Peter Quince's Parcell Players

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"'Ninus' tomb, man! Why, you must not speak that yet; that you answer to Pyramus. You speak all your parts at once, cues and all. Pyramus, enter! Your cue is past; it is 'never tire'."

A Midsummer Night's Dream 3.1.93-96[1]

Peter Quince's directorial challenge might be difficult for a modern reader to understand. Francis Flute, his leading lady, has demonstrated an ample amount of enthusiasm by volunteering to be in the play which Quince and his fellow mechanicals hope to present before Duke Theseus. His enthusiasm, however, has led him to commit a major error in his preparations. Flute, it would appear, has memorized every line on the part given to him by Quince, without considering whether each was to be spoken aloud or intended simply as a cue. Quince's rehearsal, had it not been interrupted almost immediately after this bit of instruction, would surely have been a long and tedious affair: Flute would have been forced to "unlearn" the cue lines for his part, one by one, as each of his speeches came up.

The humor here relies on a knowledge of how Elizabethan professional actors prepared their performances. The members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the first company to perform *Midsummer*, would not have been given full copies of the new play to read over, discuss, and rehearse like a modern cast. Rather, each actor would have been given only his own part, written out most likely on a long roll of paper. Each of his speeches would have been preceded by the final few words of the previous speaker's part, serving as a cue.[2] Each actor would then have studied his roll privately to memorize his lines. Rather than several weeks of group rehearsal, the company most likely would have met only once, for perhaps an hour or two, possibly on the day of the first performance, to run through entrances and exits and complicated sequences of movement, such as dances or fights.[3] This is the rehearsal at which the mechanicals are laboring when Flute's problem is revealed. His error has been a quintessentially amateur

one. He has failed to recognize the conventions and techniques of a particular field: in this case, the rules governing his written part itself.

Midsummer also offers opportunities to observe how working from rolls, and without the benefit of group rehearsal, required early modern companies to ensure that actors in the company could be, in an anachronistic term, "self-directed." One manifestation of this concern can be found in the internal stage directions embedded in many of Shakespeare's plays; an actor who knows only the lines and cues for his part and has only limited opportunity for rehearsal needs to be prompted somehow about business necessary to the play. In this context, Quince's line, "Here are your parts," delivered near the end of the mechanicals' first meeting, is evidence not only for the use of actors' rolls by his company, but also as a prompt to the actor learning the part of Quince: "Here are your parts" lets him know not only that he needs parts for all of the "actors" as props from the top of the scene, but also that he is to distribute them only at this point, near the end of the scene, and not as he assigns each role individually. It is not hard to imagine an intended blocking for this scene, with Quince making the rounds to each mechanical and only bringing them together as a group at the end of the scene to distribute the physical parts themselves. In addition, at the play's first performance (and even, likely, at later performances), the actors in the roles of Bottom and the other mechanicals, having only their own parts as a reference, would not have known for certain in what order Quince would call their names; this certainly would have encouraged an eagerness and alertness as each actor (and, from the audience's perspective, each character) listened for their turn.

Another intriguing consequence of playing from actors' rolls comes in the suggestion of false entrances. Consider two entrances by individual mechanicals that are "delayed," in a sense, by intervening dialogue. During the rehearsal in the woods, just before Bottom re-enters wearing the ass head, his cue line is given three separate times. The actor playing Bottom would have worked from a roll that listed, "And by and by I will to thee appear" as the last line of one of his speeches, then "never tire" as a cue for his next line, "If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine" (3.1.82-98). "Never tire," however, is spoken by other actors three times between Bottom's two speeches (91; 96; 97). Considering that he has to exit and re-enter to deliver his next line in the ass head, it is possible that Bottom here might make two false entrances, far upstage and out of the sight of Quince and Flute, only to turn back when he

realizes that the other actors are continuing on with other speeches. In addition to creating a moment of ludicrous dramatic irony, this re-entering would allow the audience to enjoy first the sight of Bottom transformed and then the reactions of his fellows as two separate comic moments. In contrast, during the eventual performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* before Theseus, Bottom breaks in at one point to explain the on-stage action to the audience, "unexpectedly" delaying Flute's re-entrance. Shakespeare is careful, however, not to give the actor playing Flute false cues. Here is the sequence:

