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Section 4: The Long Middle Ages

Chapter 16

Manuscripts, antiquarians, editors and critics: the historiography of reception.¹

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The performances of early drama have come and gone. The sights, sounds, smells and other sensory experiences of each particular audience cannot be recreated. Studying early theatre, in particular the plays performed before the rise of print culture and the professional playhouse, is therefore the study of oblique witnesses to a long gone ephemeral event – unique even when repetition of an earlier event was intended – that took place in real time. These witnesses form the enduring substance that surrounds the essential void that is the thing itself. As the other essays in this volume demonstrate, those witnesses, and the fruitful scholarship they engender, are various, including eye-witness accounts, itemised accounts of the other kinds recording the expenditure and income relating to the performance, as well as regulatory materials in which various authorities asserted control over what was performed. In the case of drama, that is performance which included spoken text, the script of what characters should or did speak has traditionally been privileged to the point at which it has tended to be discussed synonymously with “the play”. There is, of course, a now well-established caution in scholarship that makes scrupulous distinction between the text and the play itself, and yet proficient editions still lead students to accept unquestioningly that texts of very dubious provenance represent what was played in this or that place for a hundred and fifty years or more. The present essay will explore the status of a number of our surviving

¹ As editor of this volume I am extremely grateful to Gail MacMurray Gibson for generously reading, commenting on, and correcting my own contribution. Any remaining errors are my own responsibility.

texts of medieval plays, concentrating on the English biblical tradition,² interlaced with a consideration of their reception in the intervening centuries from the earliest antiquarian collectors to modern critical scholarship, and with the merest nod towards theatrical adaptation and production. The essay thus aims to introduce the idea that throughout their history these texts have been received in ways that are necessarily understood within the grand narratives current at the time, with the implicit caveat that our own time is no exception. What set out to be a survey of codicological and antiquarian research, and the opportunities that remain within the field, becomes rather an exploration into the historiography of early drama studies, or how generations of blind men – and women – have felt, and understood, the elephant.

Playbooks

Who has been involved in the performance of any play and not had their heavily annotated script or prompt copy fall apart at the seams by the end of the performance run? We are fortunate indeed to have E. Martin Browne's prompt copy of the revival of the York mystery plays for the 1951 Festival of Britain, complete with director's annotations including the final injunction at the end of Doomsday to "Kepe Christ in Heaven".³ How much more miraculous is it that we have any original working scripts from the period in which the plays were performed in the first place, yet there are a few that bear physical signs of having been used

² Necessarily the primary material studied in this essay coincides to some extent with that covered in Alexandra Johnston's essay on biblical plays, but the very different approaches in the two essays are designed to offer complementarity in terms of modelling the practices of research, rather than overlap.

³ Browne's own prompt copy is in the E. Martin Browne archive held by *Medieval English Theatre* in the English Department at the University of Lancaster.

in actual performance. These are our only true “scripts”. Three well-known examples illustrate their physical characteristics.

The York Scriveners’ pageant of the Incredulity of Thomas is the only independently-surviving working text from the York cycle. The pageant draws on the story of Christ’s appearance to the apostles following the Resurrection as told in John 20: 24-29, embellished with the liturgy of the *Peregrinus*. It survives in the Sykes MS in York City Archives and was described in detail by A.C. Cawley in 1952 (45–80). Cawley includes an exhaustive analysis of the variants between this version of the pageant and that in the Register, the surviving text of the near-complete cycle which will be discussed below. He accepts N. R. Ker’s dating of the manuscript on palaeographical evidence to the second quarter of the sixteenth century (45n2), post-dating the York Register by half a century or more. Moreover, his detailed analysis demonstrates that the text in the playbook is neither the original from which the Register version was copied, nor does it seem to be a later copy taken from the Register, as each has a number of better, as in more comprehensible, readings than the other. It seems altogether likely, therefore, that this text was written exclusively for guild ownership, probably as a prompt copy. It is written on four vellum leaves in a single quire, 24.5 cms by 16.25 cms, and has a protective wrap-around vellum cover. It shows signs of having been folded vertically down the centre for some time, as if to fit in a pocket, and inside the front cover are scribblings, including the names “Thomas” and “Edward Beckwith”. The base text is written in a single hand, but there are cancellations and insertions in other hands, speaking of a play text modified from one production to another to fit the exigencies of performance circumstances and resources. The speeches are separated by rules, making cue-lines immediately visually apparent, and speakers’ names are in the right hand margin as is customary in the period. There are no stage directions nor any other theatrical apparatus.

The manuscript disappointed its twentieth-century editor by not being a better piece of work given that it was the property of scribes (Cawley 46), but workaday quality notwithstanding it serves as a particularly pointed illustration of the longevity of performance in York alongside the tenacity of the occupation of scribbling well after the advent of the printing press. Moreover, just as the manuscript of the York Register survived not through preservation by recusants but in the hands of the Cromwellian Fairfax family in whom the impulse for conservation modified reformist zeal, this little playbook seems to have been associated early in its history with the firmly Protestant Beckwith family. Sir Leonard Beckwith was a member of the King's Council in the North in 1546, and was granted the lands formerly belonging to Holy Trinity Priory which had a long association with the plays. As late as 1843 this playbook was believed to be the only surviving text from the whole York Cycle, as the Register was still in private hands and largely unknown.

The situation where manuscripts of the Chester plays are concerned is complicated, as all five versions of the complete text post-date the last production of the plays as we shall see, and are all related to a now lost "regynall", or original. There are, however, in addition, two survivals from the time during which the plays were actually performed. First there is a fragment, in very poor condition, of the Resurrection, in Manchester Central Library MS 822, possibly dating from the fifteenth century. More informative, however, is National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 399 a copy of the whole of the penultimate pageant in the cycle, Antichrist, a subject unique to Chester. W.W. Greg (1935) described the text as having a wrap-around vellum cover, although it is now bound in brown leather. The ten parchment folios containing the text of the play measure c. 28 by c. 17.5 cm, and are bracketed between eleven paper folios at the front and ten at the back. Like the York Scribes manuscript, the play text also shows signs of having been folded down the middle, and all speech headings (which are centred), stage directions, and other headings are underlined in red. Such is the

overlay of later interference to the text, that it is now impossible to make any definitive statement about its original purpose, but, given its date and format, it is at least plausibly another guild copy that may have been used in production.

