Véronique Dominguez

MEDIEVALISM AND MEDIEVAL THEATRE:
About Adam[1]

Exploring the relation between medieval studies and medievalism, this article focuses on theatre in Europe and France. What are the relations between a scholarly knowledge of medieval theatre and the various reconstructions of medieval theatre to be found on the twentieth-century stage? To answer this question, this article studies different types of productions, from Gustave Cohen's *Jeu d'Adam et Eve* staged at the Sorbonne in 1935 to the York Mysteries adapted in England in the 1950s and 1980s, as well as some modern texts that adapt or integrate medieval theatre, from Brecht to Novarina. It concludes by proposing a renewed approach to medieval theatre, especially from an editorial point of view.

In an interview with Richard Utz, Leslie Workman touched on a question that has frequently been asked in the history of the field he created, medievalism: the relation between this field, its practice and its findings, and medieval studies, or between the study of medieval recreations in the real world, both ancient and contemporary, and medieval studies in academia.[2] Where do we stand today in the dialogue between medievalism and medieval studies? Have we reached, as Workman wished then, the future of medievalism, when "medievalism will adopt more of the attitude of historicism and […] medieval studies will adopt more of the approach of medievalism? (443)" That the second part of that wish has been fulfilled cannot be doubted after reading Paul Zumthor's *Parler du Moyen Age*. Since that book, one cannot possibly be a medieval studies scholar without also being a medievalist, or at the very least without having a critical approach to medieval studies that includes post-medieval representations of the Middle Ages. However, Zumthor's book was

published in 1980. Dealing primarily with medieval texts, it found continuities between the New Philology and medievalism studies,[3] both of which had as their goal to shed a critical light on their own practice. Both the New Philology and medievalism also constructed their own identity on a redefinition of notions and practices used by historians of the Middle Ages, in particular those associated with the French *Annales* school.[4] Yet all of the perspectives and approaches used in the traditional field of medieval studies, whether in literary studies, history or philology, can also be traced in the rise and history of medievalism.[5] Thus the question of the dialogue between medieval studies and medievalism, examining how they have defined one another as well as one another's influence, is a valid one. In this perspective,[6] I will explore here the other part of Workman's wish. In the past as in the present, was there and is there still any interest to being a medieval studies scholar when working as a medievalist? To be more precise, in what way can a well-tempered knowledge of medieval studies help in the perception, understanding and construction of the contemporary Middle Ages?

Should we, in French, speak of *médiévisme* or, using a neologism, of *médiévalisme*, in other words of well-balanced, continental medieval studies or of new-fangled, American medievalism? Before starting my analysis, I have to comment on the linguistic discomfort these terms produce in French scholars: which words should we use, in French, when talking about an approach to medieval studies that also includes its representations and heritage up to our own day? To address this problem, we have recently seen in France the use of such expressions as "the Middle Ages in contemporary fiction" or "today's Middle Ages" in works that investigate the traces of the medieval in post-medieval cultural artifacts (Gally, Koble and Séguy). In French, those expressions are more pleasing than a Gallicized *médiévalisme*, with its suffix -*avisme*, which, like the prefix "neo-" or the adjective "new", appears to underscore a less legitimate claim, to the extent that in theory at least, it seems to have been addressed already by traditional medieval studies. In the same way, the expression "the contemporary Middle Ages" (*Moyen Age contemporain*) seeks to account for the crystallization of the Middle Ages and their representations in various post-medieval productions.

In the very broad context of exploring the relation between medieval studies and medievalism, this article will focus more specifically on theatre in Europe and France. While in England and Germany, studies on medieval theatre and its resurgence on contemporary stages have been the subject of several books (Elliot, Normington), French medieval theatre had not enjoyed this honour before the recent publication of Helen Solterer's book *Medieval*

Roles for Modern Times. Theater and the Battle for the French Republic. Working on the Théophiliens, a university theatre company, and on its founder and director, the medievalist theatre historian Gustave Cohen, Solterer explores their role during the key moments of French history from the interwar period to the aftermath of the Liberation. The Théophiliens did indeed hold high the banner of medievalism by performing successfully and all over the world, between the 1930s and the 1950s, several medieval French plays. As exceptional as this was, was their experience however fated to be short-lived, both for medieval scholars and for medievalists?

That is certainly not the case, if we consider the richness and range of medieval material used by the contemporary stage,[7] both in France and outside. But we do have to analyze a paradox: that of a contemporary theatre that, in many aspects, enters into a dialogue with medieval theatre, yet without placing the latter, as such, at the core of its writing or performance practices. If the Middle Ages are often present in modern stage productions, these never choose to perform a genuine medieval play, with the consequence that only scholars specialized in the subject seem to keep an attentive eye to medieval theater. What, then, can be and are the relations between a scholarly knowledge of medieval theatre and the various reconstructions of elements of medieval theatre to be found on the twentieth-century stage?

To answer this question, I will study different types of productions, in order to understand the reasons of the disinterest of the modern stage towards original medieval theatre. I will first analyze some reconstitutions of European medieval theatre, from Gustave Cohen's *Jeu d'Adam et Eve* staged at the Sorbonne in 1935 to the York Mysteries adapted in England, and directed by Reverend Martin E. Browne in the 1950s and by Bill Bryden in 1985. I will underline the conformity of these productions to academic knowledge and representations, but also their distance from the original texts as a result of their systematic practice of adaptation, however brilliant and successful this may be. Secondly, I will investigate some contemporary theoretical and dramatic texts that either adapt or integrate elements from medieval theatre, from Bertolt Brecht to Valère Novarina. This will enable me to uncover a second type of dialogue between today's stage and medieval theatre, where the latter appears as a historical, aesthetic or metaphysical source used by contemporary theatre-makers without actually being designated as such. It is in this process leading from adapting the forms of medieval theatre to integrating them into contemporary theatre that we witness the estrangement of the original medieval text. The final moment of my reflection will be dedicated to a critical examination of this phenomenon, for which I will trace

the causes but also a possible cure in medieval scholarship, and more specifically in a renewed approach to medieval theatre, especially from an editorial point of view.