> *Pyramus*: O wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss,
>   Curs'd be thy stones for thus deceiving me!
> *Theseus*:   The wall, methinks, being sensible, should curse
>   again.
> *Pyramus*: No, in truth, sir, he should not. "Deceiving me" is
>   Thisbe's cue: she is to enter now, and I am to spy
>   her through the wall. You shall see it will fall pat
>   as I told you. Yonder she comes.
>   *Enter Thisbe* (5.1.178-185)

Here, even though Flute's cue is, as Bottom asserts, "Deceiving me," the cue for the actor playing Flute is "Yonder she comes." No false-entrance is implied here, as Shakespeare has made certain to differentiate between the cue line for the play and the cue line for the play-within-a-play.

The mechanicals are not being lampooned, in other words, for their schedule of rehearsals or their general approach to learning a play; in these respects, they mirror fairly closely how Shakespeare's own company, the most successful of its time, would have prepared the very play in which they appear. Rather, they are laughable because as a group (with the exception, presumably, of Quince, who has drawn up the parts) they do not understand the codes embedded in a dramatic text which stage players regularly deciphered. Plays written to be learned from cue-scripts follow specific patterns and utilize characteristic techniques that facilitate actors' private preparation of their parts.[4] Flute's failure to understand one of the most basic of these techniques, the cue-line, suggests that he has little hope of deciphering any others.

While *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a somewhat fantastical play, appearing to be set in ancient Athens, merchant-class London, and the faerie-world of the English countryside all at the same time, the similarity of Quince, Flute, Bottom and the other mechanicals to medieval amateur performers has been noted by several observers.[5] The members of Quince's troupe are all

professional craftsmen who join together solely for this one performance. Their professions—they are variously a carpenter, a weaver, a bellows-mender, a tinker, a joiner, and a tailor—all echo or duplicate the guilds which customarily produced the Corpus Christi plays in cities throughout England. While it is wise to keep in mind that Shakespeare was writing a comedy and not an historical treatise on the production techniques of medieval theatre, the mechanicals' preparations are in some ways quite consistent with what we know about the preparations for much of medieval theatre.[6] Modern production practice has generally caused us to fail to recognize and appreciate fully just how different these preparations were in an era prior to the triumph of psychological realism as an acting goal.

While it might be rash to employ the mechanicals as a template for understanding how the medieval guild members in the Corpus Christi plays prepared their performances, closer examination of the record reveals a preponderance of evidence that suggests the use of actors' parts was in fact widespread prior to Shakespeare's theatre. The technique was used both in England and in the rest of Europe, not only by what we would term amateurs, but also by professional actors. A number of manuscripts have survived which are either clearly actors' parts or seem to be derived from them. In addition, various records document the use of cue scripts in the preparation of plays. Internal evidence from some plays also suggests the existence of actors' parts. While the mere existence of these parts is interesting in its own right, the consequences for our understanding of the nature of medieval acting is more significant. An appreciation of how cue-script acting may have shaped medieval performances may help us better understand how (and what) these performances communicated to their audiences.

In his discussion of French medieval play manuscripts, Graham Runnalls offers a production process for medieval theatre which explains how and why actors' parts may have been created. The production process, according to Runnalls, would have begun with a dramatist writing out his play in a rough draft. When the play was felt to be sufficiently complete, he would give what he had to a scribe, who would then write out a master "fair copy." At this point, assuming some sort of production was imminent, arrangements would be made to provide the actors with what they needed to prepare. Since "it was not possible for every participant to have a complete copy of the play," due to the "cost and time" involved, Runnalls concludes that a more streamlined approach was employed:

> A scribe copies out the roles, referred to variously as the *roole*, or *rollet*, or *roullet*, for the actors; each actor was given a manuscript which contained only that actor's lines. But each of his speeches was preceded by the last line spoken by another actor immediately before the speech; these were the cue-lines. The actor used his role during rehearsal — and possibly even during performance.[7]

After individual parts had been copied, a master copy may have been made for producers, which featured expanded stage directions, but only suggestions of full speeches.

