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The Middle Ages after the Middle Ages
Medievalism in the Study of European Drama and Theatre History

Periodization. Specialization in the study of literary history has some negative consequences. Research institutes are mostly divided into departments according to literary periods. At the average institute there will always be a division or a working group for old, medieval, renaissance, early modern, and modern literature. This specialization depends on periodization. Fortunately, some of the problems caused by literary periods suggest their solution. We have different times for the literary Middle Ages in the main cultural areas of Europe. But if we were to write a European literary history by periods, the discrepancies among European literatures would force us to compile it quite differently from the way which is common for national literatures. The medieval heritage created earlier in older literatures will show up as something new in languages of “younger Europe.”

Another reason to be cautious with respect to the time of “medieval” experience is phenomena which cannot undergo any periodization, like folklore or some smaller and only later emerging literatures like Frisian, Lithuanian, or Yiddish.

Longer Middle Ages. If we are going to acknowledge the afterlife of medieval genres, subject matters, motifs and techniques, three methods of research are preferable: 1. looking for simple continuity, 2. taking into account residual afterlife of medieval items in popular culture including folklore, and 3. recognizing the phenomena of the renewal of medieval genres in later ages.

Simple continuity: Fully traditional texts of religious drama and practices neglected by post-renaissance scholars. Regular mystery plays were written in the centuries belonging to early modern times, 1500-1800, and even later. The oldest complete Polish mystery play, the *History of the Glorious Resurrection*, medieval in every respect, was written shortly before 1600. This is to be expected for vernacular literatures starting in the 15th cent., like the Polish writing. However, we do have such plays written and performed in areas with the richest harvest of medieval vernacular drama possible, as in the case of the French. Let us have a look at an example from ca. 1700 – a French mystery play performed at the end of a Dominican mission in the parish of Romans at the cost of 420 livre, paid for by one of the burghers.

Mystère représenté à Romans à la clôture de la mission de 1698-9,
ed. Ulysse Chevalier, Valence: impr. J. Céas, [ca 1887], P. 129-143.
[performed on Jan 4, 1699]

Abel, „représenté par le fils de M. Dochier, vêtu de blanc, en berger chantant”
Angel with a banner *Nova et Vetera*;
Twelve children in white (symbolizing the saints of the Old Testament);
Isaac and Abraham, “L’Ange, représenté par le fils de M. Garnier,” all three speaking;
Procession of 12 Patriarchs, with no speaking parts, accompanied by another angel carrying the banner “Patriarcharum laudabilis numerus” played by young married men from good homes;

Procession of Sybills, 12 young ladies in royal garments of different styles and original cut like that of the Libyan Sybil: “La Sybille Lybienne avec un habit couleur de rose, parsemé des fleurs or et argent, portant une couronne sur sa tête, représenté par Mlle” [blank space left, no name];
 St John the Baptist (“il était vêtu d’une hermine, et il récita les vers suivantes”);
 Archangel Gabriel and Mary in the Annunciation scene (“La Vierge représenté par Mlle Paquier, répond”);
 Nativity with “Bergers et Bergères” playing flute and singing Christmas carols;
 Presentation in the Temple (Virgin with Simeon, “récitèrent les vers suivants,” “Saint Simeon levant les yeux au ciel, représenté par le sieur Chambéry,” 137);
 Flight to Egypt;
 Jesus in the Temple;
 Gloriosus Apostolorum Chorus represented by 12 young men from the best families (full names and roles given; each saint has his emblem, to begin with the keys of St Peter) who sing the Creed of 24 lines. The Creed must have been sung by the twelve apostles, two lines each.
 Mary Magdalene weeping about the Passion (139);
 Small angels carrying the Arma Christi;
 Jesus after flagellation;
 Jesus passing Pilate’s office (Description of Christ’s tortured head; “Sa face paraissait toute défigurée et salie de crachats”, 140);
 The four evangelists singing *Vexilla regis*;
 The *Via dolorosa* with a young advocate playing Christ and with soldiers and their mounted commander; Simon of Cyrene, Veronique, three Mary’s;
 Planctus (with Christ answering, 141).

How many subgenres or scenes of the medieval mystery play can be found here?¹ It is a whole cycle. All the essential scenes of a mystery cycle are there, until the Passion, with no reference to the Resurrection.

The play adapted the taste of its modern audience: the Prophets walk in procession, but have no speaking parts. However, the Sybils do speak and have enough time to give a regular fashion show.

It is almost merry-making, if not a party. Rejoicing by the higher levels of urban society with pleasure as the reason for participation. Using common knowledge, respectable circumstances, and honourable players, society could demonstrate its essential value, devotion, especially of the younger generation – this was a way to prove that the pedagogical agenda had been fulfilled. It has more of a ritual drama, displaying attitudes towards the main values of society; everybody should protect them. If values deserve protection and receive it, they remain values. If not, they cease to be values and become irrelevant.

Having said this, we cannot dismiss the religious dimension of the event, even if it was a sort of pretext for socializing and display of beauty by the “better” part of society. The procession closed with the erection of a big cross, as happens today in Catholic churches to commemorate an important event in the life of the parish. The whole celebration was attended by many people from the outskirts of the town Romans; everybody regretted that the day was too short to experience more *pleasure* from the show (142). It suggests a less theological and more ecclesiological, and even purely social, dimension of the event.

