

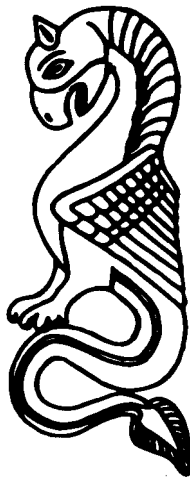
Leeds Studies in English

Article:

Dick McCaw, 'Old Theatre for New: The Cambridge Medieval Players (1974-1977), The Medieval Players (1980-1992)', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 32 (2001), 275-88

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=124842&silos_library=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

**Old Theatre for New:
The Cambridge Medieval Players (1974-1977), The
Medieval Players (1980-1992)**

Dick McCaw

Twenty years ago in 1980 Carl Heap and I spent much of a hot summer arguing about theatre. Medieval theatre, to be precise. The reasons for this conversation go back to Summer 1974 when we were both students at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. I used to work nights in the college bar and he was one of my regulars, arriving promptly at 10.30 for the last half hour. One night after work he asked me whether I would join him in a theatre company called the Cambridge Medieval Players (CMP). Although I had little experience of theatre, and none of medieval theatre, the idea as he described it, appealed and I said yes. Thus began a four-week training session that was military in its rigour. Apart from physical exercises for building strength and developing suppleness, he would take us out to a cricket pitch for vocal warm-ups. We would stand at opposite ends of the field and speak our lines to each other, sometimes whispering them whilst still remaining audible. This training stood us in good stead when we were performing outdoors and without any acoustic assistance at all: it also built up our physical stamina which resulted in our high-octane performances.

During the summer vacation of 1974 we performed *Johan Johan The Husband*, and *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament* on Latham Lawn, Trinity Hall. Our audience consisted of tourists and Cambridge academics who hadn't gone on holiday. In 1975 we added *Mankynde* and the Towneley *Mactatio Abel* to the repertoire and New College Oxford to the tour schedule. We added *The Pardoner's Tale* to the repertoire in 1977 and toured to Alençon, venues in East Anglia, New College Oxford and ended our five-week tour at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe where we all nearly froze to death in an arctic Scottish summer. By this time all the performers had learned a variety of skills for which the subsequent Medieval Players were to become celebrated: acrobatics, singing, juggling and stilt-walking. Our street parades showed off our circus skills and garish costumes to great effect: no-one could forget Carl striding

down Princes Street blowing his cow horn, preceded by the lewdly capering devil, Titivillus.

After September 1977 we went our separate ways. Carl began a professional career after a one-year course at Webber Douglas College, his brother Mark went back to Oxford University, Roy Weskin went into professional theatre, where he worked with Carl in Purves' Puppets, Andy Watts became a professional musician, and, in 1978, I joined a scratch theatre company called The Actor's Touring Company (ATC). I returned to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe with ATC's adaptation of Byron's *Don Juan* and, having won one of the coveted 'Fringe First Awards', started my professional career.

Don Juan was a show whose minimal set could be stowed in the back of a Renault 5 – an example of theatre at its most portable. The stage was laid bare for the six actors who between them took on some forty or so roles. I loved the show for the invention of its staging and for the whippy sophistication of Byron's poetry, but it lacked something. The actors didn't have the stage reality of the CMP performers – all they could do was act. Byron's poem had a fantastic geographical sweep but it lacked the cosmic dimension of the medieval dramas. Byron's rudeness was sharp and witty but lacked the earthy vulgarity of a play like *Mankynde*. During ATC's third production – this time an adaptation by Richard Curtis of *Don Quixote* – I began to dream of a company which would perform those medieval plays we had experimented with in the 1970s.

I tracked Carl down and we began to discuss the idea that was later to become The Medieval Players. He brought his knowledge of medieval theatre and his actor training, and I brought the experience of having started a professional theatre company. The result of our sometimes heated discussions was a two-page manifesto whose propositions we remained faithful to until we parted company in 1990. After it had been produced I don't remember us ever arguing about fundamentals again. I now realise just how unique our partnership was: rarely does one achieve such a harmony of purpose, and from that, such a complete trust in one another's actions.

