they literally had the ear of Magnificence, whether or not they were themselves devils.

vii. *Folly*. Since Reitlinger's outline sketch was drawn, there has appeared, thanks doubtless to a subsequent restoration, the figure of a very small man and a very large dog over the east side of the window, in *J*. In the play it is Folly who is accompanied, on his first appearance, by a dog whose general size is unspecified but which is described as having 'a grete hede' in line 1049, so presumably its body would be in proportion. The figures in *J* are therefore suggested for Folly and his dog.

viii. *Good Hope*. What is seen in *F* is by no means clear, but in the present writer's opinion it is a pilgrim's staff with his wallet hanging from it, as illustrated in Ferguson's book on Christian iconography,⁴⁷ the apparent 'hole' being the place where the scallop-shell, symbol of pilgrimage, was once painted but from which it has since flaked off, possibly because the pigment used was incompatible with the lime in the plaster. Turning to the play, Magnificence's abasement and his subsequent encounters with Adversity, Poverty, Despair, and Mischief finally lead him to the state of mind described by Good Hope in lines 2337 and 2340 as Wanhope, that is, despair of the mercy of God,⁴⁸ so that his only recourse, as he supposes, is suicide. As he is about to despatch himself with a knife brought him by Mischief (whose name, it will be remembered, could be equated with evil), he is saved at the last moment by the intervention of Good Hope, who, after some preliminary exchanges in the course of which Good Hope says that God's Grace will be Magnificence's physician, introduces himself as:

Good Hope, your potecary, assygned am I, . . . (line 2351)
 Nowe must I make you a lectuary softe,
 I to mynyster it, you to recyve it ofte,
 With rubarbe of repentaunce in you for to rest;
 With drammes of devocyon your dyet must be drest,
 With gomme goostly of glad herte and mynde,
 To thanke God of his sonde; . . . (lines 2355 – 2360)

'Sonde', the last word in the foregoing quotation, has been explained as meaning 'his providential dispensation.'⁴⁹

Assuming the artist at Oddington to have been given the difficult task of portraying the characters of *Magnificence* in a wall-painting, he could be expected to have eagerly taken advantage of any visual shorthand available to him which would have been understood by the informed observer. What better means of conveying the idea of Good Hope in his capacity as a healer than to depict the pilgrim's staff, with wallet and scallop-shell, the symbols of St Roch, who was a healer too?⁵⁰ Ferguson points out that fire and flames are the symbols of religious fervour⁵¹ and this might be the explanation of what appear to be tongues of flame at the four corners of the pilgrim's wallet in the painting.

Good Hope himself might have been either the figure in the adjacent *G*, or it may be that the heart-shaped piece of painting just above the staff in *F* is all that is left of his face, and perhaps only an under-painting of that. If Good Hope were in fact in *F*, then the figure in *G* is suggested as one of his companions – Redress, Circumspection, or Perseverance.

ix. *Poverty*. It is now clear, though this was apparently not the case in Reitlinger's day, that in *H* there is a person whose head is lacking, but who had a wooden crutch, with a T-shaped portion at the top, under each armpit. Such a person might plausibly be Poverty, who visits Magnificence after the latter has been despoiled of his riches and says to him:

Alasse, I have the cyatcya full evyll in my hyppe . . . (line 1956)

A. howe my lymms be lyther and lame . . . (line 2038)

A Lorde God, howe the gowte wryngeth me by the too . . . (line 2047)

With all these afflictions, it would be natural to portray Poverty with a pair of crutches, like the figure in *H*.

x. *Mischief*. In addition to the devils already definitely identified in *K* and *Q*, coupled with the possibility of others being found in *C* and *L*, there is also one of the striped sort in *D*. Since the character in the play who is called Mischief represents evil, as mentioned above, could he not be one of them? Functions having already been suggested for those devils in *C*, *L*, and *Q*, the choice would seem to lie between those in *D* or *K* for this role; the one in *D* looks the more likely to have hands capable of carrying the halter and knife mentioned in lines 2313 and 2314 as being proffered by Mischief to Magnificence for the latter's suicide.

xi. *The Apotheosis of Magnificence*, with his rescuers. In the upper corner of the west end of the painting, *A*, now much more populated than in Reitlinger's day, is a man in a short tunic but with longish sleeves, and with at least two figures on either side of him. It is a commonplace in wall-paintings to show the same character performing a sequence of stages of the same story within the same frame, a convention now known, in this age of the camera, as 'multiple exposure'. Thus, at Black Bourton, in Oxfordshire, the Magi can be seen in one and the same painting not only travelling to Bethlehem, but also, arrived there, adoring the infant Christ. Notwithstanding that Magnificence is already shown in *M*, the scene in *A* may therefore represent the apotheosis of the prince after his downfall and repentance, his spirits cleansed by the ministrations of his 'potecary', and now indicated by his simpler, though still not entirely ordinary, clothing, and supported by the good influences who helped to rescue him, Good Hope, Circumspection, Perseverance, and Redress, which latter had literally re-dressed him, saying 'take nowe upon you this abylyment' (line 2405), Magnificence's ruination having culminated in his being 'beten downe and spoyled from all his goodys and rayment', as stated in the stage direction following line 1875. Below this group are vestiges of what may be two other persons; if so, they could be Liberty and Measure, whom Circumspection says in lines 2485 and 2487 will still be needed by Magnificence, though they do not reappear in person in the play.

