Toward a New History of Medieval Theatre: Assessing the Written and Unwritten Evidence for Indigenous Performance Practices

Carol Symes

Department of History, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Société Internationale pour l'étude du Théâtre Médiéval

XIIe Congrès – Lille, 2-7 juillet 2007

A B S T R A C T

"Medieval drama" is essentially an invention of modern philology, which drew upon the models of classical literature, evolutionary biology, ethnography, and nationalism for its constructions of the medieval past. Access to a truly *medieval* theatre, therefore, requires us to eschew these expectations and categories, which still govern the study of formal dramatic documents and the larger culture which produced them, and to look very freshly at the evidence for indigenous methods of transmitting information about performance during the Middle Ages. How, and why, did some individuals and communities choose to record certain practices, while others did not? How do we tell a prescriptive text from a proscriptive one? If we grant – as we must – that the vast majority of medieval entertainments (didactic and recreational) were unscripted and improvisational, what methods can we develop in order to recover information about what was performed, when, by whom, and why? These are some of the vital questions to be addressed in this paper.

In this attempt to move us toward a new history of medieval theatre, I want to discuss two major ways in which our conceptualization of theatre *and the historical evidence for it* need to change, and then to outline just a few of the very significant gains that will be made if those changes are effected.

Here is my first point. The study of the medieval theatre does not merely consist in the study of "drama," that is the discrete, textualized artifacts which were designated as "plays" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even those scholars of medieval drama who are lucky enough to have such plays to study – and this usually means the handful of people who work on the liturgy or the legion of those who work on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (an era hardly representative of the Middle Ages as a whole) – must fight to overcome the strictures of anachronistic paradigms that judge these plays (adversely), either with respect to the Aristotelian model of classical antiquity or the walled theatre building of the era after 1576. There is still a ghostly playhouse hovering over the landscape of medieval playing, and in a variety of obvious and subtle ways, medieval theatre is only defined and validated with reference to the theatre as an architectural entity, or with respect to architectural metaphors of the kind articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin and eagerly taken up by cultural historians, who have described the early modern city as "a theatre without walls" during Carnival.[1] This image betrays the assumption that theatres, properly speaking, *have* walls – while at the same time conveying the mistaken impression that towns do not. It reveals the powerful suppositions that arise from thinking about plays as performed in spaces alien to the pursuits of everyday life.

In reality, of course, the theatres of the Middle Ages were *not* fixed structures and, even when they were, they doubled as towns or taverns or houses or halls or churches. Medieval theatres were not built. They were called into being. And this means, crucially, that scripted plays of the kind now known to us shared the same spaces, and the same audiences, as the preaching of sermons, the news of town criers, royal proclamations, public executions, religious processions, acts of worship, and plethora of other activities. Extant scripts, although extremely limited in number, nonetheless corroborate this, registering a limitless array of occasions, messages, and modes: musical dramas performed in tandem with the liturgy, bawdy Latin comedies for the amusement of students and clerics, Biblical plays that

translated sacred stories into familiar languages and scenarios, ballads and tales of heroic deeds activated by professional entertainers, obscene jokes and sketches for late-night entertainment, royal entries and pageants that dramatized power, morality plays, farces, and civic spectacles on every scale. They suggest that, in addition to the study of individual plays and their possible production(s), the study of a medieval theatre entails the study of exchanges, confluences, and ruptures between performers and audiences. It is not enough to view plays *against* an historical background, as though they were readily separable from it. Liturgical dramas used the personnel, properties, vestments, vocabulary, and symbolically-charged geography of the church to create dramatic effects; so the use of indigenous actors, local vocabularies of gesture, noise, and display, the selection of a performance venue, the observance of times and seasons with local significance – all communicated meaning to those accustomed to "reading" their environments. If medieval theatres can be comprehended as the spaces and times in which performers and audiences encountered one another, plays are the (occasionally formalized) outcome of those encounters.

This means that what went on in those theatres was conditioned only in part by the performance of plays, while the plays themselves were responses to contemporary circumstances, further conditioned by complex configurations of space and the complex perceptions of the people who occupied or visited those spaces.

In other words, the study of theatre in the Middle Ages is tantamount to the study of public life.[2] And it therefore requires that anyone interested in what medieval people did – whether in play or "for real" – needs to cultivate an interest in performance. This places an equal burden on all medievalists, because it's going to mean a lot more work. For those who study theatre *per se,* it means that it is not enough to look at plays or even at those archival documents making specific mention of obvious dramatic or festive activity; instead, one must consider all the varieties of performed, public activity that went on in a given locale before one can really posit anything meaningful about the difference between the behavior that we might label self-consciously "dramatic" or "mimetic" and the behavior which was a function of everyday life in an era when meaning was often conveyed through gesture, noise, the deployment of symbolic objects, and spatial orientation. For those medievalists who do not take theatre into

consideration – the vast majority of historians, art historians, linguists, and even some literary critics – it means considering the performative aspects of *every* source, for the basic and enormously important reason that the human actions mediated *all* the artifacts historians rely upon as evidence for "what happened," even in the most positivist von Rankian realm of history *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. This is even more necessary when approaching phenomena that would *appear* to have little to do with performance, but in which a performative element is so fundamental that it simply goes unremarked by the makers of the text – and therefore unnoticed by modern readers – because performance was encoded and presupposed by the act of writing.[3] John of Salisbury described letters formed by the pen as notation for the speaking voice. Roger Bacon classed the accentuation and punctuation of texts under the rubric of *music*, "because all these things consist in the raising and lowering of the voice and are therefore like some kind of chant." The great jurist and reformer Innocent III, according to Gerald of Wales, found it easier to concentrate while listening and caused everything to be read aloud to him. Writing and reading were difficult tasks, and had to be accomplished using all one's available resources. "Hearing the text aloud in a performance – even if the sole performer was the reader himself – was therefore the rule rather than the exception," says Michael Clanchy.[4] The medieval performer was both the consummate reader and the potential producer of texts. His or her audiences were made aware of the advantages to be gained by partaking in literate culture precisely because they were constantly hearing and seeing its effects.

Taking performance seriously, whether one is a scholar of medieval drama or not, therefore means doing more than strip-mining documents for facts. It means using performance as a category of analysis, a tool for the re-embodiment of texts which are, essentially, the residue of human interaction. Thinking about performance historically thus aids in the recovery of what was said or done by re-examining the making of the historical record on which we rely, in order to uncover the strategies, purposes, motives, and claims to authority that are revealed in the emplotment, layout, and physical appearance of the text, and the modes of reception, immediate or delayed, of the object and/or its contents. Governing this process at every stage is what ancient and medieval rhetoricians called *actio*, the delivery, the activation, the *enactment* of a message; the final and most important phase of

communication, the phase involving materialization and physicalization. *How* was something to be communicated? In what form, when, why, and where? How was the body of the enactor to be used? Would the communication be read aloud from a text and, if so, with what embellishment, gestures, tone of voice? Would an accompanying text contain a different message than that which was spoken aloud? Or was the enactor not equipped with a text of any kind? – implying that the record we have was made by someone else, at a time after the event. How many people were present at a given enactment? How many could understand the language (verbal, physical) of communication? How were enactor(s) and audience(s) situated with respect to one another, and in what type of place? The answers to these questions may not be conclusive, and it may be that they will consist of nothing more than responsible conjectures. But whether or not we succeed in recovering or establishing the *actio* of any given artifact does not alter the fact that these performance dynamics constitute evidence and are, furthermore, the forces that shaped the evidence we have.

This is the first of the two major methodological and conceptual changes to which I would like to draw attention, and which I will canvas below. The second is that *all* medievalists must cultivate a greater awareness of how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tenets of philology, literary criticism, and history continue to impact the way we study *all* texts produced in the Middle Ages. Histories of medieval drama continue to repeat, albeit with increasing nuance, the tired narrative of the Church's suppression of drama, its descent into the hell of liturgical boredom, and its eventual resurrection in the fifteenth century; and they do this with the complicity of scholars who should know better, who know that for every chance reference to a condemnation or chastisement there were thousands of plays and songs and dances that went unmentioned *because they were pervasive* and it is only when something goes wrong that we are told how the future abbot of St. Albans lost the vestments he had borrowed for a play in a fire, and so pledged himself to monastic life; or how Lambert of Liège was called on the carpet for teaching his parishioners to perform plays; or how a group of Latvians in Riga were scared off by the all-too-realistic battle scenes of "an extremely well-produced play of the prophets." Who knew that *ordines prophetarum* even *had* battle scenes? We never would have guessed, were it not for this stray reference in a chronicle,

since none of the scripts that we have contains such a scene. That is because most of the scripts we have – not only of plays, but of all medieval *acta* (court proceedings, fiscal accounts, law codes, chronicles) are *proscriptive*, not *prescriptive* documents. They are created after the fact. They intend to impose limits on the endeavors they describe, to keep them within bounds.

To acknowledge this is to stand the evidence for drama on its head. One example: the late tenth-/early eleventh-century *Regularis concordia* of Bishop Æthelwald of Winchester, together with its companion, the Winchester troper, is considered to contain the fullest record of the *Quem quæritis* liturgy for Easter, supposedly the *fons et origo* of medieval drama, which hitherto (we are told) was a static and colorless ceremony. I argue the opposite, that Æthelwald's long rubric, describing how decorously and piously the monastic performers should conduct themselves, and how quietly and reverentially they should sing, is a reaction *against* a more varied and lively dramatic praxis. It is not the beginning of a tradition; it is an attempt to put an end to it. Like most legislation, it responded to abuses, and like most legislation it probably didn't end those abuses. But it has fooled scholars of medieval theatre for four hundred years.

Paradoxically, then, the very technologies which enable the recording of some practices – whether dramatic, "paradramatic," or apparently undramatic – are instrumental in eradicating or disguising others. Writing not only preserves and facilitates, it constrains and limits. Medieval performers were keenly aware of this. The unscripted improvisations of the *commedia dell'arte* were a reaction against attempts at censorship, which means that we have no texts, and no expectation of texts for these plays. On the other side of the spectrum, most of the late-medieval cycle plays of England, and the civic Passion plays of the Continent, were transcribed in order to ensure that actors adhered to approved and orthodox scripts. The *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages*, that remarkable group of forty plays comprising a sizable portion of the dramatic canon of the fourteenth century, are preserved in a deluxe presentation manuscript copied between 1382 and 1389, the very years when a series of royal edicts banned annual confraternal assemblies of the kind for which these plays had been devised. Their original scripts, the oldest of which would have dated from 1339, no longer survive, and it is unlikely that

the Parisian guild of goldsmiths, who had produced the plays and their texts, was allowed to continue performing them. By 1402, their manuscript appears to have been handed over to Charles VI, who had restricted public performance of such plays to the Confrérie de la Passion, making the scripts of other corporations into dead letters.[5] In other words, had it not been for the fact of their suppression, the scripts of these plays might never have preserved in their present form – or at all.

