Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama

General Editor's Preface
Helen Ostovich, McMaster University

Performance assumes a string of creative, analytical, and collaborative acts that, in defiance of theatrical ephemerality, live on through records, manuscripts, and printed books. The monographs and essay collections in this series offer original research which addresses theatre histories and performance histories in the context of the sixteenth and seventeenth century life. Of especial interest are studies in which women's activities are a central feature of discussion as financial or technical supporters (patrons, musicians, dancers, seamstresses, wigmakers, or 'gatherers'), if not authors or performers per se. Welcome too are critiques of early modern drama that not only take into account the production values of the plays, but also speculate on how intellectual advances or popular culture affect the theatre.

The series logo, selected by my colleague Mary V. Silcox, derives from Thomas Combe's duodecimo volume, *The Theater of Fine Devices* (London, 1592), Emblem VI, sig. B. The emblem of four masks has a verse which makes claims for the increasing complexity of early modern experience, a complexity that makes interpretation difficult. Hence the corresponding perhaps uneasy rise in sophistication:

Masks will be more hereafter in request,
And grow more deare than they did heretofore.

No longer simply signs of performance 'in play and jest', the mask has become the 'double face' worn 'in earnest' even by 'the best' of people, in order to manipulate or profit from the world around them. The books stamped with this design attempt to understand the complications of performance produced on stage and interpreted by the audience, whose experiences outside the theatre may reflect the emblem's argument:

Most men do use some colour'd shift
For to conceal their craftie drift.

Centuries after their first presentations, the possible performance choices and meanings they engender still stir the imaginations of actors, audiences, and readers of early plays. The products of scholarly creativity in this series, I hope, will also stir imaginations to new ways of thinking about performance.

The Chester Cycle in Context, 1555–1575
Religion, Drama, and the Impact of Change

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ASHGATE

Conclusions

Especially in the wake of the queen's excommunication in 1570, pageants such as *The Purification*, *The Coming of Antichrist*, and *The Last Judgment* struck protestant leaders as radically papist, *anti*-protestant, and perhaps even treasonous. It is therefore no surprise that local puritans called on national authorities to shut the Chester Whitsun plays down. But I am doubtful that the average Cestrian playgoer viewed these plays and the cycle in general as deeply offensive. In 1575 the city council voted thirty-five to eleven to revive the Whitsun plays, and that seems as good indication as any of the favourable/unfavourable ratio within the community three years earlier. My guess is that the spectacular theatrics of *The Coming of Antichrist* would have overshadowed any serious offense given by the staging of a Roman Catholic host. And as I have argued, the elimination of the saved pope from *The Last Judgment* likely blunted the pageant's polemical edge in 1572. In 1575, *The Coming of Antichrist* appears to have been reformed to comment on 'whoe be Antechristes the worlde rownde aboute', although, as Mills suggests, both antichrist plays and the Weaver's pageant may have been dropped from the midsummer performance that year.

Another conclusion is that the Catholic recusants and fellow travellers who are documented as participants in the 1572 *Purification*, and almost certainly controlled the production of *The Last Judgment*, clearly used the plays, as Goodman claims, to assemble and organize religious conservatives and to reassert their faith ('giveth great comfort to the rebellious papist').[89] Such 'assembling and conference' included, of course, the two or three major rehearsals used to prepare the pageants for production.[90] Having said that, one should also be open to the possibility that with some spectators the pageants may have engendered doubt rather than faith. *The Coming of Antichrist* features as its hero an actor who impersonates Christ in a story where false images masquerade as truth. Some Elizabethan playgoers, however, who already disbelieved in the sacred host that the pageant highlights as the centre of Christian faith, may have possibly questioned protestantism's own exclusive claims to religious truth. The last year of the cycle, 1575, was only a decade or so away from the great religious tragedies of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Webster, wherein, arguably, the representation of religion on stage raised as many questions about the Christian faith as it answered.

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[89]   Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.143–4.

[90]   Surviving cycle accounts published by REED suggest this. See Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford, 2000), 26–34.

Chapter 8
'Erazed in the booke'?:
Periodization and the Material Text
of the Chester Banns

Kurt A. Schreyer

Christopher Goodman begins his 10 May 1572 letter to the earl of Huntingdon with a brief historical sketch of the Chester mystery plays: 'certain plays were devised by a monk about 200 years past in the depth of ignorance, & by the Pope then authorized to be set forth, & by that authority placed in the city of Chester to the intent to retain that place in assured ignorance & superstition according to the Popish policy. against which plays all preachers & godly men since the time of the blessed light of the gospell have inveyed and impugned'. Goodman's religious views obligate him to divide Chester history, not simply into ancient and modern or past and present periods, but rather Catholic and protestant epochs, a 'past time of monkish ignorance' and a 'godly present time of the blessed light of the gospel'.[1] This history is, of course, hardly neutral; it is ideologically driven and has as its goal the destruction of the Chester cycle. Not until the enlightenment project of the eighteenth century and Hegel's world history in the following century would a decisive historical break between the middle ages and the Renaissance, with the Reformation as the pivotal epochal moment, be assumed as a matter of course.[2] Goodman's letter, therefore, asks us to consider how late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Cestrians viewed their city's past, particularly their theatrical history.

