

## Issues in Review

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### **The York Cycle in Performance: Toronto and York**

This first volume of *Early Theatre*, heir of more than two pioneering decades of the REED *Newsletter*, appropriately reviews a landmark occasion, multiple productions of the York Cycle during the summer of 1998. On 20 June the Cycle literally was brought to light of day in the Victoria College precincts at the University of Toronto by forty troupes of travelling players, drawn from two continents and three nations. Starting precisely at six o'clock of the morning, these forty casts, drawn from a variety of academic and civic sources, displayed all forty-seven York Cycle pageants in procession at four discrete stations. The following month, on 12 July, eleven troupes representing city of York guilds performed eleven pageants at five stations in the ancient home of the original text.

These two remarkable productions mark an extraordinary progress down a fascinating road for early English theatre. We who are writing here have been privileged to be part of a generation of rich discovery in which academic collaboration has been both the norm and also the expectation. In 1978 the first REED Colloquium was held at Erindale College of the University of Toronto with thirty-nine scholars in attendance. One of the papers in that ground-breaking session of shared early explorations was 'Where Are the Records and What Do They Tell Us?' – a title which now seems touchingly naive as we continue to struggle with the answers. The modest tentativeness, the generosity, the anxiety of sharing what in fact might not have been worth sharing forever made its mark. In 1978 none of us had the slightest clue how much remained to be discovered. Although troubled by the occasional doubt, most of us recited the minster-to-marketplace creed with its peasant audience, simple faith, simpler drama, and civic Corpus Christi cycle norm.

That unsettling 1978 Colloquium shared another experience, watching the *Poculi Ludique Societas* ('the drinking and playing group') production of the

York Cycle 'Judgment Day' pageant. For those of us who had not attended the first Toronto York Cycle production in 1977, this PLS performance was a revelation verging on epiphany. It also signalled what would prove to be the unique overlap in early English drama studies between academics and actors, between classroom and performance. Among the cast members of that 1978 PLS performance for the REED Colloquium were David Parry as God; Cameron Louis as a Good Soul; R.W. Ingram, Ian Lancashire, and J.A.B. Somerset as Apostles; and Mary Blackstone as a Devil. Alexandra F. Johnston directed this particular 1978 'Judgment Day'. Over the years numerous other academics mounted a wagon or strode a platea. Even when (as a professional theatre colleague put it) one sometimes wishes the door had been locked on the English Department, this dual perspective has enriched both our knowledge and also our understanding of early drama.

For many of us, then, these 1998 productions of the York Cycle struck peculiar intellectual and emotional chords, evident here in our use of the first-person pronoun – not quite our customary voice. In some ways the productions were a memorial, a tribute, a silent and poignant gesture of appreciation to 'absent friends' who gave so much of themselves to the study of early English drama. All of us writing here have our ghosts, our own friendly shades of past productions, performers, and audience members – isles of memory indeed populated by 'sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not'. These productions, however, are also a celebration of continuity, both academic and human. In the 1977 Toronto York Cycle program, some few pages are devoted to building the pageant wagons with production manager and wainwright K. Reed Needles' drawings and painstaking explication of how to convert an Ontario farm wagon into a play wagon. For the 1998 Toronto York Cycle, schoolmaster K. Reed Needles directed his Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School students in their wagon performance of Play 28, 'The Agony in the Garden'. In 1983 undergraduate Scot W. Myers studied medieval drama with Gail McMurray Gibson; fifteen years later he brought the Sacred Stone Players of Davidson, North Carolina to act Play 35, 'The Crucifixion', in Toronto. John B. Mayberry (a cherished sprite from the PLS-on-tour 1980s as New Guise in *Mankind*, Insatiability in *The Blessed Apple Tree*, Robin Hood in *Robin Hood and the Friar*, Herman Grampas in *The Stolen Shrovetide Cock*, and the First Beggar in *The Pie and the Tart*) brought his own children to see these 1998 York Corpus Christi plays, which were so important to who we were and who we were to become.

A memorial and a celebration, these productions also were a remarkable educational experience, in remarkably different ways. As Alexandra Johnston

wrote in the 1983 Toronto Chester Cycle program, 'It is only in the last decade that on-going "laboratory" productions have become possible', and certainly one primary laboratory site has been the Victoria College quadrangle. Earlier productions there have tested various staging and production theories, but this 1998 performance specifically tested whether all forty-seven pageants could be played in a single dawn-to-darkness day, as they apparently were on Corpus Christi Day in medieval York. Thus for the 1998 Toronto York Cycle, single-day performance was the central focus and dominant thesis both of production experiment and of academic analysis.

On that score, I must allow, the Toronto experiment proved very little except that modern wagons can tool around the short, almost hermetically-sealed academic circuit of Victoria College's paved sidewalks to play 47 pageants at four stations in seventeen hours. From that experiment, rewarding as it was on various grounds, we certainly 'know' perhaps even less than we thought we 'knew' about York's original playing places and performance conditions. Two very pragmatic sessions at the Leeds 1998 International Medieval Congress, sessions heavily populated by surviving attendees of both 1998 cycle performances, pointed to any number of unanswered questions: actor endurance, stamina from one station to the next, speed and pace of performance, uniformity of pageant dressings, reconsideration of York records which had seemed quite clear before this remarkable 1998 performance year. David Palliser addressed contemporary York street widths, 'paving' materials, shop encroachments, public conveniences, and lighting. Margaret Rogerson sketched in crowd control, ale, and the constabulary. I, for one, cannot factor how some 47 pageants could have been performed in a single day on a presumably near-annual basis at some twelve to seventeen sites within the City of York for some two centuries.

That deficiency in imagination admitted, a quite different focus will forever dominate my central perception of the 1998 City of York guild performance, namely a wide-eyed recollection of what was and is required from a community infrastructure to produce a single civic multiple-pageant event. We already know these things in theory, mind you, since we have digested the REED York volumes and stage-managed parts of cycle productions and taught extant cycle texts to our students and read enough medieval socio-economic-cultural-civic history studies to choke the proverbial horse – and even, perhaps, prided ourselves on being efficient administrators in earlier lives. Nevertheless, this 1998 City of York production compelled me to appreciate the sheer amount of community cooperation required to bring forth the least of these pageants.

My tardy eureka profited from some fine papers at the two International Medieval Congresses and two colloquia which surrounded these York Cycle

productions (where I learned much about medieval crowd control, sanitary facilities, street width, and civic lighting), but it primarily was prompted by observation of the York pageants and crowds on the day itself. Jane Oakshott, executive and artistic director of the York Mystery Plays 1998, later explicated at the International Congress some of the challenges this production faced and the ways in which those challenges were met. On the day, however, I found myself noting the York waits, the livery-clad wagon crews, the smooth timing as one wagon after another rolled into place, the North Yorkshire police gently moving crowds from the wagons' path but clearly attentive to less gentle modern dangers, the proximity of dustbins and public toilets and a cup or pint, the condition of York cobblestones in the rain – civic infrastructure, buttressed by reminders in the play program of gratitude to city council and dean and chapter of York Minster and local knitting club and wagon construction and storage places and change ringers and ... the community cooperation which produced this remarkable event.