Paradoxically, then, efforts to limit the power and purview of *some* entertainments have resulted in the making of the texts on which we rely for our study of all the performances thus suppressed, while creating the conditions in which others could not survive. To take a well-known example: when the Creed pageant performed annually at York was submitted to scrutiny in 1567, the Lord Mayor and his council took the precaution of asking an expert if it could be safely mounted under the new Protestant regime. Matthew Hutton, dean of York Minster cathedral, replied in the negative: 'For thoghe it was plausible XL yeares agoe, & wold now also of the ignorant sort be well liked; yet now in this happie time of the Gospell, I knowe the learned will mislike it: and how the State will beare with it, I knowe not'. The fact that the script of this pageant is missing from the official register is not coincidental; its disappearance signals that untold numbers of texts met with similar fates within a generation or two of that "happy time."[6] By the 1580s, the laws governing the official registry of playscripts in London made the licensing of certain entertainments profitable to an increasingly authoritarian state, and necessitated the suppression of others. A years or two before *Hamlet* premiered at The Globe playhouse in London, the 73-year-old antiquarian John Stow (1525-1605) looked back nostalgically to the theatre of his youth. in *A SURVAY OF LONDON. Conteyning the Originall, Antiquity, Increaſe, Moderne eſtate, and deſcription of that City*, published for the first time in 1598 and popular enough to be revised and reprinted in 1603 with an appendix quoting the entirety of William FitzStephen's famous description of London and its "sports" in 1174, since this was a city more familiar to Stow than the one he inhabited. His purpose was to demonstrate that "These or the like exercises haue beene continued till our time" and to bewail the rapidity with which temporary and impromptu playing-places had been subsumed into buildings whose names revealed their pretensions to universality – The Theatre, The Globe – but whose

licensed confines betrayed that he and his contemporaries were now living in an era of increasingly restricted civic and religious liberties. "Of late time in place of those Stage plays, hath been vsed comedies, Tragedies, and Enterludes, and Histories, both true and fayned: For the acting whereof certaine publicke places haue been erected." Struck by the sudden change, he devoted page after page to the Christmas revels, May games, Carnival celebrations, city festivals, athletic contests, religious processions, and shows, "which open pastimes in my youth, being now suppressed, worser practises within doores are to be feared."[7] At the same time, we know that entrepreneurs' desire to circumscribe other acting companies' access to their approved playbooks meant that some plays would not be published so long as they remained in a repertory, in order to maintain a semblance of copyright; Andrew Gurr estimates that over half of the plays produced by Shakespeare's company during the productive years of 1594-1600 have "been lost without a trace."[8] These measures could not stop rival troupes from performing pirated versions of protected plays, nor did they prevent the theatres' clowns from speaking more than was set down for them, as Hamlet was to complain. But they do mean that we have far fewer scripts than there were plays and – another paradox – a great deal of scripted material that may never have been performed.

THE MODERN ORIGINS OF MEDIEVAL DRAMA

The scripts of medieval plays, packaged and conveyed to us via scholarly editions and theatre histories, have been the objects of analysis and interpretation by generations of readers over the course of many centuries. As such, they are not really the products of the Middle Ages. They are available for our consideration thanks to certain formal or freakish characteristics that recommended them to the attention of bibliophiles, cataloguers, and literary critics, generations of whom are responsible for constructing the æsthetic framework within which certain texts are considered specimens of medieval "literature" or "drama," while others are not. We are their heirs, and their hostages.

Many of the earliest scholars of medieval literature – of which medieval theatre is misleadingly considered a subcategory – were motivated by proto-nationalist loyalties, as eager to colonize their own

European heritage as their contemporaries were to make claims on the Orient, Africa, or the Indies. Theirs was, in more ways than one, an Age of Discovery. In fact, the search for the "origins" of particular literary and cultural traditions in the manuscripts of the Middle Ages was a heuristic project whose beginnings are discernible barely a generation after the advent of print, predating even the conquest of the New World. In 1491, the German humanist Konrad Celtes (1459-1508) "discovered" the Latin plays of the canoness Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (*c.* 935-1001/2), hailing her as the Saxon Sappho and printing an edition of her works a decade later. Albrecht Dürer was commissioned to engrave a portrait for the frontispiece.[9] This was the eve of the Reformation, and the Counter-Reformation. Among other upheavals, that "happy time" (*pace* the censor of the York "Creed Play") produced a *diaspora* of medieval books, which now began to circulate well beyond the scriptoria in which they had been produced, encountering readers unfamiliar with the traditions in which they had long been manufactured, preserved, and read. For most medieval texts were originally copied and eventually bound into books alongside other texts; they were not sold and circulated, as printed books and pamphlets were, in individualized formats. And because they were usually intended for communities of readers who were already familiar with them, texts were not always adequately labeled or easily distinguishable from other texts. Indeed, the logic of a given book's organization, or the principles underlying the selection of its contents, could be baffling. Sometimes, a group of texts were deemed to have a shared affinity and were collected together: saints' lives, sermons, theological treatises, advice manuals, chronicles, love letters. Others found themselves sharing a binding because the parchment folios on which they had been copied were roughly the same size. Still other books were miscellanies or *florilegia*, gatherings of texts culled from other codices according to the eclectic tastes of the copyist or his patron. By the end of the seventeenth century, the concentration of these richly varied manuscripts in great private collections – the components of Europe's nascent national libraries – called for systematic efforts to create a series of generic categories into which their now alien and confusing contents could be apportioned. Increasingly, this became part of an intensified effort to stake out cultural territory that would ground the sovereignty of

emerging states. The appropriation of vernacular languages and their medieval literary manifestations

was a key component of this project.[10]

France may serve as an example. In 1655, the alchemist Pierre Borel (*c.* 1620- 1671) published

an etymological dictionary of Old French, the *Tresor de recherches et antiquitez gauloises et françoises,*

based on a word-list derived from his readings in medieval manuscripts.[11] Following up on Borel's

"discovery" of certain "rare and curious things," many of a seemingly salacious nature, Étienne Barbazan

strove to rescue a number of medieval texts from the twin fates of historical oblivion and alleged

obscenity by demonstrating that they were the work of poets "whose character was, at bottom, the same

as that which distinguishes those of today," artifacts whose venerable antiquity "proves that Poetry is not

at all a new thing among the French." If these early poets were ignorant of Aristotle and the approved

forms of classical antiquity, they made up for this by exhibiting a "genius" indigenous to themselves and

native to all the French, "naturally gay, light-hearted, and droll." At the same time, their French language

alone could be said to have remained faithful to the pure Latin from which it had sprung, and from which

other European languages -- including the discredited "jargons" of Provence, Languedoc, and Gascony --

had long since departed, or merely borrowed.[12]

If Barbazan's linguistic chauvinism differed little from that of his contemporaries, his approach to

the manuscript record was remarkably organic and insightful. Although noting anachronistically that

medieval poets' use of familiar verse-forms made them look just "like the moderns," he strove to

convince his audience that those aspects of the ancestral French vocabulary that had been dismissed as

"barbarous" were not inferior, just *different.* They furnished poof that "our forefathers" were more

straightforward and direct, more in touch with the natural world and more comfortable with the

juxtaposition of plain speech and pious sentiment. Their earthy mixture of scatalogy and eschatology was

mirrored in the homogeneity of a culture that was open to all, its playful interactions expressed in forms

that modern readers needed to learn "to hear," rather than to read. He characterized the poetry of the

period as quintessentially participatory, requiring the support and industry of entire communities, or

designed to be shared among friends, augmenting the entertainments that fostered hospitality and good-will. "There must have been a need for a great many plays (*pièces*) of this kind, because in all companies where anyone might find himself, it was the custom for each one to sing a Song, or recount a story." He quoted evidence from the fabliaux he had found to prove his point; and he included, among his chosen specimens of thirteenth-century artistry, the tale "About Brownie, the Priest's Cow," now known to have been composed by Jehan Bodel (see Chapter Three).[13] Perhaps most strikingly, Barbazan asserted that medieval poetry was inherently theatrical. "We will never find, among the Works which have come down to us, dramatic poetry of the kind resembling that which is performed today in our Theatres," he admitted, but rather many "types of Plays (*Pièces*)," some augmented by tournaments and festivals, some interrupted by entr'actes "in which a fool, that is a jester, would appear on the stage, saying whatever came to him at that moment, by his own inspiration," such interludes being "signaled in the margins by these words: *Hic stultus loquitur. Ici le fol parle.*" Fundamentally, too, Barbazan recognized that modern performance conditions were irrelevant to medieval entertainment. "All these activities were performed, then, beyond the Theatre. Was it a matter of building a town, a tower, a dwelling? Masons, carpenters, and other workers would have constructed it on the spot. . . . That is why a large number of people were necessary for the performance of these types of Plays."[14]

Making its appearance in the format of the three-volume novel then coming into vogue, Barbazan's collection was published in time to exert influence over the likes of a young Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803) or a Marquis Donatien Alphonse François de Sade (1740-1814). Yet his fervent hope that it would demolish widespread public prejudice against the robust medieval vocabulary "of so many words, so energetic and expressive," terms "that we no longer dare to utter," was not to be fulfilled.[15] Nor was his endorsement of the essentially aural, performative, and dramatic aspects of Old French poetry to be received in a temperate climate. In 1779, a decade before the Revolution, Pierre Jean Baptiste le Grand d'Aussy (1737-1800) insisted that "the true origin of the theatre in France" resided more discretely in a handful of texts abstracted from among thousands of similar candidates in the books

of the Bibliothèque du Roi, thus establishing the pedigree of four plays from Arras – and severely limiting the modern genre of medieval vernacular drama.[16]

Le Grand d'Aussy's own assessment of his chosen prototypes of "modern" "French" "theatre" reveals strict criteria at work, criteria which probably curtailed the scope of his investigations to two or three of the several hundred codices available for his perusal, in which he identified four of the plays from Arras (the fifth, *Le garçon et l'aveugle,* either did not pass under his gaze or failed the litmus test of "true" theatricality). But only one met with his approval: the "charming pastoral" of Adam de la Halle, the *Jeu de Robin et de Marion* -- although he also sanctioned the portion of that poet's *Jeu de la feuillée* which survived in one miscellany, described as "Le mariage d'Adam." He altogether deplored "the absurd genre" of comic pastiche pioneered by other designated plays in that same manuscript collection, the *Courtois d'Arras* and Rutebeuf's *Miracle de Théophile,* blaming them for "the bad taste" exhibited by the farces of the later Middle Ages, whose artistic progeny still flaunted themselves on the stages of his own day. (This reads like a direct disparagement of Barbazan, who had cited the "exquisite taste" of certain noblemen, scientists, and "great men" of letters in support of his earlier endorsement of similar works.[17]) Le Grand d'Aussy was also unimpressed by the *Jeu de saint Nicolas* of Jehan Bodel, copied side by side with the more palatable works of Jehan's Arrageois successor, Adam.[18]

It is worth noting that a more favorable review of Jehan's dramatic artistry had appeared a few years before, when the play received its first mention outside the manuscript in which it is copied. But this notice also measured its praise with a modern yardstick: preparing the sale catalogue in which its manuscript was described, Guillaume de Bure tantalized prospective buyers by comparing the *Jeu de saint Nicolas* to Corneille's *Le Cid.*[19] (Would that Barbazan, with his more catholic tastes, had seen this manuscript! But it was only acquired for the king's library after his death.) Nor were such æsthetic judgments the only impossible standards to which medieval plays and other texts were now held. When a translation of selections from Le Grand d'Aussy's œuvre was published in England in 1796, it was with the justification that the contents of these manuscripts, "written in a language which at that period was

common to France and England, may be considered as equally connected with the literary history of both countries." Their French editor was accused of being overly "anxious to establish the pretensions of his countrymen to priority of romantick invention" and chastised for his "violent invectives against the English nation," who fervently claimed that their hero, King Arthur, was greater than the Frenchman's Charlemagne.[20] The battle had been joined: at issue were modernity, the cultural wealth of nations, and the definition of national character. Enthusiastically echoing the assessment of De Bure in 1843, Onésime Leroy exclaimed over the "revolution" that must account for the differences between the *Jeu de saint Nicolas* and the twelfth-century *Ludus sancti Nicholai* of Hilarius, the earlier play being "nothing but a bizarre amalgam of two languages and of uncertain beliefs, without unity, without nationality, without any sort of heroism," while the latter was truly representative of "those generous warriors, our ancestors," and must therefore have been written during the reign of Saint-Louis, who "without doubt" was figured in the play's angelic messenger. As the title of his study suggests, he considered the history of France to be mirrored in the history of its theatre: these were *Époques de l'histoire de France en rapport avec le théâtre français*, which were culminating in the marvelous achievements of his own time. Thus he held up the play's crusading themes as an inspiration to his countrymen who had so recently taken up the white man's burden in Africa, asking what "Frenchman worthy of that name could learn of it with indifference," should a conversion like that of Jehan's pagan king come to pass in Algiers, through the good offices of imperialism. At the same time, however, he confessed himself nonplussed by the "feeble" comedy and the loose morals of the *Jeu de la feuillée* ("let us not admire *everything* about our fathers"), yet was cheerfully able to console himself with the knowledge that its author, the "troubadour of the North" must truly have derived his inspiration form the Midi, his work being so "so gay, so lively, so Provençal." To the charge of the South he also laid the "insulting frivolity" with which Adam's *Jeu de Robin et de Marion* dealt with sexual indiscretion, going so far as to insist that the play must have been the proximate cause of the Sicilian Vespers uprising in Palermo in 1282.[21]

It is important to mention here that Le Grand d'Aussy had thrown down a gauntlet to galvanize theatre historians of LeRoy's generation, as well as our own, asserting "that these are not by any means

the only old plays that are to be found in the manuscripts, if anyone wanted to dig for them."[22] To this day, his challenge has not been taken up. Charlotte Stern, in her book on *The Theatre of Medieval Castile,* observes that most of the evidence for medieval theatre "has been lost or still lies entombed in archives," and she is quite right.[23] This is not for want of looking: the positive identification of medieval plays still requires that they resemble modern plays in content, form, and appearance; so scholars scouring manuscripts for texts labeled *ludus, ordo, Spiel, jeu, play* will go away unsatisfied; readers trained to look for rubrics, stage directions or *didascalia*, character designations, and other signs of dramatic apparatus will find only a few scripts to meet their expectations. Even were we to concede, rashly, that the other texts alongside which these few modern-looking plays were copied cannot provide us with evidence for the workings of medieval theatre – texts similarly designed to record or facilitate performances – we can be reasonably certain that the great libraries of Europe, whose contents were catalogued in the nineteenth century by the successors of Le Grand d'Aussy and his counterparts in other countries, harbor scores of unrecognized plays.

