

ROOMER

An occasional newsletter for researchers
in Traditional Drama. Vol 1:2 Dec 1989



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Research in any field is, as often as not, hampered by the lack of communication between individual researchers, and traditional drama is no exception. We are acutely aware of the fact that there are many people doing valuable work who have little or no contact with others in this field and, consequently, no opportunity to compare notes or air their views. ROOMER then is designed to fill this gap by providing an informal forum.

Our brief is wide and we intend to include notes and queries, details of publications, out-of-the-way texts, information on work in progress, in fact anything that may be of interest to individuals working in the field of traditional drama. As such it will obviously rely heavily on participation by subscribers and contributors and we welcome any information you would like to forward.

In addition, we hope to prepare a series of occasional publications dealing with various aspects of traditional drama research. Suggestions for suitable topics or items for inclusion in this series are most welcome.

We hope you find this issue of ROOMER useful. If you would like further details please contact the editors.

PLOUGH MONDAY AND THE PRIMITIVE METHODISTS IN LEICESTERSHIRE

I have recently come across two accounts of encounters between Primitive Methodists and plough-bullocks and mummers in Leicestershire.

A contribution by W. Antliff D.D. to Local Notes and Queries, Nottingham Daily Guardian, 7th January 1885, page 6, describes that:

"When the Primitive Methodists missioned the county of Leicester There prevailed among other practices, a system of going round the country on what is called Plough Monday, and in the most fantastic and ridiculous costumes, performing the most absurd and foolish exhibitions. The money collected during the day by this system was carried at night to the public house where scenes of revelry and devilry were enacted that often terminated most disasterously. The men who had recourse to this vile system were in that part distinguished by the name of "plough-bullocks""

W. Antliff was obviously not an enthusiast and recalls:

"On our missionaries entering one of the Leicestershire villages they soon experienced a considerable measure of success, notably among the leading plough-bullocks of the place. The result was that on the following Plough Monday the accustomed performance fell through."

There is however a hero to this tale and the article continues:

"But one individual, unwilling to lose the opportunity of his annual drunken spree, resolved to undertake the performance single-handed. He accordingly made his way to the adjacent villages in good time on the morning of the day, and intended to make as good a day for himself and the publicans as he possible could."

The only other details given of the performance are that there used to be a dozen or so men including a drummer, a German flute player, a fifer, a man dressed in women's clothes and "..... old Johnny Hubbard, that had a black stocking on one leg and a white one on the other".

The second account appears in H. B. Kendall, The Origins and History of the Primitive Methodist Church, 1906? , page 297. It reads:

"Hanford a Primitive Methodist preacher tells us that on Plough Monday, January 12th 1818, he was accosted by some mummers fantastically dressed, who hailed from Syston. They looked for money, but he gave them good advice instead, where upon they intimated he must be a 'ranter' by his talk. This led him to ask whether they had any 'ranters' at Syston. 'No,' they said and if they ever come there we will kill them."

Three thoughts occur to me about these accounts, namely:

1. Were these plough-bullocks and mummers actually performing a play?
2. Were Plough Monday customs, at one time, as wide-spread in Leicestershire as they were in the neighbouring counties of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire?

If so this would lend further support to the idea that there is a connection between the area of the Danelaw and the geographical extent of Plough Monday customs.

3. Did the Primitive Methodists and other similar sects have a big effect on the discontinuance of folk customs, particularly in Leicestershire?

If anyone has any comments on any of these points, I would be very pleased to hear from them.

Idwal Jones, 16 Wensley Road, Woodthorpe, Nottingham.

GRAPHS FOR VISUALISING THE STRUCTURES OF FOLK PLAYS

This is a fairly simple graphical tool which I hope someone may find useful.

The graphs (diagrams may be a better word) are based on a grid in which the vertical divisions indicate time. Blocks are then drawn in for every speech for each character (see figs). If the horizontal axis is graded in speeches, then it is possible to draw lines linking the blocks in sequence in order to make the different features of the graph more clear (figs 1a and 2a).

