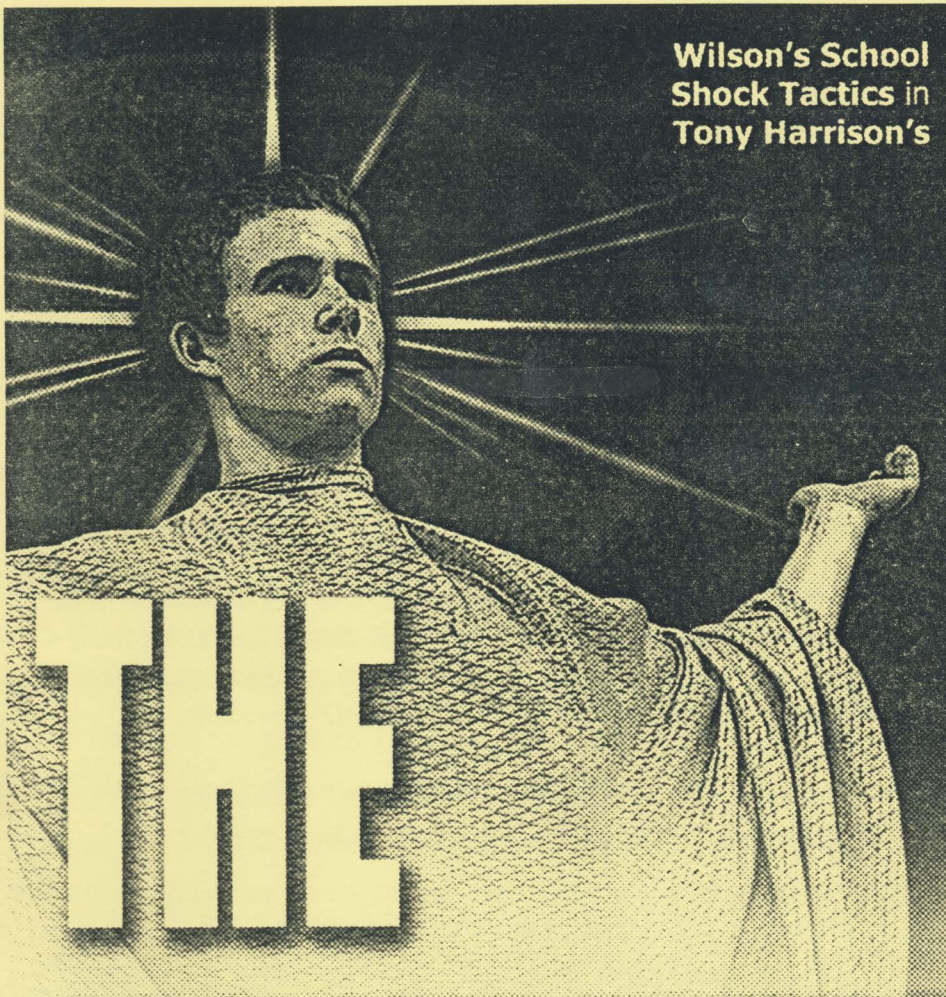


Wilson's School
Shock Tactics in
Tony Harrison's



THE NATIVITY



Wilson's School presents
SHOCK TACTICS in

The Nativity

by Tony Harrison

Directed by Jeff Shaw

Music by arrangement with Graeme Taylor

Opening night: 12 December 2001

Although some changes have been made, this performance is at heart a revival of the celebrated Royal National Theatre production which was first shown in 1980. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Bill Bryden and the whole RNT company.

- Running time: about 2 hours 40 minutes, including 20 minute interval
- Interval refreshments and Christmas crackers will be available in the foyer. Feel free to wear your paper hats in the second half!
- Please switch off mobile phones
- A video recording will be available. Details at the Box Office stand in the main foyer

www.shocktactics.org.uk

FINALE: SHEPHERDS ARISE

Shepherds arise, be not afraid,
With hasty steps prepare.
To David's city, sing on earth.
With our blessed infant there,
With our blessed infant there,
With our blessed infant there.

