

## Puppets and Puppet Theater



The Romance of Alexander (Bodley 264)Folio 54v

As William has grown older it has become more challenging to entertain such a bright mind. To that end we have hired a man to perform puppet shows for his delight. So far the stories are about knights riding off to war, as requested by my Lord Husband, I would prefer more gentle stories.

There are large gaps in the timeline of the development of Drama. For example we have a number of Greek and Roman plays, yet very few of the Liturgical Drama's of the 1300's have survived . What is known about drama in the 1350's is that it had out grown the confines of the church and moved outside. This growth outside of the church is paralleling the growth of towns and guilds. "As groups other than the Church gained in prominence, it was probably inevitable that they should come to participate in and eventually to dominate theatrical productions." (Brockert, p. 94) In 1375 records have survived from several cycle plays (the York cycle of 48 plays, the 24 plays from Chester and the 32 Wakefield plays.) It is evident from reading the plays that a director and a stage manager were present and that the works were produced outdoors. These plays required large casts, which were frequently recruited locally. "The chanting that had been typical in liturgical drama was abandoned in the vernacular plays in favor of a delivery resembling everyday speech...Most characters are stereotyped with few clear-cut actions and emotions." (Brockert, p.101) At this same time Interludes were being performed. They were small plays presented between other activities, for example a small play might be performed between the courses of a banquet. I think that from these various roots puppet theaters began to flourish.

Again not much is known about early puppet theater, as there are no surviving scripts. The only evidence, which has been found, is the small marginalia illumination (see above picture.) It is thought to be the earliest reference to Punch and Judy (although her name was "Joan.") If scholars have correctly identified this small illustration, than the beginnings of Punch and Judy theater can be moved back another 100 years.

I am very familiar with the workings of a theatrical mind (as this is my mundane profession) to that end I have made the theater from scrap lumber and painted it a bright color. All of the materials are from supplies found in my home, with nothing specifically purchased for this part of my pentathlon entry. I feel that this is the way an itinerant director would have worked. The colors and characters are all designed to catch and hold a child's attention.