The only situation where blocks can be drawn in for more than one character for any given speech or sequence of lines is when these characters are singing or speaking in unison.

Where a speech or sequence of lines cannot be ascribed with certainty to a particular character then it may be best to leave a gap and, if appropriate, draw a dashed line across the gap. On the other hand, if a tentative identification is possible then the block should be drawn in using dashed lines and/or a different type of shading.

The order of characters on the grid should usually be given in order of appearance, but if you are comparing several plays with substantially the same characters

(e.g. when studying evolution at one location), it is better to use a standard set of characters in a standard order. In this way any differences in structure should become self evident.

FIG.1 - "THE PEACE EGG" CHAPBOOK TEXT

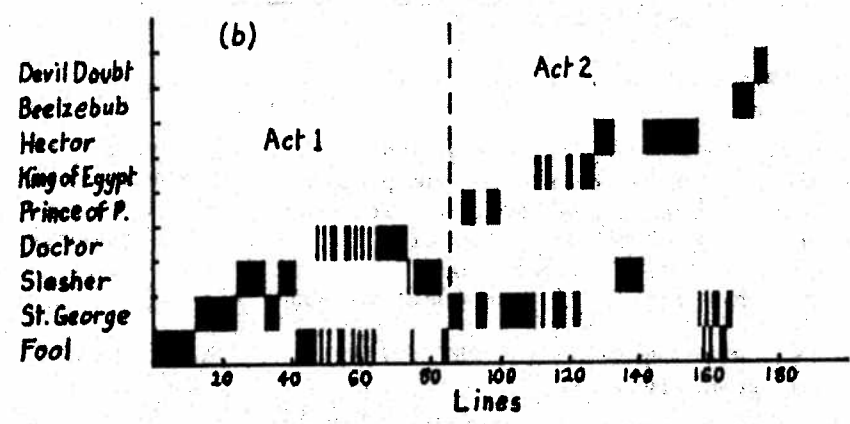
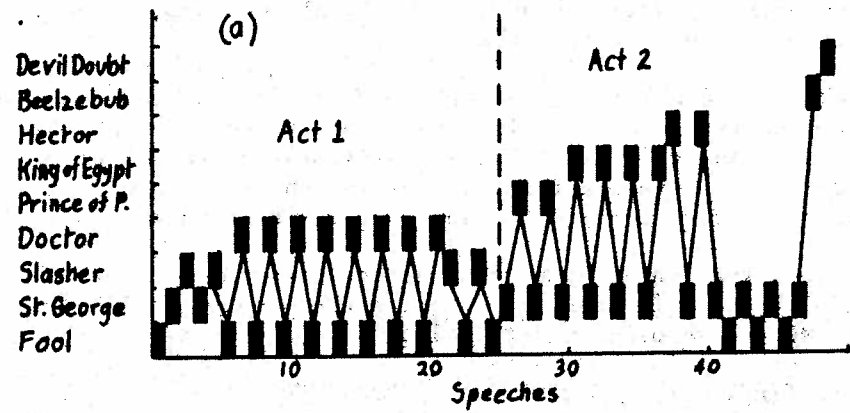
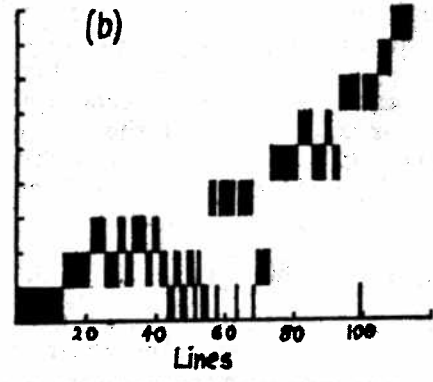
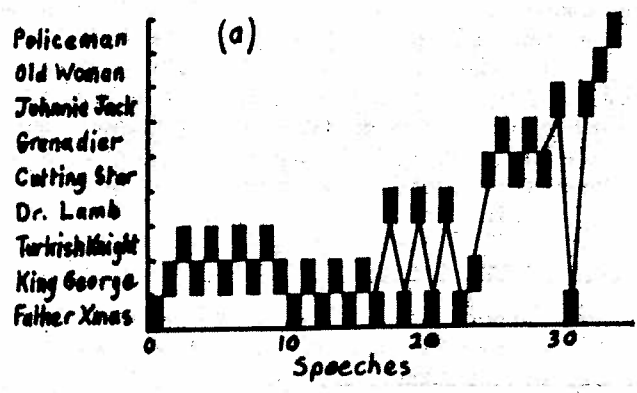


