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Director of Productions: PHILIP HEDLEY

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LINCOLNSHIRE YOUNG PEOPLE

present

YOUTH PROJECT '69

THE LINCOLN CYCLE OF MYSTERY PLAYS

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MARTIAL ROSE

in

LINCOLN CATHEDRAL

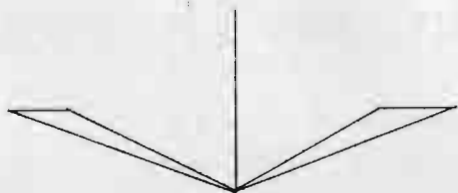
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First performance Saturday, 23rd August, 1969

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A NOTE ON THE PRODUCTION —

(Further notes on this production can be seen in the Lincoln Theatre Company's magazine PSSSST.)

This production arises directly from our work with children which has been going on all the year. Both of us have been intrigued by the idea of doing the "local" Mystery Cycle, and the combination of the Cathedral itself, the Plays and the children became irresistible.

Naturally working with children has not only influenced the way we work on the text of the play but has dictated the form of the performance. We have found that what the children do in an improvisation is far more important than what they look like, so we have not attempted to disguise the children, and we only costume them where absolutely necessary. The large groups of children serve several functions in the play — a "naturalistic" one for example when they are people coming to the Census at Bethlehem, and a "symbolic" or "abstract" one as in the Garden of Eden where they become plants, water, animals, stars, etc. The children find this change of style completely natural, which is why they can make us believe in it.

Our starting point on this production was the same as with any classical script, a mixture of reverence and irreverence. We have cut scenes, changed the order and interspersed improvised sections into the play. Our aim is to present a version faithful to the spirit of the original text, although we make no pretence of being faithful to the letter. One of the main functions of the drama as an instrument of the Medieval Church was to teach the Christian faith. Thus the characters both play a scene and comment on it at the same time. Jesus screams in agony on the cross and teaches the audience the implications of his suffering in Christian terms. But as a modern audience is not necessarily united by a single faith, we have tended to cut the teaching and present the images leaving the audience to derive its own implications.

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The personal convictions of the audience are really irrelevant. What we have tried to find is a way of presenting the truth of the "Myth" as one would in a Greek Play. We may not believe in Zeus in a religious sense but we can believe in the truth of the Myth, which tells us something about the life of Man.

To this end we have tried to question and challenge all traditional Christian images so that the audience can meet the narrative in a fresh way. Often without realising it, we are conditioned in our image of biblical characters by a combination of Victorian Sunday School pictures, Medieval painting and semi-Arab dress. In order to get away from dressing gowns and bath towels we have tried to find costumes that state a function rather than a period — for example Herod is exotic and Eastern, Pilate is just military rather than Roman. In the "supernatural" scenes we have been stimulated by the paintings of Hieronymous Bosch, and in the Passion Play by the paintings of Grünewald.

The Cathedral in Lincoln has been used for plays before and the acoustics are notoriously difficult. One may ask why the Cathedral? Obviously the fact that the plays originated from Medieval Lincoln, and that Medieval Lincoln means the Cathedral, is a dominant reason. The large open area of the Cathedral is a challenge to a Company used to working within the proscenium arch of the Theatre Royal. In the Cathedral we can expand to meet the breadth of the play. The children function best in a large open area and we hope that the less formal seating "in the round" will overcome both the technical difficulty of the acoustics, and also enable the audience to identify more closely with the action of the play.

Clare Venables
Rhys McConnochie

Lincoln Theatre Company

JESUS	BRIAN TREE
LUCIFER	BRIAN PROTHEROE
GOD CAIAPHAS }	HOWARD LLOYD LEWIS
JOHN THE BAPTIST } ANNAS	DAVID BRADFORD
JOSEPH PILATE }	DAVID PEART
ADAM HEROD PETER }	NEIL McLAUCLAN
GABRIEL JUDAS }	MARTIN DUNCAN
MARY MAGDALENE } EVE	ANNABEL SCASE
MARY	ALISON STEADMAN

There is one interval

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Lincolnshire Young People

THEATRE IN ACTION (T.I.A.) is the Theatre Royal Youth Group for over 14 year olds. Meets fortnightly on Sunday evenings at the Theatre, for discussions, talks, improvisations, etc.

YOUTH THEATRE GROUP (Y.T.G.) meets fortnightly on Saturday mornings at the Further Education Centre. For 11-14 year olds.