The Coventry playbook presents us with a slightly different case (King and Davidson 20–26). The texts of only two pageants survive from what was clearly another ambitious civic cycle, though different again from York's or Chester's in the detail of its organisation. The Shearmen and Tailors' story of the Nativity survives in only an antiquarian transcript, which we shall meet later, but for the Weavers' pageant of the Purification of the Virgin and Christ's Debate with the Doctors in the Temple we have not only the guild's playbook, but records of the commissioning of that playbook, and two surviving leaves from an earlier, fifteenth-century, version of the same pageant. The text is full of alterations and additions, some made by the redactor as he wrote, others clearly part of the production process. Various people have written or scribbled on the book, with a particular concentration of casual marginalia on the flyleaves. These were originally pastedowns and, being sheets torn from a now rare incunable, the *Expositio hymnorum*, printed by Pinson in 1498 (King and Davidson 26), are of codicological interest in their own right. The name Pixley occurs in the marginal jottings; the guild accounts relating to the play in the later sixteenth century include a number of members of the Pixley family, and Alan Pixley, Harry Pixley, and William Pixley were all masters of the guild through the middle of the sixteenth century. But we also have record of the man who wrote the playbook from the colophon:

Tys matter nevly translate be Robert Croo/ In the yere of owre lord god M^lvCxxxiii^j^{te} /
then beyng meyre Mastur palmar beddar/ and Rychard smythe an ... Pyxley/ masturs of
the weywars thys boke yendide/ the seycond dey of marche in yere above seyde.

Robert Croo (Crow) in fact wrote both the Shearmen and Tailors' and Weavers' playbooks in 1535. Then, in 1557 the Drapers paid him 20s. for the new playbook for their Doomsday

pageant, and six years later he was paid by the Smiths for two leaves for their pageant which covered the Passion sequence. He is also recorded as playing God for the Drapers in 1562 and 1566, making the worlds that they burned in 1556, 1561, 1563, and 1566, and making a hat for the Pharisee in 1562. In 1556 he also made the two giants for the Drapers' midsummer show. The playbook also has the texts of two songs appended at the back in different hands from the main text, reminding us that music was an integral part of this type of theatre, though evidently farmed out to specialists such as the city waits.

The two leaves from the previous version of the Coventry Weavers' pageant are written on paper and, in their present condition show signs of having been used to wipe a pen nib. The paper is of the kind made from rags, and highly absorbent, so it seems at least possible that Crow had them beside him as he wrote, and viewed the previous version as expendable waste-paper. Certainly the equivalent sections in his version of the play show coincidental evidence that the nib of his pen was causing problems at the moment in question (King and Davidson 24). Thus we have with the Coventry Weavers' material a rare glimpse into the actual process of production, ownership, and safe-keeping of play texts – the Weavers' playbook was probably kept for some years in the Pixley household, where it appears young Alan and Richard used it for writing practice – as well as the purely functional value accorded to such manuscripts. Their evident ephemerality, on a par with props and costumes, to be replaced and discarded as they wore out with use, makes the survival of any at all the more remarkable.

There are other manuscript fragments which show signs of having had direct physical relationship with performance comparable with the three considered above. While many of the “Non-cycle plays and fragments” published by Norman Davis are anthology pieces in manuscript miscellanies (Davis 1970; 1979), those that are free-standing, such as the Rickingham Fragment, and the Durham Prologue, may have a history in performance; *Dux*

Moraud, a small roll of parchment cut from the margin of an East Anglian assize roll and containing the speech of the character from which its name is taken, more securely shows every sign of being an actor's part (1979, 69). And, in the present volume, John Marshall (PAGE) discusses what is clearly the performance script of an early Robin Hood play, preserved on the dorse of a document in the Paston family collection. The reason for singling out the three playbooks discussed above, however, is so that they may be juxtaposed codicologically and in terms of their apparent status, function, and reception, with the better-known surviving manuscripts of near-complete "mystery cycles". In the case of the first two, from York and Chester, versions of the same pageant survive in the larger collections, and in the case of Coventry we can see how before a catastrophic fire in the Birmingham Free Library, it was possible to reconstruct a rather different cycle on the basis of individual playbooks and guild records alone.

The modest and ephemeral nature of these exemplars stands in sharp contrast to the better-known comprehensive manuscripts, and their self-evident remove from actual performance. What they have in common is that the material in them is formally identifiable as drama from its *mise en page*, although the methods used both in the playbooks and the larger manuscripts to distinguish spoken material from non-spoken, such as speakers' names and stage directions, is itself borrowed from liturgical service books and the practice of rubrication. Once we get over the simplistic idea that page layout as dialogue implies performance script, however, we can consider the manuscripts formerly treated as synonymous with the "English mystery plays" (Woolf) according to different criteria. They are marked out by their original contexts: the York Register, containing forty-seven pageants, is a document of civic control, and the rest (N-Town, Chester, and Towneley) are antiquarian exercises of more or less opaque motive. The history of their physical generation and preservation points to their singular status in manuscript culture. The very fact that many

were written after the advent of the printing press is probably itself a fruitful line of enquiry that has yet to be pursued. Functional playbooks were treated as cultural ephemera, like private letters, papers, and shopping lists, surviving through chance or the activity of congenial hoarders like the Paston family only; the ambitiously large manuscripts we move on to consider now are of a completely different order, self-consciously compiled with aspirations to the permanence accorded to the written record or the preservation of “heritage”. As such, they ask to be treated not as scripts but as books that evidence the reception and valuing of the material they contain, and thus as early instances of critical editing.

The Chester Manuscripts

It is conventional to begin with York, as the York Register, dated to around 1476-77, is both early and retains a demonstrable connection with performance, if at a remove. Here, however, as our narrative is governed by historiography rather than chronology, the York Register which languished in obscurity until the late nineteenth century, will enter the picture later; for now we stay in Chester.

The Chester cycle survives in five manuscript versions, dating from 1591 to 1607.⁴ We know that the last performance in Chester took place in 1575, predating all. All appear to be copies of the same base text, the lost “Regynall”, possibly a version of “original” or the official text mentioned in the records and kept at the Pentice. A collation of all the extant manuscripts is clearly set out in the authoritative edition of the plays (Lumiansky and Mills, 1974 and 1986). This reveals that the Regynall was similar to the York Register which we come to later, a civic control document, subject to two-

⁴ Huntington 2 (1591); London, British Library MS Additional 10305 (1592); BL MS Harley 2013 (1600); Oxford MS Bodley 175 (1604); BL MS Harley 2124 (1607).

way traffic between the city clerical officers and the guilds, to establish the texts but also to record updating and alterations. Thus the surviving manuscripts in Chester are at least two removes from the guilds' scripts.

