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中世紀劇場的領域

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摘　要

歐洲中世紀劇場是由龐雜多元的表演形式所組成，因此不管在定義上、標示上、歷史定位上、或理論歸納上，都有著難以克服的困難。然而，若我們檢視「中世紀劇場」賴以建立的史料編纂過程，卻很可能有所收穫。這個過程的特色在於兩項理論上的突破，尤其它挑戰了西方劇場的「亞里斯多德典範」標準：第一、它將中世紀劇場納入歷史演化進程的一部分，第二、它重新定義劇場，視其爲表演活動，而不是文學文本。儘管演化論之說爲多數人所駁斥，另一個事實上更重要的概念－將戲劇視爲活動（event）－卻由此而生。（這個概念比起號稱「文學」傑作如雲的領域，更容易爲人所接受。）不過，這些實證論者的推論固然還影響現今戲劇的研究，卻容易落入另一種危險－即再次將嚴格定義的戲劇框架套用在中世紀的表演形式上。比較好的作法，是將標準放寬，以共時性（synchronic）的角度研究中世紀時期的劇場（*medieval* theatre），也以歷時性（diachronic）的角度觀照劇場史的中世紀（medieval *theatre*）。

關鍵詞：中世紀劇場、劇場史、中古世紀、表演、宗教劇

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The Field of Medieval Theatre

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Abstract

Even beyond the obvious cultural and linguistic barriers—which are formidable—the medieval theatre of Europe suffers from several drawbacks specific to students of the theatre: The occasional nature of most performances provides few realizable models for modern productions. Most of the surviving dramatic texts are of little, if any, literary value. The medieval theatre has proved difficult to slot into the standard narrative of Western theatrical history. Above all, this vast, unruly field has for the most part been left to specialists who are able to illuminate parts of the picture, but often do so at the expense of the whole. In fact, we have difficulties establishing exactly what the "whole" is. What does the field of medieval theatre consist of and how are we to go about studying it? What are we to teach, and how are we to go about teaching it? If we believe that the field is objectively there, waiting to be examined and described, we would do well to begin by learning a dozen or so European languages, familiarizing ourselves with a seemingly endless number of performance forms, immersing ourselves in theology, heraldry, art, music and dance, and mastering the economic, social, political, and intellectual life of Europe between 500 and 1500. If, on the other hand, we conceive of the "field" of medieval theatre as an historiographical phenomenon that has been emerging in theatre studies over the past one hundred years or so, we might be able to make of a constructed "medieval theatre" a useful paradigm for an evolving general theory of the theatre, and at the same time find a way to incorporate medieval performance into a larger historical

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narrative. I propose in the present paper to outline some of the ways in which the historiography of the medieval theatre has functioned as such a paradigm, and to suggest ways in which a more open and tentative conception of "field" can stimulate fruitful theoretical speculation.

Keywords: medieval theatre, historiography, Middle Ages, performance, religious drama

The Field of Medieval Theatre

Ronald Vince

The medieval theatre has traditionally been treated as the step-child or perhaps the awkward cousin of departments of literature and it even now barely acknowledged by departments of theatre. Among literary scholars and historians the medieval theatre until relatively recently (the last 50 years) was something of an embarrassment. It seemed a crude and irrelevant interlude between the classical theatres of Greece and Rome and the mature flourishing of the Renaissance and baroque theatres of England, France and Spain. It has been difficult to find a way to accommodate the medieval theatre in the narrative of Western theatrical history, principally because the standard frame of reference was literary and few critics were willing to claim literary merit on behalf of medieval dramatic texts. As recently as thirty years ago, even an apologist for the medieval drama was forced to concede that "The dialogue [of medieval plays] has not the richness of texture that would make a constant re-reading of the words rewarding."[1] Moreover, the historical paradigm that interpreted Western theatre as Greek-based and Greek-inspired (text-based, involving mimesis and impersonation) saw the theatre historically as flourishing in fifth-century Athens, declining with Rome, reviving in the Renaissance, being codified in European neoclassicism, and reaching a kind of apogee in the modern realistic theatre. There simply was no place for the medieval theatre. Specialists might labour and assemble and comment; but unless their subject could be accommodated within a larger historical model, it was necessarily relegated to the periphery. So long as the criterion for attention was literary merit, so long as the medieval drama was seen as an aberration in dramatic history, and so long as there appeared to be no relationship between the drama of the Middle Ages and the

