Emma Maggie Solberg

A History of 'The Mysteries'

This study explores the history of the term 'mystery' in its theatrical sense. Victorian scholar (and forger) J.P. Collier was the first to question the term's legitimacy, accusing the eighteenth-century publisher Robert Dodsley of having invented it. Collier's condemnation has held sway ever since; 'mystery' is nearly bankrupt in the field of early English drama studies. I reconsider the authenticity, utility, etymology, and history of 'mystery', fact-checking the arguments made for and against it by Collier, E.K. Chambers, J.M. Salter, and Meg Twycross (amongst others) to show that reports of the term's illegitimacy have been greatly exaggerated.

The study of early English drama suffers from a self-acknowledged problem with terminology that extends even to the titles of the texts themselves.[1] For example 'Hegge', 'Cotton', 'Coventry', and 'N-Town' all refer to one compilation of plays; the manuscript in question has had at least seven names, the most current of which has been standard only since the 1980s.[2] One of the most widely read early English plays suffers from a similar crisis of identity: while specialists now refer to the *Towneley Second Shepherds Play,* anthologies and encyclopedias still call it the *Wakefield Second Shepherds Play.*[3] The terms for early English dramatic genres are likewise subject to rather frequent change: texts like the York and N-Town plays have been called amongst other things the mysteries (or mystery plays or cycles), Corpus Christi plays (or cycles), and miracles (or miracle plays or cycles). The task of choosing which label to use is tricky: the field now frowns on the terms cycle (because it implies a high standard of artistic coherence met by only one or perhaps two texts), Corpus Christi (a category which, some argue, 'does not exist'), mystery, and many more besides (medieval, biblical, English).[4] The field of early English drama studies seems to thrive on remarkably frequent disruptions of its taxonomy — some recent scholarly work dismantles the categories of theatre and drama.[5]

Emma Maggie Solberg (esolberg@bowdoin.edu) is an assistant professor in the English department at Bowdoin College.

The problem stems from the source material, which does not offer its own system of user-friendly classification.[6] The massive archives of the Records of Early English Drama and the Middle English Compendium offer myriad fuzzy synonyms for theatrical representation, including pageant, procession, miracle, interlude, play, and game. In this terminological fog, scholars struggle to determine what distinguishes drama or theatre from a wide array of performative phenomena including parades, contests, banquets, jokes, tales, acrobatics, tableaux, banners, meditations, treatises, and mechanical devices. What seems clear is, as Carol Symes puts it, that 'the generic definition of a play as such was in flux for most of the Middle Ages'.[7]

Distinguishing discrete genres within this fluctuation proves distinctly challenging (if not foolhardy): the archives suggest nothing remotely resembling Aristotle's content-based organization of ancient Greek drama into the categories of comedy and tragedy. Early English records make no coherent generic distinction between sacred and profane themes, nor between dramatic representations of canonical scripture as opposed to apocryphal hagiography or local history. And these records do not label plays with helpfully consistent or catchy titles. This absence forced the manuscripts' post-medieval caretakers — scholars and antiquarians of the Renaissance and Enlightenment — to come up with new names. Their 'not very happy' choices, as W.W. Greg put it,[8] tended to name texts after manuscripts' owners or supposed places of origin — attributions they often got wrong, resulting in a canon of early English drama that relies upon nomenclature based on their mistakes. Even worse, some of these antiquarians (most infamously John Walker, whom Barbara Palmer barely restrains herself from calling 'a blackguard') were prone to fraud.[9] To quote Symes again, our current taxonomy 'derive[s] from the capricious tastes of seventeenth-century antiquaries, eighteenth-century bibliophiles, [and] nineteenth-century philologists'.[10]

Their caprices, errors, and forgeries ensured that the future study of early drama would need to police its vocabulary. The field has eagerly exiled allegedly corrupt terms and concepts. But accusations of error have sometimes been accepted too readily, perhaps even uncritically. This study attempts to rebalance the scales by subjecting an accusation of inaccurate terminology to intense critical scrutiny and thorough historical contextualization. The history of taxonomic reformations within the field of early English drama studies reveals just as much about our anachronistic and distorting post-medieval biases and preconceptions as does the better-known history of our errors. As the field turns to the task of rethinking the categories of drama and theatre, now seems the right time to pause and look back on the history of one of our oldest taxonomical controversies.

Let us reconsider the value of a discarded label: the mysteries. The term mystery play is rarely used in early English drama studies because of longstanding, internecine controversy over its legitimacy. The debate within the field about 'the mysteries' can be summarized as such: while hardliners insist that the term is an eighteenth-century invention with little academic value (a position first articulated by J.P. Collier in the early nineteenth century), others (repeating an argument first made by F.M. Salter in 1955) use complex etymological evidence to defend its authenticity. In order to avoid the crossfire between these two camps, most specialists have dropped the term, but no satisfactory alternative has taken its place. Descriptive mouthfuls like 'civic-sponsored, processional, biblical drama' or 'episodic sacramental pageantry presenting salvation history from Creation to Doomsday' replace references to 'the mysteries' with definitions, not titles.

Despite its bankruptcy within the field, 'the mysteries' retains no small measure of popularity: you will find reference to 'the mysteries' in Norton and Blackwell anthologies, Cambridge Companions, Stephen Greenblatt's bestsellers, encyclopedia entries, off-off Broadway plays, curatorial captions and catalogues, and *Guardian* and *New York Times* articles. Of all the myriad titles promulgated by amateurs and experts over the centuries, this one has stuck. Perhaps Collier's critique of the term has failed to circulate as widely as Salter's defense. Perhaps even the term's nay-sayers rely on it to communicate with non-specialists. In either case, even the term's harshest critics admit that they find it fascinating. Karl Young acknowledged in 1933 that although he believed the term to be 'a modern invention' he nevertheless found it, of all the available options, 'the most instructive in its relationships'.[11] More recently Meg Twycross expressed her admiration for the term, confessing that she finds it 'temptingly ambiguous' despite its bad reputation.[12] The evocative label 'the mysteries' invites exegesis, an invitation that philologists find hard to resist. So why resist?

John Payne Collier provided a persuasive reason, arguing in 1831 that the term had been 'unknown in England…until a comparatively recent period', specifically until it was invented by Robert Dodsley in 1744.[13] Let us return to the scene of this alleged crime. Dodlsey — self-made man of letters and 'the most important bookseller of his age' — brought pre-Shakespearean drama to the attention of the reading public with his publication of *Select Collection of Old Plays* in 1744, the first volume of which contained several Tudor interludes prefaced by a scholarly overview of the history of English drama from the Middle Ages to the present day.[14] Dodsley intended for this anthology to 'snatch' old plays 'from total Neglect and Oblivion'.[15] No vain boast: Dodsley was the first Englishman of the Enlightenment to attempt to use the power of the printing press to educate 'the

Publick' about pre-Shakespearean English theatre history.[16] Only after Dodsley reawakened interest in 'old plays' did Thomas Hawkins publish *Everyman* and the Digby *Killing of the Children,* perhaps the earliest English plays to appear in print in more than two hundred years.[17]

The time was ripe for their return. During and immediately after the Reformation, many English Protestants longed to forget the idolatrous ways of medieval Catholics, particularly their old plays. An antiquarian who came across the Chester plays in 1609 prayed to God that 'neither wee nor oure posterities after us maye nevar see the like abomination' again.[18] For a while he got his wish, at least in part: until Dodsley, the manuscripts of early English drama circulated only amongst small circles of aristocrats and their librarians.[19] Dodsley, in contrast, sought to share what he considered an important chapter of English literary history with the entire 'Generality of Readers', an ever-increasing portion of the population.[20] He advertised that he would sell 'at so cheap a rate that they shall not exceed six-pence each Play', and he successfully secured nearly five hundred subscribers and eight hundred sets.[21] Dodsley rightly considered himself a pioneer: 'It is enough for me that I have led the Way, and been the first, however imperfect, Discoverer'.[22]

The field of early English drama studies sadly does not remember Dodsley for his discoveries so much as for his imperfections.[23] He is perhaps most infamous for having put forth an inauthentic organizational system of content-based genres for medieval drama that differentiated biblical 'mysteries' from allegorical 'moralities'. Dodsley implied that these terms could be found in medieval English manuscripts. As we know, they cannot: there is no evidence that medieval English, French, or Latin records distinguish between biblical and allegorical content. As Graham Runnalls has demonstrated in his in-depth study of French theatrical taxonomy, a play that we would call a *moralit*é is as likely to identify itself as a *mystère* (as in the case of the *Mystère de l'homme pécheur*) as a play that we would call a *mystère* is to identify itself as something else entirely (like a *miracle* or *jeu*).[24] Yet Dodsley claimed that 'mysteries' represented 'some miraculous history from the Old or New Testament' while 'moralities' employed allegorical figures ('Virtues, Vices, and other Affections of the Mind') to represent 'a fable and a Moral'.[25] In short, Dodsley got it wrong.