Ten years on from the break-up of the Medieval Players we have all gone our separate ways again. I am a part-time PhD student, working on a thesis called *Bakhtin's Other Theatre* which examines the theories of the Russian writer Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and their application to twentieth-century Eastern European theatre.¹ The inspiration for my approach goes back to the principles Carl and I put into practice, in particular to the Medieval Players' landmark tour of Autumn 1982. This, our fourth national tour, saw the beginnings of our first ensemble; it marked the moment at which Carl and I stopped feeding the company members with theory, and

began following and shaping their creative development as they interpreted our vision. During the Autumn tour we started working on an adaptation of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and copies of Thomas Urquhart's wonderfully unfaithful translation circulated around the van.² Urquhart was accompanied by another book, which Carl recommended to Rabelais-remedialists like myself who were having difficulties getting to grips with the novel. This book was called *Rabelais and His World* by Mikhail Bakhtin.³ Carl had set me off on my theatrical journey in 1974 and unwittingly on my academic journey in 1982.

The thesis has become, in some respects, a 200-page elaboration of our two-page manifesto. It is a rediscovery of those fundamentals of theatre which I now find echoed in the writings of Appia, Brecht, Copeau, and, above all, Meyerhold. The thesis grew directly out of the talks I had to give throughout Britain and Australia to try and persuade sixth-formers and university students to come and watch our plays. At first their function was simply to sell our performances, emphasising the spectacle and skills and downplaying the religion and middle English of our productions; after a while they became a means of testing and exploring our manifesto and for applying the latest translations of Bakhtin's writings which appeared throughout the eighties. The thesis also originated in a book I was asked to write in 1987 when Carl and I were planning our farewell tour. I wrote eighty pages before The Medieval Players' hugely successful 'farewell tour' became the prelude to our most intense period of activity, and after September 1987 I never had time to return to the book. Its title was to have been *Old Theatre for New*.

Of course The Medieval Players were not the first to confront the challenges of producing medieval plays in such a way that they appealed to modern theatre audiences. William Poel's 1900 production of *Everyman* was the first 20th century performance of a medieval play, although he is probably better remembered as a re-inventor of Shakespeare's plays, staging them as close to what was then known of, or believed to be, the Elizabethan original as possible. When he was asked whether he wasn't being a little 'archaeological' in his approach, he replied that, on the contrary, he was in the vanguard of the New Theatre by doing away with the proscenium arch and footlights which separate actors from their audience.⁴ The distinction he implied between the 'archaeological' and the contemporary introduces the fundamental dilemma faced by anyone wanting to present early theatre to a modern paying audience. Putting it another way, if the two are in tension should one's first debt be to the audience or to the original material? How can one be faithful to a theatre that no diarist described in detail, for which we have no instruction manuals on either acting or stage conventions, and that had scant stage directions in the play texts? Non-specialists like

Carl and me had to look to the academics like Meg Twycross for an informed view based on painstaking and eclectic research of what a play might originally have looked like, and what acting styles might have prevailed. In deciding to draw on and interpret that body of evidence, The Medieval Players' approach might seem in danger of falling into the archaeological camp. Indeed when we met with Dario Fo who was performing his celebrated *Mistero Buffo* at the Riverside Studios in 1985 the one thing he warned us against was 'archaeology'. But not surprisingly Carl and I are with Poel in thinking that our approach was modern rather than archaeological, ironically precisely *because* we drew on recent academic research into medieval theatre.