Still, the religious messages of the play cannot be underestimated. But how should we estimate the religious messages of plays? How can we say that a cultural phenomenon is or is not medieval? How can we say that a celebration had a religious function? It is not enough

¹ This question could be used for class discussion or in an examination.

to say there was a church feast and a theatrical production. Why was religious drama performed when it brought absolutely no new content, and the performance did not attempt to be a perfect work of art?

Those residual forms of religious drama can also omit wholly or partly any theatrical realization. They can be confined to an imaginary performance with texts only spoken or simply read, yet they should still stay within the scope of our interest as drama historians. Even for Aristotle the performance was not a necessary part of tragedy, and Horace's *Ars poetica* could be called *Ars dramatica*, because drama was for him just poetry "which we sometimes play on stage, and sometimes only narrate."

The French "mystery" of 1699 was only a shadow of medieval cycles of 40 thousand lines performed on several days. It is difficult to determine the genre of such performances. They are at the same time processions, tableaux vivants, but they do have some very short and simplified spoken dialogue, but in reasonable versification, some amateurish acting, with facial expression and conventional gestures; the players have abundant costumes, and there is music and singing. As a whole it is not a satisfactory work of art, rather a cluster of fragments. For somebody who did not know the story it could have been difficult to follow. Looking at this event through the eyes of a modern literary scholar, one could be inclined to think those people must have been retarded, to stage something like that in 1699, decennia after the triumphs of Corneille's classicism, after the achievements of psychologism made by Racine (who died BTW that very same year!).

I am sure that those people were not insane. Such residual religious performances had two functions connected with each other, recollection and meditation. Recollection and meditation were two special and additional uses of a mystery play which continued long after the plays were invented primarily around the 13th c. as a form of learning, appropriating elementary issues of faith (its catechism).

Meditation was in its topic independent from a continuous and complete history of salvation, but otherwise, as a rule, it was very systematic. The classic author of the devotio moderna, Geert Groote (~1400), invented a visual model of meditation which looks almost like imagined theater (SCHUPPISSER 1993). If we are meditating on the imagined scenes from the Scripture "everything should happen as if it were taking place in the present and in our presence, as if we were seeing Christ acting and as if we were hearing him speak."² A substantial part of Thomas a Kempis' treaty *De imitatione Christi* is an account of an imagined meeting with Christ, which includes seeing him and listening to him. But above all it is an account of a personal conversation going on continually between the believing soul and Christ.

In its advanced forms, exceeding the patterns of repetitional prayers, meditation was something less than cognition by reason and something more than mere contemplation. Acquiring knowledge was of course a prerequisite for any meditation. The meditating mind has to center on an issue and keep it in focus, but first of all the knowledge acquired should become part of the internal world of the person meditating. In religious meditation this knowledge consisted of the facts of the history of salvation. They were to be interiorized to enable the believer to move through the reality where the history of salvation took place. Moving mentally out there – that is meditating. This imaginary walking through holy places

² "[...] omnia quasi ad praesens tempus et ad nostram quasi praesentiam, quasi [Christum] et sua facta videremus et audiremus loquentem" Gerardo Groote, *Il trattato "De quatuor generibus meditabilium"* (ed. Ilario Tolomio, Padua 1975 [in:] SCHUPPISSER, p. 183).

had the same effect as actually participating in those events. It allowed the individual to incorporate that experience and turn it into the most personal of property, and only the “most personal” things can be put on the internal timeline of a believer. As soon as the factor of time is mentioned, we are at the second function of traditional religious performances.

Recollection means the public recalling of essential devotional issues, mostly in a penitential context. It is not teaching or being taught new material, but re-examining its presence in memory (“inside one’s recollection”), checking if nothing has been forgotten, and using the well-saved moral knowledge to put oneself back on the path of justice. In this sense it was also re-collecting one’s spiritual powers, which is the organizing idea behind the institute of periodical retreat introduced formally by the Jesuits, but modelled after Christ’s 40 days retreat in the desert, preceded by the spiritual recollection proposed by mystical writers like Teresa of Avila. No actual penitence was needed, of course. The expected reaction to such recollection exercises should only prove that one takes the faith seriously and shows an undiminished readiness to conform. This could be easily proved by displaying pious behaviour. The celebration gave the believers a chance for such a display.

Recollection exercises of any sort do not have to fully cover the matter they help recall. In our case choosing some chapters of the salvation history was enough. Because the story is well known and the ideas are taken for granted, there is no need for completeness or accuracy.

To sum up the paragraph, *Simple continuity*. The functional-cognitive shift from teaching and learning to meditation and recollection explains a freer attitude towards the subject matter. It is not because biblical or ecclesiastical matters became more secular and less important, but because they have a different cognitive status.

Afterlife in popular culture. Medieval literary tradition was twofold: popular and scholarly. Neither of them disappeared in the Renaissance. The popular stream merged with folk creativity. In modern societies we still find traces of old customs, especially those originating in elementary schools. It is convenient to include in folklore diverse manifestations of folk devotion taking place in parishes.

