



Poculi Ludique Societas

PLS Newsletter

Fall Season 2009

We're still here!

PLS/Centre for Performance Studies in Early Theatre has officially become part of the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, but we are still located in the basement of 125 Queen's Park, where we continue our long and happy association with the Centre for Medieval Studies.

Welcome from the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama

Stephen Johnson, Director

It gives me great pleasure to welcome PLS/CPSET to a closer association with the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. For as long as both organizations have been in existence, they have collaborated frequently and successfully, sharing productions, designers, staff, venues, costumes, actors.... Everything, really. For all of this time, their experiments in theatrical performance have been a central concern of ours, so that, as the Drama Centre further incorporates performance practice into its curriculum and its research, a move by PLS/CPSET of its operations to the GDC has been smooth, natural--and most welcome. We look forward to even greater collaboration in the future.



Last Season (2008-2009)

In November 2008 we presented two plays from the N-Town pageants: *The Trial of Mary and Joseph* and *The Woman Taken in Adultery*, two plays that highlighted medieval attitudes towards women and female sexuality. Then in February/March of 2009, our co-production of the Elizabethan romance *Clyomon and Clamydes* continued the Shakespeare and the Queen's Men project. Thanks to the support of a generous patron, six members of the original 2006 Queen's Men troupe were able to participate, including Peter Cockett – this time as both director and actor. A popular feature of our productions last season was a talkback with directors and cast following each performance, a custom we intend to continue.

2009-2010 Season

A Child Shall Be Born: Annunciation and Nativity Pageants from the Chester Cycle

For Advent we present a seasonal preview of the newly edited version of the Chester Cycle! Prophets predict the coming of Christ; an angel appears to Mary; Joseph has his doubts; a star shines over Bethlehem, sceptical midwives are shocked by the miraculous birth!

*Performances: Friday, December 11, 8 pm –
Rosedale Presbyterian Church*

*Saturday December 12, 2 pm & 8 pm; Sunday
December 13, 8 pm - Trinity College Chapel*



Inside Out: The Persistence of Allegory in Renaissance Performance

In this workshop exploration of the allegorical 'character' on stage, PLS /CPSET and the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama continue to experiment with theatrical performance. Building on his work with the Shakespeare and the Queen's Men project, director Peter Cockett and guest researcher/dramaturge Alan Dessen will work with students and professionals investigating the performance of allegorical characters and the dramatization of moral choice in early modern drama. Among the 'characters' we will explore are Despair, Conscience, Justice and Lechery, evil angels and good, alongside some famous ethically-challenged characters such as Hamlet, Mark Anthony and Faustus.

*Performances: Friday 5th, Saturday 6th and
Sunday 7th February*

Studio Theatre, 4 Glen Morris Street.

The Chester Cycle 2010

In May of 2010 groups from 20 different Canadian and American universities will gather to participate in an exciting outdoor production of the cycle of plays that were performed in the city of Chester until 1575. The colourful PLS pageant wagons will be rolling once again around the campuses of Victoria and St Michael's Colleges at the University of Toronto for three magical days of mystery plays and an academic conference. This is your chance to be part of a unique theatrical experience – as an audience member, as a volunteer participant or a donor. We hope that you will join us for this once-in-a-lifetime adventure!

If you would like to help in any way, or for more information, go to www.plspls.ca or email info@plspls.ca or call 416 978-5096.



- *Clyomon & Clamydes*

The Chester Text Re-worked

Alexandra Johnston

The Chester Cycle presents a unique challenge to producers. The last performance of the cycle was 1575. All five full manuscript copies of the text were written down between 1591 and 1607 and none of them is an acting text. Until about ten years ago, there was no way a reconstruction of a performance could be attempted that had any grounding in the period. Then, over 400 years later, an 'eye witness' account was found of the performance in 1572! A Protestant minister, Christopher Goodman, was so incensed by the Catholic version of the play that the city intended to produce that he wrote to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in the north to put a stop to it. One of his letters contains a 'List of absurdities' and from it we have been able to deduce what parts of the surviving text were actually produced that year.

The episodes in the text I have created are divided differently from the manuscript versions according to Goodman's account and wherever there was a choice of repeated scenes I took the one that reflected Catholic rather than Protestant theology and sensibility. The result is an exciting version of the Chester Cycle as it may have been performed as a Catholic statement in the tense religious 'stand off' in the north of England where a large part of the population were opposed to the Elizabethan Protestant church. I learned a lot about how the text was put together and how it was shaped to carry the audience along from episode to episode using the wagon stages. I hope you will all come to watch the experiment unfold as we attempt to re-create the performance of 1572!

The Chester Herod in 2011

On November 11-12, 2011, the convention of an international group called the Friends of the Crèche will be meeting in Toronto. Early in the planning stages PLS was approached by Nancy Mallett, the archivist of St James' Cathedral, to see if we could provide a play for the occasion. Plans had just begun for Chester 2010 and we had realized that three plays in the manuscript – the Kings' visit to Herod, the Adoration of the Kings and the Slaughter of the Innocents and Death of Herod – seem to have been played as one play in 1572. Put together as one those three plays are a powerful contrast of the opposition of some earthly rulers to the coming of Christ and the acceptance of others. We proposed the amalgamated play to the conference planning committee who were delighted to accept our offer.

The performances will take place in St James' Cathedral itself. The first performance on November 11 will be for the conference but there will be other performances for our patrons and the general public. It will be interesting to see the different effect created by the three plays being played alone indoors in a church setting and outdoors in the context of a wagon production of the entire Christian story.

As always, we count on your support for PLS in its many activities. Your donation – a cheque or money order to "Poculi Ludique Societas" (USA donors, "Associates of the University of Toronto") will be most gratefully received.

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