The Medieval Players took inspiration from and worked creatively with academic models of a theatre that was completely alien to contemporary ideas of illusionist theatre. Their projection had more in common with the theatre of Bertholt Brecht and Tadeusz Kantor than current West End fodder. While we were working, Ronald Harwood introduced his own history of (European) theatre for the BBC called *All the World's a Stage*, which remains instructive in reminding us of the official theatre world's received wisdom on medieval theatre at the time.⁵ This was, in our view, a tendentious history whose culminating point was the West End theatre of the early 1980s and which presented medieval theatre as apparently lacking any intelligence, beauty or sophistication, as coarse and stupid plays for coarse and stupid people, who had to wait 150 years for Shakespeare, whose plays were performed according to the best traditions of television naturalism. The excerpt from *Mankynde* appears to have been contrived to enact these prejudices and stands as a piece of historical/theatrical snobbery in which actors and audiences were both presented as microcephalic idiots laughing at jokes which no modern viewer could grasp, often before the gags had been delivered. For Harwood the past truly was a foreign land and medieval theatre an entirely alien phenomenon.

Bill Bryden's production of Tony Harrison's *The Mysteries* was another, much more interesting example of an 'official' theatre taking on what it championed as a 'popular' theatre. Their (very self-conscious) process of popularisation was explicitly un-'archeological'.

I hope you understand our purpose to throw out all scholarship and bring the plays back to a popular audience. [. . .] The Mystery Plays are essentially popular art, designed for mass audiences in open spaces. [. . .] by rooting the plays in a gritty working-class environment he [Bill Bryden] has reclaimed them for our times for what they are: an essential part of our dramatic heritage.⁶

Old Theatre for New

If Harwood's version of medieval was predicated on a particular theatrical tradition (which calls itself Theatre), Hall reinstates it but as 'our dramatic heritage'. In the programme there is much made of the grittiness and working-class origins of this theatre: wholemeal theatre wi' nowt of the goodness taken out. Musical Director, John Tams describes Tony Harrison's verse transliteration in exactly these terms:

Language is powerful verse and strong rhythm; not thinly-sliced language with the crusts taken off . . . but stone ground and crunchy so that it tastes good in your mouth and you want everyone to have a slice.⁷

I am not saying their production was a travesty of medieval theatre; Bryden, Harrison, Tams and Bill Dudley (the designer) were clearly inspired by the York and Towneley Plays and worked on them with both admiration and affection for the original. I could not help but enjoy their production: the staging had brilliant moments, and the cast played with an emotional commitment rare in British theatre. But out with the scholarly bathwater went much of the very baby they were so keen to present to us *tel quel*. Their rendering of *Abraham and Isaac* was terrifically moving up until the Angel's appearance – an excellent piece of rough-hewn Ibsen played with great realism. But what to make of the Angel? There is no context for Angels in the Yorkshire of *Kes* – especially angels who play such a decisive role in the story.

Religion was the problem in this production. *The Creation* was played as a comic tour de force by an actor who seemed to have confused his role of God with that of Herod. For him (or Bryden) authority was synonymous with shouting and bullying. It was funny but it failed to make sense of the theological structure of the play as a whole. This was the case too with Bill Dudley's *Hell's Mouth*. It was spectacular but had only the vaguest meaning:

Hellmouth below was a corporation dust cart's jaws and Hell itself, a combination of sewage and garbage – more real for a largely agnostic audience than a gargoyles mouth and demons.⁸

I don't agree that their production decisions did create images which were 'more real for a largely agnostic audience': medieval theatre was accessible and intelligible precisely because its dramaturgical register was visual. This theatre was a 'living book' for the illiterate because the concepts were presented in vivid iconic form. The staging of *The Creation* can and should set out the medieval theological cosmology, situating

mankind in relation to God and the Devil. God was an inaccessible figure set high above the stage, masked, speaking from a throne set within a golden mandorla. From Hell's Mouth leaped the Devil, close-up and terrifying – the costume a horrible confusion of animal, bird and fish, all natural order reversed. In between was mankind, on middle-earth, aspiring to the heavenly and tempted by the devil. These images which we were able to draw on because of the research of Meg Twycross and others, read, I believe, more clearly than fudged generality.