But nineteenth-century researchers had different agendas and methods. They also had more material. In France, the Revolution took the processes of cultural dispersion, destruction, and patriation to new levels. The dissolution of the religious orders in 1790 flooded European markets with medieval books and documents, only some of which found their ways into the new municipal libraries and the new national archives of France. The Bibliothèque de Roi became, eventually, the Bibliothèque Impériale and then the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and its manuscripts moved to their present home in the renovated palace of Cardinal Richelieu in 1868 (they have so far escaped transport to the new Site-François-Mitterand). In 1821, Louis XVIII founded the École Nationale des Chartes, whose students were trained to rank and catalogue surviving artifacts according to an enlightened system designed, ironically enough, by the Benedictine congregation of Saint-Maur, recently eradicated. Work continued apace, increasingly carried forward by men whose romantic attachment to the Middle Ages was filtered, directly and indirectly, through the *Scienza Nuova* of Giambattista Vico (1688-1744), which entered the

intellectual bloodstream in 1824, thanks to Jules Michelet's French translation, and *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, published by Charles Darwin in 1859. Disciples once removed of the new schools of evolutionary biology, ethnography, and anthropology, the new philologists of the late nineteenth century were simultaneously attracted, repelled, and puzzled by the textual artifacts of the Middle Ages.   How could their own civilization have produced such strange literary species, and how could they explain the evolution and extinction of dramatic forms that looked so disturbingly like those odd practices being studied by Bronislaw Malinowski and James Frazer, among the primitive peoples of the world?   how best to establish the scientific basis on which the *fait accompli* of European cultural supremacy might rest?   They practiced their own form of "natural selection," via the collation of manuscript variants and their genealogical declension, tasks accompanied by painstaking edition and explanation. In their capable hands, the plays of the Middle Ages were captured and restrained, caged like exotic animals in the new zoological gardens of European capitals, tamed like curious, once-warlike peoples glimpsed in the state-of-the-art "natural habitats" of exhibitions and museums. The eminent Shakespearean E. K. Chambers was among those who saw a parallel between the primitive rites being studied by contemporary anthropologists and the folk drama of the Middle Ages. In his two-volume study of *The Mediæval Stage* (1903), he argued that an indigenous, largely pagan, drama did co-exist with Church-sponsored religious drama during the Middle Ages; however, he went on to observe, the advancement of civilization would eventually make both varieties of medieval drama obsolete. Not until Harold C. Gardiner published *Mysteries' End* (1946) was it contended that medieval dramatic conventions continued to be influential during the Renaissance, and did not die a "natural" death in the wake of the "evolutionary progress" of humanism.[24]

This process of textual selection is aptly demonstrated by the stern treatment meted out to the earliest play with a vernacular component included in the "canon" of medieval dramatic texts. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the bits and pieces of medieval liturgical manuscripts edited by Charles-Edmond-Henri de Coussemaker (1805-1876), the founder of what his contemporaries called "musical

archeology" and the first to hail Adam de la Halle as the progenitor of modern music, sometimes had to

be tightly corseted in order to fit the generic definition of liturgical drama that he helped to develop.

Hence a "facsimile" page of the so-called *Sponsus* from the abbey of Saint-Martial at Limoges, a

dramatization of the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins and their encounter with the allegorical

Bridegroom (Matthew 25: 1-13) datable to around 1100, was in fact doctored by De Coussemaker to give

the impression that a clear distinction could be made between the authentically "French" Biblical *drama*

and the otherwise unevolved Latin *liturgy* of the Church from which it had triumphantly emerged, like a

promising organism pulling itself out of the muck.[25] The influence of *The Origin of Species,* still hot off

the presses, is almost palpable. Toward the beginning of the century, by contrast, the parameters of

theatre had been more pliable. In 1817, François-Just-Marie Raynouard justly assumed that the vernacular

and Latin components of this artifact worked together to form a single dramatic entity, and that both

belonged to a larger discussion about troubadour lyric and the history of Occitania, since the vernacular

featured in the play, and in a number of devotional songs included in the same manuscript, is actually

Provençal.[26] By 1860, however, this sort of argument no longer seemed to make sense.

There were dissenting voices. In 1867, the young Marius Sepet (1845-1925) made a first attempt

to argue that the medieval Church was actually the cradle of modern theatre, a project culminating

decades later with the publication of *Les origines catholiques du théâtre moderne* (Paris, 1901). Sepet

noted that a twelfth-century copy of the well-known Christmas sermon commonly attributed to St.

Augustine was rubricated for performance, presumably by a number of actors. In an important article

subtitled "Études sur les origines du théâtre au moyen âge," he contended that the many *ordines*

prophetarum of the Middle Ages (like the *ludus prophetarum ordinatissimus* performed in Henry of

Livonia's Riga) were derived from this sermon, and went on to contend that the sermon itself was a kind

of play. He also argued for the dramatic possibilities of other texts, pointing in particular to a rubricated

gospel lesson for Palm Sunday and comparing it to the Anglo-Norman plays known as the *Seinte*

Resureccion and the *Ordo representacionis Ade,* or *Jeu d'Adam*. He saw these – reasonably – as

various ways of scripting Biblical stories for performance, and drew an analogy with the dialogic singing of the Passion during Holy Week, "in our own time."[27]

Yet Sepet's reading of the dramatic record, catholic in every sense, was largely ignored. In France, the multi-volume *Histoire du théâtre en France* of Louis Petit de Julleville (1841-1900)*,* published between 1880 and 1886, proceeded along the lines proposed by Le Grand D'Aussy, but with more scientific precision and patriotic fervor. As he declared in the opening sentence of the first volume, "There were two theatres, there were two dramatic genres in France, during the Middle Ages: one destined to edify the people while, at the same time, amusing them; the other to amuse, without claiming to edify." The first consisted of liturgical and Biblical dramas, beginning with the *Jeu d'Adam*; the second of the plays identified by Le Grand d'Aussy, plays now described as "often badly put together, or at least put together in a bizarre and capricious manner" but to be applauded for successfully "sloughing off" the sanctimony of Latin so as "to speak henceforth in the common, the national language." Hence the *Jeu de saint Nicolas* was "incoherent," but it was also an attempt to put modern dramatic theories into practice, six hundred years *avant la lettre*, while the *Jeu de Robin et de Marion* was "the oldest and most graceful of our comic operas" and the *Jeu de la feuillée* "an Aristophanic satire, in which the ancient comedy of the Athenians seems to live again," Attic and Gallic wit seasoning one another.[28] It was comedy, in fact, that united the ancient with the modern: whereas the serious drama of Petit de Julleville's own time bore (happily) no resemblance to medieval religious drama, he saw these few thirteenth-century comedies as providing the missing link between the classical past and the present, "thereby explaining, in large part, the incomparable perfection attained by the comic genre in France," where "the reconciliation of otherwise disparate names, Athens and Arras" took place.[29] However, the cultural products of both these venerable towns were judged to be equally, irretrievably, dead. As Petit de Julleville later observed, plays cannot exist outside of a theatre: "We no longer play the Greeks; we no longer produce Sophocles, nor Aristophanes. They no longer exist for the theatre." Old plays must accept their fate; they must become "dramatic literature."[30]

A half-century later, Gustave Cohen (1879-1958) would attempt to reverse part of this trend by restoring the very scripts singled out by Le Grand d'Aussy to the dramatic repertoire of the modern theatre, staging meticulously-researched productions with a troupe comprised of his own students at the Sorbonne, the Théophiliens. Yet he, like his academic predecessors Gaston Paris (1839-1903) and Joseph Bédier (1864-1938), and his colleague Edmond Faral (1882-1958), he would continue to maintain the distinctions that had now become central to the construction of French identity and its "national language," insisting above all that religious drama in general, and Latin liturgical drama in particular, were not part of the national heritage. In different ways, Cohen and Faral also attempted to distance the few indigenous and authentic "French" comedies from the many Latin comedies produced at the same time, some in the same (French-speaking) places. Medieval French comedy might claim kinship with the classical age of the Greeks, but medieval Latin "comedy" (in quotation marks) was merely a didactic exercise, founded on a misunderstanding of classical genres. Furthermore, it was held to be obvious that Latin-speaking clerics would always be hostile to the vernacular arts of the jongleur.[31]

These views persist today in most scholarship that touches – or neglects to touch – on the earliest French plays. In the late 1970s, two Anglophone scholars partitioned the landscape of medieval French theatre into "religious drama" and "comic drama" without so much as a comment on the assumptions underlying this division.[32] Meanwhile, Francophone scholars have continued to crown one or another of the early plays with the laurels of modernity and nationalist sentiment. In 1998, it was the Anglo-Norman *Jeu d'Adam* that emerged as "our first masterpiece of French theatre,"[33] although the Franco-Flemish *Jeu de saint Nicolas* is a more perennial prize-winner, declared "thoroughly secular" and said to display "almost complete indifference to the traditions of liturgical drama,"[34] hailed as presiding over the birth of "the French theatre."[35] *Le garçon et l'aveugle* also has its advocates, the most eminent being Faral, for whom it represented the beginnings of modern comedy.[36] And in 2003, the Comédie-Française put forward its own favored candidate while simultaneously congratulating itself on rescuing from oblivion "the work of our first secular playwright," Adam de la Halle. Yet the stubborn fact remains that these

plays are not "French" in any sense save the linguistic; the plays from Arras are in the Picard vernacular, not the Francien of the Île-de-France, and Arras itself was only marginally "French" for the whole of the Middle Ages; the two early Biblical plays in Anglo-Norman, the *Jeu d'Adam* and the *Seinte Resureccion* were probably composed in Angevin England or her Continental territories. This merely underscores the extent to which the modern construction of medieval literatures has succeeded in convincing us that languages and their textual manifestations are national possessions. When Paul Meyer (1840-1917) was dispatched by the French government to inventory French-language manuscripts in the libraries of Great Britain, the very title of the resulting catalogue published in 1871 suggested that those texts, although mostly composed and produced in England, were exiles in a foreign land. They were "Manuscript Documents of the Ancient Literature of France Preserved in the Libraries of Great Britain."[37]

The continuing result of these powerful teleologies, largely accepted on either side of the Channel and on both sides of the Atlantic, have meant that even the (few) sophisticated twentieth-century narratives of medieval theatre history (most of which have been written by scholars in England or North America) have taken little account of vernaculars other than Middle English, and have not grappled with the fact of a coeval "secular" or comic theatre and a substantial vernacular religious theatre subsisting side by side with Latin liturgical drama and Latin comedy. Instead, theatricality has been construed as inversely proportionate to Latinity.[38] Fundamentally, in fact, the coexistence of many different dramatic genres, in many linguistic registers, threatens at every turn to undermine the careful construction of medieval theatre as evolving from simple to complex forms, or from Latin dogmatism to vernacular independence, constructions whose only partial demolition has left a great deal of rubble strewn about the field. It is still customary to assume that the existence of a text marks a point of origin, customary to keep different species of medieval entertainment in hermeneutically-sealed compartments, and to study earlier materials in light of the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

This teleology of medieval theatre history rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between plays and scripts, performance and texts, innovation and notation. The implications of recent research in medieval musicology, which has established that the "late" appearance of musical

notation does not in any way suggest the late development of the liturgical repertoires it recorded, is entirely relevant here. Neumes, a type of musical shorthand, were instrumental in stabilizing the chant tradition, just as Carolingian miniscule was essential to the diffusion and standardization of texts. Both notations, for music and for words, were developed at about the same time and were propagated by a central authority, and both were designed to supplement memory. However, neither replaced oral instruction, and neither was relied upon to convey all the information necessary for performance, although their use would result in a certain uniformity of performance practice in certain places, notably the heartland of Charlemagne's empire.[39] In most cases, then, the execution and transmission of performance practices, even within the Church, were not reliant on texts. And for at least a century or two after the development of new recording technologies, their use remained very much a matter of individual or community initiative, as at Saint-Martial of Limoges (where the *Sponsus* was written down around 1100).

