

THE REVIVAL OF DRAMA

- From the Fall of Rome to the Middle Ages there were only histriones [wandering players] and jongleurs [minstrels] to keep drama alive with dancing, singing, juggling, acrobatics, & marionettes.
- Strangely enough, it would be the needs of the Church that would revive drama.

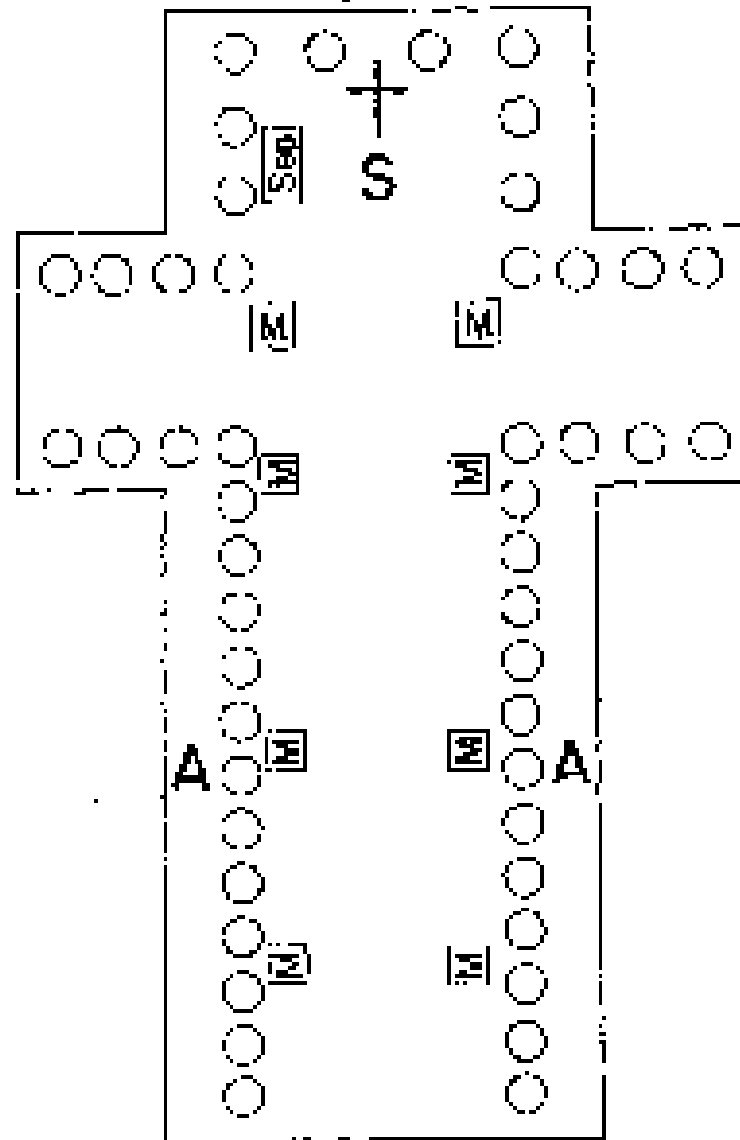
THE DILEMMA OF THE CHURCH

- Common people were illiterate as were many nobles.
- Books were rare and highly prized, including The Bible, which was in Latin.
- How then was the Church to better spread its message?
- LITURGICAL DRAMA

TROPES

- A trope is the performance of a religious text
- Tropes were developed to highlight important aspects of the Church year: Easter, Christmas, Corpus Christi, Whitsunday (Pentecost)
- Earliest known trope is *Quem Quaeritis*, a story of the Resurrection. (920-970 A.D.)

- Initially, all parts were played by clergy and choirboys.
- Usually took place in cathedrals & monasteries
- Though initially in Latin, soon the tropes would be performed in **vernacular**, the common language.
- Staging involved **mansions** arrayed around a **platea**. Hell was stage left, heaven stage right, earth in middle.



A ground flux of a magnetic
cathedral. A-water, M-reson-
ance, S-contrary S-p-
repulsive.