Because the medieval material used on the contemporary stage is so rich and manifold, I have chosen one particular character often portrayed in theatrical performances, from the Middle Ages to our own time:[8] Adam. Indeed he is not only a mythical figure par excellence, but his story from the Creation to the Fall is also the main subject of the first medieval play composed in French: the twelfth-century *Mystère* or *Jeu d'Adam*.[9] Thanks to its historical interest, this play was used in the various types of productions studied below, and it was also my own subject of reflection as a medieval scholar, for a new edition, translation and commentary of my own. In other words, how was the medieval *Jeu d'Adam* recreated, adapted or integrated by contemporary texts and stages? And in this various process, what was, and what could be the role of medieval scholarship ?

Adam: "untutored" recreations?

In 1935, when Gustave Cohen and his Théophiliens chose to stage the *Jeu d'Adam* at the Sorbonne University, they were not the first to have a go at this famous medieval mystery play in this academic and scholarly setting. Back in 1898, there had already been a performance on the university square, the Place de la Sorbonne.[10] More than his predecessor, however, Cohen was faced with huge difficulties in terms of scenery and direction since he preferred to perform the *Jeu* in the very place where he was teaching it rather than opting for the freedom of the outdoors. Narrow and without any depth, the Louis Liard amphitheatre, built, as is every university amphitheatre, of tiers overlooking a platform, bore no resemblance at all to a theatre stage. But Cohen and the Théophiliens set booths (*mansions*) on the platform, and ranging from Hell to Heaven, the characters of Adam, Eve, the Devil and the Figure replayed the Creation and the Fall, to the great pleasure of an audience who applauded them, from "the ordinary folk [to] the most delicate and difficult men of letters" (Cohen 9, note 3).[11]

Today this success can seem surprising if we consider the pasteboard scenery and drapery costumes[12] which sought to represent an undefined past and an a-historicism favourable to a medievalist analysis. Yet can we qualify this as an "untutored recreation", in the words that Paul Zumthor used to talk about "the experience of [...] those of us who set out to have our students put on a performance of a medieval play?" While noting immediately afterwards that "the experience alone is significant, that [this experience] keep on

repeating itself in most sites where a discourse on the Middle Ages has taken hold"(39), Zumthor invites his readers to focus on the possible meaning of these experiences, for medieval studies as well as for any discourse evoking the Middle Ages.

Grasping the sense of the Théophilien experiment here means also considering the complex thinking behind Cohen's reconstitution. But firstly, questioning the historicity of performing the *Jeu d'Adam* in the Liard Amphitheatre because this was more in line with Cohen's scholarly work than with the liturgy, which would instead place it in an ecclesiastic space without *mansions*,[13] does not change the basic principle. Cohen claimed that his staging was in conformity with the medieval performance of the *Ordo*, especially with regard to the polarization of the playing space (7-8). However, like most other readings and stagings that took place in Cohen's classroom and lectures,[14] the goal of this reconstitution was not to give a meticulous rendition of the *Ordo Representacionis Ade* as such, as is indeed immediately evident in the most obvious changes in the adaptation made by Cohen for his students.[15] The goal was also, and even primarily, to underline the existence and importance of the medieval literary corpus, especially in terms of drama, in a "resurrection" that was presented as such by Cohen and the Théophiliens. This goal, where spirituality gives way to pedagogy, is clearly visible when we closely examine the written transcription of the *Jeu*. The awkward and broken syntax is less the medieval text itself than a text from the past whose charm was intended to lead to a general rediscovery of the whole historical period.[16]

Thus, when we consider the high level of sophistication implied in Cohen's composition of *Le Jeu d'Adam et Eve*, this dramatic reconstitution of a medieval play cannot possibly be called "untutored". It did indeed have some attributes of amateur theatre – none of the actors were professionals – but it clearly had goals and forms that distinguished it from a raw and inarticulate desire to "go medieval" and that any medievalist analysis would be justified in bringing to light. To underline the aesthetic value of this reconstitution, without forgetting the importance of subjectivity in such a judgment, I will only quote someone who personally saw Cohen's *Jeu d'Adam et Eve*: none other than Paul Zumthor himself, who was a Théophilien as a student and also a spectator of the second staging of *Le Jeu d'Adam et Eve* on the square of Notre-Dame in Chartres at Pentecost in 1935: "It was very beautiful, without any scenery: the singers were simply distributed at different points before the façade. It was above all musical" (Solterer 1998, 127).[17]

Might we consider that a reconstitution is less "untutored" depending on the country where it is performed and the relation this country has with its

medieval theatre? A quick comparison between French and English reconstitutions reveals how uneven is the dedication of quality artists in bringing European medieval theatre to the stage. While in France theatrical studies and performance history start with French classicism,[18] thereby greatly endangering the scholarly and aesthetic existence of French medieval theatre, the most prominent English theatres owe it to Shakespeare and his vital importance in their culture to look back to older theatrical productions. And this might be why they first became interested in medieval theatre as well. Thus for example the talented director Bill Bryden has turned his attention to the York mysteries, a group of fifteenth-century texts that was adapted by the Scottish poet Tony Harrison[19] for Bryden to stage at the London National Theatre in 1985. While the performance was presented from the very start as a strongly politicized, socially critical transposition, and more precisely as an anti-Thatcher reading of the conflicts of authority that were taking place in the country at that time, it delivered this reading through an interpretation of the main elements of Christian myth that was as striking as it was beautiful, and the performance was, just like that of the Théophiliens in their time, acclaimed by the critics.[20] Elaborate and inventive, this professional reworking of the texts and forms of medieval theatre was also a critical and distant reformulation of a traditional English staging tradition: that of the York mysteries, that have been performed in this town every year since 1951 during a festival bearing the same name.[21] In this last case, the performances were and still are part of a tradition of amateur theatre, since the majority of the actors were inhabitants of the city of York and the first director, the Reverend E. Martin Browne, was a priest and not a man of the arts. However, taking part in those celebrations was as much a social and local experience as an aesthetic one, and many famous actors did join in.[22]