Runnalls's suggestion of practice in this case is borne out by the existence of actual documents. A number of actor's rolls exist for French *mystère* plays, many of which have been published in various locations.[8] Since the roll was a common format for government and church record-keeping, it appears to have been a natural choice for writing down an actor's part. Most of the extant rolls have a common appearance. Often made of multiple pieces of parchment stitched together, they are usually long and relatively narrow. The lines to be spoken appear on only one side of the paper. The bottoms of the rolls were customarily nailed into small, round pieces of wood. The actor's lines are written down the left-hand margin, while the cue lines (which are customarily only one word) are indented, at least halfway across the sheet, in order to be set apart visually. Occasional stage directions or notes may be written in the margins. Finally, the cue word usually (though not without exception) rhymes with the final word of the next speech's first line;[9] in this way, each actor's first line of a speech completes a couplet begun by his cue line, a technique perhaps intended to aid memorization.

Allowing for variations in the sizes of the pieces themselves and the spacing of the writing, the French rolls seem to be very similar to Edward Alleyn's part for *Orlando Furioso*, the prime example of an Elizabethan actor's roll. It is interesting to note, as well, that professional theatre parts in the English theatre remained in essentially this form throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries.[10] These similarities suggest the existence of a common working method which French *mystère* guild members, Elizabethan players, and later English professional actors shared. Judging from what they were given to prepare themselves, these actors were expected first and foremost to learn what to say and when to say it; unlike some modern approaches to acting, the emphasis was on speaking and not on listening or reacting. An actor prepared by means of a cue-script might only hear the play

once, or perhaps not even at all, before performing it. Under these circumstances, it was crucial for that actor to prepare not only what to say, but also what to do when he was speaking, on his own, without concerning himself with what other actors might be doing on stage. It was just as important, however, that the playwright give his actors a fighting chance: it was crucial for him to utilize techniques which would facilitate the memorization of lines and indicate as much as possible to the actor any necessary stage movements.

While French *mystère* actors' rolls and Elizabethan professional players' rolls do a good job of suggesting medieval English theatre practice, they do not on their own prove the existence of rolls during that period. Few prototypical actors' rolls in English have survived, but a broad range of extant manuscripts point to the widespread use of the technique. In addition, some manuscripts appear to have been influenced by the layout and content of actors' rolls. The thirteenth-century *Interludium de Clerico et Puella* (British Library MS Add. 23986), a brief manuscript which has been missing from the British library for some thirty years, [11] seems to have been written down by someone who was either working from actors' parts or was familiar with the way in which these parts were laid out. [12] Although the *Interludium de Clerico* has been variously described as part of a minstrel's repertoire, an actor's part, or a dramatic fragment, [13] it is difficult to tell exactly how this particular piece of text was used.

Whatever its original purpose, certain of its features show an affinity with actors' rolls. The *Interludium* is written on a vellum roll three inches wide by twenty-four inches long. Regular, repeated wear patterns on the sides suggest that for at least some of its life, the roll was, in fact, rolled up. More importantly, the layout of the text resembles the format used for actors' parts. A line separates each individual speech and also isolates a particular word or phrase in the familiar "cue" location. Strangely, the words so isolated are not cues, but rather the beginning of the speech which follows. While the *Interludium* most likely was not a part for an individual performer in a dramatic representation, its physical layout does seem to have been influenced by similar techniques.

