

# TRADITIONAL DRAMA STUDIES



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## SOME REMINISCENCES OF SCOTTISH TRADITIONAL DRAMA

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In this brief survey of reminiscences of Scottish traditional drama I am presenting material from six people recorded in 1977 and 1979.<sup>1</sup> Three are women who were observers of the action and three are men who acted in the play when they were boys. All speak of a tradition of house-visiting. After the performance the performers were given such things as pennies, apples and oranges, nuts and cakes. The time of year was either at or around Hallowe'en or else the Christmas and New year period.

In connection with the seasons of the year I should like to take this opportunity to mention, parenthetically, that work I have been doing on the relationship between triads and tetrads in Indo-European tradition suggests that three principal festivals were celebrated from an early period. The approach I am taking - which I first spoke of in a paper on "Cosmos and Indo-European Folktales" given at the Seventh Congress of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research held at Edinburgh in August 1979 - offers the possibility of relating the high points of the year to a total classificatory scheme which appears likely to embrace all aspects of life. I merely mention this as something which could radically affect our understanding of seasonal ritual. On this occasion I am presenting a few vivid memories of play performance.

The first is from Mrs. Helen Bickerton, whose maiden name was Chambers. She had a partial recollection of the play as performed in Broxburn, a village to the west of Edinburgh. She could not recall the middle section but the opening and closing lines that she did remember are not included in the other versions I shall be referring to. This recording was made in 1977 when I was in Australia collecting Scottish oral tradition there on a Fellowship from the Humanities Research Centre in Canberra. I took the opportunity of enquiring for traditional drama and was given two reminiscences of performance, this one, and another from Kippen near Stirling. It is worth noting two points about the locations. First, neither Broxburn nor Kippen has been listed as a place where performances were known; and second, both villages are in general areas where performances have been recorded. These additions do nothing to disturb our broad

picture of the location of plays in recent times<sup>2</sup> but serve to indicate that there is probably much detail to be filled in. The collecting I have been able to do suggests that it is still possible to add considerably to our knowledge of traditional drama in Scotland. Mrs. Bickerton's reminiscence which follows is a first sample of what is still remembered.

H.B. We always kept Hallowe'en. We always had a party for that, and they used - I don't know whether it was at Hallowe'en that they'd come in - and dad remembered nearly all of that. ... "Here come the guisers!" and they'd have their faces blackened. If they had nothing to wear they'd turn their jackets inside out, and ... how did it start?

"Stir up the fire and give us light  
For in this house there'll be a fight."

They had mock swords and cocked hats and they'd go through all this motion of having a fight and it finishes up with:

"Here comes in wee Mickey Funny  
The best wee man to gather the money.  
Great lang pooches doon to his knees  
He'll tak' penny or twopence or three bawbees."

But ... I don't remember going out guising but I can remember others coming in. You know they'd come and ... I don't know if it was just at Hallowe'en or if it had to do with Guy Fawkes, because I think they came around then.

. . . . .

E.L. What happened after this fight? You know, you talked of them having these mock swords ...

H.B. Well, that's all I can remember because dad used to say it for us. I've forgotten all the middle part, but then there was this wee Mickey Funny that came around and gathered up the ...

E.L. But you saw it done as well as hearing your father speak of it?

H.B. I can just remember, you know, that they had these wooden swords and they pretended to have ... it was a fight with swords, you know, as if they ... like the Errol Flynn sort of thing.

E.L. Were they dressed up? Yes?

H.B. Well, as much as they could. They had somebody ... you know, their coats back to front and at that time the coats would have a light striped lining, you know, that made them look ... something to make them look different, or they'd wear somebody else's clothes or they'd be dressed up if they could.

The coats turned inside out and the blackened faces were mentioned by other informants. On several occasions when I have asked what was used to blacken the face, the reply, "Soot," was accompanied by a gesture towards the fireplace indicating the taking of soot from the chimney.

The next example is what may I think be the Scottish "core play" with the basic hero-combat action presented in eight lines. It is from Miss E. D. Trotter who saw the play performed at Whitsome near Coldstream about 1945. The time of year was probably Hallowe'en.

E.T. When the little boy came in, he knocked at the door, you see and someone opened the door and in he came with his sword and his pistol and said:

"Here comes I Goloshins,"

(Golashins I think it sounded like)

"Golashins in ... is my name

A sword and pistol in my hand, I hope to prove the game."

And the other little boy who was in already said:

"The game sir, the game sir,"

(and I think he had a sword)

"is not within your power

I'll chop you into inches in less than half an hour."

And proceeded to slay Galatians, you see, and then when he was slain and laid out on the rug at the fireside this knock came to the door [knock] and ... opened the door and

"Here comes in old Doctor Brown  
The best old doctor in the town."

