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***UNTHINKING GENRE IN MODERN SCHOLARSHIP OF MEDIEVAL  
DRAMA, OR WHO IS AFRAID OF HISTORICISING GENERIC  
LIMIT(ATION)S?***

**Keywords:** *generic format, Christocentric devotionalism, Conyhope cross, Tractatus pro Devotis Simplicibus, The Book of Margery Kempe, Dives and Pauper, Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*

**Abstract:** *Modern scholarship of medieval religious drama in England often assumes explicitly the capacity of the generic format, vaguely if at all identified as the thematic framework, and likewise of the festive setting to contain and control the range of interpretative possibilities available to original audiences. Unfortunately, the containment role of this unthought 'genre' comes into focus precisely where the modern interpretation of certain plays seems to allow for medieval responses potentially contrary to the teachings of the Church or the flow of power.*

*My purpose here is not to supply a working definition of genre that would somehow fill in a glaring definitional void so as to account retrospectively for late medieval social practices. Nor is it to offer guidelines for modern speculation on what reception of religious–dramatic–entertaining practices in late medieval England may have been like. Rather, I want, first, to suggest the inadequacy of our nineteenth-century grounded classificatory system for the medieval play and game in England by historicising it briefly. Second, I pursue not so much modern assumptions about the ultimate containment provided by 'genre' as medieval assumptions regarding the (un)reliability of types of devotional practices for fostering a desirable religious attitude. To this end, I garner evidence from (mainly) fifteenth-century texts that voice apprehensions about the reception of 'quick' (living) images either intended to have a devotional impact on the beholders or encapsulating casual everyday scenes. Sifting such evidence suggests that systematic preaching on how to 'read' religious iconography and 'generic format' alike did not guarantee audience reception and response.*