



The Wakefield Mystery Plays

Martial Rose

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Four hundred years ago the medieval mystery plays, presented each year in various English villages to teach the stories of the Bible to the illiterate population, were the great classic English dramas. Queen Elizabeth I banned these plays because she considered them Roman Catholic, and since then the texts have been available only to scholars.

In this volume, Martial Rose has restored the most dramatic collection of these plays—the cycle presented annually by the town of Wakefield—to the modern reader in complete, acting versions of the original text, with notes on their production and staging.

The thirty-two plays of the Wakefield cycle, written during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, go from the Creation to the Last Judgement, covering every important event in the Old and New Testaments. The anonymous authors, it is now clear, had not only a deep dedication to their subject, but also a keen sense of the theatre. Humor, horror, and sharp earthly details are mingled with admonitions to the audience and religious devotion. The plays are both lively and moving in their own right, and important links in the history of drama.

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