Let us consider the utility of that error. If Dodsley wanted his readers to appreciate early English plays, he faced a seemingly insurmountable obstacle: seething anti-papism. Dodsley himself found the idea of medieval Catholic drama unpalatable. He condemned the mysteries' dramatization of sacred scripture as not only 'stupid and ridiculous' but also morally pernicious.[26] Dodsley rather ingeniously

circumnavigated this problem by separating the less distasteful allegorical plays into their own discrete category, the so-called moralities. He came up with a very soothing Whig progress narrative, arguing that when England produced the mysteries the muses had been in a 'dead sleep'; the moralities were their 'morning dream', the first stirrings of the Shakespearean greatness to come.[27]

Dodsley's strategy worked wonders. When the newly classified morality *Everyman* appeared in print some years later, readers heralded the play as the English *Oedipus* whereas the mysteries provoked horror.[28] After reading Dodsley's history of English theatre, Thomas Warton expressed his astonishment that the medieval masses,

> who were forbidden to read the events of the sacred history in the bible, in which they were faithfully and beautifully related, should at the same time be permitted to see them represented on the stage, disgraced with the grossest improprieties, corrupted with inventions and additions of the most ridiculous kind, sullied with impurities, and expressed in the language and gesticulations of the lowest farce.[29]

Many shared these sentiments. The poet Thomas Chatterton felt such antipathy towards the mysteries that he was inspired to risk his reputation by forging an antidote: he invented a Middle English historical tragedy (entitled *The Tragedy of Ælla*) — the most correct and proper dramatic subgenre, as he felt — prefaced by a scathing takedown of the mysteries. Posing as the fifteenth-century poet Thomas Rowlie, Chatteron writes:

> Plaies made from HALLIE TALES I hold unmete;
> Let some great story of a man be songe;
> Whanne, as a man, we Godde and Jesus trete,
> Ynne mie poore mynde we doe the godhead wronge.[30]

Unfortunately for Chatteron, this 'censure of the mysteries' gave him away: his critics observed that these lines demonstrated 'taste and discrimination, which could only belong to a more advanced period of society'.[31]

Dodsley knew his audience well, telling them what they wanted to hear. Perhaps we still want to hear it: we continue to employ Dodsley's inauthentic generic categories today, though with caveats and disclaimers. His generic categories fostered appreciation for and interest in early English plays, especially but not exclusively the moralities. In a less obvious way, Dodsley sold the mysteries too. His grotesque, gothic portrait of medieval biblical drama captured the fancy of none other than Lord Byron, inspiring him to write a provocative biblical play

of his own, *Cain,* published in 1821. Byron slyly leveraged the profanity of the mysteries to excuse his own: 'The author has by no means taken the same liberties with his subject which were common formerly, as may be seen by any reader curious enough to refer to those very profane productions'.[32] Byron was perhaps the first reader to admire the mysteries for their shock value, a tradition carried on by (amongst others) E.K. Chambers, A.P. Rossiter, and Jody Enders.[33]

English intellectuals, poets, and actors (most notably David Garrick) promulgated Dodsley's terms of art — especially the evocative term 'the mysteries'. (Byron even used it in the title of his play; the full title is *Cain, A Mystery.*) Yet almost from the very beginning, careful readers could not help but note Dodsley's 'imperfections' and 'faults'.[34] The second editor of *Dodsley's Old Plays,* Isaac Reed, dealt gently with his predecessor's mistakes:

> It hath been customary with those who have given new editions of works which have exercised the abilities of other persons, to be very diffuse in pointing out the defects of their predecessors, and to dwell with great satisfaction on mistakes, which the most careful editors cannot avoid falling into. This practice is the more to be condemned, as every person who has had any concern in undertakings of this kind, must be convinced of the fallibility of all claims to unerring perfection.[35]

Having said that, however, Reed frankly acknowledged Dodsley took liberties that could not 'be defended or excused'.[36] The next editor of *Dodsley's Old Plays,* John Payne Collier, was not so temperate in his critique.

Collier (1789–1883) would become his generation's most important and infamous expert on early English drama.[37] In 1825 his career had only just begun; *Dodsley's Old Plays* was his first editorial project. Unlike his more amateurish predecessors (Dodsley, Reed, and Hawkins), Collier wanted 'to treat [his] subject as a science' in order to methodically disprove 'Dryden's re-echoed assertion, that Shakespeare 'created first the stage'.[38] These methods and motivations still characterize the field. Although Dodsley claimed to be 'the first Discoverer', Collier is the true forefather of the discipline of early English drama studies. Unfortunately, in addition to being a reformer and a pioneer, Collier was also a master forger and seemingly compulsive liar who inextricably tangled discoveries of facts with inventions of fictions across the span of his long and fascinating 'double career'.[39]

Collier accused Dodsley (and Reed) of many errors, but most importantly of having invented the term 'the mysteries'. In his *History of English Dramatic Poetry and Annals of the Stage* (1831), Collier claimed that he could find no evidence that mystery had ever been used to describe theatre in Middle English:

Warton, Percy, Hawkins, Malone and others have concurred in calling them 'mysteries', a term at a very early date adopted in France, but in any similar sense, I apprehend, (until a comparatively recent period) unknown in England. Dodsley, in the preface to the *Collection of Old Plays* he published in 1744, seems to have been the first to use the word 'mystery' to denote one of our most ancient dramatic representations.[40]

Collier urged his English peers to replace this inauthentic, imported title with the legitimate, homegrown term 'miracle-plays': the 'proper designation' for biblical and hagiographic drama.[41] (Note that Collier failed to myth-bust Dodsley's false distinction between mysteries and moralities.) Collier's reformist zeal for scientific levels of accuracy manifested in fastidious attention to stylistic details of taxonomy: he not only renamed Dodsley's categories but also insisted upon certain (self-invented) patterns of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Moralities, he specifies, are heretofore to be referred to as 'Moral-plays' and mysteries as 'Miracle-plays' — capitalized and hyphenated just so.[42]

Several pillars of the field soon took up Collier's position against Dodsley and 'the mysteries'. In his monumental *The Medieval Stage* (1903), Chambers writes, '"Mystere" or "mystery", is not English at all, in a dramatic sense'.[43] In his *Drama of the Medieval Church* (1933) Young concurs: 'The use of English *mystery* in a dramatic sense is a modern invention, being found first, apparently, in R. Dodsley'.[44] Collier's uncompromising position continued to be repeated throughout the twentieth century and into the new millennium. Quite recently Meg Twycross summed up the consensus on the matter:

> Mystery and morality were first applied to medieval theatre in the eighteenth century, when English antiquarians with renewed interest in 'old plays' picked up the terms from scholars in France. They were not contemporary theatrical terms, and we are on shaky ground if we attempt to argue from them.[45]

Until F.M. Salter (1895–1962), no one questioned Collier's claim that the semantic concept of mystery plays had been alien to premodern English culture. Then came 1955, a watershed year that marked the turn from the so-called 'evolutionary school' to the era of O.B. Hardison, Alan Nelson, and REED.[46] In 1955 Salter published *Medieval Drama in Chester;* his 'archival sensibility … set the tone' for the study of early English drama for decades — not least of all by revising the field's taxonomy.[47] Salter made a case for the legitimacy of the term mystery plays grounded in etymology and archival records of staging practices:

> The French word *mystere* (modern *métier*) signified a craft; and the word mystery as signifying a craft or occupation is common in English as early as 1375. When the religious plays have been taken over by the mystery or craft guilds, they are called mystery plays.[48]

Salter's defense of 'the mysteries' has since then been widely disseminated. Across a range of reference works from the most widely read encyclopedias to more specialized anthologies and critical companions, scholars commonly justify the use of mystery plays by following Salter: because mystery can mean craft in Middle English and because medieval plays were sometimes produced by craft guilds, it is appropriate to refer to medieval plays as mysteries. Yet despite the popularity of Salter's argument, this logic has ultimately failed to persuade those who agree with Collier's case against Dodsley. Twycross dismisses Salter's argument as 'complete moonshine' and holds fast to Collier's original position.[49] This debate between Dodsley, Collier, and Salter has never been adequately resolved.

