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Uncovering Performance in Medieval Scandinavia:  
A Survey and Analysis of Medieval Performance in Scandinavia

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Germanic Languages

by

Kimberly Jo La Palm

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Timothy R. Tangherlini, Chair

The academic study of Scandinavian culture and Scandinavian literature has long ignored the engagement of the Nordic nations in the tradition of drama and performance in medieval Europe. Early drama history scholars like Sophus Birket Smith and G.E. Klemming made claims about a perceived lack of practice based on limited sources and most of the scholars who followed them have accepted those claims as valid. Unfortunately, Birket Smith and Klemming were working with an incomplete corpus and nineteenth-century ideas about what constituted “drama”. Later scholars such as Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker and Terry Gunnell have made great headway in expanding the concept of drama and performance within the field of Scandinavian studies while also clarifying what texts we do, in fact, still have. The work that has been done, however, is still far below the level of depth and complexity of work that has been done with the study of medieval drama and performance in other language traditions. It is my

goal to gather and present a more complete corpus of early Scandinavian drama along with an analysis of the work that has been done to date. The goal of this dissertation is to offer an overview of this long misunderstood tradition and to introduce the international scholarly community to a revised corpus of medieval drama running the gamut from liturgical drama to secular comedy.

The dissertation of Kimberly Jo La Palm is approved.

Arne O. Lunde

Christine N. Chism

James R. Massengale

Timothy R. Tangherlini, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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For my mom, Bonnie.

I miss you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	viii
Vita	x
Introduction - Scholarship and Lack of Scholarship	1
Chapter One - <i>Herre herre hwad skal jak göra</i> : Miracle Plays	11
Chapter Two - <i>Commedier om helgha män</i> : Mystery Plays	42
Chapter Three - <i>Giffwer meg ad dricke fføer</i> : Secular Comedy	72
Chapter Four - <i>Non est hic</i> : Liturgical Enactment	93
Chapter Five - <i>Som hår på en höna</i> : Epiphany Plays and Public Processions	116
Conclusion - What This Means for the Field	139
Bibliography	144

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## VITA

Kimberly received her B.A. in Scandinavian Studies and Theatre & Drama from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2006. She received her M.A. in Scandinavian from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2010 and her C. Phil. in Germanic Languages in 2013.

## INTRODUCTION:

### **Scholarship and Lack of Scholarship**

The study of medieval drama in Scandinavia is a neglected field. There is a relatively small collection of extant scripts from this period, most of which were rediscovered in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As a result, these scripts were introduced to the field by scholars with a strict conception of drama and who observed a rigid historical timeline. These scholars, most notable among them the theater historians and heads of the Royal Libraries in Stockholm and Copenhagen respectively, G.E. Klemming and Sophus Birket Smith, claimed that these select scripts represented the entirety of the history of pre-Reformation performance in Scandinavia. Their conclusions remained largely unchallenged and unexplored throughout much of the twentieth century. Hans Wiers-Jensen, Alf Kjéllen, Bert Möller, Audrey Ekdahl Davidson, Leif Søndergaard, and Leif Stedstrup among others have published studies that deal in part or in depth with aspects of Scandinavian performance related to the medieval tradition while Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker have included a brief overview of the period in their history of Scandinavian theater. Terry Gunnell and Bertha Philpotts have postulated an early medieval tradition based on theories of the performance of Eddic poetry, but scholars such as Kjéllen, Henrik Schück and even Gunnell himself have cited a lack of primary sources and the work of earlier scholars, including Klemming and Birket-Smith, as their evidence for a lack of practice in the late medieval period.

While it is true that the surviving evidence is rather limited compared to what might be found in Germany or England from the same time period, this evidence is not nearly as sparse as previously assumed. No one has done an extensive study of the entire field that challenges the

claim that Scandinavians simply did not participate in the tradition of performance evidenced on the continent. This dissertation offers that challenge through an application of contemporary definitions of drama and performance as well as a historical and contextual study of the remaining texts that aims to identify evidence of an earlier tradition in later sources. This application of modern theories of performance along with original research and an extensive literature review that covers all known scholarship in the field has extended the corpus of primary sources from the five or six scripts referenced by nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars to more than sixty primary sources. These additional sources have extended the possibilities for research in the field of medieval Scandinavian drama. In addition, the information uncovered has led to a revised understanding of the way in which Scandinavians engaged in performance traditions at this time, drawing on the history of school performance in the renaissance period that had previously been assumed to be the product of post-Reformation Humanism and the growth of Scandinavian court culture.

As a field independent of the tradition of any one national culture or literature, medieval drama encompasses a number of different genres and styles of performance which date from the tenth century onward. Medieval drama scholars typically divide the field into five categories: Liturgical drama, Miracle Plays, Mystery Plays (or Miracle and Mystery Plays as one), Morality Plays, and Secular Comedy (or farces and masques). These fields are negotiable as they are simply a tool meant to facilitate discussion of the texts. *Miraculum* (miracle), and *Mysterium* (mystery) were used by medieval sources to describe certain performances based on their subject matter, as well as the terms *ludos* and *commedia* which refer more generally to scripted performance. Some of these genres are well represented in one geographic or political context while they are nearly or completely absent elsewhere. Shrovetide farce, for example, was quite

popular in fifteenth century Germany and particularly in the city of Nurnberg, but only survives in a handful of examples from other locations. Mystery plays staged in celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi were wildly popular in England for several centuries and, while mystery plays themselves are found all over Europe, the elaborate tradition that thrived in England never developed elsewhere. For this reason, we cannot dismiss inconsistencies in the number or quality of the remaining texts from Scandinavia. Their simple existence is proof of engagement with the practice. Detailed study of these texts is necessary to draw conclusions about the way in which the Scandinavian tradition was manifested.

Most Scandinavianists, including most theater history scholars, believe that the tradition of performance only became an established practice in Scandinavia with the Reformation and the development of student performance as a pedagogical tool. Evidence suggests, however, that student performance was an established practice by the mid-1400s at the latest and likely much earlier. The relative abundance of surviving dramatic texts from the post-Reformation period must then be attributed to factors beyond simply the development of Humanistic pedagogy. While it is true that a fondness on the part of the Lutheran leadership (including Luther himself) for the use of drama in education likely contributed to an expansion of the practice, pedagogical drama was not introduced by the Lutheran church. The destruction and confiscation of church property by the crown that accompanied the Reformation in both Sweden and Denmark-Norway is a better explanation for the limited number of surviving sources than is a complete lack of practice. The remaining sources all suggest that performance was commonplace and not an exception or a particularly special event.

There is a small collection of letters, documents and other supplementary evidence dating back as early as the mid-1400s that reference student performance. In several cases this includes

performance for a public audience – meaning that young Scandinavian students were responsible for sharing the tradition of performance that was often assumed by community members or members of craft guilds on the continent and in Britain. Such civic performances are not attested in Scandinavia and this absence of secondary civic records has contributed to the misunderstanding of Scandinavian performance history on the part of scholars. In Britain, for example, where the city councils and other municipal authorities took an active part in organizing and funding (or receiving revenue from) public performances, there is a relative wealth of such secondary records – accounting that considers the cost to the city for a public festival, for instance, or guild records that include receipts related to the mounting of plays. Several of the cities involved in the Corpus Christi processions kept official copies of the scripts in public records or have documentation of city ordinances or legal proceeding related to disputes over money, location or rights associated with these plays.

In Scandinavia, where the vast majority of public performance was undertaken (and funded by or provided funding for) boys at the local schools, there is little or no public record of performance. An exception to this is a court document from Bergen regarding a dispute between the local Cathedral school and a community member who attempted to usurp their Epiphany performance in the public marketplace in 1609. This record, however, documents only a dispute. Civic authorities had no responsibility for this performance beyond the granting of permission to use a public space and thus no other reason exists for documentation in the public record.

It is useful to apply Sarah Beckwith's discussion of the York Corpus Christi cycle to the Scandinavian texts. Beckwith argues that the English festivals reinforced late medieval social structure and civic organization. The small size and late development of significant urban centers in Scandinavia suggests that complex community building events were unnecessary or

undeveloped at such an early stage. The usefulness of performance as part of the scholarly project, however, is evidenced early on and appears to thrive in Scandinavia for centuries. The different channels through which performance tradition developed in Scandinavia versus the continent means that evidence of a history of performance will be found in different sources in Scandinavia than elsewhere – in school records rather than public records, for example.

Beyond the contribution of student and secular organizations in the development of drama in Scandinavia is the engagement in the liturgical tradition that is also documented throughout Europe. Many scholars of Scandinavian drama have all but ignored the relatively extensive collection of Scandinavian liturgical sources. Richard McCall addresses the issue of the distinction between liturgical performance and drama in his 2007 study, *Do This: Liturgy as Performance*. Liturgical drama – the performance of short skits as part of the liturgy itself – were not considered drama until the early twentieth century and the work of the theater historian E.K. Chambers. Their inclusion in this broad category continues to be the source of some debate. As Michael L. Norton argues in a recent book on this topic, the performances were not considered anything more (or rather, anything less) than a part of the liturgy in which they were included at the time of their recording (Norton 2015, 89). This argument restricts the field, in essence, to medieval *theater* – or scripted performance undertaken with the goal of entertainment and/or education, a restriction which has been a significant impediment to sustained work in the field of Scandinavian medieval drama.

McCall argues for an expanded discussion of "performance" based on the field of performance studies which defines any action that conveys meaning as a form of performance. Performance Studies, originally promoted by the collaboration between the theater scholar and artist Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Turner considers action as a signifier in a

semiotic system. Within the field of Performance Studies any action that negotiates a meaning for the viewer qualifies as performance. McCall cites Marvin Carlson, Victor Turner and Noam Chomsky saying, "The word performance has come to denote not only a "show put on by a performer for an audience" but also a many faceted model for approaching all of the reality which can only be, for human beings, symbolic and enacted in our institutions, relationships, art and rituals" (McCall 2007, 3). With this concept in mind, many performance studies scholars see the liturgy itself as a performative event. Just as Turner's work with the cultural, social and religious rituals of the Ndembu people in central Africa identifies ritual as performance, the religious rituals associated with the Catholic Church are the performance of religious, cultural and social meaning. McCall does not dismiss this claim, but rather focuses on what he calls "the basic structures of enactment" which are demonstrated in enactment as manifested in staged drama as well as in the liturgy (Ibid).

For the purposes of this survey, I have applied McCall's discussion of enactment in order to identify the remnants of representational enactment in medieval Scandinavia. Essentially, I have identified evidence of the intentional representation of a third party in any form. Performance therefore need not be understood strictly as the self-identified performance of "a play" as referenced by Norton, but includes any form of action that communicates a narrative through enactment. This definition allows me to include all the forms of performance broadly identified by medieval drama scholars as "drama" while also allowing me to focus my attention on a specific subset of categories on the "continuum of performance," as McCall refers to it (McCall 2007, 5).

For the most part, I have followed the pattern of genre distinction established for the field of medieval drama studies by previous scholars and have separated my analysis of the known

texts into five chapters. There are extant Scandinavian examples of each of the genres listed above with the exception of the morality play. Although we have later morality plays from Scandinavia and the argument has been made by some for the inclusion of a few of the Nordic texts into the category of medieval morality play, I disagree with these arguments for reasons that will be discussed in Chapter Three. Instead I have substituted the category of Epiphany Plays and Public Processions in Chapter Four – a category which I feel better exemplifies the ways in which the medieval performance tradition in Scandinavia diverged from that of the continent, therefore proving an active engagement in the creative process on the part of Scandinavian tradition participants.

Rather than discussing liturgical enactment first, as is often the case in discussions of medieval performance that extend across genres due to the chronology of the source material, I have chosen to begin my discussion with an analysis of the remaining Miracle and Mystery plays. This allows me to preface my entire discussion with an explanation of the timeline of late medieval performance. It is a well-established scholarly convention to adapt the historical timeline between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean. While it is readily accepted that the Italian Renaissance began in the late fourteenth/early fifteenth centuries, most scholars would place the beginning of the Northern Renaissance almost a century later in the late fifteenth century. In Scandinavia, this timeline could be extended further, aligning the Nordic Renaissance with the firm establishment of Protestantism and the development of Scandinavian court culture in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Thus the sixteenth century – the years between the breakup of the Kalmar Union and the official political breaks between Sweden and Rome and between Denmark-Norway and Rome and the establishment of the state churches and powerful crowns – is read as a transition period between the medieval (or pre-Reformation) and

the Nordic Renaissance. The drama that developed during this period reflects the sweeping cultural and political changes that were taking place at this time. Chapters One and Two highlight the movement from Catholic performance practice to Protestant performance while reaffirming the early significance of student performance in the north.

Chapter Three relies heavily on the work of Leif Stedstrup, the Danish historian and literary scholar who has done more for the study of early Nordic performance than anyone before or since. The discussion of the position of the remaining Danish farces begun by Stedstrup and expanded on here to include an extended discussion of the two remaining Swedish texts as well, serves to position Scandinavia within the larger European performance tradition. While previous scholars had dismissed translations of known works from the German tradition, this chapter uses those translated texts to develop a narrative of the interface and exchange of cultural traditions between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe, in particular through the well-developed economic and political relationships between the Nordic and German states.

Chapters Four and Five deal with the history of liturgical and liturgically related performance as well as the known history of public enactment in Scandinavia. As mentioned above, the discussion of Epiphany plays – a form of public secular performance that seems to have developed out of continental liturgical practices and enjoyed an extended popularity in Scandinavia – highlights the ways in which Scandinavians engaged in the performance tradition and adapted it to suit their cultural and political environment. In addition, this chapter covers a number of examples of non-liturgical processional enactment – using the theories put forth by Max Harris in connection to his discussion of the feast of fools to highlight the significance of the interaction between secular and church sponsored performance in the medieval period.

Chapter Five specifically addresses the *quem quaeritis* trope and its Scandinavian variants. The *quem quaeritis*, a reenactment of the visit of the Marys to the tomb of Christ that was part of the Easter liturgy, also referred to as the *Visitatio Sepulcri*, is the most common example of liturgical drama across Europe. As might be expected then, it is also the best preserved example of such practice in Scandinavia as well. This chapter reinforces the connections between Scandinavia and the continent while moving back in time into the undisputed Catholic medieval era. In addition to a review of the remaining text based sources that have been studied more closely by the musicologist Audrey Ekdahl Davidson, Chapter Five also presents a number of sculptural sources – *kristigrav* (Christ graves) from Sweden and Denmark that were used to stand in for the crucified Christ in these liturgical performances. There are nearly as many (and possibly more) examples of Scandinavian *kristigrav* as there are textual sources of this tradition, a testament to the significance of this practice in Scandinavia.

By incorporating liturgical and liturgically related performance as well as unscripted secular performance into the discussion of the Scandinavian performance tradition, drama is acknowledged as something more than just the *miraculum* and *mysterium* that so closely resemble the structure of modern theater. This also opens up the possibility to explore evidence of performance beyond just extant scripts. As yet there are no known references to the performance of miracle and mystery plays outside of the scripts themselves from earlier than 1509 although there are several references to liturgical and liturgically related performance that have been largely excluded from the list of available evidence. The sources gathered here, and included in the sixty-odd sources mentioned above, are all primary sources – scripts, artworks, records or references that indicate a living tradition for those responsible for their recording. The sources themselves do not all date to the pre-Reformation period – a selection of them reference

traditions that were active as late as the nineteenth century – but they all demonstrate medieval origins. The majority of the sources included here can be dated either to the late medieval period or to the transitional sixteenth century when the Catholic traditions of the past began to change and adapt to the new Lutheran state religions. There are no entirely new archival finds in this collection. While the research for the project did include analyzing and verifying these primary sources as well as locating sources that were referenced but uncited by other scholars, all of these sources were known previously. This collection is the first time that they have been explored and combined as a corpus the collective study of which serves as evidence of a larger tradition. My study thus establishes early Scandinavian performance as the norm, not a select few texts as an exception, while also promoting further study in this field, by foregrounding the social context of a range of performances. The contextual evidence is important for rounding out our understanding of the history of a practice that may never have had a written record or for which written records may have been lost due to age, neglect or political considerations. These inclusions serve to better align the study of Scandinavian medieval drama with the study of European medieval drama as a whole.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### **Herre herre hwad skal jak göra: Miracle Plays**

The best recognized examples of performance in the late medieval period are miracle and mystery plays. These narrative, scripted performances most closely reflect the understanding of drama that has dominated the discourse on theater and performance for centuries – and most certainly in the nineteenth century when Scandinavianists were rediscovering the surviving miracle and mystery texts from Sweden and Denmark. The small number and late provenance of northern texts compared to the large number of surviving texts from Germany, France and Britain were interpreted as proof of a lack of any earlier extended tradition of performance in the north. Closer analysis of these scripts and a revised, twenty-first century conception of performance say otherwise.

Miracle and Mystery plays are often wrongly conflated into the same genre, despite there being a difference between the two terms. Miracle plays, in the strict sense, refer to plays about saints and the lives of saints. They are often didactic in that they suggest that the viewer seek out the guidance of the saints to address their worldly concerns. Mystery plays, on the other hand, are reenactments of Biblical narratives, or narratives found in the gospels – regardless of whether or not their source text is canonical. Like Miracle plays, they serve didactic and entertainment purposes as they are performed by non-clergy outside of the church. As these types of performance became increasingly more popular, they also became increasingly irreverent, taking a less serious approach to religious material than had been done when these performances were solely the product of the church.

In addition to three full miracle play scripts from pre-reformation Scandinavia, there is also an auction catalogue from 1717 that lists *comœdiæ sacræ* (sacred comedies) that are attributed either to Bishop Henrik of Linköping or "circa ejus tempus" (Brenner 1717, 13; written around his time)<sup>1</sup>. Bishop Henrik of Linköping could refer to one of two men as there were two Linköping Bishops named Henrik. The first sat from 1258 until 1283 and very little is known about him. The second, Henrik Tidemansson, sat from 1465 until 1500 and left behind a great deal of personal writing, including works of poetry. The catalogue does not specify which Henrik is meant, but it seems safe, under the circumstances, to assume that Henrik Tidemansson is the Bishop Henrik in question. Tidemansson's time would then date the lost *comœdiæ sacræ* to the late 1400s – exactly the same age as the earliest acknowledged example of a narrative dramatic text from Scandinavia, *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*, a Swedish miracle play.

The surviving Scandinavian miracle plays are part of a century of cultural change. While very few of them were recorded prior to the date of the official break with the Catholic Church in their respective countries, there are several texts spread across the sixteenth century (and the beginning of the seventeenth century), that demonstrate stylistic influences that are medieval in origin while also being part of a new Lutheran tradition of performance. The extant works straddle the line between the Catholic past and the Lutheran future.

The political separation between the Swedish and Danish states and the authority of Rome does not translate into a drastic and immediate cultural revolution. In Sweden, the new Swedish Church did not officially declare itself Lutheran until the 1570's, despite the original break happening in 1527. From 1397 to 1523, Sweden, Denmark and Norway were part of a

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<sup>1</sup> All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

voluntary union under the Danish crown, known as the Kalmar Union. Political unrest in the late 1400s and early 1500s, particularly among Swedish nobles, led to the dissolution of the union in 1523 following the Swedish War of Succession. Gustav Trolle, the archbishop of Uppsala from 1515-1521 had supported Christian II of Denmark and opposed the dissent of the Swedish nobles. His participation in the Stockholm Bloodbath of 1520, in which Christian II had roughly eighty members of the Swedish nobility beheaded in Stockholm's main square, resulted in Trolle being driven into exile by Gustav Vasa and his followers. Meanwhile Olaus and Laurentiis Petri, brothers and students of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, had already begun disseminating Luther's ideas in Sweden. Johannes Magnus, who had been Vasa's choice as Trolle's successor, was denied the position by Pope Clement VII because he believed that Trolle's dismissal had been unfounded. Vasa ignored the orders of the pope and assigned Magnus to the archbishop's seat anyway, a move which did not make him popular with Rome – or with Johannes Magnus. Shortly thereafter, Magnus, who was already unhappy that the Petri brothers had the ear of the King, was sent abroad by Vasa, presumably in a diplomatic role, but was never to return, as Vasa replaced him with Laurentiis Petri and officially declared Sweden free of Vatican influence shortly after his departure. Despite these dramatic political events, all of which unfolded in less than ten years, it took roughly fifty years for the Swedish Church to officially declare themselves Lutheran. Sweden was, therefore, not fully Protestant until more than a generation after Gustav Vasa's clash with Clement VII. While the King and the nobles may have seen fit to separate themselves from the church because of political disagreements, it is not so easy to change the faith and practice of an entire population.

The story is similar in Denmark. Although the Danish church almost immediately called itself Lutheran upon its formation in 1536, the break itself was a longer, less blatantly political

process. Christian II had opposed Lutheran teachings when he was king of Denmark-Norway and briefly Sweden between 1513 and 1523, but wavered in his personal beliefs after he abdicated the throne. His uncle and successor, Frederik I was officially Catholic, but allowed the spread of Lutheranism to continue, even encouraging it in certain respects (such as providing protection to the Lutheran reformer Hans Tausen so that he could preach Luther's teachings publically without fear of repercussions by the Church). Frederik's son, Christian III, was a Lutheran for personal religious reasons and made Denmark and its possessions Lutheran to match his personal beliefs. Unlike Vasa in Sweden, his reasons for cutting ties with Rome were not purely political, although political concerns seem to have been what kept Christian I and Frederik I from breaking ties with the Vatican earlier.

Hans Tausen was the most influential of the Danish Reformers and had also been a student at Wittenberg, although after Luther had already been expelled by Rome. Luther had returned to Wittenberg to live by the time Tausen was a student. As a student, Tausen was influenced by the dramatic events and influential men who surrounded him. Back in Denmark, he developed a following – and a number of enemies. Frederik I made Tausen his personal chaplain in order to protect him from the wrath of his Catholic opponents. After Christian III's official split with the Church and the seizure of Church property by the crown, Lutheranism spread more rapidly, as was so ordered. Nevertheless, the cultural transition between being a Catholic country, observant of the Pope's authority, and being a firmly Protestant nation in name and practice, took a great deal of cultural adaptation on the level of the populace and the new church itself. As a result of this, the 1500s in Sweden and Denmark-Norway were a period of great cultural change. It is therefore far too simplistic to think of the sixteenth century as distinctly Catholic or Lutheran. In Scandinavia it was neither and both at the same time.

There is also an assumption that Scandinavian Lutheranism was virulently conservative from the very beginning. Actually, the strict conservatism often associated with the early Lutheran Church in Scandinavia was the product of this transition period, not an immediate effect of the political Reformation. The early Lutheran church never dismissed performance as indulgent or papist. Just the opposite. A Swedish ordinance from 1572 describes performance as an effective pedagogical tool (Marker 2006, 19). In an effort to retrain the public and to raise a new generation of school boys to be transmitters of the new Lutheran teachings, the church and the schools took advantage of didactic performance to highlight Lutheran doctrine (Carlson 1973, 35).

Marvin Carlson, makes a distinction between “the church drama of the Middle Ages” and “school drama of the Renaissance,” using the rather arbitrary line discussed above (Carlson 1973, 22). He marks the beginning of the Scandinavian renaissance at roughly 1500, or just before the Reformation. He claims that medieval performance in Scandinavia was entirely liturgical and school performance is something that is the product of the Reformation and universities in Scandinavia. Carlson states that medieval church drama “gave way to [later] school drama” (Carlson 1973, 22). This simply is not true. There is evidence that must be considered of performance undertaken exclusively by young scholars at an early period.

The Royal Archive in Stockholm has a letter that was sent by Hans Jacobi, a Catholic priest in Söderköping, to his brother in Stockholm in 1506. In this letter, he refers to a “*mysterium resurrectionis*” being performed by students in his school. While there is no written record of the play itself, it seems quite clear by the language – language which specifically refers to the performance of a “mysterium” – that this was not simply students performing the liturgical *quem quaeritis* dramas. There is no evidence indicating that students would have ever been

involved in that type of performance. Further, as pointed out by Michael L. Norton, at no point did the practitioners of liturgical drama refer to these performances as anything but liturgy (Norton 2015, 89). The fact that Father Jacobi uses language that specifically references performance, indicates that the '*mysterium resurrectionis*' in question was a consciously undertaken performance and not a religious ritual that made use of performative elements. A "*mysterium*" was undoubtedly a play.

In a similar letter from Odense dated 1447, Birket Smith cites a Catholic priest and educator writing about students performing Shrovetide farces at the proposed Cathedral School in Odense, using language that specifically points to performance as performance, not performance as an element of religious ritual: "cum scholaribus (suis) . . . choreas et ludos carnispriviales publice . . . celebrari" (Birket Smith 1874, 12). The Latin word "ludos" works in the same way as the word "spel" or "spil" in the Scandinavian languages or the word "play" in English. The noun that refers to a scripted performance is the same as the verb that indicates the action involved in performing. An actor "plays" in English just as in Swedish, an actor "spelar" and in Danish and Norwegian, an actor "spiller." One also plays a game, "spelar ett spel" or "spiller et spil." In Latin, one "ludas ludo." Again, it seems clear that the Danish prior who wrote the letter meant that the students would be performing plays.

The early Reformation period – the years between 1527/1536 and roughly 1600, must be looked at as a cultural transition period. The plays being performed by school children during this period are the product of an earlier tradition that was carried on and elaborated by the Lutheran school masters. As Carlson points out, the school performances also functioned as court performance at this time unlike elsewhere where professional companies with royal patrons developed much earlier (Carlson 1973, 22). The survival of texts that begins almost

simultaneously with the early years after the Reformation is most likely connected to the association that these late school dramas had with the court. A spike in popularity and an organized secular patronage that was interested in preserving the texts seems a more likely explanation than simply a lack of earlier practice. In fact, if the school performances were happening in Catholic schools, which is evidenced by the Odense and Söderköping letters and the Hansen plays, then any recorded texts would have been confiscated with the rest of the possessions of the church by Gustav Vasa and Christian III.

Carlson and others, including Marker and Marker, Klemming and Birket Smith cite the relative wealth of dramatic sources post Reformation as evidence of the adoption of the tradition in the Renaissance period. Carlson saw the pre-Reformation texts as purely church performance and therefore separate from the secular tradition evidenced later. Similarly, Klemming and Birket Smith dismiss church performance as something separate from drama proper. Marker and Marker pay greater attention to the early tradition, refusing to dismiss it out of hand, but as their work is a history meant to cover all drama in Scandinavia to date, they devote far more attention to the period in which evidence is more readily available without delving too deeply into the question of what became of the evidence of an earlier performance tradition. There are several possible explanations for this increase in texts which still acknowledges the earlier tradition and its connections with later secular performance. In the case of the miracle and mystery plays there are at least two reasonable explanations for the lack of pre-Reformation texts: the seizure of church property as discussed above or innovations made to movable type.

The early school plays were a continuation of an earlier tradition. Performance by school boys had been an important part of the curriculum since at least the mid-1400s, and in all practical estimations much earlier. This tradition would continue into the early 1800s,

particularly in the case of epiphany processions and wise-men plays. As the schools at this time were, for the most part, under the auspices of the church, the seizure of church property by both Gustav Vasa and Christian III easily accounts for missing texts. While there are a number of Catholic texts that have survived, there are an even greater number of texts that were destroyed, recycled or simply left to decompose. The first record of the Christiern Hansen manuscript is from a 1739 auction catalogue. The book, described as "*Nogle gamle ganske Comoedier, i sær De Sancte Virgine Dorothea*" (A collection of rather old plays, including the virgin saint Dorothea) was in the collection of Peder Terpager, the noted Danish historian, and was sold after his death. The Royal Library in Copenhagen was willed the manuscript in 1785, along with several others from the collection of a Count and antiquities collector named Otto Thott (Søndergaard 1989, 23). It is uncertain how Terpager acquired the manuscript or how it managed to survive. It is likely, however, that the manuscript (now known as MS Thott 780 folio), having been the private possession of a priest, escaped the confiscation of church property by the crown and passed from private owner to private owner until making its way into the Royal Library's collection.