FIG.2 - BURGHCLERE, HAMPSHIRE

from - R.J.E.Tiddy (1923) *The Mummer's play*
Oxford University Press, 1923, pp.185-188



Following on from this, you could also use a standard set of lines or speeches instead of characters. In this case, a play which conforms to the standard order will produce a straight diagonal row of blocks, whereas any omissions or juxtapositions will produce a stepped or jagged diagonal.

The horizontal axis can be graded in terms of numbers of speeches (figs 1a and 2a), or lines (figs 1b and 2b), or words, or minutes and seconds (if you are working from a tape recording and have a stop watch). I cannot say which is the best of these options since I can see advantages and disadvantages in all of them. However, I can see little advantage in using words rather than lines.

There is nothing which can be done with these graphs which cannot be done using the play texts themselves. However, they do eliminate a lot of the paper shuffling associated with full texts, and they highlight the different parts of the action and key characters more easily. I have not tried to develop the technique to its full potential and so I will be very interested to see what anyone else can do with it.

Finally, to those who feel that this may be yet another step towards the dehumanisation of folk plays, I would like to point out that these graphs can be really quite aesthetic especially if they are shaded in using pretty colours.

Peter Millington, 6 The Pingle, Long Eaton, Nottingham. NG10 4LN

PAPERS ON TRADITIONAL DRAMA PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY 1980 ANNUAL MEETING - PITTSBURGH, OCTOBER 16-19, 1980

BURSON, Anne C., THE SATIRIC MEDICAL SKIT: FOLK DRAMA IN A MODERN OCCUPATIONAL GROUP. (University of Pennsylvania).

Satiric skits presented within a group are one of the most common types of modern folk drama. Their scripts are not handed down from one production to the next, but are each time written anew around traditional models. The content of such skits is taken directly from the current concerns of the group creating them. This paper discussed the manifestations of the satiric skit tradition in the medical community, and the varying meanings the event has for its participants and audience.

COUZA, James, MUMMING IN SOUTH COUNTY ARMAGH: REMINISCENCES OF A PHILADELPHIA IRISH AMERICAN. (University of Pennsylvania).

This paper seeks to understand the hero-combat play in Northern Ireland as a product of the collective aesthetic of a community, and how it permits the enactments and ritual mediation of dangerous conflicts in the ludic buffered zone. The paper examines some of the mechanisms involved such as the improvisational nature of the play. The basic proposition is that the play is a form of artistic behaviour that is constitutive of culture and community as well as being affected by it - reflexive rather than reflective.

DAVIS, Susan C., "MAKING NIGHT HIDEOUS": MUMMERY AND MASKING IN NINETEENTH CENTURY PHILADELPHIA. (University of Pennsylvania).

New sources on the nineteenth century antecedents of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade reveal that this festival changed in form, content and participants as the city's geography, population and social structure became more complex and diverse. Official attitudes and policies also shaped the carnival: masking by young men was a problem of social order, linked to the development of urban youth culture in the 1840s, and to patterns of neighbourhood and ethnic group conflict. Thus, mummery's meanings were located in social tension as well as group cohesion, this urban folk drama dealt with and was shaped by the problems of life in urbanizing industrializing Philadelphia.