1 Rosemary Wolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London: 1972), 100.

classical drama that preceded it and the Renaissance drama that succeeded it, there was little chance of the "field" of medieval theatre developing. As pertinent as we might think the notions contained in such words and phrases as "intrinsic," "in its own right," and so on are, a medieval "flourishing" was unlikely to be recognized isolated from the received, standard historical paradigm and the discourse it legitimates. The first step then was to historicize the medieval theatre.

The process of historicizing actually began near the end of the eighteenth century. In 1765 Thomas Percy descried the seeds of modern tragedy and comedy in the morality play and that of the history play in the English cycle plays. Classical models, he suggested, merely accelerated an indigenous process.[2] A few years later, Thomas Hawkins (1773) speculated that modern drama was not simply a revival of ancient drama but a new creation governed by its own laws. He discerned at the beginning of the sixteenth century two dramatic traditions: one based on the theatres of Greece and Rome; the other a popular, half-formed original capable, he thought, of a future development.[3] The idea of *two* dramatic traditions lying back of modern (post 1500) European theatre proved to be a fruitful one. In 1839 the French writer Charles Magnin looked for the origins of the modern theatre in the liturgical music-drama of the medieval Church, compared the process with the development of the Greek theatre from the worship of Dionysus, and pronounced that the medieval theatre had been established "absolument de la même manière" as the Greek.[4] What is significant is that now the modern theatre was considered to have developed from medieval rather than classical roots. By the beginning of the twentieth century the investigations of comparative anthropology—particularly those of Sir James Frazer and the so-called Cambridge School—which postulated an intimate connection between religious ritual and theatre, prompted the expansion of the analogy into a universal principle. Gustave Cohen (1879-1958), the great French champion of the medieval theatre, insisted that religion "is itself the generator of drama and . . . all culture takes on voluntarily and spontaneously a dramatic and

2 Thomas Percy, "An Essay on the Origin of the English Stage," in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, ed. H. B. Wheatley* (London, 1891), vol. I.

3 Thomas Hawkins, *The Origin of English Drama* (Oxford, 1773).

4 Charles Magnum, *Les Origines du théâtre antique et du théâtre moderne* (Paris, 1839).

theatrical aspect."[5]

The medieval theatre, then, was linked by analogy and by anthropological theory to the classical drama that preceded it. Moreover, it was eventually related to the later modern theatre as one of its necessary causes. Early in the twentieth century, E. K. Chambers clearly viewed the medieval theatre as a precondition for what was of real value to follow. He wished, he said, "to state and explain the pre-existing conditions . . . which made the great Shakespearean stage possible."[6]

Chambers' neglect of the literary side of medieval drama in favour of the collection of social and economic data points to yet another circumstance underlying the historicizing of the medieval theatre. For Chambers the medieval stage had ceased to represent merely an insignificant contribution to the history of dramatic literature and had instead become a factually rich collection of data about the circumstances and conditions of performance that might provide a true historical explanation for theatrical *events*. Antiquarians had, of course, long been collecting and publishing obscure records and documents, but their interest had been in the facts themselves rather than in interpretation or historical explanation. What had been needed in order to draw the attention of historians and scholars like Chambers to the medieval theatre was a theory of historical process that would enable them to interpret and explain this information, a theory that would itself prompt new fact-finding inquiries and help to determine what was relevant, a theory that could bring about a shift in perspective from value-oriented literary appreciation to historical explanation. The theory that served this purpose, of course, was the product on the one hand of historical empiricism and on the other of a concept of an evolutionary process from the simple to the complex. It is now a commonplace to decry this sort of naive Darwinism, but it would be an error to underestimate the truly revolutionary—and salutary—effect that evolutionary theory has had on the study of the medieval theatre. The monumental works of Petit de Julleville, E. K. Chambers, Gustave Cohen, and Karl Young,[7] for instance, remain indispensable compendia of