The provenance of the Askeby Codex (AM 191 folio), which contains *De uno peccatore qui promerit gratium* (*On a sinner deserving of grace*), identified by Klemming as the oldest Swedish play, is similar (Klemming 1883, 1). Again, the text was recorded by a priest, this time Johannes Gerardus, the chaplain at the Askeby Cloister, rather than a school teacher such as Hansen. Gerardus seemed to take a great interest in recording narrative texts for his own personal use and at the very least, the section of the Askeby codex containing *De uno peccatore qui promerit gratium* would have been in the personal collection of Gerardus, not a part of the cloister's library (Wright 1988, 51). The nuns living in Askeby Cloister were forced to leave in

the 1530s and their possessions were then confiscated (Lejon 2008, 166). Further research would be required to discover, if possible, where Gerardus went between 1499 and 1530 but the benefit of this research for my purposes is uncertain. It seems unlikely that a chaplain would remain at the same cloister for forty years, particularly in the last years when the nuns themselves were granted permission to stay simply by virtue of being nuns (and not priests). The fate of Gerardus is unknown. His book survived, however, and at some point passed into the hands of Elias Brenner, the Swedish book and coin collector, as Brenner's name is written in the margins of one of the pages. The manuscript catalogue published on the website [handrit.is](http://handrit.is) claims that "Árni Magnússon probably bought the manuscript" when Brenner's collection was auctioned off after his death in 1717, thus bringing it to its current home in the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection at the University of Copenhagen (National and University Library of Iceland 2016). There is no surviving record to confirm or deny this claim, although it seems as reasonable as any other conclusion. These two manuscripts and the three and one half scripts that they contain are the only texts of miracle or mystery plays that can be definitively dated before the political break with the Vatican in their respective countries of origin. These texts, along with *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce*, a Danish miracle play recorded after the Reformation but bearing evidence of much earlier composition, are the only texts identified by Klemming and Birket Smith as medieval drama without hesitation and it is this misidentification that has led to the scarcity of research in this field (Birket Smith 1874, Klemming 1883).

By 1450, Johannes Gutenberg had advanced movable type through the use of a metal alloy, making the letters more durable and easier to use, which revolutionized the way people consumed and shared information. By 1500, there were hundreds of printers in Europe making use of this technology and making books, leaflets and other information easy to disseminate and

far less expensive to acquire than hand copied manuscripts. There were only a handful of printers in Scandinavia prior to the Reformation; both printers in Denmark (one in Odense and one in Copenhagen) also ran print shops abroad. One of these men, Johannes Snell, who owned the Odense press, also owned the Stockholm press. Another press in Vadstena and one in Uppsala came later – 1490s and 1510 respectively. There was no press in Norway proper until the mid-1500s. None of these presses, it seems, did much business. For quite some time (well into the late 1500s) the majority of the printed material sold on the Scandinavian market came from Germany – either Lübeck, where the first book for the Scandinavian market, a copy of the *Missale Aboense* was printed, or Rostock. The introduction of printing and the distant primary printers for the Scandinavian market further explains the sudden abundance of extant sources dating to the mid to late 1500s. Printing accounts for the considerable increase in surviving sources throughout Europe. The advantage to printing was that multiple good quality copies of a book or other written material was able to be produced in a mere fraction of the time it took to produce a copy of a text prior to the advent of the printing press. It could take a scribe months or in some cases years, to reproduce a text and thus every manuscript was a wholly unique publication. Even in the instance that there are multiple copies of the same hand-written text, there are always differences created by the process of manual copying. The printing press largely eliminated this. Provided a text was produced on the same press in the same run, the pages would be largely identical (forgiving small aesthetic differences that could be the result of the printing process). These texts were then able to be distributed to multiple buyers. When there are multiple copies in multiple places, the chances of surviving any number of obstacles from the fires that plagued European cities for hundreds of years to simple age and decay, increases exponentially. The school plays from the Renaissance period that have been discussed by other scholars are

largely printed texts. Every text that can be definitively dated to the pre-Reformation period is hand-written.

The oldest piece of non-liturgical drama that that exists from Scandinavia is a play from Östergötland titled *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*. Despite being religious in theme and preserved in the papers of a priest, it is not a dramatized biblical excerpt meant to be performed as part of the liturgy, but rather it is a Marian miracle play recorded in the 1490s. It is written in Swedish, with the exception of the Latin title, making it Scandinavia's oldest surviving vernacular narrative drama. The text is preserved in the Askeby Codex which is owned by the Arnamagnæan Institute and kept in their Copenhagen collection. The paper folio, AM 191 folio is 137 leaves, of which nine of those leaves contain the text of *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*. According to David Kornhall, who studied the manuscript in 1959 for his dissertation about the manuscript's version of *Karl Magnus Saga* that precedes *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*, it contains the handwriting of seven different scribes and is made up of at least four separate books that were bound together at a later date (Kornhall 1959, 66). The end of *Karl Magnus* includes a note dated November 3, 1492 and signed by "johannis gerardi cappellani monesterij askaby." The verso side of the last page of *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* (93v) contains four small notations, the first one dated January 18, 1497. The notations on 93v are in the same hand as *Karl Magnus Saga* and *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*; presumably that of Gerardus, since the name and date at the end of *Karl Magnus* are also in this hand (Kornhall 1959, 67, 69). As Stephen K. Wright and Kornhall have both pointed out, unless Gerardus was skipping pages and then filling them in later with entries that were conveniently the perfect length, it is fair to assume that *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* was recorded sometime between November 3, 1492 and January 18, 1497 (Wright 1988, 52).

The action of the play involves a sinner, a man named Vratislaus, who has realized late in life that he is bound for hell. He appeals to a saint named Procopius and asks the saint to intervene on his behalf. Procopius tells him that he is too far gone for his help but that the Virgin Mary is good and forgiving and is, at this point, the only one who might be able to save his soul. Vratislaus fears that Mary will snub him and hesitates to seek the counsel of the Virgin. His fears are not unfounded and she does initially turn her back on him. After some convincing, Mary agrees to speak to Christ on his behalf. The next scene is a mirror of the previous, this time with Mary appealing to Christ on behalf of Vratislaus. Christ is initially hesitant, as Mary had been, but eventually agrees to forgive the doomed man, on the word of his merciful mother.

When G.E. Klemming published this play in 1883, he claimed that it was most likely a translation, based that on the Latin title and the foreign characters (Klemming 1883, 1). Wright argues, however, that it is quite likely that it was written not only by a Swedish author, but by an author from Östergötland. He cites specific details of the language and mentions that there is no other play still in existence in any language that resembles *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* in terms of plot or theme (Wright 1988, 55). In fact, there is also no other version of this particular story in any form. Wright also follows up on the character names and argues that there were only two Saints named Procopius and that one of them, a Bohemian monk who lived in the eleventh century, was known in legend to have had a connection with the Bohemian royal family and with a Prince Bratislaus in particular. This connection with a Bohemian legend means that, despite the likelihood that this text was originally composed in Swedish, there is evidence of a clear “foreign” influence.

There are several possible explanations for a Bohemian legend having made its way into the repertoire of a Swedish author. It is possible that the author was a student or a priest who had

attended a foreign university or lived in a foreign monastery. It is also possible that merchants brought the legend with them when they travelled to or from Scandinavia. The means through which a Swedish author learned of a Bohemian legend, however, is a mystery that can never be solved. Meanwhile, the fact that the play exists, and that it exists in Swedish, does prove that there was an active engagement with performance traditions and legends with continental origins in fifteenth century Östergötland.

Previous scholarship regarding this *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* has been limited, though not entirely non-existent. The most in-depth discussions that I have found to date were done by Wright in 1988 and 1993. The 1988 article, published in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, discusses the play in terms of language and staging (or what can be gleaned about staging from the little evidence that remains), while the 1993 article is a reevaluation of the text that focuses on the iconography and this play's relationship to the representation of Mary in visual art from across medieval Scandinavia and the continent.

As Wright discusses, this play is not the finest example of medieval drama. That is not to say that it is so poorly written as to be unworthy of any serious attention beyond its status as the only surviving example of its genre. It most certainly is not. The author was clearly quite familiar with the conventions of the medieval stage and with the traditional format of Marian miracle plays. He also had an understanding of rhyme and meter, but it is in the language in particular that the play falls short. It is written in four-stress couplets, which are rather repetitive, ending in rhymes that often seem forced. Wright does call the language "serviceable" (he means that as a compliment) and that the style is a clear indicator that this piece was intended as "popular entertainment rather than as an academic set piece." (Wright 1988, 53) While I cannot disagree with this conclusion, I would add that the author, though likely not an experienced playwright,

was not without a certain level of education and experience with cross-cultural influences on late medieval religious drama, all of which are more productive lines of inquiry for this study than is the language alone.

What Wright calls “tag lines for the sake of rhyme and meter” seem to be an attempt at dramatic device and thematic resonance (Wright 1988, 53). Vratislaus repeats several times that he has “neither mother nor father” and “neither brothers nor sisters” While these claims do, conveniently, fit the rhyme and meter, they are also a way of reiterating for the audience that, despite the fact that Vratislaus may not have earthly connections, he does indeed have a holy mother and father, or brother and sister, so to speak – and so does every lost soul who may be in the audience. Similarly, the repetition of the words “miskunna” (mercy) and “nadh” (grace) can be read as an attempt to reinforce the lesson of the text – that being the Virgin’s infinite capacity for grace. If, as Wright claims, the play was public entertainment, then, as he also claims, the uncomplicated dialogue speaks to an audience without pretension. The lack of elaborate references to external sources also speaks to this same audience.

Mary plays or Marian miracles are a sub-genre unto themselves within the larger designation of “miracle play.” There are several from Germany and France and surprisingly few from England, which is the source of the largest collection of extant medieval drama. The Virgin Mary makes appearances in quite a few of the non-secular plays that are still in existence, but often she has a supporting role. She is most often represented as the eternal and universal mother. Often that means that she is relegated to the side – sometimes quite literally; as Wright discusses in 1993, Mary is usually to one side of the main image in visual art from the period. By contrast, however, in the genre of the Marian miracle play, she is the central figure (Wright 1993, 11-12). The action of the play revolves around Mary’s role as a demi-goddess and her work as a

mediator. They all follow a similar structure, including the Swedish example, with a small but important exception. In the usual structure of Marian miracle plays there is a sinner, who appeals to Mary for salvation. Mary in turn appeals to Christ and then Christ to God the Father on behalf of the sinner. In *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*, however, the sinner first appeals to the Saint Procopius, who directs him to Mary and then Mary appeals to Christ and there is no appeal to God. In both instances, the play follows a familiar tripartite structure, but with a slightly different set of participants (Wright 1988, 57). In the usual structure, Mary is the first step in this celestial hierarchy for the sinner. For the audience, she represents a pathway that leads directly to God. In the case of *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*, Vratislaus, the sinner, is hesitant to go to Mary. He says to Procopius:

Herre herre hwad skal jak göra  
jak rädis hon wil mik enkte hora  
hurw skal jak mik for henne thee  
jak rädis at hon wil mik ekki see  
skemmande gar jak for henne fram  
thy jak är fuller mz last ok skam  
jak hafwer henne inga ära giort  
thy kan iak pröfwa thz hielper [ey]stort  
at jak nw kallar aa henne  
jak rädis thz hon mik ey kenne  
mädan jak är worden swa snöder  
gud gafwe at jag ware dödher  
tha matte jak brennaa j pina  
ok taga lön for synder mina (Klemming 1883, 2-3)

Good sir, good sir, what shall I do?  
I fear that she'll not hear me  
How can I show myself to her?  
I fear that she'll not see me  
Ashamed to stand before her  
Filled with sin and shame  
For I have never honored her  
I am lone to blame  
That I should call upon her now –  
I fear she'll not greet me  
Because I have no worth to her  
God grant that I be dead  
To burn in persecution  
And suffer for my sin

This does not seem to be a casual choice on the part of the playwright, but it is actually a device. As Wright and Patrik Åström discuss, there is an element of realism about Vratislaus, or “affective piety” as Wright calls it (Wright 1988, 64). He is very human here and he openly expresses his remorse for his past wrongs, his fear that he has made himself *persona non grata* to all of the rulers of heaven (including the celestial mediator herself) and his despair and helplessness when, at the end of this speech, he says, in essence “just go ahead and let me burn.” I accept this reading proposed by Wright as a means of demonstrating creative agency on the part of the Nordic author as well as an understanding of the tradition of Marian intercession and the confidence to break with that tradition in order to speak to his specific audience.

As Wright notes in both his 1988 and 1993 articles, the trope of Mary as celestial mediator (*Maria mediatrix*) was common in Medieval Europe. In his second article on the iconography of this play, Wright points to the visual elements in the play, in particular the repetition of a

physical gesture towards the chest (Wright 1993, 10-11). In his appeal to Mary, Vratislaus threatens to end his own life, holding a dagger to his chest. When Mary takes her appeal Christ, she reveals her bare breasts to Him, reinforcing the image of Mary as mother, reminding her son of nursing him as an infant. Christ then indicates the wound in his chest from the spear of a Roman guard. Again the repetition of three reminds the audience of the significance of these actions, but the recognition of Mary as a nursing mother indicates a particularly strong connection to continental traditions in the mid to late 1400s. This image of Mary baring her breasts in an appeal to Christ appears in visual art and literature as well as drama, reaching its peak in Germany and Switzerland at the same time as the Swedish text was being composed and recorded (Wright 1988, 59-60). Wright also points out that, while Marian intercession was a common trope, *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* is the only text that exists in which the act of intercession itself provides the substance of the drama (Wright 1988, 60). This detail, combined with Wright's conclusion that the linguistic markers point to this text as an original Swedish composition and not a translation (Wright 1988, 52), firmly establish a degree of creative agency on the part of the Swedish author that has previously been denied him.

The story of the Bohemian saint, which has puzzled scholars for some time and is what has caused men like G.E. Klemming to conclude that this must be a translation, can be attributed to the considerable contact that existed between the continent and Scandinavia by (and in fact well before) the mid to late fifteenth century. The use of the trope of the bared breast proves a similar argument. Wright provides examples of this trope in frescoes from three separate locations in Denmark (Wright 1993, 20-22) while C.R. Unger, Ole Widing and Hans Bekker-Nielsen discuss a short story of Marian intercession from Iceland that appears in AM 180 d folio following a

copy of *Karlamagnus Saga*<sup>2</sup>. The Danish frescoes are all part of images centered on Christ with Mary as a peripheral figure. The short story involves Mary kneeling before Christ and baring her breast as an act of adjuration on behalf of a sinner, with the story of the sinner's conversion being the central theme of the tale. As Wright claims in his analysis of *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*, Mary and her act of maternal appeal are secondary details, not the focus of the narrative (Wright 1988, 60). The pervasiveness of this theme throughout Scandinavia, including diverse examples from Sweden, Denmark and Iceland, is further evidence of extensive cultural contact between Scandinavia and the continent.

There are two extant miracle plays from sixteenth century Denmark that exhibit clear connections to the late medieval tradition elsewhere on the continent. The first of these plays is *Commædia de Sancta virgine Dorothea*, referred to in Danish as *Dorothea Komædie* (*A comedy of Saint Dorothy*), a miracle play in the medieval tradition about the life of St. Dorothy of Caesarea. *Dorothea Komædie* is found in the Christiern Hansen manuscript from Odense, Thott 780 folio. The inscription identifying Christiern Hansen, “anno mdxxxi Christiernus Ioannis pedagogus Iuuentutis in parrochia diue virginis prelate suo viente magistro Andrea Gloeb” is found at the end of *Dorothea Komædie*.

Whether or not Hansen can be called Denmark's oldest known playwright has been the subject of much debate. The debate over authorship of the MS Thott 780 folio texts has received far more attention than the texts themselves. As Leif Stedstrup notes in *Tre Skolekomædier fra tiden omkring 1530* (2004, *Three school comedies from roughly 1530*), the first mention of the existence of the codex is in the catalogue of items bequeathed to the Royal Library by Otto Thott

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<sup>2</sup> AM 180 d folio is a handwritten copy of a lost medieval manuscript. According to handrit.is, it was copied by Jon Arnórsson. Magnussen had acquired the original the previous year and it was lost in the Copenhagen fire of 1728.

in 1785. In 1786, Rasmus Nyerup published an article in *Minerva* in which he claims that *Dorothea Komædie* must have been inspired by *Passionale Sanctorum* (*The passion of the saints*), a German play from the early sixteenth century, although he attributes authorship of all three manuscript texts to Hansen, ignoring *Henno*, which is incomplete (Stedstrup 2004, 138). Fourteen years later, in *Bidrag til den danske Digtekunsts Historie* (*Contributions to the History of Danish Poetry*), which he co-wrote with Knud Lyne Rahbeck, he reverses his position on authorship of the plays contained in the manuscript. By that time, he had discovered that *Dorothea Komædie* was a translation of Ridder Chilian's Latin play *Chiliani equitis Mellerstatini comædia gloriose parthenices et martiris Dorothee agoniam passionemque depingens* (*Ridder Chilian of Mellerstadt's comedy depicting the agony and passion of the glorious martyr Dorothy*), published in 1507 (Nyerup 1786, 313-315). As a result of this discovery, he concluded that all of the texts in the manuscript must be translations of foreign texts, attributing *Den Utro Hustru* (*The unfaithful wife*) to an unknown German farce and declaring *Paris' dom* (*The judgment of Paris*) a reworking of a play by Hans Sachs. In the following two centuries, at least fifteen other scholars, including Stedstrup and Birket Smith, have tried to analyze the paleography and orthography of MS Thott 780 folio in an attempt to definitively answer the question of authorship of the texts. The result of this has been sixteen different theories about a question that is unanswerable in the absence of new information and very little discussion of the plays themselves.

N.M. Petersen did offer some analysis of the play itself although his conclusion was, according to Stedstrup, that the texts were "uden nogen som helst æstetisk værdi" (Stedstrup 2004, 140; without any aesthetic value whatsoever). As regards *Dorothea Komædie*, Birket Smith says "At give en nærmere Analyse af stykkets Indhold eller Bygning forekommer der mig ikke at

være nogen Grund til, da man ikke blot med Vished véd, at Stykket kun er en Oversættelse, men også kjender Originalen” (Birket Smith 1874, 79; It seems unnecessary to provide a closer analysis of the work’s content and structure, since it is certain not only that the play is a translation, but also when the original is known). He goes on to discuss that although the original Latin text is prose, the Danish translation attributed to Hansen is written in rhyming verse. While he is unwilling to deny the possibility that there may have been a rhyming German edition from which this text was translated, he disagrees with Petersen, who originally claimed as much, and argues that the epilogue, which is not part of the Latin original, points to Danish authorship. The fact that this is the entry containing Hansen’s inscription makes it all the more likely that Hansen himself was the author of the epilogue and the translator responsible for the rhyming couplets (Birket Smith 1874, 80). Therefore, there is actually a great deal that can be learned from an extended study of this translation/adaptation.

In order to build his argument, Birket Smith offers a detailed history of *Vor Frue Skole* (Our Lady School) in Odense, where Hansen claimed to be a *pedagogus Iuuentutis* (school master) in 1531. Anders Glob, who is mentioned in the inscription as *magister* (rector), was indeed the rector of *Vor Frue Skole* in 1531, although there is no record of Hansen at all. According to Birket Smith’s research, Åge Lauridssen became school master in 1529, but it is unknown when Hansen came, when Lauridssen left or how long Hansen stayed (Birket Smith 1874, 83-84). Birket Smith argues that, if Hansen was a teacher at *Vor Frue Skole* in 1531, he must have been a Catholic. Further, that a Catholic would be responsible for translating *Dorothea Komædie* is, to Birket Smith, quite clear. The Protestant church opposed the cult veneration of saints within the Catholic Church and thus a Protestant would not have appreciated the themes presented in the play (Birket Smith 1874, 85). This argument, while weak and

entirely speculative, does offer some insight. Accepting that Hansen was Catholic (which does seem likely considering he worked at a Catholic School in a country that was not yet officially Protestant), it can be concluded that he would have a different relationship, and perhaps a more positive relationship, to a saint's play. Hansen's religion, however, does not prove his level of involvement with the text. Birket Smith himself published an edition of *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce* (A play about Saint Knud, the duke), a play about the Danish Saint Knud, that exists only in a mid-sixteenth century manuscript. It is entirely possible that *Ludos* could have been copied by someone still adhering to Catholicism in the mid-sixteenth century but Lutheranism was the state religion by that time. The pro-Catholic details of this text have been used by Thomas A. DuBois and Niels Ingwersen to identify the date of composition as pre-Reformation, but it is undeniable that the text was copied by someone who likely was not Catholic (DuBois 2008, 169). Thus Birket Smith's argument about the likelihood (or unlikelihood) of Hansen as the translator of *Dorothea Komodie* is entirely speculative and unsupportable.

Stedstrup's own analysis of the orthography and paleography of MS Thott 780 folio considers the theories of every scholar since Nyerup, as well as his own investigation of the manuscript.<sup>3</sup> His conclusion is that Hansen is likely responsible for the inscription at the end of *Dorothea Komodie*, but that the play itself is recorded in a different hand. He further concludes that *Paris' dom*, *Dorothea Komodie* and the *Henno* fragment were recorded by the same copyist while *Den Utro Hustru* is written in a third hand (Stedstrup 2004, 137). Stedstrup offers no postulations about potential foreign sources for the other texts, nor does he engage in the debate over the aesthetic value of the texts or their worthiness of being included in a Danish canon if there is a possibility of non-Danish sources. Instead he offers a diplomatic reprinting of all of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Stedstrup's *Tre Skolekomedier fra tiden omkring 1530* for a review of these studies.

contents of MS Thott 780 folio (including the *Henno* fragment) as well as a thorough analysis of the debate over the text to date.

*Dorothea Komodie* is the earliest concrete example of the exchange of non-liturgical dramatic texts between Scandinavia and the continent. While *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* and the lost *comœdiæ sacræ* of Bishop Henrik clearly show a connection between the dramatic practices of the continent and Scandinavia, *Dorothea Komodie* offers undeniable proof that in addition to themes or practices, actual dramatic texts were also being exchanged. Scholars who have studied the Hansen manuscript are in universal agreement that this book contains the repertoire of or the proposed repertoire of the students at *Vor Frue Skole*. The inscription by the school master (Hansen) which references the debt owed to Glob as rector of *Vor Frue Skole*, makes it clear that this book of scripts was related to student performance. Thus it can be assumed that these plays were performed or were intended to be performed at the time of their recording. The choice to adapt Chilian's prose into rhyming verse – or simply the act of translation itself – speaks to a desire for this text to be shared with a wider Danish speaking audience. The likely means of sharing a dramatic text is performance, making this translation a part of Scandinavian performance history. Chilian's subject matter as well as his choice to write the original play in Latin is reminiscent of the medieval performance tradition. The Danish translator's choice to translate a Catholic play at a Catholic school from Latin into the vernacular is likely a product of the sixteenth century transition from the medieval to Renaissance performance tradition in which such adaptations were a key component of this transition.

The third and final example of a miracle play from Scandinavia is *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce*. The text was recorded in Ringsted in the 1570s by a man named Villum Rasmussen and is preserved in the codex MS Thott 1409 4to, which came into the possession of

the Royal Library in Copenhagen in 1786, along with the other texts willed to them by Otto Thott (Stedstrup 2003, 110). The play itself is an example of a text composed in the style of the medieval miracle plays and therefore must be considered a part of that tradition. It has been recognized by Michael Chesnutt, F.J. Billeskov Jansen and Leif Stedstrup among others as being medieval in origin, despite the late date of the manuscript in which it is contained. It is quite likely that this is a copy of an older play that has not survived. That the play exists in a new copy after the beginning of the Danish Reformation supports the claim that the sixteenth century was a period of cultural transition. Cultural practices and decidedly Catholic creative works were not abandoned completely with the Reformation and thus a hard line cannot be drawn between periods.

The discussion of the history of the texts follows a similar pattern from Birket Smith onward. In his printed edition of the play from 1868, Birket Smith claims that the text was likely composed around 1536 by a Catholic confronted with the changes being brought about by the Reformation. He cites linguistic markers that further situate the text in the early 1500s, although he does consider the possibility that the play is a reworking of an older miracle play composed in Latin, as he is critical of the Danish rhyme and meter (Birket Smith 1868, IX). It is Hans Brix in 1933 who first offers the suggestion that the play was written slightly earlier than Birket Smith claims, with the evil tyrant Magnus as analogous to the evil tyrant Christian II. Brix dismisses Birket Smith's criticism of the language, arguing that the play is written in knittle verse (Stedstrup 2005, 114, 116). Helge Tolberg in 1965, Janne Risum in 1984 and Kerstin Jacobsen in 1998 reiterate the argument that Magnus and Christian II bear striking similarities although Jacobsen argues further that the verse is similar to that found in Rimkronikan from 1495 and that

none of this disproves Birket Smith's suggestion that the play is a reworking of an earlier Latin text.

Unlike *Dorothea Komodie* and *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium, Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce* has been almost universally accepted as having been a Danish play from the beginning. Not only was Saint Knud a Danish Duke and the hero of a local legend, but the manuscript is from Ringsted, the same city where Saint Knud is said to have spent his life. Rasmussen, in an inscription following the preceding text, identifies himself as *primus adapter scholæ huius Ring(stadiensis)* (Chesnutt 2003, 70; f 24v; primary scholarly adapter of Ringsted). This text (the one bearing Rasmussen's inscription) is a record of all of the important persons buried at Trenne Klosters Church in Ringsted. The entry following the play is another list of important persons buried in the city of Ringsted, not just the cloister cemetery. A detailed paleographic analysis done by Leif Stedstrup in 2003 identifies Rasmussen as the copyist responsible for the Trenne Kloster entry as well as the ludos, while the remaining texts – including the other Ringsted specific text – are recorded in multiple other hands (Stedstrup 2003, 108). The topic of the entries seems almost universally to be local history, including a transcript of the charter for Sorø school from 1574, a copy of a letter written by the Turkish Kaiser and a fragment of a chronicle of Denmark. This collection, bound together from the works of multiple copyists, suggests an attempt to gather works highlighting local history.

Most scholarship of the play agrees that it has medieval roots, although scholars such as Hans Brix, Torben Krogh, and Olof Friis point out the Humanistic elements that make the Duke Knud of the play more of a national hero than a saint. As DuBois and Ingwersen point out, there are a number of details, including a favorable image of the Catholic practices of the early Scandinavian church, that point to a date of composition that is much earlier than the mid

sixteenth century recording. For this reason, *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce* is most often included in the short list of extant medieval plays. It is entirely possible that successive written editions of the play emphasized the concerns of the day – concerns that became increasingly more “good works” oriented with the coming of the Reformation. This is an instance where looking at the development of performance tradition abroad can give us insights into the select texts that remain from Scandinavia.

Billeskov Jansen claims that the first two lines of the prologue indicates the play was performed four times a year “Ieg rober offuer eder y denne røst; baade winther, waar, sommer och høst” (Stedstrup 2005, 15, 116; both winter, spring, summer and fall). Tolberg agrees with this argument, indicating that by the time of the recording of the text from which Rasmussen made his copy, this was an established tradition, familiar to the people of Ringsted as a seasonal event (Ibid). While I agree that it was likely an established tradition by this point and would argue that the language is simply a consequence of a transcript that was made based on the language of the day, I doubt that it was performed four times a year. Rather I suspect that “høst” was a convenient rhyme with “røst”, the listing of the seasons providing four stresses to maintain the pattern of the knittle verse and the call for attention given by the prece character being a common way to begin this type of public performance<sup>4</sup>.