According to Salter (and Chambers before him) the solution to the problem lies in etymological evidence. (This approach continues: Symes grounds her expansion of the meaning of theatre and drama in Greek and Latin etymology.[50]) So let us turn our attention to the root of the matter: the Greek word μυστήριον or *musterion* (derived from the verb *myein,* meaning 'to close' one's lips or eyes) signifies a 'sacred rite', 'secret doctrine', or 'divine secret'.[51] The Greek *musterion* fathered the Classical Latin *mystērium,* which like its Greek parent means 'secret service, rite, or worship'.[52] During the Hellenistic period, both the Greek *musterion* and Latin *mystērium* came to describe the so-called 'mystery religions', cults of initiates worshipping Mediterranean and Middle Eastern deities with elaborate, secret ceremonies.[53] The discourse of these mystery religions emphasizes visuality; the worshipper is called 'the beholder' (*epoptes*), the priest the 'one who shows sacred things' (*hierophantes*), and the climactic ceremony (which Clement of Alexandria called 'a mystic drama' or *drama mystikon*) the 'seeing' (*epopteia*).[54] Outsiders see nothing, their eyes closed to the nebulous *musterion* beyond their understanding.

It is no secret that early Christianity appropriated ideas and practices from these mystery cults — or, as Justin Martyr and Tertullian have it, vice versa.[55] In either case, the word *musterion* occurs dozens of times in the New Testament.[56] In perhaps the most important instance of its use, the disciples ask Jesus why he speaks to the people in enigmatic parables; he answers, 'Because it is given to you to know the mysteries (μυστήρια, *mysteria*) of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given' (Mt 13:11).[57] Paul elaborated on these ideas, promising that Christian scripture would reveal the mystery to those initiated into the community

of the faithful. Over the centuries the words *musterion* and *mystērium* became associated with Christian initiation rituals like baptism and the Eucharist. This semantic shift seems to derive from Tertullian, who translated the Greek *musterion* with the Latin *sacramentum,* a multivalent term that meant both a military oath of allegiance and the oath sworn by the parties in a lawsuit when wagering a sum of money against the outcome of their trial.[58] Tertullian explained the concept of baptism to the Romans as a performative speech act signifying investment in the afterlife and incorporation into the army of Christ. Although *musterion* and *sacramentum* functioned as synonyms, Tertullian often made a polemical distinction between 'the divine sacraments' (*sacramentorum divinorum*) of Christianity and paganism's dark 'mysteries of the idols' (*idolorum mysteriis*).[59] Although Christianity assimilated the mysteries, the word *mystērium* kept a distinctly pagan semantic charge.

Augustine famously defined Christian sacrament as the *sacrum signum* (sacred sign) of an invisible divine mystery — a figure that, as he put it, resembles the thing that it represents.[60] Augustine's theology of mystery and sacrament seems ready to lend itself to performative expression: like an actor, the sacrament represents and resembles what it enacts. By the time of the high Middle Ages, scribes used *mystērium* to refer to spectacular liturgical rituals that bordered on the theatrical: the *Elevatio Christi* on Easter morning, the office of the presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and reenactments of the visit to the sepulchre.[61] By the fifteenth century, letters exchanged between Charles VI of France and the *Confères de la Passion* explicitly use the phrase '*misterre* de la Passion' to refer to a theatrical representation. This series of linguistic events resembles the etymological genealogy we have been looking for: it begins with μυστήριον in its earliest pagan and Christian senses of ritual and spectacle, translates into the performative concepts of *mystērium* and *sacramentum,* and finally arrives in the medieval vernacular as an explicitly theatrical term. Yet the scholarly community has rejected this ontology as a red herring.

In the early twentieth century, E.K. Chambers nominated an alternative etymological forefather for *mystère*: the Latin *ministerium.* This word came into being when medieval writers mixed the Classical Latin *mystērium* with *minister* (meaning 'a servant' or 'assistant'), creating the medieval Latin neologism *ministerium,* meaning 'the office or functions of a minister' and also more broadly 'an office, occupation, work, labor, employment, administration'.[62] Chambers argued that *ministerium* rather than *mystērium* explained the French theatrical sense of *mystère.* He furthermore declared that *mystère* should be rendered in English with the spelling mistere in order to clarify its derivation.[63] Following Chambers's lead,

some scholars prefer to refer to ministerium or ministry rather than to mystery plays.[64] When instructors introduce students to medieval drama, one of the first things they stress is that the mystery in mystery play does not mean what they think it means — it does not mean enigma or Agatha Christie.[65] The overwhelming consensus is that *mystērium* is irrelevant to the discussion.

Yet from a linguistic perspective this strategy of extricating *mystērium* from the family tree seems misguided. Philip Durkin, the principal etymologist of *The Oxford English Dictionary,* argues that attempting to pinpoint the exact parentage of any specific vernacular offshoot of *mystērium* as opposed to *ministerium* 'may prove impossible'.[66] Medieval writers mixed and matched the Classical Latin *mystērium* with the medieval neologism *ministerium* willy-nilly.[67] As Durkin notes, the ecclesiastical service — referred to by myriad variations on *mystērium* and *ministerium* and combinations thereof — perfectly exemplifies the semantic marriage of these two terms: the mass is both a mystery in the Ancient Greek sense and a ministry in the medieval Latin sense. The marriage of *mystērium* and *ministerium* proved fruitful, breeding numerous interrelated cognates and cousins in Old French and Middle English — including *ministère, mystère, métier,* mystery, ministry, administration, mister, and minstrelsy.

The Middle English descendants of the Latin forefathers *mystērium* and *ministerium* include a wide variety of interrelated words ripe for punning: most importantly, two cognates identified by *The Middle English Dictionary* as 'misterie 1' and 'misterie 2'. 'Misterie 1' resembles mystery as we use it today in the sense of

1a) Hidden symbolism, doctrine, or spiritual significance in matters of religion; mystical truth.

1b) A rite, happening, or feeling with religious or mystical significance; a sacrament, the eucharist; the performance of a sacramental rite.

2) A problem of meaning, a hidden import, an enigma; an inexplicable feat.[68]

'Misterie 2', on the other hand, is now rare and antiquated. MED defines 'misterie 2' as 'ministry, office, service'; in this sense, the misterie of a priest would be to perform the mass, of a blacksmith to shoe a horse, and of a minstrel to play music.[69] 'Misterie 2' can also mean 'a handicraft, an art'; or 'a guild'.[70] It is this sense of the word that Salter took up in 1955 to defend the authenticity of the 'mystery' plays. Whereas Chambers excluded *mystērium* from his etymology of *mystère,* Salter excluded 'misterie 1' (*mystērium*'s direct descendent) from his etymology of mystery.

Medieval scribes do not seem to have respected Salter's theory of exclusion any more than they respected Chambers's. For example 'misterie 1' in the sense of transubstantiation represents both a sacred, enigmatic rite (or *mystērium*) and the office (or *ministerium*) of the priest. Likewise 'misterie 2' in the sense of guild draws on *ministerium*'s sense of occupation and *mystērium*'s sense of secret: the guilds teach professional secrets to an exclusive group bound by tricks of the trade. For what it is worth, Durkin lists mystery play as yet another English offspring of *mystērium* and *ministerium;* he argues that *mystērium* and not *ministerium* is the most obvious root of the 'mystery' in mystery play, though he concedes that the alternative 'is at least possible'. By and large, Durkin holds to the philosophy that 'the word form mystery corresponds to a whole variety of meanings [that are] certainly not identifiable as showing two clearly differentiated words'.[71] The study of early English drama has taken the opposite approach, focusing its energy on attempting to clearly distinguish between *mystērium* and *ministerium* and between 'misterie 1' and 'misterie 2'.