After the two productions, under the tactful prodding of the *Early Theatre* editor, I circulated potential key questions as a sort of 'what we learned in performance' focus for our reviewers' thoughts. Those six questions rambled into embarrassing Joycean paragraphs as my reach clearly exceeded my grasp, but the broad topics of those six paragraphs asked our reviewers to think about changes in the questions we have learned to ask after twenty years of performance; an awareness of the difference between regular performance and irregular occasional performance; the whole question of *contexts* and *communities*; multiple dimensions of audience analysis; performance variations among different stations; and the often heated discussion of *relevance* and modernization. In the rich diversity of these reviewers' observations, reconciliation would be reduction, except to note two clarifications. They did not all see the same pageant at the same station, and the performances could vary appreciably in playing time, audibility, crowd reaction, and even actors: the two Toronto Christs and two Mary Magdalenes of the University of Birmingham's Play 39 changed costumes in the arch between stations two and three. Second, both of the two awkward Toronto gaps between pageants, each about twenty minutes, were caused by wagon-dressing rather than actor problems – which makes one rethink some early records and regulations. Rain-drenched wagon wood swelled out of line from a blazing sun and had to be carpentered back into fit; and the 'Crucifixion' and 'Ascension' pageants followed too hard upon each other to use the same wagon without delay in re-dressing it.

Finally, what did I, who saw all forty-seven Toronto pageants, all eleven

York pageants and many of them more than once, at different stations, learn from these two extraordinary productions? Primary in my own musings is some astonishment that what in 1977 we thought a norm of early English drama, the civic Corpus Christi cycle, after twenty years of REED research, seems to have been an anomaly. I learned that there are textual benedictions at the end of many York pageants as the play concludes and the wagon moves on. I had read and taught these blessing lines but hearing them delivered, one after another, directly to us as audience members is quite different. I noted the remarkable amount of spectacle called for in the Cycle's final plays, when a weary audience is perhaps most susceptible to near-magical effects, miracles of appearance, disappearance, and transformation in the dusky light.

These two decades of performance have taught us much. We have learned that there can be many reactions to a performance, calling for a variety of emotions other than the intellectual – appreciation, in an audience's frank applause for properties, and amusement, for instance. We have learned much about iconography, and we have a way yet to go in our studies. On the stage-right hand of approbation was the hideous yellow smoke which rose from Cain's sacrifice or the Nativity tableaux which imitated a Nottingham alabaster until the beasts' heads gently swayed and their breath warmed the baby in the manger below them. On the left hand of iconographic judgment were angels in Adidas, various visible modern undergarments, and numerous Crucifixion liberties from sandals to carelessly slack wrist ropes to missing stigmata and misplaced wounds.

We have figured out how Cain can count his cheating tithe and any number of other difficult pieces of text which resisted classroom explication but came clear in performance. We have learned that we need to project our voices – and we have become impatient with adult players who are not audible. We have learned how to handle the monologues, which were thought flat or set pieces back in 1977 and which we now know demand good acting – and we learned much of that lesson from David Parry, the Expositor in more ways than one. Above all, we have learned that pace, speed, delivery, action, reaction, and interaction between actor and audience are as important to the effective performance of these plays as to any other piece of effective theatre. We have learned that the texts of the York Cycle need no academic apologists.

Barbara Palmer

*Context and Performance: The York Plays at Toronto*

I attended, and even briefly took part in, the first production of the York

Cycle at the University of Toronto in 1977. I have been present at all of the other cycle productions since then and I wasn't about to miss this one in 1998. In fact, I saw just about every bit of it, from six am till after ten pm, by scurrying around to various acting stations when other business pulled me away from my main watching station at the first location. Back in 1977, I was one of about seven people to see the performance, still outdoors on a pageant wagon, of 'Abraham and Isaac'. By this time, on a rainy cold day in early October, most of the audience had deserted and the unhappy persons in charge (Alexandra Johnston and David Parry chief among them) were deciding to move indoors. This was a fearful pity because, even in that brief witnessing of pageants outdoors on pageant wagons, we as (dwindling) audience experienced something of what it was like to be at a Corpus Christi cycle performance. A number of flatbed wagons, newly fitted out with refurbished wooden wheels, were recycled (as they were again in 1998) among the many separate groups, in turn, so that each producing 'company' had a chance to outfit its wagon with whatever superstructure it chose in the way of backdrop, curtains, and pictorial representation. In the creation sequence we saw a succession of various Gods, some thin, some tall, some short. The representations of animals varied creatively and enormously. Groups made varying decisions as to how often, and to what extent, they would get off the wagon and perform among the assembled spectators. The result triumphantly justified the undertaking. Sadly, most of the rest of the cycle had to be moved indoors, with make-believe spaces for the wagons. The loss of energy was tremendous. Lost too was the chance to see if the plays could be performed in one day. The production naturally went way over schedule. Only at the very end were the final plays able to move outdoors once again, after a night's interval.

This history helps explain, for me at least, why the York Cycle had to be repeated. Alexandra Johnston, though no longer playing the direct supervisory role of 1977, was much in evidence at Victoria College, on home ground where other cycles had been successfully performed in the interim and now ready to prove that York could be performed in a day. The 1998 production actually did start within a very few minutes of 6 am, with a respectable crowd for that hour of the day on the steps of Old Vic, video recording camera at the ready. (In medieval York, considerably further north than Toronto and designed for an early-rising rural population, the plays would have begun much earlier.) The event did keep on schedule, amazingly. A few hangups developed when one company or another monopolized a wagon too long, delaying its turnover to the next in line, but since things were actually ahead

of schedule for quite some time, there was room for a bit of slack. Of course short pageants did have to wait for longer pageants to finish at the acting station ahead but it all worked out without serious complications. Yes, Virginia, the York plays could be performed in one day!

As in 1977 the expectations and desires of the audience were nicely in sync with the production, even among those many spectators for whom the whole thing was a novel experience. The whole event was a happening and the crowd soon got with it. Audience response to performances was vociferous and appreciative. Spectators learned to switch stations as necessitated by a picnic lunch or other breaks. Knowledgeable comparisons afterwards, including those of the actors and directors, gave high marks to station three because of its adjacent high walls and comparative isolation; lighting effects there for the concluding pageant of 'Last Judgment' were awesome. Station one, in front of the main steps of Vic's central building, became known as the official reviewing stand for dignitaries; station two, on the lawn in the inner quadrangle, quickly earned a reputation as the spot for the picnic or beach crowd. Station three was the actors' and directors' favourite, with its surrounding high walls and sense of enclosed space. Station four was just folks, a bit separated from the rest of the event, rather too dark as evening came on. One could pick one's habitat, in other words; one could declare or fashion one's identity by the spectators with whom one chose to associate.

The quality of performance and production varied greatly, as has been the case with all cycle productions at Toronto, and one wonders as to how true this may have been in medieval York. Probably not nearly to the same extent; there, the productions were more centrally supervised and were put on by closely associated guilds, whereas this production (1977 also, and others since) called on acting talent as far-flung as the Universities of Birmingham, Illinois at Chicago, Dayton, Alberta, Connecticut, Maryland at Baltimore, Michigan, Duquesne, and Leeds, along with various college and non-affiliated groups in Sydney (Nova Scotia), Syracuse (New York), Buffalo, Moncton (New Brunswick), London (Ontario), Boston, Davidson (North Carolina), and, of course, many groups from the University of Toronto and from the surrounding city. A few were church related. This is not, strictly speaking, how the York plays were originally assembled, of course, but the geographical and cultural diversity nonetheless gave a rich diversity. The cross-fire of comparison more than made up for the occasional unevenness of tone.