Literary confraternities are a special case. It is difficult to overestimate their role in propagating the arts in the pre-industrial era. I have earlier discussed their functional closeness to modern mass media extensively.³ Both institutes of social communication have merits in motivating creative work and organizing its distribution. Central figures in artistic guilds were not the kings or even emperors, who were accidental members, but poets, who were in a sense professional thanks to their most appreciated skills, not because they served their guilds full-time.

The cultural history of the Netherlands gives us a fine example of a multifarious and continuous confraternal activity around a Eucharistic cult with regular performances of a drama representing the history of the miraculous Host, venerated in Northern Brabant from its discovery in 1373 until the Protestant iconoclasm of 1566, when it disappeared.

The original medieval cult has gone through two phases: for the first 77 years after being found by peat-diggers it was venerated in the parish church of Nieuwervaert (1373). Then it was moved to the large city of Breda (1449) and established in the church of St

³ See the 14th chapter of my 2001 book and my article in Dutch: *Symbool en teken in de middeleeuwse media (vroomheidsvormen en de culturele betekenis van de broederschappen)* [in:] “De Nieuwe Taalgids” 88, 1995.4:289-306.

Barbara, the patron saint of miners. There, in 1463, the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament of Nieuwervaert was established to celebrate its feast "each year and always."⁴ The celebration included performance of the play *Tspel van mirakel vanden heilighen sacramente vander nyeuwervaert*.⁵ The incoming pilgrims could follow the history of the Host on paintings placed in the choir and sacristy.⁶ The verses under the canvases were a guide to be read to pilgrims.

Remarkably, after the full right of Catholics in the Kingdom of the Netherlands had been restored (thanks to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in 1858), the 400th anniversary of the Confraternity was celebrated in 1863 and afterwards the bishopric of Breda was allowed by Pope Pius IX to have a special liturgical feast of the Holy Host of Niervaart (since 1871). In 1916 the old procession was re-established. Different performances of the drama then followed (1917, 1925, 1937, 1942, 1949, 1951).⁷

The continuity of a dramatic tradition encased in a cult of the Eucharist may be granted for extra-literary reasons; such genres as miracle plays based on belief and doctrinal issues do not easily undergo the style changes common for literature outside of church structures. But even in morality plays focused on human and social topics we see this medieval continuity, if not without historical changes in the doctrine (cf. Protestant re-interpretation of the *Elckerlyc*) or the motif substance. The frequent use of mythological figures and classical subject matter in the drama of the Rederijkers has been interpreted as the foreshadowing of the Renaissance, or even as a Renaissance phenomenon as such.⁸ This opinion is in fact undermined by Elsa Strietmans' closer research on more love plays of the Rhetoricians (2006). She recovered the strong theocentric and providential ideas, only they are more explicit in prologues and epilogues⁹ than in the main story or the secondary action stream borne by the allegorical figures of sinnekens.¹⁰

The plays' treatment of Ovidian or Vergilian matters is not far different from the medieval Ovide — moralized, or mocked (the latter ever more frequently), and in any case Strietman is wrong when she interprets Smeken's comedy *Hue Mars en Venus bueleerden* as

⁴ ...ordinancie die ghemaect sijn inde iare van LXIII. (1463) hoe dat men sal houden die gilde vanden heilighen ghebenediden sacramente vander nyeuwervaert *ende van mirakel alle iare ende euwelijck* (*Spel....* p. 96-8, Leendertz XXXIX).

⁵ Op dat des salicheit sou vermeerren, // Hebben wij van den sacrament gespeelt (lin. 46-7, Leendertz 276).

⁶ ...figueren die in prochiaens ende sacraments vander nyeuwervaert choer ontworpen sin. Leendertz 466-8 (18 couplets of 5-lines each: ababb and one title couplet).

⁷ Introduction of the edition, p. 38-41.

⁸ Interpreting A. van Gijsen's research on Colijn van Rijsselle's *De Spiegel der minnen* (ca 1500) and *Van Narcissus ende Echo* (Gijsen 2001), H. Van Dijk and B. Ramakers (2001: 28) draw the conclusion "that the early humanist ideas (...) influence both the concept and its expression in the characters and in the mise en scène of some amorous plays." They call it "evidence for the thesis that the Renaissance in Dutch literature did not begin after the Rhetoricians but with the Rhetoricians — and that already in the fifteenth century." (Elsa Strietmans's translation, in: Strietman 2006: 173)

⁹ "The two plays as a whole, notwithstanding their very elaborate and faithful re-creation of the classical story, are firmly set in a contemporary moral, religious, and political frame. The two plays share a prologue and an epilogue which make it clear that God's plan for the world, foretold in the Old Testament and confirmed in the New, was demonstrably at work in the ancient world and equally potent in Van Ghistele's time [mid-16th c.]"