Yet there are at least half a dozen confusable cognates and cousins of 'misterie 2' that merit investigation. For example the words 'maistrie' (meaning amongst other things 'a miracle', 'a master skill', and 'cunning, deceit') and 'minstralsie' (meaning 'musical entertainment', 'dancing, miming', and 'the art of performing music or story-telling') seem pertinent to the context of medieval theatre. Thanks to the flexibility of medieval unstandardized spelling, these terms and meanings can be easily confused or exchanged. As David Mills puts it, the convergence of *mystērium* and *ministerium* in the English 'misterie' cognates and variations seems 'to reflect the convergence of the text of sacred mysteries and the players from the craft-mysteries' in early English dramatic practice.[72] The supposedly modern label 'the mystery plays' encapsulates this medieval multivalence perfectly: the York plays represent sacred truths ('misterie 1', meaning 1a) by means of enigmatic theatrical trickery ('maistrie', sometimes spelled 'mistri', meanings 4a and 4d) produced by guilds ('misterie 2', meaning c) practicing the art of minstrelsy ('minstralsie', sometimes spelled 'minstrisie', meaning 1d). Yet this apparent semantic convergence has been rejected as an anachronistic projection, a trick of hindsight. Mills himself immediately after noting the 'convergence' rejects it as a mere 'coincidence'.

The academic question at hand is whether anyone used an English variation on mystery to refer to drama before 1744. Yet Chambers (following Collier's lead) set an oddly prescriptivist tone in his contribution to this descriptivist project. After all, correct orthography is not the purview of the etymologist or the historian. The vernacular offspring of *mystērium* and *ministerium,* like their parents,

tangle inextricably. (Contemporary accounts of the etymology of mystery also invariably begin to confuse what they attempt to separate.[73]) Instead of trying to untangle this etymological knot, we might instead take up the opportunity to revel in ambiguity. As Gail Gibson advises, 'all medievalists must eventually learn to accept linguistic confusion as evidence of divine providence — which, as medieval theologians and exegetes knew, loves nothing so much as a good Latin pun'.[74] An overview of the wide array of 'misterie' cognates and variations seems to reveal patterns of metatheatrical semantic possibilities. Yet Collier, Pollard, Chambers, and Young all agreed that 'mystery' never referred to drama until 1744, despite the evidence put forth by Salter.

Some scholars have certainly found Salter's evidence wanting. The go-to proof text for Salter's justification of 'the mysteries' is a line in the post-Reformation Chester Banns: 'by xxiiii^tie occupationes — artes, craftes, or misterye / these pagiantes should be played' (58–9).[75] We can find dozens of similar examples in REED. For example, a record from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (1545) uses the word mystery similarly:

> And shall yerelie amyablie associat theym self [Armorers, Curriers, and Hatters] in the ffeast of Corpus christi / And goo to hither in procession as other Misteries Doethe and sustein the charges of the Lightes pagiant and plaie on the same ffeast according to olde auncyent Customes.[76]

These records use the word mystery to refer to theatrical representation: so far so good. Yet upon closer inspection, they actually distinguish between mysteries and drama: the word mystery means guilds while other terms (like pageant and play) refer to the theatrical representations mounted by those guilds. The Chester Banns only use 'misterye' as a synonym for guild ('occupationes — artes, craftes, or misterye'), not in reference to theatre. For this reason, Salter's argument has failed to persuade.

Other early English records confirm this distinction between 'misteries' and 'pagiants' — a blurred distinction in Old French though sharp in Middle English.[77] One particular lexical variation between French and English accounts of a pageant performed by the guilds of London at the celebration of the coronation of Anne Boleyn on June 2, 1533 clearly illustrates this difference between *mystère* and mystery. A French eyewitness described the scene like this: 'Par les carrefours il y avoit eschafaux ou jouoient quelques misteres, et fountains jettans vin et par les rues estoient tout les marcants arrangez sans bouger d'une place' [In all open places were scaffolds, on which mysteries were played; and fountains

poured forth wine].[78] In the French source, *misteres* means plays. By contrast, an English account of the very same event uses the word pageants to refer to plays and the word mysteries to refer to guilds: marginalia in Holinshed's *Chronicles* notes that 'the pageant was beautified with representation of the mysteries of the citie'.[79] To paraphrase, the pageant's actors played allegorical figures symbolizing London's guilds ('the mysteries of the citie'). In English it seems that mysteries means guilds — not pageants.

Yet despite this evident difference between *mystère* and mystery it nevertheless seems hasty to conclude — as did Collier — that the French theatrical sense of the word had no impact on pre-eighteenth-century English. After all, Anne Boleyn spoke French as did countless late medieval and early modern English people. The English Channel is a permeable membrane, not an impenetrable barrier.[80] As many important studies of the past half-century have demonstrated, premodern England was profoundly multilingual.[81] Glynne Wickham in 1959 protested the isolationism of early English drama studies, pointing out that 'we are dealing with conditions in Christendom, a form of internationalism beside which the United Nations or the old League seem sketchy ghosts'.[82] It would be strange indeed if Latin and French usage was 'unknown in England', as Collier claims, during a period of such internationalism. The continuing influence of such arguments more likely demonstrates that we have inherited the nationalist myopia characteristic of much nineteenth-century medievalism.[83]

Although evidence may seem wanting when the search is limited to 'misterie 2', a slight expansion of these terms yields much more promising results. Medieval use of the term 'minstralsie' (meaning 'musical entertainment', 'dancing, miming', and 'the art of performing music or story-telling') seems closely related to the two 'misterie' cognates, especially since orthographic variation renders them interchangeable. *Cursor Mundi* describes Salome's performance of the dance of the seven veils with the word mystery: 'Ho [Salome] daunsed & sange to tumble with-al; alle wonderred on hir in þat halle, for ho sa wele hir mystri couþe' [Salome danced and sang and tumbled as well; everyone in that hall wondered at her, for she knew her mystery so well].[84] Here 'mystri' represents Salome's mastery of the overlapping concepts of her ministry of minstrelsy, loosely defined as dancing, singing, and tumbling. Salome's 'mystri' even suggests some correspondence with 'misterie 1' (in the sense of secret): the spectators' wonder evokes a sense of *mystērium*'s enigma, Salome's 'mystri', in other words, is the secret art of entertainment, a broad concept that extensively overlaps with medieval concepts of drama. Records suggest that in at least one community (Baston in Lincolnshire) the guild of St John the Baptist sponsored an annual performance of Salome's

dance of the seven veils, a custom discussed by Catherine Sanok as an example of early English drama.[85]

We could take this possibility even further: *MED* notes that the Göttingen manuscript of *Cursor Mundi* replaces 'mystri' with the closely related (and, thanks to medieval spelling, interchangeable) term 'maistrie', meaning 'mastery of a subject or an art'. This intimacy between 'misterie' and 'maistrie' sheds light on a couplet from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In 'The Miller's Tale', Chaucer describes jolly Absolon's penchant for playing the role of Herod in what we would call the mystery plays: 'Sometime to shew his lightnesse and maistrie / He plaieth Herode on a scaffold hie'.[86] Chaucer seems to be punning on the orthographic interchangeability of 'maistrie' and the many English, French, and Latin variations on *mystērium* and *ministerium,* especially those with a theatrical sense: Absolon shows his 'maistrie' by putting on a mystery play. The joke depends on an association between 'maistrie' and the interrelated concepts of theatricality and superficiality: Chaucer pairs 'maistrie' with 'lightnesse', which can mean 'ability or skill' as well as 'frivolousness' or 'wantonness'.[87] Absolon intends to demonstrate his skillfulness and dexterity, yet he exposes himself: the only mystery he has mastered is the vain art of empty show. This dig would fit in nicely with what Seth Lerer has identified as Chaucer's penchant for anti-theatricality, motivated by the rivalry between poetry and drama in late medieval England.[88]

More than a little evidence supports Durkin's theory that *mystērium* and 'misterie 1' provide ample opportunity for theatrical application. As Gail Gibson points out, the fifteenth-century poet John Lydgate describes his *Procession of Corpus Christi* as a representation of 'misteryes':

> For now this day al derkenesse t'enlumyne,
> In youre presence fette out of fygure,
> Schal beo declared by many unkouthe signe
> Gracyous *misteryes* grounded in scripture. (5–8)[89]

Lydgate uses the noun 'misteryes' as the object of the verb-phrase 'schal beo declared by many unkouthe signe': 'misteryes' stands for what is represented (declared by signs) by the actors (or figures) in 'youre presence' (for an audience of spectators). Although we have been led to expect *ministerium* to dominate the semantics in such instances, Lydgate emphasizes a theatrical interpretation of the concept of *mystērium:* the play illuminates the darkness of scriptural truth with symbols (figures) and secret (uncouth) signs. Lydgate's pageant embodies Augustine's theory of the symbiosis of mystery and sacrament by representing sacred truths with theatrical signs.