A few pageants were tediously amateurish and unimaginative. We needn't linger over details. The observation is useful only as a possible insight into the differences between regular performances (in medieval York) and irregular

occasional performances in a reconstructed cycle today (in Toronto or York). Medieval performers were paid and were fined for inadequate work; their experience with their roles year after year, and with the dramatic impact of the cycle as a whole, must have made for a richness and complexity of production that is bound to be missing when less experienced groups are assembled from far and near. No rehearsal of the 1998 production as a whole was feasible, and so many of the actors and directors went into the event having seen nothing of what other pageants had created. Inevitably, in these terms, the context of production was radically different from that of medieval England. For all the inestimable advantages of reconstructed performances, today we can only try to imagine the sorts of communal interaction and reinforcement that were integrally present in a medieval town with actors and audiences all drawn from a single community.

Despite such unavoidable limitations, many pageants were splendidly apt and rewarding. The entire sequence of the creation of the world, the fall of the angels, and the expulsion from the garden of Adam and Eve went well, with special kudos due to the Birmingham players' rendition of 'The Creation to the Fifth Day'. Not only were the actors forceful and convincing but the set was outstanding in its ingenious representation (by means of opening fans and hanging displays) of the various wonders of the world that God creates. All the creation pageants invite ingenuity of design, and the devisers of the sets in this sequence did not disappoint. Fish appeared to swim in the sea and birds in the air, both in brightly coloured variety. The birth of Adam, and then of Eve from Adam's rib, offered another invitation to theatrical inventiveness. Through the magic of theatre, the audience was aware that the devices were all patently the contrivances of *trompe l'oeil*, and yet the experience was one of confirming and sharing communally an archetypal legend in all its vitality. The theatrical experience confirmed a sense of faith and of cultural continuity. This all happened at Toronto in 1998 in such a vital way as to convince audiences that they really were in touch with what must have been so essential to the event in medieval York. It is through such theatrical magic that the sense of communion with the past is most vividly alive.

A particular delight, in the pageants following the creation sequence, was 'Joseph's Troubles about Mary', as presented by the Duquesne University Medieval and Renaissance Players. I was so charmed with the peppery Joseph that I saw the production twice. The actor playing Joseph was the star. His bouncing lilt, his delight in his wife's beauty and youth, his anxiety and disappointment at the prospect of her having been impregnated by some younger man, all came wonderfully alive, and again bridged the gap of cen-



turies by giving a timelessly amusing insight into the perplexities of an older husband fearful of cuckoldry. The motif of marital difficulty played off well against the earlier presentation of Noah and his wife as acted by the Department of Theatre Arts at Towson University, Baltimore. One was pleased to discover how much humour is to be found in the York treatment of that episode, so frequently overshadowed by the Wakefield Master's rambunctious version.

From a scholarly point of view, a particular fascination of this cycle production was the opportunity to see how well the performance could confirm the hypothesis of using pageant wagons end-on rather than broadside. The topic was central to much of the discussion during the symposium on the preceding day, and those of us involved in that debate were eager to see the results. One pageant making special use of this method of presentation was 'The Temptation of Christ'. John McKinnell, who directed the Durham Medieval Theatre Company players and took the role of Christ, gave a significant paper on the topic during the symposium. The wagon for this pageant was fitted out with thin posts supporting an open canopy and featuring also a means of providing an ascent; otherwise the rectangular wagon, low to the ground, was sparsely designed with little more than a pair of stairs at one end. To me, the issue of end-on versus broadside was less important than the fact that one could see through the set from any angle, encouraging acting in the round and also highlighting the colourful contrasts in costumes between the white garb of the haloed Christ and the more garish and animalistic outfit of the tempter. What became vividly clear to me in retrospect was that the 1977 cycle had consistently and perhaps unconsciously played only to one side of each set, with curtained backdrop and a pictorial effect derived (as the 1998 conference pointed out) from post-medieval concepts of theatrical space and from iconographic representations of *mise en scène* inspired by our ideas today (from the Limbourg brothers and others) of what a medieval scene might resemble. Most pageants in the 1998 cycle as well chose unidirectional presentation with pictorial backdrop. In this regard, the experiments with open three-dimensional staging were refreshingly new and important.

Christ's appearances before his tormenters were gripping, and the moments of 'The Crucifixion' and 'The Death and Burial of Christ' were very moving. I was interested to see how effectively 'The Dream of Pilate's Wife', ably presented by Martin Walsh and his Harlotry Players from the University of Michigan, provided a thematic idea of a contest between Christ and the devil in which the dream of Pilate's wife is a desperate move on the part of the devil to stop the ongoing crucifixion that will, ironically enough, undo everything

the devil has plotted to achieve. The overall thematic significance of this 'plot' is not as cohesive in the York Cycle as in N-Town, where what Alan Nelson calls the 'contest of guile' is essential to the overarching dramatic scheme of the cycle as a whole, but it made excellent sense as acted.

The PLS staging of the hanging in 'The Remorse of Judas' was electrifyingly real. One was tempted to circle about behind the pageant wagon (as one could do) to see how it was brought off by means of a hanging collar. The need for this *trompe l'oeil* device meant that the pageant was presented in a broadside direction only, which did reduce flexibility of movement and reinforced the pictorial dimension that some more experimental pageants avoided, but the Remorse was still a highlight reinforcing the PLS's reputation for fine work.

'The Judgment of Christ', put on by the Centre for Medieval Studies with David Klausner as Pilate, made use of an especially open wagon, with a throne for Pilate surmounting an essentially bare platform. The openness gave Klausner room to rant and tear a cat in, which he proceeded to do with aplomb. Especially at station one, audiences tended to be on all sides, taking advantage of varying points of view when the design of the pageant made it possible to see from sides and rear; at station two, in their lawn chairs and on their picnic blankets, the audience seemed to expect a show to be presented in one direction only. Similarly, station three encouraged flexibility, whereas the audience for station four seemed to face only one way, from the college buildings toward the street.

Some of the plays following 'The Resurrection' seemed to drag out the already-long day. But 'The Last Judgment' (Handmade Performance, Toronto) more than made up for the wait to the end. Not everyone approved of seeing (and hearing) the chief devil with a boom-box, but the effect of diabolical figures on a high top of the set, menacingly waving their cloaks to the tune of rock music, was tremendous. Female devils, vamps in very modern hookers' attire, added to the gritty effect of apocalypse now. The producers of this pageant were as anxious as anyone about the timing of the whole day's production: they didn't want to go on too early! Their effects demanded late twilight and even (at stations three and four) darkness, and, with some luck and real skill on the part of the organizers, they got their wish. Especially at station three, with dark shadows cast up on the walls of the surrounding buildings, the effect was unforgettable. This last pageant was a stunning ending to a remarkable day.

Barbara Palmer has asked: do anachronisms like boom-boxes and tight leather skirts cause us to lose something in the art of translating medieval plays

for modern audiences, or do the updating connections provide an intensity and immediacy that can link devils and henpecked husbands and human suffering to the way we live today? I don't think a simple yes-no answer to such a question is possible, as the varying reactions to the stridently post-modern 'Last Judgment' demonstrate, but I know that for me the effects of 'relevancy' did not cheapen my appreciation of the performances we saw in Toronto this June. That the York Plays are living entities is nowhere more evident than in their responsiveness to a wide range of interpretation. Those plays were themselves, after all, vividly anachronistic in their own late medieval context, choosing to update biblical and exegetical narrative into the immediacies of parish life in the north of England. Even if some purists were not amused then and are not amused now, we today can offer these plays no more fitting tribute than to perform and savour them in the same free spirit in which they were conceived.

David Bevington

*Playing in all directions: The York Plays, Toronto*

One should expect unevenness and inconsistency in a production that attempts to pull nearly four dozen dramatic pieces from medieval England, divided among disparate groups with various degrees and kinds of talent and experience, into a satisfying whole. The 1998 York Plays in Toronto delivered on all counts, including the satisfying whole.