Chorus:

**Sing, sing all earth.
Sing, sing all earth
Eternal praises sing
To our redeemer,
To our redeemer,
And our heavenly king.**

Laid in a manger, viewed a child.
Humility divine,
Sweet innocence sounds meek and mild.
Grace in his features shine,
Grace in his features shine,
Grace in his features shine.

For us a saviour came on earth.
For us his life he gave,
To save us from eternal death.
To raise us from the grave,
To raise us from the grave,
To raise us from the grave.

PREVIOUS PRODUCTIONS

THE LIFE OF GALILEO	Bertolt Brecht	Dec. 1975
ANDROCLES AND THE LION	Bernard Shaw	Mar. 1976
SWEENEY TODD	George Dibdin Pitt	Dec. 1976
OLIVER!	Lionel Bart	Mar. 1977
BIRDS	Aristophanes	Dec. 1977
TWELFTH NIGHT	William Shakespeare	Feb. 1979
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST	Oscar Wilde	Dec. 1979
ANTONIO'S REVENGE	John Marston	Dec. 1980
THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE	Bernard Shaw	Dec. 1981
ENTER A FREE MAN (STAFF)	Tom Stoppard	Jul. 1982
CHIPS WITH EVERYTHING	Arnold Wesker	Dec. 1982
THE GOLDEN MASQUE OF AGAMEMNON	John Wiles	Feb. 1983
TOAD OF TOAD HALL	A. A. Milne	Jul. 1983
THE ROYAL HUNT OF THE SUN	Peter Shaffer	Dec. 1983
ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST (SIXTH FORM)	Dario Fo	Mar. 1984
THE REAL INSPECTOR HOUND (STAFF)	Tom Stoppard	Jul. 1984
BEYOND A JOKE (SIXTH FORM)	Derek Benfield	Nov. 1984
HUBERT AND THE FIREWORK	Martin Knight	Dec. 1984
SMOKING IS BAD FOR YOU and A TRAGIC ROLE with OUT AT SEA and MEDEA	Anton Chekov Slavomir Mrozek	
WHITE LIARS and BLACK COMEDY (STAFF)	Euripides	Mar. 1985
MY FAIR LADY (SIXTH FORM)	Peter Shaffer	Jul. 1985
THE SPORT OF MY MAD MOTHER	A. J. Lerner & F. Lowe	May 1986
JACK AND THE BEANSTALK (SIXTH FORM)	Ann Jellicoe	Jul. 1986
FROGS		Dec. 1987
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS	Aristophanes	Mar. 1987
THE THWARTING OF BARON BOLLIGREW	William Shakespeare	Dec. 1987
CINDERELLA (STAFF)	Robert Bolt	Jul. 1988
THE INJUSTICE DONE TO TOU NGO with AFTER MAGRITTE	John Morley	Dec. 1988
OEDIPUS THE KING	Kuan Han Ch'ing	Mar. 1989
DRACULA SPECTACULA	Tom Stoppard	Mar. 1990
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	Sophocles	Mar. 1990
DOCTOR FAUSTUS	J. Gardiner & A. Parr	Dec. 1990
CULTURE BEAT	William Shakespeare	Mar. 1992
HIAWATHA	Christopher Marlowe	Dec. 1992
ALADDIN (STAFF)	Paul Gerrard	Mar. 1994
'TIS PITY SHE'S A WHORE (Secombe Theatre)	Michael Bogdanov	Dec. 1994
GHETTO (Secombe Theatre)	John Morley	Dec. 1995
THE SEVEN SIDED DICE	John Ford	Feb. 1997
MACBETH	Joshua Sobol	Feb. 1998
AMADEUS	Phil Rean & Mike Smith	Jul. 1999
	William Shakespeare	Feb. 2000
	Peter Shaffer	Dec. 2000

Welcome !

For many people, this will be a theatrical experience unlike anything you have seen before. In particular, the idea of a promenade production may be unfamiliar.