This use of the word is not a unique example; Lydgate uses the term again in his *Mumming for the Goldsmiths of London,* in which he exhorts his actors to perform 'the gret mysterye':

> O yee Levytes, which bere this lordes arke,
> Doothe youre devoyre with hevenly armonye
> The gret mysterye devoutly for to marke,
> With laude and prys the Lord to magnefye. (29–32)[90]

Here the play's herald (an allegorical representation of fortune) addresses the Levites who were appointed to minister (*ministro*) before the Ark (1 Chr 16:4). In this pageant the Goldsmiths of London represent David and the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus the herald's speech works on several levels: he voices the bible's command that the Levites 'minister before the Ark' and he metatheatrically prompts the guildsmen to administer their performance of the pageant. The word 'mysterye' encapsulates this doubling meaning, representing both the sacred mystery of the Ark of the Covenant and the ministry or function of both the Levites and the guildsmen (as both actors and craftsmen). As in the previous example, mystery stands in as a representative of the play itself: the play is 'the gret mysterye' in many senses of the word. Even in the context of early English drama, Lydgate's 'performance pieces' (to use Claire Sponsler's nomenclature) have proven difficult to classify: ever since their fifteenth-century scribe John Shirley described them as 'ballades', 'letters', 'bills', 'ordinances', and 'devices' but never once as plays, scholarship has tended to perceive these texts as poetic rather than dramatic.[91] Yet Lydgate's use of the richly multivalent and metatheatrical term mystery gives us yet another reason to, as Sponsler puts it, 'rethink what constitutes "drama" in late medieval England'.[92]

Furthermore, as V.A. Kolve notes, 'mystery' also seems to appear in a comparable metatheatrical sense in one of early English drama's core texts: the N-Town plays. In the N-Town pageant of the Last Supper, Jesus refers to the Eucharist as a mystery:

> This fygure shal sesse: anothyr shal folwe therby
> Weche shal be of my body that am youre hed,
> Weche shal be shewyd to yow be a mystery
> Of my flesch and blood in forme of bred. (27.361–4)[93]

Drawing on the ancient association between *mystērium* and *sacramentum,* Jesus refers the Last Supper as it takes place on the stage as a 'figure' (meaning 'representation' or 'symbol') of a future 'mystery', thereby associating the theatrical

representation of the pageant with the sacramental 'showing' or ministration of the 'mystery' of transubstantiation. N-Town, like Lydgate, plays with the ambiguity of 'mystery', applying its many meanings to metatheatrical commentary. Across all three examples (N-Town's 'The Last Supper' and Lydgate's *Procession of Corpus Christi* and *Mumming for the Goldsmiths of London*), 'mystery' is the object of a verb-phrase that connotes theatrical representation in terms of Augustinian sacramental theology; in all three cases, mystery is the word that stands in as a figure for the pageant itself. Early English drama scholarship has long recognized the importance of Augustinian sacramental theology to medieval drama. In fact, one of the new names for 'the mysteries' is 'sacramental drama'. Although the latter is intended as a corrective of the former, these terms are (in a late medieval context) synonyms. The search for a replacement for mystery has come full circle, albeit accidentally.

This medieval evidence at the very least calls into question Collier's claim that the use of mystery to 'denote … our most ancient dramatic representations' was 'unknown' in England until 1744. Evidence from the early modern period threatens his claim even more. The anti-papist polemic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries built on pre-existing associations between drama and the interrelated French and English children of *mystērium* and *ministerium,* adapting mystery into a byword for what Protestants saw as the bankrupt theatricality — the hypocrisy (from the Greek ὑποκριτής, meaning actor) — of Catholicism.[94] 'Mystery' became the subject of intense controversy: reformist translators of the New Testament accused the Catholic church of having misled the people by mistranslating the Greek *mysterion* as *sacramentum,* thus creating the illusion of scriptural justification for the seven sacraments.[95] Protestantism understood the Christian mystery as an open secret revealed in the naked gospels — not as Catholicism's mysterious allegory of images, rituals, and theatrics. In fact Catholicism's mysteries seemed to reformers to fit the description in 2 Thes 2:7 of the Antichrist's *mystērium iniquitatis* [mysteries of iniquity].

John Foxe discusses the distinction between Catholic and Protestant interpretations of the Christian mystery in his *Acts and Monuments:*

> Because Christ called bread his body, therefore, say they [Catholics], he made it his body, and so of a wholesome Sacrament make a perilous Idol, and that which the old Church of Rome did ever take to be a mystery, they turn into a blind myste of mere accidences to blear the peoples' eyes, making them believe they see what they see not, and not to see that which they see, and to worship a thing made for their maker, a

creature for the creator, and that was threshed out of a sheaf of wheat they set up in the Church, and worship for a Savior.[96]

Foxe turns Tertullian's anti-pagan polemical weaponry against Catholicism by distinguishing between the 'wholesome sacrament' of Protestantism and the idol-atrous 'mystery' of papism. Foxe's learned series of puns on mystery makes use of Greek, Latin, and English etymology: he plays with the Greek root meaning to close one's eyes, ingeniously translated with the English phrase 'blind mist'. Foxe's linguistic acrobatics mock the Catholic clergy for not knowing their Greek, for mistranslating and misinterpreting the Pauline mystery as a shallow spectacle.

The best example of the polemical strategy of leveraging the polyvalence of mystery for anti-papist ends is Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1605).[97] Harsnett reports the details of an infamous Catholic crime committed in Denham, Buckinghamshire between 1585 and 1586: a group of fugitive Jesuits performed spectacular quack exorcisms, thereby duping hundreds of spectators. Harsnett harps on the theatricality of these rituals throughout the text. In his preface, he begs the witnesses of the exorcism ('the seduced Catholics') to open their eyes to the truth:

> [T]he Pope and his spirits he sendeth in here amongst you do play Almighty God, his Son, and Saints upon a stage, do make a pageant of the Church, the blessed Sacraments, the rites and ceremonies of religion, do cog and coin devils, spirits, and souls departed this life to countenance and grace — or face out — their desperate abominations.[98]

This vitriol collapses Catholicism and the fake exorcisms into one immense theatrical trick orchestrated by the Antichrist. Harsnett's tirades against papist rites include numerous synonyms for Catholicism-as-theatre: he calls the exorcism 'this tragical comedy', 'this cunning juggling', 'this play of sacred miracles', 'this mystical play', 'these holy mysteries', and, in his grand finale, the 'mystery of iniquity' of the Antichrist and 'those reverend juggling priests, his disguised comedians'.[99] Harsnett's enormous arsenal of slurs draws on every possible meaning of mystery — mystery as pagan rite, mystery as sacrament, mystery as secret, mystery as occupation, mystery as ministry, mystery as minstrelsy — and, most importantly, mystery as theatre.