So were these stagings of the medieval Adam throughout Europe "untutored"?[23] This formulation can only really be applied to parish or school theatre productions, of which there are no traces left, but not to the performances we have just examined. These medievalist endeavours that created drama from medieval theatre avoided amateurism for the most part by resorting to knowledge that, no matter how erroneous it may be deemed today, ultimately came from the academic world. In Cohen's case, his staging of a kind of theatre descended from a medieval tradition was informed by his own scholarly expertise regarding original texts and vital elements of medieval theatrical practice. Similarly, Tony Harrison's adaptation consisted in rearranging and translating English medieval cycles in a way that respected the spirit as much as the letter of the original texts (Harrison, epigraph, 4).

However, in both cases, there is a striking similarity and an even bigger paradox: in spite of their closeness to the original material, both directors chose to stage adaptations and not mere translations of the plays into modern English or French. The original texts were thus not deemed capable of forming the basis of a modern performance without first being transformed, while their adaptation gave rise to performances invested with many values, including a sustained dialogue with contemporary society.

The medieval Adam of today, between theory and stage practice
The second part of the paradox is that the vitality of forms and situations drawn from medieval drama seems to be perceived through contemporary theories and directives, without the actual texts of medieval dramas themselves being brought to the stage.

The link in theoretical discourse between the contemporary stage and scholarly knowledge on the medieval theatre was first established by a number of well-known figures such as Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht. I will focus here only on the German playwright, who drew links between the theatre, especially the religious theatre of the Middle Ages and his own conception of the dramatic stage and its political functions. As a Marxist and an atheist, he used the Spanish and German theatre of the period from the Middle Ages up to the seventeenth century as one of the historical bases for his *LehrStücken*, that is the epic and didactic theatre that was the goal of his theoretical thought put into practice:

> Stylistically speaking, there is nothing at all new about the epic theatre. Its expository character and its emphasis on virtuosity bring it close to the old Asiatic theatre. Didactic tendencies are to be found in the medieval mystery plays and the classic Spanish theatre, and also in the theatre of the Jesuits.[24]

However, what can we say about contemporary playwrights and / or directors? Recent scholarship on Valère Novarina's *L'Opérette Imaginaire* has demonstrated the links that the playwright established with sacred medieval material (Koble forthcoming). Indeed, many analogies are possible between the works of Valère Novarina and the Middle Ages, both in their philosophy and drama. Thus, many of his plays such as *Le Drame de la Vie* or *La Chair de l'Homme* deal with the origins of the world and of humankind, as well as the link between those origins and the birth of language. The plot is mainly made up of the relation between body and language, in which the actor's performance defuses the latter's communicative function. From depraved dialogues to sprawling soliloquies, it is the notion of origin itself that is

disarticulated, in order to be better exhibited. Somewhere between a doctrine of the sign and parodic rewriting, Novarina's theatre takes for its subject, if only to distance itself from it, the basics of medieval Christian thought as reworked through liturgical dramas, dramatic passion plays or the Byzantine iconography of the early Middle Ages.[25] Furthermore, Novarina's characters bear a generic name instead of a Christian one, echoing the allegorical characters of medieval morality plays: The Worker of Vengeance (*L'Ouvrier de Vengeance*), The Two Members (*Les Deux Membres*), The Man of Hands (*l'Homme des Mains*), or The People of Time (*Les Gens du Temps*).[26] Finally, as in medieval plays, in Novarina's works one actor commonly plays several roles (2003, list of characters, 125-126). These recurring thematic and dramatic choices require of the audience members that they adopt a free and flexible mimetic pact, which is the total opposite of French classicist mimesis, in which the continuity of the plot reigns and where there is only one actor per role. And it is, among other things, all these medieval reminiscences that make of Novarina's "anti-characters" (87 sq.) a major illustration of the "crisis of acting on the stage" that has often been considered characteristic of contemporary theatre (Guénoun, 148).

However, have these subjects, this dramatic art and these characters, as close as they seem to their analogues in medieval theatre, really been constituted in a true dialogue with this theatre? While medieval drama has found a place in the theoretical discourse of several playwrights,[27] it is especially in their writing, on paper or on the stage, that this dialogue seems to really take place.

