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Article Abstracts

The City of York and Its 'Play of Pageants' by Peter Meredith

Abstract

This paper first presents a brief overview of York's physical growth and status as a mercantile city and a county in its own right, and its relationships with the monarchy as they appear in royal entries. It then moves on to examine the emergence of its Play from obscure beginnings in the late fourteenth century, and to investigate the changing nature of the Play during its nearly 200-year existence. The paper concludes with an investigation of the demise of the Play in the late sixteenth century. Throughout, the paper emphasizes the instability of the evidence and the necessity of open mindedness, and suggests that this essential absence of closure maintains the value of the continued scholarly investigation .

Biography

Peter Meredith <p.meredith@leeds.ac.uk> is Professor Emeritus of Medieval Drama at the University of Leeds, England. His main area of research within medieval drama has been the N-Town manuscript of plays from which he has edited *The Mary Play* and *The Passion Play*. Most recently he has produced an acting edition of *Mankind*. His primary interest has been and remains in the practice of drama - he co-directed *Mankind* (1996) and directed *Everyman* (1997) at Camerino and for the Leeds Medieval Congress. He is at present working on a full modern-spelling edition of the *Towneley Plays*, and on the liturgical drama section of the *Cambridge Documentary History of Theatre*. He directed *Play 20: Christ and the Doctors in the Temple* at the Toronto *York Cycle*.

Places to Hear the Play in York by Eileen White

Abstract

The unusual custom of using a procession of pageants playing at a series of preassigned 'stations' was the common practice in York. The route and each station can be ascertained from external evidence. Bringing to bear historic and modern evidence from the actual spaces that survive on the streets of York, the paper measures and describes each of the stations. Recent performances in the streets of York are also considered and questions raised about the nature of the historic performances.

Biography

Eileen White holds a doctorate from Leeds University and is a private scholar working on aspects of the local history of the West Riding of Yorkshire. She has done extensive research into the records of the city of York and its playing places. When not recreating playing spaces she recreates medieval banquets. She is a Research Associate of Records of Early English Drama undertaking archival checking in many repositories in England.

The Medieval Pageant Wagons at York: Their Orientation and Height by John McKinnell

Abstract

This article considers some physical aspects of the medieval pageant wagons used for the *York Cycle*. Many modern reconstructions have assumed that the pageants played side-on, but this view rests on assumptions derived from modern theatre, medieval two-dimensional art, or the demands of the open campus locations where many modern performances have taken place. Comparative European evidence (drawings of early ommegang wagons, and surviving Spanish pageant wagons) suggests pageants designed as three-dimensional pieces of street architecture, transpicuous wherever possible, and aligned toward the front or the rear. The narrowness of York's streets and practical experiments in 1988 and 1992 at some of the most popular medieval performance places strongly support this model; side-on performance in these places makes it impossible for much of the audience to see the pageants and would sometimes involve placing the property of the stationholder backstage, from where no view would be possible. Medieval pageants were probably higher than most of those used today, with wagon decks five to six feet from ground level and any upper storeys at least eight feet above the lower ones. Large pageants like the Mercers' Doomsday need a total functional height of over twenty feet, excluding spires, pinnacles, etc.; and even this looks modest beside some drawings of ommegang wagons. The larger wagons used a good deal of machinery; study of one type of machine, the functional lift, suggests that it needed grooved pillars, pulleys and a drum winch. Such a machine could be more safely and effectively mounted on an end-facing wagon than a side-facing one. The York wagons were technologically and artistically ambitious, and our modern efforts have yet to match their inventiveness or their flamboyant magnificence.