Such a consideration might seem irrelevant given current trends in early English drama studies. Nearly fifty years have passed since O.B. Hardison overturned E.K. Chambers's teleological model of dramatic history, the secularization thesis that drove a wedge between the 'Renaissance' stage and its 'medieval' antecedents. Recent scholarship, on the other hand, seems to have reached a consensus in its search for continuities rather than disjunctions between the professional London companies, especially Shakespeare's, and the earlier drama and culture of the sixteenth century.

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[1]   Goodman's letter is quoted from Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills (eds), *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire including Chester* (Toronto, 2007), 1.143.

[2]   See Margreta de Grazia, 'World Pictures, Modern Periods, and the Early Stage', in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York, 1997), 17–21.

'Aesthetic and cultural models that once opposed a primitive medieval drama to the mature achievements of Elizabethan theater have now', as Theresa Coletti explains, 'been all but abandoned, as has the teleological narrative that posited English drama's sixteenth-century progress toward formal complexity and secular mimesis'.[3] There are many reasons why the abandonment of strict periodization is now well underway. The treasure trove of archival material brought to light by the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project housed at the University of Toronto has, as David Matthews and Gordon McMullan have noted in their collection *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (itself a significant contribution to 'cross-period engagement') encouraged early English drama specialists to traverse the customary medieval-Renaissance divide.[4] Having recognized, moreover, that what is often labelled as 'medieval' drama survives in sixteenth-century manuscripts, many scholars of the 'middle ages' feel quite at home in the latter decades of their traditional disciplinary field. Renaissance studies have followed the lead of Stephen Greenblatt in exploring the carryover of medieval culture onto the stages of the professional London playhouses. Helen Cooper, Michael O'Connell, and John D. Cox, have contributed important work demonstrating how elements of traditional dramaturgy enjoyed a long stage career.[5] Scholarship on the Queen's Men and on the practices of touring has blurred distinctions between the drama of London and the provinces, and in the process helped us to rethink critical categories and distinctions. Journals such as *Early Theatre* and the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* encourage further disciplinary cross-fertilization, as do academic associations like the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society.

But our eagerness to elide the once sacrosanct medieval-Renaissance divide must not overlook the fact that centuries before E.K. Chambers's 1903 *The Mediaeval Stage* accounted for the growth and evolution of the Renaissance stage at the expense of earlier dramatic forms, pre-Reformation English drama was, if not ignored, often decried. Goodman was not alone in his desire 'for the repressing of Papacy, & advancing of godliness' through the suppression of drama.[6] In his 1607 sermon, the protestant preacher William Crashaw offered a genealogy of the English stage in which medieval mysteries, the popish progeny of ancient heathen theatre, were seen as direct conduits of the ungodly errors put on display in London's public playhouses: 'The vngodly Playes and Enterludes so rife in this

[3]   Coletti, 'The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Religious Culture', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37.3 (Fall 2007), 531.

[4]   The phrase is borrowed from Matthews and McMullan, *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), 5. As their collection recognizes and represents, the push against 'period parochialism' extends beyond early theater studies.

[5]   See Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London, 2010); O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (New York, 2000) as well as his 'Vital Cultural Practices: Shakespeare and the Mysteries', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999): 149–68; Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350–1642* (Cambridge, 2000).

[6]   Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.144.