5 Gustave Cohen, *Le Théâtre en France au moyen âge* (Paris, 1928), I, 5.

6 E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford, 1903), I, v-vi.

7 L. Petit de Julleville, *La Comédie et les moeurs* (1866), *Les Comédiens en France au moyen-âge* (1885), *Les Mystères* (1880), *Répertoire du théâtre comique en France au moyen-âge* (1886); E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903); Gustave Cohen,

fact and interpretation, no matter how sceptical we have become of the theoretical basis of their work.

A new attitude is immediately apparent in the work of Petit de Julleville. He refuted the generally accepted idea that French drama began in 1402 with the granting by Charles VI of Letters of Patent to the Confrérie de la Passion, insisting instead that fifteenth-century theatre was the culmination of an evolutionary process that had begun in the liturgy of the Church. And he rehearses the process now, unhappily, so familiar from innumerable repetitions in popular histories and handbooks: The Latin liturgical drama was slowly transformed via accretion and elaboration into a vernacular and secularized drama, performed by the laity in streets and public squares. Chambers follows a similar line when he writes of the "secularization" of the liturgical drama: "From such beginnings [in the liturgy] grew up the great popular religious drama of the miracle-plays, with its off-shoots in the moralities and the dramatic pageants."[8]

It was Gustave Cohen, however, who provides the most extensive elaboration of the evolutionary method. He believed that literature and theatre evolved in much the same way as had biological species, according to laws that ensured that the same cause always had the same effect. He thus insisted on studying and explaining the evolution of theatrical conditions for each period of theatrical history. It is necessary, he argued, to demonstrate that the *mise en scène* is an expression of the culture wherein it developed. Moreover, he cited with approval the comparative method championed by the French literary critic Ferdinand Brunetière, who in 1889 had expounded his theory of the evolution of literary genres. But Cohen went further, extrapolating from Brunetière an analogical method that he shared with contemporary comparative ethnologists—that is, what is known to be true at one time and place can assumed to be true at another time and place where evidence is lacking. For instance, he fills in and clarifies his descriptions of the French *mise en scène* with references to theatrical practice in other countries. "The historian," he

L'Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre religieux français du moyen-âge (1926), *Le Théâtre en France au moyen-âge* (1928); Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (1933).

8 Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, I, vi; see II, 68-105.

writes, "however modest he may be, ought not to isolate himself in his subject; he must elucidate it as well from without."[9]

This historicizing of the medieval theatre clearly implied a reconceptualization of theatre itself, involving the displacement of the dramatic text as the focus of the historian's attention. In its place was performance and the conditions of performance, specifically information concerning the *mise en scène* which, before Petit de Julleville, had been pretty much ignored. Petit de Julleville agreed with most of his peers concerning the literary merit, or lack thereof, of the French medieval drama, but neatly sidestepped the issue by redefining the object of study: "Our farces, our *moralités* are not literary works."[10] Obviously, something that is not literature cannot be faulted for lacking literary worth. Instead, Petit de Julleville pointed to the emphasis in the medieval theatre on *spectacle*, to its immense and varied action unlimited in time and space, to its fusion of the marvellous with a detailed realism. And he concerned himself with such unliterary matters as lists of performances, the *mystères mimes*, "mystères sans paroles," and records of actors; for as he quizzically and pointedly asked: "What can be said of a theatre without actors?"[11]

There is a tendency when considering the work of Chambers, Cohen and Petit de Julleville from the vantage point of the twenty-first century to make perhaps too much of their faulty evolutionary model. They were far more fundamentally our contemporaries in their selection of performance over dramatic text, in their preference for the thing done over the thing made. We should note that for these scholars the medieval dramatic text was of significance only as a form of theatrical documentation. (The is no evidence, of course, that any of them was prepared to extend this radical notion to periods that could boast texts of real literary merit.) But there is in these early revaluations of the medieval theatre the seed for challenges to received Western dramatic theory that are more and more insistently being made. To stress the *mise en scène* as Petit de Julleville did is not simply to see performance

9 Cohen, *L'Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre religieux français du moyen-âge,* 2nd ed. (Paris, 1926) 13.