Rather than indicating that the play was performed seasonally, this phrasing actually indicates that the play was performed as part of a larger festival or public event. Very few of the Corpus Christi mysteries from England, for example, begin with this form of address. The focus

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<sup>4</sup> The first line of *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* is “Alt got folk j hören här til” “All good people who can hear me” – an address to the crowds nearby and a call for them to pay attention. The first line of the English/Dutch Morality Play *Everyman* is “I pray you all give your audience”

of the Corpus Christi celebration was the viewing of the plays. Meanwhile existing examples of plays that were not part of performance festivals but likely performed as entertainment at seasonal celebrations or in the marketplace, do make use of this convention of audience address. In short, if the audience is prepared to watch a play, their attention is (largely) focused on the stage in anticipation of the performance to come. If the performance is part of a festival or market that includes other events or performances that may be distracting them, it is necessary to call the audience to attention. The beginning of this prologue was therefore likely yelled into the crowd. The third line “Thette skulde y alle mercke” (Of this should you all take note) and the fourth line “Borger Hoffmenndt och Klercke” (Citizens, courtiers and clerics) calls out the crowd and specific people in the crowd to pay attention. One can imagine a particularly talented preceptor climbing onto one of the raised platforms or another elevated fixture in the square and pointing to individuals in the audience as he speaks.

DuBois and Ingwersen argue that the original purpose of this play was likely to celebrate the Feast Day of St Knud, which falls on January 7, the day following epiphany and the day cited by legend as being the date of his murder. They make the assumption that this play would have been part of the liturgy associated with his feast in the city of Ringsted, the hometown of Knud Lavard and MS Thott 1409 4to. Thus they build their entire argument, including their discussion of the limited history of performance in Scandinavia, around what they refer to as “liturgical drama.” Unfortunately, *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce* is not liturgical drama. It is a miracle play. The other two examples that they cite as the only other extant examples of liturgical drama from Scandinavia are the two miracle plays discussed above – *Dorothea Komodie* and *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*. While these two texts are examples of the same genre as *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce*, that genre is the miracle play, not liturgical drama. Plays like *Ludos de*

*Sancto Canuto duce*, which incorporate religious themes but which were performed outside of the church and outside of the liturgical ritual are a separate genre, whether or not they were performed by or under the authority of the church itself.

Billeskov Jansen, Toldberg, Risum, Dahlerup and Chesnutt all identify the liturgical material related to the feast of Saint Knud as the source of the play, while Birket Smith, Paludan and Krogh place more emphasis on the local legends of Saint Knud as the source. DuBois and Ingwersen only cite Dahlerup and Chesnutt which may explain the confusion. On page 169, DuBois and Ingwersen reference "...the broader European tradition of liturgically *related* drama..."<sup>5</sup> The addition of the word "related" here is enlightening. It seems as though they have confused the religious themed performance that was popular in medieval Europe with liturgical drama, a term that refers to performance undertaken as part of the liturgy itself, enacting Biblical narrative for an audience as part of religious ritual.

Chesnutt focused on the liturgy of St. Knud. He only devotes two pages to a discussion of the play, in which he concludes that the author must have had access to the *Vita* in the liturgical library at Ringsted (Chesnutt 2003, 70). Chesnutt seems to forget, however, that Knud was a local hero and the subject of much local legend. In addition, the liturgical texts that he identifies were by no means secret, even if a portion of them would have been confined to the clergy. He also makes a half-hearted claim that the play could have been intended for performance by students at the local Latin school. He is critical of all the other scholarship that assumes this play was performed publically by the people of Ringsted, but considering the prevalence of student performers in Scandinavia, the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive. (Chesnutt 2003, 71). As discussed above, the language of the prologue indicates an open air performance, as do the

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<sup>5</sup> My italics, added for emphasis

copious stage directions, but a public performance in Ringsted in the late Middle Ages could very well have been undertaken by scholars – although there is no specific evidence in the extant manuscript that points to scholars or citizens specifically as players.

This *ludo*, unlike with the other extant texts, has intact and detailed stage directions indicating that this play made use of simultaneous staging, also known as mansion staging. This technique was popular in the late Middle Ages when dramatic action took place in several locations. Performance spaces were temporary, most often set up in a town square or other large, open public space. There are a number of full descriptions of this practice as well as illustrations that show how this was done. In the case of the Danish *ludo*, the stage directions indicate several raised *palatium* (houses or mansions) that served as various locations. Each of these locations would have featured a small set or props that indicated their location to the audience. Performers would move from one space to another, often the journey between stages standing in for a journey from place to place. Occasionally this necessitated the audience moving with them, or simply redirecting their attention to a nearby stage. *Ludos de Sancto Canuto duce* features at least five palatium as well as action that occurs at a lower level – either on the ground or on a lower stage. The palatium mentioned are Harald's palatium, Schleswig, the Duke's palatium, Roskilde, and the forest of St. George. This would have required a great deal of space and considerable planning, as the raised palatium would have had to have been built and placed on five suitable elevated surfaces found in the square outside of Sankt Bendts Kirke, the most likely place for a performance in medieval Ringsted.

There is an example of the use of simultaneous staging in Denmark in the form of a woodcut from 1648 commemorating a production of the German morality play *The Tragedy of the Virtues and Vices*, in the courtyard of Christianborg Palace. The German morality play was

mounted by Christian IV in celebration of the marriage of his daughter, Sophie Elisabeth to Christian von Pentz in October of 1634 (Wade 1996, 134). Sophie Elisabeth's wedding was part of "Det store bilager" (The Great Wedding), a weeklong festival primarily celebrating the marriage of her half-brother, Prince-Elect Christian, to Magdalena Sibylle of Saxony, which had taken place earlier in the week. The engraving in question was published in 1648 in *Triumphus nuptialis danicus* (*The great Danish wedding*), a book commemorating the event.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1 - "The Tragedy of the Virtues and the Vices" as performed for "De store bilager" and published in Jürgen Holst's book "Triumphus nuptialis danicus", 1648

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<sup>6</sup> The full title is: *Triumphus nuptialis danicus: das ist eygentliche und warhafftige Beschreibung des Hoch-Fürstlichen Beylagers des Hochgebohrnen Fürsten, Herrn Christiani des Fünfften mit der Hochgebohrnen Fürstin Fräulein Magdalena Sybilla.*

While the woodcut and the event itself date to the seventeenth century, they do provide valuable evidence of a familiarity with the practice in Denmark. It also provides an image illustrating the complexity of this type of performance. The intricacy of the staging suggests that despite the feast day of St. Knud happening on January 7, the performance was likely part of the spring or summer markets or festivals. The weather on Sjælland in early January is simply not conducive to an elaborate outdoor event. The use of five palatium essentially rules out this having been performed inside any space, including the church. The only other option is that in Ringsted, where Knud was a local hero, he was celebrated year round.

It is necessary to consider the differences in daily life between Scandinavia and the continent in order to engage in a productive discussion of early Scandinavian performance. Recognizing the cultural conversion from Catholicism to Lutheranism as a continuum, rather than as a distinct change prompted by political actions opens up this discussion by allowing for the possibility that surviving later texts may hold clues to the development of practice in the north. In addition to this, the remaining secondary references to performance practice such as the letters from instructors and official ordinances and laws regarding performance are undeniable evidence of a history that extends much further back than previously assumed. Connections to and divergences from continental tradition are not evidence of a dependence on the importation of tradition nor lack of creative agency on the part of Scandinavians. Rather, the similarities between texts and the evidence of translation and adaptation of scripts prove that Scandinavia and the continent were involved in a complex exchange of practice that stretched into the realm of public performance. That the role of student performers in this tradition was far more significant in Scandinavia than it was on the continent is a distinction that points to active engagement on the part of Scandinavian performers and an adaptation of tradition to suit their

needs. Further, the undeniably local example of *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce* proves that not only were Scandinavians actively engaged with performance tradition, but that they were also in the practice of creating dramatic texts, an observation that negates the assumption made by eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars that all extant script from Scandinavia must be translations of foreign texts. These conclusions can be applied to all genres of medieval performance in Scandinavia.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### **Commedier om helgha män: Mystery Plays**

Miracle plays and mystery plays are often incorrectly conflated into one genre. While both genres draw on religious themes and have a history of being performed by laymen in the vernacular for a public audience, mystery plays are specifically dramatizations of Biblical, apocryphal, or deuterocanonical texts. Miracle plays, on the other hand, focus on the lives and miracles of saints. Most often these plays were performed outdoors in connection with a celebration or public festival and often made use of simultaneous staging. Depending on the complexity of the script, they may not have necessitated detailed staging. There are no surviving manuscripts of Scandinavian mystery plays recorded during the medieval period, although there is some evidence that such manuscripts existed as late as the early eighteenth century: the lost play referred to by Hans Jacobi in 1506 was a resurrection mystery and there is a possibility that the missing *comædiæ sacræ* of Bishop Henrik may have fallen into this category as well. In addition to this secondary evidence of earlier performance, there are a number of preserved mystery plays from the mid to late 1500s that have a clear connection to earlier performance traditions. Among these later plays, there are at least six Swedish plays that can be addressed as examples of the development of the older Catholic tradition into the new post-Reformation cultural practice.

This absence of extant mystery play scripts has contributed to misunderstandings about the history of performance in Scandinavia. In the combined body of European medieval dramatic texts, mystery plays account for more than one-third of the surviving scripts, though their survival is still rare and exceptional thanks to the generalized document destruction/neglect of

the Reformation, and to the fact that, as play scripts, they were often in such constant use at festivals that their survival depended on constant recopying. That no Scandinavian examples have survived from earlier than the mid 1500s has contributed to the widespread misunderstanding of the history of Nordic performance, the assumption being that an absence of surviving texts in the face of such a large number of examples from the rest of Europe must mean that they simply did not exist in the north. This assumption, however, ignores the significant exception of the English Corpus Christi cycles. The cycles, which consisted of a series of plays depicting all or most of the stories of the Bible, from genesis to the resurrection, were widely popular in late medieval England and a great deal of scholarly attention has been dedicated to their study. A cycle could consist of anywhere from twenty to possibly sixty individual plays. The surviving complete copy of the York cycle includes forty-seven plays although there is evidence in municipal records that the cycle performed in 1415 consisted of fifty-seven plays (Kolve 1966, 288). There are extant scripts of four complete or almost complete cycles as well as a number of surviving plays from cycles that have mostly been lost. While there are surviving late medieval mystery plays from continental Europe, primarily Germany and France, the English examples make up well over half of all of the surviving mystery plays.

The resiliency of the English texts can be explained by the sheer number of copies initially in circulation. The Chester Plays, for example, exist in five extant manuscripts, all dated to the last decade of the sixteenth century or the first decade of the seventeenth century (Sergi 2011, 1). As Matthew James Sergi notes, at any given time during the history of the performance of these plays, there may have been as many as twenty-five different copies of the plays in circulation between the various parties responsible for the performances, including a “master copy” held by city officials (Sergi 2011, 1-2). As the example from Chester demonstrates, it is

possible for multiple copies of a text to exist over the course of a number of years and for the majority of those copies to be lost. In the case of Scandinavia, where mystery plays shared neither the popularity nor the connection to civic organization that they did in England, it is entirely reasonable, given the circumstantial evidence, to accept that the scripts that did exist have simply been lost.

There is no evidence that the guilds or city government had anything to do with performance in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages, as they did in England and elsewhere. As with the miracle plays, however, there is substantive evidence of mystery plays being performed by students long before the late sixteenth century and the rise of the Humanist school performances of newly Lutheran Scandinavia. This was a well-established practice by the mid-1400s – long before the Reformation in Scandinavia and the need to find an efficient way to spread Lutheran doctrine. While school performances were common elsewhere on the continent, they were particularly significant in Scandinavia. As Marvin Carlson points out, by the 1600s student performers also served as entertainment at court (Carlson 1973, 32). Meanwhile, by the late 1500s in England and on the continent professional companies such as Shakespeare's King's Men were already vying for royal and noble patronage and establishing permanent performance spaces in the larger cities. By contrast, the first established theater company and the first local company to receive royal patronage in Scandinavia was Ludvig Holberg's *Lille Grønegade Teatret* in 1722.

Marker and Marker, who classify all of the remaining Scandinavian mystery plays as Renaissance Humanist drama, cite a 1617 ordinance from Bergen that states "...let their [schoolmasters] pupils enact short Christian comedies as academic exercises...according to ancient custom, so that youths can become more accustomed to polite behavior and good

manners" (Marker 2006, 19). The Markers use this example to reinforce their (valid) argument about the use of performance as pedagogy by the Lutheran church. They do not notice or do not comment on the small clause in the middle of the quotation: "according to ancient custom." It would seem, from this quotation, that there was a history of student performance of Christian comedies in Bergen. In fact, the earliest record of public performance in Norway is a school production of "The Fall of Adam" in 1563. The text of this play no longer exists, but the title indicates that it was a mystery play. Public records indicate that it was performed by the students of a man named Absalom Pederssøn Beyer for a public audience (Huidtfeldt-Kass 1876, 18). Similarly, a quote from the introduction to *Tobie Comedie*, a Swedish mystery printed in 1550 and attributed erroneously to the reformer Olaus Petri, states, "Thet samma haffua ock våra förfädher brukat så här j landet som j annor land sedhan Christendomen hijt kom medh wijsor rijm och Commedier om helgha män." (Anonymous 1550, Frontmatter; Our forefathers have done the same here in this land as in other lands since the coming of Christianity with rhyming ballads and plays about holy men). This single sentence definitively claims a place for Sweden in the larger European performance tradition. Just as the Bergen ordinance acknowledges a history of this practice that presumably pre-dates the Reformation, the Swedish source outright states that the mystery *Tobie Comedie* is part of a centuries old Christian tradition in Sweden. Thus, the development of performance in Scandinavia was different than it was elsewhere in Europe but not nonexistent. Public and semi-professional performance was developed and nurtured by students and instructors, not by guilds, clergy, or city officials.

The most compelling explanation for the early development of student drama as opposed to drama as a municipal practice is the late development of significant urban centers in Scandinavia. In *Signifying God*, Sarah Beckwith discusses the York cycle in terms of its civic

and ritual significance. She argues that the Corpus Christi processions that flourished in England (with a particular focus on York) reinforced the social structure through performance that equated the body of the performer with the body of Christ and the civic body (Beckwith 2001, 47). Said civic body, as explained by Beckwith, depended on an economy organized around a separation between the merchant class and the artisanate; a structure that kept the artisanate class subject to a market controlled by wealthy merchants. Everything about the organization of the festivals reinforced this hierarchy — from which guild was responsible for which play, to where the individual stations would be located and the fee paid for having a station located near your property.

Beckwith proposes that the English Corpus Christi cycles which were so popular in the late medieval period must be thought of in terms of their economic significance. Rather than being public entertainment and devotional practice undertaken by the guilds under their own impetus, they were actually a duty imposed on the artisanate by the merchant-dominated city council. (Beckwith 2001, 42-55). In the case of York, representatives of the guilds, who were rarely consulted on matters of legislation despite being part of the council, could be fined for non-participation in the festival planning process (Beckwith 2001, 49). Responsibility for individual plays — which included not only the responsibility for organizing and mounting the production, but also the entire financial obligation associated with the performance — was assigned by the council to particular guilds. Disagreements over which parties were required to contribute were common and led to the formation and dissolution of guilds as well as supporting legislation that limited artisans to one craft, thus artificially restricting the cost of labor (Beckwith 2001, 48). This financial and social obligation served to maintain a division of labor which kept the artisan class subject to the merchants for the distribution of goods.

Labor oppressive legislation of this sort was not necessary in Scandinavia as Hansa maintained a monopoly on foreign trade while domestic trade was limited by population and the vast distances between trade centers within Scandinavia. Unlike York and the other English cities, the major trading cities in Scandinavia, including Stockholm, Copenhagen and Aarhus, were members of the Hansiatic league. London, Bishop's Lynn and Ipswich were home to Hansa *kontor* at various times, but English merchants never allowed the Hansiatic League to dominate in these cities as they did elsewhere. Bergen, for example, was home to one of the Hansiatic League's largest *kontor*, which, though limited by the Bergen city council to trade with the northern Norway, dominated the market as the northern fish trade made up the majority of the trade processed through Bergen's port. The "merchant oligarchy" as it is described by Beckwith, was based out of Lübeck and operated through the composite German/local city councils throughout the Scandinavian trade cities. The limited size of the cities at this time as well as the differing civic organization made a festival of this sort unnecessary and impractical in Scandinavia. While there were craft guilds functioning in Scandinavia in the late medieval period, they never reached the level of complexity of the English guilds.

Additionally, the Nordic cities did not have populations large enough to support a festival of the scope of the English Corpus Christi celebrations. The relatively late establishment of a Christian majority in the northern countries as well as the predominantly rural population meant that the seasonal festivals that were associated with dates of agricultural significance – rather than mercantile significance – dominated folk practice. Even though the guilds in Scandinavia were not organizing large civic festivals for the feast of Corpus Christi, they were engaged in the same sort of public organization that they were known for elsewhere. The guilds were responsible for much of the renovations, building and improvements to churches and cathedrals

in Scandinavia, as was also the case across Europe. *Storkyrkan* in Stockholm has several chapels that were built by various guilds as a place to hold their own special services (until the practice was disallowed by the reformed church). *Helge Lekmens Gille* in Stockholm (the guild named for Corpus Christi and the guild that took the feast day as their particular celebration) purchased a bell for *Storkyrkan*, a replica of which still tolls the hour today, while the original is on display in the ambulatory. They also had their own chapel built in which to hold services for their members, a practice that was common in all European cathedrals. In addition to these contributions, the Scandinavian guilds engaged in other types of public performance. In particular, many of them organized processions for their particular feast – often originating at their guild house and processing through the streets of the city to their altar at the cathedral for a special mass. The only evidence of any significant celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi in Scandinavia is the procession of the members of *Helge Lekmens Gille* through the streets of Stockholm with the sacrament, ending at St. Nicolai Cathedral (*Storkyrkan, The Great Church*). Evidence of this procession was first presented by Johan Murberg in his 1791 paper, *Historisk afhandling om Helga lekamensgille i Stockholm* in which he cites a printed edition of Olaus Petri's sermons from 1530 as evidence that this practice continued, for a short while, even after the Reformation. Additionally, he cites prayers and songs specifically dedicated to the celebration of Corpus Christi found in Swedish breviaries from 1436, 1438, 1509, and 1524 (Murberg 1791, 247).

While there were several cities, or communities described as cities ('*by*' at this time, even in Swedish), none of them came anywhere near the size, population or civic organization of their fellow European cities. Keeping with the example of York, a city that had its fair share of early influence by Scandinavians, this disparity is clear. According to Sarah Rees Jones in her history

of York, the tax population in 1377, the height of the popularity of the English Corpus Christi cycles, was 7,248 persons – a number that she regards as wildly conservative when it comes to estimating the actual population of the city. Tax records exclude any member of the community not subject to taxes – a significant portion of the population at this time. Instead she suggests that the population was somewhere closer to 25,000 (Rees Jones 2013, 236). By contrast, Stockholm's total population is estimated to have been between 6,000–7,000 with a taxed population that hovered somewhere around 1,000 at the end of the 1400s, a full century after the date of Rees-Jones' analysis of York (Dahlbäck 1987, 52). Bergen, 600 miles to the west, was Scandinavia's other major urban center and trade hub, with population estimates between 5,000–7,000 at the end of the 1400s. Copenhagen, today the second largest city in Scandinavia, did not become the capital of Denmark until the 1400s. At roughly the same time as the estimates of Stockholm and Bergen's populations, Copenhagen, Aarhus and Ribe (the capital prior to 1444) were all of similar size – all under 5,000. Oslo, today the third largest Scandinavian city, was significantly smaller in the late Middle Ages – hardly even large enough to qualify as a city. According to Rees-Jones estimates, York had a population that was more than the four largest Scandinavian cities combined by the end of the 1300s. The smallest city with a known cycle was Chester, roughly the same size as Stockholm and Bergen but located much closer to other urban centers than any of the Nordic cities.

Existing municipal records prove that the Nordic cities were subject to considerable German influence. Until the early 1500s the Stockholm city council was, by law, made up of equal numbers German and Swedish representatives and trade was dominated first by a charter with Lübeck and later as a member of the Hanseatic League (Dahlbäck 1987, 71). This same German/local council organization can be found most of the market cities in Scandinavia,

including Söderköping, Linköping and Visby in Sweden and Copenhagen, Aarhus and Ribe in Denmark (Dahlbäck 1987, 57). Göran Dahlbäck estimates that fully one third of the population of Stockholm was German by the late middle-ages (Dahlbäck 1987, 52). In addition, the position of the city, quite literally, under the eye of the king, shows itself in the day-to-day operations of early city leaders. This fact has led scholars to believe that Stockholm was, in actuality, more under the control of the King than it was under the control of the citizens, the German merchants or the church (Dahlbäck 1987, 58).



*Figure 2 - The model of medieval Stockholm at The Medieval Museum. The wall on this model is the later wall. The buildings in the middle of the island (those that are more red in color on this model) would have been inside the earlier walls as described below. This image looks at the island of Gamla Stan from the northwest with now lost Tre Kronor fortress at the upper left (where the current Royal Palace is found). Model: Trygve Jerneman, 1962 Photo: Alemy Limited*

Similarly, looking at the cities' physical footprints can indicate their function during the late Middle Ages. Stockholm's original inter-wall area (between today's Prästgatan to the west and Österlånggatan to the east and the palace to the north) was roughly sixteen acres, not

including the palace and its courtyards, while the estimated extended area after the walls were moved is only roughly thirty-five acres. The area of the entire island is only about eighty acres today, the water level having receded significantly. Bergen's medieval area (From *Haakon's Hall* to *Bergen Domkirke* and about one-third of the way around the southern edge of *Bergen Fjord*) was closer to fifty acres.



Figure 3 - This image of Bergen is from *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, a four volume collection of maps and plans of world cities commissioned by a man named George Braun between the years 1577 and 1581. The wooden walls present in the late 1500s are clearly visible here. *Haakon's Hall* is seen on the north side of the fjord on the far left while *Bergen Cathedral* is found on the far right. 100 years earlier, as discussed in the paragraph above, the southern wall would have extended only as far the monastery in the south (the large building just below the largest ship on the right) and would have run a more even path from the cathedral to the monastery. Photo: Kim Downie, University of Aberdeen, Department of Special Collections

York (which still has quite well preserved gates), had a rough area of a comparatively astounding two-hundred and sixty-three acres. With this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that urban life in York was significantly different from urban life in Bergen or Stockholm. Not only

was the population considerably larger than the population of the largest cities in Scandinavia, the actual physical area of the city was anywhere from four times to sixteen times the size of Bergen and Stockholm respectively.

Considering all this, it is hard to apply Beckwith's discussion of the York cycle as a form of communal participation in a sacramental ritual to the civic organization of Stockholm at any point between its founding around 1250 and the beginning of the Reformation in the 1520s. Beckwith states early on that, despite the great length of the York cycle, the plays themselves have often been regarded as "provincial" by the standards of southern English cities (Beckwith 2001, 4). Even though it was a large and well-established urban center, York was seen as part of the cultural periphery due to its location in the north; much like Scandinavia, on the edges of the European cultural center. London had a larger population than York at this time, but York does come in as the second largest English city – and the largest with a surviving cycle, despite claims of its northern provinciality.

The earliest example of a Nordic mystery play is the Swedish *Tobie Comedia* from 1550, the same play which features the quote about the long history of Christian performance in Sweden. The play, which was long attributed to Olaus Petri but now acknowledged as having an anonymous author, is the oldest printed play in Scandinavia. Despite the claim made by the author about the history of performance in Sweden, literary scholars claimed for over a century that *Tobie Comedia* was not just the oldest printed Swedish play, but the oldest Swedish known play<sup>7</sup>. They followed G.E. Klemming's lead and assumed that because of the foreign names and the Latin title, *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* must be a translation of an unknown

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<sup>7</sup> The Christiern Hansen texts in Thott 1409 fol were thought to be the oldest vernacular dramas in a Scandinavian language.

Latin or Bohemian play, therefore *Tobie Comedie* must be the oldest vernacular Swedish drama. *Tobie Comedie*, which was printed at least fifty years after *De uno peccatore* was recorded and perhaps one hundred or more years after it was composed, was universally regarded as the first attempt by a Swedish author to write a Swedish play.

The play itself is based on the Book of Tobit, a text that is included in the Vulgate Bible but which is considered deuterocanonical by the Catholic Church today and apocryphal by Protestants as it is not included in the *Mikra* (Coogan, Brettler, and Newsom 2010). It is a particularly salacious story of the sort that was favored by late medieval/early Reformation audiences, full of blinding (via bird excrement), cousin marrying, demon exorcism and miraculous healing. For the purposes of spreading Lutheran doctrine, it is an effective text that emphasizes fidelity, faith and the much belabored good works. There is an earlier (pre-Reformation) example of a mystery play based on the Book of Tobit from France, as well as one that is marginally later from Denmark<sup>8</sup>. The introduction, however, which takes pains to acknowledge this text as part of a tradition of performance that is centuries old by 1550, is the most significant piece of evidence for its connection to earlier works.

In addition to *Tobie Comedie*, three mystery plays of varying origins were recorded by the historian Martin Aschaneus in 1599. This manuscript, now in the collection of the Royal Library in Stockholm is labelled KB Fb 7 and contains twenty-eight parchment leaves. The cover is made from multiple layers of glued parchment which have been painted dark red/orange so as to have the appearance of leather. Two columns of Latin text written in an early Gothic hand with alternating red initials can be seen through the color, which is now faded. Near the top of

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<sup>8</sup> Reprinted in 1887 by Birket Smith under the title *Tobi(ae) Komedie: Et dansk Skuespil fra Tiden omkring 1600*. Reprinted again in 1972.

the cover, written in Aschaneus' own hand in a brown ink that is even more faded than the older text below it, are the words "Comedier om Belial" (Plays about the Devil). To the left, above Aschaneus' title is Fb 7, the shelf mark of the Royal Library. The inside of the cover bears the inscription, "Sum Martini Aschanei liber, collectus reservatus et nectus ligamento hoc pro rei temporisque memoria." (I am Martin Aschaneus' book, collected, recorded and bound for posterity.)

It seems as though the original intention was to make this book, as the title suggests, a place to record "plays about the devil" as the first three entries are mystery plays which, to a greater or lesser degree, have the devil as a character or evil as a theme. After these entries, the proposed title of the book falls apart and the rest of the pages are filled with notes and writings on various topics – some of which fit the devil theme, but not all. Included in this is an account of witch trials in Söderala parish, as well as a list of descriptions of each province's crest as well as what appears to be Aschaneus practicing writing in Latin and Greek.

It is the plays themselves that are of interest to this study. The three recorded by Aschaneus are *Holofernis och Judiths Commædia* (A Play about Holofernis and Judith), *Beliel de Inferno* (*Beliel of the Inferno*) and *De creatione mundi* (*The Creation of the World*). The scholarly discussion of these plays, is contradictory and at times confusing. In 1818, Lorenzo Hammarsköld published his *Historiskt-Kritiska Anteckningar* in which he includes an entry on Aschaneus where he credits him with having written two biblical plays (Hammarsköld 1818, 81-83). The two plays he is referring to are *Holofernis och Judith* and *De creatione mundi*. He refers to *De creatione mundi* as "snarare hvad Tyskarne kalla Ein Schwänke, än ett ordentligt Skadespel" (nearer to what Germans call a farce, than a proper play) as it is rather short and has no act or scene divisions. He calls *Belial* a poem that is "trivial" and "almost unreadable"

because of its length and dismisses it with no further consideration (Hammar-sköld 1818, 82).