DEALAIZA, Candi, DEFINITION OF CHARACTER TYPE IN THE BASQUE PASTORALE. (UCLA)

The Basque pastore is a form of traditional outdoor theatre believed to have descended from the mysteries and moralities. Characters are defined in the works through their use of costume, melody, musical accompaniment, structured movement and position on stage. As the subject matter of the pastore has changed in recent

decades, new characters have entered the works. This paper deals with how they have been absorbed into the symbolic structure of the pastorate and explores adjustments likely to be made in the near future.

LICHMAN, Simon, "NOW, THAT'S A JOB TO ANSWER, YOU'LL HAVE TO WORK THAT OUT FROM WHAT I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU": "APPEARANCE" AND "REALITY" IN THE MARSHFIELD PAPER BOYS' MUMMING TRADITION. (University of Pennsylvania).

The Marshfield Paper Boys present what appear to be two mutually exclusive aesthetics with regard to the voice disguise essential to performance of their mumming play. The mummies say that they use a more pronounced dialect during performance for they are presenting: Marshfield. However, in order for the outsider-audience to appreciate the play, linguistic tact is employed, and the mummies move towards standard English. An examination was made of such ethnographic conundrums as 'appearance' and 'reality', in which information given seems mutually exclusive, creating an illusion that is not actual. Concepts of 'reliable' and 'unreliable' informants, and the 'suspension of disbelief' were also considered.

MISHLER, Craig, OF MINING AND MUMMING: PROCESSIONAL DRAMA IN ENGLISH BAY, ALASKA. (University of Alaska, Anchorage Community College).

Among the Sugcestun-speaking Aleuts of Alaska's Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound, mumming is a living festival tradition adopted from Russian traders and missionaries who colonized the area as early as 1785. In English Bay, one of these communities, this mumming (locally called masking) is associated with the celebration of Russian Orthodox Christmas each January. The high point of this tradition comes on New Year's night, when the villagers reenact their New Year's Play, a largely nonverbal folk drama which is accompanied by music and portrays the seasonal life cycle. The play was examined from both sacred and secular perspectives and compared with British mummary.

FOLK PLAY INDEXING WORKSHOP

Parklands Community Centre, Stanhope Street, off Derby Road, Long Eaton, Nottingham

"A cooperative indexing scheme for traditional plays and related customs" was presented for consideration at the "Traditional Drama 1979" conference. The need for the scheme was generally recognised, and several researchers expressed interest in participating. For one reason and another no real progress has been made with the scheme, and at "Traditional Drama 1980" it was generally agreed that a concerted effort was needed to get it off the ground. Hence this workshop.

The workshop will be a semi-formal affair, probably involving less than a dozen people, and is intended primarily for contributors to the indexing scheme. It will include talks, discussion and practical sessions (see below). The main aims will be to recap the principles of the scheme, sort out any difficulties experienced by the participants, and inaugurate the working routines. Because the workshop will only be a one day event a certain amount of work will have to be done by the participants before the day. This is detailed below.

If required it should be possible to arrange overnight accommodation for anyone travelling long distances.

Material to be sent to the participants before the workshop

- a) Indexing guide (incorporating revisions resulting from "Traditional Drama 1979").
- b) Second experimental issue of "Traditional Drama Abstracts" (revised format).
- c) Blank work sheets (if required).
- d) Copies of four standard items for indexing before the workshop.
- e) Venue details.

Material to be returned to the organisers before the workshop for collation

- a) Completed work sheets for the four standard items.
- b) Completed work sheets for at least four items chosen by the participant (preferably illustrating possible problems).
- c) A completed "Unpublished Collection" work sheet for the participant's own collection.

Material to be brought by participants to the workshop

- a) Documentation already supplied.
- b) Copies of at least twelve items for indexing during the practical session, some of which will be indexed by other participants.