Shakespeare too deploys the word mystery in order to deride Catholicism for its theatricality. A passage in *Henry VIII* mocks the over-the-top affectations of Frenchified courtiers: an Englishman wonders, 'Is't possible the spells of France

should juggle / Men into such strange mysteries?' (1.3.1–2).[100] Shakespeare portrays France as a Circean sorceress whose spells transform ('juggle') Englishmen into 'unmanly' and 'ridiculous' jokes. Reformist polemic often used the verb 'juggle' in its double sense of transform and trick to undermine the hocus-pocus of transubstantiation.[101] Here Shakespeare makes use of an established association between theatricality, Catholicism, and witchcraft. Shakespeare did such an excellent job of collapsing theatricality and Catholicism that in the late eighteenth century Samuel Johnson glossed these lines as an explicit reference to medieval Catholic drama:

> Mysteries were allegorical shows, which the mummers of those times exhibited in odd and fantastic habits. Mysteries are used, by an easy figure, for those that exhibited mysteries; and the sense is only, that the travelled Englishmen were metamorphosed, by foreign fashions, into such an uncouth appearance, that they looked like mummers in a mystery.[102]

Johnson's interpretation of these lines as Shakespeare's critique of medieval drama became rather influential. The epitaph on the frontispiece of William Hone's nineteenth-century *Ancient Mysteries Described* (an edition of several Mary plays from N-Town) reads, 'Is it possible that Apocrypha should juggle men into such strange Mysteries?'.[103] This frontispiece faces a satirical engraving entitled 'An Idiot Holds His Bauble for a God' picturing a representative medieval idiot cradling a fool's scepter. Johnson and Hone both interpreted Shakespeare's anti-papist jibe as a literary critique of medieval Catholic drama.

Perhaps such readings recur repeatedly because Englishmen of the Enlightenment seem to have had trouble distinguishing between Reformation polemic mocking papist rituals and historicist descriptions of medieval theatrical practices — a confusion that tended to converge on the word mystery. In 1794, Isaac Disraeli interpreted John Bale's rants about the Pope's 'mystery of iniquity' (by which Bale meant the sacraments and other Catholic 'abominations of Idolatry') as a reference to medieval drama:

> It is justly observed by Bale, on these wretched representations, that while they prohibited the people from meditating on the sacred history, in the book which contains it in all its purity and truth, they permitted them to see it in the theatre, sullied with a thousand gross inventions, which were expressed in the most vulgar manner, and in a farcical style.[104]

Collier was the first to call out this reading as anachronistic. While Collier rejected Disraeli's gloss on the word mystery, however, he allowed that Bale's 'Iniquity' might refer to an actor playing an allegorical figure in a theatrical representation — which might indeed have been the case.[105]

These misreadings are easy to explain away. One could argue that after Dodsley coined 'the mysteries' in 1744, his readers (like Johnson and Disraeli) began to project his newfangled meaning onto early modern texts. Yet the ease with which the supposedly new meaning of mystery fit with old instances of the term suggests something more than anachronistic projection. In one sense, Enlightenment-era misinterpretations of vituperative early modern polemic as neutral observations mark the overlap between reformist hatred of Catholic ritual and Whiggish disdain for Catholic drama. In another sense, however, these seeming misunderstandings also document the very real and extensive overlap between Catholicism and theatricality, an overlap that for centuries was represented by variations on the word *mystērium*. For both reasons, mystery had by the early eighteenth century become so closely associated with both religion and drama that writers described Christian pageantry with the phrase 'mysteries of religion' even in neutral or even positive contexts. In a defense of passion plays published in 1691 (fifty-three years before Dodsley supposedly invented 'the mysteries'), Gerard Langbaine declared it 'lawful' to 'make a dramatic poem … treating of the Mysteries of Religion'.[106] In 1710 (fourteen years before Dodsley), the actor Charles Gildon argued that the stage 'may properly be esteemed the handmaid of the pulpit' in 'dispensing the most holy mysteries of the Christian religion'.[107] Referring to religious plays as containers or dispensers of 'the mysteries of Christianity' seems only a short step from Dodsley's abbreviation. Although Collier and others have described Dodsley's use of the term mysteries to mean medieval religious plays as unprecedented, *Early English Books Online* and *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* suggest that usage developed out of Reformation polemic, which itself exploited pre-existing associations between drama and the many interrelated vernacular offshoots of *mystērium* and *ministerium*.

Now that we have arrived back at the topic of Dodsley, it seems worth mentioning that Collier left out an important fact when he accused Dodsley of inventing 'the mysteries' — a fact that too often goes unsaid.[108] Three years before Dodsley published his *Collection of Old Plays* in 1744, he translated and published the Italian/French actor-author Luigi Riccoboni's pioneering comparativist study of European theatre history *An Historical and Critical Account of the Theatres in Europe* (1741). In this text, Dodsley first uses 'mystery' to mean 'medieval religious play', and he is translating the term, not inventing it.

Riccoboni (1676–1753) was an Italian commedia dell'arte actor, naturalized French citizen, and Continental traveler.[109] In his original Francophone edition of 1728 (*Reflexions historiques et critiques sur les differens theatres de l'Europe*), he uses the term *mystères* to refer to medieval religious plays written in Italian, Spanish French, English, Dutch, Flemish, and German.[110] Why should he not? As Chambers and Young have pointed out, the term had theatrical applications in French and Latin in the late Middle Ages — Riccoboni used a transnational term to describe a transnational phenomenon. Dodsley agreed with Riccoboni's 'view of the great similarity that appears in the rise and progress of the stage in all the principle countries of Europe'.[111] So where Riccoboni writes *mystères,* Dodlsey writes 'mysteries', an apt translation.[112] Rather than pulling the term out of thin air, Dodsley merely disseminated a Continental polyglot's term of art. In this light, Collier's characterization of Dodsley's enthusiastic participation in Riccoboni's pan-European comparativism as some kind of combination of fraud, error, and unpatriotic outsourcing seems reductive, if not unfairly biased. In 1959 Wickham advised the discipline to reconsider its penchant for nationalist isolationism:

> It seems logical to me … to reverse the usual tendency to isolate the English Miracle Plays and to assume instead a common, European basis of stage procedure except where unimpeachable evidence exists to prove English practice exceptional.[113]

Collier's critique of the term mystery has for quite some time been taken as an exemplar of justified English exceptionalism, yet I am not so sure that this particular case meets Wickham's standard: the evidence supporting Collier's position hardly seems 'unimpeachable'.

Let me be clear: this is not to say that Dodsley was a beacon of high-minded, forward-thinking cosmopolitanism. In a prefatory epistle to his translation, he dedicates his labour to Charles Fleetwood, the manager of Drury Lane and pioneering Bardolater who in 1741 erected the monument to Shakespeare that still stands in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.[114] This dedication explains Dodsley's motivation for translating Riccoboni's work: Dodsley hints portentously that drama has a unique capacity to reveal 'that Spirit which forms the true character of every people'.[115] Thus the urgency of sussing out the competition, as Dodsley knew England's premier Shakespearean revivalist would understand. While in 1741 Dodsley dutifully translates Riccoboni's assertion that the Italians are right to 'boast that their theatre is the Original and Model of all the others in Europe', three years later in his own account of things he claims 'that the English

stage rose' earlier rather than later 'than the rest of its Neighbors'.[116] Dodsley thus proves that England possesses 'a merit superior to all others' — superior to the 'faint and feeble' Spanish and to the 'degenerated' Italians ('easy prey to every ambitious invader', he adds).[117] Yet Collier still found Dodsley's patriotism insufficient. Nearly a century later Collier began his opus by chastising the English for their complacency, 'as if satisfied with our acknowledged preeminence'.[118] Preeminence amongst rivals did not satisfy Collier. He felt that English drama 'demand[ed] to be separately and systemically examined'.[119] In short, although Dodsley and Collier agreed in principle, they differed in their methods: while Dodsley engaged in competitive comparativism, Collier (standing on Dodsley's shoulders) achieved the higher standard of isolationism.

From the Reformation until the twentieth century, many (if not most) English readers considered medieval biblical drama to be idolatrous and blasphemous. The word 'mystery' with its rich polemical history suited their sectarian bias. In the twentieth century, however, the study of early English drama became professional, academic, and ostensibly neutral, so the word mystery lost its utility, and the term's heavy significance became burdensome. The field has tried to disburden itself in two ways: first, by declaring the term inauthentic and, second, by pruning its etymology (removing the *musterion* branch). Neither approach seems in keeping with the high standard of historical accuracy that the field has set for itself.