And he produced this little bag and a box like smelling salts and said:

"Put a little to his nose,  
Put a little to his toes."

And he was immediately revived.

In another account she stressed different details, mentioning, for example, that Golashins came in "with a black face and a sword, a wooden imitation sword, and an imitation pistol" and that the doctor was "dressed up with a hat and coat and a bag".

A Melrose man who had good cause to remember the part of Doctor Brown was William Brown who received the nickname "Doc" at an early age. He recalls this and goes on to speak of how he came to know the play. It was learnt orally.

E.L. Do you remember how you got your nickname?

W.B. Yes, yes. It was, ... he was a baker's vanman. Lillicoe was his name. And it was before I went to the school, and I've been Doc Brown ever since.

E.L. And was it this Lillicoe that taught you the play?

W.B. Well, no. It was ... the rest of the boys. It was the done thing at that time.

. . . . .

E.L. Yes. Oh well, and these boys taught you the play?

W.B. Yes, yes. Well, ye just learnt it from the older ones.

E.L. Do you remember their names?

W.B. The ... that eh ...?

E.L. That taught you.

W.B. Oh, one Tom Cook, and ... oh now who's the next? Jack Paterson, and ... oh dear ...

E.L. That's good.

W.B. A Wat ... a Walter Cook. Oh, I can't remember any.

E.L. And how did they teach you?

W.B. Oh jist, ye jist went wi' them and you jist heard them sayin' it.

E.L. Yes.

W.B. Ye see, you got your bit off and that was as that mattered.

E.L. And did you have a special bit yourself?

W.B. Aye, oh I'd Doctor Brown.

E.L. So you went round with these boys, did you?

W.B. Oh yes, yes. It was a great thing going to the door. "Let the guisarts in!" Of course, if they didn't let you in ye asked them to assist ye. I mean, a penny was a lot in these days.

E.L. Yes.

W.B. Aye, aye.

E.L. So how many of you went round together?

W.B. Oh about four; four or five.

E.L. Yes. And you were always Doc?

W.B. I was always Doctor Brown.

E.L. Was that because you were Brown?

W.B. Aye, I think that's how I was there wi' being so young, being Doctor Brown.

E.L. You were the youngest of them?

W.B. Oh mostly, mostly.

E.L. How old were you?

W.B. Oh, ten to eleven year old.

E.L. Yes. And how old would the others be?

W.B. Well, they ... now ... they'd be getting on for fourteen, the others, or maybes [sic] a wee bit older, but I think about fourteen.

Mr. Brown's text includes the bargaining about the fee for the cure.

W.B. "Here comes in Galashan, Galashan is my name;  
A sword and pistol by my side, I hope to win the game."

"The game sir, the game sir, it's not within your power;  
I'll cut you down in inches in less than half an hour."

"You sir?"

"I sir."

"Take yir [sic] sword and try sir."

Galashan again.

"See, see, what have I done?  
I've killed my father's only son."

Then he looks along. Here's Doctor Brown.

"Here comes in old Doctor Brown  
The best old doctor in the town."

"How much will you take to cure this man?"

The doctor.

"Twenty pound."

"Far too much."

"Ten pound."

"Far too much."

"Five pound."

"Oh, that'll do."

The doctor.

"I've got a little bottle in my pocket called hoxypoxy.  
A little to his nose  
And a little to his toes. "  
Rise up Jack and sing a song. "

Jack.

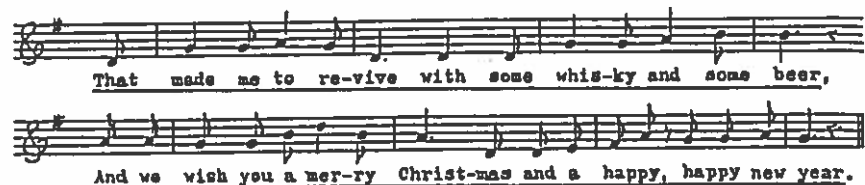


Once I was dead, but now I'm a - live;



Oh bles - sed be the doc - tor that made me to re - vive.

The whole company.



This was the play as Mr. Brown recalled performing it but he also remembered some stray lines:

W.B. "Here comes in old Belzebub  
And over my shoulder I carry my club."

And then the question is:

"What have you seen on your travels?"

He says:

"Seen? Mountains o' beef and rivers o' gravy."

He could give a probable date, 1913, for the last time he performed in the play and spoke also of the time of year.

E.L. When was this you went round?

W.B. Oh, 1913 I think.

E.L. Yes.

W.B. It was Christmas time; we did it at Christmas time.

E.L. Was it just one night you went round?

W.B. Och no, no, no. It wis ... lasted a good time when ... at Christmas time.

E.L. But would you start on Christmas?

W.B. Oh well, before.

E.L. Oh, before Christmas. And when did you stop?

W.B. Oh well, jist New Year. It was finished at New Year.