While Novarina's *Opérette Imaginaire* works on similar material as the second part of the medieval *Jeu d'Adam*, i.e. the story of Abel and Cain and the fratricide, or the first murder of humankind, and *L'Equilibre de la Croix* uses material from the first part of the *Jeu*: the creation of the first humans, original sin and its aftermath. As a stage-friendly, condensed version of *La Chair de l'Homme, L'Equilibre de la Croix* was performed in Avignon, at the Tinel de la Chartreuse, in 1995. That this text is partially a rewriting of the *Jeu d'Adam* is shown first of all in the choice of languages. Thus, the third act of *L'Equilibre de la Croix* is entitled *L'Acte en Latin*. Yet the medieval Adam uses both Anglo-Norman, a dialect of Old French, and the Latin used in the liturgical songs and stage directions. Moreover, this very act in Latin gives the stage to a character called *Figura*, who in the medieval text also played the role of God. Initially a male figure, Novarina transforms it into a female when the text switches to French, *La Figure. La Figure* and *Figura* are the different sides of an incarnated

God whose definition is discussed in an unbridled parody of a medieval *disputatio*:

> *L'Acte en Latin* (III)
> PUELLA TRANSBREVIENSIS
> Quid est Deus ?
> PUER IN TOGA RYTHMICA
> Deus est spiritus hyper-bonissimus.
> PUER PARIETALIS
> Turpe et barbare locutus est ! …
> FIGURA
> Nunc audite : liber xxiv philosophorum docet nos : « Deus est sphera infinita cujus centrum est ubique, circumferentia vero nusquam. […] ». (2003, 56)

Before that, during Act II, called "The Act of the Flesh" (*L'Acte de Chair*), it is Adam's creation that was presented, in a text which in many aspects looks also like a displacement of the medieval text:

> *L'Acte de Chair* (II)
> MONSIEUR DE CHAIR, *désignant un cadavre* :
> « Dieu, lorsqu'il exprima une forme du limon de la terre, lorsqu'il appela Adam, toi aussi il te forma. Et bien avant qu'Adam ni toi ne parliez, il savait que vous seriez, tous les deux, formés tout à la fois de terre et de verbe […] Sens-tu, sur toi et en toi, la présence de cette main [de Dieu] ?
> ADAM :
> Oui. L'argile peut-elle dire au potier : « Potier, je t'ai oublié » ?
> […] Mais pourquoi le corps ressusciterait-il ? Quand on n'aura plus besoin de manger et de boire, à quoi servira cette profonde caverne de notre bouche, ces deux rangées de nos dents, ce canal de notre gorge, ce réservoir de notre estomac, ce gouffre du ventre, ce nœud immense et cet enchaînement compliqué des entrailles ? Pourquoi ? pourquoi ? pourquoi ? pourquoi ? » (2003, 35, 38)

In the shape given to the "salt of the earth" but also through the certainty of the gratitude of the creature for the Creator that made it, we have a reformulation of the first lines of the medieval *Jeu d'Adam* :

> *The Figure says:*
> Adam !
> *The latter responds:*
>   Lord?
> *The Figure:*
>   I have formed you
> *de limo terrae*!
> *Adam :*

Yes, I know it.

The Figure :
I have shaped you to resemble me,
in my image I have made you, on earth:
never must you wage war against me!
Adam :
No, I give you my word:
I shall obey my creator![28]

However, in Valère Novarina's text, it is in designating a corpse that Mister Flesh talks about the first man, reflexively turning inside out the mystery of the Resurrection inspired by the joint presence of the first man and an image of his end. Adam then reveals his uneasiness through a series of desperate questions that create an echo, however distorted, of scenes with a similar tone in the medieval text. In this new metaphysical meditation on finiteness, if humankind is saved, it will be less thanks to God than thanks to language. It falls to the actor to show the birth of this saving language that he has to project out of himself like a stranger or a strange object. The actor's work, absurd and ventriloquist, is thus condensed for Valère Novarina in the moment of the coming onstage, when natural language gives way to dramatic language, "the one that saves." In the work of acting, Novarina's scene performs again and again the estrangement of oneself from oneself in which language is born – a labour carried out by "the actor who is none and perfect" ("L'Acteur Nul et Parfait"), and whose fecund negativity, in which a "monkey" becomes a "saint" echoes the way medieval mystical thought also worked (1989, 148).

Consequently, *L'Equilibre de la Croix* reworks a metaphysical, dramatic and stylistic heritage that is present in many aspects in the twelfth-century *Jeu d'Adam*, but in forms and shapes that are particular to Valère Novarina:

In a time when the rule of obligatory humanism and of auto-idolatry is spreading everywhere, it is the human figure, Adam, the poor human figure on the ground that we must pick up and rescue; it demands to be increasingly hollowed out and deepened. Humankind demands to be represented outside, half outside itself, represented in dance and in autopsy.[29]

And that is what he does through the lying corpse in *L'Equilibre* or the huge bicephalus dummy in "La Dormition de Polichinelle."[30] Thus, between stage theory and stage practice, from Brecht to Novarina, the great names of modern theatre dialogue with medieval theatre, in medievalist creations that work perfectly without any intervention of academic knowledge, and I can only wish a long life to those fine and nourishing creations! However, I will now adopt a more scholarly approach to the medieval to try and grasp the reasons

that could have limited a more direct use of medieval drama, whether on the contemporary stage or through transpositions as in the case of Cohen, Bryden or Harrison. Is it possible to render medieval theatre interesting to today's actors and directors, since this obviously has not been the case so far? And in such a project, what should be the role of medieval studies?

Speaking of medieval drama today, a medieval scholar's task?
If indeed such a project can be conceived, it must first and foremost be based on the knowledge that has been built up over the last centuries concerning medieval theatre (Bouhaïk-Gironès et al.). If we are to believe the Frères Parfaict, the eighteenth and nineteenth-century discoverers of the medieval textual heritage, texts constructed around character dialogue were not its most brilliant feature:

> These Poems, independently of their extreme rareness, are excessively boring. Everything contributes to this, their ridiculously constructed plot, verses without cadence and rules, a language that has become almost unintelligible, countless examples of ignorance and coarseness; in a word, everything that can make it repulsive to read them is united in these Plays (xiv).[31]