I saw the entire cycle except for 'Adam and Eve in Eden', the pageant that immediately preceded my own 'The Temptation and Fall'. Of course, what I saw was not quite what anyone else saw; much depended upon where one saw the plays. Some I watched more than once, in order to see how they played to different audiences. And they were different: the first audience, on the stairs and grand entrance to the old college building, was the most settled and focused, while the much larger, constantly changing group loosely scattered around the second station could be the most or least responsive, depending mostly on the actors' abilities to make themselves seen and heard; the third enjoyed by far the best acoustics, but not always the best sight lines, while the fourth, with all the street traffic, construction noises, and passers-by was the least likely to get involved, even when prompted by Herod himself to boo and hiss.

Some groups and individuals handled the differences between audiences better than others, just as some were better able to project their voices, or just hold an audience's attention, but some were held back by specific production

choices. 'The Death of Mary', for instance, was staged mostly on street level, where the bedridden Virgin spoke her lines to the sky rather than to the audience. I heard little that anyone said in this production, and saw little more in the gathering dusk, except for the seven-year-old girl who opened the play as the angel Gabriel, up on the wagon; a restless audience ensured that the few other audible speakers were drowned out. Interestingly, Martin Walsh, spokesperson for the platea as stage at Friday's symposium, kept things pretty much high up on the wagon for the Harlotry Players' splendid pageants of 'Abraham and Isaac' and 'The Dream of Pilate's Wife', whereas Ralph Blasting, despite his stated enthusiasm for keeping things up on the wagon, staged most of Towson University's 'The Flood' pageant on the (supposedly already flooded) ground. What I saw of it, though, from the back of the crowd, was excellent.

There were many excellent moments throughout the long day, such as LeMoyné College's 'The Nativity', when the young angel with his high, star-topped pole effectively distracted most of the audience from the Virgin for the crucial moment, making the miraculous birth the first I've seen (or staged) that was not painfully funny. There were also wonderful sights off-stage, such as Christ sitting on an already discarded heaven-throne from an earlier pageant, leisurely eating lunch with the soldiers who would later crucify him. But these two moments are no more comparable than most pageants were. How does one compare a modern-dress production with those that attempt to look vaguely medieval? Rigorously researched period pieces with high concept stagings? High seriousness and religious faith with camp deflation? I remain amused by the number of productions that used both a side-on presentation and a procession through the crowd, as if that side were the end of the wagon, facing down a long street; overall, though, questions of wagon orientation seemed merely academic relative to other performance issues. The performance of Middle English Christian plays for a modern, ethnically and religiously mixed audience requires more than a textual translation. Some troupes clearly did not really know what they were translating, while others seemed unaware that anything was being translated; still others presented the equivalent of a medieval allegorical commentary – bits and pieces of the original quoted, then transformed into something else entirely.

The production notes for Scarborough College's 'Moses and Pharaoh' dealt mostly with the issues of gender that led, not only to their (unnoted) casting of Pharaoh as a striking young woman, but also to their dual casting of God. This made God not just both male and female but also – far more problematically – two rather than three persons. Nor was this the only dual casting of God: Stephen Johnson's production of 'The Last Judgment', to which I'll

return, gave us Father and Son but no Holy Spirit. Also Paul Babiak's 'Remorse of Judas', for the PLS, split Judas himself into two, or so it seemed – one had to read the cast list, handed out to some but not all audience members at each performance, in order to discover that the woman speaking Judas' lines along with the male actor was supposed to be 'Remorse'. Yet if the directorial intention here was unclear, the effect itself was striking. A very different effect – or non-effect – was created by Hillsdale College's predominately female cast in 'Christ's Appearance to Thomas': only a single unbearded apostle was played by a male actor, reversing the usual medieval convention of beardless boys playing women. This too was swiftly accepted as convention: like the various female Gods in this production, or the black Noah and Joseph, these bearded women simply became what they played because they drew no attention to anything other than that.

Some troupes revelled in their flouting of convention. One of my more persistent memories of the event is of God the Father standing high above the crowd between heavenly go-go boys, raucous music blaring from the blaster he holds, while below them the red-wristed Son initiates 'The Last Judgment' with a leap and a yell. In the original play, a single actor spoke first as Father, then (possibly after removing a mask) as Son, neatly representing one God in different persons, a concept that this staging blithely repudiated. Here I found myself wondering at the absence of the Holy Spirit and at the meaning of those dancers. I also worried about the Good – well, smugly self-righteous – Soul who apparently lost out on salvation after all when she moved into the audience to hold one of the spotlights so that the audience could see. A medieval audience, and possibly some medievalists, would not have recognized even the subject of this play as performed; if 'illuminating ... the intentions of the playwrights' was really the director's intention, as stated in the program notes, the production was a failure. Yet it worked as theatre. I may not have liked it but I have been entirely unable to forget its arresting visuals, or to refrain from rethinking the familiar text.

Another (mostly) modern-dress production was largely condemned by the scholarly portion of the audience. A young group from Shepherd College, West Virginia, performed 'The Harrowing of Hell' with devils in stiletto heels, Jesus in chain mail, and a motley of patriarchs, including John the Baptist with a large and bloody plate between his head and shoulders. It was silly adolescent camp that deflated the traditional climax of the cycle but the cast was certainly having fun. And that fun was infectious, especially for the younger members of the audience, who wrestled with the devils after the show, then ran off to see the play again at the next station. I suspect that more

careful thought and tighter direction could have made this production work even for some of their more serious parents.

Certainly the Catholic University of America's 'Slaughter of the Innocents' proved that contemporary stylization could work, theatrically, without compromising either religious values or the integrity of the original text. This Herod was a mad Edwardian villain in a modern suit, a gold cape, and a hat that no one of any era would have been caught dead in, while the messenger was a bicycle courier. For the slaughter itself, which involved bundles of red rags rather than the usual dolls, the soldiers four – instead of the original two – donned black capes with massive shoulder pads, along with dark glasses and nylon masks, and strapped large plastic buckets to their feet as stilts, before making their measured advance toward the audience; they were thus far more visible than the women they confronted in the crowd, whose screams were nonetheless distinctly audible above the percussive effects provided by the other actors onstage, visibly watching the carnage below. The effect was far more chilling than comic, in an episode that too often seems unintentionally funny.

Without the comfort of identifiably medieval (or merely silly) garb on the soldiers to distance them from us, we are forced to confront them more directly. This is not a new concept: evidence suggests that medieval audiences would similarly have been confronted with a Herodian court that appeared vaguely Saracen – both distantly Other and, unlike the actual historical Herod, sufficiently contemporary and familiar to suggest a real threat. This production presented us with our nightmares, not those of a safely distant past. But unlike 'The Last Judgment' and 'The Harrowing of Hell' productions, it did not simply repudiate or ignore that past; rather, it effectively did what the original must have done, presenting the past through contemporary lenses, showing less how that past might have looked than what it meant. But the past was not forgotten in the look of things, either: the soldiers' studded dog-collars evoked not only modern s/m and fascist punks but also the Girdlers and Nailers, the guilds that originally produced this pageant.

And that to me is what producing medieval plays for modern audiences, as opposed to merely theorizing them among academics, is all about. This, more than any potential insights as to wagon orientation, is why I came to see, and to do, these plays.