10 Petit de Julleville, *La Comédie et les moeurs* (Paris, 1886) 6.

11 *Les Comédiens en France au moyen-âge* (Paris, 1885) 11.

as the "realization" of a written text, a text that somehow contains the genetic code for its own performance, and that objectively embodies its true meaning and value. It is rather to conceive of the thing done, the performance, as constructing meaning and value in a cultural-historical context, as an event in time and space. In contrast, we need to recall that what has remained more or less constant in Western dramatic theory are two ideas: i) that theatre is centred on the dramatic text, which embodies an essential meaning and which governs or at least circumscribes theatrical interpretation; and ii) that drama is a mimetic art whose forms and genres are determined largely on literary grounds, usually on the basis of the kind of action imitated. Only fairly recently have performance theorists begun to offer alternative models to this Aristotelian paradigm. But such possibilities were in fact implicit in the work of Chambers, Cohen, and Petit de Julleville.

When in 1989 I wrote in the Preface to *A Companion to the Medieval Theatre* that "a medieval drama was an event rather than a literary text, related far more closely to other events—political, social, military, diplomatic, religious, recreational—than to literature," I was right. However, when I added, "it is this realization that has informed the revaluation of the medieval theatre over the past thirty or so years," I failed to acknowledge the historiographical pioneers that made this revaluation possible. Indeed, in retrospect, the real question becomes one of asking why it took so long for the revolution to be realized. For, while I would like to report that the work of Chambers and Cohen revolutionized the study of the medieval theatre and led inexorably to the received wisdom of an editorial preface, the public record and my own experience suggest otherwise. Of the two most prominent distinguishing characteristics of this early work—the historicizing of the medieval theatre as part of an evolutionary sequence, and the redefinition of medieval theatre as performance event rather than as literary text—only the first initially took hold.

Let me begin with my own experience as a student. As an undergraduate I studied medieval English drama in a course titled "Fourteenth-Century Verse and Prose." We read, as I recall, the York *Harrowing of Hell* and the Wakefield *Noah*. Any theatrical qualities we might have sensed, however dimly, were submerged in considerations of language and dialect. As a graduate student I had no opportunity

to do course work in medieval drama, even if the thought had crossed my mind. (It didn't.) I added to my repertoire via teaching texts and anthologies the Brome *Abraham and Isaac*, the *Second Shepherds Play*, and *Everyman*. And that was pretty much the medieval drama so far as I was concerned. Of the medieval theatre of the European continent I remained blissfully ignorant.[12]

So far as performance was concerned, most of us had vague notions of crude farm wagons carrying yokels decked out in sandals, bathrobes and towelled headgear, reciting doggerel verse accompanied by appropriately pious histrionics. The medieval theatre was, in fact, often associated with a naive religiosity, primitive stage effects, and amateurish performance.

Lest you think that this pitiful misconception was little more than could be expected of a student doomed to intellectual backwaters in Canada and the United States, let me assure you that the scholarly world was doing precious little to alter our misconceptions. Texts and documents continued to be collected and published to be sure, but they were addressed to specialists who were for the most part themselves theatrically naive and generally content with leaving their precious material safely on the shelf. Two books published in the mid-fifties are representative of the prevailing attitude. Both Grace Frank (1954) and Hardin Craig (1955) accepted in general terms at least the Petit de Julleville-Chambers-Cohen evolutionary paradigm, and both focussed almost exclusively on the descriptive analyses of surviving dramatic texts in French and English respectively. Craig in particular was especially contemptuous of medieval theatricality. "To be sure," he wrote, "the machinery of theatres, stages, and actors somewhat as we know them came into existence as it was needed . . . ."[13] Left with the texts of plays and only the most rudimentary notion of dramaturgy and staging (apparently derived from Aristotle and Roman comedy), Craig not surprisingly found little to admire in the English drama of the Middle Ages. It lacked, he thought, dramatic technique, dramatic purpose, artistic self-consciousness, and theory: "For the technique of the mystery and miracle

12 Prior to David Bevington's admirable *Medieval Drama* (1974), the most accessible collections of early English drama were Joseph Quincey Adams' heavily bowdlerized *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas* (1924), and A. C. Crawley's *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (1956).