nation; what are they but *a Bastard of Babylon*, a daughter of error and confusion, a hellish deuice … deliuered to the *Heathen*, from them to the *Papists*, and from them to vs?'[7] Reminding King James that the primitive church had condemned plays, Crashaw called for the destruction of this 'tower of Babel' as part of a larger programme of religious reformation. As Cathy Shrank reminds us, we ought to view reformist narratives with considerable suspicion whether, as in the case of John Bale that she considers, they promote novelty and chronological difference or, as with Crashaw, they insist on historical continuity.[8] Yet defenders of the early public theatres were also skittish about early English religious drama. Thomas Heywood's 1612 *Apology for Actors* responded to anti-theatricalists like Crashaw by simply ignoring religious drama altogether. Holding up pagans (not the church) as the bearers of 'antiquity and dignity' to English theatre, he wrote: 'Thus our Antiquity haue we brought from the *Grecians* in the time of *Hercules*, from the *Macedonians* in the age of *Alexander*, from the Romans long before Iulius Caesar.'[9] Embracing theatre's pagan origins, Heywood is careful to exclude popish forms of drama: 'I omit the shewes and ceremonies euen in these times generally vsed amongst the Catholikes, in which by the Churchmen & most religious, diuerse pageants, as of the Natiuity, Passion, and Ascension, with other Historicall places of the Bible, are at diuerse times & seasons of the year vsually celebrated.'[10] While both Crashaw and Heywood abhor mystery drama and agree that the London playhouses revive antiquity in some way, their conflicting accounts raise questions about the place of pre-Reformation plays in the history of early English drama. According to Crashaw, the theatre persists in a continuous history of corruption and heathen degeneracy. In Heywood's narrative, on the other hand, commercial theatre has disclaimed a dark ages of Catholic drama in order to recuperate respectable pagan virtues. Neither opponents of the professional London acting companies nor their supporters, it would seem, had much use for mystery plays. And yet, given that both Crashaw's sermon and Heywood's *Apology* were composed decades after the suppression of the mysteries, this powerful dramatic form was apparently not easily forgotten.

Considering the theatrical genealogies offered by Goodman, Crashaw, and Heywood, the current scholarly push for historical continuity in early English drama seems less straightforward than it first appears. However artificial and arbitrary period divisions are, they seem likewise ineluctable, and while this essay cannot claim to solve this dilemma, it does suggest that a historical perspective may be beneficial. I will therefore interrogate the traditional medieval-Renaissance

[7]   William Crashaw, 'The sermon preached at the Crosse' (London, 1607), STC (2nd edn) 6028, Z1r.

[8]   Cathy Shrank, 'John Bale and reconfiguring the "medieval" in Reformation England' in David Matthew and Gordon McMullan (eds), *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, 179–92.

[9]   Thomas Heywood, *Apology for Actors* (London, 1612), STC (2nd edn) 13309, G2v–G3r.

[10]   Ibid, E4r.

divide and address current efforts to elide it altogether by suggesting that we look to the surviving texts of the Chester Banns for their perspective on pre- and post-Reformation drama. The 1619 *Breviary of Chester History* calls the Banns 'the breeife of the whole playes', for this proclamation not only advertised the upcoming performance of the plays and encouraged audience attendance, but also promoted the contributions of the various guilds.[11] Divided into poetic stanzas, the Banns announce which guilds will present each pageant, draw attention to significant events in each performance, and highlight noteworthy pieces of craftsmanship such as carriages, props, or costumes. The Banns also articulate what I believe to be a productive alternative account of sixteenth-century theatrical history from those outlined above, a narrative that seeks to preserve synchronic contact with past theatrical objects and practices even as the Banns themselves record and perform diachronic historical change.

Of Custome Olde

Two versions of the Banns survive: the first (often called 'Early' or 'Catholic') survives to us only in Harley MS 2150 and was, according to Lawrence Clopper, originally composed for Corpus Christi play performances between 1505 and 1521, then revised by a scribe between 1521 and 1532, when the plays were moved to Whitsun and expanded. They were most likely transcribed into their present form around 1540. Clopper maintains that a scribe copied them onto folios 85v to 88v of Harley 2150 sometime in the late sixteenth century (c. 1570), but the story of their emendation does not end there by any means. During the period 1630–68, long after any Chester audiences had seen their famous mysteries performed, Chester antiquarian Randle Holme II collated the Early Banns with other sixteenth-century civic records by adding previously omitted lines and explicitly marking passages which had been 'erazed' in the authorized post-Reformation version of the Banns (the 'Late Banns') during the previous century.[12] Perhaps most significant, and certainly most striking, are his marginalia. Holme drew black vertical lines to the left of lines 156 through 163 of the Banns with a horizontal line above line 156 (Figure 8.1). Holme also marked lines 164 through 171 with a vertical line in the left-hand margin, with a horizontal line drawn beneath line 171. Holme labelled both of these boxed-in passages as 'erazed in the booke', presumably referring to the city's official 'White Book of the Pentice'. These passages describe liturgical and Marian elements of the cycle similar to those that outraged protestant

Fig. 8.1   British Library MS Harley 2150, fol. 88^r detail. © British Library Board.

clergyman Christopher Goodman. The bold lines that box in these passages call the reader's attention to the censored material, and in doing so invite us to consider Holme's purpose in drawing them, particularly in light of the fact that they appear to be unique: no other material that he copied into the Harley 2150 manuscript is similarly delimited. These border lines may simply reflect Holme's assiduous record keeping; they carefully delineate which passages had been erased in order to make the Banns conform to the suppression of the feast of Corpus Christi and Marian devotion. But I want to go further and suggest that they hinge upon the very same historical periodization that is also at work in Goodman's letter of 10 May 1572. To see the historiographical work Holme's marginalia performs, we must first turn to the later version of the Chester Banns.