Garrett Epp

*The Toronto York Cycle: Design and Technical Display*

I did not want to miss the beginning of the cycle at 6 am but I have to admit

that I was somewhat surprised to see that over a hundred others were of a like mind, waiting at the first station for one of the grandest opening lines in dramatic literature: '*Ego sum alpha et O*'. Nor did the crowd consist only of medievalists or participants. Even in the early-morning rain, a diverse group had gathered who were interested in *the event*. A sense of the uniqueness of this performance informed the entire day and that sense was reinforced by the spectacle and the staging of the pageants. As in years past in Toronto, the design and technical qualities varied widely. Overall, however, there was a clear sense that the level of comfort with processional performance had increased. By and large the groups were not afraid of the wagons. Directors seemed to know what to expect from the stations and the audiences. Few felt compelled either to ignore the wagon and move onto the ground as quickly as possible, or to restrict themselves to immobile 'religious' tableaux. In most cases, this York Cycle exhibited a sophistication in wagon design and staging which indicates that a collective awareness is developing among what is now two generations of practitioners.

Before looking at the design and technical achievements of the Toronto York Cycle, we should take note of some of the differences between what Barbara Palmer calls the 'regular' performances in medieval York and the 'occasional' modern recreations. Aside from obvious modern advantages, such as cordless drills and Velcro, medieval producers had a much easier time of it than did the Toronto groups. First of all, the York guilds were all in the same city. While logistical challenges confronted the York producers as each guild rolled out its pageant, they could not have been worse than those faced by the Toronto producers and the twenty-three groups who came from out of town. The restrictions of travelling affected design choices especially. Not only did all of the sets, props, and costumes have to be transported, but once in Toronto the groups had relatively little time to set up and test their materials. Both Durham ('The Temptation') and Yale ('The Ascension') used a winch to elevate an actor. The mechanism was built by the PLS but the actors who used it weren't able to try it out until the day before the performance. Second, most guilds in York had their own wagons. With the exception of Towson, all the other groups used one of the nine wagons provided by the PLS. This fact alone is a cause for disparity between medieval and modern pageant designs. As the Toronto wagons were recycled, each group had approximately thirty minutes to assemble its set on top of the next available wagon. Many of the solutions revealed a great deal of ingenuity but clearly the modern wagons had to have been simpler than the medieval pageant wagons, which were refurbished each year by the trade guilds. Finally, the York Cycle was an annual

(or nearly annual) event. It stands to reason that the York practitioners would have improved their pageants continually in response to their experiences each year. A similar process may have been occurring in Toronto over the past twenty years but certainly with less consistency.

Differences between medieval and modern conditions notwithstanding, the design and technical choices of the Toronto York Cycle offer plenty of insight into processional performance. I'd like to divide my comments between two major considerations: getting to and using the space, and visual imagery. The first addresses the dramatic quality of the procession itself, as well as choices about the use of the wagon as a performance space. Visual imagery addresses how the pageant designs use size, scale, colour, and texture to take advantage of outdoor performance.

Getting to and using the space is a dominant factor in the experience of medieval drama. The procession of the plays from station to station creates a parade atmosphere in which the audience is involved, and the qualities of anticipation and welcoming were not lost on Toronto spectators. Several groups used musicians, song, or chanting to cover their movement. This was sometimes distracting if the preceding pageant had not finished performing, but more often than not the technique covered a gap in performance and announced that the next pageant was approaching. Many of the plays begin with soliloquies which the performers used to cover the placement and set-up of the wagons. But even this notion of 'covering' the set-up rings false, since audiences clearly enjoyed the drama of getting the wagon into – or out of – the correct position. After the second station, the wagons had to be drawn under a close-fitting arch and more than a few received applause when they finally completed the manoeuver after several attempts.

The variety of the stations added to the audience's experience of the plays and their designs. In cinematic terms, the stations offered various perspectives. The first station played to a raked audience seated on the steps of Old Vic. With very few opportunities for viewing from the sides or the back, the experience was a controlled medium-distance position. The second station afforded both close-ups and long shots. Children especially liked to sit on the wall of the 'sunken road', with the pageant wagon not two feet in front of them. Performers often played right through them. At the same time this station, facing onto the green, allowed others to watch from a distance. Many spectators chose to remain in the middle of the quadrangle, watching the pageants only for their spectacle and sometimes moving closer to hear a specific episode or even a favourite speech or character. The third station, situated in a narrow passage between two buildings, sacrificed panorama for good acoustics as it



created the feeling of a private, open-air theater. The fourth and final station in Toronto was a favourite of many, perhaps because it achieved just the right combination of openness and manageable scale. Playing in the street under a tree and facing the dining hall, this space had good acoustics, fine sight lines, and plenty of shade. I mention the four stations separately to emphasize that the audience could and did experience the pageants differently at each one. Some staked out their favourite station and stayed put while others roamed from place to place. The most successful pageants were those whose simplicity of design and staging allowed them to adapt to each environment. 'The Fall of the Angels' (Vagabond Knight, Toronto), 'The Nativity' (Syracuse), and both plays from Birmingham ('The Creation to the Fifth Day' and 'Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene') are examples of plays that were effective in every setting – although they were by no means the only ones.

The idea of (apparent) simplicity applies also to the use of the wagons as performance spaces. There was much discussion in Toronto of end-on or side-on staging, and of playing on the wagon versus playing in the street. None of the issues was resolved by the performances but it was apparent to me that the plays are self-contained. That is, when a director used the wagon literally as a jumping-off point and took the action far into the crowd, the effectiveness seemed to dissipate. 'The Agony in the Garden' had a beautifully simple set but the play lost its focus when it was allowed to range freely into the space. 'Herod and the Magi' kept the action closer in; by not allowing the Magi to stray too far, the wagon stage maintained its integrity as the location on which the action depended.

Visually, those plays which accepted the wagon as a small, moveable tableau fared the best. There were many good examples but 'The Creation to the Fifth Day' was extraordinary for its sheer beauty. A series of quarter- and semi-circular panels filled the wagon stage like a pop-up card. Their colours and texture were vibrant and meticulous, giving the entire picture an air of confidence – surely an effect that the early guilds would have cherished. Another notable if more grand example was 'The Resurrection' (University of Toronto Drama Centre). A draped panel behind Herod opened like a triptych to reveal a panoramic landscape with Christ's tomb in the foreground. This was perhaps a more elaborate solution than would have been found in medieval York, but in both cases the wagon was used to create a striking visual effect and a tableau which told the story of the pageant almost by itself.

It hardly seems fair to single out a few examples from over sixteen hours of performance. There were many noteworthy elements of the forty-seven pageants which I simply do not have space to discuss. Overall, the design

achievements of the 1998 York Cycle in Toronto were impressive. Their level seems to have increased during the fifteen years that I have been watching Toronto performances mainly because of two factors. First, designers and directors have learned to value the simplicity of the wagon stage. Clear designs based on well-defined icons carry the meaning of the pageant to spectators near to or far from the platform. Second, there is now a confidence in outdoor wagon performance. No longer as apprehensive about engaging the audience, directors are learning to let the plays speak for themselves. In the process, perhaps we're getting closer to what the York Cycle was: a presentation of a community to itself, perhaps with their attendant foibles, but safe in the knowledge that they were among friends.

Ralph Blasting

*Acting The Text: York Mystery Plays In York, 12 July 1998*

'The first Guild production of the Mystery Plays for over 400 years' was the billing given to Jane Oakshott's production of eleven plays from the York Cycle. The pragmatic requirement that each play should have a sponsor was a major factor in determining the shape of the series of plays produced. Seven of the surviving York guilds performed, or sponsored others to perform, those plays in BL: Additional MS 35,290 for which their medieval counterparts had been responsible; local church and community groups contributed four further plays. The sequence performed on that dull, wet Sunday in York was therefore eclectic (Plays 2, 3, 5, 18, 28, 36, 37, 41, 42, 47), with no 'Nativity', 'Trial' plays, or 'Resurrection'. It was performed at five stations, at two of which there were stands for paying spectators.