Applied without any nuance to a vast, diverse corpus composed and performed during more than six centuries, this destructive conception of medieval drama long governed editions and readings of medieval texts. These editions transformed medieval theatre into no more than an object of scholarly study and knowledge, pushing totally aside the fact that these texts were meant to be performed. However, in more recent decades studies of medieval drama have found a privileged theoretical and methodological basis in one of the milestones of modern medieval studies. When he mentioned "untutored performances", Paul Zumthor was actually attempting a general definition of medievalist practices and methods and giving to theatre a pragmatic role in a methodology that was anxious to give back its true identity to medieval texts:

> In performance, the spoken text constitutes, in a primal sense, a sound signal, active as such, and only secondarily becomes an articulated message. From this follows, for the medieval scholar, a critical quandary, since he cannot ever seize the performance *in situ*. Nonetheless, this impossibility does not in any way justify the negligence with which scholars tend to treat this problem as an aside or even, with supreme pride, to ignore it. It is not, for all that, inconceivable to reconstruct the factors that influenced the performative operation (time, place, circumstances, historical context, actors) and to perceive, at least globally, the nature of the values in which it was invested . . . To be sure, of itself, and should it turn out that way, *the reconstitution would remain folkloric* and could not, albeit contributing to it, truly lay the basis for knowledge. It

nonetheless seems to me a necessity that the idea of its possibility, and if I may so so, the hope of its realization, be interiorized, semanticized, integrated into our evaluations and our methodological choices. (38-39)

Understanding the medieval text as a performance is a "methodological choice" that must lead the scholar to find the conditions of realization and functioning of this performance, and it is what gave rise to the school of performance studies that is now very active in medieval studies, especially in England and in the United States (e.g. Birge Vitz, Doss-Quinby), where it is naturally complemented by medieval drama studies (Emerson, Maddox). The latter try to highlight the qualities of the varied and complex scholarly object that is "medieval drama", while respecting in each text its particular context and its relation to performance practices whose traces it is essential, perhaps, for these studies to recover.

In this perspective, I would like to conclude by underlining some of the qualities peculiar to the medieval *Jeu d'Adam* that appeared to me upon examining the only extant manuscript of the *Ordo Representacionis Ade*. This examination led to an edition in which I kept some punctuation, stage directions, rhymes and verses that had previously been deemed faulty by scholarly editors. These elements had been corrected and had led to mixed judgements about an object that was at once deemed both a milestone of literary history and a faulty text. Respecting, regrouping and reproducing the faults of the manuscript of this text enabled me to rethink its links with performance, without ever challenging its inscription within the specifically medieval liturgical context.

When it first talks to Adam,[32] the Figure describes the gesture it had just made, according to the stage directions given prior to that conversation:

> *Thus starts the following lesson:* In principio creavit Deus celum et terram.
> *After the lesson, the chorus sings the responsorial*: Formavit igitur Dominus. (182)

Thus it is not to the audience, but really to Adam that the Figure addresses the words that are redundant in relation to the dramatic action. "Lord?": the interrogation mark, which was systematically erased and that punctuates Adam's first word, underlines at once his naiveté and his ignorance, both of which are constantly apparent in his relation to language. That he needs to understand the sound and the meaning of words is underlined by the progress from Latin to French in the Figure's speech. "De limo terrae": mimicking biblical exegesis, it unfolds word for word the meaning of the words and acts that gave birth to Adam. Hence Adam's second utterance "I know it" could

well be an antiphrasis (he does not understand Latin!) or could even show his indifference to the Divine Word, an indifference that will lead the first man to his Fall. Preserving this punctuation in the printed text and showing the suggested naïve and developing relation that Adam has with language enables the reader to see in this text a very peculiar conception of the theological *homo novus*.[33] In an echo of the logical and theological thought prevalent at the time of its writing,[34] the medieval *Jeu* portrays an Adam who is above all born into language, and his major learning experience is that of the ways and byways of language, interlaced with the fatal discovery of sin.

This learning takes place before the gift of the Garden of Eden:

The Figure :
                                I have a project.
See this garden.
Adam :
                Which is called?
The Figure :
                                Paradise.
Adam :
How beautiful it is!
La Figure :
                I did planted it.
Adam :
Its inhabitant shall be my friend!
The Figure :
It will be you: you shall be its guardian.   (verses 80-84, pp. 193-195)

Asking for the name of Paradise shows Adam pursuing his acquisition of language, and he expresses twice his appreciation of this new object. While the "How beautiful it is!" line has always been attributed to him, no edition ever gave him verse 83: "Its inhabitant shall be my friend!", putting it instead into the mouth of the Figure, and thereby going against the manuscript — which clearly states in the stage directions *A.*, meaning *Adam*. Yet giving this line to Adam emphasizes one of the main mimetic strategies of the *Jeu*: its feudal anchoring. Before awakening to spirituality, Adam is a peasant and he sighs, torn between mockery and envy, before the richness of a garden that he cannot imagine will soon be his:

It leads them to Paradise, saying:
I put you here.
Adam :
                May we stay here?
The Figure :

> Yes, forever! There, you will have nothing to fear,
> you will neither die nor suffer [...]
> *Then the Figure says, pointing to Paradise :*
> I will tell you about the virtue of this garden [...]   (verses 84-88, pp. 195-197)

Adam's reaction is limited, then, to remaining in a place where his subsistence will be guaranteed, but of which he wishes to know no more; and it is the Figure who endeavours to reveal its virtues to him. The medieval text is thus based on a double mimetic pact. Adam is both a *homo novus* whose fate mirrors the history of salvation, and a cunning peasant very much satisfied by his good fortune. And it is by unwinding the two threads of that pact that the dramatic action moves, inexorably, towards the Fall.