13 Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955) 1.

plays and of the main current of English popular drama consisted merely in telling a story on a stage by means of dialogue, impersonation, and action."[14] Merely.

The historiography of the medieval theatre since Frank and Craig has, of course, largely rejected the evolutionary paradigm. But of more importance in my view has been a growing emphasis on the idea of theatre as event, and a comparative methodology that has begun to treat the medieval theatre as a pan-European phenomenon.

Once a connection was made between text-centred drama and the sometimes textless spectacle of tournament, street pageantry and courtly entertainment, there seemed no limits to what might be subsumed under the rubric of "medieval theatre." In fact, we might better refer to "medieval performance" or even to "spectacle"—terms which reflect a new emphasis on the optics of performance, on the language of icon and emblem, of visual symbol and allegory. Historians increasingly turned their attention to the diversity of medieval performance, while at the same time they recognized that these activities proceeded on the basis of shared assumptions concerning performance and dramaturgy. "It becomes both possible and reasonable," wrote Glynne Wickham in 1959, "to consider the stagecraft of Tournaments, Royal Entries, the Miracle Cycles and the Elizabethan Public Theatre as so many different manifestations of a single homogeneous tradition of stage spectacle, acting and production."[15] Procession and spectacle, emblematic costume and décor, place-and-scaffold staging were common to a wide variety of performance forms. "In a sense, medieval civilization best expressed its values and ideals through spectacle, pageantry and ceremony, in which role-playing and performance were well-nigh universal phenomena. The priest commemorating the Last Supper in the Mass, the preacher bringing the illustrative *exemplum* to life, the guild member portraying Satan in a Corpus Christi pageant, the costumed knight both imitating and anticipating his warrior's role in the tournament, the prince entering a city to the welcome of the townspeople—all were playing their parts in a world in which every person had a part."[16]

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14 Craig, 9.

15 Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300-1600* (London: Routledge, 1959) I, 113.

16 Ronald W. Vince, *A Companion to the Medieval Theatre* (New York: Greenwood, 1989) ix-x.

Exploring medieval performance so broadly conceived has forced even the most parochial of scholars to stretch beyond the confines of national or linguistic identity. The theatre we call medieval spanned almost a thousand years, stretched from Scandinavia to Moorish Spain to Constantinople, and expressed itself in dozens of languages and dialects. Indeed, some commentators have questioned "the undesirable demarcation between 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' scholarship."[17] Moreover, theatre as event is ubiquitous, seemingly without limits. The field of medieval theatre seems in fact unsurveyable. We might well ask if it has not expanded to the point where it has no limits at all, or if there are margins, they are like those of Ulysses' untravelled world, "whose margin fades/For ever and for ever when [we] move." Both vast and heterogeneous, the medieval theatre has caused more than one young scholar to seek tenure elsewhere. "Small wonder," remarked a senior scholar a few years ago, "that few have ventured into the archives of our medieval dramatic heritage when quicker profits can patently be made by ignoring it."[18]

The explanatory model that underlies what we might call the "revisionist" paradigm is that of a single theatre distinguished by a finite number of variations brought about by differences in motivation and local circumstance. But the balance between general and local is difficult to maintain. On the one hand, the model has proved to be a useful replacement for the fragmented national histories that (mis)informed my own student experiences. On the other hand, it can suggest a homogeneity of purpose and execution that blurs national and local distinctiveness and reinforces the popular misconception of the European Middle Ages as static and uniform. Although this larger perspective was reflected in half a dozen books in English published in the 1970s and 1980s,[19] the re-theorizing and re-historicizing of the medieval theatre in terms of pan-Europeanism has not fully materialized. This

17 Peter Happé, *The Cambridge Companion to English Medieval Theatre* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) 343.