¹⁰ "In some plays the sinnekens as the drivers of the action are replaced by classic deities. "The role of the sinnekens is narrowed down to the usual theatrical aspects: giving actors time to change and entertaining the audience during intervals in the serious and sometimes solemn narrative scenes. They act as commentators to the audience, they anticipate, titillate, summarize, and they relate parts of the plays not acted out on the stage (...). Nowhere do they interact with (...) any of the characters, divine or human. (...) their moral role is in effect taken over by the speakers of the epilogue" (Strietman 2006: 182).

a morality play, although she proves its genre identity with farce.¹¹ Farces need no overt Christian contents and morals to be Christian if only their presented world is unacceptable from Christian point of view. And Smeken's play is about adultery in an unequal marriage, whose consequences for the anti-heroes are a catastrophe which by the negative dialectics of farce stresses the Christian sacramental model of marriage based on consent, equality and allegiance. You can not possibly say that a story of Mars and Venus who betray Vulcan and, as a consequence, lose their honour, lose face, and become social outcasts (179) makes for a "cheerfully pagan play without so much as a hint of a theocratic world view" (178). It belongs to the genre qualities of farce as it shows the world upside down, not to cherish in its subversiveness, but to show the disastrous consequences of non-normative behaviour.¹²

Renewal of traditional religious drama. The advanced or sophisticated literature of the Middle Ages underwent the stylistic changes of the mainstream: academic classicism and the rebirth of ancient genres and aesthetics. In drama it was the "new" tragedy and comedy.

However, the impact of classicism was not absolute. The more popular repertoire was developed by writers who were aware of new techniques but did not apply them. Even the prohibition of mysteries in Paris (1548) did not cause any "sudden death"; *Confrérie de la Passion* performed them under the fashionable name *tragédie* or *tragi-comédie*. The traditional repertory of mysteries and miracles was more popular in France than classicist "renaissance" repertory even after 1600 (FRANK 270). The first tragicomedies "are actually Medieval religious plays that were given the name 'tragicomedy'" (PETERS 1966). In all European literatures of the 16th-18th centuries we can find biblical, allegorical, and saint plays which were written in the same style that was common in the 14th - 15th centuries.¹³ In the Netherlands belong some plays by Gnapheus and Macropedius (e.g. the latter's *Hecastus*, 1539, a regular Latin version of the Dutch *Elckerlyc*).¹⁴

Renewal of traditional religious drama was most prominent with the coming of the Jesuits, but also known in other confessional schools. The latter's successful plays like *Acolastus*¹⁵ reduced the Jesuits' "anti-theatrical prejudice" and they allowed the playing of theatre, even in the vernacular.

It is possible that medieval repertory had been played by post-Tridentine schools before a genuine Jesuit repertory was created. Before the Jesuits established their own school buildings, they started teaching at old church institutes, and, more important, also taking over their repertoire, and some of their sponsors.¹⁶

A special case of continuity is the medieval Corpus Christi plays, written and produced in different countries through the 14-15th c. (see above).

Before Trent, Eucharistic motifs in drama concerned two general aspects: the institution of the sacrament of body and blood, and the miracles of the Host proving its divine power. Less

¹¹ "Smeecken's comedy only differs from these in the length of the play, in the overt moralizing, in the use of sinnekens, in his use of characters in high places, literally. He could have used knights and ladies, kings and queens, but chose to set his play on Moun Olympus, an unusual choice for an early sixteenth-century Rhetorician playwright." (Strietman 2006: 180).

¹² See chapter 26 of my *Teatr i sacrum w średniowieczu*.

¹³ For a recent collection of studies on England see Lloyd E. KERMODE et al., eds. *Tudor Drama before Shakespeare, 1485-1590: New Directions for Research, Criticism, and Pedagogy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, and international: *The Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, C. DAVIDSON (ed.), New York: AMS Press 2005.

¹⁴ See further WOP p. 235, and a new monograph on Macropedius: H. Giebels, F. Slits, *Georgius Macropedius. Leven en werken van een Brabantse humanist*, Tilburg 2005.

¹⁵ Guilielmus Gnapheus (Fullonius), *Acolastus. De filio prodigo comoedia*, Antwerp 1529 (1577¹⁴).

¹⁶ Confirmed e.g. for the Jesuits of Hertogenbosch, Brabant (WOP I, 238).

frequent was a third aspect, the importance of this sacrament for the salvation of mankind. If the two former covered the historical and legendary legitimization of the Eucharist (its past), the latter (third) motif covers the devotional aims of its use (its present and future). The two former aspects found its divinity, the latter one its ethics and eschatology.

We recognize in this tripartition the three main genres of drama: the mystery play, the miracle or saint play, and the morality play. Each of them has its continuation in post-Tridentine Eucharistic drama.

The first type can be classified as a Eucharistic mystery play. The mystery play receives a new dimension: proof of the Eucharist's historicity is preferably sought and found in the subject matter of the Old Testament.

The legendary tradition of medieval miracle plays, based on *exempla* and *miracula* only becomes richer, but its argument remains unchanged. Many new stories about new saints are invented and new miracles happen. The Host miracles and the stories about them do not disappear in the Catholic countries.

In the Eucharistic morality play the third motif (soteriological legitimization) gets more elaboration by depicting the devotional and moral circumstances of the way of sacramental salvation, read: obligations of humans in their relation to the Eucharist, which takes the place of the Saviour.

At the level of theological message the discussed types of plays (I have examples from the 17th c.) are deeply medieval. The stress on prefiguration and typology are the most prominent features. Acceptability of such features is only possible on a stable fundament created by the ability to communicate with the sacred, and the facticity of its experience.