The latter is not caused by the Devil, although it is only during his second visit, and after 82 verses of dialogue, that Adam finally recognizes him:

> *Adam [threatening] :*
> Begone. Quick!
> *The Devil [dodging a blow] :*
>   What is Adam saying?
> *Adam :*
> Begone, for you are Satan!
> But what advice!
> *The Devil:*
>   What do you mean?   (verses 194-196, pp. 214-215)

The Devil tries to dodge a blow from Adam, saying in an aside: "What is Adam saying?" This has always been corrected into "What are you saying, Adam?" Keeping the third person instead of the second give a comical dimension to the Devil, at once strengthened and distanced by the connivance he creates at that moment with the audience. But it is always from an incorrect use of language that Sin arises, and more precisely from an incorrect reading of the pact between the Figure and Adam and his wife: "Jo t'en crerra, tu es ma per" or "I trust you my wife" (v. 132), says Adam to Eve before eating the apple. To "believe" (*crerra*) is either "to trust" or "to have faith in". Adam makes the wrong choice: by giving his "trust" to Eve, he betrays the "faith" he should have had in the Figure. Finally "Lord, is this modesty then?" (v. 397): even as he cries over his sin, Adam reaches for a new word that the Figure has just uttered: "The other day, there was nothing / to inspire your modesty" (v. 394-95). Showing no sensitivity towards this philological enthusiasm, the Figure interrupts its fallen creature with a tetrasyllabic verse, which had always been thought of as faulty, even though this short verse contrasts with

the octosyllabic verses around it, thereby underlining the growing, and legitimate, anger of the deceived Lord: "E tu por quoi?" — "Do you know what is the matter?" (v. 398).

The medieval *Jeu d'Adam* is therefore the drama of the *homo novus* who discovers sin along with language. He learns to adapt the latter to the world, both feudal and spiritual, in which he must exist as a Christian. With a set of spiritual and mimetic choices that are particular to him, and whose implications for performances of the play are materialized through the punctuation, lexicon, verse forms and asides, the anonymous author of the *Jeu d'Adam* managed to make of original sin a true happening, in an arrangement as potent and reflexive as Brecht's epic theatre or Novarina's "anti-characters". Far from neglecting the foundational, ritual dimension of the play, this arrangement renews it, allowing for a spiritual mediation of original sin and its aftermath just as easily as for an aesthetic contemplation of its coming about, which was inexorably linked to Adam's mastery of language.

After its adaptation by the Théophiliens, can the twelfth-century *Jeu d'Adam* still provoke the interest of modern audiences in its original form? However interesting and esthetically valuable its recreations and adaptations may be, what is finally at stake in a revitalized scholarly discourse on medieval drama is the possibility of enabling the genuine texts that compose this complex object to find their place, so far vacant, in the repertoire of plays that can be performed today. Mysteries and farces performed alongside Greek or French classicist tragedies: this could be one of the possible outcomes of the dialogue between medieval studies and medievalism, in which scholarship and the stage would answer each other, and in which medieval studies would converse with the creators of today's Middle Ages.

Notes

1. This article is dedicated to the memory of Robert Potter († 2010), American medievalist and director, with whom I would have wished to continue our conversation about modern medieval theatre.
2. See Workman et al. and Metzger.
3. On these aspects of medieval studies, see primarily Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante*. This text provoked many reactions, underscoring its pamphletary nature and proving that medieval studies did include that self-critical approach that the author had claimed to be lacking. Such a self-critical approach was also Busby's when he edited *Towards a synthesis? Essays on the New Philology*. On "New Medievalism", which brought together philological approaches and critical reflection on medieval studies, see Brownlee et al., Nichols et al.
4. For a recent synthesis of the work of the *Annales*, see Burguière.

5. See "Speaking of Medievalism", 445, where Workman speaks of his attempt at retranslating *Parler du Moyen Age* to avoid confusion between medieval studies and medievalism.

6. See Gletzer, but also Richard Utz's medievalist attempt to historicize editions of Chaucer in "The Colony Writes Back".

7. See, among others, the recent Parisian productions of *Merlin ou la Terre Dévastée* by Tankred Dorst, by Jorge Lavelli in 2005 at the Maison de la Culture de Bobigny, and by the collective Les Possédés at the Théâtre de la Colline in 2009.

8. On the Adam story in medieval drama, see Crist. For the same story in the modern theatre, see Bowness; Sacha Guitry, *Adam et Eve,* comedy in two acts, music by Louis Beydts, performed for the first time at the Comédie Française on May 10, 1993; Mikhaïl Boulgakov, *Adam et Eve*, French-language adaptation by Bernard Noël, and the many stagings of this play since it was ordered by Leningrad's Red Theatre in 1930 (directed by Charles Tordjman in 1993, with Jérôme Kircher as Adam; by Daniel Jeanneteau in 2007, with Axel Bogousslavski as Adam); Pascal Bancou, *Adam, Eve et descendance*, first produced in France in Avignon, for the "off festival", Théâtre du Balcon, July 8, 2004.

9. On the editorial history of this text, see Sletsjöe.

10. *Le Mystère d'Adam, suivi du Miracle des fous*, adaptation by A. P. De Lannoy, performed for the first time on Pentecost Sunday on the Place de la Sorbonne in Paris (fête des fous et de l'âne), music by Albert Radoux, particularly *Adam*, 2-22.

11. As immodest as it is, the note is a real press review of the many performances of *Adam* by the Théophiliens. The best example of this enthusiasm remains that of Crémieux.

12. See the pictures of performances by the Théophiliens in Cohen, *Le Jeu d'Adam et Eve*.

13. Supporters of performing the *Jeu d'Adam* in an ecclesiastic setting grew more numerous after the publication of Noomen, especially "Note sur la représentation", 190-193.