Harrison accepts that while the York Cycle was a popular drama its *function* was religious:

One of the things religion does is help people cope with mortality.
What else have we? There are very few public ceremonies for that.⁹

Harrison's religion helps us 'cope' with our own mortality perhaps, but the 'religion' of the York cycle deals centrally not with the mortality of the individual body but with the resurrection of Christ's body, Corpus Christi. It is about salvation and the *immortality* of the soul. Only if we grasp this can we understand the meaning of its representations of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. What *The Mysteries* courted was popular drama, the 'public ceremony' without the religious content, the *ecclesiam* without the *sanctum*.

... these plays are not really about what your religion is. They're about the faith of the common people, and their days of celebration. They make sense today, at a time when the church is virtually nowhere, because they help us to remember our faith and our struggle for that faith, whether it is in our family, our home town, our union.¹⁰

Bernard Levin found that they achieved their aim completely:

It is this welding of actor, audience, play and story into one whole that gives the performance its unique quality – and I wish there were another word for performance, for it diminishes the thing that has been created, which transcends any idea of a theatre as a place which we visit to see a play, and of a play as that which we visit a theatre to see.¹¹

Old Theatre for New

Having recently seen *The Mysteries* again, I still feel that they work as a *spectacle*, but at bottom the project is an exercise in nostalgia, and nostalgia not for the Middle Ages but for a William Morrisite pre-industrial nirvana, a world of gritty working-class honesty, of Northern folk who call spades spades. In the 1980s the production was also seen as an act of solidarity in the face of the Thatcher government's defeat of the Miner's Strike, based on a very questionable equation of Craft Guild (an employer's organisation) with a Trades Union (a worker's organisation). It was a wonderful party that affirmed our need for fellowship and celebration but without having found within the plays a convincing reason for doing so.

Even if they sidestepped the religious burden of the plays, the National Theatre team did get the collective moment right: a sense of 'communitas' was also one of the central objectives of The Medieval Players. To explain our type of theatre Carl would quote a passage from Tyrone Guthrie's autobiography, describing the author's reaction to *Ane Satire of The Thrie Estates*:

Gradually as I toiled through the formidable text, it began to dawn that here was an opportunity to put into practice some of the theories which, through the years, I had been longing to test. Scene after scene seemed absolutely unplayable on a proscenium stage, almost meaningless in terms of 'dramatic illusion'; but seemed at the same time to offer fascinating possibilities.¹²

The first thing to note in this quotation is the phrase 'toiled through the formidable text'. It has to be said that medieval plays do not have the literary allure of Shakespeare; they only come to life when performed. This is why many colleagues thought that we were mad wanting to create popular theatre from what looked like such unpromising material. But, like Guthrie, we realised that this drama allowed us to take inspiration from the theatrical experiments of our contemporaries. Carl listed his inspirations as the theatre of Tadeusz Kantor and Peter Schumann of Bread and Puppet Theatre, both of whom created drama that is 'unplayable on a proscenium stage'. It was a 'revelation' for Guthrie when he found the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh to stage the play at the 1948 Edinburgh Festival.

. . . it threw a new light for me on the whole meaning of theatrical performance. One of the most pleasing effects of the performance was the physical relation of the audience to the stage. [. . .] Seated

around three sides they focused upon the actors in the brightly lit acting area, but the background was of the dimly lit rows of people similarly focused on the actor. All the time, but unemphatically and by inference, each member of the audience was being ceaselessly reminded that he was not lost in an illusion, was not at the court of King Humanitie in 16thC Scotland, but was, in fact, a member of a large audience, taking part, 'assisting' as the French very properly express it, in a performance, a participant in a ritual.¹³

Anyone who saw The Medieval Players perform can understand why this description of Guthrie's production was used by Carl to support our work. Guthrie vividly describes the complex actor/audience relationship that develops once one jettisons the footlights and proscenium arch of illusionist theatre: the audience is transformed from a passive 'fly on the wall' into an active participant in the total event. This active relationship means far more than embarrassing moments of audience participation; it demands a different kind of acting, and a different kind of responding. Ever fond of bad jokes Carl would announce that 'The Medieval Players do it with the lights on', but it took us years to perfect a style of playing directly to an audience that didn't drop into condescending *Jackanory* story-telling, or assume the hectoring tones of agit-prop.