Endorsing this supposition, we know from a letter-book recently come to light, that what was performed in the early 1570s was different again from the sequence in any of the extant manuscripts. Christopher Goodman, a native Cestrian and Puritan zealot, had spent some years in exile in John Knox's Scotland before returning to his old home. He was outraged by the pageants he saw and wrote to the Earl of Huntington and the Archbishop of York, listing the "absurdities" in the performance. Thus one of the plays' earliest identifiable textual critics is sadly not of a liberal persuasion. Some, but not all, of the "absurdities" he quotes can be traced to the extant, later, manuscripts. The stanza relating to the sacrament of the Eucharist he indignantly quotes from the Resurrection play, for example, is quite different. The version in the manuscripts reflects an adaptation striving to accommodate Reformation sensitivities, in the same spirit as the "post-Reformation banns" written to preface the performance and placate those who objected to the representation of the deity. In practice some accommodations seem to have been made, but others promised then ignored (Dell, Klausner and Ostavich 3–4). Although the "protestantising" of the Chester plays is tangential to our concerns here, observing that what was spoken in Chester when Goodman saw them towards the end of their run of about 150 years differs markedly from what is recorded in any of the extant manuscripts, highlights the danger, or absurdity, of extrapolating the fifteenth-century Corpus Christi play in Chester from the extant texts.

What then is the status of those five manuscripts? The motives for their generation, and the intentions of their commissioners and scribes, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, are relatively inscrutable. We know, as has been valuably set out by Alexandra

Johnston (2012, 21–23), that the 1591 manuscript was signed by “Edward Gregorie scholler at Bunburye”. Nothing is known of him, but the manuscript later passed into the hands of the Egerton family, Earls of Bridgewater, and an important Cheshire family. The 1592 and 1600 manuscripts were written down by George Bellin, scribe of the Coopers’ company, who also wrote out an archival copy of his guild’s pageant of the Trial and Flagellation. The 1607 manuscript was written by three scribes, one a James Miller, minor canon in Chester Cathedral. The 1604 manuscript is described by Johnston as “hurriedly written” and is attributed in a later hand to William Bedford, who was clerk to the Chester Brewers’ company in 1606. All the known scribes are, therefore, local men. We can perhaps assume that this was an exercise in conservation and civic and/or guild pride. Four of the manuscripts were later preserved by aristocratic Cheshire families with antiquarian interests, the Egertons, Cowpers, and Holmes.

These are also, like the York Scriveners’ playbook, manuscripts written in the post-print period. To suggest, on grounds of medium and content, that they are merely old-fashioned is surely simplistic. Their copying was at least equally likely to have been the result of the new enthusiasm for antiquarianism which burgeoned in the wake of Reformation iconoclasm. Read in this way, they are arguably further conscious acts of textual criticism, and axiomatically not “medieval” so much as “(early) modern”. James Simpson, in his study of the verse of Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Henry Howard, Early of Surrey, identifies the particular renaissance impulse towards genealogical endeavour, as the “mobile, divided, and self-fashioning voice ... [yet one] acutely conscious of history as needing, if unlikely to achieve, resurrection” (124–25). The intervening “period of loss” he goes on to identify as causal, may be broadly connected with the systematic proscription of pre-Reformation devotional practices which were bound up with group and individual identity-formation. The systematic destruction of many of the material artefacts which substantiated those identities,

such as chantry chapels and family tombs, ruptured the social mechanisms by which rank, affiliation, and memory were validated. The Chester manuscripts post-date the long evolution of the Chester plays, true critical editions, based on the authoritative base-text, the “Regynall”. The labour involved in the copying exercise stands testimony to the valorising of their content. Their manuscript format, in keeping with many Tudor antiquarian projects, asserts continuity with the past as a single tradition, but their impulse is that common to all editors of early texts which is also surely the preservation and recuperation of that past for a new world order.⁵

There is no small irony in the fact that James Heywood Markland, the next known editor of the Chester plays took the three later manuscripts to be primary scripts. Markland, a Chester-born lawyer, had joined the newly-formed antiquarian Roxburghe Club in 1813, and in 1818, at the age of only thirty, produced an edition of the Chester plays of Noah’s Flood and The Slaughter of the Innocents (Markland). He had wanted to write an entire history of the origins of medieval English drama, but had little confidence that his project would be well-received, writing to the like-minded Coventry antiquarian, Thomas Sharp:

Few readers are to be found who enjoy even specimens of ancient relics like these, & still fewer would peruse a copious collection -- besides, tho’ not intended by the compilers, or so considered in former days, there are unquestionably in these compositions both speeches and incidents that combine so much obscenity and profanity as could disgust the taste of the present eye (Sharp, MS end papers).

⁵ The case for the growth of Tudor antiquarianism as a cultural product of Reformation iconoclasm is well made in Phillip Lindley. *Tomb Destruction and Scholarship: Medieval Monuments in Early Modern England*. Donington: Shaun Tyas (2007).

His successors in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Deimling, Matthews and Greg have been criticised by David Mills, the most recent editor, as “textual scholars, who ... divorced them [the plays] from their social and performative contexts” (1998, 204). It is perhaps worth pausing to consider why. In part it is surely attributable to the further separation in the intervening centuries of the manuscripts, preserved in national collections, from any of the contextualising evidence available in local record. It is also, however, a marker of fashions in what constitutes the important cultural capital in early texts. Early collectors like Egerton were conserving memory; Markland was writing in the period of Romantic antiquarianism subject to the same imaginative responses to medieval texts as those modelled by Keats and Tennyson, and the later editors represent the remarkably tenacious academic practice of valorising medieval texts principally or solely as repositories of philological data.