A similar example is provided by the mid-fifteenth-century Northampton *Abraham and Isaac* (Dublin, Trinity College MS D.4.18, cat. no. 432, ff. 74v-81r). This text does appear to be dramatic in nature. In this case, each speaker's name is written on the right side of the page above a separating red line. Again, while the presence of two speakers (and, in this case, the physical appearance

of the manuscript) clearly rules this text out as an actor's part, the solid line and positioning of the speech heading once more suggest an affinity with theatrical practice.

Other manuscripts retain more than simply a resemblance to actors' parts. The *Dux Moraud*, a fifteenth-century manuscript held in the Bodleian Library (MS Eng. Poet. f.2[R]), is comprised of two long, narrow pieces of parchment which were at one point stitched together. The two pieces, which together are nearly three feet long and only four inches wide, contain a series of speeches separated by horizontal lines. Norman Davis describes the roll as an actor's part: "The text is not a complete play or a continuous extract from one, but a record of the part played by a single actor. The name of the part, or of the play, is given at the head. A line marks the end of speeches, but there are no cues to relate it to other parts."[14] While the absence of cues from this fragment is obviously confusing, taken as a whole the *Dux Moraud* certainly appears to have been created as an actor's part. The manuscript contains the lines to be spoken by a single actor, in order, divided into discrete speeches. In addition, the physical shape of the manuscript seems predicated on utility.

The Ashmole Fragment (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 750, f. 168r) provides direct evidence that the cue line/full speech format was known in medieval England. The fragment in question, written some time in the fifteenth century, consists of a few lines from a character named "Secundus Miles," squeezed in at the bottom of a page of unrelated writing. Two brief speeches for the character are recorded. Each is preceded by a brief cue of three or four words, written in one case in the center and in the other at the right side of the above line. Both cues are set off by slash marks (/) before and after. Although this fragment appears in a book-shaped manuscript which contains a number of other types of writing, the presence of cues indicates strongly that these two speeches were copied directly from an actor's part; cue lines would only have been copied into a manuscript in this way if they had appeared in that form on an original piece of writing.

Even these last two fragments, which point strongly to the existence and use of actors' rolls, are, of course, only indirect evidence; rather than the actual rolls in the expected formats, we have what might be copies of the rolls from which either the physical shape or the cues themselves have been lost. It should not be surprising, however, that such little physical evidence remains of these highly practical pieces of writing. As Andrew Taylor argues, any manuscript which was actually used by someone

preparing a play would be extremely unlikely to continue to exist once it had outlived its usefulness. Although Taylor examines mostly the likelihood of locating the manuscripts used by minstrels in preparing their performances, his points might be applied to actors as well. While discussing the collection of writings maintained by a late sixteenth-century stonemason/storyteller, he underscores the limited chances of this "manuscript" having survived:

> This is just what one would expect most minstrels' working texts to be: a fistful of songs and ballads accumulated slowly over the years, copied down on different sheets and scraps of paper or parchment, and then not even bound but simply piled together and placed in a leather wrapper. Such manuscripts must once have been common, but their chances of surviving into the present century were negligible.[15]

Actors' parts would have served the same purpose as a minstrel's bundle, namely, as tools to aid performance and not as ends in themselves. As such, they would have been particularly ephemeral bits of writing: once a performance had ended or a production had passed out of repertory, there would have been no obvious reason to keep the individual parts of a play. It is remarkable in this situation that the little evidence we have of their existence has managed to survive.

