

# ROOMER

The New/letter of the Traditional  
Drama Research Group.  
Vol. 5 no. 4 1985



## SOVIET FOLK: A SELECTION OF FILMS

Enclosed with this issue of Roomer is a brochure giving details of a selection of Russian folklore films to be shown at the National Film Theatre in London (2 to 5 October 1985). Of particular interest to those individuals researching into traditional drama is the programme for the evening of Wednesday, 2 October.

### "The Russian Folk Theatre/Russian Calendar Customs

Two very rich and inter-related areas of folklore among The Easter Slavs (Russians, Belorussians and Ukranians) are theatre and the traditions connected with the year of the rural community. These form the main themes of tonight's programme including Russian Calendar Customs (Leningrad University 1978-83/Dir M Kashe, G Shapovalova) which offers some interesting parallels with Friday's films from Belorussia and parts of L Kopperschmidt's Russian Folk Theatre (Moscow 1974-76), commissioned by the Ministry of Culture as a teaching film - a unique and colourful record of the art. Commentary by well-known actor I Smoktunovskii."

A selection of these films will be touring England and Scotland during October. The films are accompanied by a delegation of three film-makers who will be available at most programmes to answer questions and for informal discussion. Further details of venues and programmes can be obtained from the Department of Russian Studies, University of Hull (Tel: 0482-497614).

### Venues:

- 6-7 October - Film House, Edinburgh
- 10 October - Middleton Hall, University of Hull
- 12 October - National Photographic Museum, Bradford

## BRITISH THEATRE INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS

(British Theatre Institute, 61 Surbiton Court, St. Andrews Square, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 4ED)

David Cheshire: Bibliography of Theatre and Stage Design 1960-1970 (1974) £2.50

Datec Directory of Drama Courses in Higher Education (1984) £3

Leonard Conolly: Directory of British Theatre Research Resources in North America (1978) £3

Directory of Theatre Research Resources in Greater London (1978) 75p

Diana Howard: London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950: A Directory and Bibliography (1971) £8

Christine Redington & Kenneth Pickering: Select Bibliography of Drama and Education (1980) £3

Pauline Stuart: Theatre Procedures and Practices (1983) £4.75

David Edgar: Public Theatre in a Private Age (1984) 75p

THE EARLIEST TEXT OF A MUMMING PLAY (1832) FROM THE ISLE OF MAN

Stephen Miller

Reproduced following is the earliest text of a mumming play from the Isle of Man (1). It appeared in the weekly Tuesday edition of the Manx Sun for the 10th of January, 1832. The correspondent mentioned is unacknowledged and the manuscript appears not to have survived. The antiquarian and travel literature of this period contains only one reference to mumming this by Joseph Train writing between 1836 and 1842 as follows:

"The Christmas festival is introduced by young persons perambulating the various towns and villages, in the evenings, fantastically dressed, and armed with swords, calling as they proceed "Who wants to see the White Boys act?". When their services are engaged, they, like the Scotch Guisards or Quhite-boys of Yule, perform a rude drama, in which St. George, Prince Valentine, King of Egypt, Sambo, and the Doctor, are the dramatis personae" (2).

This is all that Train wrote with no accompanying text nor any fragment of one. It is uncertain if Train ever witnessed a performance - he does recount a visit to the Island during 1836 but it appears to have taken place during the summer months only (3). Much more certain is that the details were taken from a description of Manx folklore written especially for him by a native islander (4).

Island mumming troupes have always been called 'White Boys' - it is not likely that there is any connection with the Irish agrarian protest movement of the 1760's whose members were similarly named save a common appellation from the wearing of white shirts as part of a disguise (5); the 'Quhite-boys of Yule' from Galloway mentioned above appear to be so described for the same reason (6).

One other text from the nineteenth century is known taken down in 1845 from a performance in the home of William Harrison a local antiquarian (7). Published later in 1869 this text has remained the only example to appear in published collections of Manx folklore (8). The performers match those mentioned by Train; the Manx Sun version shares only the Doctor and Saint George adding Saints Denis and Patrick (9). The Folk Life Survey of the Manx Museum has since collected a further two texts from Ramsey and Castletown (towns at the north and south of the Island); these await full publication along with relevant surrounding material (10).