In 1864, Gustaf Ljunggren takes on Hammar-sköld's reading of the manuscript, dismissing him for assuming that because Aschaneus recorded the texts, he is the author. Ljunggren says, "Men egande-rätt är ej att förblanda med författare-rätten till ett arbete, och innan bättre bevis för Aschanei författarskap kan företes, måste det derföre fränkännas honom; och det så mycket snarare, som dessa stycken svårligen kunna hafva samma författare," (Ljunggren 1864, 187; But the rights of ownership of a work cannot be confused with the rights of the authorship of a work, and unless better proof of Achaneus' authorship can be produced, it must therefore be denied him. Furthermore, these texts could hardly have the same author.) Like Hammar-sköld, he offers no defense of this claim about multiple authors, but simply dismisses the possibility of Aschaneus as the author for lack of more evidence. G.E. Klemming, in his notes on the manuscript that accompany the published edition of *De creatione mundi* and *Belial de Inferno* titled *Twå hitills outgifna Swenska Mystèrer* (1864) from that same year, mentions handwriting (*handstilarna*) as an indicator of multiple authors.

In fact, a fairly cursory glance at the texts proves they were recorded by multiple hands. Perhaps Birket Smith and Ljunggren felt it unnecessary to defend this claim because the texts are so clearly different, but a closer examination of these differences offers insights into their history and provenance. Figure 4 is a selection of the first page of *De Creatione Mundi*.

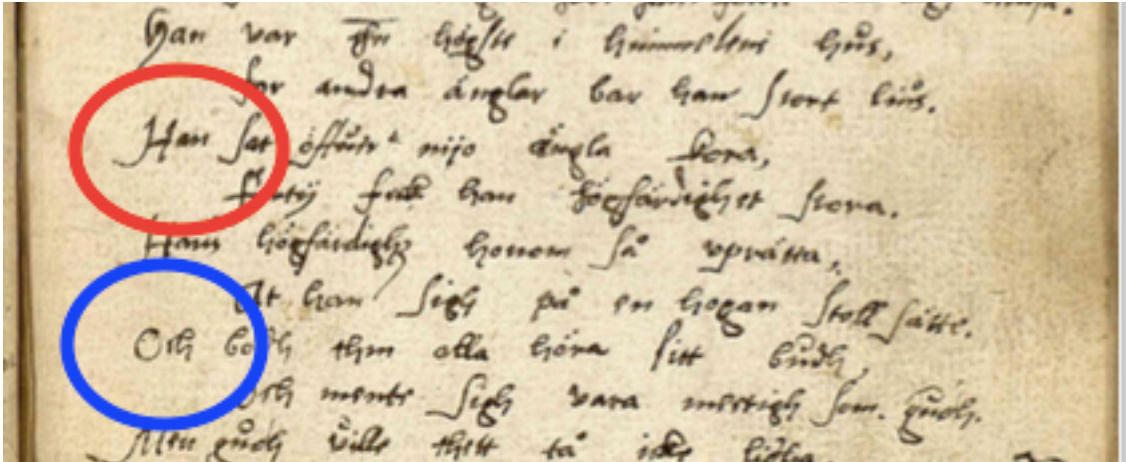


Figure 4 - A selection from the first page of *De Creatione mundi*. The red circle marks the word "Han" and the blue circle marks the word "Och", both written with a capital letter in the first position.

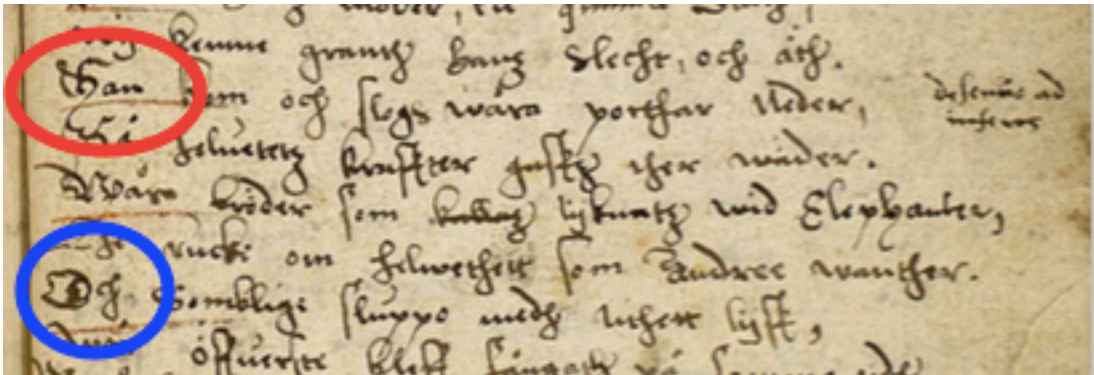


Figure 5 - A selection from *Belial de Inferno*. The red circle marks the word "Han" and the blue circle marks the word "Og", both written with a capital letter in the first position.

Figure 5 is a selection from the first page of *Belial de Inferno*. The "H" and "O" are quite different between the two texts. In both cases, the *Belial* scribe used much more elaborate, multi-stroke majuscule letters. The "H" closely resembles the scribe's miniscule "h", although in other places in the text the "h" lacks the upward flourish on the left, which indicates that this is, in fact, intended to be a capitalized version of the letter. The "O" as well features elaborate flourishes, while the scribe responsible for recording *De Creatione mundi* uses a rather straightforward "H" and a simple circular "O". Perhaps the most interesting detail, however, is the use of the words "och" and "og". While both words mean "and" the use of the Danish or Danish influenced "og"

form of the word indicates that the scribe who recorded Belial was not from the Stockholm/Uppsala area, as was Achaneus, but was, more likely from southern or south western Sweden. Klemming standardizes "og" to "och" in the published edition of the texts. Neither Ljunggren nor Hammarsköld notes the orthographic distinction that suggests Belial was not recorded by Aschaneus.

Hammarsköld's designation of *De creatione mundi* as "ein Schwänke" is dismissed by Ljunggren because, according to him, "...hvad tyskarna kalla 'Schwank,' är, som sjelfva namnet ger tillkänna, af burleskt-komiskt innehåll, hvilket deremot ej träffar in på denna dikt." (Ljunggren 1864, 190; What Germans call "ein Schwank" is, as the name itself indicates, a burlesque comedy, which is not the case with this poem.) He goes on to say "Att icke *Meniskiones Skapelse och hennes Fall* är ett ordentligt skådespel, kunna vi deremot gerna medgifva Hammarsköld. Det synes nästan snarare som början af något jul- eller påsk-mysterium från sednare medeltiden..."<sup>9</sup> (Ljunggren 1864, 190; That *Meniskiones Skapelse och hennes Fall* is not a proper play, can we readily grant Hammarsköld. It seems more like the beginning of a Christmas or Easter mystery from the late middle-ages...). Hammarsköld and Ljunggren's designation of "not a play" maintains the strict adherence to the nineteenth century concept of drama discussed in the previous chapter. Ljunggren's dismissal of Hammarsköld's claim that the text is more aptly described as a farce (or *schwank* in German) is confused by very specific nineteenth century understanding of the word "farce" – or *schwank* in German or *fars/farse* in the Scandinavian languages. The term did, in fact, have stronger associations with bawdiness in the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it has come to mean any

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<sup>9</sup> In the Table of Contents, which was unquestionably written by Aschaneus, the entry is titled *Meniskiones Skapelse och hennes Fall*, but on the top of the first page, the debated author has titled the piece *De Creatione mundi*. For the sake of clarity, I will use the text title.

short absurd comedy. The word farce originated in late medieval France in reference to short comedic interludes inserted into mystery plays. Thus, Ljunggren's suggestion that *De creatione mundi* is closer to a Christmas or Easter mystery than a farce is much more similar to Hammarsköld's claim than Ljunggren realized. In fact, they are both describing *De creatione mundi* in the same way – as a short piece, performed on the street with simple props and little to no sets, likely by amateurs, as part of a larger festival or celebration.

All of the texts demonstrate medieval origins. Klemming looks for texts that may be the source of *De creatione mundi* and *Belial de Inferno*, but is only successful in eliminating an Anglo Norman text of the same name as the source of the former. He notes that the seventeenth century Danish scholar Peder Syv claims that *Belial* borrows its concept from a late medieval theological treatise, but does not cite in which text Syv does this. He does mention that Syv had access to the text in Danish, which makes sense considering Syv's work with language and the use of "og" discussed above. Knowledge of Syv's source text within a century of the copy in the Aschaneus manuscript, would provide a better idea of the provenance of the text itself. If *Belial* is, as Syv claimed, based on a late medieval treatise, this means that it was written in the 1400s, when the treatise was in circulation. This also means that neither Aschaneus nor the scribe who recorded it was the author and this piece was somehow kept in rotation throughout the period of Reformation. Aschaneus was a historian interested in early Swedish history, including the Catholic period, a fact that offers a reasonable thesis as to how he came to include a copy of this text in his collection. The title, *Comedia om Belial*, and the inclusion of the recounting of the witch trials in Söderala point to a particular interest, at least at this time, in the study of religious practice.

It is also unlikely that Aschaneus is the author of *De creatione mundi*. In his discussion of Fb 7, Ljunggren cites Klemming's claim that the manuscript was bound in 1599, but that *Holofernis och Judith* and *De creatione mundi* were performed sometime between 1570 and 1580. He uses Aschaneus' own notes in the Table of Contents to argue that Aschaneus must have seen these plays performed in Uppsala when he was a student, but again with no further explanation. Ljunggren picks up this argument but misquotes Aschaneus through Klemming when he says that the notes say "agerat synes" (production seen). In fact, Klemming does not include the word *synes*, although he does argue that the note "agerat ut et" under *Holofernis och Judith* and "agerat et" under *De creatione mundi*<sup>10</sup> indicate that Aschaneus had seen the plays in production. Again, this is a case of Ljunggren and Klemming making assumptions even while criticizing Hammar-sköld for making similar assumptions. "Agerat" under the title could simply mean that the text is intended to be performed. Aschaneus does not clearly claim, despite previous readings, to have seen these plays performed. In addition, Klemming himself argues that the handwriting of *Belial de Inferno* and *De Creatione mundi* suggests that the texts were recorded as much as thirty years prior to the date in the table of contents (1599). If these texts were recorded in the 1560s, they would have been recorded before Aschaneus was born.

Addressing the play itself, however, it is quite clear that the play was not composed in the late 1500s or even the mid-1500s. The other texts discussed, such as *Tobie Comedie* and *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce* exist in copies that have been reliably dated to the mid-1500s. They show clear influences of the pre and post Reformation periods in their extant examples while *De creatione mundi* bears no signs specific signs of Lutheran doctrine. It is therefore also unlikely

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<sup>10</sup> As this is written under the title in the Table of Contents, it is actually written *under Meniskiones Skapelse och hennes Fall*, but, as previously mentioned, in order to avoid confusion, I will refer to that play by the text title *De creatione mundi*.

that Aschaneus encountered the text in performance and choose to transcribe it. It is more likely that he, or a copyist before him, choose to copy an older text from a second source that has since been lost. Further research is needed to determine whether or not there is any validity to Klemming's claim that the handwriting indicates the texts were recorded twenty to thirty years before the manuscript was bound and the Table of Contents added. On that same note, Ljunggren's unsupported claim that the two texts "could hardly" have the same author, warrants further study. Sylwan's study does prove that *Holofernis och Judith* and *De creatione mundi* (the two texts Hammarsköld and Ljunggren were addressing), did not have the same author. Sylwan shows that *Holofernis och Judith* did not even have one author throughout, but it would serve the field to address *De creatione mundi* and *Belial* together in order to determine whether or not they share stylistic features that might indicate a common author (Sylwan 1895, ii-iii).

*De creatione mundi* presents the familiar tale of original sin. It lacks the humor and local flavor of some of better known English and continental stage versions of this tale, but rather reads like a modern Sunday school primer. It begins with a prologue telling of Lucifer's fall which, as David Bevington points out in his introduction to *The Creation and the Fall of the Angels* from Wakefield as well as the York *Fall of Man*, is an exegetical construction of the Catholic Church as the story does not actually exist in any Biblical text. There are allusions to a fallen angel, but the well-known and detailed story that is presented in these three plays was created by the mediaeval church to connect the diverse references and to explain the existence of evil in a cohesive manner (Bevington 1975, 258, 267). This short play promotes this explanation by intertwining the story of Lucifer's fall with the story of mankind's fall in a manner that, as can be seen in the English examples, is consistent across medieval Christendom. It is almost certain that the 1563 production of *The Fall of Adam* in Bergen presented a similarly constructed tale.

*De creatione mundi* has almost nothing in the way of stage directions – only indications of who is speaking. Important actions are narrated, rather than being indicated as performed by stage directions. Even the eating of the apple, arguably the most important action in this particular story, is narrated by Eve, when she says:

Jagh tager thz äplet i mina handh,  
Icke mister iag förty then helge andh. (Klemming 1864, 16)

I take this apple in my hand,  
Thus, I have not forgotten the holy spirit.

This narration and lack of dramatic notation perhaps explains the hesitation on the part of Hammerskiöld and Ljunggren to designate this a “real play” but it is not uncommon for late medieval plays to narrate actions as they are performed. Even in the Catholic period and even outside of the school setting, these works were largely didactic. A playwright had to be certain that the audience understood the significance of Eve eating the apple, thus it was not sufficient to simply allow the audience to see her perform the action and draw their own conclusions. Eve explains as she performs the act that she does so not without regard to the Holy Spirit. Shortly thereafter, she calls out to Adam and explains:

Adam Adam huar äft tu nu,  
Som gudh ähr iag bliffuin en mecktig fru.  
Jagh haffuer ättit aff trädzens fruct,  
Aff huilket som gånger all godh luckt.  
Thett är söött och icke surt,  
Jag haffuer thz både smakat och sport. (Klemming 1864, 17)

Adam Adam where are you now,  
By God's honor, I have become a powerful wife.  
I have eaten of the tree's fruit,  
From which come all the lovely odors.  
It is sweet and not sour,  
I have both tasted it and asked.

The audience understands, from this speech, that she has been deceived. She did not do this out of malice or disregard for God's law, but because she was tricked by the devil. The concept of human fallibility, that as humans we make mistakes and are punished but are still worthy of grace, is consistent and strong from the late medieval period and into the early Reformation period across Europe. These performances were meant, in large part, to allow the audience to identify with the protagonists (Biblical or otherwise), and to recognize the church as an intermediary on the path to salvation. This is apparent to varying degrees in the other Scandinavian examples. In *De uno peccatore*, the name of which plainly expresses this concept, viewers are encouraged to seek out the Virgin Mary as an interlocutor on their behalf. In the final lines of *De creation mundi*, the unassigned narrator reminds the audience:

Men taack ware Gudh för sin stora nådhe  
Som oß beuarar för allan wådhe  
Ath wij genom Christum kune leffua frij  
För dieffuulens grymme tyrannij  
Thz wne oß Gudh wår skapare blidh  
Then iagh edher beffaller euinnerlig (Klemming 1864, 24)

But thanks be to God for his great mercy  
That protects us from all suffering  
That we, through Christ, can live free  
From the devil's grim tyranny  
This was granted us by God our gentle creator  
Thus I bestow on you eternally

Unlike the later Lutheran texts that emphasize the path to salvation through good works and repentance (promoting Lutheran doctrine), *De creatione mundi* emphasizes God's grace through the medium of Christ. The audience is asked simply to recognize and appreciate celestial mercy. The image of God as a benevolent being and of Christ as the conduit of that benevolence is a common late medieval trope across Europe. This is demonstrated most clearly in visual art, as it shifts the depiction of God from divine power over human sin, to God's incarnational experience of human vulnerability and compassion: Early medieval devotional artwork across Europe often focused on Christ as martyr, to fill onlookers with a sense of obligation. The emaciated Christ on the cross is the central figure, his suffering at the hands of and for the sake of human sinners, is an evocative and frightening image. By the late medieval period, Christ was most often depicted as the benevolent king of heaven, seated on a throne, his right hand lifted in a sign of blessing. It is this figure alluded to in *De creatione mundi*. God is no longer the wrathful God of the Old Testament or the figure demanding of repentance who proliferated in the early medieval period.

As the Humanism of the Reformation period took hold, the depiction of the infant Christ became the most common, first overlapping with the late medieval period as a miniature adult, sitting upright on Mary's knee, blessing the viewer just as did the adult Christ on the throne. By the height of the Renaissance, the infant Christ was seen as a human infant, often nursing. The

image of Mary as the internal mother discussed in relation to *De uno peccatore*, is extended. Not only is Mary seen as the merciful mother, but Christ is seen in his most vulnerable human form, dependent on his human mother. Our Swedish play fits firmly in the late medieval, benevolent God category. He is all powerful and able to hand out forgiveness like a gift. The sacrifice of Christ was his gift to humanity. Further, Eve's reference to "then helge andh" is decidedly Catholic, as the Lutheran church rejected the Catholic language of the Holy Trinity as borderline polytheistic. Despite the late recording date of the surviving copy of this play, it is quite clearly connected to late medieval Catholic traditions.

Unlike *De creatione mundi* which has an unknown earlier source, *Holofernis och Judiths commædia* has been identified by Otto Sylwan as an adaptation of two sixteenth century German texts with the addition of some original details by the Swedish adapter. Sylwan's study, published in 1894 with the first published edition of the Swedish text, is a response to Ljunggren and Klemming's critique of Hammarsköld. Hammarsköld had identified *Holofernis och Judith* as a translation of a German play, but did not go to the same lengths as Sylwan did to identify that original text. Sylwan concludes that the play preserved in Aschaneus' book is a combination of Hans Sachs' 1551 *Ein comedi, mit 16 personen zu recidirn, die Judith, unnd bat fünff actus* and Greff von Zwickaw's 1536 *Tragedia des Buchs Judith inn Duedsche Reim verfasset durch Joachi*, with a few verses that are unique to the Swedish translator. Sylwan's analysis is significant for several reasons. Beyond being the only in-depth analysis to be done of this text, it also offers, as mentioned above, the first published edition of the play. Sylwan's analysis offers insight into the play as part of the transition period under discussion here. It is odd that the play is neither a direct translation nor an original work, but rather a hybrid. The translator, whom Sylwan refers to as the "svensk bearbetare" (Swedish adapter) chooses between Sachs and von

Zwickaw at his own discretion. He makes liberal adjustments to the text to suit his own style as well as composing sections of three separate acts on his own. The term adapter is appropriate then. The play is not simply a translation of two separate German texts, but a combination of the work of three authors. Sylwan notes that von Zwickaw, whose text was published as early as 1536, was the first German dramatist to embrace Lutheran doctrine. Sachs, who is the better known of the two authors, and who was a Lutheran himself, does not incorporate the doctrine to the same extent that von Zwickaw did fifteen years previous, nor is he so strict about meter. As a result, and as noted by Sylwan, Sachs' original text is often much shorter than von Zwickaw. The Swedish adapter picks and chooses selections at will. This melding of texts, while it may seem a bit strange, is an excellent example of the transitional nature of all Scandinavian drama of the period. The combination of the works of three men, working over the course of roughly sixty-five years and two countries and languages, shows exactly how these traditions merge and adapt to author and audience.

Sylwan never refers to Aschaneus as the adapter in question. He never refers to Aschaneus at all, although he has to have read and copied the text from Fb 7 since this is the first printing of the text. Sylwan's work, however, whether or not it was his intention, speaks to Ljunggren's comment about a lack of evidence pointing to Aschaneus as the author. While Sylwan has definitively proven that Aschaneus, or the Swedish adapter, was not the primary author of the majority of the text, his discovery of the collaborative nature of the translation suggests a particular level of creative involvement on the part of the Swedish adapter. Of course it is entirely possible that Aschaneus translated the work of someone else, but until that text is found, the only known agent associated with the collaboration is Aschaneus himself. Ljunggren's own argument can, in a sense, be used against him in this case. Until more evidence is uncovered that

shows that he is not the adapter in question, it cannot be assumed that he was simply a scribe.

Sylwan also considers how these German texts may have been made available to a Swedish translator/adapter. This line of inquiry seems pointless. Not only does he reach no conclusion, but there is very little pertinent information to be gleaned from this knowledge. Sweden had extensive contact with Germany and German merchants since the 1200s and even earlier. Information and goods were readily exchanged and by 1599 when Fb 7 was recorded, this had been the case for hundreds of years. Not only that, but the invention of the printing press, now nearly 150 years earlier, made the dissemination of published texts a matter of trade, not cultural exchange alone. Additionally, Aschaneus, who seems to have been forgotten by Sylwan at least, was an Uppsala educated historian. Although he was relatively young in 1599 (about twenty-four years old), he had likely completed his education or was near completion of his education at this point. Even having been a student at a domestic university, it was common for young scholars to travel to the continent in order to enhance their studies. Germany was particularly popular with Scandinavians. The question of how the German texts made it into the hands of Aschaneus seems quite clear – he bought them, borrowed them or was gifted them in printed form either at home in Sweden or while traveling abroad. He may also have seen them performed. That is not at all unreasonable at this time. Sylwan's attempt to place them, especially to place them through a linguistic connection to Denmark which he himself discredits, is another attempt, either on the part of Sylwan himself or in response to his predecessors, to dismiss creative agency on the part of the Swedish. There is no reason to assume that these texts would not have been available to a Swedish translator/adapter, nor that the adapter in question be Aschaneus himself.

The codex is a personal notebook and its contents are not necessarily what the title claims, with frequent edits and marginalia. *Belial de Inferno* remains a fragment. *Holofernus* is likely

missing an epilogue. Sylwan suggests that there was likely an epilogue as there was one for both Sachs' and Zwikaw's plays. It was also quite common for a play to have a short epilogue or address to the audience, both in the Middle Ages and in the renaissance period. *Belial*, however, is missing much more than simply a page or two at the end. The three pages that remain are quite complete – including stage directions written in Latin in the margins. This indicates that this play may be a copy or translation of another text, but Klemming, when he published an edition of this play and *De creatione mundi*, notes that he was unable to locate a possible original. Again, there is a possibility that this is Aschaneus' own composition or even the beginning of a transcription of his own composition, but there is no way, short of finding an original, to answer that question. What can be derived from this text is that whether it is a translation or an original text, there was a Swedish agent who was actively engaged with performance tradition.

*Holofernis och Judith* demonstrates the blending of traditions, not only in the combination of translated text and new composition, but in the choice of translated texts. The differences between Sachs' text and von Zwikaw's more conservatively Lutheran text along with the translator's choice to incorporate Sachs where his work aligned more closely with the theme the translator hoped to achieve, indicates a level of creative agency on the part of the Swedish translator/adaptor that goes beyond the level of translation (a type of creative agency that has been dismissed all too often by scholars attempting studies in this field) and into a level of independent composition that reflects an active engagement with performance practice.

The Royal Library in Stockholm possesses another manuscript, this one bearing the shelf mark KB VP 13, which includes a mystery play presumably recorded in the sixteenth century. The text, titled in Klemming's own hand as *Jesus docet in templo, Comoedia in 3 Actibus (Jesus teaches in the temple, A play in 3 Acts)* is bound together with two short, printed treatises written

by Olaus Petri and another written by his brother Laurentiis Petri in 1528 and 1529. The three Petri texts were printed together in 1594, but how the handwritten play came to be bound together with pages from the 1594 printing is unknown. Based on the writing style, *Jesus lärer i templet*, as it is referred to in Swedish and as I will refer to it from now on, was recorded in the sixteenth century. The style is very similar to that of the copyists responsible for KB FB 7, although not the same hand as any of the Aschaneus texts. The slightly more ornate capitals indicate a recording date that is somewhat earlier than that of the Aschaneus texts, but not significantly earlier. Although further orthographic study would help date the text more definitively, it would appear that it was recorded in the mid-1500s, probably not long after the Petri texts were first composed.

The play is, as Carl Iver Ståhle points out, the only surviving mystery play from this period that presents a New Testament narrative (Ståhle 1975, 29). Despite this, and Ståhle's claim that it is "en välkomponerad och älskvärd dramatisering av Lukas 2:42-52 (a well-composed and agreeable dramatization of Luke 2:42-52)," *Jesus lärer i templet* has received very little scholarly attention. Klemming published an edition of the play in 1873 but beyond Ståhle's brief synopsis of the main theme "borta bra men hemma bäst" (away is good but home is best), he takes his analysis of the text no further (Ståhle 1975, 29). Klemming includes the play in *Sveriges dramatiska litteratur til och med 1875*, but says only that it is in a manuscript owned by the Royal Library and that it has no title and that several of the pages are ripped or missing pieces (Klemming 1883, 10). He has repaired the pages and filled in missing text, presumably from damaged leaves that have been removed or lost since Klemming's time as the repaired texts are also incomplete, indicating pieces were lost to him as well. He has also written in his title

(*Jesus docet in templo*) on the first page. Marvin Carlson mentions that the play exists but does not discuss it in any depth.

The final example of Scandinavian mystery plays in medieval style is an early seventeenth century play titled *Judas Redivivas*. Two handwritten versions of this play exist – one in the collection of Uppsala University Library and the other, more complete edition, in the collection of the Royal Library in Stockholm (Klemming 1883, 20). The subject matter is originally found in a medieval Swedish legend about the life of Judas Iscariot. Klemming claims that there are several written versions of this legend from the Middle Ages that have survived in addition to those cited by Ljunggren, including a fragment from as early as the thirteenth century (Rondeletius 1871, 109). The play is not, therefore, based on any known biblical literature, making its designation as a mystery play debatable. It is, however, written in the style of a medieval mystery, using biblical characters, thus a debate about genre would be unnecessarily hypercritical. Carl Magnus Carlander and Henrik Schück both mention the medieval inspiration for the play, but neither of them mentions the legend specifically. It is unclear as to whether or not they are aware of the source material or if their comments about the medieval style and influence found in the play is based on an analysis of the text alone. Carlander goes so far as to suggest that it could be a reworking of an unknown medieval play and speculates that it could be part of the lost *commædia sacrae* of Bishop Henrik (Carlander 1904, 817). Of course this is entirely speculation and even Carlander acknowledges that such an assumption is pure guesswork. The likelihood of this guess having any merit at all is significantly diminished by the fact that unlike the other examples that have been discussed in this chapter, *Judas Redivivas* has an acknowledged author and a recorded date of composition.

In the introduction to the play, Jacob Rondeletius, a Lutheran minister and teacher at Telje school, identifies himself as the author, referring to the text as “mijn suenska Comædie” (Rondeletius 1871, 3; my Swedish play). He never references the legend or a source on which the play is based, but he does acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the classical plays of Terrence, two of which were performed at the school during his tenure (Ljunggren 1864, 241). His failure to reference the legend is not surprising and is actually further proof of the transitional nature of performance practice in Scandinavia at this time. All of the texts discussed combine inspiration from a medieval legend still in circulation with the classical comedy that was only recently being rediscovered in Northern Europe in the context of a Lutheran school.