Enquiries to Clare Venables at the Theatre Royal.

Young People taking part :—

Frances Avery	Susan Hains Cliff Herbert Robert Hignell Barbara Hodson Linda Hollingworth	Karen Raby Christine Richardson Gwenda Richmond Joy Richmond Stephen Roberts June Rogers Neville Rowland
Jenny Barnes Roger Beckett Julie Brader Susan Brader Jane Braybrooke Barbara Breslin Melanie Burton Peter Burton Larry Bustin	Susan Jackson Graham Jefferson Yvonne Jenkinson Anita Jones Jennifer Jones	Regina Scott Helen Sharman Elizabeth Stallebrass Helen Stokes
Valerie Cane Judith Chapman Philip Clarke Diane Corlett Vivien Corringham Elizabeth Covington Richard Courtney Judith Crownshaw Linda Crombie Susan Curtis	John Langley Richard Langley Angela Lett Suzanne London Helen Lubin Hilary Lubin Christine Marriott Derek Moon Stephanie Moore Morris Mulligan	Susan Taylor Alexandra Thom Elaine Thom Sandra Thom Jane Thompson Lorraine Toyne
Nicola Davies	Pauline Nelson Kevin Nessling Marquerite Nix Martin Newmann Christopher Nolan Tanzeem Nooruddin Yasmin Nooruddin	Colin Turk Keith Turk Barry Turner Patricia Turner Gillian Turner
Valerie Faull Heather Fletcher Michael Foley Julie Foyster Linda Foyster Keith Freeman	Linda O'Neill Dawn Osko	Julie Vickers Ann Vivian Judith Virgin
Ann Gowenlock Richard Greenway Helen Gregory	Christine Partridge Christine Petch Barbara Portas Beverley Portas Catherine Pyle	Philip Wadsworth Graham Walker Salli Webb Stella Williams Melody Wing David Would

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MEDIEVAL DRAMA IN LINCOLN

by Dr. STANLEY J. KAHRL

(This article is printed in full in the Theatre Royal magazine PSSSST).

Religious life in late Medieval England was characterized by a steadily increasing effort to make the Christian religion more meaningful to the ordinary lay folk of the parishes. Wallpaintings and stained glass windows complemented the efforts of preachers, both friars and parsons, to bring the word of God to his people. In this effort it was early found that dramatic representations of central points of doctrine were particularly effective. Throughout Europe from the eleventh century on, stylized dramatic productions had been incorporated into various liturgical observances during the church year, such as the visit of the three Marys to the empty tomb on Easter, or the visit of the shepherds to the manger at Christmas. These however had been restricted to a relatively select audience, both on account of their language, Latin, and the fact that the liturgy was more concerned to celebrate than to represent the events memorialized. Furthermore, anyone who has paused to observe such a choir screen as can be seen in Lincoln Cathedral today must realize that any liturgical observance taking place within the choir would be completely hidden from a lay congregation situated in the body of the nave.

One solution to this problem was to bring the liturgical service out of the choir. The festival of Corpus Christi, in which the consecrated Host was borne in procession through the town in specially constructed feretories before a high Mass was celebrated in the cathedral, is the festival of greatest interest in the history of the early English drama. In England it became the practice by the end of the fourteenth century to include in this procession floats, or pageant waggons as they were called, illustrating important scenes in the sacred history leading up to Christ's institution of the Mass and culminating in the Last Judgment. By the first quarter of the fifteenth century, through a process not yet entirely clear to those studying this development, it became the practice to produce a cycle of plays on the same subjects as had been illustrated by the pageant waggons, either on or near Corpus Christi Day (the Thursday after Trinity Sunday), or on Whitsunday.

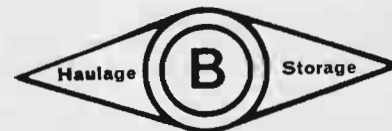
Unfortunately few texts survive of these cycle plays. Still popular in the sixteenth century, they had in the course of the Catholic-Protestant controversy become a symbol for the old faith, the traditional observance. Discouraged to some extent under Edward VI, produced determinedly during the reign of Philip and Mary, they were put down systematically by the reforming bishops of Elizabeth. Furthermore attendance at such plays too often assumed political overtones. By the end of the century the plays had been stamped out in England, not to reappear until the second half of the twentieth century. The most effective means of eliminating the plays was to ask to see the playbooks kept by the town authorities, ostensibly to censor offensive passages, and then to destroy the text. Thus full texts of only four English and Cornish cycles survive, together with assorted fragments. Most of the texts can be localized. One, however, is very difficult to place.