NOTES & REFERENCES

1. This text has remained unpublished though there is a handwritten copy made this century by P.W.Caine in the library of the Manx Museum in Manx Museum Mss. MS. 858.
2. Page 127 in Joseph Train (1845), An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man, 2 volumes. Douglas [Isle of Man]: Mary A.Quiggin. The work was earlier published in 4 parts (with parts 2 to 4 making up Vol. II) between ?1842 and ?1845. For the somewhat complicated publishing history of this work see pp.476-77 in William Cubbon (Comp. & ed.) (1933), A Bibliographical Account of Works relating to the Isle of Man, Volume I, London: Oxford University Press for the Manx Museum and Ancient Monuments Trustees.
3. He mentions being in Peel precisely on the 18th July and later watching the harvest at the foot of South Barrule mountain. Train (1845), Vol. II, p.356 & 247.
4. This account is described as a 'MS. Account of Manks Customs collected for this work by a talented native of the Island, who understands the Manks language, and is thoroughly acquainted with all the ancient customs, superstitions, and legends of the peasantry'. Train (1845), Vol. II, p.115, fn 6. The whole of the chapter in which the quote (see fn 2 above) appears, Chapter XVII, 'Manners and Customs', pp.102-39, is based on this most remarkable manuscript whose whereabouts now are unknown.

5. The White Boys ('Buachailli Bana') agitated against tithe-farmers and the enclosure of commonage; they first appeared on the Tipperary side of the Knockmealdown Mountains in 1761. See James S. Donnelly (1978), 'The Whiteboy Movement', 1761-65', Irish Historical Studies, Vol. XXI, No.81 (Mar.), pp.3-54.
6. For the Galloway reference see John MacTaggart (1824), The Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopedia. Reprinted 1981 by the Clunie Press, Perthshire in association with the E.A.Hornel trust. The entry for 'Yule-Boys' (p.502) reads: 'Boys who ramble the country during the Christmas holidays. They are dressed in white, all but one in each gang, the Belzebub of the corps'.
7. Harrison lived at 'Rockmount' a private house in German parish. The troupe was presumably from the fishing village of Peel on the Island's west coast.
8. Pp. 166 ff. in William Harrison (Coll. & ed.) (1869), Mona Miscellany. A Selection of Proverbs, Sayings, Ballads, Customs, Superstitions, and Legends peculiar to the Isle of Man (= Manx Society, Vol. XVI). Douglas: The Manx Society. Also pp.128-31 in A.W. Moore (1891), The Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man. London & Douglas: David Nutt & Brown and Son. The most accessible version to date is pp.122-26 in Cyril I. Paton (1941) 'Manx Calendar Customs. The Calendar: The Fourth Quarter, No. II', Folk-Lore, Vol.LII, No.ii (June), pp.120-35. This text has also appeared as pp.273-77 in Stuart Piggot (1929), 'Mummers' Plays from Berkshire, Derbyshire, Cumberland, and Isle of Man', Folk-Lore, Vol. XL, No.ii (Sept.) pp.262-77. He appears unaware that the text sent him is a written copy of a version that had already appeared in print at least twice and once at that in a well known work.
9. Comments on the affinities of the Manx texts would be welcome.
10. These texts and contextual material are briefly but excellently outlined in I.M.Killip (1976), 'The White Boys and the Mollag Band', Journal of the Manx Museum, Vol. VII, No.88, pp.201-05.

[The following text is reprinted verbatim from the Manx Sun, but line numbers have been added to facilitate future reference]

(From a Correspondent)

A CHRISTMAS DRAMA,

AS PERFORMED BY THE DOUGLAS WHITE BOYS

In Manuscript for the first time.

Enter St. Denis and St. George

St. Denis.

A stately knight, well armed with sword and shield,  
Approaches, marching proudly o'er the field:  
Sir Knight, whence cam'st thou? also tell me where  
Thou'rt bound? thy name and country do declare:  
I fear thee not, altho' thou look'st so big;  
Nor for thy long sword do I care a fig!

5

St. George.

Tho' thy demands are insolent, yet I  
Will condescend thus briefly to reply:-  
A knight am I, and not unknown to fame--  
St. George the Bold of England is my name!  
Still in the front of battle foremost found;  
By field and flood for martial deeds renown'd;  
Many brave knights I've stretch'd upon the plain;  
Towns have I taken, mighty giants slain;  
And lately, 'tis indeed a feat to brag on,

10

15

I kill'd, with this good sword, a furious dragon!  
 Deeply enamour'd of a lady bright,  
 Thro' the wide world I travel as her knight;  
 More fair, more virtuous, more divine than she  
 In any realm or country ne'er can be; 20  
 And what I say I'll prove 'gainst any knight,  
 By dint of arms, in fierce and mortal fight!