It was the same achievement of this live actor/audience that led William Poel to consider himself a modernist rather than an 'archaeologist'. On Sundays when West End theatres were closed he would lay down a platform stage over the stalls and play directly to his audience. Poel's challenge to proscenium arch, illusionist theatre, was being repeated throughout Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Swiss designer Adolphe Appia found the separation of audience and performer spiritually impoverishing and, in 1911, he designed the lighting and architecture of Great Hall at Hellerau (near Dresden) to bring together both halves of the total event.¹⁴ The Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius designed his 'Total Theatre' for political theatre-maker Erwin Piscator in 1927, with exactly the same idea in mind.¹⁵ Indeed the very name Bauhaus was taken from the sheds that the Cathedral masons would be housed in during construction. The more I study theatre the more I feel confident about placing the work of The Medieval Players within a tradition of twentieth-century experimentation: I want, therefore, to conclude this article by examining the relationship between the Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1865-1940) and medieval theatre as we came to understand it.

A constant in all productions by The Medieval Players was the booth-and-

Old Theatre for New

trestle staging which allowed us to perform in almost any space: village hall, gymnasium, shopping precinct or football pitch. The priorities of the Arts Council of England's national lottery scheme demonstrate how authorities seem much happier funding theatre buildings than paying for artists to make work in them. It is clearly much sounder to invest in the solid durability of bricks and mortar than in the ephemeral life of artistic performances. Theatre, however, is not about buildings but the live exchange between actor and audience. The booth-and-trestle stage demonstrates that you don't need theatre buildings in order to make theatre; by jettisoning the weighty paraphernalia of theatres you return to the fundamentals of theatre. The proscenium arch is not simply a feature of stage architecture; by the physical distance it places between actor and audience it determines the kind of theatre that can be performed on that stage. The frame disengages and highlights the represented world of the play. Not only stage space but also stage time becomes remote. Events cease to have immediacy and become representations of time past, they move from the present to the preterite tense. Meyerhold notes how the isolation created by the proscenium arch affected the interaction between audience and spectator:

The spectator experienced passively that which was presented on the stage. There arose that magic barrier which even today, in the form of footlights, divides the theatre into two opposed camps, the performers and the onlookers; no artery exists to unite these two separate bodies and preserve the unbroken circulation of creative energy. The orchestra kept the spectator close to the action; when it was replaced by footlights the spectator became isolated.¹⁶

Meyerhold's was just one voice amongst many challenging the limitations of the naturalistic stage and he looked to the equally ancient tradition of the booth-and-trestle.

At the present time, when the cinematograph is in the ascendant, the absence of the fairground booth is only apparent. The fairground booth is eternal. Its heroes do not die; they simply change their aspects and assume new forms. The heroes of the ancient *Atellanae*, the foolish *Maccus* and the simple *Pappus*, were resurrected almost twenty centuries later in the figures of *Arlecchino* and *Pantalone*, the principal characters of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.¹⁷

Meyerhold's first reference is to the depictions on Etruscan pottery of the stock characters of Atellan farce, Pappus and Maccus, capering on the phlyax stage. His historical sweep from the popular farces of first century Campania to the *Commedia dell'Arte* of sixteenth-century Northern Italy anticipates Bakhtin's millenary tradition of the carnivalesque, especially because it focuses on the specific *genre* of theatre played on these portable stages. It is a theatre of stock characters, of masks, performed by the strolling player who could turn his hand to a whole range of skills. When referring to this player Meyerhold uses the French term 'Cabotin', a word quite often used pejoratively to refer to performers in the boulevard touring theatres of the nineteenth century.