Surprisingly, the Late Banns – the late sixteenth-century (frequently labeled 'post-Reformation' or 'protestant') proclamation composed and revised several times between 1548 and 1572 – do not hide the fact that these plays were, in Goodman's words, 'devised by a monk about 200 years past in the depth of ignorance' but in fact share his periodized view of Chester history.[13] Unlike the

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[11]   Quoted from Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.332. The *Breviary* was written by Robert Rogers, archdeacon of the Cathedral of St. Werburgh in the late 1500s (he died in 1595), and completed by his son David, who produced five copies of four versions of the Breviary between 1609 and about 1637 (see p. cxcvi of the same volume).

[12]   Lawrence M. Clopper, 'The History and Development of the Chester Cycle', *Modern Philology* 75 (1978), 231. R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill, 1983), 273.
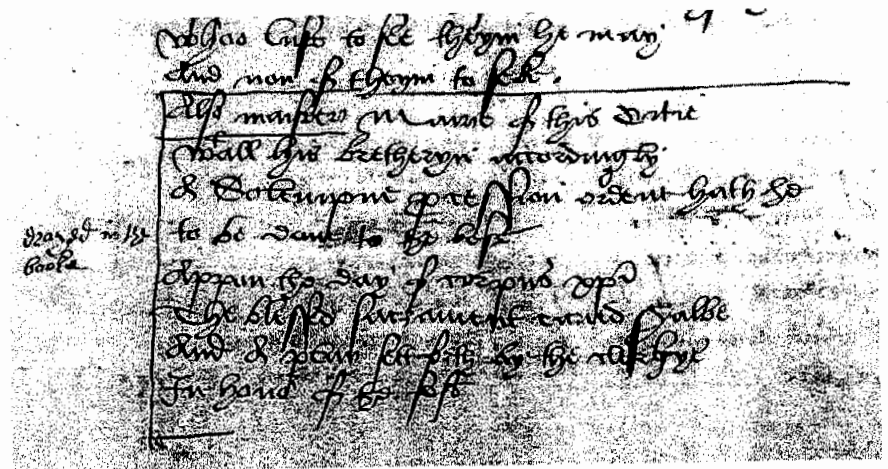
[13]   Four versions of the Late Banns survive; when I use the term 'Late Banns' I refer primarily to the version that survives in Rogers's 1609 *Breviary* in the Chester City Archives (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.332–40) which includes the 'conclusion' and, given what Clopper calls its 'apologetic' tone, is probably a later revision. On the approximate date of 1572, see Clopper, 'The History and Development of the Chester Cycle', 236–41. On the vagaries of these manuscripts, see Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents*, 272–7.

outspoken preacher, however, the Late Banns consider the historical distance of the mystery plays to be their saving virtue, preserving and protecting them from contemporary critics like Goodman. To defuse this hostility, the Late Banns present the plays as relics of a bygone age:

> we moste humblye praye
> Not to compare this matter or storye
> With the age or tyme wherein we presentlye staye
> But to the tyme of Ignorance whearein we doe straye
> And then dare I compare yat this lande throughout
> None had the like. nor the like durste set out
>
> …
> If noe matter or shewe. thereof enye thinge speciall
> Doe not please but mislycke ye moste of the trayne
> Goe backe againe to the firste tyme I saye
> Then shall yow finde the fine witte at this daye aboundinge
> At yat day & yat age, had uerye smale beinge[14]

The Late Banns divide the history of the Chester mysteries into periods for a strategic purpose. Carefully deploying the categories of 'old' and 'new', the Late Banns avoid responsibility for any lingering superstition by reminding the audience that the plays were written in the remote 'tyme of Ignorance'. Elsewhere, they encourage the belief that the cycle was established by the city's first mayor, Sir John Arneway, and written by Ranulf Higden, 'Moncke of Chester Abbaye', though they know quite well that many of the pageants were written and added in Tudor times.[15] The decision to antiquate the city's mystery cycle is peculiar. Whatever the virtues of age-old customs and traditions, they raise the spectre of the old religion in a climate of increasing protestant suspicion. What is at stake in the Late Banns' historicization is the very survival of the plays and Chester's unique civic identity, which, as Sheila Christie argues in this volume, was deeply rooted in its Roman heritage. Note the thinly veiled pride which views Chester as an exceptional city even in its darker days: 'dare I compare yat this lande throughout / None had the like. nor the like durste set out'. Perhaps this sense of civic identity explains why the Banns do not entirely conform to later more extreme protestant views but seek instead to preserve vast amounts of 'Auntient' material for modern performance.[16] The Banns, for example, urge that the traditional appearance of the devil be preserved:

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[14] Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.334.

