

Transformations of “Galoshins” in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

The transformations include those in age and gender of performers. There is a trace right at the beginning of the century of the play being performed by young men but it was predominantly performed by boys of school age. There are records, however, of performances by mixed groups of boys and girls and by girls alone and the factors enabling girls to perform can be examined. There is something of a diachronic shift from boys only to the inclusion of girls in the custom. There is also a change in season. The play had been performed at either Christmas/New Year or at Hallowe'en, but most of the later records demonstrate a movement to Hallowe'en. At this time of year, the continued guising custom sometimes retained traces of the play after it ceased to be performed.

Possible reasons for the demise of the custom will be explored, including changing attitudes to the requests for reward. In the course of the breaking-down of the custom, which was almost total by the middle of the century, it is possible to observe forces at work which sustained it for a while at the same time as they altered it. The norm had been boys learning orally from the performances of other boys, but later on fathers taught it to their children either by oral instruction or by writing out the words. There was more parental control and the houses visited became more restricted. The play was also performed on stage under adult supervision, and, in these cases, recourse was often made to a published text unconnected with local tradition.

An interesting development was the performance of the play as a monologue by an adult, either seasonally or without regard to the season. These performances were based on memories of the play in performance by a group.