This mystical dimension is the common feature shared by the early modern non-classical dramas and their medieval predecessors. Both are averse to mimetic obligations of probability, typicalness, fictionality, which were so strongly stressed by the Renaissance poetics.

Aesthetics of early drama: from anamnesis to mimesis.¹⁷ Here I am addressing readers who have not studied medieval drama, and who want to understand its influence or afterlife in the drama of early modern times. In order to find medieval features in later drama, we have to establish its relation to the aesthetic category of mimesis mentioned in the last paragraph. The liturgical notion of anamnesis appears as a central idea here.

Anamnesis is an act with a triple function: (1) memory, remembering what happened (Lk 22,19; 1 Cor 11, 24-26), (2) making a past event present in our time; (Rom 6, 3-5), and (3) pointing to the eschatological future, to which it is a preparation, promise, and guarantee.

Access to the past, or making another reality accessible, can be done by miraculous vision, ritual wonder (e.g. transubstantiation), or delatation of time by contemplation and meditation. But there is also a very simple method of trans-temporal communication, connecting mentally with an old event by way of cognition. How do we acquire knowledge of an old authentic fact that happened a long time ago? *Not* very differently from most people who lived at that time. That is because not all of those who lived then were eyewitnesses, most of them had only *heard* about the event from witnesses, or from people who *claimed* to have been witness. It is still so. We are in the same position as those non-witnesses of an older time.

¹⁷ Here I draw on my paper DABRÓWKA 2003.

In matters of religion it is even more so, only here people invented more ways to immediately connect with the past. We call them meditation, contemplation, visions, or mysticism. Only through mystical experience can somebody see Christ, here or in other times and places. Those who believe in Christ but are not gifted with supernatural visions have only second hand sources.

While *memory* preserves knowledge of the past, *anamnesis* establishes a contact of the mind with an earlier event – not through travel by a time-machine, but by actual joining the event, which is still going on. It can still be ongoing because it was *really* started, initialized by *real* people. In this world there are things which happen in this way, they start and never end. If we look at the world according to modern processual ontology (not the things but processes, “provenance” — CURRIE 1989), we can better understand the great movement of finding relics and giving them a place in the cultic system. Relics are valuable not as miraculous amulets, but as segments of processes started ages ago, thus real, as real as the prefigurations in typological cognition. Processuality is a good philosophical basis for a definition of anamnesis as a sign that remembers, shows, and promises (*signum rememorativum, signum demonstrativum* and *prognosticum futuri*).

One of the ways to get connected with another reality is by establishing typological binding. We know typology as method of biblical exegesis (finding prefigurations in the Old Testament) and also as a method of giving sense to a constructed literary figure. Sometimes it is mentioned together with the allegorical method. But in allegory we relate to other fictions, while in typology the prefigurations actually did exist (MEYERS 1992, p. 262, earlier AUERBACH 1953, p. 13). Typology starts with cognitive reduction: in our mental model of the world only real elements are selected from different experiences as important and irreducible. A mental connection to those elements across time can be established. This cognitive typology is also a technique of transcendence, as good and bad, as vision or meditation. What they have in common is the strong belief that the other world is real.

According to HARDISON (1965 p. 30-32), in a theatrical performance we see actors *impersonating* people, while what takes place in ritual is the *identification* with other persons; participants in a Palm Sunday procession do not *play* the crowd of Jerusalem, but *identify* themselves with it, without ceasing to be themselves. This implies a different experience of space and time. The space in religious ritual is always the same as ever; the past time in religious ritual is not being remembered, but is joined as something going on. In this joining the participants of a ritual are establishing a connection with a past event that is perceived as going on, or its presence in its consequences is recognized. The anamnesis is a bridge connecting the past, present and future. It is a method that allows us to experience the unity of the time of salvation. Mystery plays allowed their audience the same experience, connecting different phases of salvation history in one big event covering the recollected past, the real present, and the future, a future for which the believers were preparing themselves.

History of salvation is not just a name of a theological idea. It should be understood as a cultural movement of building the Church as a community of believers who expect salvation, made possible by the Atonement. They are doing it united in what is called the mystical body of Christ, who became the head of his church (recapitulation) through the Incarnation. Not only liturgy, art also served the purpose of building the Church. There was a system of principles regulating different forms of artistic creativity, which I call the aesthetics of

recapitulation.¹⁸ As long as the works of art were made by the force of this system, and functioned within its frame, any judgement about their quality mustn't ignore this circumstance.

If traditional religious dramas are mentioned at all in handbooks of literary history, their authors describe the plays as chaotic, old-fashioned, badly-written, lacking artistry, with undeveloped characters, unreal, unconvincing, simplified ideas, no conflict etc. – all this according to the Aristotelian principles of mimesis and to his concept of tragedy.

The mystery play at Romans in 1699 closed with a short and simple Planctus: *La Vierge à son fils*. Such closure is uncommon and difficult to understand. However, it is acceptable if we know that the procession and mystery play accompanied the erection of a big cross at the end of the seven weeks of the Dominican mission in the parish. This means that the mission was a form of preparation for this performance – a sort of rehearsal. The words of Mary were answered by Christ, who was pointing at the cross as the proof of his love. For the parishioners a connection was established between the new cross and the Passion. The new cross was getting a past, it *was* the cross of Golgotha. What we see happening here is the *identification* (as described by HARDISON), only on the level of objects. Not just people, objects too have the same historical value, the value of being witnesses of history, like people; it is this quality of both people and objects that makes the history valuable. They are so close to each other that it is better not to speak about them separately.