xii. *The scenery*. The stage direction between lines 1966 and 1967 requires the provision of something like a bed, but apart from this the play is so non-committal that the furthest any of the other directions go is occasionally to refer to the scene as 'the place'. Internal evidence from the words of the play is limited to line 660, which mentions the court – a glimpse of the obvious in a play about a prince – while line 957 refers to one of the characters waiting in the street. This almost total absence of any explicit reference to scenery accords well with the suggestion that, whereas the normal wall-painting of this period would have a diapered background, in the present case it was deliberately left completely blank.

The foregoing leaves one Zone, *E*, containing what might be the 'magician?', outstanding. Had Hobart Bird given any reason for this tentative identification, it might have been invaluable, and certainly one of the two characters left unaccounted for, Adversity, the arbiter of men's fortunes, in his great speech from line 1876, devotes much time to describing so large a number of transformation scenes in the affairs of mankind as to be the envy of any magician, but it is

impossible to argue that the vestigial remains in *E* could have any reference to his splendid bombast.

To summarise, of the fifteen Zones into which the wall-painting has been divided, fourteen are, it is suggested, accounted for in terms of their subject-matter having some correspondence with the characters or incidents in the play *Magnificence*, with only *E* left outstanding.

Put another way, of the eighteen characters in the play, it is suggested that twelve can be regarded as directly represented by what have been called 'portraits', while another four are represented symbolically. Affinities for sixteen out of the eighteen characters being thus accounted for, no suggestions can be made about the two other characters, Adversity and Despair.

If it is asked why so unusual a subject for a wall-painting was chosen, particularly for a parish church in what is still a remote rural area, this is in fact no bar to the use of highly specialised subject-matter, as, for example, the story of St James and the magician Hermogenes in the equally remote church at Stoke Orchard,⁵² which David Verey has said is paralleled only in one of the windows at Chartres.⁵³

Since this is a case where, almost alone of all medieval wall-paintings, a possible reason for the choice of subject can be suggested, it is worth considering whether the very remoteness of the parish might imply that whoever commissioned the painting might have been able safely to ignore the rustic parishioners when making his choice of subject-matter. It has already been mentioned that there is a school of thought – doubtless a minority – which considers *Magnificence* to be a satire against Wolsey, who, as Archbishop of York, was the owner of the manor of Oddington from 1514 to 1529,⁵⁴ during which period the play might well have been written. Wolsey was far too concerned with affairs of state, and not least with foreign policy,⁵⁵ to trouble himself with so humble a part of his domains as Oddington – he did not even visit York during the years of his power.⁵⁶ The fact that Oddington was the Cardinal's property might mean that a person of exceptional calibre might have commissioned the painting; the advowson, for example, was vested in the Precentor of York.⁵⁷ Bearing in mind that Wolsey was 'very generally hated'⁵⁸ it is probable – though the idea is of course purely speculative and is in any event not essential to the main argument – that such a person might be among those who had no cause to respect the Cardinal/Archbishop, and might think it a method both elegant and safe precisely because of the remoteness of Oddington, of taking his revenge by choosing a subject which, to those in the know (which would certainly *not* include the parishioners) would be understood as a satire on Wolsey. Circumspection might be the reason why not all the figures in the painting should be obvious portraits of characters in the play, but that some of them should be represented symbolically.