In sum, the lack of mystery play scripts from the pre-Reformation era does not mean that they did not exist. The remaining Scandinavian mystery plays, despite being recorded well after the Reformation, exhibit features that connect them to that earlier tradition. Secondary sources, such as the lost Bishop Henrik plays and the Söderköping resurrection mystery are proof that these performances did exist as early as the mid 1400s. The significance of school performances in connection to both the mystery and miracle play genres must be acknowledged. While there is a much larger collection of scripts and records associated with the Humanist dramas of the Renaissance period, it is not true that school performances were solely the product of Lutheran reformers and their desire to spread doctrine. It is true that early Lutheran schoolmasters took advantage of performance as a didactic tool, used for both teaching their students as well as sharing religious doctrine with the public but this is not a practice developed or even popularized by them. Unlike public performance on the continent, and in England especially, the widely dispersed and relatively small urban and mercantile centers in Scandinavia could not support large scale or frequent dramatic production. Thus, young scholars were almost solely responsible

for public performance in lieu of professional performers or even local amateurs. The connection between the schools in the pre-Reformation era and the Catholic Church suggests that a majority of the texts that may have existed would have been destroyed, sold or repurposed along with the rest of the possessions of the church. The scattered and inconsistent scholarship in this area demands a more thorough combing of the archives and a more complete review of the remaining early Lutheran dramas in order to expand on this discussion.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### **Giffwer meg ad dricke fføer: Secular Comedy**

The performance of Shrovetide farce is best documented in late medieval Germany. Shrovetide can refer to anything from the day before Ash Wednesday (Shrove Tuesday) to the weekend or even week preceding the beginning of Lent. The celebration associated with this semi-religious holiday is often referred to, particularly in southern Europe, as "carnival." Carnival is typically understood as an inversion of the austere period of sacrifice and self-reflection carried out during the observance of Lent. The Dutch artist Pieter Bruegel's painting "The Fight Between Carnival and Lent" famously illustrates the conflict between Lent and carnival, the former being represented by an emaciated figure being pulled into the jousting match holding a paddle with fish, while the latter is depicted as a corpulent man dressed in bright colors, riding a keg and brandishing a pig on a spit. This understanding of carnival is common and is in no small part thanks to Bruegel's work. Thomas Pettitt, in his 1982 article "English Folk Drama and the Early German *Fastnachtspiel*" uses Brueghel to explain medieval carnival as does Stephen Wilson in his analysis of magic and ritual in pre-Modern Europe. Breughel's image provides a convenient and easily understood insight into the medieval mind. It is an eye-witness account of the way these festivities were understood by the participants. Even the title reflects the theme of conflict, while the image presents an exaggerated contradiction between the excess and indulgence of Shrovetide and the penance and self-sacrifice of Lent.

There are roughly 150 remaining German Shrovetide farces (*fastnachtspiele* in German), most of which come from Nuremburg and can be attributed to a small collection of authors. *Fastnachtspiele* are universally short – most are no more than a few pages. They rely heavily on

physical comedy, bawdy themes and bathroom humor. These irreverent comedies stand in direct opposition to the religious introspection and discipline of Lent. As with Italian Comedia dell'arte, which was at the height of its popularity at roughly the same time as *fastnachtspiele*, the plays feature a familiar cast of characters – all exaggerated satirical representations of different social roles. The doctor, the maiden, the farmer, the aristocrat, the clergy member, and the nagging wife are common characters and are all figures who appear in the Scandinavian examples.

Late medieval secular comedy has received moderately more attention than other genres of medieval performance in Scandinavia. This is mostly due to the work of Leif Søndergaard, who has made an investigation of the few remaining Danish texts into a career project. Leif Stedstrup has also done considerable work on the existing late medieval Danish dramatic texts while Esaias Tegnér undertook a considerable study of the one remaining full Swedish farce in 1925. Søndergaard identifies the Danish texts contained in MS Thott 780 folio as Shrovetide farce based on their stylistic and structural connection with the popular late medieval German *fastnachtspiele*. Included in the Scandinavian collection are two complete Danish farces from the early 1500s, *Den utro hustru* (*The Unfaithful Wife*) and *Paris' dom* (*The Judgment of Paris*), both of which are contained in MS Thott 780 folio along with *Dorothea Komodie*. There is also a one-page fragment of a Danish farce included in the same manuscript. In addition to these Danish examples, there are two examples of secular farce from Sweden, including the play *Enn lustigh comedie om Doctor Simon* (*A Merry Comedy of Doctor Simon*), which survives in a collective volume at Uppsala University Library (MS Nordin 1145). The other Swedish text is the earliest remaining example of secular comedy from Scandinavia, which has been dated to the mid-1400s. It is a short dialogue between Christmas and Lent, aptly titled *Jwll och fasta* (*Christmas and Lent*), which would have been performed as part of the annual Shrovetide festivities and which is

contained in Codex Verelianus. This codex is in the possession of the Royal Library in Stockholm. These short farces differ from the miracle and mystery plays of the same period in several ways, most notably their secular, and in some cases downright bawdy, subject matter.

The Scandinavian examples demonstrate cultural connections between Scandinavia and the continent that have been either ignored, or used to dismiss the work that we do have as not Scandinavian enough. The argument that translations, adaptations, or even genres with origins outside of Scandinavia are not worth discussing relies on outdated ideas connecting cultural production with national identity. Modern scholarship, which recognizes the fluidity of culture and the development of practice and tradition as the product of a complex web of social interactions, dismisses this over reliance on national origins in a discussion of cultural practices such as performance. Looking at the remaining Scandinavian texts as part of this web of social interaction offers proof of an active exchange of culture and practice between the relatively remote Scandinavian populations and those of the more densely populated continent. These remaining farces are perhaps the best examples of this exchange. As with the other genres discussed, we have limited extant texts, but those that we do have demonstrate strong connections to German and English traditions while maintaining the uniquely Scandinavian focus on student led performance.

Surviving secondary records from Germany show that Shrovetide farces were performed by amateur actors in a variety of performance spaces with limited costumes or props. In much the same way as the later Scandinavian epiphany processions or the English mummers plays, the performers moved from place to place – private homes, taverns or other public spaces. The construction of the text – an address to the audience calling them to attention and explaining what they are about to see – closely follows the patterns found in the German and Danish

examples as well as in other plays from the same period. In the case of the Danish farce, *Den utro hustru*, the play ends with the *preco* character declaring:

Alle I, som sidder her, vær hilset blot.  
Er I glade, så er alting godt  
Dermed vil jeg gå ud af den dør,  
Men giv mig noget at drikke før (Søndergaard 2003, 25).

All of you, who are sitting here, fair greetings  
If you are amused, then all is well  
Thus I will go out the door,  
but give me something to drink first.

This final request – that if the audience is pleased with the performance they ought to give the performers something in return, is quite common. In this case, as is often the case with performances intended for indoor spaces like a home or a tavern, the request is for food or drink. Travelling players often requested (or demanded) money in exchange for the entertainment offered. The large number of surviving German texts suggests that they performed a new play every year, rather than reusing a play that had already been performed (Pettitt 1982, 5). At their most complex, these short farces offer a satirical view of the social hierarchy of the late medieval manorial system.

The Russian literary critic and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin argues that carnival was not a time of raucous revelry and cathartic escape from the oppressive feudal structure of the day, but was rather a publicly sanctioned reinforcement of the social order (Bakhtin 1984, 10).

Representatives of all classes were presented, in person or in effigy, and mocked with equal levels of zeal. The absurd was celebrated to such a degree that the norm, in all of its inequality,

appeared an attractive alternative. Beckwith's theory about the English Corpus Christi festivals can be applied to a discussion of Shrovetide farce in Scandinavia: just as the English Corpus Christi festivals reinforced the social order through a top-down application of legislation and fiscal responsibility that rested squarely on the shoulders of the labor guilds, the festivities associated with the celebration of Shrove Tuesday openly and unabashedly acknowledged the medieval class structure. These plays present the manorial system as a natural social construction merely pock-marked with benign examples of the mildly absurd.

*Den utro hustru*, a Danish farce preserved in MS Thott 780 folio, lends itself readily to an analysis of the text in terms of social hierarchy. The action of the play – which can hardly be called a plot, but rather a series of comedic exchanges – revolves around a married woman whose husband has gone off on a pilgrimage. She is propositioned by three different men, all of whom she rejects in turn, until the final suitor – an arrogant nobleman who will not take no for an answer, tricks her into conceding to his advances.

The parade of suitors represents a succession of classes, which aligns with Bakhtin's theory about carnival as a reflection of the social hierarchy. The farmer, who is the lowest level, actually works the hardest to win the woman's affection. He does as he is directed, taking her insults as suggestions for improvement. She calls him a 'store bæst' (big beast) who 'fjerter nok bedre end nogen hest' (probably farts better than a horse) calls him filthy and makes fun of his beard (Søndergaard 2003, 15). She tells him that she has absolutely no desire to sleep with him...and yet he persists. He goes to a bathhouse, has his beard trimmed and cleans himself up, returning to the woman to show her what he has done. She still resists, and it is not until the intervention of the farmer's own wife that the woman escapes him.

The monk, whose interaction with the woman is quite brief, pillories the corrupt and ineffectual clergy. A monk requesting an intimate encounter with a woman – a married woman no less, is a flagrant violation of his vows, but on top that, he is easily dismissed. Unlike the farmer who works to win her affections, the monk leaves with very little protest. He is abused by the nobleman, running back to the safety of the abbey after being confronted and lying when he claims to have been mistaken in his intentions. The implications of the exchange with the monk are that the clergy are dishonest and weak, using the shroud of the church to protect them from facing their wrongdoing.

The nobleman, unlike the farmer and the monk, refuses to accept defeat. He behaves as though he is entitled to have whatever he wants and is horribly insulted when the woman rejects him. He goes to great lengths to achieve his goal, including enlisting the help of a witch and a demon in his efforts to sway the woman. When the demon conjured by the witch is unsuccessful in tempting the woman into infidelity, the nobleman is furious that the witch cannot achieve what he has requested. He threatens her, forcing her to go to the woman herself and present an elaborate lie that finally convinces her to accept the nobleman's advances – not out of desire or disregard for her marriage vows, but out of fear of retribution. The caricatures presented in the characters of the farmer, the monk, and the nobleman reflect a parody of the late medieval manorial system: the dirty but hard-working farmer, the weak, self-serving clergy and the entitled aristocracy. There is no suggestion of change though. Shrovetide was not the place for morals and thoughtful analysis. Instead, these figures present a satirical image of the way society functioned.

Søndergaard regards *Den utro hustru* as the best of the available Scandinavian farces, on par with the best German examples from the same period (Søndergaard 1989, 7). The rhyme and

meter are well-used and the dialogue is quite clever. In particular, the strong female protagonist makes this play stand out from the German examples. Søndergaard describes the "typiske Nürnberg-fastelavnsspil" (typical Nuremberg Shrovetide farce), in which a woman is left alone by her husband because of a pilgrimage...or a pub crawl... and is confronted by a series of suitors (Søndergaard 1989, 28). Pettitt compares German plays of this sort to similar plays in the English folk tradition, which he calls "Wooring plays." Of these plays he says:

"A student of English folk drama would greet with a nod of recognition those Fastnachtspiele which are built up of a series of short speeches in which a succession of male characters woo a lady, each urging his claims to her favor (e.g., Keller Nos. 12, 15, 70, and, in more complex fashion, Zingerle No. XI). This parallels exactly the action of the English Wooring Plays, particularly in those instances (Keller Nos. 15 & 70) where the lady replies with a short speech rejecting each suitor in turn" (Pettitt 1982, 6).

*Den utro hustru* fits neatly into this genre. The majority of the play focuses on the 'wooring' (if one can call it that) of the wife and her rejection of the suitors while the contrast between the debauchery of the wooing scenes compared to the holy pursuit of her husband adds a layer of reflexive social commentary. Like Bruegel's painting, it acknowledges the contrast being celebrated during Shrovetide by presenting a clear disparity between the religious and introspective Lent (the husband and his pilgrimage) and the amoral expression of social inversion that is Shrovetide (the lewd pursuit of the wife). Just as the viewers are about to embark on a period of sacrifice and self-reflection, accounting for the sins of the previous year, the husband is about to embark on a pilgrimage, a time to reflect on 'den indre vej' (the inner path) (Søndergaard 2003, 12).

The title *Den utro hustru* was assigned to the text by Birket Smith in his 1874 edition of the Hansen texts; the play has no title in the manuscript. Nyerup, in 1795, called the play *Comedia de muliere pulchra* (*Komedien om den skønne kvinde; Comedy of a beautiful woman*), while in 1844, Jacobsen referred to the play as "Om en Kiærling som forførte en Kone til Utroskab ved Hielp af sin Hund" (On a suitor who deceived a woman to unfaithfulness with the help of his dog) (Søndergaard 1989, 23). Birket Smith's title – the title that has continued to be used – takes on the theme of inversion. The reader expects "the unfaithful wife" to be just that – maliciously unfaithful. That is not the case. The relationship between the husband and wife is not what one would expect from this genre. There is no animosity: the wife is not cruel and authoritarian, nor is the husband irresponsible and dismissive. She begs him to stay, saying that she is afraid of what may happen to him while he is away and declaring her intention to remain eternally faithful. She stalwartly, and with no attempts to be delicate, rejects the advances of her suitors until the very end of the play. The men, however, make no efforts to conceal their intentions. They ask outright, or even demand, that she concede to their advances. The situation is absurd and humorous in its absurdity: after the farmer made every attempt to meet her standards and the monk called on duty to influence her, even after a demon promised her riches if she were to give in, the thing that finally convinces her to abandon her vow is an absurd and improbable lie. Birket Smith's title "The unfaithful wife" is the most successful name for the play as it further develops the absurdity of the play by intentionally misleading the audience. The reader/audience is expecting to encounter a malicious character – the type of stock-wife frequently seen in medieval and renaissance comedies. Doctor Simon, who will be discussed below, falls into this category as does Nille, the wife of the foolish and unfortunate Jeppe in Holberg's early eighteenth century *Jeppe of the Hill*. The wife in *Den utro hustru* is not

unfaithful so much as she is gullible, however. There is no lesson to be learned here – the situation is simply ridiculous. The continued attempts by the farmer and the nobleman to change her mind provide the conflict necessary to a narrative, although the resolution could hardly be called a resolution and is more of an elaborate joke.

The other complete Danish farce found in MS Thott 780 folio is *Paris' dom* (*The Judgment of Paris*), a short play based on the well-known classical tale. Birket Smith dismissed *Paris' dom* as “puerilt” (puerile) and insisted it must have been written by a student, while Jacobsen calls it the “uheldigst” (least successful) of the three full plays contained in the manuscript (Stedstrup 2004, 141, 139). Hansen and Søndergaard insist that *Paris' dom* is more of a morality play than anything else, although it remains part of the farce tradition because there are a number of German farces on this same topic. In his first analysis of the manuscript, Nyerup identifies *Paris' dom* as a reworking of a Hans Sachs play on the same theme from 1536. Søndergaard dismisses this argument as the Sachs play is later than the Danish *Paris' dom* (Søndergaard 1995, 9-10). Nyerup had no conclusive evidence, nor was his defense of the discrepancy adequate. The classical tale of the judgment of Paris is and was well-known. There are an unknown number of variants of this text, thus making the use of the same theme by Sachs merely a coincidence, not evidence of any shared creative origin. It is just as likely, perhaps more likely considering the quality of the text, that *Paris' dom* was a student-composed variant of the classical tale drawing to inspiration from Sachs. There is no conclusive linguistic evidence that connects the surviving Danish variant with any of the German variants. Further, Hans Sachs was a prolific playwright and poet. He is the author of the majority of the remaining German Shrovetide farce as well as a number of other works, none of which could be described as puerile. Ultimately, there is no way to prove the origins of the play with the available evidence.

Dismissing the text as “not Danish” because there is a vague possibility that it was written by a German author is unnecessarily restricting to an already limited field. The same can be said of dismissing the play because it is not good. The origins of the text and the artistic merit of the text are of secondary importance at this point in the discussion. That it is preserved in this manuscript is proof that it was known by someone, whether that be a student or Hansen himself, in Odense in the early 1500s.

Similarly, the fragment of a farce simply referred to as *Henno* has been largely overlooked by scholars. *Henno* is also included in MS Thott 780 folio and while most of the scholars who have discussed this manuscript have mentioned that it is there, none of them have engaged in a discussion of the text beyond attempts to identify the source. There is only one surviving page (30v), containing preco's opening address to the audience and the first short speech of a character named Elsa, making a full analysis of the play impossible. Preco's speech itself is enough to identify the fragment as a farce as it, like the other farces discussed, includes an address to the audience as well as a summary of the performance that they are about to see. Despite this, Søndergaard, whose goal it was to create a dialogue regarding the extant Danish *fastelavnspil*, ignores the fragment completely in his book about *Den utro hustru* and only mentions it briefly in his book on *Paris' dom*. Stedstrup gives it more attention, including a diplomatic reprinting of the single page in *Skolekomedier fra tiden omkring 1530*, as well as notes on language as he does with all of the other plays included in the Hansen manuscript. In his literature review, he mentions that Billeskov Jansen cites a 1498 German farce as the original source of the text. The German play, which was composed in Latin, borrows its story from the popular French farce, *La Farce de maître Pierre Pathelin* (*The Farce of Master Pierre Pathelin*) (Stedstrup 2004, 144). While the length of the fragment does make it difficult to offer an analysis

of the play itself, there is significant information to be gleaned from its inclusion in the Hansen manuscript. A study of medieval Scandinavian drama must consider *Henno* in the same way as secondary sources must be considered. While the script itself is, for the most part, lost, the inclusion of the first page indicates that Hansen, or whoever the translator may have been, intended for this play to be part of the Danish repertoire. There do not appear to be any missing manuscript pages – page 31 recto and verso is left blank. Instead it seems that this translation was simply a project that was never completed. An incomplete translation in one source does not mean that a complete translation never existed, nor does it mean that students would not have performed it in the original Latin. It may very well have been performed by students at *Vor frue skole*. The inclusion and partial translation of *Henno* is further proof of direct Danish interaction with German *fastnachtspiel* practice, and like *Paris' dom*, its existence makes it a part of Nordic performance tradition.

Several scholars, including Søndergaard, Stedstrup, and Marker have identified the strong German influence in the tradition of farce in Scandinavia. This influence is easily explained through a discussion of the historical organization of medieval Scandinavian culture and economy. As several Nordic cities were full Hansa cities or *kontorstad* (trading post cities), while other market towns were outposts for trade with the continent largely facilitated by German merchants, the German emigrant population was large. This economic system, one which relied heavily on two-way traffic between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe, was not simply about commodity exchange. Along with the movement of goods and people is the movement and interaction of ideas and cultural practice. This being the case, it is certain that the tradition of performing Shrovetide farce existed alongside the known tradition in Germany. The claim made by scholars, like Nyerup, that the Scandinavian performance tradition was the

product of German influence rather than a cultural exchange neglects to address any considerations beyond just the text. The Scandinavian tradition was not a regurgitation of translated German texts. The participation of students in the Nordic tradition as evidenced by the secondary sources and the source of the texts themselves makes the tradition in the north unique from the tradition on the continent.

There is reason to believe that the Hansen texts are copies and not original compositions. Søndergaard identifies mistakes in the recording of *Den utro hustru*, which he claims point to the surviving version of the play as a transcription of an older play. Missing lines or entire verses that maintain the original pattern of rhyme and meter indicate, according to Søndergaard, reading and transcription mistakes rather than a translation mistake. He identifies several such examples, including a missing verse between verses 307 and 308 that should rhyme with verse 308, as well as pointing out that verses 103 and 104 are in the wrong order, upsetting the rhyme scheme (Søndergaard 1989, 13-14). That Danish words could easily be placed in the vacant spot to complete the pattern, or that the verses could easily be switched back to correct the error, indicates that these are copyist mistakes and not translation mistakes. Translation mistakes would not resolve disrupted patterns so easily, as maintaining rhyme and meter in translation requires extensive reworking. Skipping an entire verse would disrupt the whole translation. In this case, it is no more complex than simply forgetting to record a few lines. By extension, this claim that the surviving text is likely a copy of an older Danish text also indicates that there was indeed an older text to be copied. It does not eliminate the possibility that the older text was a translation of a German text, but it does indicate that the tradition of performance in Denmark was maintained to some degree in those intervening years. That *Vor frue skole* engaged with the Shrovetide farce

tradition to the extent that they recorded the plays was not anomalous. The anomaly is that this collection has managed to survive.

The earliest available evidence of the performance of Shrovetide farce in Scandinavia exists in a letter dated 1447 written by the prior of St. Hans Cloister in Odense. In this letter he promises not to allow students to perform “*ludos carnisprivales*” (Shrovetide plays) if he is permitted to open a school at the monastery (Birket Smith 1874, 12). The language of this letter indicates that that *ludos carnisprivales* were an established tradition by the time he wrote the letter in 1447. The promise indicates that the performance of these plays was something that might be expected. In addition, the detail that he is not willing to allow them speaks to the nature of these performances – which were hardly church-friendly. Although Birket Smith identifies the Hansen texts as the oldest surviving examples of Danish drama, this letter indicates that plays of the same sort were performed as much as eighty years before the plays recorded in MS Thott 780 folio. The earliest German scripts date to the early 1430s, marginally earlier than the date of the letter. Meanwhile, the extant Swedish dialogue *Jwll och fasta* (*Christmas and Lent*) has been dated by Klemming to 1457, just ten years after the Odense letter (Klemming 1883, 524). The text itself is found in the Codex Verelianus, alternately known as *Fru Märetas bok* (Mrs. Märeta's Book), now housed at the Royal Library in Stockholm. Klemming includes the full text of *Jwll och fasta*, which is only two pages, in *Sveriges dramatiska litteratur til och med 1875* under the rubric *Qvasi-dramatik (quasi-dramatic)* (Klemming 1883, 523-524). It is not considered a true farce as there is no action involved. It is purely a dialogue lacking any stage directions. Klemming categorization of the piece as quasi-dramatic is presumably based of its length and lack of characters beyond the two named. Similarly, in his analysis of the *Doctor Simon*, Tegnér claims, “...redan dess ringa omfång förbjuder oss att bedöma den som ett drama i

egentlig mening" (Tegnér 1925, 431; already its short length prohibits us from calling this a drama strictly speaking). However, this strict definition of drama, when applied to the late medieval performance tradition across Europe, would eliminate a large number of the surviving scripts, including this short Swedish farce. The Aristotelian conception of dramatic structure was only relatively recently rediscovered in northern Europe at the time in question. An objective study of late medieval performance must take into consideration elements beyond simply narrative structure from a literary perspective.

*As the title *Jwll och Fasta* suggests, it is a dialogue between Christmas and Lent in which the anthropomorphized events discuss their opposing roles. It plays on the same themes of conflict and inversion highlighted in *Den utro hustru* and in Bakhtin's understanding of the carnival as an event. Just as carnival is understood as an inversion of Lent, here Christmas is depicted as the opposite of the somber period of religious contemplation. The relationship between the two holidays is mildly adversarial and simultaneously ridiculous. Christmas dismisses Lent for sitting in church and "doing nothing else"; Lent continues to encourage Christmas (and the audience) to practice restraint and consider the wages of sin (Klemming 1883, 524). In terms of character, Christmas is boisterous and aggressive, while Lent is mild, if not slightly condescending. It is an *Odd Couple*-type relationship – the humor is in the opposing personalities while the audience sees the duality expressed by the conflicting religious holidays. Søndergaard includes it in his discussion of Nordic plays, incorporating it in his list of surviving Scandinavian Shrovetide performance. He suggests that dialogues of the same type are known from the continental tradition as part of carnival, but he does not discuss this short dialogue in any depth. He does date the text to the late 1300s, but gives no explanation and no citation for this date (Søndergaard 1989, 7). The absence of any evidence of Shrovetide performance from*

the period in between 1457 and 1531 suggests that more than just the passing time and the natural decomposition or loss of documents is responsible for the lack of sources.

The last example of Scandinavian farce is a Swedish play from the 1500s titled *Enn lustigh comedie om Doctor Simon*. The play is found in a collective volume in the possession of the University of Uppsala Library (MS Nordin 1145). Søndergaard, Marker and Marker and Stedstrup all mention this play as one of the existing Shrovetide farces from Scandinavia, although Esaias Tegnér is the only scholar to address the play in any depth, publishing a detailed discussion of the text as well as a revised edition of the play in his 1925 essay collection "Ur språkens värld: Fyra uppsatser av Esaias Tegnér" (From the world of language: Four essays by Esaias Tegnér). Although the short play is a farce, it is not appropriate to call it a Shrovetide farce specifically. In the final address to the audience, the *preco*, referred to here as *Epilogus*, specifically references "den nyia år som nu tilländer" (Tegnér 1925, 458; the new year that is coming). This indicates that the play was performed around Christmas or New Year (Tegnér 1925, 427). Placing the play in the Shrovetide farce category without considering this small detail is convenient and speaks to the tendency to assume these few remaining Nordic texts must have foreign origins. Shrovetide farce connects it with the popular German tradition, but it is more accurate to classify it simply as a farce or secular comedy. Like the other farces discussed, it is short, it employs violence for comedic effect, it has no plot to speak of, and it presents an inverted social structure as the foundation of its humor. Along with *Den utro hustru*, *Doctor Simon* is a satire infused with social commentary.

In their description of the play, Marker and Marker state, "In this play a peasant and his wife quarrel over a pair of trousers, the signifier of domestic power and authority...After being beaten and driven from the house, the husband must relinquish his authority" (Marker 2006, 17).

The use of the word “quarrel” makes it seem as though there is a plot related to a dispute regarding the trousers, when in fact the “quarrel” is simply a physical altercation meant to establish dominance. The farmer (peasant, as Marker calls him), never had any power. All of the dialogue leading up to the fight is expository, establishing the farmer’s wife, Dr. Simon as domineering and abusive. In addition to the prece, who is referred to in the beginning as *Prologus* and at the end as *Epilogus*, the play features six roles – a farmhand, a servant girl, a groom, a bride, the farmer and his wife. *Prologus* introduces the play, telling the audience that it will be about a farmer and his wife fighting over a pair of trousers. These trousers are both a symbol of authority and a literal pair of pants which, according to the dialogue of the play, are hanging from the ceiling throughout. As a symbol, they refer to the idiom "to wear the pants" in English (*att bära byxorna* in modern Swedish). The expression, or the fifteenth century version of it, is never used in the dialogue, but the meaning is implicit.

Tegnér investigates the nickname Doctor Simon, citing the use of Simon or Siemann (she-man) in German as early as the 1400s to refer to a manly woman or a cowardly man. He suggests that the addition of the title Doctor is a confusion with the title Saint as it refers to the apostle Simon whose Saint's day, according to Grimm's German lexicon, was connected with a folk belief about not questioning one's wife or not marrying on that day (Tegnér 1925, 399-400). Very little is known about St. Simon and it is unclear as to how his feast day became associated with marital conflict unless we assume it is simply a misunderstanding based on the German pronunciation of a Hebrew name (which seems likely). Tegnér's conclusion about the name Doctor Simon meaning an aggressive or masculine woman holds up in the context of the play, although his claim that "doctor" is simply a confusion of the title "saint" is bit of a stretch. I

would argue instead that the use of the title "Doctor" was meant to emphasize the role of the farmer's wife as an expert in aggressive masculine behavior.