Ministerium and 'misterie 2' dominate current understanding of the term mystery play to such an extent that many assume that this is the way it has always been.[120] Yet post-Reformation to pre-twentieth century commentary on 'the mysteries' tends to focus on the semantic inheritance of *mystērium* — unsurprisingly, considering the extent to which reformers foregrounded the term's Greek root. As late as 1875, Adolphus William Ward introduced medieval English drama as the representation of 'the central mystery of the Christian faith' — not as the function of the craft guilds.[121] Even Lucy Toulmin Smith — the ultimate nineteenth-century ambassador for the medieval guilds — seems relatively uninterested in the lexical connection between 'misteries' (meaning 'guilds') and the so-called mystery plays. In *York Plays: Plays Performed by the Crafts or Mysteries of York on the Day of Corpus Christi* (1885), Smith habitually refers to medieval guilds as mysteries and repeatedly asserts the strong bond between the guilds and medieval religious plays, which she also calls mysteries.[122] Yet Smith does not definitely claim a causal connection between these cognates — she does not argue that the term mystery play is authentic because of the guilds. I can find little evidence of this exact idea in Smith's work or in any other eighteenth- or nineteenth-century

commentary on medieval drama. As far as I can tell, the 'mystery' in mystery plays began to refer primarily and exclusively to *ministerium* and 'misterie 2' only in the twentieth century. This is only the latest chapter in the term's long history.

It seems understandable that the field of early English drama studies would want to escape the toxic sectarian polemical atmosphere in which these texts have subsisted for so long. 'Mystery' carries within itself the memory of conflicts between Christianity and paganism, Catholicism and Protestantism, and Whig amateur antiquarianism and modern professional academia. Calling the plays mysteries evokes this long history of conflict. Yet none of this unpleasant history makes the term inauthentic. The word is so charged with historical relevance that it still shocks, even after all these years. To my mind, energy of that voltage begs to be used, not avoided.

Notes

1   Clifford Flanigan, 'Comparative Literature and the Study of Medieval Drama', *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 35 (1986), 77; Lawrence Clopper, '*Communitas:* The Play of Saints in Late Medieval and Tudor England', *Mediaevalia* 18 (1995), 81–109; Kate Normington, *Gender and Medieval Drama* (Cambridge, 2004), 14; Carol Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras* (Ithaca, 2007), 8–9.

2   Douglas Sugano, 'Introduction', *The N-Town Plays* (Kalamazoo, 2007), 17; W.W. Greg, *Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Miracle Cycles* (London, 1914), 365.

3   Although Barbara Palmer made her convincing case for calling the manuscript Towneley rather than Wakefield in 1987–8, many subsequent anthologies and textbooks continue to use the old name or both names together. Barbara Palmer, '"Towneley Plays" or "Wakefield Cycle" Revisited', *Comparative Drama* 21.4 (1987–8), 318–48.

4   Alexandra Johnston, '"All the World Was a Stage": Records of Early English Drama', Eckehard Simon (ed.), *The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama* (Cambridge, 1991), 118; Johnston, 'What If No Texts Survived? External Evidence for Early English Drama', Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey (eds), *Contexts for Early English Drama* (Bloomington, 1989), 11–12; Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Burlington, 2007), 49–79; David Mills, 'Editorial Preface', *Medieval English Theatre* 13 (1991), n.p.

5   Symes, *A Common Stage,* xi–xiii, 2–3, 8–9; Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago,

2007), 298–300; Claire Sponsler, *The Queen's Dumbshows: John Lydgate and the Making of Early Theatre* (Philadelphia, 2014), 17–21.

6   Meg Twycross, 'Books for the Unlearned', James Redmond (ed.), *Drama and Religion* 5 (Cambridge, 1983), 89.

7   Carol Symes, 'The Appearance of Early Vernacular Plays: Forms, Functions, and the Future of Medieval Theater', *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 77 (2002), 778.

8   Greg, *Bibliographic and Textual Problems,* 365.

9   Palmer, '"Towneley Plays"', 335.

10 Symes, *A Common Stage,* 8.

11 Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church,* 2.409.

12 Meg Twycross, 'Medieval English Theatre: Codes and Genres', Peter Brown (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500* (Oxford, 2006), 454–5.

13 John Payne Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare; and Annals of the Stage to the Restoration,* 3 vols (London, 1831), 2.123.

14 Harry M. Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley: Creating the New Age of Print* (Carbondale, 1996), 93–6.

15 Robert Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 10 vols (London, 1744), *Early English Books Online,* 1.xxxxv.

16 Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 1.i, xi.

17 Thomas Hawkins, *The Origins of the English Drama,* 3 vols (Oxford, 1773). A notable exception: Thomas Bourne published his transcription of a no-longer-extant fragment of Newcastle's Noah pageant in his *History of Newcastle* in 1736; due to the manuscript's disappearance, we cannot be sure of its authenticity.

18 Robert M. Lumiansky and Robert Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill, 1983), 255–6.

19 Alexandra Johnston, 'The Manuscripts of Early English Drama: They Are Not What They Appear To Be' (lecture, *Société Internationale pour l'étude du théâtre médiéval* (Giessen, Germany, 24 July 2010).

20 Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 1.xxxvi.

21 Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley,* 94.

22 Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 1.xxxv.

23 By contrast, Dodsley is a hero in eighteenth-century studies: 'The extent of his influence was perhaps best captured many years ago by the late Wilmarth Lewis. When founding a social club of distinguished eighteenth-century scholars at Yale, Lewis chose to call it: "Dodsley's Collection"'. See James E. Tierney, *The Correspondence of Robert Dodsley 1733–1764* (Cambridge, 1988), vix.

24   Graham A. Runnalls, '*Mystère* <<représentation théâtrale>>: histoire d'un mot', *Revue de Linguistique Romane (RLiR)* 64 (2000), 321.

25   Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 1.xiv.

26   Ibid, 1.x.

27   Ibid, 1.xiii.

28   Hawkins, *The Origins of the English Drama,* 1.32.

29   Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century,* 3 vols (London, 1778), 2.373–4.

30   Thomas Chatterton, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton* (Boston, 1878), 29.

31   Warton, *The History of English Poetry,* 2.466.

32   George Gordon Byron, *Cain, A Mystery* (London, 1821), v.

33   A.P. Rossiter, *English Drama From Early Times to the Elizabethans: Its Background, Origins, and Developments* (London, 1950); Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, and Violence* (Ithaca, 1999) and *"The Farce of the Fart" and Other Ribaldries Twelve Medieval French Plays in Modern English* (Philadelphia, 2011).

34   Isaac Reed, 'Preface', *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 8 vols (London, 1780), xx; Hawkins, *The Origins of the English Drama,* 1.xvi.

35   Reed, 'Preface', 1.xix.

36   Ibid, 1.xx.

37   Arthur Freeman and Janet Ing Freeman, *John Payne Collier: Scholarship and Forgery in the Nineteenth Century,* 2 vols (New Haven, 2004), 1.xi.

38   Ibid, 330; John Payne Collier, 'Advertisement to the Present Edition', *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 12 vols (London, 1825), 1.ii.

39   Freeman and Freeman, *John Payne Collier,* 1.xi.

40   Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry,* 2.123.

41   Ibid.

42   Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry,* 1.ix.

43   Chambers, *The Medieval Stage,* 2.104–5.

44   Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church,* 2.501.

45   Twycross, 'Medieval English Theatre: Codes and Genres', 454.

46   Ronald W. Vince, *Ancient and Medieval Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (Westport, 1984), 94–5; Glynne Wickham, 'Introduction', Eckehard Simon (ed.), *The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama* (Cambridge, 1991), 4–6; David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto, 1998), 12–14.

47 Daniel Kline, 'Medieval English Drama', Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (eds), *A Companion to Old and Middle English Literature* (Westport, 2002), 170–1.

48 F.M. Salter, *Mediaeval Drama in Chester* (Toronto, 1955), 9.

49 Twycross, 'Medieval English Theatre: Codes and Genres', 454–5.

50 Symes, *A Common Stage,* xii, 2.

51 *A Greek-English Lexicon,* ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott (Oxford, 1940), Perseus Digital Library, s.v. 'μυστήριον'; Marvin Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Ancient Texts* (Philadelphia, 1999), 4–5.

52 *A Latin Dictionary,* Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (eds) (Oxford, 1879), Perseus Digital Library, s.v. 'mystērium'.

53 Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries,* 3–4; John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire: Aspects of Greek and Roman Life* (Ithaca, 1985).