This means that liturgical drama does not make a belated appearance. Quite the contrary: it appears in writing at the very earliest opportunity, as soon as the notation to facilitate its transcription is invented. But the invention of notation does not imply the invention of music or drama; it implies that the music and the drama are already so pervasive, important, and varied that they were occasionally described in writing and conveyed to future generations. Moreover, medieval neums are merely a species of notational shorthand; the liturgical books that contain them were reference tools for experienced performers who continued to learn most of what they needed to know about performance from ongoing local traditions. Therefore, if many early liturgical dramas look "primitive" or stark, it is because only the most basic information is being conveyed in writing. To provide detailed instructions about costuming, props, gestures, and inflections to men and women whose lives were devoted to ritualized behavior would be to waste time and parchment teaching one's proverbial grandmother to suck eggs When such instructions *are* included, it rather suggests that a practice is either new and unfamiliar, or in danger of being forgotten (see below).

To summarize: the textual remains of medieval rituals and entertainments have continued, down to the end of the twentieth century, to be peculiarly impervious to important scholarship in fields outside

the purview of traditional philology and cultural anthropology, and have even dodged meaningful contact

with postmodern critical theory, despite the direct applicability of Paul Zumthor's notions of *mouvance*

and *variance* in the voicing of medieval texts, or Bernard Cerquilini's scathing denunciation of

philology's Procrustean approach to the edition of manuscripts. Perhaps this is because few medieval

plays exist in more than one copy, thereby seeming to simplify the task of the editor; perhaps it is because

of the plays' own apparent simplicity and naïveté. So much, indeed, has seemed to depend on

appearances, on the supposed transparency of the medieval script. In order to qualify as a play, a text has

to look like a play: it has to be labeled*,* it has to have *dramatis personae* and *didascalia*, it has to meet

certain standards of dramatic representation and impersonation. If it flouts the conventions by

demonstrating a disturbing hybridity, it is dismissed as marginal or otherwise alienated from the approved

dramatic repertoire of the Middle Ages. Because this repertoire has been depicted as narrow, static, and

primitive *by definition*, maverick texts have been declassified lest they interrupt the magisterial narrative

of medieval drama's ascent from primitive folkways and stiff ecclesiastical rituals to the "happy time"

when it was finally overthrown by the "favoured races" of the Renaissance, brandishing their translations

of Aristotle's *Poetics.* The result is an ongoing, self-perpetuating effort to maintain the proprieties of

modern generic constructs. In much the same way that early modern civic authorities had regulated the

publication of plays, modern scholarship has set about the regulation of medieval theatre.

EVIDENCE FOR THE INSCRIPTION OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICE DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

Everything about the material fact of a dramatic text should be regarded as surprising: its

manufacture, its tenuous survival, and its later designation as an object of academic interest. All three of

these processes suggest something about a document's transmission and purpose at the time of its

making, not to mention the uses to which it was put by later generations of readers and editors. However,

these processes do not necessarily reveal anything about the circumstances behind the composition of

what exists, for us, as a text. Those few, unusual artifacts that we call medieval plays are visible only as

the result of certain accidents and initiatives, in varying degrees of cooperation. Their relationship to what was actually accomplished in performance is difficult to determine. Of course, the same can be said for most pre-modern texts; and in many fields of endeavor, this recognition of the complex relationship between orality and literacy, performance and writing, has transformed the way that scholars evaluate the evidence of the past, particularly with respect to those traditions which were largely responsible for safeguarding a society's heritage, history, and customs: music, poetry, and law. Gregory Nagy, for example, has distinguished among three varieties of written artifact: the *transcript*, defined as "a record of performance, even an aid for performance, but not the equivalent of performance," the *script*, "a prerequisite for performance," and the *scripture*, the text that does not "even presuppose performance."[40] Most modern texts fall into the third category; most ancient and medieval texts were of the first or second type, more often the first.

The application of these ideas to the evidence of plays and their scripts has the potential to transform the study of medieval theatre, since the texts of most medieval plays are the remnants of a creative process that moves in the opposite direction from the one we have come to recognize and expect, given the theatrical conditions of our own age. In the twenty-first century, as by the late sixteenth, a play takes shape in the mind of a playwright, whose craft is expressed in writing, in a script. This script is then marketed to a theatrical producer, who enlists the talents of a theatre company, which distributes parts to actors, and finally tries to capture the attention of an audience, who pay to see a certain performance in a particular venue at a fixed time. Throughout the Middle Ages, by contrast, a play usually took shape within a certain community: a monastery, court, town, village, school, confraternity, guild, parish, settlement, manor, neighborhood, family, faction. It was the public resources and needs, the community's stories and spaces and people and pastimes that would determine what was eventually performed. This performance may or may not have involved conscious role-playing, or even sustained efforts on the part of participants to disguise themselves, or to personify other characters. It may not have depended on narrative coherence of a kind recognizable to us. It would rarely involve the invocation, or memorization, of a text.

As a rule of thumb, I therefore suggest that it was only in the course of the trajectory outlined above that someone might decide that a particular performance, or performance tradition, should be preserved for posterity in some form.   Yet whether that form would resemble one of those manuscript texts that have so far been identified as "plays" or even "records of early drama" is by no means certain, as I shall demonstrate below. Moreover, the vast majority of medieval plays, however broadly or narrowly defined, were never thus recorded. This is overwhelmingly the case when we consider the work of entertainment professionals, who had a vested interest in keeping their material unscripted and flexible, and who have left very few traces of that work in writing. They prepared routines and gags, sketches and bits, tricks and acts: they did not, for the most part, memorize texts (although one of the scripts associated with Arras looks tantalizingly close to being a performer's annotated aide-mémoire). This is because professional entertainers had to be ready to perform anywhere, at any time, for any audience; their livelihood depended on the immediacy of impromptu displays and spontaneous rewards. The scripted passing-of-the-hat in the mid-fifteenth-century morality *Mankind* provides a belated glimpse of this and other standard practices, encased in parchment, a witness to what had worked in the unscripted past and might continue to work in the scripted future.[41]   It is an isolated example, proof in itself that most of the actors who performed such plays would not have relied on such scripts, learning their crafts by watching and listening as they traveled and worked, singly or in couples, occasionally in larger groups. Most would have had other money-making skills, and as a result were often indistinguishable from, or interchangeable with, singers, dancers, trumpeters, tricksters, acrobats, heralds, clowns, and other itinerants. The catch-all term was apt: *jongleur,* "juggler." Certainly, some of these men and women could and did read; some could also write, a skill which (unlike reading) was rare in the Middle Ages – although not so rare among the jongleurs of Arras, many of whom were actually clerics. For it is important to observe that the clergy, too, were professional performers, and in the thirteenth century would have learned their psalmody and the symbolic language of the liturgy from boyhood training, and not necessarily from books.[42]

The only occasional reliance of professional performers on the practice of writing is therefore one reason why the earliest manuscripts of nearly all extant medieval plays, including the sung Latin dramas of the Church, long postdate the performance traditions to which they sketchily refer. Yet the standard histories of medieval theatre have presumed the opposite, predicating their narratives on the assumption that plays depend on texts, and that texts precede performance: if something was not scripted, it never happened. But, as I will demonstrate below, careful scripting was the exception and not the rule, especially prior to 1300 and very often thereafter. A more illuminating approach to medieval play scripts, as to other medieval documents, thus begins with the premise that the text is the vestigial remains of a lively praxis which was either being tamed by the imposition of an official template or translated into a new medium, to husband treasured customs in forgetful times. The advent of a text may indicate the invention of a *literary* genre, that is a textual one, but it does not mark the origins of a tradition. Often, in fact, it reveals an attempt to capture something in writing, as part of an effort to promote, appropriate, or control.

What can the extant manuscripts of plays tell us about the way that performance practices were transmitted, up to and throughout the formative thirteenth century? What kinds of information do they provide? What kind of information is it reasonable for us to expect them to provide? Hitherto, modern expectations have depicted most of these scripts as dramatically impoverished, or uncommunicative, while the small number of surviving plays has been construed as evidence of ecclesiastical disapprobation, or even a virtual depletion of popular dramatic initiative. Yet this is, in part, because the juxtaposition of "plays" with other texts has been ignored, or deemed irrelevant to our understanding of how performance traditions were passed down in writing. By extension, the absence of stage directions, or their scarcity, has been taken as an indication that many plays, in performance, would have been wooden and lifeless. In some cases the lack of specific indication as to the circumstances of performance has been used to argue that the plays were not performed at all. If we set these presumptions aside, and focus our attention on the available evidence, what do we learn?

I. Even those plays recorded in writing are not apt to survive. Medieval texts unprotected by the binding of a codex, or by the covering of leather cases or wooden chests, were fragile, and it is highly likely that most scripted entertainments were exposed to the elements, traveling in single sheets, booklets, or scrolls of parchment. The very popular Latin comedy *Pamphilus*, which survives in an astonishing number of copies (some 170), was transmitted in this format and actually gave rise to the term "pamphlet"; given that the survival rate of such pamphlets is very low, one is invited to imagine that hundreds more copies were originally in circulation but did not outlive hard usage. Three out of the seven surviving copies of the Latin comedy *Babio*, to take another example, seem to have seen long service in the schoolroom of Lincoln Cathedral, and are so frail and tattered as a result that they were later bound together into a single codex, to which even the most recent editor of the comedy was denied full access. [43] And the very same qualities that made these booklets or scrolls easily portable in the Middle Ages makes them vulnerable to theft today: the oldest known actor's role, once in the British Library, has been missing since 1971; the next oldest, long preserved in Switzerland, has also vanished.[44]

In the age of print, when the quantity of scripted plays available for our perusal certainly increases, we still have only a fraction of the plays that were replicated using this new medium. And many scripts were not printed at all, hence the plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries that are known to have been composed but do not survive. Furthermore, the fact that *hardly any* of the other documents supporting the production of plays still exist – the thousands of plats, prompt-books, and actors' roles used in the theatres of London between 1576 and 1642 – is further proof that theatrical texts do not fair well in the hands of actors, or the hands of time.[45] An unusually quantifiable sample of evidence from late-medieval France confirms this: of the fifty-two plays listed in the catalogue of a bookseller in Tours at the end of the fifteenth century, only twenty have survived to this day and another twenty-one are unattested anywhere else (mention of the remaining lost eleven is made in various other sources). One can therefore estimate the survival rate of all late medieval plays at forty percent, but the percentage becomes much lower if we look at the manuscript record alone: nine of the twenty extant

plays mentioned in the catalogue survive *only* in printed copies. This means that a mere eleven of the fifty-two named plays have survived in singular manuscripts, suggesting that less than twenty percent of all late medieval plays recorded in manuscript have come down to us.[46]

These figures account only for plays from the very last century of Middle Ages, when performance was more often supported by texts. In the earlier period, as I have argued elsewhere, both the scripting and the transcription of medieval entertainments were rare practices; contemporary identification of discrete texts as "plays" was rarer still. How many of the plays performed in Europe, even in highly literate communities like monasteries and cathedral schools, were supported by scripts, or helpfully identified as *ludus, ordo, jeu* in extant scripts? We recall that Geoffrey de Gorron, abbot of St. Albans, made his monastic profession after the vestments borrowed from that abbey for his play about St. Catherine were burned in the fire that ravaged his rooms the night after the performance. Was the play scripted, and was that script also burned? (No mention is made of it.) If it was scripted, in what language was it written? How did the boys who acted it learn their parts? Was it usual for "this sort of play, which we commonly called 'a miracle'" to take on a textual form? Would a group of clerics need a script to perform a dramatic sequence so familiar to them from other productions, not to mention from lections and sermons?