The farmer's wife does not appear in person until line 244 and does not speak until line 263. All of the dialogue leading up to her appearance is expository, establishing her as Doctor Simon based on the testimony of all of the other characters. The first mention of the name comes from *Prologus* and it is repeated by every character with the exception of the servant girl who venerates her mistress and professes her intention to be just like her, to the disgust of the farm hand and the groom. He (the groom) attests "doch skulle iagh tigh strax öffergiffua" (thus shall I immediately renounce you), should his bride go the way of the farmer's wife and laments for the poor man who should end up with the girl. The bride insists that she will respect and honor her husband *as she should*. The farmer returns, this time with his wife, whom he denounces, proclaiming "tu kallas D. Simon och en baselisk" (you are called Doctor Simon and a basilisk). There is no plot and no escalation of action; there is simply a confrontation. The farmer declares:

Ty wele wij nu om thenna broken kämpa  
Wij moste rätt strijda thär om rätt nu  
Anten moste iag vara husbonde eller tu (Tegnér 1925, 456)

So now we battle over these trousers  
We must have fight for what is right  
Either I must be husband or you

After this declaration he is beaten by his wife and must concede the pants to her – a victory lauded by the servant girl and lamented by *Epilogus*, reinforcing the social commentary presented by the play. Tegnér refers to this social commentary in his discussion of the "moralisk

rättvisa" (moral justice) referenced by *Epilogus* at the end (Tegnér 1925, 438). I would hesitate to call use the word "moral" in connection with this play for fear that it would be misinterpreted as a morality play, however. Morality plays in the Middle Ages aimed specifically to bring the audience's attention to their sins, encouraging them to account for those indiscretions before they die. *Everyman*, arguably the most famous medieval morality play, uses the language of money and accounting to make this point. Everyman tells death that he needs time because "unredy is my boke of rekinige." He is granted time, albeit begrudgingly, to get his accounts in order (Bevington 1975, 943). The moral of this tale is spoken directly to the audience when the doctor says "If his rekeninge be not clere when he doth come, God will saye: "Ite, maledicte, in ignem aeternum! (Bevington 1975, 963)" In other words, God won't give you time to get your affairs in order. If you are not ready when death comes, you will go to hell. Modern Scandinavian morality plays follow this example. Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* both follow a protagonist on a literal journey as they put their lives in order and prepare for death (or in *Peer Gynt*'s case, to be melted down and made useful).

*Enn lustigh comedia om Doctor Simon* does nothing of the sort. There is no journey. There is no reflection. Rather than reflecting on morality, it is a cautionary tale that speaks to social ethics at the time of its composition (and, based on Tegnér's reading, the social ethics of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries as well). It is an inversion of social expectations that results in disaster – and humor – as the husband is beaten and forced to acquiesce, giving away his masculine authority to an imposter, Doctor Simon. The men in the audience should walk away from this performance convinced that the world they have just witnessed is ridiculous, thus ensuring their commitment to maintaining their own authoritative masculine role. The groom is the symbol of the correct social order when he declares that he would leave his future wife if she

became a Dr. Simon (Tegnér 1925, 454). The women in the audience should leave the performance convinced of the correctness of the bride who declares that she will always respect and honor her future husband (Tegnér 1925, 456). Tegnér was certainly convinced of this in 1925. He states explicitly "Jag kan inte neka att jag under läsningen av detta gammaldags diktverk har fått en liten klockarkärlek till den anspråklösa, enkla, rara fästemon – och till hennes skildrare." (Tegner 1925, 433; I cannot deny that I developed a certain fondness for the unpretentious, simple, sweet bride – as well as for her creator, while reading this old-fashioned piece of poetry). The moral justice Tegnér is referring to is moral as in a sense of "right and wrong." In this play that moral justice is expressed by *Epilogus* in his hope for a better year ahead for the farmer and an appeal to Doctor Simon's beating stick to come to his aid (Tegnér 1925, 426).

I believe that Tegnér's reading of the play is quite accurate as regards the intention of a medieval playwright and performers. The authoritative voice of *Epilogus* and his appeal at the end suggests that the play was meant to strike fear in the hearts of medieval men who might allow themselves to be metaphorically pantsed by an assertive woman. What Tegnér and other (male) scholars have failed to recognize, however, is the evidence of social disruption presented by this play. The farmer's wife is triumphant and serves as a role model to the young servant girl. While it may be an attempt on the part of the playwright to prevent social inversion as comic and ultimately detrimental, it does suggest that the role of the dominant wife and the young woman dissatisfied with the prospect of a future as an obedient wife were recognizable trophies. The manifestation of this scenario of social inversion was entirely possible to the audience of this play and thus offers a glimpse of the everyday world from which this script sprung.

This play, despite being performed as part of the celebration of Christmas and the New Year, follows closely Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque in its use of inversion to support social convention. Just as *Den utro hustru* uses the moral inversion of the pursuit of the woman and her eventual concession, the oddly literal dispute over a pair of pants as a symbol of authority and the opportunity for staged farcical violence that it allows cements this play as a satire and a farce. If it were not for the single line references the new year, it would be natural to assume this play was part of a Shrovetide celebration. The knowledge that it was intended to be performed around Christmas is a tantalizing clue about how performance was part of the yuletide celebration as well. It opens up the possibility of connections between the Scandinavian tradition and the English mumming tradition as well as continental Christmas performance that has yet to be considered.

As with all of the genres discussed, the majority of the scholarly work that has been done on the remaining Scandinavian farces has focused on finding origins for these texts outside of Scandinavia, with little regard to the performance of the texts in Scandinavia itself. While locating the origins of a text may offer insights into the way in which northern European performance tradition spread, it is equally as informative to acknowledge the way in which that tradition manifested itself once it was embraced by the Scandinavian community. Additionally, the assumption that a text has foreign origins simply because it is one of a limited number of texts, unfairly assumes that medieval Scandinavians were incapable of offering a creative contribution to the tradition of performance in Europe. In fact, the survival of these texts – in translation or with unknown origins – is proof of the active participation of Scandinavians in this history of performance. The close relationship between the Danish Shrovetide tradition and the German *fastnachtspiel* tradition has encouraged a discussion of the texts in the last thirty-five

years in the work of Stedstrup and Søndergaard as it allows an investigation based on the known German tradition. Earlier scholars, including all of those cited by Stedstrup, have found this connection a reason to limit inquiry into these texts based on an assumption that they must be translations of German texts. The two remaining Swedish examples have been dismissed by Swedish scholars with the exception of Tegnér as not interesting or not worthy to be discussed as performance. In the case of Marker and Marker as well as the Danish scholars who recognize these plays, they have been acknowledged but dismissed in favor of a more detailed discussion of the surviving Danish texts, the provenance of which is better known than is that of the Swedish texts. All of the remaining examples offer particular evidence of their connection to continental traditions, their position within Scandinavian practice and Scandinavian performance practice itself. The Odense letter as well as the Hansen collection are proof of student-led performance that occurred much earlier than the Renaissance Humanist theater with which it has previously been associated. In addition, the Odense letter and the Swedish *Jvll och fasta* dialogue speak to the age of the secular performance tradition in Scandinavia in general, while the Swedish farce *Enn lustigh comedie om Doctor Simon* offers a possible glimpse into performance as part of yuletide festivities.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### **Non est hic: Liturgical Enactment**

Although the inclusion of liturgical ritual in a discussion of medieval drama is currently the topic of scholarly debate, it is necessary to consider the numerous examples of liturgical performance in Scandinavia in order to establish a complete corpus of extant Nordic texts. The study of Nordic drama has been stymied by an inaccurate assumption that medieval Scandinavia was the recipient of cultural influence rather than a participant in cultural exchange. The dismissal of surviving texts based on presumed foreign influences has trapped the field in an unproductive approach based on nineteenth century nationalistic theory which has no place in the discussion of cultural practice in a time before the establishment of the modern Scandinavian nation-states. Therefore, regardless of one's opinion of the debate over the classification of liturgical ritual as drama, the Nordic examples must be considered alongside the continental examples which have been part of the larger discussion for one-hundred years.

The category of liturgical drama was first popularized by E.K. Chambers in 1903 in *The Mediaeval Stage*. The term refers to performance that was part of the liturgy itself. The most commonly discussed form of liturgical drama is the *Quem Quaeritis* trope (*Whom do you seek*), also referred to as *Visitatio sepulchri* (*the visit to the sepulcher*). There more than 800 *Quem Quaeritis* preserved in ordinals, missals, breviaries and other instructional texts from across Europe (Norton, 85). The earliest example of such is a staged dialogue from the *Winchester Regularis Concordia*, attributed to Bishop Æthelwald and dated to the late tenth-century. These performances, explained by the *Regularis* as a way to communicate the significance of the mass to the non-Latin speaking parishioners, are dramatizations in song of the visit of the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the sister of Lazarus, to the tomb of Christ. Here, the Marys

are met by an angel who inquires as to whom they seek in the tomb and who explains that Christ is no longer there, as he has risen from the dead. Monks, priests or other members of the clergy were to act out this meeting, while singing the dialogue provided in the instructional text.

The name *Quem quaeritis* comes from the line spoken by the angel (or angels) as the three (or two) women approach the tomb. The Easter ritual itself is actually made up of three sections, of which the *Visitatio* is the last. The *Depositio crucis* (*burial of the cross*) and *Elevatio crucis* (*elevation of the cross*) are discussed more often by musicologists than by drama scholars. Drama scholars often stop with a discussion of the *Visitatio*, as it contains the only form of dramatic embodiment found in the ritual. The *Depositio* would have occurred on Good Friday, when a representation of the crucified Christ, such as a *kristigrav* sculpture, a painting of Christ, or the host itself, was placed in the sepulcher to signify the burial of the body. The *Elevatio* was the ritual carried out when the object was removed from the designated sacred space, in a symbolic recreation of the Resurrection. This was most often done before the mass on Sunday or before Matins, depending on the source (Norton, 86). The *Visitatio* was most often part of the Easter mass, when the Marys returned to anoint the body and learned from an angel (or angels) that the body was gone.

In many cases the three are found together although there are examples in which one or perhaps two of the instructional texts are missing, or in which there is no evidence of the performance of all three ritual components. There are six examples of *Visitatio* from Sweden as well as a seventh example of the *Elevatio* and *Depositio* without an accompanying *Visitatio*. In addition to these, there is a passage from the *Graduale Arosiense* that includes the musical sequence *Victime paschali laudes*, which is found in many of the extant *Visitatio* from across Europe, including two of the Swedish examples. There is no textual evidence of this type of

liturgical drama from Denmark or Norway, although there is a Missal from Lund that also includes the *Victime* sequence without the *quem quaeritis* dialogue. There is also material evidence of such practices from both Denmark and Sweden in the form *kristigrav*: wooden sculptures of the crucified Christ – often accompanied by a corresponding sepulcher. Additionally, there is documentation from as late as 1854 of a sepulcher as part of the architecture of a church in Flensburg, a market town in the disputed province of Schleswig. Marker and Marker also cite a church ordinance from 1591 that specifically forbade the practice of the *depositio* ritual in Swedish churches. Acknowledging this secondary evidence of liturgical performance is essential as its existence provides further proof of this practice in the north.

Prior to 1903 and the work of E.K. Chambers, the *Quem quaeritis* exchange was not called *drama* and was not included in a discussion of such. In Scandinavia, this is evidenced in the work of G.E. Klemming. In 1879, Klemming published *Sveriges dramatiska litteratur till och med 1875*, a survey of the entire history of Swedish drama in which he ignores the liturgical scenes. Instead, he begins his survey with *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium*, the Swedish miracle play from the late fifteenth century that has since been described as “Scandinavia’s oldest play” (Klemming 1883, 1). In an appendix to the primary corpus, he includes a limited selection of texts, which he describes as: “...hvarjehand skrifter som väl äga mer eller mindre fullständig dramatisk form, men dock icke kunna räknas till dramatikens område i egentlig mening” (Klemming 1883, Foreword; ... diverse texts that certainly possess, to a greater or lesser degree, complete dramatic form, but still cannot be counted as drama, strictly speaking). While he never explains what “complete dramatic form” means, it seems likely, based on the other appendix categories, *Dramatic performances without words* and *Dramatic musical numbers without action*, that this vague categorization refers to pieces that appear to possess

some of, but not all of, the elements typically associated with theater in the nineteenth century – enactment, action, dialogue and narrative. At almost exactly the same time in Denmark, Sophus Birket Smith, published *De tre ældste danske Skuespil (The three oldest Danish plays)*, a diplomatic edition of the three full plays and one fragment contained in MS Thott 780 folio. These plays, attributed to the Odense schoolmaster Christiern Hansen, have been dated to the early 1500s and are undeniably plays – scripts written in dialogue form with enactment, action and a clear narrative. In his introduction, Birket Smith defends his timeline by refuting the opinion of L. Helveg and A. Heise who claim that certain satires in dialogue form could be considered proper plays. Instead, he claims, they must be considered something more akin to Platonic dialogues as they are missing “*dramatisk Handling*” or, *enactment* (Birket Smith 1874, 1).

Beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – or at roughly the same time as or shortly after Klemming and Birket Smith were writing about the history of Scandinavian theater, drama scholars developed what Richard McCall refers to as a “Darwinian” narrative of the evolution of the theater, beginning with the staged reenactment of biblical narratives as a part of the liturgy in roughly the ninth century. For Klemming and Birket Smith, theater and drama were essentially one in the same. For a text to be considered drama, it had to be just that, a text. Theater scholars were literary scholars, looking primarily at performance in its literary forms. In order for a text to be a play it needed to demonstrate the “dramatic form” referenced by Klemming and explained here as enactment, action, dialogue and narrative. As McCall points out, this theory, which defines drama as the transmission of *narrative* through reenactment and spoken word or song easily allows for the inclusion of short liturgical scenes as they clearly include the *playing* of narrative through dialogue and staging (McCall 2007, 3). Unlike the

Platonic dialogues or the *Jwll och Fasta* dialogue categorized by Klemming as quasi-dramatic, the liturgical texts clearly include the requisite enactment, action, dialogue and narrative to qualify as "drama, strictly speaking." It is not surprising, however, that Klemming makes no mention of the extant *Visitatio* texts, considering they would not seriously be included in a discussion of drama for another thirty-nine years. Unfortunately, the scholarly approach that has left Klemming's 1883 assessment of the field almost unquestioned, neglects to consider changing theories about drama.

By 2016, this changing theory of drama has come almost full circle: from the complete exclusion of non-literary performance to Chambers' inclusion of liturgical texts as primitive forms of drama in the evolution of theater to a debate over whether or not the performance of ritual can be discussed in relation to staged theatrical performance. In 2007, Sven-Åke Heed, in *Ny Svensk Teaterhistoria*, raised the question of whether or not liturgical dramas can be considered plays. He describes the extant Swedish *Quem quaeritis* as "... korta, nästan fragmentariska spel – om man nu ens kan kalla det så -..." (Heed 2007, 45; ... short, almost fragmentary plays – if one can even call them that -...). However, in the same chapter, he claims that a modern discussion of medieval drama must include a discussion of all forms of scripted and non-scripted performance, going on to discuss several possible instances of dramatic enactment. Heed addresses what is currently a topic of debate within the field of medieval drama studies. Michael L. Norton argues in his forthcoming book *Liturgical Drama and the Reimagining of Medieval Theater*, that *representational rites*<sup>1</sup> such as the *Visitatio supulchri* cannot be considered drama as they functioned for the participants in the same way as all other forms of ritual. He states, "The whole of medieval liturgical practice was infused with multiple layers of meaning, and even when a rite was not in itself representational, it was often

understood in a way that we might see as representational nonetheless" (Norton, 93).

Norton's argument, which insists that mimesis in the context of ritual does not qualify as drama in the theatrical sense may support excluding the existing Swedish variants as well as the Swedish and Danish secondary sources, but it does not address the question of the performative nature of ritual. What Norton calls "mimesis" or "mimetic drama," however, is what Richard McCall refers to as "enactment." Scholars such as McCall, who adhere to the theories of performance put forth by Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, among others, discuss the liturgy itself as ritual enactment, citing particular practices like the Eucharist and the ritual of transubstantiation as "act [fulfilling] narrative" that serves to connect the ritual participants with the symbolic narrative being enacted, in other words, to allow the participants to experience and engage with theology (McCall 2007, 2). In this sense, the entire liturgy, with all of its rules, costumes and ritual repetitions, is easily dubbed performance. By extension, the inclusion of staged events involving dialogue, costumes and even props, is unquestionably dramatic enactment.

Audrey Ekdahl Davidson and Alf Kjellén are the only scholars who have dedicated extended scholarly attention to the remaining Swedish texts. In their 1975 history of Scandinavian theater and the 2006 revision, Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker refer to the Swedish *Quem quaeritis* as examples of early performance in Scandinavia, also referencing non-textual evidence of their performance. As their study is a history covering roughly 1,000 years, however, they were only able to dedicate two pages to this discussion. In his study of the performance of Eddic poetry, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*, Terry Gunnell makes the claim "...there is no evidence that the Norwegians or Icelanders developed any form of liturgical drama themselves during the Middle Ages. It is fairly certain that the Swedes did, since there are

no less than three extant manuscripts of Easter plays, which were probably performed in Linköping and in the Stockholm area during the thirteenth century" (Gunnell 1995, 329). In fact, the six *Visitatio* discussed by Ekdahl Davidson in 1990 (five years before the publication of Gunnell's book) had been edited and catalogued by Walther Lipphardt in *Lateinsche Osterfeiern und Osterspiel* in 1981. In the first edition of their history of Scandinavian theater which was published in 1975, Marker and Marker had pointed out evidence of epiphany plays and processions in Norway that may have been related to the liturgical tradition (Marker 1975, 3-6). While the focus of Gunnell's study was specifically the performative elements of Eddic poetry and not late medieval liturgical or scripted performance, it is the claims like the one made by Gunnell that have perpetuated the idea that there is no tradition of liturgical performance (or medieval performance of any kind) in Scandinavia to speak of.

However, in fact, there is ample evidence of participation in liturgical performance in Scandinavia. Trusting the dating that has already been done by Toni Schmid and Walther Lipphardt, the surviving texts come from a wide range of sources covering a span of roughly 300 years. Lipphardt catalogued all known examples of medieval liturgical drama from across Europe, giving each of these texts a catalogue number, as well as a reference name that indicates the diocese from which they originate (or are believed to originate). Ekdahl Davidson refers to the texts by their diocese of origin and their number in the chronology of Swedish examples. This means that they both include the examples from Vadstena Cloister as "Linköping" texts. While it is true that Vadstena would have been part of the diocese of Linköping, the continued importance of the Easter processional in the Birgittine order across Europe even after the end of the Middle-Ages makes it important to remember that these two texts are not just from a Linköping church, but from the original Birgittine cloister itself. Maintaining Ekdahl Davidson's

numbering that includes only the Swedish examples, I refer to the Vadstena texts as Vadstena #4 and Vadstena #7 rather than as Linköping #4 and Linköping #7 as does Ekdahl Davidson. The *Victime paschali laudes* and *Surgit christus cum tropeo* sequences from *Graduale Suecicum* are not referenced by Lipphardt or Ekdahl Davidson nor is the *Victime paschali laudes* from *Missale Lundense* and thus have no catalogue number. Following the pattern established by Ekdahl Davidson, I will refer to them as Västerås #8 and Lund #9. The chart below indicates my catalogue numbers as well as Lipphardt's numbers along with the type of source, the date of recording, and the manuscript's current location.

Reference #	Text	Source	Date	Lipphardt #	Location
Linköping #1	<i>Visitatio Sepulchri</i>	Ordinal	1200s	No. 446 (Link <sup>1</sup> )	Riksarkivet: Värmland, 1589, No. 12; KA THEOL. Ord. 3
Linköping #2	<i>Visitatio Sepulchri</i>	Antiphonal	1200s	No. 448 (Link <sup>3</sup> )	Riksarkivet: Småland 1574, No. 3:2
Stockholm #3	<i>Visitatio Sepulchri</i>	Gradual	1200s	No. 450 (Stock <sup>1</sup> )	Riksarkivet: Dalarna 1575, No. 14
Vadstena #4	<i>Elevatio Crucis</i> and <i>Visitatio Sepulchri</i>	<i>Ordinarius Lincopensis</i>	1384	No. 447 (Link <sup>2</sup> )	Riksarkivet: Skoklostersamlingen, No. 2 (E 8899)
Unknown #5	<i>Visitatio Sepulchri</i>	Breviary	1200s or 1300s	No. 451 (Stock <sup>2</sup> )	Riksarkivet: Räkenskaper för Varuhus o. Handling [attached to another text]
Linköping #6	<i>Elevatio Crucis</i> and <i>Visitatio Sepulchri</i>	<i>Ordinarius Lincopensis</i>	1493	No. 449 (Link <sup>4</sup> )	Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek: MS. C. 428
Vadstena #7	<i>Depositio Crucis</i> and <i>Elevatio Crucis</i>	Processional	1400s	No. 449a (Link <sup>5</sup> )	Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek: MS. C. 506
Västerås #8	<i>Victime paschali laudes</i> and <i>Surgit Christus cum tropeo</i>	<i>Graduale Suecicum</i>	1493	N/A	Kungliga Biblioteket (Stockholm): Coll(S) 464
Lund #9	<i>Victime paschali laudes</i>	<i>Missale Lundense</i>	1514	N/A	Det Kongelige Bibliotek (Copenhagen): Hielmst. 43 folio, (LN 181) [1 of 5 surviving copies]

All of the extant variants of the *quem quaeritis* from Sweden follow the same pattern as the remaining variants from the continent and are a version of the dialogue as it is written in the Vulgate Mark 16:2-8 and Matthew 28:6 (Ek Dahl Davidson 1990, 13). While often we know the origins of liturgical texts, such as the *Victime paschali laudes* sequence which is attributed the eleventh century priest Wipo of Burgundy, in the case of the *visitatio* sequence, the origins are uncertain. The appearance of this trope in sources across Europe is expected and not really a matter of note. The way in which liturgical material was shared and spread is a well-documented function of the church. It would be odd if this practice was not evidenced in Scandinavia at all. This absence would indicate a lack of interaction or a remarkable isolation from the widespread practices of the greater church.

The Scandinavian preoccupation with the origins of the surviving texts extends, rather oddly, to the liturgical texts as well. Kjellén in particular is concerned about the nativity of these texts and the tradition itself. In fact, Kjellén is so concerned with finding the origin of these texts that he presents a detailed theory claiming that the *Visitatio* tradition actually originated in Jerusalem, a theory that, to Kjellén, entirely negates any discussion of this as a “Western” tradition (Kjellén 1926, 14). A good portion of his discussion of Linköping #6 focuses on the similarities between the Linköping text and a thirteenth century German text from a breviary in the city of Gotha, leading him to conclude that the Gotha text is likely the source for the variant recorded in the Linköping Ordinal of 1493. While it may be interesting to identify the path from Gotha to Linköping, however, it does not actually tell us anything significant about the way this practice was carried out in late medieval Sweden. All of Scandinavia was heavily influenced by German merchants in the late medieval period. Linköping in particular, as a market city in the heart of main travel corridor between Stockholm and Copenhagen, had a large and influential

German merchant population. As the bishopric of a large diocese, Linköping was a hub for travelers and merchants alike, international in nature from its very founding. It is not surprising, therefore, that any text originating in this city would reflect international, and in particular German, influences.

Comparing the extant Swedish documents, on the other hand, gives us clues about the degree to which the Scandinavian churches practiced this particular liturgical form. It also provides some compelling clues to the fate of the lost texts. Linköping #6 is the variant discussed by Kjellén, but it is also one of only three examples that is contained in a complete, or mostly complete, manuscript, the other two full manuscripts being Vadstena #4 and Vadstena #7. As it is part of a full manuscript, it is known that Linköping #6 is found in an ordinal used at Linköping Cathedral and dating to 1493 (*Ordinarius Lincopensis 1493*). The manuscript in which Vadstena #4 is found is also a Linköping Ordinal (*Ordinarius Lincopensis*), this one being more than one-hundred years older than the one in which Linköping #6 is found, with specific notations indicating that it was intended to be used by the sisters and brothers at Vadstena Cloister (Ekdahl Davidson 1990, 63). It is evident that the older text was used as a source text for the younger when the *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* texts in *Ordinarius Lincopensis* and *Ordinarius Lincopensis 1493* are compared. For all intents and purposes, the texts are identical. With the exception of some minor grammatical and orthographic differences, found mostly in the rubrics, the basic script remains unchanged. These grammatical and orthographic changes, for example, changing *eleuacionem* in the first line of Vadstena #4 to *eleuationem* in the same place in Linköping #6, are to be expected over the course of a century, or even between two different scribes. It is also not surprising that the text would not have changed in such a significant amount of time. An active performance tradition undergoes considerable changes over the course of one-

hundred years, but in the case of liturgical performance, ritual performed based on recorded texts derived from sacred sources, it is less likely that the dialogue would change.

In fact, the most likely changes would have occurred in the way that the rubrics were carried out or in the music itself. Unfortunately, the music associated with both of these texts is lost. The most complex directions are, as is often the case, the explanation of the arrival of the Marys and Salome at the tomb. Again, they are almost identical, with only minor orthographic differences, some of which, it seems, may be the fault of a scribe with less than perfect handwriting. It is unknown how these performances would look, with the exception of the “clerics representing women in copes” carrying thuribles and incense and “two deacons in dalmatics as angels”, details that are also quite common<sup>11</sup>. How and where this would have taken place and to what extent the directions would have been followed as written, is entirely unclear. This practice continued during the entire intervening period. If it had fallen out of practice, or if considerable changes had been made, it seems quite unlikely that it would have been preserved in the later text. As the ordinal is an instructional text for carrying out church rituals, it would be unnecessary to include a practice that was simply not followed when undertaking the painstaking task of updating, and copying by hand, the new instructional text. While entirely circumstantial and possibly anecdotal, it does seem at least noteworthy to mention here that it is the younger scribe who had such trouble with his duties, perhaps making it even more likely that any unnecessary texts would have been excluded entirely.

It seems that this was a practice common to the churches of the diocese of Linköping from a very early date. The oldest preserved Swedish liturgical dramatic text, Linköping #1, can be

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<sup>11</sup> This is Ekdahl Davidson’s translation. The Latin is identical in both texts “*ecce tres clerici pro mulieribus in capis*” and *duobus dyachonibus in dalmaticis pro angelis*”

dated to the thirteenth century. As is the case with Linköping #6 and Vadstena #4, Linköping #1 is found in an ordinal. Unlike the other two texts mentioned, it is not preserved as a complete manuscript, but instead was used to make the covers of a set of records from Värmland in the sixteenth century. Although the *Elevatio* is missing from this text, the *Visitatio* begins with Psalms 94, 1 and 2 and the retelling of the story of the visit in the form of the lessons of Pope Gregory before the actual reenactment of the visit, just as it does in Vadstena #4 and Linköping #6. However, while most of the differences here are, again, minor and orthographic, there is a significant change between this early text and the two, closely related, later texts. Both the Vadstena #4 and Linköping #6 variants feature the *Victime paschali laudes* sequence, while Linköping #1 does not, indicating the evolution of an active tradition.

Often attributed to Wipo of Burgundy, an eleventh century priest and chaplain to the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad II, the *Victime paschali* as preserved in the Scandinavian variants is the perfect example of the melding of influences on medieval liturgical practice. As Ekdahl Davidson notes, the *Victime* sequence is less common than the *Surrexit Dominus* sequence, appearing in only two of the six *Visitatio* variants (Vadstena #4 and Linköping #6), though it is, in fact one of the few sequences that is still part of the Roman Catholic Missal today (Ekdahl Davidson 1990, 91). As mentioned above, Linköping #1 is at least one-hundred years older than Vadstena #4, but also has its origins in a Linköping ordinal. It does not use the *Victime* sequence, but instead uses the more common *Surrexit Dominus*. Just as the appearance of the *Visitatio*, despite a lack of changes, in the two later Linköping ordinals indicated a continuity of practice, the adoption of the *Victime* sequence indicates the evolution of active practice.