This means that mental anamnesis has its counterpart in the domain of behavior. Behavior can convey revelation as words do, behavior is an important means of transmission of the content of the Word. When establishing his Church during the Last Supper Christ told his followers, *Do this in my memory* – not, *Say this in my memory*, or, *Think about me sometimes*. Ever since then the imitation of behavior serves the perpetuation of belief in the incarnation of the Word as it really and truly happened. The Word incarnated after finishing the earthly mission does exist in spoken and written tradition, in rituals and in physical form – embodied in the lives of saints. That is why hagiographic narration, especially if it has to be visual, will preferably be modelled after the behavior of Christ. This explains the well known uniformity of hagiography (HAHN 1990, p. 5). The lives of all saints have many identical features. Why? It is anamnesis realized at the level of existence of real people. The saints are presented in hagiography as existentially identical in the same way as ritual acts of liturgy are identical, although each time they happen the participants are different.

After solving this theological problem, we can answer a literary question. What is the essential difference between a traditional saint play and a play written according to Renaissance or Baroque style? Medieval plays are concerned with illustrating the vita of the saint-martyr. Renaissance poetics adopted the Aristotelian idea of tragedy as a story affecting the audience with the tragic emotions fear and pity. Theoreticians of Baroque poetry discussed whether the martyrdom of saints was good subject matter for a regular tragedy. Although it can be proved it was, and there have been regular tragedies about Christian martyrs, also in Polish,¹⁹ it was not because of technical difficulties in applying the

¹⁸ On this see my book, DABRÓWKA 2001, esp. part IV, pp. 249-384.

¹⁹ Where the classical touch is visible (choruses, genre division and labels, the number of actors allowed to speak in a scene, some style devices and motifs), it produces a new genre quality only in the *Boleslaus Furens*, a play programmatic in its allusion to Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, and following the Aristotelian-Senecan scheme for a tragedy: five acts, historical subject matter, complex action structure [peplegmenoi], *pathos* (of the purest sort: both the protagonist and his antagonist are Christians; a king killing his bishop and cutting his body into pieces), and decline of the noble hero ("dauntless but without integrity").

Aristotelian poetics to hagiography that traditional saint plays were being written long after the revival of Aristotle. Nor was it caused by the unwillingness of the authors, or due to their being retarded (so CROXEN 1999). It is rather because fear and pity imply a partial identification of the viewer with the fictional figure. And the figures of saints can't be conceived of as being fictional; they were real. Identification with a saint figure is of the same sort as the *imitatio Christi*. Identification puts minds and bodies in relation to the attempted likeness. Rhetorically speaking, the act of identification is an existential form of literary comparison suggesting likeness between two unities. The saints are not inhabitants of an imaginary space and time, but of a reality ruled by the time of salvation.

In mystery plays physical and historical time may be ignored with the result being a sort of simultaneity we know from medieval non-perspectivic pictures, putting different time layers into one view, so common in pictures and drama (POTEET 1982, p. 240). Identification of 15th-c European town with Jerusalem implies "ignoring centuries" of development. But thanks to this access to the reality out there, it appears or becomes closer. When a text aims not at simple information, but at the formation of a soul, the effects of proximity become exceptionally effective. As soon as one sees that Judas has been paid with the same money one has in his or her purse, everybody should feel a little uneasy (POTEET). Such instances of presentism are not a manifestation of clumsiness, but a device of transcendence, like typology. However, presentism is the reverse of typology because it moves the thought backwards, from later to earlier events. Experience of this way to go back in time is identification (HARDISON), while in a typological relation it was imitation (*imitatio Christi*). The program of *imitatio Christi* is a typological one. Saints imitate Christ, common people imitate saints. Both relations (presentism and typology) are vehicles traveling through the time of salvation in both directions. Moving in time backwards and forwards means simultaneous existence in time.

Not only mystery plays, but hagiography and traditional saint plays may also both be interpreted according to the aesthetics of recapitulation. The theological doctrines of recapitulation and the *communio sanctorum* are very close to each other. The *communio sanctorum* is a "mystical union connecting in one spiritual body the believers on earth, the souls suffering in purgatory, and the saints in heaven"; the head of this body is Christ. The Catholic cult of the saints is as communal as anamnesis. Both have as its subject the community (GOCZOŁ 512). The inclusion of saints in the institute of anamnesis allows them to be the connection between the First and the Second Coming (incarnation and *parusia*).