[15] Ibid, 332. For the argument that 'the cycle as we know it was largely an invention of Tudor times', see Clopper, 'The History and Development of the Chester Cycle'.

[16] Compare Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter who write, 'The new Banns comment extensively on the plays, showing a rather defensively apologetic attitude towards their "old-fashioned" drama', in *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Burlington VT, 2002), 194.

> And nexte to this yow the Butchers of this Cittie
> The storye of Sathan yat woulde Criste needes tempte
> Set out as accustomablie vsed have ye
> The Deuell in his ffeathers all Rugged and rente[17]

This description is quite literal: the Chester REED documents tell us that shredded rags of canvas were used to make 'dye menes Covtes' for the *Harrowing of Hell*.[18] Making even the smallest details of time-honored stage properties, like the demons' costumes, present once more is part of the attraction, and therefore of the advertising, of this production. The Late Banns excuse disagreeable topics and stage practices by depicting the plays as the products of a bygone age of ignorance that is divided from the 'age or tyme wherein we presentlye staye'. In doing so, they ingeniously co-opt Goodman's historical periodization and turn it on its head: they shove the cycle plays into the popish past not to destroy but to protect them.

Though protective of past customs, the Late Banns are quite aware of tenuous present circumstances and are forced to drastically reinterpret the theological and dramatic significance of certain stage properties and practices. A passage unique to the Late Banns admonishes the audience concerning the embodied representation of the godhead and was perhaps written with Goodman and his fellow preachers in mind:

> Of one thinge warne you now I shall
> That not possible it is those matters to be contryued
> In such sorte and cunninge, & by suche players of price
> As at this daye good players & fine wittes. coulde deuise
> ffor then shoulde all those persones that as godes doe playe
> In Clowdes come downe with voyce and not be seene,
> ffor noe man can proportion that Godhead I saye
> To the shape of man face. nose and eyne
> But sethence the face gilte doth disfigure the man yat deme
> A Clowdye coueringe of the man. a Voyce onlye to heare
> And not god in shape or person to appeare[19]

In order to defend the players from the charge of idolatry, the Banns admonish the audience to excuse the embodied representation of God. If you see a player in a gilt mask playing God, then imagine it's a cloud or that you only hear a voice, the

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[17] Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.337.

[18] Ibid, 261. See also Meg Twycross, 'The Chester Cycle Wardrobe', in David Mills (ed.), *Staging the Chester Cycle* (Leeds, 1985), 121.

[19] Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.340. I read the beginning of this passage as: 'Since it's impossible even for our talented, present-day actors to devise an alternative means of staging, I must caution you that you will see God impersonated by an actor in a gilt mask.' Compare Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 195. Also see Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: A New Edition with Modernised Spelling* (East Lansing MI, 1992), 12.

Banns prescribe. Consequently, a gilt mask that had previously made God visible, could now be supposed to render him invisible, merely audible.[20]

What is so surprising is not that the Late Banns give a note of warning, but to whom that word of caution is spoken: they admonish the audience to adjust its thinking. There is never any question that dubious pre-Reformation material will be resurrected and staged. The Late Banns are not, as we might expect on such an incendiary religious issue, bowing to Goodman's accusations, but in fact urging tolerance of traditional (read 'Catholic') stagecraft.[21] Human flesh will continue to be gilded, deified if you will, as before. Yet if fault is to be found with this stage practice then, according to the Late Banns, it lies with the audience, not the players, for misinterpreting what is being performed. As with previous subject matter, historical precedent is underscored so as to assuage any discomfort:

> That not possible it is those matters to be contryued
> In such sorte and cunninge, & by suche players of price
> As at this daye good players & fine wittes. coulde deuise.[22]

In other words, even contemporary craftsmen-actors cannot develop an effective alternative to staging Christ without somehow incarnating him, and therefore they must adopt the traditional technique of painted masks. These matters were the product of a rude, bygone age, the Late Banns admit, and yet, as there is no present alternative, the audience must appreciate their historicity and excuse them.