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

1. Introduction and Recap to the Indexing Scheme

In this session the different parts of the indexing work sheets will be described and related to the way in which they will be processed in order to produce "Traditional Drama Abstracts" and the various indexes.

2. Discussion

3. Indexing Problems

The various indexing problems and inconsistencies raised by the pre-workshop indexing returns will be discussed.

4. Administration

Various aspects of the administration of the scheme will be discussed, including: submission of work sheets, checking procedures, publication, finance, etc.

5. Practical Session

The participants will index the material they have brought with them. Individually completed work sheets will be redistributed to other participants for checking via a central coordinator. In this way the normal working routine will be established in miniature.

6. Concluding Discussion

TRADITIONAL DRAMA 1980 : An Informal Seminar on Aspects of Current Research on Traditional Plays of the British Isles

University of Sheffield - Saturday, 11th October, 1980

This year the format of the annual Traditional Drama Conference was changed considerably. Primarily, the number of formal papers was reduced and instead a series of discussion sessions were instituted. This, coupled with a change of venue, provided a situation whereby more informal discussions took place. In addition, an exhibition of photographs and costumes was mounted and there was an opportunity to view a selection of films on traditional drama. The sessions presented were as follows:

Paul Smith & Liza Warner; The Quack Doctor: Some Aspects - An Informal Discussion

Jon Drake; The Fool and the Hobby-Horse in Ritual Drama

Steve Roud (Chairperson); Forum on Aspects of Traditional Drama Research
Contributions by Derek Schofield and Duncan Broomhead

Peter Harrop; The Internal Meaning of the English Folk Play

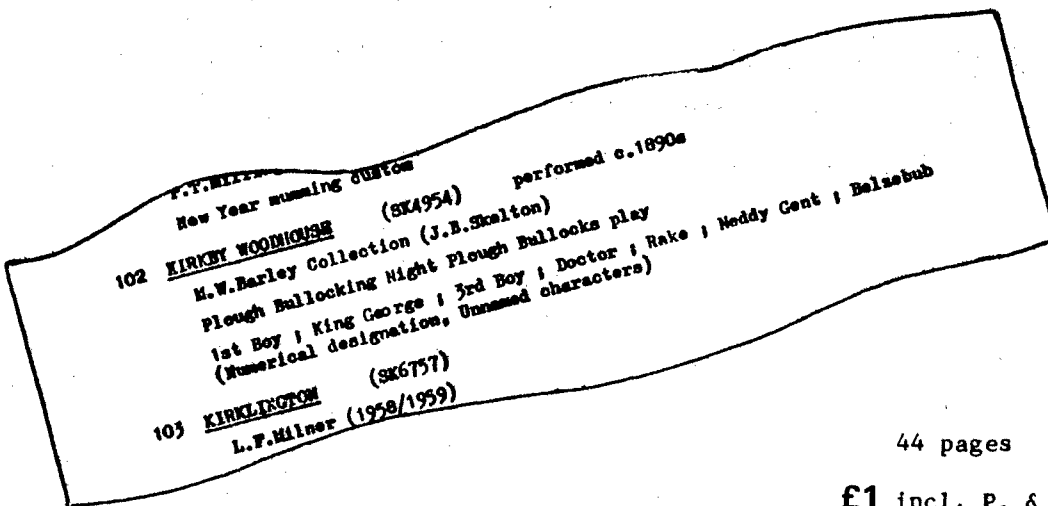
A list of people attending the Conference is available from Paul Smith

AN INTERIM LIST OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE FOLK PLAYS AND RELATED CUSTOMS

compiled by P.T.Millington

This list includes the following :-

- (a) Details of 206 folk plays and related customs from Nottinghamshire (see example below).
- (b) A bibliography of 64 publications relating to Notts folk drama.
- (c) Addresses for 13 unpublished collections of folk plays.
- (d) Indexes for times of occurrence, names for customs, character names and dates.
- (e) Distribution map.



44 pages

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