The mere fact that the overwhelming majority of all designated medieval plays exist only in single copies suggests that all are hovering on the edge of extinction. The *Jeu de saint Nicolas* of Jehan Bodel, that *fons et origo* from which modernity, comedy, and Frenchness is sometimes said to spring, would not exist at all were it not for the mysterious impulse that led to its inclusion in the manuscript of Adam de la Halle's work, copied nearly a century after its composition. And were it not for this remarkable commission, paid for by a patron whose identity cannot be established with certainty, Adam's *Jeu de la feuillée,* featured in the same collection, would be known to us only in two abbreviated versions of the opening scene, preserved in other manuscripts. This is to leave aside, for the moment, the academic caprice with which the medieval plays so far identified have been sought.

II. Most of the scripts that do survive provide only the most basic information about performance. Perhaps the best example of medieval scripts' economy of expression is the Castilian *Auto de los reyes magos*. This is an Epiphany play, and so the basic plot would have been familiar to most Christians. But it was an Epiphany play with a contemporary political twist, using the journey and enlightenment of the magi kings as a metaphor for the recent achievements of the Reconquista. Moreover, it was couched in the same local vernacular that would become, in the hands of Alphonso X "el Sabio" and his translators, a significant written instrument of cultural and political authority in the course of the following century. It was written down, then, because it was attempting to accomplish something new. However, it was apparently assumed by the copyist that future performers would need only the most minimal instruction; that is, they would need only to learn the words that were said or sung. So the words are all we have. There are no rubrics or *didascalia* of any kind: no character designations, no stage directions. The shift from one character's lines to another's is simply marked with a cross, while other markings indicate stage business or the processions central to Epiphany plays.[47]

In general, scripts produced for performers "in the know" could afford to be sparsely presented, even careless. The liturgical dramas in the famous "Fleury Playbook," prepared for a monastic community (possibly that of Saint-Benoît sur-Loire), were copied in a slapdash, sloppy fashion. They are not differentiated from one another (a modern hand has gone through the manuscript and numbered them) and the lines of chant are frequently interrupted or obscured by the *didascalia*. Either the task was not important enough to merit the attention of a good scribe, or it was considered to be a perfunctory effort expended on plays that everyone in the community already knew well.[48] Similarly, the so-called *Sponsus* of Limoges trusts that performers will understand what to do with the text. For one thing, it assumes that the users of the manuscript will know where the sequence begins and ends. The "title" usually bestowed upon the play is actually the rubric designating the first chanted lines to be sung by the character of the Bridegroom; in fact, the performance probably began with a version of the venerable *Quem quæritis* trope, copied just above it on the page, and labeled "This is about the women" (*'Oc est de mulieribus*). Similarly, I have argued that the performance may have continued with the subsequent *ordo prophetarum,*

which is not presented in the manuscript as a separate entity. In any case, it is clear that these confusing

elements would not have been confusing to the performers for whom this text was made. Casual mistakes

in the copying of rubrics suggest, further, that such information was secondary in importance to the

music, since the conventions of staging were probably well known.[49]

More worldly performers, like professional jongleurs and actors, were also unreliant on upon

such niceties as character designations. The manuscripts of the thirteenth-century *Courtois d'Arras,* like

those of all medieval fabliaux, assume that performers – working singly or in groups – will know how to

apportion lines to different characters. The manuscript of *Le garçon et l'aveugle*, which may have been

copied by one such performer, assumes the same. It makes distinctions only between spoken lines and

songs; the character designations in the margins were added and changed by later readers, editors, and/or

performers over the course of two or more centuries.[50] Even in the early modern theatre, professionals

were expected to extract most of the information they needed from the lines themselves.

III. Plays and other performance pieces are only identified as such on rare occasions. Most

medieval texts assume that readers know what it is that they have in front of them, often because the

reader was also the scribe or the patron who had commissioned the copy for his or her own use. Those

rare entitled texts, provided with obvious beginnings and endings (*incipits* and *explicits*), are apt to lose

these features if the text is cut up or rebound, or if the rubricator has been prevented from supplying them

– as in the late-thirteenth century miscellany preserving one copy of *Courtois*, part of the *Jeu de la

feuillée,* and the *Miracle de Théophile*, which leaves spaces for rubricated *incipits* that were not, for the

most part, added until the fifteenth century.[51] As I noted above, the Fleury plays carry no intitulation,

although some begin with lengthy instructions on how to set the scene: "In order to represent the

conversion of the blessed apostle Paul . . ." (*Ad repraesentandum conversionem beati Pauli apostoli . . .*)

or "In order to represent how St. Nicholas freed the son of Getron from the hands of Marmorinus, king of

the Agareni . . ." (*Ad repraesentandum quomodo Sanctus Nicholaus Getronis filium, de manu Marmorini,

regis Agarenorum, liberavit . . .*).[52] The so-called *Ludus de Antichristo* or "Play about the Antichrist"

from Tegernesee, is not given that title in the manuscript. Neither does "The Raising of Lazarus"

(*Suscitio Lazari*) by Hilarius call itself a play, although it does stipulate that "these characters are

necessary" for its performance*:* "the character of Lazarus, his two sisters, four Jews, Jesus Christ, and

the twelve apostles -- or six at least." [53] (This roster of *dramatis personæ* is highly unusual.)   Examples

could be multiplied. More noteworthy are those plays that *do* self-identify, the most obvious example

being the *Danielis ludus* from Beauvais, which calls attention to itself in performance, as well as on the

page.

Incipit Danielis ludus.	*Here begins the play of Daniel.*
Ad honorem tui Christe	In your honor, Christ our Lord,
Danielis ludus iste	The play of Daniel we record
in Belvaco est inventus.	Which was created in Beauvais:
et invenit hunc iuventus	The work of youth, in every way.[54]

Were it to have been re-copied by a careless scribe, losing its elaborate rubrics and the scaffolding of its

music, future readers would still be able to tell what this text was, where it was composed and performed,

and by whom. Most medieval plays do not provide such data, nor should we expect it of them. Rather,

we should ask why the cathedral scholars of Beauvais chose to be so *explicit*. Were they merely boastful?

or were they mindful of the difficulties inherent in conveying such information to future performers and

to posterity?   Whatever the motive, the care taken in the preservation of this play and its apparatus has

facilitated performances down to our own day.

**IV. The scripts of plays are rarely presented as different from other kinds of texts, or can

be "camouflaged" as other texts.** The difficulty (for modern scholars) of determining where the

Sponsus begins and ends is a case in point.   More fundamentally, it is important to note that oft-cited

distinctions between liturgical drama and liturgy *per se* are not maintained by the books containing these

elements. Even the "Play of Daniel," so carefully delineated, is presented in its sole manuscript as part of

the Office for the Feast of the Circumcision, which provided the occasion for its performance.[55] The

"Play about the Antichrist" is virtually indistinguishable from the Latin lyrics with which it is juxtaposed, save for the narrative prose stage directions, which have been underlined by a later hand. Not one of the four copies of the *Courtois d'Arras* is provided with character designations or stage directions, and not one is called a "play." In fact, it is explicitly described as *lai* in one manuscript, and is otherwise identical, in form and in function, to all the fabliaux and verse tales alongside which it was conveyed, and with which it probably shared space in performance. The two copies of the *Seinte Resureccion* dress the play in two entirely different disguises: in one case, it is laid out and rubricated like a scholarly treatise; in another, it has been stripped of its distinguishing features in order to conform to the layout of a very different manuscript. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, the likelihood that a fancy dramatic apparatus would be the first thing to be abandoned by a copyist lacking time, skill, or resources explains why the *Miracle de Théophile, Courtois,* most *fabliaux*, and nearly all Latin comedies contain narrative material in verse: it was a type of insurance policy, preserving basic information for performers within the fabric of the piece.[56] This is probably the reason why the *Seinte Resureccion,* like the *Danielis ludus*, carries its title and most instructions for its performance in the verse itself.

En ceste maniere recitom	In this manner let us put on
la seinte resureccion.	The holy Resurrection.
Primerement apareillons	First, prepare the space and dress
tus les lius e les mansions,	The playing-places and the sets:
Le crucifix primerement	The crucifix, most prominent,
e puis apres le monument . . .	And then the tomb, a monument. . . .[57]

The "Play of Adam" is also a textual chameleon, changing its layout over the course of several folios as its scribe experimented with different ways of handling spoken vernacular dialogue within the context of what was, in other respects, a sung Latin liturgical drama.

V. Plays are likely to lose – or acquire – distinguishing features in the copying process. This axiom follows from the last. Did the Norwich manuscript of the *Seinte Resureccion* acquire a dramatic

apparatus, or did the Canterbury copy lose one?   And if the copy laid out "as a play" had not survived,

would the other copy have been identified "as a play"?   Not that there was one way of transcribing or

inscribing a play: that is my point.   It seems, from my analysis of the scribal strategies at work in the *Jeu*

d'Adam, that this script acquired a dramatic layout as the scribe went along, working to clarify the action

in ways that would be helpful to potential performers and readers. It is possible that a pared-down script

like the *Auto de los reyes magos* could represent only one of many attempts to record that drama in

writing, some of which might have been more specific. Needless to say, the number of liturgical

manuscripts that contain no music to underscore what was usually sung are proof enough that some

scribes, or some performers, did not feel the need to rely on notation for these aspects of the performance.

Some manuscripts, of course, were meant to have music or rubrics, but were never supplied with them:

the abbreviated sketch adapted from Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de la feuillée* is missing its rubrics in the

Paris manuscript (blank spaces show where they should have been), while in the Vatican codex the names

of the characters in the original play have been changed to suit different performers and audiences. The

Jeu de Robin et de Marion, which survives in three deluxe manuscripts, is lacking music in one of them,

while in another it has acquired a lavish set of illuminated miniatures. In the third, part of the anthology

of Adam's works that concludes with the *Jeu de saint Nicolas,* it has acquired a dramatic prologue, the

Jeu du Pelerin, and an additional scene.   Many scripts also acquired marginalia or rubrics over time: a

number of Latin comedies bear the annotations and clarifications of generations of reader-performers, and

so does the single manuscript of "The Boy and the Blind Man." Even the archetypical *Regularis*

concordia was provided, in one copy, with an interlinear Anglo-Saxon gloss of the extensive Latin

rubrics.[58]

      VI. Some plays were more readily adaptable than others. This observation, too, follows upon

the last.   The *Jeu de la feuillée* is virtually incomprehensible to an audience outside Arras, *circa* 1276.