The next reminiscence is from Mr. Thomas Fox and his wife, Annie Fox, who live in Morebattle near Kelso. Mr. Fox acted in the play about the years 1910 to 1914 but both he and his wife had seen the play performed more recently. Performances took place on the nights between Christmas and "Auld Year's Night" with the exception of Sunday. This is the longest version that I have recorded and the characters include a presenter called Little I:

T.F. "Here comes in Little I, who's never been before;  
I'll try to do the best I can, the best can do no more."

Knock, knock. [Knock] "Come in."

"Here comes in Golashin, Golashin is ma name;  
My sword and pistol by ma side I hope to win the game."

Knock, knock. In comes The Game Sir

"The game sir, it's not within yir power;  
I'll ram this dagger through yir heart in less than half an hour."

"You sir?"

"Yes I sir."

"Take your sword and try sir."

Bang, bang, wallop, bang. Down goes The Game Sir; down goes Golashin.

A.F. He falls, ye see.

T.F. The Game Sir looks at Golashin and he says:

"Dear oh dear, what have I done?  
I've killed my sister's only son.  
Round the kitchen round the hall,  
Is there not a good doctor to be found at all?"

[Knock]

Who's there?"

"Doctor Brown."

"Come in Doctor Brown."

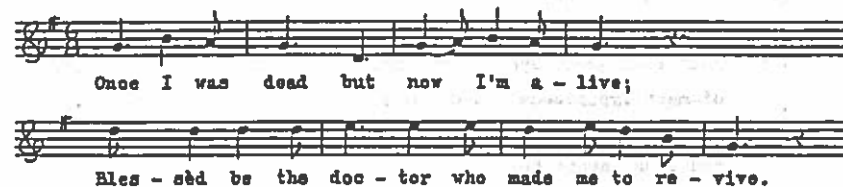
In comes Doctor Brown.

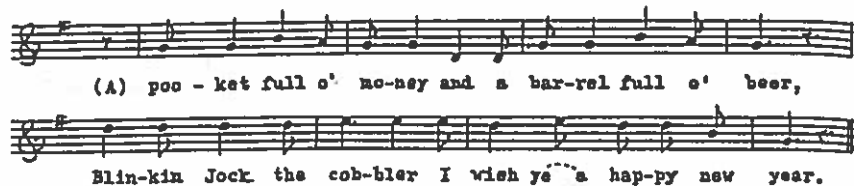
"Here comes in old Doctor Brown  
The best old doctor in the town.  
Over ma shoulder I carry a club  
And in ma hand a frying pan  
An I think myself a jolly good man."

The Game Sir asks Doctor Brown if he can cure a dead man.

"Yes, yes. I've got a little bottle here an' they call it hoxycroxy.  
A little to his nose,  
A little to his toes.  
Rise up Jack an' sing a song."

Up gets Golashin, sings a song:





- A.F. That's it.  
 T.F. That's it.  
 E.L. That's great, yes.  
 T.F. And then the rest, you know, they sing, the four o' them. Well, one'll sing a song, another'll dae a little bit recitation an' they'll aa sing a wee song, an' then they go roon wi' the hat for pennies an' out they go.  
 . . . . .  
 E.L. Now, which of them gets killed? Or do they both get killed?  
 T.F. No, no. Golashin gets killed.  
 E.L. Yes. And what's the name of the other one?  
 T.F. The Game Sir, the next one.  
 E.L. That's his name, was The Game Sir?  
 T.F. The Game Sir, yes. That was his name, yes.  
 E.L. You've got a good version of it; it's nice. And what about Little I? Did he wear anything special?  
 T.F. Oh well, no nothing special at aa. He was jist ...  
 A.F. He was usually the tiniest one.  
 E.L. Oh yes.  
 T.F. He was the wee one you see.  
 A.F. He was always Little I.  
 E.L. And he started things?  
 T.F. He started things off, aye. Then Golashin comes in.  
 A.F. The door was opened and you invited them in, and the wee one would come in first of all and then the rest would follow on. As their name was called out, ye see, they all trooped in until they were all together.  
 E.L. Yes. And it was just the four, was it? Just four?  
 A.F. I think so.  
 T.F. Just four, yes, aye. Very very often only three. Little I wasnae of much importance. Sometimes he wasnae there.  
 E.L. And how many people would be going round altogether? In Morebattle and round about here?

- T.F. How many squads, like?  
 E.L. Yes.  
 A.F. Oh quite a few, I think.  
 T.F. Quite a few, I think. My word, I couldna tell ye. I couldna tell ye how many.  
 E.L. And would you get several visits to a house in one evening?  
 T.F. Oh yes, that's right, aye.  
 A.F. Yes, oh yes.