In the case of the Corpus Christi plays, it is easy to understand why no actors' rolls exist. Despite the importance of the productions to individual cities, the irregular year-to-year schedule and the apparent re-editing of the plays would have contributed to the loss of these parts. Created most likely on inexpensive paper (unlike the Registers, which were often on parchment), parts for the cycle plays would not have been very durable.[16] In addition, they would have been distributed to individuals for private study and use, which would have lasted potentially right up to and into the performance itself; given the festive nature of the day of performance, it is not hard to imagine how difficult it would have been to collect the parts again afterwards. The incompleteness of the parts themselves also would have discouraged their preservation: as the Ashmole Fragment demonstrates, one person's part of a play is usually of little apparent use. Most importantly, perhaps, the longevity of the cycle and the diffuse control over the particulars of the performance combined with other elements to create a situation in which revision and modification was a regular occurrence. A. M. Lumiansky and David Mills conclude that choice

and change were standard features of the performances: "What emerges from a study of the manuscripts is a sense of flexibility and an awareness of the responsibility that lay with both the civic authorities and the guild producers for determining the cycle-form from one performance to the next."[17]   Creating individual parts for each year's performance would have been a way to easily incorporate changes and variations into the actual production.

Even though there are no extant actor's parts from the Corpus Christi plays, evidence of their use does exist in the financial and civic records surrounding the cycles.   Account books of various guilds feature numerous entries indicating that the standard method employed by members in preparing the pageants was the use of parts written out for individual actors.   In these records, however, actors' rolls are not referred to as "rolls" or as "parts," but rather as "parcells."   The word was used as early as 1421, in the Saddlers' Charter,[18] but is most frequently found in sixteenth-century documents.   The Smiths, Cutlers, and Plumbers' records of 1560-61 indicate a payment made for "paper to Coppy out the parcells of the booke," and an expense incurred for the "deliveringe forth of the parcells."[19] The guild appears to have taken responsibility both for physically creating a part and for delivering it to the proper actor. The Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers' Records of 1567-68 list adjacent entries for the "Coppying of oure orygenall" and for "Coppying A parsell,"[20] suggesting strongly that although a guild might have its own copy of the play to be performed, it was not the means by which individual actors learned the play.   The cost for copying a part, according to this entry, was about a third the cost (iiij d as compared to xij d) of copying out the entire play.   The "Shepherds" play, which the Painters at one time performed, had nine characters alone; the difference in cost between creating parts and creating full texts for the entire cast would have been significant. Other records indicate that the price paid by the Painters et al. was relatively expensive: copying two parcells cost the Smiths ii d,[21] and the copying of an unspecified number of "parceles" cost the Coopers vj d.[22] The relatively high cost of the parcell copied for the Painters may indicate that it was a particularly long part; if so, the savings involved in using parts instead of originals would have been even greater.

Other internal evidence suggests that the Chester cycle may have been written with an awareness of or an intention to facilitate the use of what might be called "parcell playing."   The use of verse itself, although common to most of medieval drama in English, can certainly be seen as a mnemonic device which would

have made it easier for actors who only possessed portions of a given play to remember their lines.[23] Rhythm and rhyme appear to have been used in a number of ways to help the occasional actors of Chester master their parts. One technique involves the placement of single lines. In the "Nativity" play, Octavianus delivers a speech of nearly one hundred lines, after which Preco responds and begins a dialogue. Much like an orchestral timpanist faced with hundreds of measures of rest before a fortissimo entrance, the actor playing Preco has a difficult challenge: how to wait out a very long stretch and come in at precisely the right moment. Fortunately, the playwright has provided him with a verbal cue. After twelve full stanzas, Octavianus delivers a single line directed to Preco: "Have donne, boye! Art thou not bowne?"[24] Two elements here would help the actor. First, Octavianus has not used the "bowne" rhyme yet in the speech (although other rhymes have been repeated); in this way, the sound alone would help the second actor. In addition, Octavianus's line is in fact the beginning of a new stanza and thus rhymes with the next actor's line. Rather than ending a stanza with the second actor's cue and thus eliminating the possibility of rhyme, the text makes things easier. The actor playing Preco would have a parcell which likely would have looked like this:

> --------------- bowne
> All readye, my lorde, by Mahounde.
> Noe tayles tupp in all this towne
> shall goe further withowten fayle.