54 Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries,* 5, 11.

55 Ibid, 225–7.

56 Galen W. Wiley, 'A Study of "Mystery" in the New Testament', *Grace Theological Journal* 6.2 (1985), 352.

57 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, 2001), 245.

58 Paul du Plessis, *Borkowski's Textbook on Roman Law,* 4th edition (Oxford, 2010), 67–8.

59 Tertullian, *Liber de prescription haereticorum,* R.F. Refoulé (ed.), 2 vols, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CCSL) (Paris, 1954), 1.220.

60 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* X.5, Emanuel Hoffman (ed.), *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (CSEL) 40, 2 vols (Vienna, 1899), 1.452; Augustine, *Epistola* 98.9, Al Goldbacher (ed.), CSEL 34, 2 vols (Vienna, 1898), 530–1.

61 Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church,* 2.409.

62 *A Latin Dictionary,* ed. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford, 1879), Perseus Digital Library, s.v. 'ministerium'; Philip Durkin, *The Oxford Guide to Etymology* (Oxford, 2009), 80–81.

63 Chambers, *The Medieval Stage,* 2.104–5.

64 Gail Gibson, 'Writing Before the Eye: The N-Town *Woman Taken in Adultery* and the Medieval Ministry Play', *Comparative Drama* 27.4 (1993), 399–400.

65 Alexandra Johnston, *Medieval Drama: From Sanctuary to Stage* (Princeton, 2000), VHS.

66 Durkin, *The Oxford Guide to Etymology,* 80–81.

67 Runnalls, '*Mystère*', 324.

68 *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), s.v. 'misterie' (n) 1.

69 Chambers, *The Medieval Stage,* 2.104–5.

70   MED, s.v. 'misterie' (n) 2.

71   Durkin, *The Oxford Guide to Etymology,* 80–81.

72   Mills, *Recycling the Cycle,* 9.

73   See Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* 8th ed., 6 vols. (New York, 2006), 1.406 and J. Ellen Gainor, Stanton B. Garner Jr., and Martin Puchner (eds), *The Norton Anthology of Drama* 2nd ed, 2 vols (New York, 2014), 1.27, which respectively locate the origin of the term mystery play in the Latin *ministerium* (defined as craft) and *mysterium* (defined as a profession known only to a few).

74   Gibson, 'Writing Before the Eye', 400.

75   Robert M. Lumiansky and Robert Mills (eds), *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill, 1983), 287.

76   J.J. Anderson (ed.), REED: *Newcastle-Upon-Tyne* (Toronto, 1982), 23.

77   Runnalls, '*Mystère*', 323–5.

78   James Gairdner (ed.), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII,* vol. 6 (London, 1882), 265; Alice Hunt, *The Drama of Coronation: Medieval Ceremony in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2008), 58.

79   Raphael Holinshed, *The Third Volume of Chronicles* (London, 1587), EEBO, 6.1290.

80   Deanne Williams, *The French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 2004), 50–86.

81   Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1993), 207, 222; William Rothwell, 'The Trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994), 53; Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford, 1996), 191; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al (eds), *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c.1100–c.1500* (York, 2009).

82   Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300 to 1576* (London, 1959), xxxviii.

83   Flanigan, 'Comparative Literature and the Study of Medieval Drama', 56–104.

84   MED, s.v. 'misterie' (n) 2b.

85   Catherine Sanok, 'Performing Feminine Sanctity in Late Medieval England: Parish Guilds, Saints' Plays, and the *Second Nun's Tale*', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.2 (2002), 287.

86   Larry Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer,* 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1987), 70–71.

87   MED, s.v. 'lightnesse' (n2) 3a, 5b; OED, s.v. 'lightness' (n) 7b.

88   Seth Lerer, 'The Chaucerian Critique of Medieval Theatricality', James J. Paxson, Lawrence M. Clopper, and Sylvia Tomasch (eds), *The Performance of Middle English Culture: Essays on Chaucer and the Drama* (Cambridge 1998), 59–76.

89 John Lydgate, *A Procession of Corpus Christi,* Claire Sponsler (ed.), *John Lydgate: Mummings and Entertainments, The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages (TEAMS) Middle English Text Series (METS)* (Kalamazoo, 2010).

90 John Lydgate, *Mumming for the Goldsmiths of London,* Claire Sponsler (ed.), *John Lydgate: Mummings and Entertainments, TEAMS METS* (Kalamazoo, 2010).

91 Sponsler, *The Queen's Dumbshows,* 27.

92 Ibid, 11.

93 V.A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, 1966), 81.

94 *A Greek-English Lexicon,* s.v. ʹὑποκριτής'.

95 Abdel Ross Wentz (ed.) and Frederick C. Ahrens (trans.), *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament,* 4 vols (Philadelphia, 1959), 2.93.

96 John Foxe, *The First Volume of the Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1570), EEBO, 42.

97 Frank Walsh Brownlow, *Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham* (Cranbury, 1993); John Parker, 'Faustus, Confession, and the Sins of Omission', *English Literary History* 80.1 (2013), 46–7.

98 Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (London, 1605), EEBO, A2.

99 Harnsett, *A Declaration,* 2, 12.

100 William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII or All Is True,* ed. Gordon McMullan (London, 2000).

101 OED, s.v. 'juggle'.

102 Samuel Johnson, George Stevens, and John Bell (eds), *The Dramatick Writings of William Shakespeare with the Notes of all the Various Commentators,* 20 vols (London, 1788), 15.21.

103 William Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described: English Miracle Plays Founded on Apocryphal New Testament Story* (London, 1823).

104 John Bale, *A Mysterye of Inyquyte* (Antwerp, 1545), EEBO, 4; Isaac Disraeli, *Curiosities of Literature* (London, 1794), EEBO, 89.

105 Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry,* 2.124.

106 Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (Oxford, 1691), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)*, 293.

107 Charles Gildon, *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, the Late Eminent Tragedian* (London, 1710), ECCO, 19.

108 Those who do refer to Riccoboni's contribution include Thomas Percy, *Four essays, as improved and enlarged in the second edition of The reliques of ancient English poetry* (London, 1767), ECCO, 5; Edmond Malone, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare,* 16 vols (London, 1790), ECCO, 1.2.3, 26–7; Thomas Sharp, *A Dissertation on the Pageants Or Dramatic Mysteries Anciently Performed at Coventry, by the Trading*

Companies of that City (London, 1825), 23; Joseph A. Dane, *Abstractions of Evidence in the Study of Manuscripts and Early Printed Books* (Burlington, 2009), 57–8.

109 Salvatore Cappelletti, *Luigi Riccoboni e la Riforma del Teatro* (Ravenna, 1986), 13–18.

110 Riccoboni uses the terms mysteries and moralities interchangeably, sometimes swapping between them in the space of one sentence: he writes, 'they acted the mysteries, or other pieces of piety and morality, under the title of moralities'; Luigi Riccoboni, *Reflexions historiques et critiques sur les differens theatres de l'Europe* (Paris, 1728), 123.

111 Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 1.ii.

112 Riccoboni, *Reflexions historiques,* 154; R. Dodsley (trans.), *An Historical and Critical Account of the Theatres in Europe…by the Famous Lewis Riccoboni* (London, 1741), ECCO, 162.

113 Wickham, *Early English Stages,* xxxviii.

114 Fiona Ritche, 'The Influence of the Female Audience on the Shakespeare Revival of 1736–1738: The Case of the Shakespeare Ladies Club', Peter Sabor and Paul Edward Yachnin (eds), *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century* (Burlington, 2008), 66.

115 Dodsley (trans.), *An Historical and Critical Account of the Theatres in Europe…by the Famous Lewis Riccoboni,* A3.

116 Ibid, 46; Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays,* 1.ix.

117 Dodsley (trans.), *An Historical and Critical Account,* A3.

118 Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry,* 1.v.

119 Ibid, 1.vi.

120 Johnston, *Medieval Drama: From Sanctuary to Stage,* 10:18–54.

121 Adolphus William Ward, *A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne,* 2 vols (London, 1875), 1.xix.

122 Lucy Toulmin Smith, *York Plays: Plays Performed by the Crafts or Mysteries of York on the Day of Corpus Christi* (Oxford, 1885), 1.