St. Denis.

St. George, St. George! thou talkest like an ass!  
 Full of conceit, nor will I let thee pass  
 Till I have bang'd thy hide, thou empty boaster, 25  
 Spite of thy swaggering airs, and long cheese-toaster.  
 A knight of France, St. Denis famed, am I,  
 And ere we part, I surely mean to try  
 Whether I cannot lower thy lofty tones,  
 And bring thee, caitiff, to thy marrow bones: 30  
 Forc'd to confess that on this world so round,  
 The dames of France are still the fairest found!

St. George

That head from off thy shoulders soon I'll lop,  
 And that foul mouth of thine for ever stop;  
 An English knight, on coming 'o the scratch, 35  
 For two of France is always found a match!

[They fight - St. George falls.]

I die by Frenchman's hand - ah! Fate too cruel!

St. Denis.

I think I've given St. George his gruel!

[Enter St. Patrick.]

St. Patrick.

I am St. Patrick. Ireland gave me birth--  
 In dearest Dublin, sweetest place on earth 40  
 Sword or shillalah equally I yield,  
 To break a head or cut a throat well skill'd.  
 Fighting and eating - drinking too my trade is,  
 With some spare time devoted to the ladies!  
 Saint tho' I'm call'd, and yet I must allow 45  
 That now and then I dearly love a row!  
 The English George you've fairly floor'd, I see  
 And now, my boy, you'll take a turn with me;  
 Come on, St. Denis, sprung from frogs of France,  
 And, without fiddle, I will make you dance! 50

St. Denis

For this thou well deserv'st a broken head,  
 Born in a bog, and on potatoes fed!  
 Nor bog nor murphies shall delight thee more--  
 This weapon sends thee to the Stygian shore;  
 I'll put a stopper to thy bulls and brogue, 55  
 And rid the world right quickly of a rogue!

[They fight - St. Denis falls.]

Alas! St. Patrick, rather queer I feel,  
Run through the body by thy Irish steel;  
Prithee, good fellow, for a doctor roar,  
Or poor St. Denis soon will be no more.

60

St. Patrick.

Halloo--a doctor, is a doctor near?

Doctor.

Friend, did you call a doctor--I am here;  
Jalap, my name, and for all sorts of ills  
I've powders, holus, lotions, pills;  
For cholera morbus too--complaint terrific,  
I have a ne'er failing and a grand specific!  
Skilful man-midwife likewise, necoucheur,  
No fee I look for, if I make no cure!

65

St. Patrick.

I prithee, doctor, cease thy bothering cant,  
A midwife in this case we do not want;  
Thy aid obstetric for some female friend,  
If there be need, I'll Jalap recommend;  
These wounded knights straightway demand thy care  
--Run thro' the guts in mortal fight they were!

70

Doctor.

Stabbed thro' the guts is sure a sad disaster.  
But, even for that I've a surprising plaster--  
Plaster that soon their vigour shall restore,  
And make them sound and active as before.

75

[The Doctor operates - the wounded  
knights jump up perfectly recovered.]

St. Patrick

After this squabble, thus our hands let's join  
In friendship, and together let us dine;  
Hungry I am, and well prepared for prog,  
With no objections to a glass of grog.

80

St. Denis

To a good dinner I am nothing loath;

St. George.

And I've a twist that will surprise you both.

[The knights standing in a circle  
sing the following]

SONG. --Tune, "Christmas Carol".

Then here's success to all brave boys  
Of stout and gallant heart,  
In battle field or at banquet board,  
Prepared to play a part

85

We handle well a knife and fork  
Likewise the sword and spear,  
And we wish you a merry Christmas,  
And a happy New Year. 90

With hostile bands confronted,  
To fight we are not slack,  
On roast beef and plum pudding  
We can make a stout attack. 95

We handle well a knife and fork,  
Likewise a sword and spear,  
And we wish a merry Christmas,  
And a happy New Year! 100

St. Patrick.

Now, lets to dinner,

Doctor.

Stop! I wish to know  
Who's to come down my fee before you go!

St. Patrick.