Originally the English Medieval Mystery plays were performed during Corpus Christi on carts passing various locations ("stations") in the city from early morning till late at night, with the audience following them from one place to the next. A promenade performance is an indoor version of such a pageant; the actors will perform in various places on the floor of the Hall; the promenade audience is invited to follow the action around on foot. Sometimes you will have to be quick to find a place or get out of the way when required!

However, we must also bear in mind the needs of the seated audience who will also want to see everything.

• **Would promenaders please therefore avoid *standing* in the marked space immediately in front of the fixed seating, though you may of course *sit* on the floor in that area.**

Tony Harrison and the Mystery Plays

When Peter Hall rejoiced, with reference to Harrison, 'we have a great poet back in the theatre', he was paying tribute to the diverse range of virtuoso linguistic skills that Harrison brought to his plays. The power and skill of the Yorkshire alliterative language was praised by all commentators on the productions of *The Mysteries*; but it should be stressed that Harrison's structural achievements here are no less remarkable. To see how this is, it is necessary to look in detail at the nature of the surviving medieval cycles and at what Harrison has done with them.

Four complete cycles of the plays in English survive from the Middle Ages: York, Towneley (from Wakefield), Chester and the *Ludus Coventriae*: 'Coventry's play', so called because there was a cycle from Coventry—though it is now certain that this is not it; two plays from the Coventry cycle do survive. *Ludus Coventriae* probably comes from Norfolk.

The cycles vary considerably in scope, coverage and styles. York is much the longest, comprising forty-eight plays, very diverse in language and register, and it has a marked sense of responsibility for the completeness of its coverage of the Bible epic of salvation, from the Creation of the world to the Last Judgement. Of the other cycles, *Ludus Coventriae* is York's nearest rival in scope and disparateness, comprising forty-two plays including two longer Passion sequences (close to the language of the Bible) and a Nativity sequence of linked plays. It is also the most literary of the four cycles, surviving in a book-form with no evidence that it was staged.

The Chester cycle, of twenty-four plays, survives in five manuscripts and, though in some ways the least appealing, it makes a coherent cycle. It is praised mostly for the excellence of particular plays within it. It was staged very successfully by BBC Television in 1976, starring Tom Courtenay.

The Towneley cycle (named after the Burnley family amongst whose

papers the manuscript survived) has been thought to be a cancelled version of York because a few plays are common to both. It is much the least coherent cycle, omitting some crucial Biblical stories which have been thought central in the others. But even more than Chester, Towneley is celebrated for the attractions of a few individual plays within it: the six 'Wakefield pageants', written in a sophisticated rhyme scheme in Yorkshire dialect and containing the best-known of all the Mystery plays, the 'Second Shepherds' Play' containing the story of the sheep-stealer Mak, a kind of visual parody of the Nativity proper which ends it.

These then were Harrison's sources, the cloth from which he cut his new tapestry. In the Nativity, the first two episodes (the Creation and the Fall of Man) are from York, and the next two (Cain and Abel, and the Flood) are from the Towneley 'Wakefield pageants', except for Noah's more grave concluding speech which is from York. The next episode, Abraham and Isaac, begins with *Ludus Coventriae* but draws principally on the celebrated, wonderfully touching Chester play. The next two episodes (Joseph's doubts and the brief birth of Christ) are again from York, but the play ends with a brilliantly inventive and complicated redaction of all four cycles, worked into a coherent and convincing whole.

It is clear from the above outline that Harrison knows the medieval cycles very well indeed and he has a clear sense of what is most to his purpose. There is no doubt that the creative drive in this new play is Harrison's; he reminds us in his introductory note that the process by which the medieval cycles were composed was 'one of translation, accretion, adaptation, revision', and he has chimed in with the process and spirit of construction of the medieval originals in the creation of an actable modern text in their language. In this way, his achievement is more like that of the anonymous medieval compilers of this collaborative social drama than the individualistic work of the Wakefield master.

