

TRADITIONAL DRAMA STUDIES



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Traditional drama has been a major focus of British folklorists' research since the late nineteenth century. To that end, considerable time and effort have been spent by scholars in researching into the traditional plays of the British Isles. The primary focus of much of this research, until recently, has been to document the occurrence of such plays and, following the route of historical determinism, has attempted to explain their existence in terms of origin theory. Similarly, much discussion has concentrated on reconstructing the source of the actions of the plays in the religious rituals of prehistory.

Over the past decade, however, criticism has been levelled at the employment of such abstract, unsubstantiated theory and also at the total neglect of any aspect of the performance of plays. This criticism has in turn fostered an expansion of research in traditional drama studies at all levels and pure dissatisfaction has led to the development of several alternative orientations in the scholarship. These range from literary and statistical analyses of textual relationships, studies of performances in context, to the development of an indexing scheme and archive for traditional drama materials. In relative terms this growth in scholarship has been almost out of proportion to other areas of folklore studies in the United Kingdom and many new ideas and vital areas of research are now being explored.

Unfortunately, little of this ongoing research has been published. This has been detrimental to the subject in that it has curtailed the debate of relevant issues and, at the same time, maintained the outdated perception that traditional drama as a subject has little to offer. It is hoped that the publication of Traditional Drama Studies will redress this situation by making available many of the unpublished research studies and conference papers which have been completed in the past decade.

All the papers in this first volume of Traditional Drama Studies were originally presented at Traditional Drama 1978. This one day conference on aspects of current traditional drama research was originally sponsored by the Division of Continuing Education and The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language at the University of Sheffield. This conference has now become an

annual event. This selection of papers given at the first conference represents a range of these newer approaches to the subject and covers topics such as the theoretical premises which shape the study of the plays, examinations of contemporary performances and analytical techniques. They demonstrate the scope of theory and methodology which is now being used to further understanding of our traditional culture.

Future volumes of Traditional Drama Studies will include further papers presented at these conferences. We are also actively seeking for publication articles that are currently coming to fruition. To this end, if you wish to submit materials for consideration, please forward your contribution to the editors at The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, The University, Sheffield. S10 2TN.

Finally we must offer our thanks to the contributors to this volume and also to Sydonia Donnelly and Helen Hartnell for the excellent typing and assistance with this production.