Coventry survivals

Markland’s correspondent, Thomas Sharp, is probably the most important of the early nineteenth-century antiquarians to modern students of early drama, not because he was necessarily more aesthetically insightful than Markland, nor more interested in conservation than the others into whose hands manuscript copies fell – indeed Sharp, being a relatively modest hatter and city coroner rather than an aristocratic collector, worked with material that remained in the possession of Coventry’s guilds and city corporation. Sharp’s significance is the result of an historical accident, which postdates his death and underscores the remarkable survival of any of the material in question. In 1879, by which time all bar one of Coventry’s surviving playbooks had been deposited in the Birmingham Free Library, that library burned down, then, on the night of 14 November 1940, enemy action dispatched many of the accompanying civic records. Had

Thomas Sharp not spent his spare time copying out what is only a fraction of the material available to him in the eighteen teens and twenties, one of the handful of elements from our early drama to leak into common recognition, the Coventry Carol, along with its original context, the Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors, would have been lost forever along with many of the records of Coventry's Corpus Christi plays.

The plays in Coventry had survived the Reformation longer than most, but they eventually collapsed in the 1590s under pressure from extreme Puritans amongst the influential local magnates. Then, after the death of the Warwickshire herald and antiquarian, William Dugdale, in the 1680s, interest in pre-Reformation ceremonies died off. In the fullness of time the city took up a pageant which re-enacted the fabled naked ride of Lady Godiva as an alternative occasion for annual display and jollity. It is unclear whether Sharp was a self-conscious Romantic, but his activity found its moment alongside Markland's, as Walter Scott collected ancient Scottish traditional ballads, Richard Gough made engravings of the effigies on medieval tombs, and John Whittaker produced a facsimile of Magna Carta. At the centre of this circle was Francis Douce, director of the British Museum. Douce encouraged Sharp, to record and publish the records of Coventry's early drama. Even in this benign climate for coterie antiquarianism, Sharp's interest was considered eccentric in some circles. He phlegmatically preserved without comment the following response in *The Monthly Review* (May 1826) to his *Dissertation on the Pageants or Dramatic Mysteries Anciently performed at Coventry* (Sharp MS 202):

...but he is, at the same time, possessed with some share of that overweening belief in the deep importance of his particular theme, which seems inevitably to result from the long pursuit of such researches...it is evident either that he conceived a very extravagant opinion of the paramount magnitude of the subject, or that he very much exaggerates the value and novelty of his own

discoveries...Whatever certain antiquarians may delight to believe, the useful end of investigation does not consist in the laborious trifling with which the attention is frittered away upon minute certainties and petty doubts...

As if in anticipation of the present interest in the historiography of the subject, Sharp also kept his long correspondence with Douce, Walter Scott, Francis Palgrave and others, as well as critical reviews of his project. The critics were not kind; Sharp had gone into far more detail than the champions of grand narratives could wholeheartedly approve, yet, by modern standards, he was quite selective and certainly did not publish all he could have laid hands on. Nonetheless the total volume of early nineteenth-century antiquarian transcriptions of accounts and other documents by Sharp and his circle more than doubles the range of materials available to the scholar researching early plays.

N-Town

The correspondence between Francis Douce and Sharp also shows them bemused by the relationship between the Coventry playbooks and a fifteenth-century manuscript in the British Museum, now London BL MS Cotton Vespasian D VIII. Notes on the flyleaf by Robert Cotton's first librarian, Richard James, have created persistent confusion by perpetuating the error that this was not only Coventry's civic cycle, but written and acted by mendicant friars (Meredith and Kahrl xxvi). A number of arguments have been advanced as to where this disastrously misleading information came from (see, for example, Gibson 517), but the attribution to the Greyfriars offers a salutary lesson in the "Chinese whispers" hazard of historical reporting. The local annals of Coventry for 1493 record that the King and Queen saw the city's Corpus Christi plays "acted by the Greyfriars" (Ingram 77), where "by" is simply an adverb of place. The attribution to Coventry was just as tenacious on rather more substantive grounds, originating from the Warwickshire antiquarians Dugdale and Stevens. In

a letter of 1808, Douce, who remained convinced of the fraternal source of the plays, is emphatic that Dugdale and Stevens were wrong, and Sharp, ever self-effacingly cautious, went into print in 1825 advising the reader to “draw his own conclusions”.

The manuscript contains what superficially appears to be another sequence of pageants based on the story of the world from Creation to Doomsday, and, under the influence of the flyleaf inscription, was published as *Ludus Coventriae* in 1841 by James O. Halliwell. Such was the influence of Halliwell’s edition that the bogus Coventry provenance persisted into the 1960s. Then Hardin Craig in 1955 confirmed that this was indeed a civic cycle (259-60),

... we have to do with a Corpus Christi play not essentially different in its scope and the history of its development from other Corpus Christi cycles. To be sure, it has its special features, but certainly in the form outlined in the Proclamation, there is nothing about it that would put it in another dramatic class or lead one to think that it had other origin and growth than the accepted ones for Corpus Christi plays, that is simple beginnings and a gradual incremental growth by revision into its final, highly developed form,

Craig further adopted Esther L. Swenson’s claim in her doctoral dissertation of 1914 “that the Proclamation or banns enumerate the scenes as they were in an original Corpus Christi play of which the Hegge plays as we have them are a revision and amplification” (249). Further confusion is here introduced by the sometime use of the title “Hegge Plays” which is at least accurate, being based on the name of the manuscript’s first known owner, Robert Hegge of Durham (c.1597-1629). Hegge, despite a Protestant enforcement lineage, became a student of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and appears to have mixed in the course of his brief life in recusant bibliophile circles, encountering Richard James at Oxford, and also becoming a close associate of Thomas Allen, the old recusant antiquary of Gloucester Hall in Oxford

(Gibson). But how he acquired the manuscript, which remains otherwise “without habitation or name” (Gibson 504) beyond its attribution to the Norfolk/Suffolk border on dialect grounds, remains obscure.

The manuscript is now acknowledged to be no cycle at all, but a compilation. Nor is this a recent discovery; in 1913 Greg published his view that it was written for private reading (114), and K.S. Block, editing the manuscript in 1922 concurred that it was a compilation of other manuscripts rather than a transcription of a single exemplar (xxxiii-iv). Peter Meredith, one of the foremost scholars in the field in the late twentieth century, perceived the manuscript’s complexity, and extracted from it two freestanding and different plays, one dealing with the early life of the Virgin Mary the other a two-part Passion Play (1987, 1990). The French medieval *Passions*, dramas from Grebain and Valenciennes, are usually discussed as very unlike the English cycle model, but the Passion Play that has been buried in the N.Town manuscript is comparable with these French models, as it is, possibly, with the lost Passion Play from New Romney, tantalisingly glimpsed in records surviving from Kent (King, 2013). The Mary Play also takes its place alongside the numerous records of local saints’ plays emerging from parish records up and down the country. Also in the N.Town manuscript is a play, in a different hand from that of the main scribe, of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, which was clearly written for performance inside a church with elaborate lifting gear. The much misunderstood not-a-cycle manuscript BL Cotton Vespasian D VIII, is now recognised as a treasure-trove of other things. The later history, and teasing out of what has been painstakingly revealed as a compilation, has most recently been investigated by Alexandra Johnston (2014) including the suggestion that its organisational principles derive from Vincent de Beauvais’ model for a *compilatio*.