This is largely a matter of language: on the very first page of *The Nativity*, Harrison and his medieval forebears send us to the dialect dictionary:

In loving aye lasting to lout me. [praise]

This regionally-based exclusivity is carried to very considerable lengths, and quite deliberately so. Sometimes opaque medievalisms are retained for local picturesqueness: 'bunfast' for 'bound fast', for example. While there is a general updating in the direction of theatrical intelligibility, there is also a good deal of uncompromising retention of the remote alliterative original: Lucifer 'gars me go growling and gurning'. Side by side with this Harrison has introduced vigorous elements of the corresponding modern Yorkshire register: he adds ambitiously and with convincing fidelity to the Wakefield 'Cain and Abel' play, one of the most admired in the whole corpus:

Farewell. When I am dead
Bury me in Wakefield by t'quarry head.
Damned for my deed I now depart.
By all men set I not a fart.

A concern with the register and feel of language, characteristic of his poetry, keeps the vivid medieval medium ringingly alive. Even the flaws in the linguistic fabric are the result of a deliberate strategy to produce a full-scale Yorkshire acting version, not inviting close scrutiny of every word: for example the exploitation of the accidental homophone in the provision for Adam of 'a wife to fear' rather than 'a wife to fere' (meaning 'as a companion'). The production of theatrical sound effect is more important than the author's textual accountability.

As well as on their language, Harrison has capitalized too on the full details of stage-direction employed by the compilers of the medieval cycles. This is reinforced by his insistence on the audience's understanding of the genesis of the text in the course of performance; he shares responsibility for their form not only with Bill Bryden and the other producers, but with the actors too. Significantly, their names appear in the Faber text as an element in its construction, not just its performance. The medieval-style stage-directions are reinforced by the repeated reminders that the plays are being performed by Yorkshire workmen (just as their medieval counterpart in the Wakefield 'Second Shepherds' Play' preempts literalist scepticism by saying 'I thocht that we had layd us full nere

Yngland'). At the very start 'God enters on a fork-lift truck'.

It is not incidental to Harrison's purpose that the medieval plays were enacted by the guilds, the equivalent of modern trade unions. With an elegant piece of disingenuousness, in the introductory paragraph Harrison says he offered himself as 'a Yorkshire poet who came to read the metre'. In this egalitarian northern venture, he is an artisan (he is well aware that English lacks a common word for the Greek *techné*, which means both 'art' and 'tradesman's work') on a level with 'The Company' who are relentlessly itemized as dressed 'in the various uniforms and overalls of carpenter, painter, butcher, fireman, bus conductor, ticket collector, fishmonger, miner, mechanic, meat porter, cleaner, gas-fitter, construction worker, etc'. One of the most memorable scenes in the 1984-5 production of *The Mysteries, Doomsday*, was Hell lit only by the miners' pit-helmets. The application was left unlaboured, but it needed no labouring during the long and bitter Miners' Strike as you watched the toiling group of devils: Nibelungs, labourers, prejudged to damnation. Harrison is of the devil's party; but, unlike Blake's Milton, he knows it.

The process of creation here is exactly how meaning was constructed by the medieval cycles. The local guild members used limited resources of language and staging to build to a larger meaning through communal effort. A view of the world, whether divine or human, was created by diverse and often unlikely means, given the apparent crudeness of language and stage-effects. What Harrison is doing, in fact, is to become a medieval author for the purposes of this enterprise. This is why *The Mysteries* remains his text, whatever its sources: *Troilus and Criseyde* remains Chaucer's even if most of its material in detail is translated from Boccaccio. The idea of authorship that Harrison is rejecting is the increasingly insistent post-Renaissance cult of the author as more central than the text. He is the artisan working among other artisans to produce literary meaning. It may seem to the proponents of the standard view of authorship a barbarian's conception: involved in a community; opinionated; political; anarchic; provincial. But this vengeful text is all the more his own for that.