The cabotin is a strolling player; the cabotin is a kinsman to the mime, the histrion, and the juggler; the cabotin can work miracles with his technical mastery; the cabotin keeps alive the tradition of the true art of acting. [. . .] In order to rescue the Russian theatre from its desire to become the servant of literature, we must spare nothing to restore to the stage the cult of cabotinage in its broadest sense.¹⁸

Along with other revolutionaries of the theatre (notably Craig) Meyerhold makes an opposition between 'the true art of acting' and theatre which risks becoming 'the servant of literature'. Without ever having read a word of Meyerhold in the 1970s and 80s Carl Heap was pursuing exactly the same exercise of reinvention, of reanimation of theatre. I'm sure he would agree with the following words:

Overjoyed at the simplicity, the refined grace, the extreme artistry of the old yet eternally new tricks of the histrions, *mimi atellanae*, *scurrae*, *jaculatores* and *ministrelli* the actor of the future should- or if he wishes to remain an actor must co-ordinate his emotional responses with his technique, measuring both against the traditional precepts of the old theatre.¹⁹

I began this article by saying that Carl and I spent one summer 'talking about theatre. Medieval theatre, to be precise'. I think we have now got far enough to turn this statement around. To be precise, by talking about 'medieval' theatre, we were talking about Theatre in its simplest and purest state; not some archaeological revival, some hand-me-down from literature, some pictorial make-believe, but an artistic genre

Old Theatre for New

with a unique appeal and immediacy. Meyerhold defines the specific appeal of theatre in terms of the actor's physical presence on stage, as opposed to the beauty of the spoken word. Indeed he is always presented in opposition to Stanislavski precisely because he insisted on the actor 'co-ordinating his emotional responses with his technique': he demanded a theatre of 'emotional excitability' and not the 'psychological' approach of emotional memory. To achieve this type of physical performance he re-invented the ancient tradition of popular acting.

If you think that traditions survive without attention you are wrong – they need watering just like a bulb under cultivation. It is ridiculous to expect a tradition to flourish by itself; culture doesn't function like that. Anybody who is familiar with the history of Italian theatre knows what a bitter struggle Gozzi had with Goldoni when they quarrelled over the need to revive the ancient tradition of the mask in Italian comedy. In his battles with Goldoni Gozzi placed his faith in the masses, in popular taste, and in the needs of the contemporary Italian audience; furthermore, he assembled a troupe of actors ready to fight with him to preserve the lusty traditions of the theatre.²⁰

This describes the path The Medieval Players trod. Each generation has to fight its own battle with non-theatrical theatre, with stagings of literary texts which are neither theatre nor literature. What makes a tradition alive is precisely the recurrent and militant act of reinvention.

A tradition is not a content, but a generic or stylistic structure that you have to rediscover through trial and error. We have pictures of Atellan farces and pictures and descriptions of Commedia dell'Arte and its masks, but how does one make the leap from still (possibly idealised or decorated) pictures to live theatre? Just how does the performer create an immediate effect whilst wearing stylised mask? Because the answers to these questions lie in form and style, ultimately they have to be resolved through practice. One has to work with the old texts, and work with the masks, sustained by the belief that they contain within them (like some genetic code) a characteristic notion of theatre. I think it was because the National Theatre changed anything which didn't conform to (their notion of) contemporary theatre practice that their theatrical results were limited.

As I mentioned earlier in this article, it took Carl and me two years of dogged experiment before we really started to create an ensemble (Autumn 1982). One quality

that Carl sought was naïveté, which also happens to be central to Meyerhold's conception of stylised acting:

The basic quality of kabuki players' acting is the same as Chaplin's: their naïveté. Naive in everything they do: in tragedy and in comedy. That's why the stylised form of their productions seems natural. Without the naïveté in acting, the stylised devices of a director seem stiff and strange.²¹

It is true that stylised acting would seem 'stiff and strange', or better, affected, unless one had that ease, simplicity or, as Dario Fo puts it, *souplesse* in one's way of playing. But one must remember that theatre *is* unnatural and is a style of communication which becomes more immediate, more surprising, more effective, as a genre when the stylisation is acknowledged. The National Theatre realised that you needed to have 'high octane' language for the York plays, hence Harrison's driving alliterative verse; what they did not realise is that you need the same pent-energy in the gesture and movement – *that* is the element that makes the play watchable. On the booth-and-trestle stage neither words nor movement can descend into flaccid, formless naturalism which simply doesn't register as theatre.