Here we should back-track from the later history of the manuscript’s confused reception, to consider briefly, as with the much later Chester manuscripts, what its internal

organisation reveals about its original purpose and reception. It shows evidence of two types of intended use, the first as a compendium from which scripts could be drawn for performance, the second is as a meditation text for private reading. If we focus on the latter function, the embedded *Mary Play* offers clues about the tastes of the guiding intelligence behind the compilation. We find a text indebted to the late fourteenth-century *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, and to Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*,⁶ themselves texts with a strongly performative approach to their sources, prompting their readers to "look", "see", "consider", and "understand" (Sargent 79). The play fulfils, by adapting to the stage of the mind's eye, the experiential nature of Bonaventuran vernacular theology, through dialogue that is affective, immediate, and inclusive. A master of ceremonies, *Contemplacio*, exists to assist the reader into this participatory role, animating the contemplative exercise, and acting as an inciter to emotion. The *Mary Play* is affective, didactic, and catechetical, its playwright not only familiar with vernacular prose, but adept at combining iconic sight and sound in the manner of the liturgy. Dating from the mid fifteenth century, the play offers, thereby, some clues as to the motives behind the formation of the compilation as a whole. It belongs to the period of catechetical revival which reached back to late fourteenth-century vernacular theology and to the aspirations for a transformed orthodoxy emanating from the Council of Constance (King, "Medieval English Religious Plays" 2014). Moreover, the manuscript exhibits a process lodged in the mind of its compiler that performs a fundamentally self-contained aesthetic; at a remove from staged performance

⁶ *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* is published in C. Horstman, ed. *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole an English Father of the Church and his Followers*. London: Swan Sonnenschien, 1895. 337–63. See also Nicholas Love. *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: a Full Critical Edition, based on Cambridge University Library MSS Additional 6578 and 6686*. Ed. Michael G. Sargent. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005.

it deploys dramatic dialogue to evoke idealised and participatory performance as an internalised process, just as the textual environment from which it emanates urges (King, "Rules of Exchange", 2014). It too is, therefore, a critical edition reflecting a particular understanding not only of the devotional utility, but of the literary aesthetic of its selected and adapted content. As such, it demonstrates that as early as the mid fifteenth century, during the height of the popularity of performances in Chester, York, and Coventry, there were already critical readers valuing play texts beyond their theatrical functionality, for literary qualities that met a particular contemporary devotional aesthetic.

The Towneley Manuscript

Change and appropriation are major factors in any consideration of the notoriously problematic Towneley play manuscript, San Marino Ca. Huntington Library MS HM1 (Cawley and Stevens). Again in her consideration of biblical drama, Alexandra Johnston (PAGE) has rehearsed the continuing debates that surround a book whose codicologically smooth surface masks a mystery that has nothing to do with the higher mysteries of the faith usually associated with this type of dramatic text, and everything to do with stories of local self-interest, entrenched scholarly opinion, and outright forgery (Epp, 91–92). In brief, the work on the records of the West Riding of Yorkshire by the late Barbara Palmer, and the on-going editorial work of Garrett Epp, have combined to present a convincing case that this manuscript is neither from Wakefield nor is it a civic cycle. Again we appear to be dealing with a compilation. As is the case with the N.Town manuscript, the performability of each of the component parts is as indisputable as the idea that they were performed all at once in the sequence suggested by the manuscript is untenable. Whereas the N.Town manuscript contains plays or pageants clearly written with very different staging

requirements and running time, but organised roughly to mimic the Creation to Doom sequence, the Towneley manuscript lacks a Nativity play and a Last Supper altogether, contains two shepherds' plays, and places the Raising of Lazarus and the hanging of Judas after the Last Judgement.

As the focus has moved away from considerations of the so-called "Wakefield Master" and from disentangling the manuscript's debt to York for a number of its shorter pageants, its dating and connection with the Towneley family have proved, and are proving, a fruitful avenue for enquiry. Again we are in the territory of reception, of why the compilation was made, when, and for whom. In 2010 Teresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson investigated the manuscript in the context of the Towneley family's involvement with recusancy on the Yorkshire-Lancashire border, concluding that

we can best understand the preservation of these plays if we think of "performance" of these texts as encompassing a range of possible recusant devotional activities that might have involved an intimate audience of self as well as of other participants and spectators... not only the occasional staged production of a play, but also family or extended household devotional readings in the Towneley Hall chapel or even private reading and meditation (241).

For what follows I acknowledge a debt to Meg Twycross whose on-going work on the Towneleys, alongside further work by Gibson, currently promise further opportunities of providing some answers to the questions posed by this manuscript (2015).⁷

⁷ The article referenced here offers a taste of things to come in a collection of essays on the Towneley manuscript which Meg Twycross is editing as well as contributing the fruits of the as yet unpublished further researches on the Towneleys in which she collaborated with the late Olga Horner.

In 1814, Peregrine Edward Towneley sold off part of the library inherited from his father John, and the printed catalogue includes “a manuscript collection of English mysteries, more curious and ancient than the celebrated Chester and Coventry mysteries” (Twycross 149). Testimonial as to the unique nature and value of the manuscript to bibliophiles was given by Francis Douce, whom we have already met. Twycross has discovered that Douce must have known of the manuscript as it is mentioned in correspondence with Thomas Sharp some five years previous to the sale. Douce then reported that John Towneley, Peregrine’s father, had shown it to him in 1812. Partly because Douce had internalised the understanding that the Coventry plays were ecclesiastical in origin, and partly because he believed the unfounded legend that the Chester plays were written by Ranulf Higden, he considerably obfuscated understanding of the origins of the plays in the Towneley manuscript with his *idée fixe* that they too must have originated in the house of a religious order, opting for Widkirk. In 1812 he discovered that they had been in the possession of the Towneleys since the time of John’s grandfather, Charles (1658-1712), but continued to highlight monastic provenance in the sale catalogue, presumably to enhance the manuscript’s saleability. Peregrine Towneley then bought the manuscript back in 1819 and asked Douce to help him prepare extracts for publication in 1821. On this occasion Douce attributes the origin of the plays not to Widkirk but to Whalley.