Moreover, it is long, and has 16 speaking parts (not counting interjections from a member of the

audience), only 8 of which can be doubled, and so requires at least a dozen actors. But the opening scene,

which features a pretentious poet suffering from marital *ennui* and scholarly *Wanderlust,* exchanging

witticisms with a couple of buddies over a few tankards of beer, could be played for a much larger array of audiences, possibly by a single performer. That it was occasionally played that way is suggested by the fact that it still survives in two separate versions (there may have been others), and the fifteenth-century scribe who added the missing *incipit* to the Paris copy was able to identify it easily. *Courtois* was, as we have seen, extremely adaptable and was, judging by the number of manuscripts into which it was copied, at least four times more often seen than most other medieval scripts, with the exception of Rutebeuf's *Théophile* (extant in two copies) and the more significant exception of the many, many Latin comedies that exist in multiples ranging from 170 (*Pamphilus*) to 65 (*Geta*) and so on down the line. (I have already demonstrated that medievalists' prejudice against these comedies is extremely misplaced, and they need to be studied as central to the experience of the large Latin-literate public of the Middle Ages.[59]) "The Boy and the Blind Man," interestingly, was adapted in various stages over the course of at least two centuries, up to the time when the appetite for farces may have lent it a renewed relevance.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are highly localized plays, specific to a particular set of conditions or requiring the resources of a particular community: the *Jeu de la feuillée,* the *Ordo virtutum* of Hildegard of Bingen, and especially the *Ludus de Antichristo*. Composed and presumably performed by the monks of Tegernsee abbey around the year 1160, this play promotes the political and military policies of Emperor Frederick II "Barbarossa," exhibiting a perspective that would hardly meet with approval in other quarters, even if the elaborate staging could be replicated in another venue. However, it may have been performed on other occasions at Tegernsee, since the surviving manuscript was copied a generation later, probably between 1178 and 1180, certainly by 1186.[60] Alternatively, this text may have served as a memorial of past theatrical grandeur, or a tribute to the late emperor; it is noteworthy that Otto of Freising's *Gesta Frederici* forms part of the same codex.

VII. The technical demands of describing certain special effects, or the unusual expertise of copyists, can help to promote the theatrical appearance of certain texts. Once more, the so-called *Sponsus* provides an example, since the demands of the particular form of musical notation that was employed at the abbey of Saint-Martial meant that the text of this play was entrusted to a skilled copyist --

who was not, however, responsible for the errors made in rubrication. Two hundred years later, the

anthology of Adam de la Halle's work would also benefit from the special requirements of musical

innovation. Since Adam was a pioneer in the composition of polyphony, any manuscript containing his

motets would have to be entrusted to one of the few scribes then skilled in the transcription of the new

mensural notation that made the transmission of multi-voiced songs possible. Such scribes were only to

be found in Paris and Arras, and their services would not be cheaply bought; nor would it make sense to

combine meticulous musical layout with a perfunctory presentation of Adam's monophonic songs,

versified debate poems, lyrics, and plays.[61] In fact, no expense was spared in the making of this

extraordinary book, in which the *Jeu de saint Nicolas* was also thoughtfully transcribed.

Likewise, the musical requirements of the "Play of Daniel" certainly contributed something to its

manuscript presentation, but it is arguably the fullness of the stage directions that account for the unusual

legibility of this script, and its utility for future performers. In many other liturgical and dramatic texts, as

I have explained, such directions are absent, suggesting a parallel oral tradition that supplemented the

written text when it was adapted for performance, or (alternatively) suggesting that the play survives only

as a textual fossil: it is almost certain, for instance, that the *Ludus de Antichristo* would have been sung,

but no music is included in the manuscript. In the manuscript of "Daniel," the *didascalia* concern

themselves with types of performed action that are not specified in the lyrics but are necessary to the plot,

such as the moment in Balthasar's court when "a right hand will appear in full view of the king, writing

on the wall: *Mane, Thechel, Phares*," or Daniel's rescue from the lions' den with the assistance of

Habbakuk and the angel, or the punishment of the king's evil counselors who, "thrown into the pit, will

immediately be eaten by the lions."[62] However, the rubrics do not tell us *how* these effects are to be

achieved. By contrast, the contemporary "Play of Adam" is astonishingly explicit about matters of

staging. Not only does it describe how all the characters should be dressed and how Adam and Eve's

"nakedness" is to be represented (among myriad other details), it also describes the setting, the movement

of the characters through the playing-space, their behavior and gestures, and makes note of all the props

needed for performance – down to the pot that should be hidden from view in Abel's clothing "which

Cain will strike and break, as though he has killed Abel."[63] The *Jeu d'Adam* is also notable for its detailed instructions as to the speaking of the verse, an indication that it was unusual for a liturgical play to be spoken, rather than sung.

This degree of practical detail is, as I have stressed, particular to certain types of plays and should not be construed as the norm. The *Ludus de Antichristo* stages a series of battles, ceremonies, and diplomatic missions which obviously called for pomp and pageantry, but much of that staging is left to the imagination of the performers, who would have been able to draw upon personal experience and developing heraldic conventions for the costuming of the various kings who subject themselves to the Emperor and afterward to the Antichrist. It also calls for certain very important special effects, among them a series of false miracles which must be executed in such a way that their deceit is made apparent to the audience. Hence, the *didascalia* call for a coffin to be brought in, containing "someone pretending to have been killed in battle." But just how the actor who is playing dead is supposed to signal that he is merely *playing* at playing dead is not explained.[64] By the same token, the Christmas play from Benedicktbeuern, which forms part of the celebrated *Carmina Burana* codex, does not explain how the actor playing Herod "should be gnawed to bits by worms." It is possible, indeed, that these instructions were not intended to be carried out by performers but were instead substitutes for performance, aids which helped the reader of the text to re-enact the play in his mind. Whatever the case, it is striking that the most detailed instructions in this particular play are reserved for the actor playing the pivotal role of Archisynagogus, the leader of the Jews who disputes – successfully – with St. Augustine and the Old Testament prophets, skillfully countering their credulous arguments for the Virgin Birth with references to cutting-edge Aristotelian philosophy. In my view, it is precisely because Archisynagogus' arguments are so superior that he is directed to undercut his own authority by playing the fool in a manner that was supposed to appear stereotypically Jewish: bellowing with derision and indignation, pushing his companions around, wagging his head and stamping his foot, "and imitating the behavior of a Jew in all ways." Later on, when Archisynagogus no longer poses a threat to the doctrine central to the message of

the play, his behavior changes markedly; as Herod's chief advisor, he is directed to speak to the visiting magi "with great wisdom and eloquence." [65]

In a similar fashion, the scripts in the "Fleury Playbook" occasionally specify the emotions to be displayed by certain characters when such emotions are central to the action, as when Saul (Paul) must persecute the followers of Christ "as if enraged" (*quasi iratus*), this state contrasting strikingly with his behavior on the road to Damascus, when he must act "as if now believing" (*quasi iam credens*).[66] Hildegard of Bingen's *Ordo virtutum* ("Service of the Virtues") goes farther. [67] Not only do the lyrics of this play call for specific and often violent action (Fly!" "Run!" "Bind him!") but the carefully-inserted rubrics delineate the protagonist's emotional journey from "Happy Soul" (*Felix Anima*) to "Unhappy Soul" (*Infelix Anima*), and at length to "penitent" Soul (*penitens*). These different emotional states are manifestations of Anima's journey toward salvation, but a careful analysis of the manuscript's facsimile suggests that the playwright and her scribe were working hard to ensure that the changes in Anima's spiritual condition would not be construed as the attributes of different *characters* called "Felix Anima" and "Infelix Anima." Hence, the rubrics direct that the Virtues should address themselves "to that same Anima" (*Virtutes ad Animam illam*) and describe "The shouting of the Devil to that same Anima" (*Strepitus Diaboli ad Animam illam*). Even after Anima's dramatic identity would seem to have been adequately established, she is always distinctly labeled as "the same Soul." However, the fact that some of these designations were supplied *after* the initial copying campaign, on second thought and occasionally at the expense of the lyrics' clarity, emphasizes the mechanical difficulties of the composer's and copyist's tasks, while underscoring that the enactment of Anima's altered demeanor is essential to the message of the play.[68]

VIII. **The specificity of the instructions included in certain manuscripts suggests an attempt to codify existing practices, establish a template for performers outside a community, or limit future innovations.** Hildegard's *Ordo virtutum* may have received its inaugural performance on the first of May in 1151, when the new convent at the Rupertsburg was solemnly consecrated by the archbishop of

Mainz and attendant prelates from the region. It is conceivable that these dignitaries were simultaneously pressed into service as the introductory chorus of prophets and patriarchs, while the religious of the convent played the Virtues and Hildegard's long-suffering amanuensis, Volmar, took on the somewhat thankless role of the Devil. Perhaps the aristocratic congregation stood in for the Souls "set in bodies" (*in carne positarum*) from among whom the individual Soul, Anima, emerged as protagonist. Whatever may have taken place at the play's premiere, the script of the *Ordo* is preserved in a selected edition of Hildegard's works now known as the Riesenkodex, and strong arguments have been put forward that the manuscript as a whole was copied over two decades later under Hildegard's supervision, most probably between 1177 and 1180 (the year of her death). [69] If so, it is arguably the only medieval play to exist in anything like an autograph copy, and certainly one of the few premodern scripts (perhaps the only one, prior to the seventeenth century) over which anyone directly associated with a live performance can be said to have exercised so much control.

The extant script of the *Ordo virtutum* was either intended to foster future performances that would be governed by a definitive text, or to supply a definitive text that took the place of performance. In either case, it suggests an interesting correlation between artistic innovation and the availability of sophisticated scribal skills. Margot Fassler has called Hildegard "the most prolific composer of monophonic chants known to us, not only from the twelfth century but from the entire Middle Ages," and while it might sound facile to observe that this is, in part, because she had access to an extremely competent scribe, we must recognize that the very novelty of her works, especially the novelty of the music, posed a potential threat to their own survival. Hildegard appears to have composed orally, and her nuns may have learned their parts aurally. [70] The Riesenkodex is thus charged with the task of conveying something of her genius to a new audience dependent on a textual record, or desiring a definitive memorial of a singular life's work. It is comparable, in some respects, to the manuscript of the *Danielis ludus*, produced a generation or two later at Beauvais, or to the *Regularis concordia,* promulgated by Æthelwold of Winchester around 973. It is more closely analogous to the mysterious manuscript preserving the *œuvre* of Adam de la Halle. That book, too, was carefully designed to establish a series of

set texts, a memorial of Adam's artistic endeavors, and a record of his relationship with his patron(s), with the people of Arras, and with his predecessor, Jehan Bodel. But unlike the codices copied under Hildegard's eye and at her direction, its circumstances of production are unknown.

One thing can be said with certainty: such manuscripts as these were the exception, not the rule. We are closer to the dynamics of performance when we encounter indeterminate scripts like *Courtois*, works-in-progress like "The Boy and the Blind Man," or adapted dialogues like the two versions of the scene borrowed from the *Jeu de la feuillée.* Perhaps we are closer still when we have to use our imaginations entirely, to flesh out the bare bones of the most basic "Type I" *Visitatio sepulchri*, that supposedly unevolved staple of the Church's ubiquitous repertoire. As Ralph, G. Williams, a scholar and editor of early Biblical manuscripts has observed, "the vastly complex indeterminacies involved in the generation and transmission of texts, and in the very nature of textuality, encourage us to be open to the presentation (and interpretation) of texts in accordance with quite various logistics."[71] According to the medievalist Roger Dagenais, this means apprehending how "fundamental the indeterminacy of text and gloss was to the medieval reading experience," and that "[t]he very act of reading a scriptum involved constant choices."[72] Such views encourage us to react creatively when there are few texts to be had, and few obvious references to the dramatic possibilities that lie beyond the text – that is, the moment of performance to which the text was a response, or for which it was only a starting point. No play is complete until it is played. No text, whether script or transcript, is anything but a shadow. Musing on the limitations of writing as an instrument for recording the richness of what takes place in performance, a contemporary witness to a splendid set of Burgundian civic spectacles remarked, in 1496: "It is not at all within the capacities of any man living on this earth to know how to describe in writing something that has been accomplished in reality."[73]

THE USES OF A NEW THEATRE HISTORY

What might happen if we consider *all* the various ways that medieval texts might have been produced in performance, after a performance, to regulate performance, to prompt performance? And what might happen if put away the ill-suited generic criteria of antiquity and modernity, dispel what Marc Bloch called "the fetish of origins," and instead look for medieval theatre in its "natural habitats," as something indigenous to communities, something which doesn't need to have an origin, but which always has a context? The answer is radically simple: we will uncover a whole new history of medieval theatre, and a whole new way of studying medieval theatre which will have a direct effect on current historical narratives. That is, we will make theatre *matter*. The rubric above alludes to the question made famous by Bloch in *The Historian's Craft*, published posthumously and left incomplete in 1944: "'What is the use of history?'" What is the use of *theatre* history? If, as I have argued, the study of theatre is not the study of texts but the study of the public interactions that gave rise to those texts – some of which were conceived and received as fictions – it adds not only to our knowledge of plays and players, audiences and performance conditions, but to our understanding of real people with real concerns.