While the *Visitatio* in which the *Victime* sequence appears are both from the same diocese, there are two other examples of this dialogue that are neither part of a full *Visitatio* sequence, nor

from the Linköping area. The first of these is a version of the *Victime* sequence from the *Graduale Arosiense*, a gradual from Västerås, printed in the late fifteenth century, but surviving in pieces that demonstrate earlier influences. The other is the only surviving text with dramatic tendencies from Denmark, an example of the *Victime* from the *Missale Lundense* of 1514.

Both the *Victime paschali* and the *Surgit Christus* from the Västerås Gradual and the Lund Missal retain elements of rituals that have been identified as liturgical drama. The dialogue form that requires one performer, or one group of performers, to speak as Mary, is reminiscent of the enactment seen in the *Visitatio* sequence. Anytime an individual takes on the persona of someone else, there is a certain degree of suspension of disbelief required of both the audience and the performers themselves. Whether or not that performance is considered “drama” as discussed by Heed and Norton, all parties involved are assuming that, for a moment, everyone can agree to accept the enactment as valid in that moment. As these brief sequences appear not only in extended episodes of enactment, like the *Visitatio* sequences, but also in the brief excerpts from two cities with no surviving examples of extended enactment as part of the liturgy, it can be assumed that this type of representational enactment was understood and accepted as part of the liturgy across Scandinavia, hinting that perhaps no surviving examples does not mean no examples at all.

In their *History of Scandinavian Theater*, Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker refer to a Swedish church edict of 1591 that expressly forbade *Depositio Crucis* enactments (Marker and Marker 2006, 4). This church law, recorded some sixty-five years after Sweden's official separation from the Catholic church suggests that *Depositio* continued to be practiced in the early Lutheran period. Linköping #1, Linköping #2, Stockholm #3 and Unknown #5 are all fragments, attached to the covers of municipal records from across central and Western Sweden. Not one of

them was found near their origin, or, for that matter, near a parish from which there is a surviving example of liturgical performance. Of course, it is not simply Easter plays that were used for this purpose. It was common practice to cannibalize the pages of old books to make covers for new books. Many of these old books are Catholic texts that were outdated by the late sixteenth century, or, in some cases, were records of things that were no longer legal. Considering that examples we have were rediscovered as part of repurposed texts and that there is an untold number of unexamined repurposed texts still in the archives, the probability that there are more surviving examples of the *quem quaeritis* trope from Scandinavia that have yet to be discovered is quite good.

The Reformation in Sweden and Denmark took no pains to preserve the possessions of the Catholic Church. In both countries the Crown confiscated Church properties and possessions when ties were broken with Rome. Items were sold, repurposed, intentionally destroyed or simply neglected in the years that followed. After the Parliament of Västerås in 1527, Gustav Vasa declared that the Catholic Church must forfeit all of their possessions to the state. Most of these possessions were destroyed, repurposed or sold to pay the King's extensive war debts. Hans Brask, the last bishop of Linköping managed to flee the country with a good deal of the movable possessions that had been housed in Linköping. This may explain why there seems to be a larger collection of well-preserved texts from the Linköping diocese, but further research would be required to trace the fates of items taken with Brask to Rome or the histories of the Linköping texts that remain. In addition to the action or inaction on the part of early Reformers as regards Catholic texts, large, destructive fires were common. The entire city of Stockholm burned no less than four times during the fifteenth century alone and Copenhagen more times that. City Hall, the university library and a large portion of what remained of the medieval

architecture of Copenhagen was famously destroyed in the great fire of 1728. The three oldest fragments of liturgical drama surviving from Scandinavia – Linköping #1, Linköping #2 and Stockholm #3 – all bear signs of fire damage. The Royal Library in Stockholm's most famous possession, the *Codex Gigas*, “The Devil’s Bible”, famously survived the burning of the palace in 1697, a feat often attributed to the book’s legendary demonic properties. Most early books, however, did not manage to escape such a fate.

Davidson has also done an extended analysis of two extant passion plays from Scandinavia. The plays from Sweden and Denmark are from a much later period than that being discussed here, but bear the clear influence of earlier continental passion plays. Again, it seems ridiculous to assume that a practice that is well-documented on the continent before the Reformation, would miraculously appear in Scandinavia post Reformation, with absolutely no precedent for it earlier. Rather, we can assume, as Ekdahl Davidson does, that these preserved St John’s Passions are the evolution of an earlier tradition (Davidson 1981, 12).

In addition to the surviving textual evidence of pre-Reformation liturgical performance in Scandinavia, there is a robust collection of evidence that, when viewed alongside these texts, points to the performance of Easter plays as a widespread practice. Bengt Stolt discusses the art associated with medieval performance in depth in his book *Medeltida teater och gotländsk kyrkokonst* (Stolt 1993; *Medieval Theater and Church Art from Gotland*). He is specifically interested in the works found in the churches and ruins on the island of Gotland, but outlines all of the examples known to him from elsewhere in Scandinavia. Of particular interest to the discussion of liturgical drama are extant examples of *kristigrav*, wooden sculptures of the crucified Christ that were used in the *Depositio and Elevatio* rituals. There is documentation from across Europe of similar statues being used for this purpose, though not every church would

have had something quite so elaborate. Oftentimes a parish would make do with an image of Christ or even the host itself (Stolt 1993, 26). Unlike the liturgical texts, which survive primarily in Sweden with only one example from Denmark (Lund #9), there are at least seven surviving *kristigrav* from Scandinavia. Four of these examples are from Sweden (Västerlöfsta, Roslags-Bro, Bollnäs<sup>12</sup>, and Enköping), while the fifth and sixth are from Denmark (Mariager and Kerteminde). Stolt also claims that there is a surviving *kristigrav* from Korppoo, Finland at the National Museum in Helsinki as well as an example from Frørup at Fyns Stiftsmuseum in Odense, and another from Tornby at a museum in Hjørring, Denmark. He also claims that there is a wooden casket at Tromsø Museum in northern Norway but there is no sculpture remaining and the age of the casket or existence of a sculpture at any time is unknown (Stolt 1993, 27). In addition to these surviving sculptures, he cites written sources that identify similar *kristigrav* at Ridderholmskyrka in Stockholm in the early 1400s, and at Uppsala Cathedral in 1448. He further cites archival documentation of "gravkistor" (caskets) in Alunda, Tuna and Vada, Sweden and possibly others in Denmark, including one in Genarp in Skåne (Stolt 1993, 26). Tracking down Stolt's sources and following up on these claims is a considerable project in itself. While the possibility of the existence of these artifacts is intriguing and his sources are sound, he does not go into detail about the examples found outside of Gotland nor does he explain why he thinks these particular statues or caskets may be of the same age, style or function of those referenced by other sources. A physical examination of these artifacts would be necessary in order to definitively place them in a corpus of evidence of medieval performance.

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<sup>12</sup> Stolt is the only source who mentions the Bollnäs sculpture (below) although Lars Nylander at Hälsinglands Museum has confirmed that it is in the collection of the museum along with an unusual number of surviving medieval wooden sculptures from Bollnäs. The only available photo is of poor quality and found on a personal website.

*Kristigrav* consisted of a life-sized statue of Christ and a sepulcher in which to place the statue. The well-preserved *kristigrav* from Västerlövsta in Uppland has been dated to the latter part of the fifteenth century, according to *Historiska museet* in Stockholm, where the statue now resides, making it the oldest surviving *kristigrav* from Scandinavia as well as one of the best preserved. What is remarkable about this particular statue is that in addition to the survival of the statue and its original sepulcher, the sepulcher and sculpture have both retained a great deal of their original paint. The detail evidenced in this example suggests the significance of this ritual for participating churches. A piece such as this would have been a substantial investment for a small church. The Västerlövsta example continued to be used in some capacity well after the Reformation. Stolt cites a source from 1682 which mentions the statue still residing in the church and refers to people in "forna tijder" (the past), touching their lips to the sepulcher and wearing away the paint (Stolt 1993, 26).



*Figure 6 - Västerlövsta kristigrav Photo: Lennart Karlsson*

Similarly, the Danish examples from the Birgittine cloister in Mariager and Skt. Laurentii Kirke in Kerteminde are in good condition. The Mariager example, though negligibly younger

than the sculpture from Västerlöfsta, is equally well preserved. Two of the nine remaining liturgical texts come from Vadstena cloister (Vadstena #4 and Vadstena #7), the home of St. Birgitta herself, indicating that the practice was popular with the sisters as early as the fourteenth century. The photo below on the left is the Mariager example. The seated Christ behind the sepulcher is referred to as "Smertensmanden," an image of the suffering Christ that was also a popular trope in the late Middle Ages. Stolt states that the Tromsø *gravkista* now holds a painted *smertensmand* although it is uncertain whether or not the painting was ever used as part of the liturgical reenactment (Stolt 1993, 25; 26). The example from Kerteminde (below right), now housed at the National Museum in Copenhagen, features a *smertensmand* painting on the sepulcher (Stolt 1993, 27).



*Figure 7 - Mariager kristigrav (and Smertensmand),  
Photo: Troels Langvad*



*Figure 8 - Kerteminde kristigrav,  
Photo: Jesper Weng*

The examples from Roslagsbro (Figure 9) and Enköping (Figure 10) in Sweden are both missing their original sepulchers and paint. They have been damaged but the style and pose of the Roslagsbro example indicates that it was used as part of the Easter rituals. As with the two Danish examples, the Västerlövsta example and the Bollnäs example, the figure is laying as if awaiting burial. The Enköping example is more difficult to identify as a kristigrav. His head droops and is tilted to right as is common in images of Christ on the cross. His arms are missing, making it impossible to tell their original position although his feet are not crossed and do not have the nails or nail holes that would be present in a crucifix. Historiska Museet identifies the style of the sculpture as a kristigrav as well (Enköping kristigrav, [historiska.se](http://historiska.se)).

Both of these sculptures, which are dated around 1500, are examples of the evocative potential of these plays referenced by Æthelwald in the *Regularis Concordia*. They are detailed in ways that are evident even without their original paint. Both depict Christ as an emaciated figure. The Roslags-Bro sculpture is particularly stark in its imagery, detailing his ribs and veins – making this example look less like a restful, sleeping figure and more like a corpse. The Enköping example is also quite realistic, though it is not as elaborate as the example from Roslags-Bro and has sustained more damage over the years. Despite the damage, they remain excellent examples of the detail with which these pieces were crafted, indicating that the practice of this type of liturgical drama was not simply coincidental, or, as Heed implied, possibly non-existent (Heed 2007, 45). These are the elaborate and certainly expensive remnants of a practice that was considered an essential part of the liturgy. The detail in these sculptures and the expense that most certainly went into them indicates a high degree of cultural significance for the people responsible for their acquisition. For a church, and in the case of all of the surviving examples, for a small church in a relatively remote place, to invest so much in an object that was meant to be used once a year implies that this annual ceremony was significant – more than just a small piece of the liturgy.



*Figure 9 - Roslags-Bro kristigrav*

*Photo: Lennart Karlsson*



*Figure 10 - Enköping kristigrav,*

*Photo: Lennart Karlsson*

Marker and Marker cite an edict from 1591 that specifically forbade the practice of Depositio Crucis, or, the burying of the cross. Banning a specific practice, nearly seventy years after the official split with Rome, indicates a lingering tendency to participate in a practice that had been deemed too closely associated with the decadent practices of the Catholic Church

(Marker 2006, 4). Olaus Petri, the Swedish priest and student of Martin Luther who is credited with introducing the Reformation in Sweden, makes clear his feelings about Catholic practices that he deemed “ornament” in his 1529 church manual (Petri 1529, 12). According to Petri, the church had adopted a number of ritual practices that were outside the instruction of the scriptures. In his discussion of the sacrament of baptism he says,

Because we have many ceremonies and practices in the administration of the sacrament which the sacraments themselves can well afford to be without, thus salt, chrism, oil, candles, and white robes are used in the baptism. Formerly milk, honey or wine, were also used in baptism. These ceremonies are more of an ornament to baptism than of any special efficacy, because baptism itself is just as good if such ceremonies are not there since in fact they were not used in early Christendom. The same is true relative to several other matters. (Petri 1529, 12-13)

Although he does not specifically refer to dramatic enactment as part of the liturgy, it is reasonable to conclude, in light of the examples that he does give, that the donning of costumes and the ritual “burial” of Christ would be viewed by Petri as the sort of unnecessary practice that had turned the mass into “a sort of farce.” Petri himself was not opposed to performance and was a vocal proponent of using drama as a teaching tool. In fact, Petri was credited until quite recently as the author of *Tobie Commedia*, a humanist play from the mid-sixteenth century. The elaborate ritual performance of the Catholic Church, however, was not the same sort of drama that Petri endorsed. The movement away from enactment as a part of church ritual and towards a more austere form of worship supports the loss of texts discussed above. Preserving the records of an outdated and even discouraged ritual would not have been a priority.

The presence of these early examples, although they may be sparser than surviving

examples from Britain and the continent, is evidence that Scandinavians were exposed to and participated in the development of performance tradition alongside their neighbors to the south. They did not simply adopt the practices of the continent later, in an attempt to bolster their own cultural relevance. While it is true that later generations imported continental performers in order to bring a sense of cultural legitimacy to the court before the development of professional national companies in the eighteenth century, the acknowledgement that the concept of the dramatic embodiment has been present in Scandinavia since the twelfth century changes the understanding of the history of performance in the north. The relationship between the Humanist school plays and the liturgical performance tradition demonstrates the influence and continuation of Catholic practices into the Lutheran period, rather than an importation of foreign traditions in the late seventeenth century. Scandinavians had been participating in larger European performance traditions for hundreds of years by the late 1600s.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### **Som hår på en höna: Epiphany Plays and Public Processions**

The development of certain secular practices in post-Reformation Scandinavia and even the modern period can be traced back to the influence of pre-Reformation rituals and traditions, including liturgical enactments similar to the performance of the *quem quaeritis* discussed in Chapter Four. The longevity of *stjernespil* (star plays) in Scandinavia, and in particular in Bergen, suggests a strong connection to the liturgical *Officium Stellae* (Office of the Star) evidenced in surviving records from France and Germany. The extension of these traditions into related public processions and revelries such as the *Steffansridning* (Steffan's ride) in Sweden in the nineteenth century and eventually into the Lucia processions still practiced today follows a similar pattern to the development of such liturgical and secular traditions on the continent. Large populations of German merchants across Scandinavia from at least the thirteenth century onward guarantees a significant and sustained interaction between Nordic traditions and those documented elsewhere in Europe. Comparing post-Reformation and even modern documentation of Scandinavian traditions with known medieval traditions abroad as well as with older, extant evidence from Scandinavia creates a sound argument for the existence of medieval practices that have either been lost or previously overlooked.

In his 1737 description of Bergen, *Den berømmelige Norske Handel-Stad Bergens Beskrivelse*, Ludvig Holberg describes a practice among the young German merchants living in Bergen in the late middle-ages that he calls "*contorske spil*" (Holberg 1737, 247). Lyder C. Sagan and Henrik H. Foss reference these *spil* again in 1824, reprinting Holberg's own descriptions of the events (Sagen 1824, 139-144). Marker and Marker later cite Sagan and Foss

in their history of Scandinavian theater, describing *contorske spil* as "farce." This language is not entirely accurate, however. The word "farce" implies that the Bergen *contorske spil* were dramatic enactments but the descriptions as written by Holberg read more like hazing rituals than scripted drama<sup>13</sup>. It seems more likely that Holberg's eighteenth century use of the word *spil* was intended to mean *spil* in the sense of game rather than *spil* as a dramatic performance. Lawrence Clopper addresses the misreading of the Latin word "ludos" by drama scholars, making a distinction between plays in the dramatic sense and games that made use of performative elements such as masks, costumes and the playing of characters (Clopper 2001). Max Harris invokes Clopper's reading in his discussion of the Feast of Fools. The same argument can be applied here as well. As Norton argued regarding liturgical performance, there is small likelihood that the participants in these "spil" understood them as dramatic performance but rather as games and revelry<sup>14</sup>. Despite this and despite Norton's dismissal of liturgical drama, these games and revelries do exhibit features similar to those of documented liturgical enactments and thus suggest a related or parallel development.

Although Bergen itself was not a member of the Hanseatic League, it was one of the league's primary *kontorstad*. Kontorstad were cities with Hansa trading posts and Bergen was a major port, controlling much of the trade in that area. This means that, like Stockholm and Visby in the east, which were Hansa member cities, or Malmö and Falsterbo in the south which were home to significantly smaller Hansa trading posts, Bergen had a sizable German population. The German merchants lived and conducted their business in the area known as *Bryggen*, along the water on the northern edge of the inlet. Hansa merchants were limited to trade with Nordland as

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<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, *contorske spil* were eventually forbidden by Christian IV in 1671 (Holberg 1737, 262-263).

<sup>14</sup> Refer back to Norton's analysis of liturgical drama discussed in the previous chapter.

well as with certain areas of Troms, but with no other areas of Norway. Since Bergen never joined the league, the Norwegian merchants in Bergen still controlled trade with the rest of the country.

According to the rules for merchants laid out by Lübeck, the men living and working in the *kontorstad* were required to remain single, which meant that not only were there a good number of German merchants living in the city, but also that those Germans were largely young men. As Harris points out, the participants in the rowdy entertainments in Germany (and France) were primarily young, unmarried men – either young clergy members participating in events inside (and often outside) of the church or young laymen taking part in the secular events outside of the church (Harris 2011, 169). The *contorske spil* described by Holberg were the exclusive practice of these young merchants. Elsewhere in Scandinavia – as well as in Bergen – participants in *stjernespil* and other yuletide revelries were also young men, a condition that remained well into the nineteenth century. The Scandinavian *stjernespil* practice, of which there is earlier evidence in Germany and France, was likely influenced significantly by the contact between German merchants and the Scandinavian public. As is evidenced by the example of Bergen, trade cities in Scandinavia had large German populations, even those that were not associated with the Hanseatic League, thus the same influence can be assumed across the region. Close, regular contact with Northern German merchants has left behind considerable evidence of German influence in all aspects of recorded daily life. The fact that traditions like the *stjernespil* were continued well after the Germans were gone makes them Scandinavian practice worthy of consideration.

*Røge-spillet* (the smoke game) is the first *contorske spil* described by Holberg. It involved *candidaten* (the candidate – new merchant) and three other merchants proceeding to the

home of the shoemaker after most of the town was in bed for the night. The three attendants were to dress as a fool, a farmer and a farmer's wife, each carrying with them a box – *en smør-æske* (butter box) – to fill with ox hair, discarded wood and "*anden Ureenlighed*" (other dirty things). After processing through town and gathering these things, they would return home, throwing their collected dirty things at anyone they passed. Back home, they would proceed to the cookhouse and hoist the candidate to the ceiling with a rope tied to his waist. They then set the remaining "dirty things" on fire and proceeded to ask him questions that he was required to answer so that he would be forced to inhale the pungent smoke (Holberg 1737, 246-247).

All of the *spil* that Holberg described are similar to *røge-spillet* in that they were annual revels in which *candidaten* was forced to participate in embarrassing and/or dangerous stunts in order to be accepted as part of the merchant community. The details of this game are strikingly similar to the Feast of Fools as it was described by the Faculty of Theology at The University of Paris in a letter from March of 1445. The letter as cited by Harris states, "Priests should not shed their clerical dress and, dressed as laymen or fools, further diminish the reputation of the clergy by their behavior. Even less should they adopt masked or painted faces, put on women's clothes or take part in theatrical plays or other games involving impersonation, especially in a public place or in the presence of a large crowd (Harris 2011, 2-3). Harris further cites a study from 1978 written by Barbara Tuchman in which she states, "Naked men haul carts of manure which they throw at the populace." She also describes the swinging of "censers made of old shoes emitting a 'stinking smoke' (Harris 2011, 4-5; Tuchman 1978, 32-33)" Harris uses this letter and Tuchman's description of the events as the basis of his argument against the popular understanding of the Feast of Fools as purely a wild revel within the church itself. In so doing, he postulates that the vulgarity criticized by the letter writers was likely an exaggeration of events

within the church or, more likely, an exaggeration of practices carried out in concurrent public events organized by lay youth groups – and possibly participated in by young members of the clergy (Harris 2011, 169). The similarities to the Bergen *contorske spil* – the dressing in women's clothes or as fools and processing through the streets, participation in games involving impersonation or the hurling of manure at bystanders (which would most certainly be covered by the category "other dirty things"), along with the detail of the 'stinking smoke' suggests a relationship with the merchant games from Bergen, if only that the shared details are a reflection of common festive practice in the late Middle Ages.

This conclusion does not dismiss Harris' assertion that the surviving descriptions of the feast are actually exaggerations of multiple games, performances and events – rather it supports it. The appearance of these same details in lay tradition some 1,000 plus kilometers away in activities with absolutely no identifiable connection to liturgical tradition suggests that these practices were common forms of revelry. Dressing as fools or men dressing in women's clothing is documented in other public diversions while throwing refuse and burning foul smelling objects is a more specialized form of carousing, although certainly not unheard of. The relationship between amusements instituted and organized by lay youth groups that occurred simultaneously with liturgical processions speaks to the scale and popularity of this type of public spectacle. The repetition of the event, the prescribed formula for the evenings events, the public processions, and the costumes all point to this ritual as a performative event in which the candidate and the entire participating merchant community enact a ritual of position and hierarchy in front of the town and the members of their own community. While it is unlikely that Holberg, an eighteenth century dramatist whose own dramatic works followed strict dramatic guidelines, intended for these to be understood as performance in the same sense as drama, this material is still valuable

to a discussion of medieval performance in Scandinavia. It is particularly valuable to a discussion of the movement from liturgical epiphany performances to public epiphany performance to tangentially related epiphany revelry.

There are a number of other examples of this type of public enactment both in Scandinavia as well as in Britain and on the continent. Labor guilds and social fraternities led urban processions and sponsored events related to the celebration of their patron saint such as the procession of the members of *Hellige Lekmens Gille* through the streets of Stockholm with the host in celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi (Murberg 1791, 246-247). While exiled in Rome, Olaus Magnus, the brother of Johannes Magnus, and the last papal appointed archbishop of Uppsala, published an expansive history of the Nordic peoples in 1555 titled *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus (A History of the Northern Peoples)*. In this history, he details a number of traditions practiced in Scandinavia including a celebration of the coming of spring in which two community members would dress as *Blomstergreven* (the Count of Flowers) and *Vinterhöfdingen* (the Winter Chief). *Blomstergreven* and *Vinterhöfdingen* would act out a mock jousting match which winter would inevitably lose, making way for the reign of summer and *Blomstergreven* (Magnus 1555, 679-680). Ljunggren identifies the same tradition in central Sweden, Skåne and Denmark although he gives no further details (Ljunggren 1864, 127). Chambers also discussed similar traditions across Europe (Chambers 1903, i 160-181).

The case of *Blomstergreven* is an example of early folk performance in Scandinavia. The short skit includes all of the elements identified by McCall as ritual performance as well being an example of the type of secular amusements discussed by Harris. The enactment of the characters of *Blomstergreven* and *Vinterhöfdingen* requires the temporary suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience. Despite knowing that the men portraying winter and summer are actually

community members in costume, the ritual asks the audience to accept that they are who they claim to be for the duration of the event. Despite knowing that the outcome is predetermined, the audience engages in the spectacle as a symbolic means of recognizing the change of season. The repetition of this performance annually lends authority to the ritual. The performance becomes associated with the coming of spring in the same way that the Corpus Christi festivals in England or the performance of *Ludos de Sancto Canuto Duce* in Ringsted functioned as markers of the passage of time.

In his book *The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe*, Stephen Wilson discusses festivals – both secular and church-related – as marking periods of economic transition (Wilson 2000, 25-26). The confrontation between *Blomstergreven* and *Vinterhöfdingen* in Scandinavia clearly emphasizes the shift from the hardship of winter into the relative plenty of summer. Similarly, the major liturgical events correspond to periods of agricultural or historical significance (Wilson 2000, 27-29). Harris argues that existing rituals (such as the Roman Kalends which contribute to the festivities later associated with the feast of Fools), liturgical ritual (such as the elaborate Easter traditions associated with the *quem quaeritis* discussed in Chapter Four) and secular entertainments (such as the carnival activities and performances discussed in Chapter Three) developed in tandem, simultaneously lending and borrowing aspects of organization and practice (Harris 2011, 171). In Scandinavia, this parallel development of tradition is evidenced in the survival of epiphany and epiphany related celebrations such as the *stjernespil*, *Steffansridning* and the eventual adoption of the Lucia processions still practiced.

There is evidence from as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries of liturgical enactment associated with Epiphany in both France and Germany, along with evidence of

popular processions related to this practice. In Scandinavia, the tradition of public performance related to epiphany has enjoyed a long history and is practiced, in some respects, even today. In English language sources, these popular traditions may be referred to as *stella plays* or *processions*, *epiphany plays* or *processions*, *magi plays*, *Herodes* or even *Tres Reges*. In Scandinavia, the same practice is known as *stjernespil*, *helligtrekongersspillet*, or *trettondagsspel*. Despite the variety of names, these practices are all related or in some cases identical traditions. Nineteenth century Scandinavianist scholars have often dismissed this practice as non-native, citing its relationship to the French and German liturgical traditions and the absence of evidence of that same tradition in Scandinavia. Again, this nationalistic and strictly literary understanding of genre is outdated, however, the longevity of this tradition in Scandinavia has attracted the attention of scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The work of Hans Wiers-Jenssen in the 1920s in which he identifies the *stjernespil* tradition in Scandinavia as a continuation of the medieval tradition of epiphany processions has advanced the discussion considerably.

E.K. Chambers has argued that *stella* processions have their origins in the *Offertorium* that took place in the medieval church as part of the epiphany liturgy (Chambers 1903, ii 52). Epiphany is alternately known as Three Wise Men Day or *trettondag* (thirteenth day) in Scandinavia, as it is the thirteenth and final day of the Christmas season. It commemorates the visit of the angel to the three kings and their subsequent journey to Bethlehem to bring gifts to the infant Christ. According to Chambers, it was customary for Christian kings to reenact this story by bringing offerings of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the altar in celebration of Epiphany. Chambers argues that in the event that there was no royalty or local noblemen to carry out this tradition, members of the clergy would dress as the three kings and make a symbolic

offering on their behalf (Ibid). In several cases, the public would not have been able to see these performances at all. Chambers notes that the liturgical stella from Fleury would have been done as part of matins, Strasbourg's was part of vespers and Bilsen's was part of benediction. Of the eleven sources, only Limoges' and Nevers' stella were part of the public mass (Chambers 1903, ii 45-51).

The eleven surviving written sources cited by Chambers vary in age from the eleventh until the early sixteenth centuries. Unlike the *quem quaeritis*, however, evidence of the liturgical magi plays is only extant in French and German sources. Again, as Chambers notes, this limited number of sources indicates a practice that never gained the same sort of enthusiastic participation as the *quem quaeritis*, but this does not mean that it was restricted to only the communities from which we have surviving texts (Chambers 1903, ii 45). Evidence of the later, related traditions throughout Europe indicate a great deal of interaction and cultural exchange, either in the form of liturgical practice, which has been witnessed in the discussion of the *quem quaeritis*, or on the level of popular practice in the late Middle Ages. On the continent, this happened through a gradual merging of the *stella* practices with that of the *Prophetae*, dialogues explaining the teachings of the prophets, performed by laymen in the role of the prophets themselves (Chambers 1903, ii 72). In Scandinavia, the development of this tradition, one that has survived to some extent until today, took a slightly different trajectory and rather than simply becoming a genre of public performance for entertainment purposes, *stjernespil* become more of a public farce, while the associated *steffansspel* were, at least by the nineteenth century, full on revelry.