In the program of meditative exercises of the confraternity of Windesheim (~1400) there were four meditations daily, the third devoted to different saints. Thus the saints' lives and miracles could be called signals of the salvation time (VAN DIJK 1995, p. 148-9). If, according to this explanation, Christ is in the liturgy of the canonical hours "sacrament of the meeting with God," the same function can be assumed for theatrical performances presenting Christ's earthly life, and, consequently the lives of saints. The visual and behavioral aspect of a performance, its presentism, all this has a special value for the task of proving the truth of the belief that God is acting through the saints, which is the main function of hagiography (Kieckhefer). Openness and the fragmentary character of hagiographic subject matter made it a difficult material for drama writers. But the loose structure of many saint plays was, again, not the fault of their authors. They knew that it was not their purpose to move their audience with the emotions of fear and pity, nor to convince anybody that the figure of a saint was well-written, "probable," or "typical." The author wrote not fiction, but history. Maybe a special sort of history, in which the detailed chronology did not matter much, and

only the irreversible sequence of events was important. That time is ruled by the clock of typology, which cannot be set back. That author is not concerned with mimesis, because his writing serves transcendence, understood as moving through time in the same way as happens in meditation and anamnesis. The reality presented in traditional religious drama is not the eternal present, it is the time of salvation – the time which is, thanks to anamnesis, made accessible from its beginning, pregnant with the consequences of our present deeds, and open without end into the future.

Again, those interested in recognizing a religious drama outside the Middle Ages use the following clue: the community of anamnesis takes some space, but is constituted by way of overpowering time. The most important thing is that the dialogue started long ago after the sermon on the mount, not the whereabouts, looks, and deeds of those who started that never-ending conversation. Religious drama remains essentially medieval as long as its aesthetic principles allow the anamnesis to prevail against the mimesis.

Medievalism. The new attitude towards the medieval tradition in later periods can be seen as a result of the development of the method of reception research in literary history. The name medievalism was given first to a certain preoccupation with romanticism. At that time the recalling and interpreting of typically medieval motifs and ideas became common, especially in historical narrative. It wasn't until our times that Leslie Workman established medievalism as a scholarly discipline concerned with modern and historical forms of reshaping, rethinking, using motifs, creating an image of medieval times (not only in Romanticism). The picture of the Middle Ages we find in modern writing and art is only seldom based on recent historical knowledge. Most frequently it has nothing in common with the Middle Ages. The creation of an image of the Middle Ages to be used as an argument starts already in the later MA. The later periods add their own contribution. We should speak not of 'Renaissance medievalism,' Baroque medievalism, and so on, but of medievalism as such, meaning any manifestation of using the medieval past as a source of examples or proofs, both positive and negative.

Such a solution would bring us closer to a more general method; it is not only the medieval past which has been and will be constructed to prove something with the construct. This historicism would give us the possibility to create a common methodology without isolating medievalism from other instances of using the past for heuristic or creative, artistic applications, as with e.g. classicism.

Why should we study the afterlife of the Middle Ages? Not because we love the Middle Ages so much. Neglecting the post-medieval existence of medieval genres has negative consequences for our understanding of later literature and culture. It wrongly excludes texts (which had a function of their own) because they did not follow rules that would have enabled them to fulfill functions they were not supposed to have at all.

This was the case when Renaissance scholarship found a guide for new, not medieval writing in the poetics of Aristotle. Many scholars ignored all the teachings of Aristotle. Jacobus PONTANUS (1597, pp. 87-119) stressed the importance of character development in drama, but SARBIEWSKI strictly followed Aristotle. However, making the hero's psychology central to the tragedy is against Aristotle's stress on reception and the impact on the audience. For him only the action really counts. A tragedy can reach its aim without clear-cut characters.²⁰ Fear and pity can be caused with a Christian audience by the same means, but

²⁰ The *ethos*, *Poetics* 1450a.

with other types of persons; the means are, “an unhappy fate for the righteous, and the ruin of somebody like us.”²¹ These persons can include even martyrs. It is just the martyr’s *choice* or *will* to die for his cause which turns his death into something different from a “common crime.” Only then would the audience’s reaction be “not fear and pity, but indignation” (*Poetics* 1452b, 35). There is, finally, not one sort of tragedy. Alongside the most sublime peripethia-and-recognition tragedy, we have the pathos-tragedy, the ethos-tragedy, and the spectacle-tragedy (*Poetics* 1455b-1456a). Sarbiewski neglected the hero’s suffering, the *pathos*, as a source of tragic effect.

But these were all just possibilities, e.g. using the historical figure of a saint in a purely literary way, which was not necessary, and in some circumstances even wrong. It would weaken and dissolve this figure’s historicity and authenticity. How should a believer imitate a fiction? A good imitation of Christ is not a question of pleasure or cognition, it is a matter of life and death.

To summarize, if there had been no new saints in the 16th and 17th centuries, we could then say that the old legends were adopted by modern writers as subject matter with some tragic potential to be rewritten in a new, “purged,” tragic fashion. However, new saints were being canonized, and new stories about them were to be circulated to people with a new humanist, scholarly background, but with quite “medieval” ideas about the sacred and quite “medieval” expectations towards the saints. The classical pattern of tragedy could not purge medieval elements from literature if the genres still had the same functions. It is the apparatus of classical tragedy that has been adopted to maintain and improve the impact of the old genre of the saint play on the post-medieval Catholic audience, not the other way round.

As long as that impact was not identical to affecting people by fear and pity, the genre remained the same. The genre remained the same as long as it answered the question of how to become a saint, that is, in modern terms, how to become an ideal person.