A Siege Wall of Ink

But what about those vertical black lines Randle Holme added in the margins of the Early Banns? As a palimpsestic record of Chester theatrical history, Harley 2150 reflects not one moment in time but many, and I would now like to propose that what the Late Banns accomplish rhetorically, the material text of the Early Banns accomplishes graphically. Just as the Late Banns attempt to preserve the sixteenth-century Chester cycle as 'auntient' history dating to the city's founding, the ink on folios 88 recto and verso marks particular dramatic material as past, superseded, and indeed 'erazed in the booke'.[23] The Late Banns co-opt the biased historical periodization of protestants like Christopher Goodman in an effort to ensure the cycle's continued performance. Perhaps Holme's annotation of 'erazed' material similarly preempts an iconoclastic practice of erasure in order to retain rather than obliterate the textual record of past Catholic devotion and practice. We will probably never know the reasons for Randle Holme's collation and emendation of this censored text. Perhaps he carefully recorded the textual permutations of the Banns in response to the ideological upheavals occurring in his own time. Active in his antiquarian pursuits from the 1630s into the 1660s, including the bitter siege years of 1644–45, perhaps he feared iconoclastic outbursts as a result of the civil war. Julie Spraggon has studied numerous instances of iconoclasm performed by parliamentarian armies, and while she acknowledges that much of the destruction may have been the result of the wreckage and looting common to all wars, she contends that these men often saw their army as a godly agent of anti-papist reformation. As Canterbury Cathedral was being ransacked, for example, one fervent soldier played a parliamentary song on the organ and sang of his willingness 'to fall in battle to maintain / God's worship' and to 'extirpate Papacy'.[24] Altar rails, organs, sacred images, service books, and vestments obviously met their violent disapprobation, but in their zeal to eradicate popery in all of its forms, soldiers also targeted books and parish records for destruction. As Spraggon explains, 'the suspicion of the written records of the church can be seen at Peterborough, where the soldiers believed the records they destroyed to be papal bulls. Similarly, at Ashover and Derbyshire, soldiers burnt an old parish register because it was written in Latin, and they believed it, therefore, to be 'full of popery and treason'.[25] They might have viewed the manuscripts of the Chester cycle in a similar light as Christopher Goodman in the previous century. Goodman represented the texts of 'the old Popish plays of Chester', full of manifold 'absurdities' which he felt obliged to catalogue in a letter to the Archbishop of York, as threats to queen and commonweal.[26] Holme's antiquarian collections might therefore bear witness to his ideological undertakings. Defiant acts of recusancy (perhaps civically rather than doctrinally motivated), they aimed both to restore what had been iconoclastically 'erazed' by the predecessors of the Roundheads nearly a century before and, perhaps, to anticipate further acts of erasure. As scholars have noted, Holme was a zealous scribe 'who in many cases reproduced the same spellings, abbreviations, contractions, and the like of his manuscript source'.[27] Whatever his motives or intentions, Holme does not merely resurrect the 'Early' or 'Catholic' version of the Banns, but collates it with the censored, post-Reformation copy that was available

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[20]   See Twycross and Carpenter's discussion of 'disfigure' in this Banns passage in *Masks and Masking*, 194–5. As their explanation demonstrates, the Banns' curious precaution touches many scenes of the cycle production and underscores how volatile the mystery plays could be in post-Reformation England.

[21]   Compare Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 195, 196.

[22]   Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.340.

[23]   My subsequent discussion of the materiality of the Chester Banns is indebted to Jonathan Gil Harris's work on Renaissance theories of matter and 'palimpsested time' in *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia, 2009).

[24]   Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (London, 2003), 202.

[25]   Ibid, 209.

[26]   For Goodman's account of 'absurdities' in 'the old Popish plays of Chester' see Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.146–8; for the perceived 'peril' and 'danger to Her Majesty' etc., see 144 of the same volume.

[27]   Even when Holme made minor variations in spelling and the like, REED editors believe we can be confident in the accuracy of the large quantity of records that he was responsible for transmitting (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.cxcvi).

to him. As a result, the horizontal and vertical lines he has drawn between accepted and erased passages have a double effect: they preserve the act of censorship but also cordon off and seemingly protect forbidden areas. Antiquarian recuperation therefore blurs strict temporal distinctions of 'present' and 'past' even as it records the effects of historical (and ideological) change.

In his theory of the ruin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), Walter Benjamin explores the manner in which past objects, particularly the stage properties of *Trauerspiel*, may persist in the present precisely as superseded remnants.[28] 'Rather than signaling the advent of another epoch's renewal', Benjamin's ruin, writes Julia Lupton, 'itself constitutes a kind of rebirth, a rebirth as ruin – namely, the survival of a work beyond the period of its cultural currency'.[29] In the wake of Henrician and Edwardian reforms, the Chester plays were losing their cultural currency. For this reason, the Banns text was updated, and it begged the pardon of its now post-Reformation audience for the vestiges of popish ignorance. Yet in doing so the Late Banns give their matter a rebirth, a rebirth as 'accustomed' cultural artefacts of the city's 'ancient' past. They revive the mysteries but prevent them from being swept away in the current tide of Reformation by anchoring them in the city's ancient past, 'that age' which seems so remote from 'the age or tyme wherein we presently staye', that time loathed by Goodman because it is buried in 'the depth of ignorance' and 'Popish policy'. In a similar fashion, Chester antiquarian Randle Holme did not simply recopy the Early Banns with the previously excised material restored to its original place, but transposed the Early Banns with the forbidden material set apart as superseded matter. We might say that Holme, like Benjamin's historical materialist, resurrects shards of Chester's Catholic past that have been 'sundered from official [protestant] history and now presents the possibility of doing and imagining things differently'.[30] His ink forms a siege wall to protect an oppressed, beleaguered Catholic past from present protestant assault.