Bernard Donoghue, *from the Introduction to the Faber edition*

SHOCK TACTICS ARE:

GOD SAM ROBERSON
LUCIFER RORY THOMPSON
ANGEL GABRIEL ANISH SHONPAL
ADAM ALEX CROWLEY
EVE LAURA KERR
CAIN DAVID CLIFFORD
ABEL ANDREW SIMPSON
NOAH JAMES BARBOUR
MRS NOAH KATY McDONNELL
ABRAHAM JONATHAN EYNON
ISAAC JOE CRUTTWELL
MARY JO VINSON
JOSEPH ORAN HASSAN
HEROD BRIAN MELICAN
HEROD'S SON TOM MCAWEANEY
WISE MEN BEN GARDNER
JONATHAN EYNON
DANIEL WARD
SHEPHERDS JAMES BARBOUR
ALEX CROWLEY
JAMES FRITZ
MAK WILLIAM BROTHWOOD
MAK'S WIFE MARISA SALDHANA
WAITER PETER COWLIN
OTHER PARTS PLAYED BY ELLIE BROUGHTON
ROBERT DENHAM
ADAM ELJADI
JOE GALLAGHER
LAUREN HARPER
ENESI YISA
AND MEMBERS OF
THE COMPANY

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
& KEYBOARDS **SAM HUDSON**
GUITAR/VOCALS **RUSSELL MARTIN**
BASS GUITAR/VOCALS **BEN DUNN**
DRUMS **MICHAEL WEDGE**
VIOLIN/VOCALS **NICK SMITH**

DIRECTOR **JEFF SHAW**
DESIGN **ALAN SMITH**
SCENERY **KEVIN HEMMINGS**
BERT BURCHILL
JOHN PARKER

LIGHTING **MICHAEL PRIESTMAN**
TECHNICAL MANAGER **CHRIS BURTON**
COSTUMES **EMMA WATERHOUSE**
DEBORAH LAMBLE

STAGE MANAGER **OLIVER TAYLOR-MEDHURST**
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER **KHALID HANIF**
SOUND MANAGER **LEON JOSEPH**
PROPS MANAGER **MATTHEW LAMBLE**
PROPS HANDLER **JOE GALLAGHER**

LIGHTING SUPERVISOR **CHRIS GATES**
LIGHTING CREW **DAVID BRANDON**
STAGE CREW **STEVE LOCK**

DAVID SMELLIE
LIFT OPERATOR **KEVIN HEMMINGS**
STEWARDS **BEN CLOVES**

PHILIP WALTERS
SIMON HOOKINS
CALL BOY **HEMAL CHUDASAMA**
BOX OFFICE **JON HARRIES**
ADAM JANUSZEWSKI

MANY THANKS TO **DYRCK LAMBLE** FOR PRINTING OUR
POSTERS AND TO **ROLATRUC** FOR THEIR GENEROUS ASSIS-
TANCE WITH THE FORK LIFTS.

While shepherds count their flocks

- 1 Yan
- 2 Tyan
- 3 Tethera
- 4 Methera
- 5 Pimp
- 6 Setherera
- 7 Letherera
- 8 Hoverera
- 9 Doverera
- 10 Dick
- 11 Yan-a-Dick
- 12 Tyan-a-Dick
- 13 Tethera-Dick
- 14 Methera-Dick
- 15 Bumfit
- 16 Yan-a-bumfit
- 17 Tyan-a-bumfit
- 18 Tethera Bumfit
- 19 Methera Bumfit
- 20 Giggot

Shepherds have always had to keep a keen eye for the safety of their flock, frequently counting their sheep to keep track of strays, deaths and losses. Every task associated with the flock, such as shearing and dipping, was also followed by a count. In modern Britain, head counts are still important because agricultural subsidies are calculated on a per-head basis. In the borders area between England and Scotland, shepherds continued to use variations of the old British (Celtic) language for the purpose of counting their sheep up till the 20th century. The example shown is from Borrowdale in the Lake District. The system doesn't go above twenty because flocks were always reckoned as so many score.