The last recollection, from Watt Ramage, is of the play as performed at Westruther near Lauder. This performance, unlike the others mentioned here, opened with the "Get up auld wife" begging verse:

- W.R. Well when we wis bairns at the school we had this play, Galoshin, and about a dizzen o' us got dressed up at night, what we ca'd guisin' and us guisers, and we went fae [sic] one house tae another and we had this play that we ... a little play that we went through, and it wis: We went to the door and rapped at the door and when the wife came to the door we said:  
 "Get up auld wife and shake your feathers  
 Dinna think that we are beggars  
 We're only bairnies come to play  
 Get up and gie's oor Hogmanay."

And then we maiched in.

Mr. Ramage speaks of about a dozen children of both sexes taking part but only three had distinct roles (the two combatants and the doctor). The others held hands in a circle round the two fighters and I was interested in Mr. Ramage's comment on this which made it clear that those forming the circle participated in the action of the duel in much the same way as they participated in the fight between two boys at school in their everyday life.

- E.L. And what did the rest of you do at the time that the fight was going on?  
 W.R. Well we wis jist aa roond aboot, ye see, keepin' them thegither [sic], and jist the same as when we wis at the skull, if there was a ... ony difference at the skull, you know, between twae bairns, twae laddies, fightin', the other yins wid aa circle roond aboot and they aa eggit yin side on and the tother yun eggit the tother yun on, ye see.

Generally the boys in the circle were dressed in female clothes and the girls in male clothes, and one of the children would carry a basket to collect what they were given. The play concluded with the singing of the "Once I was dead" song in a longer version than the others quoted here.

W.R. But he drew his sword and ... Galoshin was supposed to be dead; he fell down dead, and then there were one sent away outside and he brought in old Doctor Brown, the best old doctor in the town, an' he doctort up Galoshin, gied him some potion, an' then Galoshin banged up to his feet and startit. Here's:

Once I was dead, sir, but now I am a - live;

Bless'd be the doc - tor that made me to re - vive.

Bless'd be the mis-tress of the house, the mas-ter al - so,

And all the lit-tle bairn-ies that roun the ta-ble go,

wi' their poc-kets fu' o' mo-ney an' their bes-kets fu'o' gear,

Suo - cess in-til our gui-ser, a hap-py, guid new year.

an' then we went away tae anither hoose, an' went from yin hoose to another, an' this play went on aa night.

#### NOTES

1. The recordings are all in the archive of the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University, and are copyright by the School for the benefit of informants. The items quoted and mentioned are:

Broxburn (NT 0872) SA 1977/24/A2

Mrs. Helen F. Bickerton, née Chambers, recorded 20th January 1977.

Kippen (NS 6594) SA 1977/23/B1

Mrs. Margaret Shepherd, née Clark, recorded 20th January 1977.

Whitsome (NT 8650) SA 1979/91/A1

Miss E. D. Trotter, recorded 24th September 1979.

Melrose (NT 5434) SA 1977/205/B3, SA 1979/91/B1

Mr. William Brown, recorded 27th August 1977 and 8th October 1979.

Morebattle (NT 7725) SA 1979/91/A2

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Fox, recorded 24th September 1979.

Westruther (NT 6350) SA 1977/205/A2, SA 1979/91/B3

Mr. Watt Ramage, recorded 24th August 1977 and 13th October 1979.

Interjections by Mrs. Nancy Stirton and myself have been omitted from the transcription of the recording from Mrs. Bickerton. The actual passages quoted, where re-recording was done, are as follows: Miss Trotter - second recording of text; Mr. Brown - 1979 session, using the second recording of the text on that occasion, with the "Belzebub" fragment from the 1977 session; Mr. Ramage - 1979 recording.

2. See E. C. Cawte, Alex Helm and N. Peacock, *English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index* (London: The Folklore Society, 1967), pp.32, 66-7, and David Buchan, "The Folk Play, Guising, and Northern Scotland", *Lore and Language*, 1:10 (1974), 10-14. It should be noted that the entry under Orkney in *English Ritual Drama* is an error. The reference is to James Fleming Leishman's *A Son of Knox* (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1909), p.109, where Leishman includes in a composite play text the following two lines which he states are from the parish of Deerness, Orkney:

"Oor shoon's made o' mare's skin,  
Come, open the door and let's in."

Leishman appears to have drawn these lines from Robert Chambers', *The Book of Days* (London and Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1863-4 and later editions) which he mentions on page 114. Chambers gives them as part, not of a play, but of the house-visiting song "We're a' here Queen Mary's men" as sung on the last night of the year in the parish of Deerness (Chambers, Vol.2, pp.788-89).

Brian Hayward, who is doing postgraduate work at Glasgow University on Scottish traditional drama, has accumulated material in addition to that noted in the above sources.

3. I am very grateful to Virginia Blankenhorn, School of Scottish Studies, for transcribing the music.