While standing among the spectators at the side of the acting area in St Sampson's Square (station four, one of the stations with a stand) watching the eleven plays, I wondered what the modern post-Christian, unfamiliar with the biblical narratives, was making of this sequence as it cut from the Fall directly to 'The Flight into Egypt'. What contact could these plays now establish with us, accustomed to the immediacy of video and cinema? At worst, we might read them as people dressing up and pretending to be medieval people, imitating an imitation. On the other hand, the new eclecticism might have the potential to reveal new significances and, by changing the rhythms of performance and the sequencing of material from those in our manuscript and Bible, make us appreciate the power of the plays as theatre.

Inevitably, different groups approached the challenge in different ways and with varying degrees of success. In my report, I focus on two very different

plays which generated productions that were, in their own terms, equally successful but embodied quite different concepts of theatre.

The first of these, 'Creation to the Fifth Day', originally assigned to the Plasterers and here performed by the Guilds of Building with the College of Further and Higher Education, appears in the manuscript as the second play of the cycle, a 'tell and show' play following the conflict and comedy of 'The Fall of the Angels'. In this production it began the sequence. Its new position removed it from the shadow of MS Play 1 and gave it new prominence. As a text, it is unpromising – 172 lines spoken by God which serve as a series of cues for what must have been spectacular scenic effects. Richard Collier, in *Poetry and Drama in the York Corpus Christi Play* (Hamden, Conn, 1978), characterizes its style by 'its lack of imagery, its denotativeness, its blandness and abstractness' (54). For the modern audience, unconvinced by creationist theology and accustomed to extravagant visual effects on TV, video, and film, a condescending distance seemed the most likely response. Any theatrical image they might have could well be of the ebullient Brian Glover in *The Mysteries*, raised aloft and exulting in his own power.

York's production made its illusion its theme, both visually and textually. The drab, small wagon with its dull curtain, the insignificant world, proved a toy-box of tricks as, on command, the backdrop of hills appeared, cut-out blue waves bobbed, the sun and moon popped out, the side-pieces opened to reveal trees behind which revolving disks revealed alternately fruit and flowers. This 'child's pop-up book' reflected with each new device the ingenuity of its constructors. The audience responded appreciatively rather than condescendingly, laughing and applauding each device.

On top of the wagon was a cartoon-like cut-out of God. The opening lines boomed out as a disembodied voice from behind. In almost anti-climactic contrast, the actor-god walked on at ground level. Though dressed in white with a red cloak and a nimbus, his human face was not masked or gilded. He carried a blue plastic folder from which he read his lines. Whatever unrevealed practical necessity lay behind this arrangement, the play script was visible and concrete in the hands of its performer. His positioning beside the wagon rather than on high allowed him to move smoothly between the roles of play director, in issuing cues ('I publysch my power/Noght by my strenkth, but by my steven', 30–1); of audience, viewing the result with evident appreciation; and of divine authority, as at the end of each 'show' his voice rose in triumphant conclusion. Importantly, as audience he looked not only at the stage but also at us, so that his contemporary 'creatures' became part of his theatre and our enjoyment of the 'shows' became part of his pleasure.

Divorced from 'The Fall of the Angels', his lines

My hegh Godhede I will nocht hyde  
All-yf sume foles be fallyne me fro (7–8)

referred exclusively to us spectators, and 'My blyssyng haue ye all' appropriately encompassed both show and audience. In contrast to Glover's tone, this was a gentle, humane God, at one with humankind. His undisguised human face, whose expression conveyed anticipation and enjoyment of audience response, confirmed that relationship. (My quotations are from Richard Beadle's 1982 edition, *The York Plays*. A generally faithful but modernized version was used by all except the Lords of Misrule in their play of 'The Ascension'. 'Mummy, why were they speaking Scottish', a little girl asked after their performance. 'That wasn't Scottish, dear. That was Middle English. That was why we couldn't understand it.')

In contrast to this short visual creation play, 'The Death of Christ', performed for the company of Butchers – the company originally responsible – by Howdenshire Live Arts, represents one of the most complex and ambitious plays in the cycle. It contains multiple action, stark emotional interludes, and, at 416 lines, is textually lengthy. Moreover, its complex thirteen-line stanza with strong alliteration and repetition draws attention to itself. Whereas in the 'Creation', text serves spectacle, here the text is the vehicle for emotion and action. In the manuscript this complex play follows the closely focused 'Crucifixion', and represents the culmination of the 'Trials' sequence with their social resonances and cynical brutality and self-interest. In this production, it followed the no less complex play of 'The Agony in the Garden and the Betrayal'. Sufficient to say that that play was not realized with strong conviction, so there was a contrast of competence.

The director of this production had clearly grasped the potential of the wagon-theatre for audience involvement. The wagons were usually some twenty feet from the front of the stand towards which they played. In this production the distance was approximately halved by introducing a long ramp from the ground to the wagon. Representing, presumably, the slope of Calvary, it enabled ready movement between ground and stage, foreshortening the audience distance and thrusting the actors closer to the front rows of spectators. Soldiers and Mary entered through the audience and addressed them directly, casting them as potential opponents and allies respectively, to be kept at bay or appealed to for assistance.

The notable feature of the production was the performance of the actors

playing Pilate and Mary. In contrast to the God of the 'Creation', they occupied their characters, constructing and realizing plausible psychologies. While the contrast between the two figures is evident within the text – the one representing authority, the other emotion – both actors gave added significance to their roles.

Uninfluenced by the cosy alliance of pleasure and power between the priests and Pilate in the 'Trials', this production took the bold step of casting a youthful Pilate, arrogant but insecure, in a world where everyone else seemed middle-aged or elderly. The age gap from the older, more confident priests gave new point to the insistence that the Crucifixion was their responsibility and made the refusal to change the superscription a sort of youthful display of petty authority for its own sake. In turban and red robe, echoing the red cloaks of his soldiers, the young Pilate moved anxiously about as the action went on, scanning the audience, pondering his position, delivering his alliterating lines with a pent-up impatience. Mary was cast in total contrast to the arrogant youth – a rather plump, plain middle-aged woman in black cloak and white wimple. This figure, looking old enough to be Pilate's mother, had a pathos in her helplessness that was intensified when her way up the ramp to her son was barred by the soldiers. Her stanzas are rhetorically powerful in their rhythms and repetitions, but this actress' strong and feeling delivery fully exploited their emotive force.

In theory at least, the three crosses with their burdens should provide an emotional and meditational focus but I found, as I often do, that a modern, well-nourished man lounging slackly on the cross supplied an inadequate stimulus to compassionate response. But the crucified Christ became merely the backdrop to a contrast in tone and style between two powerful stage presences, each as fascinating when silent as when addressing the audience or fellow actors. The crosses and their burdens seemed incidental and actions directly focused on them – the drink, Longeus, the deposition – suffered accordingly. The structure of the play is too diffuse but its director had wisely placed the emphasis upon the theatre of emotions and a 'Stanislavskian' conception of role which engaged the audience directly and strongly.

These two productions represent polarities of theatre, each admirably suited to its particular play. They respected the text and were alert to its possibilities and to the visual impact of theatre. Not all the productions in York fulfilled those requirements. But the experiment generated several unexpected and theatrically effective interpretations and held the audience even when the rain poured down.