14. In a letter to the Dean of the University of Paris dated February 16, 1935, Cohen asked permission (it was granted) to answer an invitation to visit several English universites from March 4 to 11, accompanied by "the medieval section of our artistic and theatrical group, in order to give living illustrations of our lessons on medieval theatre." Archives Nationales, call number AJ 16/5931, file "Correspondance".

15. Cohen's *Le Jeu d'Adam et Eve* only transposed the first part of the medieval text, and its title was different from the original *Ordo Representacionis Ade* (Tours, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms. 927, folio 20).

16. On the relation of Cohen's transpositions to contemporary definitions of translation, especially that of Walter Benjamin, see Dominguez 2014.

17. Between 1935 and 1936, Zumthor played the role of the prophet Abacut in the *Jeu de Marie-Madeleine*, and that of Godin in the *Miracle de Théophile* at the Opéra Comique (131).

18. The recent anthology *Théâtre de la cruauté et récits sanglants en France,* ed. Biet, gives access to a number of pre-classicist dramatic texts, most of which had never been printed before.

19. Including sections on Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and the Nativity (14-25, 25-31).

20. See Marshall, 294 for analyses and pictures of Bryden's production, and on several performances of English medieval cycles in York and Toronto.

21. On the York festival, its historical origins and ramifications in contemporary English drama, see Elliot Junior. This book includes two pages of illustrations depicting the performance of the Creation of Adam and Eve and the Expulsion from Paradise during the York festival of 1969. The first humans are shown dressed in white overalls, and God and the

Angel in white togas, in an outdoor performance on a stage-set of stairs leading up to four connected rib vaults.

22. *Ibidem* on the casting per year at the York Festival from 1951 to 1969, 149-156. Note, among others, Judi Dench playing "An Angel" in 1951, an "Angel of the Resurrection" in 1954, and "Mary" in 1957.

23. Without forgetting their American imitators, studied by Sponsler.

24. Extract from *Theatre for pleasure and Theatre for Instruction* (1936), in *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 76, quoted by Potter.

25. In the interview "L'acteur sacrifiant" that he gave to the philosopher Olivier Dubouclez during the symposium *Le geste de témoigner: un dispositif pour le théâtre*, organized by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac at INHA on March 24 and 25, 2011, Valère Novarina mentioned a collection of medieval orthodox Dormitions as the basis for his staging of *L'Acte Inconnu*, performed in Avignon in the courtyard of the Palais des Papes in 2007 and filmed by Dominique Thiel, and especially scene 11 from Act III, a "Dormition de Polichinelle".

26. See also the list of names of "those who preceded [Adam]", and who form the ultimate soliloquy of the *Drame de la Vie*, 297-319.

27. "I am very sensitive to the vibrations of these little lives confronted with the great mystery of the drama of life – I understand 'mystery' both in the medieval sense and in the sense that Mallarmé gives the term. It is a gigantic intertextuality in which the smallest element refers to the largest." Novarina 2002a, 124.

28. English translation based on my edition of *Le Jeu d'Adam*, 182-186.

29. "Au moment où s'étend partout l'empire de l'humanisme obligatoire, l'auto-idolâtrie — c'est la figure humaine, Adam, la pauvre figure humaine au sol qu'il faut ramasser, recueillir; elle demande à être de plus en plus évidée et creusée. L'homme demande à être représenté dehors, mis hors de lui, représenté en danse et en autopsie." Novarina, 2002b, 175.

30. Polichinelle is first moved about lying on a cart and the relations of birth and death are commented by the protagonists standing in line. Then he is pulled up and walked around in a dance accompanied by chanting, in a counterpoint to the comments that is as moving as it is absurd.

31. "Ces Poëmes, indépendamment de leur extrême rareté, sont ennuyeux à l'excès. Tout y contribue, plan ridiculement construit, vers sans cadences & sans règles, langage qui est devenu presque inintelligible, ignorances & grossieretés sans nombre; en un mot, tout ce qui peut rendre une lecture rebutante, se trouve rassemblé dans ces Pièces."

32. See the introductory scene quoted above.

33. On the notion of the medieval *homo novus*, that was transmitted through exegetical compilations such as the *Aurora* of Petrus Riga, see Hunt.

34. See especially Abélard, whose influence on the *Jeu d'Adam* has been emphasized by Accarie as one of the possible sources of the Pelagianism of this text.

Works cited

Accarie, Maurice, "Théologie et morale dans le *Jeu d'Adam*", *Revue des Langues Romanes* 83 (1978), 123-147.

Bancou, Pascal, *Adam, Eve et descendance*, Paris, Editions Art et Comédie, 2004.

Biet, Christian (ed.), *Théâtre de la cruauté et récits sanglants en France, XVIe-XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Laffont, 2006.

Birge Vitz, Evelyn, Nancy Freeman Regalado and Marilyn Lawrence (eds.), *Performing Medieval Narrative*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2005.

Bouhaïk-Gironès, Marie, Véronique Dominguez and Jelle Koopmans (eds.), *Les pères du théâtre médiéval: examen critique de la constitution d'un savoir académique*, Rennes, PUR, 2010.

Boulgakov, Mikhaïl, *Adam et Eve*, trans. and adaptation by Bernard Noël, Paris, Bernard Dumerchez, 1993.

Bowness, Sophie, "L'*Adam et Eve* de Léger et la renaissance du théâtre médiéval dans les années 30", *Europe* 818-819 (June-July 1997), 148-156.

Brownleee, Kevin, Marina S. Brownlee and Stephen G. Nichols (ed.), *The New Medievalism*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Burguière, André, *L'Ecole des Annales: une histoire intellectuelle*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2006.

Busby, Keith (ed.), *Towards a synthesis? Essays on the New Philology*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1993.