This morn I had a tenpenny, my dear,  
But on the road I spent it all in beer!  
St. Patrick's seldom bothered with such riches,  
And now I've not a copper in my breeches.  
St. George, fork out, and satisfy the chap: 105

St. George.

I'm short of rime too--I've not a rap.

St. Denis.

Nor I, good Doctor, but I'll try to borrow  
A one pound note, so call again to-morrow. 110

Exeunt knights.

Doctor.

I'm fairly didd'l'd! Birds of the same feather  
Are all the three, and humbugs altogether!  
No cash, and call to-morrow!--all a bubble!  
The Doctor's billed, just is his time and trouble. 115

(To the audience)

Good folks, I hope you'll pity my mishap,  
And kindly drop a tester in my cap,  
So may a merry Christmas,--good New Year  
Attend you all, with plenty of good cheer.

Exeunt Omnes


# TRADITIONAL DRAMA 1985

The 8<sup>th</sup> annual conference  
on Traditional Drama Studies.

**UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD**  
**12<sup>th</sup> OCT 1985**

*For details:*

The Centre for English Cultural Tradition  
and Language - University of Sheffield  
SHEFFIELD - S10 2TN.



Since 1978 the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language has hosted the annual Traditional Drama Conference. The papers and discussion sessions over the past years have suggested a wide range of innovative approaches to this area of study and the 1985 meeting will again follow in this tradition. In addition to the conference an exhibition of photographs is to be mounted and a film session is scheduled. If you have any publicity materials you wish to distribute please feel free to bring them along.

#### VENUE

Saturday, 12 October 1985 (10.00 am to 5.30 pm)

Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language,  
Endcliffe Exhibition Hall, 605 Ecclesall Road, Sheffield. (Tel: 0742-681270)

Fee: £4 (including refreshments)

#### PROGRAMME

- 10.00 am - Coffee
- 10.30 am - Thomas Pettitt, Dramaturgical Formulas in the English Folk Play
  - Rafael Portillo, Medieval Spanish Drama: Present Knowledge and Future Prospects
  - Film Session introduced by Steve Roud
- 1.00 pm - Lunch (available in nearby restaurants and pubs)
- 2.30 pm - Peter Millington, A New Look at English Folk Play Costumes
  - Rachelle Saltzman, The 1926 General Strike: An Upper Class Festival of Rebellion
  - Frances Clarke, "As Pleased as Punch"

"AS PLEASED AS PUNCH"

Frances Clarke

This paper presents an attempt to explore some of the aspects of Mr. Punch's character which account for his popularity both past and present.

A NEW LOOK AT ENGLISH FOLK PLAY COSTUMES

Peter Millington

This paper attempts a fresh examination of English folk play costumes, taking account of the broader European context. It starts with a review of the ideas of previous writers, which covered the types and functions of the costumes, as well as trends in their development.

A set of working categories is presented which divides the costumes into 1. realistic costumes, 2. non-representational costumes and 3. dancers' uniforms. Non-representational costumes are further subdivided into streamer, decorated and fancy dress types. Trends and influences which have shaped the folk play costumes are examined in more detail. Important among these have been the costume practices of the popular professional theatre. Some non-representational costumes were probably inherited from the pre-existing customs to which the plays became attached in the eighteenth century. They may therefore give clues to the early history of the plays.

DRAMATURGICAL FORMULAS IN THE ENGLISH FOLK PLAY

Thomas Pettitt

Theatre historians habitually point to "folk-play echoes" in early dramatic works such as mysteries, moralities, interludes and stage-plays. When these are not purely verbal parallels, or vague archetypal fallings-and-risings, but concrete and recognisably similar sequences of action, such instances are undoubtedly significant for appreciation of the interaction of "traditional" with other early forms of English drama. Priority has been assigned to the folk play on the basis of its ritual origins, which counter the absence of documentation prior to the medieval and renaissance genres it is supposed to have influenced. With the collapse of the ritual origins theory this priority can no longer be assumed and in some cases it is likely that the direction of borrowing was the other way round, with traditional drama absorbing material, via jigs and drolls, from the early popular theatre. It is also likely that there existed a corpus of standard routines of "dramaturgical formulas", comprising both action and speech, common to many popular dramatic traditions, and analogous to the verbal formulas of traditional song. The familiar *lazzi* of the sixteenth century Italian *commedia dell'arte* may merely be one particular manifestation of the phenomenon. The English folk plays, within the framework of the seasonal house-visit mummery, comprise varying conglomerations of such formulas, sometimes, say through chapbook or antiquarian intervention, temporarily coalescing into fixed sequences.