David Mills

*The Two Yorks: Playing in Toronto and York*

I want to give as accurate a picture as I can of my experience of watching the plays at Toronto and York. To do so I need to provide a context, which, I'm afraid, means going back in time. Over the years I have become more and more aware of the importance of community in performances of the plays. When we started on the grand scale at Leeds in 1975, it was with the intention of testing medieval staging techniques; community was on the agenda but rather as a necessary means of achieving an end than as an end in itself – local drama groups to perform, stallholders to create a festive atmosphere, the city council for permission to hold a 'market'. For some time the idea of testing medieval staging techniques seemed to me of primary importance – the 'original-staging' approach as it came to be called. It has achieved a lot. I'm sure we are all much wiser as scholars than we were thirty years ago as a result of these productions. But, as Barbara Palmer has suggested, communication in the broadest sense must get a look in. Who are we playing for? Ourselves or a wider public? For the original-staging approach to be fulfilled we should be researching and putting into practice every element of a production and even then, as has been said before, we cannot re-create a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century audience. However 'authentic' the production (and we can never be certain), we cannot see it through medieval eyes.

This raises the question of an alternative approach, one of community. In addition to re-creating the plays as a scholarly theatrical exercise, we can perform them as a contemporary theatrical (or perhaps spiritual) experience. But can they be the expression of a contemporary community, and, if so, what processes have to be gone through in order to make this possible? Does it have to have a church context – either as performers or audience? Is modern dress the right way to present the plays? Must they be translated? Do we ignore medieval methods of staging?

Like many of us I have seen a number of productions over the past twenty years or so. Many have been based on scholarly research but many have not. The productions at Chester (eg, 1987, 1992) and Birmingham (1992) were broadly community-based; those at Worsbrough (a small satellite village of Barnsley in West Yorkshire) narrowly so. They all aimed at a cycle-like series of pageants, played (except partly at Birmingham) in the open air. Except for Chester (again partly) they used a kind of generalized medieval costume and all used a modernized text of some sort. All were played in close proximity to church or cathedral. In all cases, to my mind, there was a strong sense of community, in players, place, audience, and approach.

What has this to do with our perception of medieval theatre? One thing that comes out of it for me is the validity of the approach. It has a sense of 'reality', a sense of growing out of the local situation rather than being imposed upon it. It also broadens the parameters of acceptability. One example will have to suffice. At Chester in 1992, the group performing 'The Creation' chose to have a troupe of young dancers dance-miming the creation in the usual diaphanous garments. 'Long-drawn out but effective', I wrote at the time. On what level was it effective? Certainly not in telling me anything about the pageant, but rather as an expression of the needs, the resources, and the point-of-view of the group, an expression of what the community is and how it sees. Community creates its own criteria for judging.

I hope it will begin to be apparent how this relates to the York Cycle at Toronto and York. Effectiveness can come in a variety of forms. A school group performing a pageant with no great acting skills can sometimes present the meaning more satisfyingly than a drama group with experience of what may turn out to be inappropriate acting skills, or simply ones which are made too apparent. Much of this has to do, I think, with community. A school group can be effective because the sense of community expression comes through or because there is a value in the community project itself. But it has also to do with telling the story. It is perhaps unfashionable now to emphasize telling the story – turn it inside out, tell it backwards, or turn it into disconnected shreds but don't simply tell it. What you often hear referred to as 'trusting the text' is actually allowing the text to tell the story; performing the text in such a way as to bring out the meaning, which in turn tells the story, is often what is needed.

What of the overall experiences of Toronto and York? The major difference (apart from length) was that York in York had an overall sense of a community in action, whereas York in Toronto had a sense of multifariousness. Lots of different groups did their own things in their own ways. Within this multifariousness, there were community pageants with the strengths that I've already described. There were also well-performed pageants with strengths of quite another kind. But the overall experience of the play for me was not one of community. It was, however, a very successful day. Its wholeness came from the event and not from the pageants alone. It came from sitting around in the sunshine with stalls and 'beggars' and Lutheran preachers haranguing the crowds; from a shower of rain at the first performance of the first pageant at the first station just to show what God could do if he (or as it was the first pageant 'she') chose; from the pageants in all their variety rumbling on and on. But enough of general comment.

Two productions that absorbed me at Toronto were (Play 2) 'Creation to the Fifth Day' and (Plays 8 and 9) the conflated Noah ('The Building of the Ark' and 'The Flood'). In the first of these a single actor carries the words but the presence of angels and stagehands creating the creation made it not a one-person *tour de force* but a multiple act. In this case the pageant worked visually. It was ingeniously simple in working (just a series of opening fans) yet quite beautiful to look at. Because it was so beautiful the rather crude knotted strings of birds and fish stood out but hardly mattered because of the delight of the dangling creatures. God's performance was powerful in gesture and voice. He powered the creation. It was as though the words needed his energy to empower the act. In this it was a most interesting contrast to the same pageant in York. In both, the universe was a machine, the 'machina mundi', or more precisely perhaps the 'machina theatri' – a series of mechanical effects. One was brilliantly colourful and beautifully crafted, the other a little fairgroundy and crude. But the major difference was in God. The original intention at York was for God at first to be simply a voice. But the speaking-tube device didn't work and consequently he had to appear beside the wagon, book in hand. Except for the book the effect was strikingly like many manuscript illuminations where a large God stands beside his series of creations. But most importantly he spoke with quiet dignity. His was a word which created effortlessly and lovingly. I liked them both but the York pageant had a quality of (I come back to the word again) reality. This wasn't God but it felt like God because the words were all. In Toronto we were never allowed to forget the actor. Perhaps it's significant that God in York was the Master of the Guild of Building.

In the case of the Toronto Noah pageants ('The Building of the Ark' and 'The Flood') it was storytelling that mattered. The whole production was made to subserve that; mechanically, delightfully conceived forest panels opened out into an ark and then opened again to form a roof over the animals revealed inside, especially the wonderfully simple raven and dove, wafted over the ark by God. God's continual presence over the ark was interesting; she was never involved during the flood and even as bird-wielder she was only a stagehand, so there was not a sense of her controlling the flood, simply of being present, but you were not allowed to forget that it was part of her plan. I also particularly liked the pageant at the fourth station, where the tree, God, ark, and, finally, the rainbow formed a perfect whole. This was one of the chance effects that outside staging and changing positions provided.

As always, I also learned a few things. The Doctor in 'The Annunciation' is not a tub-thumping preacher. It is obvious really from the text but it took



the beautifully measured delivery of the Doctor at Toronto to convince me. This again was a performance that came out of community 'now' and felt like community 'then'. I was also fascinated by the use made of the banners in 'The Harrowing of Hell' at York – a production which I thought in general worked imaginatively and excitingly. The banners preceded the wagon in processional style but then formed in front of it to create a pictorial contrast of heaven and hell, and a curtain to conceal and then reveal the pageant. And in Toronto for the first time I felt what it was that Adam and Eve were losing. Whether it was the musical box appearance of the set, or the acting – probably both – there was a real sense of paradise, and a most moving premonition of loss. I saw at last why the York playwright wanted a scene simply of 'Adam and Eve in Eden'.

So where to now? My own feeling is that the full-length scholarly productions have done their work. They are wonderful for bringing large groups of interested people together, and we need that every now and again, but I'm not sure that we'll learn much more from them. I think the future lies with the community and with smaller-scale experiment. But I look forward to being proved wrong.

Peter Meredith

ADDENDA: THE PLAY LISTS

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**The York Cycle: *Poculi Ludique Societas*,  
University of Toronto, 20 June 1998**

PLAY 1. 'The Fall of the Angels'. Vagabond Knight Company, with the support of The Alumnae Theatre Company, Toronto.

DIRECTOR: Jennifer Parr.