Biography

John McKinnell <john.mckinnell@durham.ac.uk> is Reader in Medieval Literature at the University of Durham; he directed PLAY 22: The Temptation of Christ in the 1998 production at Toronto and is editing the REED volume for County Durham. His work on early drama includes modern-spelling editions of the *Chester Cycle Moses, Balaak and Balaam*, the *York Cycle Mary Plays* and the English *Mary of Nemmegen*; articles on reconstructive productions of the *Digby Mary Magdalen* and the *York Mary Plays*; and monographs and articles on early drama in Durham (eg *The Sequence of the Sacrament at Durham*, Teesside, 1998). Videos are available of his productions of the *York Assumption of the Virgin* (1988), *Mary of Nemmegen* (1989), *Cambises* (co-production with David Crane, 1992), *Dame Sirith* and *Calisto and Melebea* (1996), and *Everyman* (1999).

Raging in the Streets of Medieval York by Margaret Rogerson

Abstract

In the processional performance mode that was the norm for biblical cycle plays in several English towns in the Middle Ages, the area of the pageant wagon stage was a restricted one. Modern 'original staging' experiments have shown that off-wagon performance has advantages of additional playing space and the enhanced contact between performance and audience occasioned when the actors appropriate the space otherwise occupied by the observers. A stage direction in a sixteenth-century pageant text from Coventry indicates that off-wagon performance was used in some performances of the Nativity pageant, where Herod was seen 'raging in the street'. This article examines the possibility that the Coventry practice was followed in York. It begins with a review of the records of the stage history of Herod, from Chaucer to Shakespeare. From the evidence available, we can learn about the use of rhetorical gesture and props in the expression of the tyrant's rage, but not about movement around the stage area or into the audience space. The discussion considers the common tendency of scholarly investigators to assume that off-wagon playing was widely employed in York, and outlines evidence for it in implicit stage directions in the York texts. It also explores the advantages and appeal of performances confined to the pageant wagon stage. It draws on modern 'original staging' experiments with the York texts in 1992 and 1998, and the work of Shakespearean scholars as well as medievalists. It concludes that we should keep an open mind about the viability of on-wagon performance and should not privilege off-wagon playing in our thinking about the York Play.

Biography

Margaret Rogerson <margaret.rogerson@english.usyd.edu.au> is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Sydney. She co-edited the REED volume for York (1979) and has written a number of articles on the *York* and *Coventry* plays and other aspects of early English drama. She is currently working on a project to investigate the modern staging traditions of the the *York Play* in York.

The Pageant Wagon as Iconic Site in the York Cycle by Ralph Blasting

Abstract

Theories of pageant-wagon dramaturgy have ranged from viewing the wagons purely as processional tableaux with no intention of mimetic performance to investing them with all the complexity of place-and-scaffold staging. This is especially true for the *York Plays*. The paper examines specific uses of the street as *platea* in the *York Cycle*, arguing that such use was limited specifically to its function as a contrast to the iconography of the wagon stage. Characters leave the wagon or approach it as a means of interrupting or re-establishing the iconic moment represented by that pageant. The dramatic effect on the audience derives from the disruption or reconfiguration of the stasis of the site.

Biography

Ralph Blasting <rblasting@towson.edu> is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Theatre Arts at Towson University in Maryland. He has participated as a designer, director, or technician in all four of the English cycle plays at the University of Toronto, most recently as director of Towson's production of the two Noah plays, Plays 8-9: The Building of the Ark and The Flood, in the 1998 *York Cycle*. He has published numerous articles on the civic/religious drama of medieval Germany and England; his review of Larry West's translation and edition of the *Alsfeld Passion Play* recently appeared in the *Early Drama, Art, and Music Review*.

High Places and Travelling Scenes: Some Observations on the Staging of the *York Cycle*

by Martin Walsh

Abstract

An argument for a more expanded use of the *platea* in staging certain (earth-bound) plays of the *York Cycle*, based on the experience of producing Abraham and Isaac for the 1998 Toronto project. Extended 'travelling scenes' focusing upon a high point (naked hill or elevated temple or castle) are found throughout the *Cycle*, suggesting that significant playing at street-level with a culminating action on the wagon-top was a distinct possibility for many plays of the *Cycle*.