18 Wickham, *Early English Stages*, I, xxiii.

19 Glynne Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre* (1974); A. M. Nagler, *The Medieval Religious Stage* (1976); William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (1978); Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby, *The Staging of Religious Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (1983); Ronald W. Vince, ed., *A Companion to the Medieval Theatre* (1989).

may be at least partly attributed to the current popularity of the new historicism, which privileges the specific over the universal in historical discourse (the idiographic over the nomothetic).

The study of the medieval theatre, then, remains fragmented by nationality and language. Furthermore, studies since 1990 are overwhelmingly devoted to text-centred drama of the late Middle Ages and to the theatrical circumstances of its production. This failure to develop a pan-European, performance-based interpretive paradigm for the medieval theatre may, of course, be nothing more than a temporary failure of nerve in the face of an obviously exhausting and near-impossible enterprise. What concerns me more is the apparent reversion in some current work to a positivist methodology that for the most part has long been discredited. I am thinking of the multiple volumes devoted to the *Records of Early English Drama* being published by the University of Toronto, to the articles that appears regularly in *English Medieval Theatre*, and on the broader front to the documentary history of the medieval theatre published by Cambridge University Press.[20] I am not at all impugning the diligence, intelligence or integrity of the scholars involved in these projects. My hesitation stems from the circumscribed nature of the methodology itself.

The fundamental assumption underlying a positivist methodology is that the truth and validity of history lies in the factual record of the past, recoverable through the accumulation of documentary-based data. The collection of date is followed by its interpretation, usually taken to mean the recognition of patterns objectively present in the assembled data. The stated objectives of the REED project, for example, include the collection and publication of all the records of drama, ceremonial and minstrelsy in the United Kingdom and Ireland to 1640, in order to make the documents available for various kinds of "objective" analysis. To this end, the REED volumes contain a minimum of interpretive commentary that might sway an objective consideration of the documents. The acts of collection and interpretation are conceived as sequential and separable operations. ("Objective" evidently is intended to apply both to the uninterpreted data and to the historian.) Furthermore, positivism assumes that historical knowledge increases with the

20 For an expression of similar concerns, see Michal Kobialka's review of William Tydeman, ed., The Medieval European Stage, 500-1550 in *Theatre Survey* 44 (2003): 138-40.

accumulation of documentary data, and that changes in our explanatory model—shifts in our theoretical paradigm—come about because fresh data undermines and renders inadequate old theories and eventually forces us to create a new interpretive model. As Sportin' Life so eloquently commented in *Porgy and Bess*, "It ain't necessarily so."

First, there is a disconcerting sense here of *déja vu*. The criticism that O. B. Hardison levelled at Chambers and Young remains valid: Interpretation does not simply emerge from collected data unsullied by human bias; it serves equally as a criterion for the selection of the data in the first place. And even if interpretation is consciously suppressed in the interests of objective collection, Hardison argued, "Buried among the facts and protestations of objectivity are assumptions peculiar to a specific age and group of thinkers."[21] Historical method and purpose then is itself historically and culturally determined, and materials are selected and arranged to reflect that method and purpose. Hardison identified the idea of historical evolution implicit in the work of Chambers and Young. It is less clear what qualifies a document as a "record" of early English drama. But whatever it is, we must remind ourselves that if the REED project serves as it is intended to serve—as the completed first step in a historiographical sequence—whatever is included is *de facto* theatrical, whatever is excluded is not. Like it or no, "theatre" is itself being defined.[22]

Second, and a closely related point: There is nothing objective about collected data. We cannot even identify historical data, let alone determine what it means, without contextualization. The REED volumes, of course, contextualize data in a very obvious way; but consider what happens. The documents are removed from the particular context in which they are found, arranged chronologically together with other documents similarly selected, and printed in large red volumes clearly labelled "Records of Early English Drama." There is some suggestion that the REED editors recognize that the nature and purpose of specific documents determined their creation and survival in the first place, as well as their content, but

21 O. B. Hardison, Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965) 26.

22 See Theresa Coletti, "Reading REED: History and the Records of Early English Drama," in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 248-84.