Training! Training! Training! But if it's the kind of training which exercises only the body and not the mind then No, thank you! I have no use for the actors who know how to move but cannot think.²²

In the 1920s Meyerhold was one of the first directors to create an actor's training which is now taken as a commonplace of experimental theatre, promulgated by Jerzy Grotowski in the late 1950s²³ and brought to wider attention by Peter Brook and Eugeno Barba in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁴ We inherited this ethos and made it very much our own. The grace of movement, the energy of delivery, the physical availability of actors was entirely due to Carl's insistence on regular training for our ensemble of actors. Like Meyerhold we looked to the earlier tradition of the multifaceted performer who could juggle, sing, walk stilts and was an acrobat.

As a teacher I began by employing many means of expression which had been rejected by theatre; one of them was acrobatic training, which I revived in the system known as 'biomechanics'.

Old Theatre for New

That is why I was to enjoy following the course of Chaplin's career: in discovering the means he employed to develop his monumental art, I find that he, too, realised the necessity for acrobatic training in the actor's education.²⁵

How right that these 'means of expression . . . had been rejected by theatre'. Throughout our career we came up against what Bakhtin would call 'official theatre' for which most of the drama schools train actors, which the greater part of theatres are built for, and which most theatre organisations promote and produce. Our success was as a marginal group, hugely popular in smaller communities, both rural or inner city, but never quite accepted by the arbiters of official theatre. Which is how it should be. We took our inspiration from a tradition which always seems to have run parallel with a more official, less dangerous, less immediate kind of theatre. Ours is the poor theatre of minimal technical requirements, of direct audience address, which appeals to their imagination through suggestive gesture, a theatre of skill and spectacle. This is the theatre which I left ATC London to create with Carl, a creation which was supported and informed by Meg Twycross's work. Now I am discovering in retrospect the rich tradition of theatre to which we belong and to which I hope The Medieval Players made some contribution.

[**Editor's note.** The archives of The Medieval Players' entire touring career passed into the custody of York *Doomsday* Project (Lancaster), of which Meg Twycross is a director, after the company disbanded, where they await the attentions of a suitable PhD candidate.]

NOTES

¹ The thesis is being written under the supervision of Professor David Wiles, Royal Holloway College, University of London. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own.

² *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. by Thomas Urquhart (The Navarre Society: London, 1931).

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Midland Books: London, 1984).

⁴ William Poel, *The Elizabethan Revival* (Heinemann: London, 1954).

⁵ BBC 1, 1984.

⁶ Peter Hall, *The Mysteries*, programme notes, National Theatre, 1985.

⁷ Johns Tams, *ibid.*

⁸ Bill Dudley, *ibid.*

⁹ Tony Harrison, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Bill Bryden, *ibid.*

¹¹ Bernard Levin, 'When Mystery was an Open Book', *The Times*, 19 April 1985, 18.

¹² Tyrone Guthrie, *A Life in the Theatre* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960)

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Richard C. Beacham, *Adolphe Appia: Artist and Visionary of the Modern Theatre* (Chur, Switzerland; Philadelphia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994).

¹⁵ Reginald Isaacs, *Gropius, Biography* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1984), pp. 131-32.

¹⁶ *Meyerhold on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by Edward Braun (London: Methuen, 1991), p. 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 258

²¹ A. Gladkov, *Meyerhold Speaks, Meyerhold Rehearses* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), p. 113.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²³ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1991).

²⁴ Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²⁵ Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, pp. 312-13.