In addition to the sense of the scene (Octavianus's line is directed at him) and the sound (his cue is the first time Octavianus uses an "-owne" word), the actor playing Preco is thus further aided by a cue line which rhymes with his next line, much in the manner of the French rolls discussed earlier. While it is impossible to prove that this is a result of writing plays with actors' parts in mind, it certainly may be seen as a complimentary technique.

In the Waterleaders and Drawers of Dee's play of "Noyes Fludd," rhyme is used more extensively as an aid to the actor. The first true exchange of dialogue (after a series of long speeches) occurs in lines 96 through 104 between Noe and his Wife:

Noe:	Wife, in this vessell wee shal be kepte;
	my children and thou, I would in yee lepte.
Noes Wife:	In fayth, Noe, I had as leeve thou slepte.
	For all thy Frenyshe fare,
	I will not doe after thy reade.
Noe:	Good wiffe, do nowe as I thee bydd.

> *Noes Wife*: By Christe, not or I see more neede,
> though thou stand all daye and stare.

Here the stanza, rather than the individual line, aids the actor. Both of Noe's Wife's lines and Noe's own entrance in the middle of the stanza are cued by rhyming words, making the entire sequence easier to remember. This "interlocking" of stanzas is used throughout the cycle in a number of places, perhaps again to aid the actors in remembering not only their lines but the order in which they come.[25]

Another technique which would have facilitated parcell playing is found in sections of the plays in which multiple speakers repeatedly deliver their lines in the same order. This sequencing would have addressed one of the most difficult aspects of acting from cue scripts. In most cue scripts, including those discussed above, no indication is given as to who will speak the cue, only what will be said. An actor prepared with a cue script needs to be aware constantly of every word being spoken by every character so as not to miss his cue.[26] While this level of concentration would be easy to achieve for professional players who performed every day, it may have been too much of a challenge for a guildsman-turned-occasional player. Particularly in the case of less prominent parts, which likely were assigned to less talented performers, assistance in finding cues would have been very helpful. The passages where multiple characters (such as the sons and wives in "Noe," the Jews in "Antichrist's Prophets," and the Kings in "Antichrist") customarily speak in sequence would have provided all but the first actor with an important aid: the knowledge of exactly who would be delivering his cue. With this knowledge, an actor could focus his concentration and be less likely to miss a line and require assistance from a prompter.[27] Like the other techniques mentioned above, sequencing would be a tremendous advantage to actors who were performing plays with a thorough knowledge of only their own part.

For medieval plays not produced by the guilds, little exists in the way of external evidence regarding actors' parts. Internal evidence, however, both direct and indirect, strongly suggests that some plays were produced by parcell playing. The fifteenth-century morality, *The Castle of Perseverance*, makes a direct reference to parcells in its Banns:

> Grace if God will graunte us, of his mikyl mirth,
> These parcellys in propyrtes we purpose us to playe
> This day sevenyt, before you in syth,
> At _____ on the grene, in ryal aray.[28]

While the Banns here may simply be suggesting that there will be various characters presented in the play, the technical sense of the word in the guild records is likely also intended. For the *Castle*, actors' parts would likely have been the cast's primary means of learning the play. To begin with, the play is immense—some thirty-six hundred lines long—making both writing out full copies of the script and teaching by rote very impractical. In addition, the presence of thirty-five speaking roles would also have discouraged the use of full texts. If, in fact, actors' parts were the primary technique employed in the preparation of the play, *The Castle of Perseverance* would provide a very early example of their use.

Considering that *The Castle of Perseverance* may have been performed by an early touring professional company,[29] it is tempting to look to other plays which are thought to have been performed by strolling players for evidence of parcell playing. Although no direct link exists between actors' parts and *Mankind*, certain aspects of the play suggest their use in the preparation of the play. This raucous morality seems to have been designed for a compact traveling company which Bevington calls "the ancestors of the Elizabethan acting company."[30] Although better than one hundred years separate this presumed company from the first permanent London companies, it is nevertheless possible that the Elizabethan use of actors' rolls may have been an inheritance from this early troupe. The most convincing argument for parcell playing in *Mankind* is found in the frequency and nature of internal stage directions. An actor who has only his own part may or may not have separate stage directions which accompany his dialogue, but frequently will have lines of dialogue which make clear what should be physically happening on stage.[31] These internal directions are crucial to an actor whose preparation involves mostly private study, as opposed to instruction given by a director.