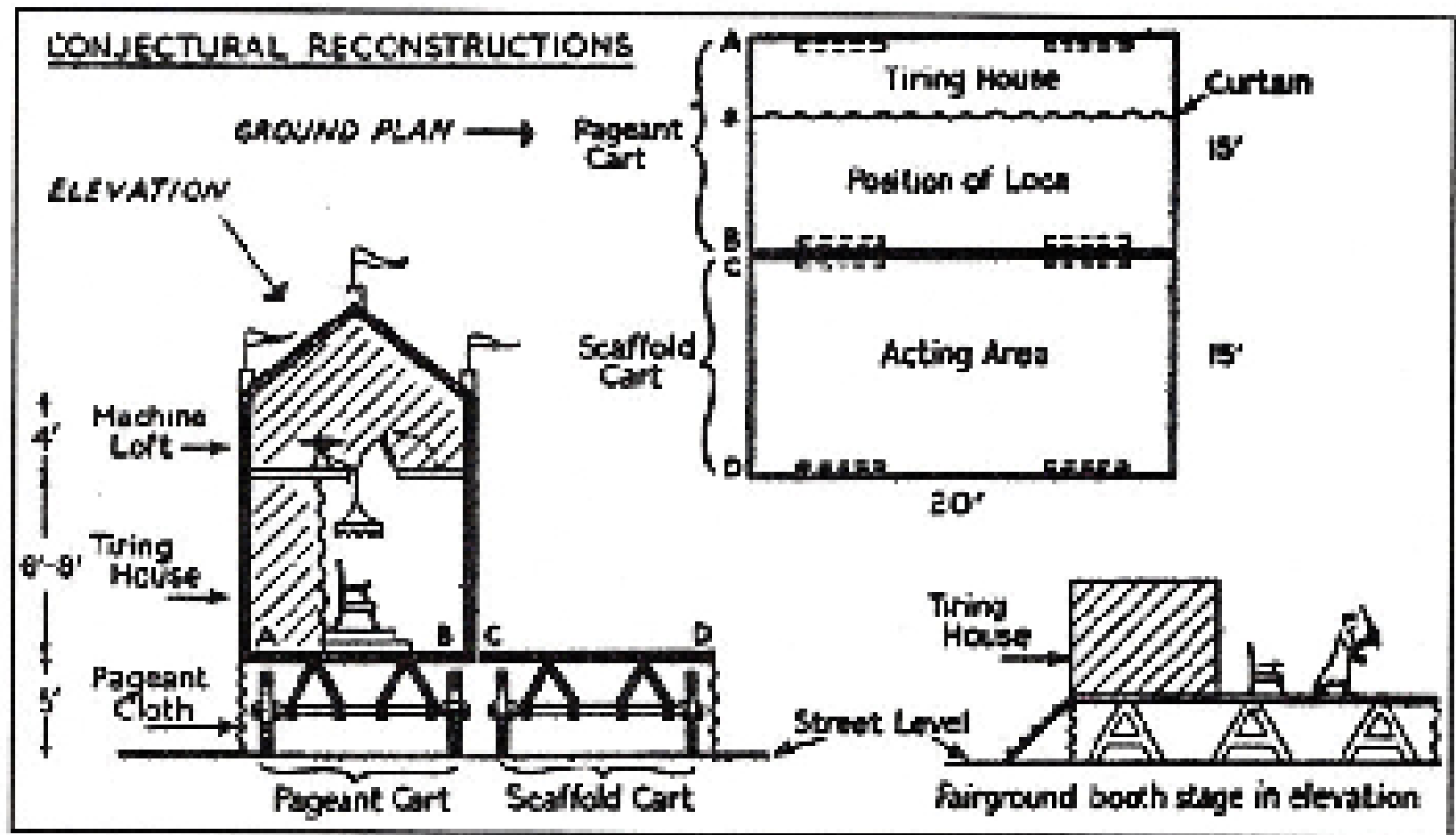
DRAMA MOVES OUTDOORS

- For 200 years the tropes grew in importance and elaborateness.
- Around 1200 the performances began to move outdoors due to lack of space and the more elaborate mansions needed.
- 1350-1550 medieval theatre came under secular control and grew.
- **Secrets** (stage machinery) were added.

The Cycle Plays

- Guilds and tradesmen took over productions, in competitions. Called Mystery Plays (from *mystere*)
- Elaborate cycles, portraying biblical events from Creation to Last Judgment.
- Name after the towns of production, four cycles survive: York (48 plays), Chester (24), Townley [Wakefield] (32), and *Ludus Coventriae* [N Town] (42)

- Were completely in vernacular
- Became disfavored by the Church because of growing lack of Biblical adherence (comedic lines and actions being inserted)
- Pageant wagons were developed for the productions. (see next slide)



At left, a pageant wagon alongside a wheeled platform stage; above, a floor plan of this arrangement; below right, plan of a booth stage, used to show its similarity to the pageant wagon arrangement of the other two drawings. Reconstructions by Glynne Wickham. (from Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 1, 1959; courtesy of Routledge Publishers)

OTHER MIDDLE AGES DRAMATIC FORMS

- **MIRACLE PLAYS:** dramatized incidents from lives or saints or martyrs, usually performed on the feast day of the saint
- **MORALITY PLAYS:** sought to give a moral message through allegories about moral temptation, e.g. **EVERYMAN**); flourished 1400-1550.

- **FOLK PLAYS:** portrayed adventures of popular heroes – Robin Hood, St. George
 - Performed by amateurs
 - Went from house to house, usually at Christmas
- **FARCE:** showed the ridiculous depravity of man. Very popular in France.
- **SECULAR INTERLUDE:** a serious or comic play, performed by traveling troupes, usually between parts of celebration such as a banquet
- Eventually, all would merge into Renaissance drama.