As matters stand, therefore, the manuscript’s only verifiable history takes it back to Towneley Hall in the mid seventeenth century; all earlier monastic attributions being exposed as Doucian speculation. Although the Towneleys were one of Lancashire’s recusant families, Roman Catholic survivalists who rode the Reformation largely undisturbed by reason of diocesan and physical geography, there is currently no evidence that the manuscript originated with the family. A variety of

evidence does, however, date it to the mid sixteenth century, so certainly post printing, and probably post-Reformation (Palmer, 96). Once this is made clear from external evidence the manuscript comes into focus:

[its]contents show signs of layered composition, accretion, revision, and acquisition over a period of time. Perhaps what one has in the Towneley [manuscript] is a “cycle” of parish, manor, hamlet, and town cooperative production, parts of which were acquired from York, parts of which already existed as independent plays throughout the Riding, and parts of which were newly-written (Palmer, 340-41)

Those newly-written parts are, moreover, clearly the products of a very inventive theatrical imagination, and include amongst them the famous First and Second Shepherds’ Plays.

Anyone familiar with the Second Shepherds’ Play knows that, with its comic mirror sub-plot, it is intricately self-referential. It has been proposed that we might imagine the play being performed before a gentry audience at a banquet in a great hall, possibly at Christmas and by the choirboys of the chapel (Westfall 51). It would certainly appeal to a great recusant household who might recognise the type of earlier street drama that it references, but with which it should not be confused. Moreover, such an imagining, in which some topical and pungent attacks on the gentry are made by choirboys, has an archness that confers immunity from offense, much as was the case with plays by, for example, John Heywood, performed at the Tudor royal court. And that is where we must leave it. Huntington MS 1 has further secrets to reveal, but we may already read it as another edition, a mixed collection of religious plays as Palmer describes, probably compiled as a commission, possibly with recusant connections, but speculation about whether this was as a parody of an earlier theatre or as an exercise in nostalgic revivalism can merely lead at present into the cul-de-sac of intentionalism.

The York Register

After the difficulties presented by the preceding, it may seem perverse to have deferred consideration of the comparatively transparent York Register. We know from city council minutes, from accounts, proclamations, and indentures, more or less what happened in York, and we know that the Register is the official civic copy against which the pageants were checked each year, a document subject to constant revision and at a remove from actual playbooks, but directly associated with performance and securely dated to the mid 1470s. The Register, London British Library MS Additional 35290, contains the scripts for 47 pageants, in the form of around 14,000 lines of spoken dialogue. The performance to which it bears witness requires a huge cast, including 24 adult Christs. Each pageant within it is distinctive in a number of ways, suggesting a number of different authors working over a period of at least fifty years. It is not a finished product but is full of evidence of its status as a continuing process, of alterations and one or two blank pages where the play script didn't come in, such as, for example, the forever-lost Vintners' "Marriage at Cana", pageant 24, represented by a series of blank folios. The Register is not an authorial copy of a play, not deterministic, in the way a modern playwright's text attempts to be, but is a record of a process that was already going on, and made after the event. This in turn suggests that what we have is a snapshot of what was happening in each pageant in the year when it was recorded, that the sense of stability and near-completeness conveyed by even this manuscript is largely illusory.

Moreover, the situation is considerably compromised by the survival of another document from 1415, the *Ordo Paginarum* [order of pages, or more likely, pageants], which lists 57 pageants that are not the same as those in the later Register. There is, indeed, much in this that might lead us to wonder if at this date the pageants were plays as we know them at all (King "Medieval Religious Drama", 2014). So the situation with York's manuscript evidence is more immediate, but still barely more stable than Chester's. The chief reason for

delaying the addition of York to our picture until this point is, however, not only to underscore the instability of the witnesses to what is generally taken to be the archetype against which all other “cycles” are measured, but also because, in terms of the historiography of the subject, the York Register came into the public domain very late.

Lucy Toulmin Smith (1838-1911), who was to become its first editor, borrowed the manuscript of the Register, long divorced from the other materials relating to the performance in York, from the Earl of Ashburnham, the then owner, in 1885. The existence of the manuscript had been known since at least 1784, when it was mentioned in a piece in the *Gentlemen's Magazine*, and subsequently by editors and recorders of other medieval plays, but its very survival remained a matter of doubt. Smith's record of its journey from York to the then owner serves to demonstrate just how random survival of such manuscripts has been. They include its possession by the Fairfax family, members of whom included the Cromwellian general, where fortunately a concern with the conservation of antiquities moderated iconoclastic zeal. This allowed it to survive to pass then through the Dentons to the famous Leeds antiquarian, Ralph Thoresby, whence it was sold on his death as “a folio volume written upon vellum of Old English Poetry, very curious”. Horace Walpole bought it for £1.1s, but when his collection was sold Thomas Rodd paid £220.10s for the volume, selling it to Heywood Bright of Bristol for £235. It passed through a couple of other pairs of hands before being sold to Lord Ashburnham in the 1860s (Smith xi–xiii).

The Editor

It is again as we observed with Chester, that, at some point in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, the manuscripts in which the matter of the plays is recorded were inevitably divided from the other civic records of their performance purely on grounds of religious sensitivity, and the subsequent growth in Puritan distaste for all things dramatic.

Where they survived it was largely in private collections from where they passed to national collections and were initially edited in isolation from, and some ignorance of, their civic documentary context. The other civic records, buried in minute books and accounts, remained unmolested by and large in their places of origin. Unmolested that is until the efforts of Records of Early English Drama project began work in the late 1970s, setting the literary evidence and the archival in relation, and tension, for the first time. But here Lucy Toulmin Smith proved an exemplary exception to the rule, for she knew what she was looking at rather more than some of the other editors. Her familiarity with other kinds of civic record was exceptional for she had completed and published in 1870, *English Gilds*, a collection of early ordinances which her father was working on before his death. She had, by this accident of familial loyalty, developed a familiarity with something of the original context of the plays. She had, however, never seen, or perhaps contemplated, an English medieval play in performance, and, like the rest of those of her generation, had only the Oberammergau play to invoke as a remote and misleading point of reference. It is to her reception as an editor of the York plays according to modern understandings of the process, that we now turn in the continuing exploration of how since their earliest copyings these plays have been appropriated by each generation in reflection of the preoccupations of its own age.