Research obligations and opportunities. If we accept the medievalist broadening of scope and accept more texts of post-medieval times as representing the medieval tradition and deserving detailed comparative studies and monographs of their own, an analogous step should follow in the area of scholarly and even popular compendia. They should exceed the traditional boundary of the Middle Ages (ca 1500) and take into account later texts and other cultural phenomena, at least those which simply continue the style of the medieval period. There are many areas of necessary “additional” or “corrected” research. Narrative motifs²² functioning in dramas as their themes, their subject matter, could be gathered into a separate comparative catalogue. Medieval drama genres with all more or less stabilized forms of representation, text types, and circumstances of their production and transmission should be studied and described along this long timeline (*durée longue*), not split among many epochs.

Final remarks. Today scholarly methods of criticism prefer innovation. Distinguishing literary periods is based on the appearance of new, important works representing new genres,

²¹ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453a, 2-3.

²² Collected in S. THOMPSON’s *Motif Index*, with many additions and in later national catalogs and journal publications, mostly in the “Fabula.”

values, and methods. As soon as they become old they are marginalized, even if there are still authors and readers who like and understand them.

Maybe we should listen to our students, who quickly become tired when confronted with old stuff. Is a reduction of old topics not reasonable? Are we actually going to lose something if a history of literature is preoccupied with describing only innovative creation while neglecting the popular genres with their recycling techniques?

We should realize that the process of culture would be impossible by way of experiment only. The making of culture happens not through creation of new items only, but also, if not first of all, by proving their value and preserving what has been commonly acknowledged as good or useful. There are two sorts of bank clients, one who brings money only to withdraw it quickly, and the other who keeps his money in the bank for a long time. We cannot behave like a bank owner who is very happy with the clients who come and go, and neglects those who stay with him.

As individuals we prefer changes and news, but social institutions are there for the sake of perpetuation. There is, after all, an essential philosophical reason for our looking back to the past of quite common things for "more history". This reason can be found in a new theory of the art object, or ontology of art (CURRIE). If we look at two pictures, they may seem identical today, but if we know "their ways," we can establish a difference between them. We can imagine (with CURRIE) a perfect copy of an old work of art made with old materials and as such physically undistinguishable from the old original. The only distinguishing factor will be the differences in the circumstances of their creation and further existence. The processes which resulted in the creation of an art object are part of its identity. Without recognizing the circumstances of creation and later events, we cannot understand the object properly. The only way of recognizing the identity of the objects of our research is by looking at their past, the circumstances of their origin, the people who created them, and those who contributed to their transmission through space and time. It is our obligation to recognize the processes which enabled the art objects to exist and to discover the different ways in which they reached us.

The world we see around us does not consist of objects and so culture does not consist of works of art and momentary events. That is why literary history cannot busy itself with texts only. Works of art are not objects. The visible things are only parts or segments of longer events which precede, accompany, and follow their existence. The mere objects would not move us, engage us in their relations, nor include us in their fates. In a world consisting solely of objects we could not act nor move because we could not understand anything. We love understanding, acting and moving, which are only possible in a world that is alive and permanently changing. This living theatre of the world consists of processes. So does the world of theatre.

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chait devant le Christ, tenant un suaire à la main, soutenu par deux Anges, avec lequel elle essuyait de temps en temps sa face.

La VIERGE, accompagnée des trois MARIE, marchait après.

La fille de M. Escoffier représentant la Mère de Dieu.

M ^{lle} Belland, la cadette. . .	} (les) trois MARIE.
M ^{lle} Pangon.	
M ^{lle} Coréard, la cadette . .	

Voici les vers que la Vierge et le Christ récitaient :

La VIERGE à son fils :

Est-ce vous, mon cher fils, qu'on conduit au supplice ?
 Arrêtez, arrêtez, bourreaux trop inhumains !
 Dieu ! quelle cruauté ! le plus beau des humains
 Est tout défiguré. Hélas ! quelle injustice !
 Où sont ces cheveux blonds, ces yeux, ce teint si doux ?
 Ce corps si délicat est déchiré de coups,
 Le sang de toutes parts distille goutte à goutte.
 Mes yeux, fondez en pleurs ! mon fils est aux abois.
 Il trébuche à tous pas, sous sa pesante croix ;
 Je ne le verrai plus que ce moment sans doute.

Réponse de Jésus à sa mère :

Ma mère, c'est assez ; ne pleurez pas mon sort.
 Je ne suis né de vous que pour souffrir la mort,
 Il faut sur cette croix que mon amour éclate.
 Et vous, qui me suivez, ne pleurez plus sur moi ;
 Pleurez sur vos enfants qui n'ont ni foi, ni loi,
 Pleurez et soupirez sur votre ville ingrate.

Ceux qui avaient le plus blâmé l'ordre de cette procession et que plusieurs avaient cru ne devoir avoir d'autre succès que celui d'une mascarade, furent les premiers à en être touchés. Ils en poussèrent des soupirs et ils se virent forcés de fondre en pleurs en présence de tout le peuple, lorsqu'ils entendirent les tristes paroles du Sauveur et de sa mère ; car, quoique le reste eût fait quelque impression sur eux, ils convinrent pourtant que cet endroit-ci les avait particulièrement touchés.

Ce fut dans cet ordre qu'on alla jusqu'au lieu où l'on planta la grande croix. Jamais on ne vit une telle affluence de peuple ; tous