Cerquiglini, Bernard, *Éloge de la variante*, Paris, Seuil, 1989.

Cohen, Gustave (ed.), *Le Jeu d'Adam et Eve*, Paris, Delagrave, 1936.

Crémieux, Benjamin, "Miracle du théâtre en Sorbonne", *Nouvelle Revue Française* 44 (April 1, 1935), 649-650.

Crist, Larry S., "La chute de l'homme sur la scène dans la France du XIIe et du XVe siècle", *Romania* 99 (1978), 207-219.

Dominguez, Véronique (ed. and trans.), *Le Jeu d'Adam*, Paris, Champion, 2012.

———, "Une certaine idée du Moyen Age? Les transpositions de Gustave Cohen pour la scène", in Valérie Cangemi, Alain Corbellari and Ursula Bähler (eds.), *Le Savant dans les Lettres*, Rennes, PUR, 2014.

Doss-Quinby, Eglal, Roberta L. Krueger and E. Jane Burns (eds.), *Cultural Performances in Medieval France. Essays in Honor of Nancy Freeman Regalado*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2007.

Elliot Junior, John R., *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989.

Emerson, Catherine, Mario Longtin and Adrian P. Tudor (ed.s), *Performance, Drama, and Spectacle in the Medieval City: Essays in Honour of Alan Hindley*, Leuven, Peeters, 2010.

Gally, Michèle (ed.), *La trace médiévale et les écrivains d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, PUF, 2000.

Gletzer, Richard G., "The New Medievalism and the (Im)Possibility of the Middle Ages", in Metzger (ed.), *Medievalism and the Academy II*, 104-119.

Guénoun, Denis, *Actions et acteurs. Raisons du drame sur la scène*, Paris, Belin, 2005.

Guitry, Sacha, *Adam et Eve*, in *Théâtre Complet*, Paris, Editions du Club de l'Honnête Homme, vol. 7, 177-193.

Harrison, Tony, *Plays One: The Mysteries*, London, Faber and Faber, 1985.

Hunt, Tony, "The Unity of the *Jeu d'Adam* (*Ordo representacionis Adae*)", *Romania* 96 (1975), 368-388, 497-527.

Koble, Nathalie and Mireille Séguy (eds.), *Passé présent: le Moyen Age dans les fictions contemporaines*, Paris, Editions de la rue d'Ulm, 2009.

———, "L'envers liturgique de la parole novarinienne: l'*Opérette imaginaire* à l'épreuve du sacré", forthcoming.

Lannoy, A.P. de (ed.) *Le Mystère d'Adam, suivi du Miracle des fous*, Paris, A. Charles, 1898.

Maddox, Donald and Sara Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Parisian Confraternity Drama of the Fourteenth Century: The "Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages"*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2008.

Marshall, John, "Modern Productions of Medieval English Plays", in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 290-311.

Metzger, David (ed.), *Medievalism and the Academy II: Cultural Studies, Studies in Medievalism* 10, Cambridge, Brewer, 2000.

Nichols, Stephen G. and R. Howard Bloch (eds.), *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Noomen, Willem, "Le *Jeu d'Adam*. Étude descriptive et analytique", *Romania* 89 (1968), pp. 145-193.

Normington, Katie, *Modern Mysteries: Contemporary productions of Medieval English Cycle Dramas*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2007.

Novarina, Valère, *Le Drame de la Vie*, Paris, POL, 1984.

———, "Pour Louis de Funès", in *Le Théâtre des paroles*, Paris, POL, 1989, 113-150.

———, "L'atelier volant ou le théâtre de l'origine", interview with Céline Hersant, *Europe* 880-881 (August-September 2002), 117-124. [2002a]

———, "L'homme hors de lui," interview with Jean-Marie Thomasseau, *Europe* 880-881 (August-September 2002), 162-175. [2002b]

———, *L'Equilibre de la Croix*, Paris, POL, 2003.

Parfaict, Claude and François, *Histoire du Théâtre François*, Paris, Morin et Flahaut, 1734, vol. 1.

Potter, Robert, "The Brechtian Dimensions of Medieval Drama", in *Renaissance du Théâtre Médiéval*, Louvain, Presses de l'UCL, 2009, 203-218.

Sletsjöe, Leif, "Histoire d'un texte. Les vicissitudes qu'a connues le 'Mystère d'Adam' (1854-1963)", *Studia Neophilologica* 37 (1965), 11-39.

Solterer, Helen, "Performer le passé. Rencontre avec Paul Zumthor", in *Paul Zumthor, l'invention permanente*, ed. Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet and Christopher Lucken, *Recherches et rencontres* 9, Geneva, Droz, 1998, 117-159.

———, *Medieval Roles for Modern Times. Theater and the Battle for the French Republic*, Philadelphia, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.

Sponsler, Claire, *Ritual Imports: Performing Medieval Drama in America*, Ithaca – London, Cornell University Press, 2004.

Utz, Richard, "Speaking of Medievalism: An Interview with Leslie J. Workman," in Richard Utz and Tom Shippey (eds.), *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in honour of Leslie Workman*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1998, 433-449.

———, "The Colony Writes Back: F. N. Robinson's *Complete Works* of Geoffrey Chaucer and the 'Translatio' of Chaucer Studies to the United States", in Karl Fugelso (ed.), *Defining Neo-Medievalism(s), Studies in Medievalism* 19 (2010), 161-203.

Workman, Leslie J., Kathleen Verduin, and David D. Metzger (eds.), *Medievalism and the Academy I, Studies in Medievalism* 9, Cambridge, Brewer, 1999.

Zumthor, Paul, *La Poésie et la Voix dans la Civilisation médiévale*, Paris, PUF, 1984.