Lucy Toulmin Smith's achievement as a woman of no formal education is remarkable, and her edition of the York Plays held good until the late twentieth century, being last reprinted in 1963. Although she had two brothers as well as two sisters, she was chosen, or self-selected, as her father's amanuensis, working with him on his periodicals and political tracts. Born in Massachusetts she came from a strong radical background. Her great grandfather was the dissenting minister, Joshua Toulmin, sympathetic to both French and American revolutions. Her father's admiration for this forebear is demonstrated by his incorporation of Toulmin into the family surname and the continuing family commitment to

Unitarianism. The father, also Joshua, was a contentious political figure, both in his time and in retrospective accounts of his career (Weinstien) which have read him as everything from Thatcherite libertarian, to eccentric antiquarian and “true socialist” mutualist. This mutualism, and particularly its nostalgia for pre-Conquest parish organisation, meant that while he was an individualist, he inveighed against “isolated selfishness” promoting the belief that true liberty began with community and political engagement, necessarily at a local level.

It was this political stance that directly launched his daughter’s career, working for him on the journal the *Parliamentary Remembrancer*, a watchdog publication set up to monitor crown intervention in local affairs. Her first publication was her completion of *The English Guilds* (1870), an historical examination of the medieval guild system begun by her father and prompted by his distrust of the growth of the centrally-regulated Trades Union movement. However difficult it continues to be to place her father politically, the preface to her first book indicates a conservative distrust of trades unions, destructive in her eyes to enterprise and liberty.

In stark contrast, almost exactly a century after Smith embarked on her edition, the Yorkshire poet, Tony Harrison, wrote *The Mysteries*, a translation and adaptation of a number of the pageants from the York and Towneley manuscripts. The programme notes to his production speak of the “people” breaking out for one festive day in the year from the “iron fist of the Church”. Where the underlying assumptions about the Middle Ages in Harrison’s interpretation come from is itself a mystery, but undoubtedly his re-invention of the mystery plays struck a chord with a new public. They went on being played throughout the 1980s, the period that saw the closure of Britain’s coal mines and of much other heavy industry. For Harrison the medieval trades guilds – in reality “bosses” protectionist associations – were effortlessly translated into trades unions.

Equally politically motivated, Lucy Toulmin Smith, who found in the York plays and the guild organisation a model of local business autonomy, precisely the inverse of Harrison's reading, may well have turned in her grave. She continued to live in Highgate until in 1884, in her mid-fifties, she was appointed as Librarian at Manchester College (now Harris Manchester College) in Oxford, making her "the first woman in England to be made head of a public library" (Orlando). The College was founded to accommodate male students who were debarred from mainstream education on account of being, like her, dissenters outside the Church of England. She remained in post there until November 1911, the month before her death.

The Literary Critic

The first performance in modern times of an English medieval play occurred in Toulmin Smith's lifetime, though the play is not strictly English, and medieval probably only in its Dutch original. In 1902 the Shakespearian impresario William Poel produced *Everyman* in the gardens of the London Charterhouse. Poel played God, and the play went on through the efforts of Poel and Benjamin Greet to enter the professional repertory.⁸ Poel's intervention is well known, but less so is the work of the man who put him up to it. William Adolphus Ward (1837-1924), graduate of Peterhouse College, Cambridge, later professor of History and English Literature in Owens College, Manchester, and founding Vice Chancellor of what is now the University of Manchester, was the first university scholar to tackle the corpus of English medieval plays as a matter of what we more narrowly call "literary criticism". With Ward we move from considering the reproductions and editions of early plays as conscious critical acts, to consider, albeit briefly, criticism in its narrowly understood sense, with the

⁸ A study of the early twentieth-century adoption of English medieval plays on the London stage is in preparation by the present author.

caveat that here lies a potentially autonomous historiographical project which cannot be more than indicated here.

Ward wrote his *History of English Dramatic Literature to the Age of Queen Anne* in 1875, re-editing and revising it in three volumes in 1899. This magisterial work is considered his most important amongst an impressive output including editions of the complete works of Crabbe and Pope, volumes on Chaucer and Dickens, a translation of Ernst Curtius's *History of Greece* in five volumes, as well as a number of editorial roles including the co-editorship of the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. He was later appointed Master of Peterhouse College, Cambridge, President of the Royal Historical Society, and, in 1913, received his knighthood.

Ward's grand narrative is unabashedly Darwinian, as might be expected, and underpinned by assumptions that all drama emerged from religious ritual. He comments repeatedly on the importance of the Reformation and the growth of the British Empire in bringing these beginnings to the "height of perfection", causing England to spring with unparalleled rapidity into glorious theatrical vigour, whereas Spain, from promising beginnings, has a sadly truncated theatrical development occasioned by its adherence to the Catholic faith. His determinist understanding of theatrical evolution, based on the principle of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, displays its evident weakness when he asserts the synergy between political stability and autonomy, and good drama. Believing the known biblical dramas to belong to the fourteenth, and even the thirteenth century, he is swift to attribute this florescence to strong Plantagenet rule. The strength of the Tudors led to the emergence of Shakespeare under Elizabeth, who also had peculiar characteristics as a female monarch, combining "the self-willed power of her race" with "her sex's love of undivided admiration".

Where modern criticism, reinforced by the turn which sees all artistic production as performative, has radically relaxed from policing the boundaries of drama and other forms,

Ward warns his readership that “the tendency to speak of works as dramatic when they are in no proper sense such is to be reprobated like all other loosenesses of expression” (7). Within the parameters of his Victorian world view, however, Ward offers some insights that do hold good today. For example, he offers the following distinction between ritual and drama, something that continues to be debated – as it is in the first essay in the present volume – in present times:

for the step from the mystery of the liturgy to the liturgical mystery-drama nothing is needed but the dramatic *intention*... So long as the reality of the central action... causes everything else to be regarded as merely an adjunct to it, the mystery will preponderate over the drama; so soon as the adjuncts begin in any degree to emancipate themselves from their original character as such, the play will prevail over the mystery (19).