One section in the middle of *Mankind* demonstrates how internal stage directions would have worked. Beginning at line 529, Titivillus explains and carries out his plot to frustrate Mankind, who very quickly falls victim to the devil's devices. Throughout this section, which demands specific physical actions from both characters in order to be intelligible, each character is given lines which are intended not only to make the action clear to the audience, but to the actor preparing the part as well. At line 532, Titivillus announces that "this borde shall be hidde under the erth prevely." Shortly thereafter, Mankind enters and begins attempting to work his fields. At line 544, he says, "In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, now I will begin." These lines clearly instruct the actor to

cross himself and to start work; the audience does not need either line, since the actions themselves would carry the same weight without being reinforced with spoken lines.   After becoming frustrated, Mankind says, "Here I giff uppe my spade" (l. 549); then, "Here, in my kerke, I knell on my kneys" (l. 553); and finally, "My bedys shall be here for whosummever will ellys" (l. 564). While none of these actions is extraordinary in this context, it is important to remember that the absence of a director and the likely lack of repeated group rehearsal requires an actor to "self-block." Putting behavior directly into the dialogue ensures that the stage movements necessary for the play to make sense will be carried out.

Theatre which is prepared from cue scripts yields performances which are markedly different from what modern theatergoers expect. These productions tend to be less unified, since each actor often has only a vague idea of the entire play; there may be less interaction amongst actors on stage, since all of them have frequently done the majority of their preparation in private; and there is often need for prompting, when someone following a complete copy of the play must remind an actor of his next line.[32] While lack of unity and the need for prompting might now be seen as destructive to a production's effectiveness, it does not appear that previous ages necessarily viewed them as such.[33] It should also be remembered that an actor who knows only the two or three words of his immediate cue in any particular scene certainly will make a great effort to follow the action on stage so as not to miss that cue, thus creating a certain type of focus on the stage. Also, the boost in confidence and enthusiasm that modern cue script actors report would no doubt have been noticed by medieval audiences. Acting from parts seems to infuse performances with a level of excitement not usually found in modern, directed productions. The audience for the Chester Corpus Christi Trial play, for instance, probably knew just how few times the Fletchers, some of whom might have been their friends and neighbors, had met prior to performing their play. This knowledge probably encouraged a supportive environment, one in which audiences not only pulled for performers to do well, but were acutely aware of the difficulty of their task.

Most discussions of medieval acting do not take into account how the plays were prepared, but instead concentrate on more immediately recognizable influences. Glynne Wickham's summary is representative:

> A broad style was also demanded of the actor in his bodily
> movement by the directness and intensity of the emotional

content of the text. . . .The crudeness of this style (which appealed so strongly to Bottom the Weaver) was tempered on the other hand by the rigid formality of liturgical practice out of which this acting had grown. The paradox that arises in consequence is an acting style that derives in part from the stylized rhythms of priestly devotions and in part from the spontaneous and childlike emotionalism of the peasant.[34]

While the texts of the plays and the enactment of religious ritual are certainly valid places to look for influences on medieval acting, words like "crudeness," "formality," and "childlike" certainly imply a negative opinion of an acting style which was obviously much different from that to which we have become accustomed. What is necessary to better imagine what medieval acting looked like is a more thorough awareness of how actors of the period prepared. Some form of cue script—roles, rolls, or parcels—was used by the actors of French *mystère*, English Corpus Christi plays, and pre-Elizabethan professional moralities. The few actual physical texts documenting this technique, when they exist at all, have been largely considered by those interested in the study of manuscripts. A more thorough evaluation of how they were employed, however, can be of great benefit to those who are interested in the actual performance of medieval drama. Recognizing both the limitations and the advantages of parcell playing might help us better understand the acting styles of Chester guildsmen, early strolling players, or even Bottom the Weaver and Francis Flute themselves.