Biography

Martin W. Walsh <narenlob@umich.edu> is Head of the Drama Concentration at the Residential College and an Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre & Drama at the University of Michigan. He is widely published in medieval studies, particularly in the area of early German theatre and popular culture. He is co-editor and translator of the Dutch Morality *Mariken Van Nieumeghen* (1994). He is currently pursuing research on the carnivalesque aspects of the festival of Martinmas as well as on the traditional characters of the contemporary Carnival in Trinidad. Prof. Walsh founded 'The Harlotry Players' at Michigan in 1983 and has regularly participated in the *Cycle* projects at the University of Toronto. The group has also produced several original translations of German Carnival plays, Dutch farces and, most recently, a Polish Easter play. He directed Play 10: Abraham and Isaac and Play 30: The Dream of Pilate's Wife in the Toronto *York Cycle*.

Seeing and Hearing: Looking and Listening by Pamela King

Abstract

This paper speculates about what modern reception theory, focusing as it does on assumed cultural norms, can and cannot offer the student of medieval drama. It can, for example, throw into relief the fundamental question of what we can know about medieval reception, so that we avoid foregrounding the evident literary simplicity of some of these texts at the expense of acknowledging their cultural complexities. The student of medieval theatre does well to proceed with caution in speculating on or theorizing the relationship between medieval plays and their

audiences. The relationship between speech and action deserves at least to be problematized. Beyond that lies the wider challenge of reconstructing the differences between medieval and the modern audience assumptions about the cultural event in which they are participating and its relationship to the world they inhabit. The paper suggests, drawing examples from the *York Cycle*, that a modern audience member cannot avoid imposing upon the plays contemporary ways of seeing, particularly when it comes to scenic arrangement; the paper, therefore, avoids closure.

Biography

Pamela M. King <p.king@ucsm.ac.uk> is a graduate of the Universities of Edinburgh (MA) and York (DPhil). She taught at Westfield College, then Queen Mary and Westfield, in the University of London, before taking up the post of Head of English at St Martin's College, Lancaster, where she holds a personal chair and is currently Associate Dean of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences. Her work on medieval theatre includes a modern spelling selection from the *York Cycle* (with Richard Beadle, Oxford, 1984) and a forthcoming critical edition (with Clifford Davidson) of the two surviving *Coventry Plays* (Kalamazoo, 2000), as well as numerous articles on English religious drama including the chapter on 'The Morality Plays' in the *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Theatre* (ed Beadle, 1994). She is co-director (with Meg Twycross) of the York Doomsday Project <<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/yorkdoom>>, working on a number of electronic projects related to medieval drama. She also writes on contemporary Spanish religious spectacle, on other English medieval literature, and on medieval tomb sculpture, and has recently brought out the *York Notes Advanced* on 'The Miller's Tale' (York Press, 1999).

Verbal Texture and Wordplay in the *York Cycle* by Richard Beadle

Abstract

A preliminary overview of the verbal texture of the *York Cycle* is developed with reference to several broad contexts: the physical circumstances of processional production; the 'audiate' culture of the audience; the aural (as distinct from literate) nature of the script, and its close relationship to late 14th- and 15th-century northern homiletic verse, likewise designed for oral delivery. Use is made of the ranking-frequency listings in G.B. Kinneavy's *Concordance* to the *York Plays* in order to characterize their comparatively restricted lexical range, which is seen as a function of their essentialist and universalizing tendencies, and their preference for performative and deictic language that closely integrates word and action. The presence of wordplay in this environment is explored through a range of examples taken from across the cycle as a whole.

Biography

Richard Beadle <rb243@cam.ac.uk> is Reader in English Literature in the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge, and Fellow and Director of Studies in English at St John's College, Cambridge. He was general editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (1995) and is currently revising and enlarging his critical edition of *The York Plays* (1982) for republication by the Early English Text Society.