The interpretation of this strange wall-painting was due for reconsideration after the 60 years which have elapsed since Reitlinger's article, and the present writer hopes that, quite apart from the *Magnificence* theory, his researches will have brought to light a number of aspects of this hitherto neglected painting which have previously escaped attention. Nevertheless, he also hopes that this paper will demonstrate that there are a significant number of resemblances between the greater part of the mural and nearly all the characters of the morality play. To expect absolute proof of a connection between the play and the painting would, in the present state of deterioration of the latter be asking the impossible; what has always been true of plays and players is now sadly also applicable to English pre-Reformation wall-paintings, namely: 'the best in this kind are but shadows'.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. *VCH Glos* 6 (1965), 90.
2. Leaflet (undated) available in the church.
3. *VCH*, op. cit., note 1, 95, 96.
4. Dimensions as given in W. Hobart Bird, *Ancient Mural Paintings in the Churches of Gloucs* (? 1927), 24.
5. *VCH*, op. cit., note 1, 96.
6. G. Reitlinger, 'The Wall Paintings at Oddington', *Burlington Mag* 49 (1926), 105–111, at 111.
7. Hobart Bird, op. cit., note 4, 25.
8. *TBGAS* 57 (1935), 277–278.
9. A. Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings* (1963), 142.
10. *Ibid.*, 37.
11. Victoria and Albert Museum Library ref: MSS English, c. 1930–64.
12. E.W. Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the 14th century* (1955), 103, and Tristram, 'Hoxne . . . Wall Paintings', *Apollo* 5 (1927), 33–35, at 33.
13. Reitlinger, op. cit., note 6, 111.
14. Caiger-Smith, op. cit., note 9, 80n.
15. O. Pächt, 'A Giottesque Episode in English Medieval Art', *J Warburg Courtauld Inst* 6 (1943), 51–70, at 70 and Plate 21(b).
16. Bodleian MS. LAT. LITURG. f2, fol. 146v., dated c. 1405 but before 1413.
17. A.H. Thompson, 'Jurisdiction of the Archbishops of York in Gloucs', *TBGAS* 43 (1921), 85–180, at 100–104.
18. Miss E.C. Williams, 'Wall Paintings of St. Catherine in England', *J Brit Archaeol Ass* 19 (for 1956), 20–33, at 21, 22.
19. E.W. Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Paintings: the 13th century* (1950), 341, 342.
20. É. Mâle, *L'Art Religieux de la Fin du Moyen Âge en France* (Paris 1931), 36, 295.
21. G.A. Lester, *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays* (1981), xiii.
22. Dr Paula Neuss, *Magnificence: John Skelton* (1980), 18.
23. Before deciding upon *Magnificence*, careful consideration was given to a representative selection of other morality plays, namely, *Mundus et Infans*, *the Castle of Perseverance*, *Mankind*, *Everyman*, *King John*, and *Lusty Juventus*, but all had to be discounted on the grounds either of dating or of having too commonplace a hero. Skelton's dates are from W.H. Williams, *Skelton* (1902), 2, 9.
24. L. Winsor, 'Skelton's "Magnyfycence"', *Renaissance Quarterly* 23 part I (1970), 14–25, at 14, 21.
25. Neuss, op. cit., note 22, 15.
26. Winsor, op. cit., note 24, 14.
27. Neuss, op. cit., note 22, 57.
28. J.C. Wall, *Medieval Wall Paintings* [1914], 112.
29. G.R. Elton, *Reform and Reformation* (1981), 57, 58.
30. The text of *Magnificence*, used passim, is from Dr Peter Happé's *Four Morality Plays* (1979) and I am obliged to Penguin Books Ltd. for their assurance that 'the text of the play . . . is out of copyright and may therefore be used without formal permissions clearance.'
31. J.G. Waller, 'On . . . wall-paintings at Chaldon . . .', *Archaeol J* 30 (1873), 35–58, reproduced in Fig. 1 on 38.
32. C.R. Dodwell et al., *The St. Alban's Psalter* (1960), reproduced as Plate 9 of the Calendar.
33. Neuss, op. cit., note 22, 24.
34. *Ibid.*, 46.
35. *Ibid.*, 22.
36. Drs E. Clive Rouse and K. Varty, 'Medieval paintings of Reynard the Fox in Gloucs. Cathedral . . .', *Archaeol J* 133 (1976), 104–117.
37. Dr K. Varty, *Reynard the Fox* (1967), 21.
38. *Ibid.*, 51.
39. *Ibid.*, Plates 65, 69, 74, and 128.
40. R. Broby-Johansen, *Den Danske Billedbibel* (Copenhagen 1947), 185, 209.
41. Varty, op. cit., note 37, caption to Plate 67.
42. *Ibid.*, 55.

43. Lester, *op. cit.*, note 21, xxii, describing the normal role of Titivullus.
44. M.D. Anderson (Lady Trenchard Cox), 'The Iconography of British Misericords', in G.L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (1969), xxxviii (erroneously printed as 'xxviii'), and Plate 15a.
45. Fr. G. Mathew, *The Court of Richard II* (1968), 97.
46. Neuss, *op. cit.*, note 22, 103n.
47. G. Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York 1972), 181.
48. *Oxford English Dictionary* 12 (1970), W. 69.
49. A. Dyce, *Poetical Works of John Skelton* 2 (1843), 275.
50. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, note 47, 141.
51. *Ibid.*, 41.
52. Dr E. Clive Rouse and Dr Audrey Baker, 'Wall Paintings in Stoke Orchard Church, Gloucs.', *Archaeol J* 123 (1966), 79–119.
53. D. Verey, *Buildings of England: Gloucs., the Vale* (1970), 351.
54. Elton, *op. cit.*, note 29, 48. It is appreciated that Wolsey was also Archbishop in 1530, but by that time Skelton was dead.
55. *Ibid.*, 1–115, *passim*.
56. *Ibid.*, 48.
57. Thompson, *op. cit.*, note 17, 101.
58. Elton, *op. cit.*, note 29, 65.

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