The apprehension of a truly *medieval* theatre thus entails the activation or re-activation of the historian's sources, and not only those texts that have been designated, arbitrarily and retrospectively, as "plays." Any artifact that had its origin in a public act, or which was destined for public reading or display, benefits from being placed in the context of a medieval theatre, exhibited once again to the critical scrutiny and keen ears of an imagined audience – imagined, that is, by the responsible historian using all the tools of her craft. In another meditation on *The Idea of History*, contemporary to that of Bloch and also published posthumously, R.G. Collingwood asked: "If, then, the historian has no direct or empirical knowledge of his facts, and no transmitted or testamentary knowledge of them, what kind of knowledge has he: in other words, what must the historian do in order that he may know them?" Answer: "The historian must re-enact the past in his own mind."[74] This re-enactment not only places the historical object in a new light, it shines a searchlight on those who produced it, inspected it, inflected it,

and passed it on. In a medieval theatre, as in the theatre of the historian's mind, everyone is implicated in the making of the meaning. The study of any medieval theatre therefore calls attention to the processes which led to the production of historical sources, and calls upon the historian to imagine the conditions in which those artifacts were actualized and transmitted. It therefore has the capacity to the change way we think about *what happened* in the past.

In particular, it invites us to think creatively about the manipulation and impact of pre-modern public media, and the relationship of communication technologies to the exercise of agency. Medieval documentary practices had a public, performative dimension. All the more so did the know-how of persuasive speech, arresting behavior, demonstrative noise, eloquent gesture, commanding appearance. And to those who did not have the full freedoms of their use, were given the powers of interpretation, suggesting that public opinion really mattered when it came to delineating space, wielding power, articulating custom, doing justice. Is it possible, then, to argue that a given medieval theatre is analogous to something like the "marketplace of ideas" many times associated with the Enlightenment and derived in its classic formulation from Oliver Wendell Holmes' defense of free speech?[75] I certainly believe that this formulation of medieval theatre has the power to challenge the fundamental assumptions of modernity, against which all medievalists must be aligned, which cast the Middle Ages as the ultimate subaltern. We must help the epoch itself to speak for itself. We must look more carefully at our own evidence, and think about it in new ways. We must consider the degree to which the medieval theatre created a spaces and discourses not unlike the "open realm" or *öffentlichkeit* of rational discourse supposedly dependant on the urban spaces and printing presses of some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century towns, as Jürgen Habermas famously argued, based on a very limited knowledge of the Middle Ages and its "feudal society." I would contend, in fact, that the medieval public sphere was both larger and more buoyant than that of the Enlightenment, just as the medieval theatre was more multifaceted, more immediate, and more representative (in every sense) than that circumscribed by the playhouses of the Renaissance. This is the medieval theatre we need to be studying.

[1]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, tr. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); *e.g.* Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 178.

[2]I develop this argument at length in my forthcoming book, *A Common Stage: Theatre and Public Life in Medieval Arras* (Ithaca and London, 2007).

[3]Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, "Civic Liturgies and Urban Records in Northern France, 1100-1400," in *City and Spectacle in Medieval* Europe, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Ryerson (Minneapolis, 1994), 34-55; Leo Treitler, "Oral, Written, and Literate Process in the Transmission of Medieval Music," *Speculum* 56 (1981): 471-491; Paul Saenger, "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society," *Viator* 13 (1982): 367-414, and *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, 1997); Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996).

[4]M.T. Clanchy,. *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1993), 253, 269, 285.

[5]Paris, BnF fr. 819-820. See Graham Runnalls, "The Manuscript of the *Miracles de Nostre Dame par Personnages*," *Romance Philology* 22 (1968), 15-22, and "*The Miracles de Nostre Dame par personages*: Erasures in the MS and the Dates of the Plays and the "Serventois" *Philological Quarterly* 49 (1970): 19-29.

[6]"Matthew Hutton's Letter to the Mayor and Council of York (1567)," in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology,* ed. Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 206. For a facsimile edition of the register, kept up to date until 1583, see *The York Play,* ed. Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith (Leeds: The University of Leeds School of English, 1983).

[7]John Stow, *Survay of London,* ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1908), I: 92-95.

[8]Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594-1642* (Cambridge, Eng., 2004), 126.

[9]Ann Lyon Haight, "Hroswitha of Gandersheim: Her Life, Her Times, Her Work," and Meta Harrsen, "The Manuscripts," in *Hroswitha of Gandersheim: Her Life, Times, and Works, and a Comprehensive Bibliography*, ed. Haight (New York, 1965), 3-34 and 42-56. In the preface to his edition, dedicated to Frederick the Wise of Saxony, Celtes described the dramatic moment of the manuscript's discovery without naming the library of St. Emmeram where he had found it – since he had, in fact, neglected to return the codex and never gave it back. See Lewis W. Spitz, *Conrad Celtis, The German Arch-Humanist* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 42, 47, 89, 97. See also Debra L. Stoudt, "Hrotsvit's Literary Legacy," in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Contexts, Affinities, and Performances,* ed. Phyllis R. Brown, Linda McMillin, and Katharina M. Wilson (Toronto, 2004), 213-234.

[10]Carol Symes, "Manuscript Matrix, Modern Canon," in *21st-Century Approaches* to Literature: Middle English, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford, 2007), 7-22.

[11]Pierre Borel, *Tresor de recherches et antiqvitez gavloises et françoises, redvites en ordre alphabetiqve. Et enrichies de beaucoup d'origines, epitaphes, & autres choses rares & curieuses, comme aussi de beaucoup de mots de la langue thyoise ou theuthfranque* (Paris, 1655).

[12]*Fabliaux et contes des poetes françois des XII, XIII, XIV et XVes Siécles, Tirés des meilleures Auteurs* [par Etienne Barbazan], « Avec Approbation & Privilege du Roi,» 3 vols. (Paris, 1756), I: v-lij at v-vj, xij, xlx.

[13]Barbazan, I : xlvj. The manuscripts cited by Barbazan were numbered 7218, 7615, and 7633 in the catalogue of the Bibliothèque de Roi, supplemented by a "Ms. de l'Eglise de Paris N. 2." *De Brunain la Vache au Prestre* (I: 41-44) is unattributed, and the only contemporary authors noted by name are Rutebeuf ("C'étoit un Auteur du treiziéme Siécle, qui a fait une Piéce de Poësie sur la merde," I: 112) and "Jehans li Galois d'Aubepierre," to whom is ascribed the fabliau *De la Bourse pleine de Sens*, I : 61-84. In the first-edition copy available in the library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a contemporary hand has added the attribution "par Jean De Boyer" under the title of *Brunain,* and "Anonyme, ou par Jean De Boyer " under *Dou Lou et de l'oue,* I: 85-89.

[14]Barbazan, I: xv-xvj, xxj

[15] Barbazan, I : xlvij, xxxix-xl.

[16]Pierre Jean Baptiste Le Grand d'Aussy, *Fabliaux ou contes du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle, traduits ou extraits d'après divers manuscrits du tems* [sic]*; avec notes historiques et critiques, & les imitations qui ont été faites de ces contes depuis leur origine jusqu'à nos jours,* 4 vols. (Paris, 1779-1781), I: 352-360.

[17] Barbazan, I: xxxiij-xxxjv.

[18]Le Grand d'Aussy, I: 358.

[19]Guillaume de Bure, *Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de feu M. le duc de la Vallière,* première partie, vol. II (Paris, 1783), 232.

[20]*Fabliaux or tales, abridged from French manuscripts of the XIIth and XIIIth centuries by M. Le Grand, selected and translated into English verse* [by Gregory Lewis Way]. With a preface and notes [by. G. Ellis] (London, 1796), pp. i and vi.

[21]Onésime Leroy, *Époques de l'histoire de France en rapport avec le théâtre français, dès la formation de la langue jusqu'à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1843), 85-89 and 94-101.

[22]Le Grand d'Aussy, I: 358.

[23]Charlotte Stern, *The Medieval Theater in Castile* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1996), 3.

[24]On the interdependence of medieval studies, anthropology, and evolutionary biology in Victorian England – and their effect on the study of medieval drama – see John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture, and Cultural Identity* (New York and Basingstoke, 2005), especially 83-107.

[25]Edmond de Coussemaker, *Drames liturgiques du Moyen Age (texte et musique)* (Rennes, 1860), 313. See Carol Symes, "The Appearance of Early Vernacular Plays: Forms, Functions, and the Future of Medieval Theatre," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 77 (2002): 778-831,

and "A Few Odd Visits: Unusual Settings of the *Vistatio sepulchri*," in *Music and Medieval Manuscripts: Paleography and Performance. Essays in Honor of Andrew Hughes,* ed. John Haines and Randall Rosenfeld (Aldershot, Eng., and Brookfield, VT, 2004), 300-322.

[26]François-Just-Marie Raynouard, "Extrait du mystère des vierges sages et vierges fols," in *Choix des poésies originales des troubadours*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1817), II: 139-143.

[27]Marius Sepet, "Les prophètes du Christ: Étude sur les origines du théâtre au moyen âge," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* ser. 6, 3 (1867): 1-27 at 8, 12-13. Sepet transcribes the text of the sermon (in BnF lat. 1018) in full on pp. 3-8. His analysis of the close relationship between it and the *Ordo prophetarum* in Paris, BnF lat. 1139 occupies pp. 15-24.

[28]Louis Petit de Julleville, *L'Histoire du Théâtre en France,* I : *Les Mystères*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1880), I: 1, 3-4.

[29]Louis Petit de Julleville, *L'Histoire du Théâtre en France,* II: *La Comédie et les mœurs en France au moyen age* (Paris, 1886), 1-2, 19

[30]Louis Petit de Julleville*, Le théâtre en France: Histoire de la littérature dramatique depuis ses origines jusqu'à nos jours,* 8th edn. (Paris, 1918), vi.

[31]Edmond Faral, *Les jongleurs en France au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1910; New York, 1970; Geneva, 1987), pp. 26, 223-252; "Le fabliau latin au moyen âge, " *Romania* 50 (1924): 320-385; *Mimes français du XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1910; repr. 1973), xiv; *Œuvres completes de Rutebeuf*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1959 and 1960), II: 168-169. Gustave Cohen, *Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre religieux français du moyen âge*, 2nd edn. (Paris, 1926; repr. 1971); and *Théâtre en France au Moyen-Age. II: Le théâtre profane* (Paris, 1948), 13-48 and *passim.*

[32]Graham A. Runnalls, "Medieval French Drama: A Review of Recent Scholarship. Part I: Religious Drama," *RORD* 21 (1978): 83-90; 22 (1979): 111-136; and Alan Hindley, "Medieval French Drama: A Review of Recent Scholarship. Part II: Comic Drama," *RORD* 23 (1980): 93-126.

[33]Charles Mazouer, *Le théâtre français du Moyen Âge* (Paris,1998), 89.

[34]Richard Axton, *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1974), 131.