Notes

1. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Co., 1979). All references are to this edition.

2. W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses* (Oxford: University Press, 1931), 173-87. Greg's description of Alleyn's personal copy of his part from Robert Greene's *Orlando Furioso* provides the best Elizabethan evidence of an actor's roll.

3. Tiffany Stern, "Rehearsal in Shakespeare's Theatre," chap. 2 in *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

4. Patrick Tucker, *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare: The Original Approach* (London: Routledge, 2002). See in particular pp. 197-222.

5. See, for instance, Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300 to 1660*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 176; and Clifford Davidson, "What Hempen Home-spuns Have We Swagg'ring Hgere?: Amateur Actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Coventry Civic Plays and Pageants," *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987): 87-99.

6. Stern, "Rehearsal," 28-34.

7. Graham Runnalls, "Towards a Typology of Medieval French Play Manuscripts," in *The Editor and the Text*, ed. Philip E. Bennett and Graham A. Runnalls (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 98.

8. See Elisabeth Lalou, "Les Rolets de Théâtre Étude Codicologique," in *Théâtre et Spectacles Hier et Aujoud'hui: Moyen âge et Renaissance. Actes du 115e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes* (Paris: Éditions du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifique, 1991), 60-62. Lalou lists the published French actors' roles in an appendix.

9. Graham Runnalls, "An Actor's Role in a French Morality Play," *French Studies* 42 (1988): 400.

10. Stern, "Rehearsal," 61.

11. M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Word: England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 143.

12. Norman Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and The Winchester Dialogues: Facsimiles of Plays and Fragments in Various Manuscripts and the Dialogues in Winchester College MS 33* (Leeds: University of Leeds School of English, 1979). My comments on the *Interludium*, as well as the Northampton *Abraham and Isaac*, the *Dux Moraud*, and the Ashmole fragment, are based in part on examinations of facsimiles of these manuscripts published in Davis's work.

13. Andrew Taylor, "The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript," *Speculum* 66 (1991): 69; Carol Symes, "The Appearance of Early Vernacular Plays: Forms, Functions, and the Future of Medieval Drama," *Speculum* 77 (2002): 825n; and Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays*, iii.

14. Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays*, 69.

15. Taylor, "Minstrel Manuscript," 73.

16. For paper parts, see Lalou, "Les Rolets de Theatre," 53. For the Registers, see Clifford Davidson, "Material Culture, Writing, and Early Drama," in *Material Culture and Medieval Drama*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), 2-4, on the York Register.

17. A. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 86.

18. Clopper, Lawrence M. *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 13.

19. Ibid., 66.

20. Ibid., 81.

21. Ibid., 66.

22. Ibid., 108.

23. Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 152-75.

24. A. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 107, l. 273. Subsequent references to lines in the cycle will be made in the body of the text.

25. Some examples include "Abraham," ll. 145-60; "The Last Supper," ll. 129-40 and 181-92; "Nativity," ll. 445-68.

26. See Tucker, *Secrets*, 6-16.

27. Clopper, *Chester*, lvi; Philip Butterworth, "Prompting in Full View of the Audience: A Medieval Staging Convention," in *Drama and Community: People and Plays in Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan Hindley (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis, 1999).

28. David Bevington, ed., *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), 803, ll. 131-34.

29. William Tydeman, *English Medieval Theatre, 1400-1500* (London: Routledge, 1986), 78-85.

30. Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 901.

31. Tucker, *Secrets*, 17-24.

32. Stern, "Rehearsal," 98-112.

33. Consider that admission to the premiere of a play in an Elizabethan theatre, which would likely be the first time the entire cast performed the entire play together, cost twice as much as admission to a later performance.

34. Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 176.