The liturgical epiphany play tradition, like the *quem quaeritis*, varies by source, but all maintain a central theme – in this case, the embodiment of the characters of the three kings and a

physical object that is central to the action – a star. Each manuscript of the liturgical incarnation of this practice indicates that a star be hung or placed near or above the altar. The three kings proceed through the church to the star. In some instances, they are led by someone dressed as the angel and in a few cases, they act out the meeting with Herod in Jerusalem before proceeding to the star. While Chambers points out this common physical object as a way to connect this practice to the sepulcher of the *quem quaeritis* and thus emphasize the necessity of symbolic props as motivators of staged actions, the star also serves as a point of continuity in the tradition, connecting the liturgical practice to the later, popular tradition. The name of the later processions, *stella*, star in Latin, or *stjernespil*, star play, in the Scandinavian languages, both emphasize the star over the human characters, indicating that the performance is seen as being centered around the journey, not necessarily the travelers and the story rather than the performance itself.

The star itself serves as a symbolic meeting point, not only as the heavenly body that leads the way to the infant Christ in Biblical literature, but also in the liturgical and popular traditions as well. In the medieval church, the placement of a prop representing the star is consistent, as mentioned above. While the audience is expected to accept the performers as representative of the magi, the church space as the Biblical landscape and the procession to the altar as a journey through the desert, it is not enough to simply ask them to imagine a star, nor even to use a point in the architecture of the church itself as representative of the star. Chambers claims that all of the extant scripts call for a star to be placed in the church, usually hung from the ceiling somewhere above the altar (Chambers 1903, ii 44-51). With the placement of this prop, the star then becomes a symbolic meeting point for the audience as well. They, along with the magi, see the heavenly body marking the location of Christ – in this case the church altar.

This same then applies when the magi processions move out of the sacred space of the church and into the public space of the street. The star continues to be a meeting place, the common feature of the popular traditions being that they all, again, call for the use of a physical star. The altar is no longer the central location, nor Bethlehem and the infant Christ, but rather the star marks a moving point in the public space – a gathering of laymen which takes the edifice of worship away from the clergy and makes it community property.

Considering this then, it is not a surprise, as Hans Wiers-Jenssen believes it to be, that this popular tradition which derived from Catholic liturgical practice, gained such rapid popularity in post-Reformation Scandinavia, especially when it seemed to have been of relatively little significance in the medieval Scandinavian liturgy (Wiers-Jenssen 1921, v). This movement away from the prescribed, passive mode of worship and into the hands of the public is exactly what the Reformation advocated. Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker claim, in the 1975 edition of their history, that epiphany plays were "unconditionally banned" in Denmark after the Reformation of 1536 (Marker 1975, 3; Marker 2006, 5). There is no mention of epiphany performance or performance of any kind in the Recess of Copenhagen or the Church Ordinances of 1537-1539. While it is possible that there is a later law or regulation that forbids this type of practice in the church, the Markers offer no citation. Assuming that the Markers' source is reliable, it is particularly telling that church leaders felt the need to specifically forbid certain practices in the sixteenth century. Despite having no primary sources that refer to the performance of epiphany plays as part of the liturgy prior to the Reformation, the fact that they were specifically banned indicates that they did exist and were a common part of church practice, even if no written evidence of them survives.

Both of the Danish documents as well as Christian V's *Danske lov* (Danish Law), essentially give the priests the right to choose how they conduct services for their parishioners. The missals and ordinals of the Catholic Church are gone and while there are a few days that the Reformed church marks as holy days when a service must be conducted, how the parish chooses to conduct those services or services on any other day, is essentially left up to them, not prescribed by a central authority. In keeping with this concept, parishioners are no longer meant to be the passive audience to instructional teaching by a select few. This does not mean that the new church was opposed to didactic performance. They embraced it whole-heartedly, in fact. They became active participants in this tradition, enacting the biblical story for themselves and participating in the performance.

The *stjernespil* tradition was common well before it is evidenced in the written record. Contextual clues point to a well-established tradition in Bergen by 1609 at the latest, while evidence of similar types of performance in Odense and Söderköping tell us that public farce performed by schoolboys was most certainly a pre-Reformation development in Scandinavia, just as it was on the continent. Mikel Hofnagel cites municipal records from 1609 documenting a fine assessed to a handful of boys identified as "*skreddersvenne*" (journeymen tailors) for "performing without permission." According to Hofnagel, a journeyman tailor took it upon himself to perform his own *stjernespil* at the Bergen marketplace, without first getting official permission. The local Cathedral school brought the man before the town magistrates, complaining that the performance of *stjernespil* was the exclusive privilege of the young scholars from the school. The magistrates fined the boys three *rigsdaler* for performing without a permit (Hofnagel 1868, 280; Wiers-Jenssen 1993, 36).

This case, although the record of it is quite short and nondescript, gives us important clues about the performance of *stjernespil* in the first century post-Reformation. First and foremost is the clear indication that in 1609, only seventy-three years after Denmark-Norway's official split from the Catholic Church, the performance of *stjernespil* in the Bergen marketplace was an established tradition. The practice had become so common that the town magistrates recognized it as a trade activity to be regulated by the city. The performance of *stjernespil* – which included the medieval tradition of soliciting donations in exchange for performance – was regulated to the point of it being the official privilege of the boys at the local Cathedral school. As Hans Wiers-Jenssen pointed out, the fact that a case was brought against the young men also indicates that this type of performance must have been quite lucrative (Wiers-Jenssen 1993, 36). By attempting to seize this practice, the young journeymen were also commandeering the boys' fundraising activity and thus they were losing money to such an extent that they felt it necessary to take the offenders to court in an effort to recoup potential lost earnings. The idea that street performance could elicit a sum significant enough to spur this type of action also implies that it was a popular tradition by this time – that there was a ready audience for the performance who were prepared to pay the boys for the spectacle. All of this evidence points to a tradition that was well established by the time of the confrontation between the school and the young tailors. The secular regulation of the means by which this practice took place suggests a tradition that had moved well beyond any associations with liturgical or religious practice and had instead become a secularized expression of what was once closely associated with the Catholic liturgy. While this does not offer conclusive evidence that the practice had begun prior to the Reformation, it does suggest that a tradition with its roots in Catholic liturgical practice was flourishing within one hundred years of the break with the Rome.

Wiers-Jenssen claims that Bergen was the site of the *stjernespil*'s greatest popularity based on the length of time covered by the available evidence as well as the fact that the tradition did survive almost into modern memory and certainly into the nineteenth century. Lyder Sagen and Henrik Foss discuss the popularity of *stjernespil* in Bergen until their own time in their 1824 book, *Bergens beskrivelse*. Ludvig Holberg also mentions these annual school boy processions in his book by the almost the same name, *Den berømmelige Norske Handel-Stad Bergens Beskrivelse*, most often shortened to simply *Bergens beskrivelse*, published in 1737. In his 1724 comedy, *Jule-Stue (The Christmas Party)*, Leonora complains that they cannot eat because her husband has left the light for the *stjernespil* on the kitchen table, indicating a familiarity with the tradition not only for Holberg (who grew up in Bergen), but also for his eighteenth-century Copenhagen audience (Holberg 1888, Act I, Sc 4). The majority of existing evidence of *stjernespil* and related practices actually comes from nineteenth century sources, however. There was a push in the early nineteenth century to record and preserve folk traditions. As a result, there was an increased interest in *stjernespil*, which were still being practiced in some places (like Bergen), but had begun to fall out of practice in others. Bert Möller claims that in Sweden, the processions often began in church as part of the mass on the eve of epiphany, but an 1851 parish protocol from Falkenberg in Halland forbids the practice, claiming that the songs sung by the boys are all in Latin and no one understood them anyway (Möller 1917, 11). In other cities, the songs had been sung in Latin but had been translated into Swedish. Again, this brings us back to the pre-Reformation origins of the practice. While it is interesting that this tradition was maintained until it was forbidden<sup>15</sup>, it is particularly interesting that songs being sung were in

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<sup>15</sup> It is also interesting that the parish elders in Falkenberg never thought to translate the songs instead of banning them – when they had already been translated in Halmstad, not forty-five kilometers away.

Latin. Clearly this practice was connected to the medieval church if the songs associated with it were sung in Latin. Even if the liturgical practice had never flourished in Scandinavia as it had in Germany and France, the parallel development of tradition and the extensive early German influences in the north combined with the persistence of Latin music in secular practice well into the nineteenth century suggest that these popular songs must have somehow derived from a connection with the Catholic Church.

The collection of references to *stjernespil* performance itself is small and the collection of actual scripts is even smaller. Along with the Bergen case, the oldest surviving pieces of printed evidence of *stjernespil* as popular practice are a 1642 Danish *stjernesange* (star song), one of the songs performed as part of a procession, as well as a reference from 1661 in the diary of a Danish bishop named Jens Bircherod (Wiers-Jenssen 1921, 19; 39). The entry in question states:

D 6. (16) Jan. *Der jeg om Aftenen inde til Peder Pedersen Lerkes (hvor jeg med mine Forældre var til Siest), fik de ludiones at see, hvike gik omkring med Stiernen, og iblandt dem de hvidklædte Personer, som skulde repræsentere de hellige tre Konger, lod jeg mig i min SimPLICITET indbilde, at de same vare komne fra Østerland* (Molbach 1846, 65).

D6. (16) Jan. In the evening I went to Peder Pedersen Lerke's (where I had been with my parents last), and got to see the plays where they go around with a star and some people dressed in white who are supposed to represent the three wise men, whom I, in my simplicity imagined had come from the east.

Bircherod's early diaries were edited and published in 1846 by Christian Molbech under the title *Uddrag af Biskop Jens Bircherods historisk-biografiske Dagbøger for Aarene 1658-*

1708 (*Selections from Bishop Jens Bircherod's historical-biographic diaries for the years 1658-1708*). As the title of Molbech's edition suggests, these diary entries were autobiographical. Bircherod, who grew up in Odense and eventually became the Bishop of Aalborg would have been three years old in 1661 – thus this entry about watching the *stjernespil* as a child must have been composed at a later date, based on a childhood memory. Earlier entries as well as the reference to Peder Pedersen Lerke (mayor of Copenhagen in the mid-1600s) indicate that he was in Copenhagen at this time. Molbech includes a footnote here mentioning that this same practice continued in Copenhagen until the beginning of the nineteenth century while Wiers-Jenssen cites variants of Danish *stjernesang* recorded by R. Nyerup, H.L. Feilberg and Evald Tang Kristensen in the late nineteenth century. These examples combined with the Bircherod diary entry and the 1609 Bergen record indicate that the practice extended across the geography of Denmark-Norway for several centuries.

In Sweden, this practice continued until at least the mid-nineteenth century. The three magi plays from Halland mentioned by Marker and Marker were recorded in the nineteenth century by folklorists. These texts are strikingly similar to the extant examples of continental *stella* processions from the turn of the sixteenth century and the liturgical traditions from even earlier, but they are not medieval documents. The Swedish tradition is closely related to documented Herod games from the mid-late medieval German empire which suggests a strong earlier tradition in Sweden and Denmark likely inherited from contact with German merchants, which survived, expanded, and thrived, long after the merchants were gone. Harris discusses the German liturgical tradition of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries in which clerical performers created havoc as part of or in connection to the *Officium Stellae*. Participants would enact mock battles and swordfights as part of the epiphany liturgy. In Padua (now Northern

Italy), they even beat the bishops and other high-status officials with inflated bladders. Harris argues that this event reinforced the order imposed by the church through a "comic representation of the ultimate ineptitude of evil" (Harris 2011, 52). Although it was later criticized by members of the clergy as inappropriate behavior, it was an official part of the liturgy in the cities discussed by Harris (Harris 2011, 41-53).

The nineteenth century Swedish examples primarily focus on the meeting with Herod. This does not mean, however, that the rest of the journey was not represented at some point, simply that by the nineteenth century, this is what was left. These plays were processional. The idea was that boys would go from house to house or station to station, performing as they went. On the way to each station, they would sing Christmas carols or songs specific to the procession<sup>16</sup>. At each station they would perform a short vignette before moving on to the next station. The visit with Herod in Jerusalem would be one vignette of several that would be performed throughout the evening. That only the Herod vignettes have survived in Halland suggests a connection to the earlier Herod games in Germany. While it may seem odd, as the Markers point out, that none of the Scandinavian *stjernespil* actually performed the slaughter of the innocents, neither did the early German Herod games (Marker 2006, 6; Harris 2011, 46). This is a particularly gory bit of drama that was a favorite of medieval playwrights. Some of the most exciting sequences from the English Corpus Christi processions are the bloody examples of "medieval realism" that was so enthusiastically embraced in other places (Marker 2006, 6). The religious significance of this gruesome scene was neither the goal of the German Herod games nor of the later Swedish *stjernespil*, however. By the 1800s in Sweden, when this tradition had really lost any sense of theological didacticism and was entirely an excuse for carnivalesque

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<sup>16</sup> See Möller for examples of songs from Halland.

revel, the best part of the story was the evil scheming of Herod who is presented as a super-villain of twentieth-century comic book proportions. We can assume, however, that by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when these plays were being recorded, public tastes had veered away from the too-graphic representation of killing babies that was so popular in medieval Britain. The "amusement" part of the public amusement would be overshadowed by the tragic biblical tale of the sacrifice of innocent lives for the sake of the redemption of sinful mankind. Instead, they just described it and allowed it to happen off stage.

The Halland plays as well as the Bergen and Oslo plays, feature a structure that is common to the medieval stage. Most of these processions, still in the nineteenth century, made use of a *preco* character. The *preco*, who gets his name from the Latin word for herald, would address the audience at the beginning and end of the performance. Sometimes there is a character who is simply called "*preco*" and at other times, a character fills that function. In most *stjernespil* texts (as well as *stella* texts from the continent) Judas plays this role. This explains why, in so many instances, Judas was a character in the journey of the three kings. He has no part in the nativity story, but he is synonymous with the dirty business of money and thus is the perfect biblical character to join in the procession and pass the hat before the boys moved on to the next station. Wiers-Jenssen points out that this particular piece of the *stjernespil* tradition is particularly German and thus points to German origins for these plays, but actually it is particularly medieval (Wiers-Jenssen 1993, 13). Besides the church sponsored or school sponsored performances, theater companies as we know them now, did not exist in the Middle Ages in northern Europe, especially not in Scandinavia. The first professional public theater (i.e. performers who did not work exclusively for the court) in Scandinavia was Holberg's *Lille Grønnegade Teater* that opened in 1722. Performers tended instead to be associated with

travelling troupes who made their living entirely on donations. Thus, a direct address to the audience, which often included begging or threats, was almost obligatory. Bert Möller gives an example of an alternate ending to the Laholm play, if the audience did not donate as much as the performers thought they deserved.

If they were happy with the donations:

Hafven tack, hafven tack för den redeliga skänk  
Denna skänken skall varda af Gudi betänkt.  
Som himmelen är utaf stjernor besatt  
Så beder eder all redeliga gossar godnatt (Möller 1917, 36)

Have thanks, have thanks for this honest gift  
This gift is worthy of God's consideration  
As heaven is strewn with stars  
Do we honest boys bid you all a good night

And if they were unhappy with the donations:

Som hår på en höna och fjäder på en katt  
Så beder eder alla redeliga gossar godnatt (Möller 1917, 36)

As hair on a hen and feathers on a cat  
Do we honest boys bid you all a good night

Admittedly this insult is mild compared to what medieval audiences may have heard, but the Laholm play was recorded in the 1800s, as performed by schoolboys and then printed in the local newspaper. The bawdiness of the Middle Ages may have been tempered a bit.

In Sweden and in Oslo, we see the addition of the Steffan character to the *stjernespil* procession by at least the late eighteenth century. The feast of St Stephen falls on December 26<sup>th</sup>, so his inclusion in the celebration of the Christmas holidays seems a natural conclusion, although, like Judas, he had nothing to do with the nativity story. St Stephen is often referred to as the proto-martyr of Christianity. He was a deacon, assigned by the apostles to spread Christ's teachings who was tried and stoned to death for it in the first century. In 415 CE, a priest claimed to have had a vision of the location of Stephen's bones, which were then collected and reinterred on December 26, which is why his feast day falls on the second day of Christmas. In Northern Europe, and especially in Scandinavia, St Stephen's story has been confused and possibly conflated with the story of someone else entirely. Instead of being a deacon, ministering to first century Greek Jews who died less than a decade after Christ himself, he is erroneously believed to have been a clerk or a stable boy to King Herod at the time of Christ's birth, a misunderstanding that led to his assignment as the patron saint of horses. A fifteenth century English ballad, catalogued as Child Ballad 22 by Francis James Child, the nineteenth century Harvard English professor and collector and cataloguer of English and Scottish Ballads, is the earliest known written record of the St. Stephen legend that remembers him as an insubordinate servant of Herod. According to the ballad, he sees the star in the east and announces to the King that the savior has been born and is put to death for it. Child notes that there are numerous variants of this same legend in Scandinavia and claims, as late as 1882, that said legend is "even still living in Scandinavia" (Child 1882, 233).

Indeed, that legend is even still living in Scandinavia in 2016. While the epiphany performances have undergone a number of changes in the last 500 years, that ever-present physical object that I discussed early in this chapter – the star – remains a part of the Christmas

processional tradition. It is no longer carried by school boys dressed as the three wise men in search of donations, but rather it is carried by school boys called *stjärngossar* (star boys) in Sweden, who sing the same carol about Steffan (St. Stephen) that A.A. Afvelius (1785-1871) recorded in 1880 and that Child connected, in theme and language, to a Danish broadside first published by Erik Pontopiddan in 1736 (Child 1882, 233-242). This popular Christmas carol is titled *Steffans visa* and is noted by Möller as one of the songs sung by Swedish boys during the *stjernespil* as well as later, during the *Steffanridning*.

Wiers-Jenssen notes that in the Oslo *stjernespil* tradition of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries, Steffan accompanies the other characters, often as the one collecting donations at the end. The Norwegian Steffan songs, however, are a bit strange. In some cases, they simply do not make sense unless you replace the strange Norwegian word with a closely related Swedish word. Wiers-Jenssen takes this evidence to mean that the addition of Steffan in Oslo was “importert fra Sverige” (imported from Sweden) (Wiers-Jenssen 1921, 30). He makes a convincing argument for this, but he spends a lot of time making that argument and very little time on why it might be important or how it may have come about, considering Oslo seems to be alone in their adoption of the Steffan tradition. I would argue that, just as the *stjernespil* likely came to Scandinavia with German merchants, the tradition of including Steffan in the procession likely came to Oslo due to frequent contact with Swedish merchants and Oslo’s proximity to the west coast of Sweden, where the *stjernespil* tradition seems to have thrived the longest outside of Bergen.

In Sweden, the epiphany processions developed into the Steffan processions and eventually into the Lucia processions that are still practiced. Gradually, Steffan became more significant than the three wise men and the celebration was moved from Epiphany to the Feast of

St. Stephen. This transition seems to have been more or less complete by the late 1700s/early 1800s. At the same time, a parallel tradition, called a *Steffansridning* (Steffan's Ride) was developing. The *Steffansridning* were neither processions nor were they religious in any way beyond the pretense of celebrating in honor of St. Stephen. Essentially, they were an opportunity for the young men to get drunk and ride around the countryside singing, including singing different variants of *Steffansvisa*. Eventually these activities were squashed as they were largely just excuses for boys to be drunk and rowdy on horseback. "Borrowing" horses to ride was common, as was trashing the stable when those horses were returned. The licensed disorder evidenced in the *Steffansridning* is reminiscent of the secular (and sometimes not secular) events associated with the Feast of Fools and the celebration of the Roman Kalends in Germany and France – which would have occurred at the same time of year as the later Steffan celebrations. While this is clearly a long way from the liturgical practices discussed earlier, it is part of the development of the tradition. Again, the continental influence adapted to meet local concerns and considerations is evidenced. "Licensed disorder" only extended so far, however and, as Möller notes, a criminal complaint against the *Steffansskede* (another term for 'Steffan's ride') was filed in Okome in 1828. The document refers to the practice as "ett urgammalt bruk" (an ancient custom). Clearly this was a custom that was older than the living memory of anyone living in Okome at that time, making it at least as old as the early eighteenth century (although likely older). Public processions and revelry with performative elements similar to *stjernespil* and Steffan processions are evidenced in late medieval Scandinavia both in connection with religious and liturgical performance as well as in association with secular celebrations and traditions.

The survival of these traditions with their roots in medieval religious practice not simply into the post-Reformation period but well into the modern period, speaks to the significance of

these events in even their earliest stages. Despite a lack of medieval or liturgical sources from Scandinavia, the existence of these modern variants on centuries old traditions is convincing evidence for the early and sustained development of these practices. The extensive continental cultural influences associated with the movement of German merchants across Scandinavia from the early Middle Ages onward all but guarantees the relationship between documented continental practice and the lost history of similar practices in Scandinavia at the same time. Harris' argument for the parallel development of related traditions can be extended to include a similar mirroring of growth and adaptation between Scandinavian practice and continental practice. The performative aspects of these public revelries – the reliance on enactment for an audience – makes these traditions part of the discussion of the practice of pre-Reformation performance in Scandinavia. The relationship between those public diversions without a narrative structure and those (such as the *stjernespil*) which relied on the transmission of narrative through enactment makes the exploration of the non-narrative performative traditions essential to a discussion of the long tradition of narrative performance in Scandinavia.

## CONCLUSION:

### **What This Means for the Field**

Despite what was previously believed, it is now clear that the tradition of performance in Scandinavia began well before the flourishing of Lutheran school performance in the late sixteenth century. Despite geography that places them on the physical periphery of Europe, Scandinavians have been active participants in the continental economic and cultural exchange since before the Christian conversion. The adoption of Catholic practices and the political connection to Rome that came with the Catholic identity made them subject to the same ritual history as the rest of the Europe. The strong economic relationship with the German states that resulted from early membership in and allegiance to the Hansiatic League – as well as the cultural and physical ties that accompanied that allegiance – guaranteed that the history of Scandinavian cultural practice would follow similar patterns to their neighbors and partners to the south. Evidence then of practice *in Scandinavia* that either follows those patterns or shows a clear connection to the tradition on the continent such as the evidence of liturgical enactment discussed in Chapter Four or the translations of German scripts discussed in Chapters One and Three are not evidence of a lack of native tradition as has been argued by scholars like Sven Åke Heed and Erik Forser, but rather are evidence of an active exchange of cultural influence. These texts should not be dismissed, as Birket Smith did with *Dorothea Komodie*, but should be included in a discussion that recognizes medieval performance as pan-European practice featuring local influences – not the product of an outdated, nineteenth century concept of national culture at a time when European states were only beginning to form moderately stable political boundaries.

In addition to this acceptance of foreign influences as valid aspects of Scandinavian performance history, all evidence of local practice must be considered. The oft-repeated assumption that the existence of a selection of translated texts must mean that all the available texts are translations is simply poor scholarship. There is little doubt that *Ludos de Sancto Canuto duce*, a miracle play about a Danish saint that features a good number of local details, is found in a manuscript from the city in which the subject lived and has specific language addressing the frequency with which it was performed, was composed or even performed anywhere else but Ringsted. Stephen K. Wright's linguistic analysis of *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratium* quite clearly places the origins of the text in eastern Sweden – more specifically in the province of Östergötland where it was recorded while Leif Stedstrup's work with *Den utro hustru* suggests that it is a Danish original and not a translation as had been previously argued by Danish scholars. In addition to these examples, there are a number of textual and linguistic markers in the other scripts that deserve to be followed up on which may eliminate any doubt of their origins.

The continuation of epiphany performances with medieval origins into the nineteenth century further speaks to the active local engagement with performance tradition. The surviving *stjernespil* texts from Swedish Halland are related to the popular German Herod plays from the late medieval period, which have been connected to liturgical and secular traditions in Germany and France by Max Harris among others. The connections between Swedish *stjernespil* traditions and those evidenced in Oslo are examples of the further growth of tradition within Scandinavia while early references to these types of performances in Bergen and Copenhagen demonstrate the geographic expanse of this popular practice. Fully secular performance such as the *Blomstergreven* tradition in Sweden as well as the *contorske spil* discussed by Holberg provide

not only examples of the persistence of pre-Christian ritual performance, but also the importation of continental practice and adaptation to local political, social and cultural considerations.

These local considerations have long been ignored or dismissed by scholars but have shown themselves to be particularly important to research in this field. The late development of cities and the fact that even the largest cities in Scandinavia were no bigger than the smallest cities in Britain and on the continent changes the way in which the history of public performance developed. Unlike elsewhere in Europe where there is evidence of public performance being undertaken by secular fraternal organizations, guilds and municipal authorities, these institutions simply did not exist on the same scale in Scandinavia. In the absence of these groups, public performance became the privilege and responsibility of students and schools. The importance of these student performers has been studied in quite some depth as they existed in the late fifteenth century onward but little has been done to address their significance during the Catholic medieval era. Scholars like Marvin Carlson have used the relative abundance of scripts from the Protestant Humanist school tradition and the evidence of student performers as court entertainment beginning in the early seventeenth century as a line marking the beginning of a local performance tradition in Scandinavia. Considerations like the spread of the printing press and the loss or destruction of Catholic properties and records have been ignored. Further, the existence of a small selection of scripts that were clearly connected to school performance at pre-Reformation Catholic schools (most notably the Christiern Hansen texts found in MS Thott 780 folio) has been dismissed as anomalous or very early examples of later Humanist drama – an argument that makes no sense considering the age and origin of the Hansen manuscript.

The study of medieval drama in Scandinavia has been neglected to such a degree that most scholars believe the tradition was nonexistent. This is not true. Therefore, it is necessary to

argue for a revised understanding of Scandinavian performance history before a detailed analysis can be made of any particular text or genre. The work done by Leif Stedstrup and Leif Søndergaard, for example, is thorough and enlightening but has failed to garner the attention it deserves because there are, quite simply, very few people who are aware that these plays exist. As my writing and research has progressed, I have continued to uncover evidence of performance that has not made it into this survey as it requires continued investigation before it can be accurately discussed. The work of Bengt Stolt has uncovered a number of additional *kristigrav* which I mentioned briefly in Chapter Five but have not yet been able to pursue. There is also a Swedish dialogue from the fourteenth century – oddly enough written in runes – that portrays Mary's lament at the foot of the cross. The origins of this text are unknown but the tradition of lament dialogues is not. This piece in particular has been addressed by a few of the scholars whose work has been reviewed here but all of them have dismissed it as a text written in the first person, rather than a piece intended for performance. McCall's theory of enactment suggests that dialogue in any form deserves to be included in the discussion of performance. Considering this, there is a history of the pre-Vasa Swedish kings written in dialogue form that closely resembles the format of the continental *Prophetiae* which deserves further consideration as well.

The renewed study of medieval performance in Scandinavia is long overdue. The evidence discussed here proves that this practice was far more extensive than previously believed. There is still, however, a considerable amount of work to be done in order to introduce the available Scandinavian texts not only to the field of Medieval Drama but also to the field of Scandinavian Studies. The research for this project began as an attempt to verify and solidify a small selection of disparate sources mentioned by scholars like Henrik Schück and G.E.

Klemming and has developed into the foundations of a new field of research. Simply by following the bibliographies of these early scholars and verifying the primary sources mentioned, the list grew to upwards of sixty primary sources in less than one year. The application of modern performance theories and the discovery that the Scandinavian student performance tradition began much earlier than previously assumed has expanded the number of possible repositories of evidence of this practice exponentially. I am absolutely certain that a thorough combing of the archives with these new theories in mind would uncover further, previously unidentified evidence of Scandinavian performance in the Middle Ages.

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