[35]Michel Rousse, "Le *Jeu de saint Nicolas*. Tradition et innovation," in *Arras au moyen âge: Histoire et littérature,* ed. Marie-Madeleine Castellani and Jean-Pierre Martin (Arras, 1994), 153-162 at 153. See also his "Propositions sur le théâtre profane avant les farces," *Tréteaux* 1 (1978): 4-18.

[36]Faral, *Les jongleurs,* 228.

[37]Paul Meyer, *Documents manuscrits de l'ancienne littérature de la France conservés dans les bibliothèques de la Grande Bretagne. Rapports à M. le ministre de l'Instruction publique,* Archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires, 2e série (Paris, 1871).

[38]Carol Symes, "The Performance and Preservation of Medieval Latin Comedy," *European Medieval Drama* 7 (2003): 29-50.

[39]James McKinnon, "The Emergence of Gregorian Chant in the Carolingian Era," in *Antiquity and the Middle Ages: From Ancient Greece to the 15th Century* (Man and Music, I), ed. James McKinnon (Basingstoke and London: MacMillan, 1990), 88-119 at 94; in the same volume, see David Hiley "Plainchant Transfigured: Innovation and Reformation through the Ages," 120-142 at 120-122. Musicologists are still debating whether or not the inscription of the chant repertoire would have been facilitated be the pre-existence of an earlier written tradition or even a written archetype (the position taken by Levy *et al*.), or based on a number of local, oral traditions (Van der Werf). See Andrew Hughes, "Charlemagne's Chant or the Great Vocal Shift," *Speculum* 77 (2002): 1069-1106; Kenneth Levy, *Gregorian Chant and the Carolingians* (Princeton, 1996), 5-13, and "On the Origins of Neumes," *Early Music History* 7 (1987): 59-90, repr. in *Gregorian Chant and the Carolingians* (Princeton, 1996), 109-140.

[40] Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996), 112. See also Eric A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton, 1982); John Herington, *Poetry into Drama: Early Tragedy and the Greek Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley and

Los Angeles, 1985); and Rosalind Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens*

(Cambridge, Eng., 1989).

[41] *Mankind*, ed. David Bevington in *Medieval Drama* (Boston, 1975), 903-938 at vv. 459-466;

hereinafter cited as *MD.*

[42]Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*

(Cambridge, Eng., 1990).

[43]The manuscript is Lincoln, Cathedral Chapter Library, MS 105. See Andrea Dessì Fulgheri,

"Babio," in *Commedie latine del XII e XIII secolo*, ed. Feruccio Bertini, 6 vols. (Genoa, 1976-1998), II:

129-301 at 159. See also Symes, "Performance and Preservation," 42-44.

[44]Elisabeth Lalou, "Les rôlets de théâtre: Étude codicologique," in *Théâtre et spectacles hier et

aujourd'hui: Moyen Age et Renaissance* (Paris, 1991), 51-71 at 53-54. The scroll from the British

Library (Additional MS 23986) contained the text of the Middle English *Interludium de clerico et puella*

and, on the reverse, a French *Chanson des barons*: see Clanchy, 143; and Andrew Taylor, "The Myth of

the Minstrel MS," *Speculum* 66 (1991): 43-73 at 68-69. The Swiss scroll has been transcribed by Paul

Aebischer, who includes a photograph of the artifact in his study, "Un fragment de rôle comique datant du

début du XIVe siècle retrouvé dans un manuscrit déposé aux Archives cantonales du Valais à Sion,"

Vallesia 22 (1967): 71-80.

[45]Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, "Vile Arts: The Marketing of English Printed Drama,

1512-1660," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 39 (2000): 77-165. See also Gurr, 88, 121-

129, and *passim*.

[46]Symes, "Appearance," 829-830. The catalogue is Paris, BnF fr. 2812, fols. 78-82; it has been

edited by Achille Chereau, *Catalogue d'un marchand libraire du XVe siècle tenant boutique à Tours*

(Paris, 1868). For a different view of the evidence, see Graham Runnalls, "The Catalogue of the Tours

Bookseller and Late Medieval French Drama," *Le moyen français* 11 (1982): 112-128, repr. in *Études sur*

les mystères: Un recueil de 22 études sur les mystères français, suivi d'un répertoire du théâtre religieux français du Moyen Age et d'une bibliographie (Paris, 1998), 397-411.   .

[47]Charles E. Stebbins, *Allegorica* 2 (1977): 118-143. The manuscript is Madrid, BNE C. Toledo Cax-6, 8.

[48]Orléans, Bm 201. See the facsimile photographs printed in *The Fleury* Playbook: *Essays and Studies*, ed. Thomas P. Campbell and Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, 1985), plates 8-74.

[49]Symes, "Appearance," 795-801.

[50]Symes, "Appearance," 810-814; and "*The Boy and the Blind Man*: A Medieval Play Script and Its Editors," in *The Book Unbound: New Approaches to Reading Medieval Books and Texts*, ed. Siân Echard and Stephen B. Partridge (Toronto, 2004), 105-143.

[51]Paris, BnF fr. 837. Symes, "Appearance," 813-818.

[52]*MD,* 165-168 and 170-177.

[53] *MD*, 156-163.

[54]London, BL Egerton 2615, fols. 95-108. *The Play of Daniel*, transcr. A. Mariel J. Zijlstra in *The* Play of Daniel: *Critical Essays*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden (Kalamazoo, 1996), 89-126. Another edition is available in *MD*, 138-154.

[55]Margot Fassler, "The Feast of Fools and *Danielis Ludus:* Popular Tradition in a Medieval Cathedral Play," in *Plainsong in the Age of Polyphony*, ed. Thomas Forrest Kelly (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 65-99 at 66-67.

[56]Symes, "Appearance," 802-812; see also "Performance and Preservation."

[57]The alternative first line of the Paris manuscript reads *recitom* (for *representon* in the Canterbury manuscript, cited above), possibly denoting two different strategies for activation. See *La Seinte Resureccion from the Paris and Canterbury MSS*, ed. T. A. Jenkins *et al.* (Oxford, 1943). Another edition is available in *MD,* 123-136. See also Symes, "Appeareance," 805-810.

[58]London, BL Cotton Tiberius A.III. See Lucia Kornexl, *Die* Regularis concordia *und ihre altenglische Interlinearversion: mit Einleitung und Kommentar* (Munich, 1993).

[59]Symes, "Performance and Preservation," 43.

[60]Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 19411, fols. 2v-7r.   See *Ludus de Antichristo,* ed. Gisela Vollmann-Profe, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1981), I: v-ix (a facsimile and transcription of the text are supplied in volume one, and an edition and German translation of the text in volume two).

[61]Symes, "Appearance," 818-823.

[62]*Danielis ludus* in *MD,* 138-154 at 141 and 153: "apparebit dextra in conspectu regis scribens in pariete: *Mane, Thechel, Phares*" and "statim consumentur a leonibus."

[63]*Ordo representacionis Ade,* in *MD*, 80-121 at 112 : "Et habebit ollam coopertam pannis suis, quam percutiet Chaim, quasi ipsum Abel occideret."   Other editions include *Le Mystère d'Adam*, ed. Paul Aebischer (Paris, 1964), and *Le Mystère d'Adam. Édition diplomatique accompagné d'une reproduction photographique du manuscrit de Tours et des leçons des éditions critiques*, ed. Leif Sletsjöe (Paris, 1968).

[64]*Ludus de Antichristo,* fol. 5vb (p. 12b): "quidam simulans se in proelio occisum."

[65]*Ludus de Nativitate* in *MD,* 180-201 at 183 and 195:   "imitando gestus Judaei in omnibus" and "cum magna sapientia et eloquentia."

[66]*Ad repraesentandum conversionem betai Pauli* in *MD*, 165-168 at 166-167.

[67] It is now Wiesbaden, Hessische Landesbibliothek Clm 2; the play occupies fols. 478v[a] (*Incipit Ordo Virtutum* at the foot of the column) through 481v[b], the last page of the codex. My analysis is based on the facsimile, *Hildegard von Bingen* Lieder*: Faksimile Riesencodex (Hs.2) der Hessischen Landesbibliothek Wiesbaden fol. 466-481v,* ed. Lorenz Welker and Michael Kloper (Wiesbaden, 1998). All references to the text are based on Dronke's edition in *Nine Medieval Latin Plays*, (Cambridge, 1994), 160-184.

[68]It is a testament to the excellence of the system in place at the Rupertsburg that only one character designation is open to editorial question, apparently erased by the scribe and never resupplied.

In one other instance, space was allocated for a designation which can be supplied with confidence from the context : fol. 480rᵃ, before v. 113. Further indications of later clarifications made by the same scribe are visible in the *illa* squeezed in after the designation *Anima* before v. 33 on fol. 479rᵃ and in designations for verses to be sung by the *Virtutes* added in a number of places, notably in the margin of fol. 479vᵃ (referring to vv. 72-73) and above the lines for the two following speeches in the same column (before vv. 79, 82), as well as contracted into abbreviations at the bottom of fol. 480rᵃ (before v. 125) and in three places on fol. 480rᵃ (before vv. 130, 134, 139). Moreover, the designations for the verses proper to Timor Dei, Fides, and Spes were undoubtedly added in afterthought, perhaps by the same scribe but certainly with a different or mended pen (fols. 479vᵃ and 479vᵇ). In two of these cases, any careful reader would be in no doubt as to the identity of the characters: *Ego Timor Dei* (v. 80), *Ego Fides* (v. 93). However, Spes does not name herself unambiguously in vv. 98-100, nor do the Virtutes call her by name in their reply; so it is plausible that the potential for confusion became apparent later on, and that a special effort was made to remove all ambiguities.

[69]Albert Derolez, "The Manuscript Transmission of Hildegard of Bingen's Writings: The State of the Problem," in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of Her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke (London, 1998), 17-28. In the same volume, see Madeline Caviness, "Hildegard as Designer of the Illustrations to Her Works," 29-62; also her "Artist: 'To See, Hear, and Know All at Once,'" in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World,* ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998), 110-124. A large portion of the *Ordo virtutum* was later recycled by Hildegard in the final segment of the *Scivias* (III.13), in which divine revelations are accompanied by antiphons and responsories drawn from the *Symphonia*, with the *Ordo* providing dialogue interrupted by additional *prosæ*. Barbara Newman assumes that the *Ordo* was based on the *Scivias*: "'Sibyl of the Rhine': Hildegard's Life and Times," in Newman, *Voice,* 1-20 at 17, 13. Constant Mews' discussion of the interrelationships between the two works appears not to depend on a fixed chronology, since in one place he sees aspects of the *Scivias* "expanded more fully in the *Ordo virtutum*" and, in another, presents

the *Scivias* as "recapitulating" segments of the *Ordo*. "Religious Thinker: 'A Frail Human Being' on Fiery Life," in *Voice*, 52-69 at 62 and 67. Peter Dronke's chronology posits that the *Ordo* was already in existence when this portion of the *Scivias* was completed: "Problemata Hildegardiana," *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1981): 143-191. In any case, these borrowings demonstrate that not one of Hildegard's compositions can be viewed as "a self-contained entity to be perfected and closed," as John Stevens asserted: "The Musical Individuality of Hildegard's Songs: A Liturgical Shadowland," in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of Her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke (London, 1998), 163-188 at 174.

[70]Margot Fassler, "Composer and Dramatist: 'Melodious Singing and the Freshness of Remorse,'" in Newman, *Voice,* 149-175 at 150-151, 154.

[71]Ralph G. Williams, "I Shall Be Spoken: Textual Boundaries, Authors, and Intent,'" in *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, ed. George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams (Ann Arbor, 1993), 45-66 at 61.

[72] John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in a Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de buen amor* (Princeton, 1994), 111.

[73]"[I]l n'est poinct en la possibilité d'homme vivant sur la terre le scavoyr si bien rediger par escript qu'il fut exécuté par effect." Cited by Jody Enders, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama* (Ithaca, 1992)*,* 16-17 (my translation).

[74]R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946), 282.

[75]*Abrams v. U.S.* (250 U.S. 616, 1919), No. 316.