PLAY 2. 'The Creation to the Fifth Day'. Department of Drama and Theatre Arts, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.

DIRECTOR: Joel Kaplan.

PLAY 3. 'The Creation of Adam and Eve'. University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio.

DIRECTOR: Linda Dunlevy-Shackleford.

PLAY 4. 'Adam and Eve in Eden'. Department of Performing Arts, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

DIRECTOR: Natalie Crohn Schmitt.

PLAY 5. 'The Temptation and Fall'. University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

DIRECTOR: Garrett P. J. Epp.

PLAY 6. 'The Expulsion from the Garden'. Poculi Ludique Societas, Toronto.

DIRECTOR: Paul Hall.

PLAY 7. 'Cain and Abel'. University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut.

DIRECTOR: Jerry Krasser.

PLAYS 8 and 9. 'The Building of the Ark and The Flood'. Department of Theatre Arts, Towson University, Baltimore, Maryland.

DIRECTOR: Ralph Blasting.

PLAY 10. 'Abraham and Isaac'. Harlotry Players, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

DIRECTORS: Martin Walsh and Kate Mendeloff.

- PLAY 11. 'Moses and Pharaoh'. Department of Drama, Scarborough College, University of Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Kevin Wright.
- PLAY 12. 'The Annunciation'. Department of Languages and Letters, University College of Cape Breton, Sydney, Nova Scotia.  
DIRECTOR: Todd Hiscock, assisted by John Lingard.
- PLAY 13. 'Joseph's Trouble about Mary'. Duquesne University Medieval and Renaissance Players. Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.  
DIRECTOR: John Lane.
- PLAYS 14 and 15. 'The Nativity and The Shepherds'. Department of English, LeMoyne College, Syracuse, New York.  
DIRECTOR: Michael Barbour.
- PLAY 16. 'Herod and the Magi'. The York Cycle Class (Prof. A. F. Johnston), University of Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Stephanie Halldorson.
- PLAY 17. 'The Purification of the Virgin'. Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Teresa Simm.
- PLAY 18. 'The Flight into Egypt'. The Lampe Light Players, Buffalo, New York.  
DIRECTOR: David Lampe.
- PLAY 19. 'The Slaughter of the Innocents'. The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC.  
DIRECTOR: Roland Reed.
- PLAY 20. 'Christ and the Doctors in the Temple'. Pocoli Ludique Societas and Department of English, University of Leeds, UK.  
DIRECTOR: Peter Meredith.
- PLAY 21. 'The Baptism of Christ'. Département d'anglais, Université de Moncton, Moncton, New Brunswick.  
DIRECTOR: Glen Nichols.

- PLAY 22. 'The Temptation of Christ'. Durham Medieval Theatre Company, Durham, UK.  
DIRECTOR: John McKinnell.
- PLAY 23. 'The Transfiguration'. Poculi Ludique Societas, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Janet Ritch.
- PLAY 24. 'The Woman Taken in Adultery / The Death of Lazarus'. The St Mary Magdalene Players, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Doug Cowling and Viola Lang.
- PLAY 25. 'The Entry into Jerusalem'. Stratford Central Secondary School, Stratford, Ontario.  
DIRECTOR: Nancy Stotts Jones.
- PLAY 26. 'The Conspiracy'. Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Chuck Costello.
- PLAY 27. 'The Last Supper'. St Mary's Players, Brampton, Ontario.  
DIRECTOR: M. K. Piatkowski.
- PLAY 28. 'The Agony in the Garden'. Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School, London, Ontario.  
DIRECTOR: K. Reed Needles.
- PLAY 29. 'Christ before Annas and Caiaphas'. Poculi Ludique Societas, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Victoria Shepherd.
- PLAY 30. 'Dream of Pilate's Wife'. Harlotry Players, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.  
DIRECTORS: Martin Walsh and Kate Mendeloff.
- PLAY 31. 'Christ before Herod'. Willing Suspension, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.  
DIRECTOR: Jason Beals.
- PLAY 32. 'The Remorse of Judas'. Poculi Ludique Societas, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Paul Babiak.

- PLAY 33. 'The Judgment of Christ'. Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto.  
DIRECTORS: Steve Killings and Jonathan Herold.
- PLAY 34. 'The Road to Calvary'. The Conference on Education in Independent Catholic Schools, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Claudia Sommers.
- PLAY 35. 'The Crucifixion'. Sacred Stone Players, Davidson, North Carolina.  
DIRECTOR: Scot W. Myers.
- PLAY 36. 'The Death and Burial of Christ'. Department of Mathematics, University of Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Shai Cohen.
- PLAY 37. 'The Harrowing of Hell'. Department of English, Shepherd College, Shepherdstown, West Virginia.  
DIRECTOR: Thomas R. Papeika.
- PLAY 38. 'The Resurrection'. Department of English in association with The Newman Centre, University of Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Karen Sawyer.
- PLAY 39. 'Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene'. Department of Drama & Theatre Arts, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.  
DIRECTOR: Joel Kaplan.
- PLAY 40. 'The Road to Emmaus'. Poculi Ludique Societas, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Jerry Han.
- PLAY 41. 'Christ's Appearance to Thomas'. Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan.  
DIRECTOR: Gwendolyn Waltz.
- PLAY 42. 'The Ascension'. Institute for Sacred Music, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.  
DIRECTOR: Terri Cain.
- PLAY 43. 'The Pentecost'. Rosedale Presbyterian Church, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Lindsay Empringham.

PLAY 44. 'The Death of the Virgin'. This Band of Happy Pilgrims, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Glen Molto.

PLAY 45. 'The Assumption of the Virgin'. The St John's York Mills Players,  
Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Sally Armour Wotton.

PLAY 46. 'The Coronation of the Virgin'. Earl Haig Secondary School, Toronto.  
DIRECTORS: Natasha Pike and Alison Stein.

PLAY 47. 'The Last Judgment'. Handmade Performance, Toronto.  
DIRECTOR: Stephen B. Johnson.

**The York Early Music Festival:  
Eleven Plays of the York Cycle 12 July 1998**

PLAY 1. 'The Creation of the World to the Fifth Day'. York Guild of Build-  
ing with the York College of Further and Higher Education.  
DIRECTOR: Anthony Ravenhall.

PLAY 2. 'The Creation of Adam and Eve'. Parish of Wheldrake.  
DIRECTOR: Ros Francis.

PLAY 3. 'The Fall of Adam and Eve'. Poppleton Players.  
DIRECTOR: Sue Foster.

PLAY 4. 'The Flight into Egypt'. Foxwood Community Centre Players.  
DIRECTOR: Sharon Scott.

PLAY 5. 'The Temptation of Christ'. Guild of Freeman.  
DIRECTORS: Ossie Heppell and David Wilde.

PLAY 6. 'The Agony and Betrayal of Christ'. Company of Cordwainers.  
DIRECTOR: Kathleen Foster.

PLAY 7. 'The Death of Christ'. Howdenshire Live Arts for the Company of  
Butchers of the City of York.  
DIRECTOR: Mike Carter.

- PLAY 8. 'The Harrowing of Hell'. St. Luke's Church, Burton Stone Lane.  
PRODUCER: Mike Tyler. [no director listed]
- PLAY 9. 'The Incredulity of Thomas'. Guild of Scriveners.  
DIRECTOR: Philip Bowman.
- PLAY 10. 'The Ascension of Jesus Christ'. The Lords of Misrule for the Company of Merchant Taylors.  
DIRECTOR: David Crouch.
- PLAY 11. 'The Last Judgment'. York Settlement Community Players for the Company of Merchant Adventurers.  
DIRECTOR: Richard Digby Day.