Originally part of the collection of Sir Robert Cotton, acquired in 1629 from Robert Hegge, a member of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, the manuscript known as Cotton Vespasian D. viii is now in the British Museum, where it is on permanent display. This manuscript contains a full cycle with no internal references to its place of origin. Dr. Richard James, Cotton's lib-

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arian at the time, noted on the fly-leaf that the plays were such as he thought were put on by monks or friars, and the book was commonly called the Play of Coventry — *Ludus Coventriae*. This was a most unfortunate suggestion. As already noted, a portion of the true Coventry cycle survives, that portion dealing with the events of the Nativity. It bears no resemblance to this text. Coventry's cycle was famous, however, and perhaps by 1630, a full generation after the plays had been put down, it was the only one James knew of. However, as a result of this ascription the cycle has been known for too long as the *Ludus Coventriae*, leading to a consistent confusion between the two cycles. When the new Coventry Cathedral was to be dedicated, for example, a modernized version of the Cotton manuscript was sought to be used as a play-text for a production at the cathedral. Martial Rose's modernized text is the happy result of this confusion, but it now seems time to drop James' title permanently.

Over fifty years ago the suggestion was made that the cycle might have been put on in Lincoln. Because the dialect of the play, in large part, more closely resembles that of the area south of the Wash, this ascription has always been met with some scepticism. Yet over the years, due as much to the suggestion of Hardin Craig as anyone else, the notion that Lincoln is the city which put on the unlocalized cycle has gradually seemed more and more plausible. My own recent study of the account books of medieval quills in Lincoln and the acts and accounts of the Cathedral chapter and the Lincoln Common Council on deposit in the Lincolnshire County Archives has convinced me that Lincoln is as likely to have been the home city as any other. The reasons are as follows. The cycle is, in the first place, a composite. One section in particular stands out, unique among the surviving cycle plays, that is, the long group of plays drawn from apocryphal sources on the life of the Virgin. Then, in the latter part of the cycle appears a long Passion play, again unusual in medieval English drama, apparently put on in two parts in two different years in the version recorded in the text. Finally immediately preceding the fragmentary Last Judgement play there has been inserted in the manuscript a long play on the Assumption of the Virgin.

No initial suspension of disbelief is required of either the medieval or the modern audience in the Passion play. Those who were privileged to see the production of this portion of the cycle put on in 1966 in Grantham, under the direction of Mrs. Margaret Birkett, know the power which the scenes surrounding Christ's death and Resurrection possess. The dramatist's main concern is to recreate the form of those original events in such a manner that the reality of man's inhumanity to God as men should be brought fully home to his audience. Here Christ moving between the different scaffolds of the high priests, Herod, and Pilate, beaten and scourged by the brutal, but thoroughly believable soldiery, drives home the point that for all those figures in authority Christ and his message had become an acute embarrassment.

Not all the individual plays in the cycle are of such a high quality. When the cycle plays are good, they can be very good indeed, and those seeking to bring them once more to life need make no excuses for doing so. All that one can ask of a modern audience is that one comes to a modern production of medieval drama expecting no more and no less than one would from drama of any other period. Taken in that spirit, it can be a thoroughly rewarding experience.

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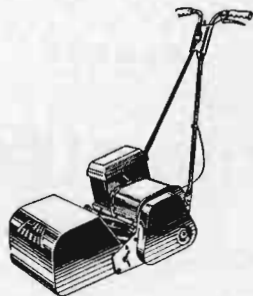
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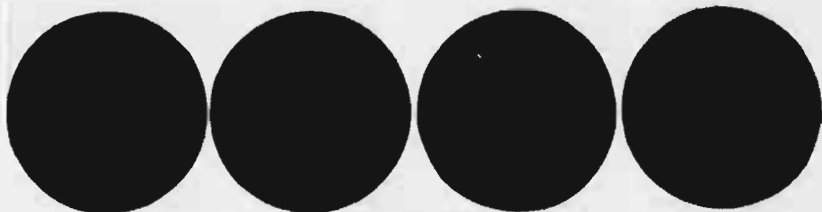


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