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[28] Yet coalescing sixteenth-century narratives and seventeenth-century textual practices with twentieth-century theory risks losing sight of the virtue of the Banns, namely their temporal proximity to both the mysteries and the professional London playhouses. The Banns, unlike Benjamin, narrate a history of early English drama free from any consideration of Burkhardt's *Kulturgeschichte* and Hegel's dialectics. So, while I wish to hold up Benjamin's ruin as an illustrative point of comparison, overstating the relevance of his work may unwittingly lead us to dwell upon, rather than to work around, the language of vestiges, precursors, and leftovers – and, perhaps, to a tacit recapitulation of Chambers's secularization thesis (itself derived from a Hegelian scholastic tradition).

[29] Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature* (Stanford, 1996), 28.

[30] Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 94.

Synchronic Diachrony

To the ecclesiastical opponents of the mysteries and to their proponents as well, the annual pageants in Chester and elsewhere were, as Michael O'Connell explains, still vital enough in the late sixteenth century to expend tremendous legal and political energy. 'The question', O'Connell adds, 'lies in what sense they remained'.[31] The Late Banns can help contemporary scholars answer that question. They demonstrate that late sixteenth-century audiences could and did look back across the Reformation divide to the mystery plays, not merely to condemn them like Goodman and Crashaw, and not to overlook them like Heywood. For, though they speak again and again 'of Custome olde', they express an unmistakable sense of the present vitality and material efficacy of the cycle even in the beleaguered days of the late sixteenth century. The Banns urge the guilds to 'be bolde' and to 'weathelye' and 'Lustelye' bring forth their traditional costumes and pageants regardless of how 'costelye' they are. We have noted the Banns' eager desire to see devils 'accustomablie' staged in their ragged costumes as well as their earnest defence of traditional gilt masks for Deus and Jesus. Other examples of the Banns' enthusiasm for stage properties, time-honoured and otherwise, abound: the star of the nativity, the 'bludshede' of the crucifixion, Noah's ark 'in all poyntes … prepared', Balaam's talking ass, Melchizedek's bread and wine, the Tanners' 'Apparell comlye'. The Mercers are directed to 'tryme up your Cariage as custome euer was' and the Shoemakers' conventional 'Ierusalem carriage' is requested. Other materials and technologies are implicit in the Banns' description. In order to satisfy their wish to see 'yat gloriose bodye in Clowdes moste ardente / Is taken vppto the heauens', the Tailors' pageant must include a hoist mechanism to achieve the spectacle of Christ's ascension. In order to 'shew … forthe howe Antechriste shoulde rise', the Shearmen and Clothiers must outfit their wagon with a sepulcher.[32] Thus eager for the 'lyuelye' and 'comlye' use of 'accustomed' stage properties and practices despite the protests of antitheatricalists, this fascinating late sixteenth-century proclamation urges us to explore the afterlives of mystery play techniques and technologies on the professional London stage.

Taking Richard Emmerson's suggestion, then, the goal for scholars of early English drama is 'to discover the similar as well as the dissimilar and to highlight continuities as well as discontinuities'. He argues for a 'synchronic analysis of drama during this period'. Emmerson is by no means calling for a synchronous view that reduces sixteenth-century theatrical experience into a homogenous whole, but rather a methodology that juxtaposes concurrent theatrical traditions previously separated by disciplinary and period divisions. Synchronic study is therefore as much concerned with complexity and range as it is with temporal overlap. Borrowing an example from the Chester mystery cycle as an illustration, Emmerson writes: 'Synchronic analysis … would ask how the meaning of a play

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[31] O'Connell, 'Vital Cultural Practices', 152–3.