'His langage is lorne' (31/190): The Silent Centre of the *York Cycle* by Alexandra Johnston**Abstract**

In their portrayal of the character of Christ, the *York* playwrights exploited the concept of *logos*. In the plays of the ministry and again in the post-resurrection plays, he is indeed, 'The Word on the Street', actively teaching and preaching the ways of holy living openly, colloquially, humanly. But at the centre of the sequence, in the hands of his enemies, Christ, the *logos*, falls silent. The playwrights understood Christ to be the Word and the Word to be Truth. The action of the trial plays is based on deceit and lies, reflecting Peraldus' exposition of the '*peccata linguae*'. All the Word needs to do is stand silent, to be the 'still centre' and even as they condemn him his enemies condemn themselves out of their own mouths.

Biography

Alexandra F. Johnston <ajohnsto@chass.utoronto.ca> is a professor of English at the University of Toronto and has been director of Records of Early English Drama (which she was instrumental in founding) since 1975. She is co-editor with Margaret Rogerson of the first of the REED series, the *Records of York* (1979) and is also co-editor of the Oxford University and City records to be published soon. She has written extensively on many aspects of early drama. Since 1974 she has been closely associated with the *Poculi Ludique Societas* and is presently chair of the *PLS* Board. She convened the symposium mounted in association with the production of the *York Cycle* in 1998.

Directors' Notes**ALEXANDRA F. JOHNSTON****YORK 1998: What We Have Learned**

Alexandra F. Johnston <ajohnsto@chass.utoronto.ca> is a professor of English at the University of Toronto and has been director of Records of Early English Drama (which she was instrumental in founding) since 1975. She is co-editor with Margaret Rogerson of the first of the REED series, the *Records of York* (1979) and is also co-editor of the Oxford University and City records to be published soon. She has written extensively on many aspects of early drama. Since 1974 she has been closely associated with the *Poculi Ludique Societas* and is presently chair of the *PLS* Board. She convened the symposium mounted in association with the production of the *York Cycle* in 1998.

GARRETT P.J. EPP**PLAY 5:** The Temptation and Fall

Garrett Epp <Garrett.Epp@ualberta.ca> is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Alberta. He was the Artistic Director for the *PLS* production of the *Towneley Plays* in 1985, while working on his dissertation on the *York Plays*; he is currently engaged in research on early English drama and sexuality.

MICHAEL AND SUSAN BARBOUR**PLAYS 14-15:** The Nativity / The Adoration of the Shepherds

Michael and Susan Barbour <barbour@maple.lemoyne.edu> work at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, NY; Michael as Assistant Director of Theatre and Susan as an Instructor in the English Department. Both are graduates of the Graduate Theatre Program at The Catholic University of America. Together they have worked as director and dramaturg, respectively, on a variety of medieval plays staged at the University of Toronto, including the *N-Town Noah* (1988), *The Apple Tree* (1992), and *Man's Desire and Fleeting Beauty* (1995).

ROLAND REED**PLAY 19:** The Slaughter of the Innocents

Roland L. Reed <wildgoose@surfree.com>, Associate Professor of Drama at The Catholic University of America, has directed the Graduate Playwriting Program at Catholic University, the directing and playwriting programs at The University of South Carolina and The University of North Carolina - Charlotte. He has directed more than 100 major productions as well as many staged readings and workshop productions of new plays. He is Playwright in Residence for the Stanislavski Theatre Studio in Washington, DC. Six of his plays have been produced: *Vera* was produced by Signature Theatre in Arlington, Virginia; *Wearing Louie* was produced off-off Broadway, and the others received student productions. He has conducted site visits for NEA Expansion Arts Theatre and served on its national panel.