Ward knew of three “cycles”. He attributes the Towneley Plays, in disagreement with Douce, to the thirteenth century on the grounds that Herod speaks in Anglo-Norman. He endorses the belief that they passed from the friars of Woodkirk (sic) to Wakefield, while expressing regret that they are in such a difficult Scandinavian dialect, as he finds them superior to his other two exemplars, “Coventry” – that is N.Town – and Chester. Throughout he is fastidious about the tainting of devotional material with low humour, finding the Chester plays at times “indecent”. His tirade against the very materiality that is lauded in modern studies would have struck a chord with Christopher Goodman 300 years earlier:

...these [the Chester] plays as a matter of course abound in evidence of the rudely material conceptions of the age in which they were produced. Such is above all to be found in the repulsive reproduction in action of an extraordinary legend in the *Salutation*, and in the *Resurrection*. Compared with such instances of a tendency to

reduce every mystery of the faith to a realised actuality, all mere anachronisms or oddities of ignorance are insignificant. These mysteries teach in their way, the lesson which the strange oaths of the Middle Ages teach in another, that a constant familiarity with the bodily presentment of sacred persons and things bred a material grossness in the whole aesthetical atmosphere of the people. What seems to us so profane in the readiness of our forefathers to allow the highest conceptions of religion to be associated with the crudest attempts at reproducing them in bodily form, was the result of an aesthetic rather than a religious deficiency; and if the mystics prepared the growth of a more spiritual age of religious life, the Renaissance made impossible the continued depression of the sublimest of subjects to the level of a treatment satisfactory only to the uncultivated and unrefined.

By the same token, although Ward mentions wagon production, taking his description of the Chester wagons from Sharp's transcription of Rogers' Breviary (32), he again in direct contradiction to the areas of enquiry legitimised in modern criticism, suggests that "it is perhaps in general advisable not to dwell too much on these external points, and thereby indulge the sense of the grotesque, at risk of overlooking the more important features common to all or nearly all these plays" (34).

William Adolphus Ward was an unabashed Victorian imperialist – other works in his prolific oeuvre include *Great Britain and Hanover* (1899), and *The Electress Sophia and the Hanoverian Succession* (1903). Leaving aside his evident sexism and religious intolerance, we can also observe that as a critic he was Darwinian, determinist, and positivist, with aesthetic judgement bound by the public morality of his age. But perhaps before we consign him to the scrap-heap of outmoded critical-theoretical positions we should entertain the possibility that the very fact that contemporary critical fashion is so opposed to his view could be a warning about the friable value of all readings. Ward's work is scrupulously

researched given the availability of information and the research technologies at his disposal; the rest is a matter of, like Lucy Toulmin Smith or Tony Harrison, reading our surviving early dramatic texts through the prisms of age and opinion. Moreover Ward was to be followed, as New Criticism swept the literary landscape, by those who in the project of canon-formation, were to find small place in their world view for the texts of early drama at all.

Conclusion

This essay was first conceived as a largely descriptive guide to the problematics of textual survival and the nature of the manuscripts, indicating where work had been done and where opportunities remain for new research. The after-histories of the manuscripts of early drama is a field which is gaining ground. It has not been possible here, for example, to look at manuscripts of non-biblical dramas. Furthermore at the time of writing Meg Twycross is on the brink of revealing her full findings about the history of the Towneley plays prior to the mid seventeenth century, and Gail Gibson is writing a book about the afterlives of five drama manuscripts including the so-called “Macro Plays” and the Croxton Play of the Sacrament, manuscripts about which there has been no space to deal in the present essay. Important ground was broken on the former by Alexandra Johnston (2013). The study of antiquarians and bibliophiles from the early modern period to the nineteenth century is providing new understandings of the selective survival of early drama manuscripts, underscoring their status as material objects that have been used, abused, “conserved”, rebound, otherwise physically manipulated, or simply ignored, rather than as transparent vehicles of text.⁹ As Gail Gibson has pointed out there remain “important questions about the motives for and meaning of their

⁹ I am grateful here to Gail McMurray Gibson for her generous correspondence about her incomplete and eagerly anticipated work in this area, and for her paper on the ownership of the Macro Plays delivered at the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, W. Michigan, in May 2015.

possession”. She goes on, “...it is time to consider also some ways in which those extant inscriptions of plays once performed in parish and urban spaces continued to be ‘performed’ in an extended sense of that word, in the communities, households, and libraries of collectors and readers whose cultures of antiquarianism and recusancy offer other sorts of drama for our understanding”. There remains much to be done in this area, and much to work from, not least in private collections of letters and papers.

Beyond the study of the early modern afterlives of medieval manuscripts, however, there lurks a more general question of reception as a critical act. We have observed that very few of the surviving manuscripts were ever used as performance scripts; they do, however, represent performative acts in their own right. Most evidently, for example, the York Register performed an act of civic control. Each is also a deliberative act of critical editing. The N.Town manuscript is a compilation formed according to theologically endorsed principles: it appears to use texts originally written for performance to fulfil a readerly desire to assemble dialogic texts based on the devotional agenda of Bonaventuran vernacular theology, aids to the inward performance of direct affective engagement with the events of the life of Christ, of “being there” (see further King, “Rules of Exchange” 2014). The manuscripts of the Chester plays suggest a differently articulated desire to perform acts of preservation related to civic identity and, possibly, early modern anxieties about the rupture of history, akin to the projects of sixteenth-century heraldic visitation and the preservation of church monuments. The Towneley manuscript too brings together materials which range from the traditional preservation of variants of some York pageants to new materials that are very “knowing” in their contemporary sophisticated manipulation of traditional forms, apparently poised between parody and nostalgia. With this manuscript too, there is the possibility of glimpsing the very particular and deliberately occluded early modern sub-culture that was provincial recusancy.

The natural conclusion to an approach from the point of view of reception is to put the modern editor, producer, or critic into the picture, to turn the historiographical searchlight on to modern praxis and scholarship. Here we have seen very briefly how one early late nineteenth-century editor and one critic from the same period, as well as one adapter/producer, read the textual traces of early drama into their own world picture and value system. Expanding on this enquiry would seem to offer another related fruitful line of enquiry, but even without pursuing that line further the fundamental lesson of historiographical enquiry is surely the judicious acknowledgement of the provisionality of all readings of the oblique witnesses to the ephemeral performances of the past which are, of course, irretrievable.

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