[32] Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.332–40.

about Antichrist staged over seven decades changes over time as the essence of the apocalyptic figure is polemicized, and suggest how the play would be received differently in pre-Reformation Chester, during the Henrician Reformation, and finally under Elizabeth.'[33] Like Emmerson I am eager to overcome the 'rigid periodization that has 'frozen dramatic forms into prescribed time frames associated with their origins'; the Chester Banns, however, caution us not to take our desire for a synchronous 'theatrical era' too far, thus replacing one form of periodization with another.[34] They recognize – indeed their own material existence has come about as a result of – an unmistakable historical difference between the 'then' of the old faith plays and the 'now' in which the Whitsun plays are under assault. As we've seen, the Late Banns manipulate, and often exaggerate, that temporal difference to their advantage. Yet, even though the Late Banns locate the Whitsun plays in a remote and ignorant time, their diachronic narrative is not reducible to our modern notion of a medieval-Renaissance divide. Rather than freezing 'dramatic forms into prescribed time frames associated with their origins', the Banns' diachrony creates the possibility of preserving past objects and practices in the present, creates the possibility, paradoxically enough, of synchrony.

Conclusion

This synchrony within (and resulting from) diachrony is significant for two reasons. First, it avoids the construction of an artificial and inflexible period boundary that divorces pre- and post-Reformation dramatic forms. Second, it recognizes historical change and difference but avoids the pitfalls of E.K. Chambers's biological narrative of the growth and evolution of early English drama. 'If I may venture to define for myself the formula of my work', he writes in the preface to *The Mediaeval Stage*, 'I would say that it endeavours to state and explain the pre-existing conditions which, by the latter half of the sixteenth century, made the great Shakespearean stage possible'.[35] From the outset, then, the project of his *Mediaeval Stage* is mere pretext: what truly matters are the flourishing 'palmy days' of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.[36] So while the study of Shakespeare cannot proceed without first grasping medieval origins, it is equally the case for Chambers that Shakespeare justifies the study of early English drama. The Banns, on the other hand, offer a historical account of the mysteries that is free from Shakespeare's monolithic presence. They view, moreover, sixteenth-century theatrical objects,

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[33]   Richard K. Emmerson, 'Dramatic History: On the Diachronic and Synchronic in the Study of Early English Drama', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35.1 (Winter 2005), 56.

[34]   My cautionary note is aimed at my own present study, and I do not mean to imply that Emmerson's careful essay is deficient in this regard; his aim, as quoted above, is to uncover 'the similar as well as the dissimilar and to highlight continuities as well as discontinuities'.

[35]   Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (London, 1903), 1.v-vi.

[36]   Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (London, 1923), 1.307.

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not the Renaissance author, as the source of dramatic inspiration and audience entertainment.[37] True, the Banns attribute the Chester pageants to the famous author of the *Polychronicon*, but they have no desire to see the pageants staged as Higden originally intended. To the contrary, they willingly impose modern interpretations upon traditional stage practices in order to avoid controversy. Literary meaning is jettisoned to guarantee the object's literal stage presence. The Banns invoke Higden for the same reason they invoke Mayor Arneway and repeatedly underscore the authority of ancient custom: to preserve the familiar sights, sounds, and spectacles of the pageant wagons, props, and costumes. Palpable objects not transcendent subjects, and Shakespeare least of all, shape the historical narrative of the Chester Banns. Far from being dead, superseded precursors, as Chambers would have it, the material elements of the mystery plays are the great attractions that the Banns implore audiences to come and see. Their stated goal is to have the guilds resurrect these treasures of Chester theatre history. Material craft thus precedes the author's pen. If Hegelian histories (like that of Chambers) strain arduously toward the *telos* of freedom for the individual subject, then the Banns, it would seem, narrate a history in which material objects are set free, not by breaking away from the past, but by becoming synecdochically tied to it.

In their rhetorical and graphic historiography, the Chester Banns engage in calculated acts of periodization, but if they erect a temporal divide, it is a curious partition that creates the possibility of temporal proximity as well as distance. Gilt masks are (must be) new precisely because they are covered, and therefore protected by, the patina of past custom. Holme's ink acts as an open box or reliquary that contains yet exhibits dangerously idolatrous theatrical customs from England's Catholic past. If the late sixteenth-century apologies of the Late Banns and the seventeenth-century marginalia in the Early Banns manuscript tell us anything, therefore, it is that despite the emendation and eventual suppression of the mysteries, this dramatic material was not entirely superseded. It had by no means lost its old Catholic signification and therefore belonged to a 'past time of monkish ignorance'. And yet for many people these plays could not so easily be banished to a previous age. Certainly for Goodman they were not bygone but a present 'perill or danger to ... the common weal'.[38] If Shakespeare and his professional colleagues had not forgotten the mysteries, they may, like Heywood, have ignored them. But it is possible that, like the Banns, they viewed them as sources of 'lyuelye' and 'comlye' inspiration and entertainment.

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[37]   I am indebted for this phrase regarding the agency of past objects to Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 25.

[38]   Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, *REED: Cheshire*, 1.144.