JONATHAN HEROLD**PLAY 33:** The Judgment of Christ

Jonathan Herold <jherold@chass.utoronto.ca> holds a BA in History from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee and is currently a graduate student at the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. Prior to pursuing his interest in medieval history at university, Jonathan worked as an actor and stage combat choreographer in the United States. His longest theatrical affiliation was with Tony Award-nominated American Players Theatre in Spring Green, Wisconsin, where he appeared in productions, including *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Tamberlaine the Great Part I*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Loves Labours Lost*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from 1982 to 1987. Jon worked as a stage combat instructor both

independently and with Bradley Waller, teaching stage combat techniques at schools, colleges and universities in Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota. He choreographed stage violence for productions of *Macbeth* for the University of Wisconsin and *Oklahoma!* for Children's Theater of Madison (with Brad Waller), *Love and Death in Verona* and *The Yearling* for CTM, *Macbeth* for First Stage - Milwaukee and *Carmen* for Milwaukee's Florentine Opera Company.

KAREN SAWYER

PLAY 38: The Resurrection

Karen Sawyer <sawyer@stolaf.edu> worked at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota and studied medieval literature at Oxford University before coming to the University of Toronto to unite her practical and academic interests in early English drama. She produced, performed in, and directed productions for Poculi Ludique Societas while pursuing her Ph.D. Her interest in the York Resurrection play was sparked in part by her dissertation, an edition and study of the sixteenth-century Protestant play *The Resurrection of Our Lord*. She now teaches in the English department at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.

GWEN WALTZ

PLAY 41: Christ's Appearance to Thomas

Currently an independent scholar, Gwendolyn Waltz <gwen.waltz@ac.hillsdale.edu> is working on *Our Mutual Cousin: The Shared Stage of American Multi-Media Performance*, a book based on her research of theatre and cinema confluence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a director in the 1998 *York Cycle*, she completed a two-year Visiting Assistant Professorship at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan.

TERRI CAIN

PLAY 42: The Ascension

Terri Cain <terese.cain@yale.edu> graduated MDiv from Yale University - Institute of Sacred Music. She works as a director, choreographer, and performer for stage and film, with special interests in early drama and liturgy. Recently she directed for the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library the modern premiere of *The Play of the Burgher's Son*, a St. Nicholas play from Beineck Library MS 841, a rare Franco-Provencal manuscript (late 14th or early 15th c.). She is devoted to bringing theatre to the streets. What will ever compare to the wonderful experience at *York '98!*

STEPHEN JOHNSON**PLAY 47: Last Judgment**

Stephen Johnson <sjohnson@credit.erin.utoronto.ca> teaches in the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama and in Erindale College's Theatre and Drama Program at the University of Toronto. As a scholar, he has published in (among other journals) *TDR*, *CTR*, *Essays in Theatre*, *Theatre Topics*, *Nineteenth Century Theater*, and *Theatre Research in Canada*, for which he has acted as co-editor for the past nine years. He was the artistic director of the Environmental Theatre Workshop in Hamilton and of Handmade Performance in Toronto, for which he wrote/adapted and/or directed *Juba*, *The Insect Play*, *The Last Judgment*, *A Little Grief*, and *Dr Faustus* (in co-production with CREED and the Drama Centre). His radio adaptation of *Juba*, produced by the CBC, was nominated for the Writer's Guild of Canada Top Ten Award. He is a member of the WGC and the Playwrights Union of Canada.

JOEL KAPLAN**Overview on the *York Cycle* Performance****PLAY 2: Creation to the Fifth Day/ PLAY 39: Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene**

Joel Kaplan <kaplanj@novell2.bham.ac.uk> is Professor of Drama and Head of Department of Drama and Theatre Arts, University of Birmingham. His research areas are nineteenth- and twentieth-century British theatre, especially the Victorian and Edwardian periods; Oscar Wilde; medieval drama; theatre and cultural history; and performance reconstruction. His recent books include: (with Sheila Stowell) *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge, 1994) and (with Michael Booth) *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage* (Cambridge, 1996). His current projects focus on the theatre of the 1890s, Oscar Wilde, and Noel Coward.