they do little to recognize this earlier contextualization beyond noting the archival sources. There is little recognition of the notoriously protean nature of historical documents. Contextualization, based on various forms of theorizing and historicizing, can make data mean many things, as the history of scholarship clearly demonstrates. A document's ambiguity is a given of historical research. In accepting ambiguity, note the authors of a study of David Rogers' Breviarye, "we would accept the subjectivity of evidence, realizing that objectivity is largely an illusion and that history exists only in the form of the records and analyses we create. If we accept these premises, then our focus would turn from the events of the past to the instruments that report those events."[23] In short, historical data and history cannot exist outside our documentary analyses. The foregrounding of evidence in this sense comes close to obliterating the distinction between data and interpretation. Certainly it requires the scholar to be acutely conscious of her role in the hermeneutic circle that characterizes historical investigation.

Finally, the most significant paradigm shift of the last century in the study of the English medieval theatre came about, not because scholarship had uncovered a treasure hoard of new facts, but because a Catholic priest preferred his own version of Christianity to Protestantism. In *Mysteries' End* (1946), Harold C. Gardiner challenged the notion that the medieval religious drama had flourished, undergone secularization, and finally died through a natural process of growth and decay. He argued instead that it had been deliberately suppressed. The villain was, he said, "Reformation distaste for the religious culture of the past . . ., a distaste, moreover, which was stimulated and kept alive by the wishes of the government."[24] This theory did not arise from collected facts any more than did Chambers' theory, or Craig's. This new interpretation was a result of a change in perspective brought about by and independent on larger matters of faith and vision. In Gardiner's case, we find a priest's preference for medieval Catholic culture over the values of the Reformation, together with a strong desire to see the medieval theatre as worthy of

23 Steven Hart and Margaret Knapp, *"The Aunchant and Famous Cittie": David Rogers and the Chester Mystery Plays* (New York: Lang, 1988) 146.

24 Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries' End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval religious Stage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946) xiii.

the Catholic culture that produced it. Gardiner's theory forced a reassessment of the theatre itself, and the same texts that a few years later were continuing to elicit Craig's condescension prompted Gardiner's admiration. Both a *cause* and a *consequence* of the revised paradigm then was the affirmation of the sophistication and worth of the early drama, and the richness of the civilization that produced it. And it has not been necessary to be a priest of the Roman Catholic Church to recognize this worth and this richness.[25]

And thus to a conclusion, at best perhaps a paralogism, at worst a non-sequitur. I am not a specialist in the medieval theatre, but this obviously does not mean that I have no opinions concerning its study. I have tried to sketch—all too briefly—the scholarly processes by which the medieval theatre has been historicized and theorized over the past century. The picture is complicated by the fact that we are, after all, dealing with a compound term ("medieval theatre") that implies at least two disciplinary discourses: a historicized medievalist discourse, and a theorized theatrical discourse. These discourses, moreover, can each be subdivided synchronically and diachronically. The *medieval* theatre can be historicized synchronically in terms of the broader medieval culture, and it can be historicized diachronically in terms of chronological periodization. The medieval *theatre* can be theorized synchronically in terms of broadly conceived medieval performance forms, and it can be theorized diachronically in terms of the historically diverse forms that preceded and followed it. This model, however complex, does provide a framework for defining and approaching a theatrical event, which exists not only in time and space (diachronically and synchronically) but more significantly as a scholarly construct.

Scholarly specialization is of course necessary, but it is only within some sort of conceptualized framework that specialist scholarship can proceed or even have any meaning. Our only choice is to consider and articulate a framework or to proceed blindly on the basis of unexamined assumptions. I would argue that it is only within the context of a theoretical model that the rudiments of any field can be taught. (That I have often failed to provide or use such a theoretical construct in my own

25 Ronald W. Vince, *Ancient and Medieval Theatre* (Westport: Greenwood, 1984) 93-95.

teaching I deeply regret.) At the same time, I am becoming more and more convinced that any definition of the "field" of medieval theatre studies can consist of little more than postulated directions and potential connections; that like a baseball field it can be organized but not limited, that some arbitrary boundaries, like the outfield fence, can occasionally be cleared by a scholarly home run.