MEDIEVAL SPANISH DRAMA: PRESENT KNOWLEDGE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Rafael Portillo

Drama in medieval Spain has been studied very little. Even when English scholars in the early twentieth century looked abroad to find parallels with Middle English cycles, they looked more to France and Germany than to Spain. There were plays in Spain in the medieval period, though no complete extant cycle survives. In Seville there are documents which record the use of pageants and the representation of certain characters, both biblical and allegorical. However, in Spain there is a well-established tradition of religious procession, and in Seville the processions of the Holy Week are organised by guilds, some of which still have trade affiliations. It is possible that these processions still maintain some of the principles of staging used at earlier periods. This is an aspect of drama that needs investigating, and it is possible that a search through Spanish archives, which have hardly been tapped as yet, could yield many interesting points of comparison with the drama in other countries, particularly England.

THE 1926 GENERAL STRIKE: AN UPPER CLASS FESTIVAL OF REBELLION

Rachelle H. Saltzman

In eighteenth and 19th century labour conflicts in Britain, such as the Luddite and Swing disturbances, it was the working classes who, fearing that technological innovations threatened their customary way of life, sought power for their protests in folk models of "upside-down" behaviour found in traditional rituals, ceremonies and dramas (e.g. men dressed up as women, blacked their faces, paraded about riotously at night demanding money and free beer from the propertied classes). In response to such displays of protest, the upper classes simply intensified their everyday roles as magistrates and paternalistic landowners to reaffirm the customary social order and their own authority.

In clear contrast, however, the 1926 General Strike exhibited a unique display of symbolic power, issuing as it did from an unexpected source not, as in previous centuries, from the workers but from the upper classes themselves whose authority had already been seriously undermined by the pre-war agitation of trade unions, suffragettes and the Irish, as well as by the Great War itself. During the strike young gentlemen transformed a potential working class revolution into a nine day May festival in which, for example, university students and young businessmen on holiday costumed themselves in workers' uniforms, assumed roles as lorry drivers and bus conductors and threw strike parties in their offices. Even upper class women offered rides to those without transportation, acted as telephone operators and debated what to wear to the strike.

Unlike most folkloric and anthropological investigations, this paper will focus on how upper, as well as lower, classes in modern western society employ folkloric forms in innovative and symbolic ways. The upper classes drew upon traditional elite cultural forms of festival, drama and play, and their associated processes of topsy-turviness, role switching and subversion to attempt - as their earlier rural counterparts had - to revivify a dying social order whose most visible threats were labour unrest and an increasingly powerful government bureaucracy. They did not intend to turn the world upside-down, but merely to arrest the historically evolving structures of the post-World War I world and turn society right side up again.

# **MUMMING SEMINAR**

**18—20 October 1985**

**Mansion House, Corsham, Wiltshire**

An informal residential weekend for all those interested in practical mumming. It will cater for all levels of knowledge and experience, and an important feature will be the opportunity to meet, talk to and drink with fellow mummers and folk enthusiasts. The programme will be kept flexible and will consist of discussions and practical sessions covering an expansive range of mumming history, ideology and practise. Nearly all the extant printed material will be available for perusal and it is hoped to screen some films and/or slides.

The seminar site is in the picturesque town of Corsham, 8 miles from Bath, 3 miles from Chippenham (the nearest railway station). The Mansion House is only 400 yds from a National Express coach stop on the A4 Bristol to London road.

The price per head for the weekend will be £25 which will include all meals and a traditional English feast on the Saturday night and a fill of free ale.

Places are restricted so it is advisable to act as soon as possible. Send a S.A.E. for a draft programme, booking form and further details.

All enquiries to:—

**Colin Burge  
5 The Old Malthouse  
Yatton Keynell  
Chippenham  
Wiltshire**

**Telephone Castle Combe 782694**

**If one of your team is interested in assisting with the presentation please contact me as soon as possible.**

CORRESPONDENCE

From Craig Fees, New Barns School, Church Lane, Toddington, Glos. GL54 5DH

"Carl Willetts is right ('West Malling, Kent', Roomer 5:3, 1985) to remind us "to be very critical about material reported by non-specialist authors", but I would like to extend the caveat further and say that we must beware of any text whatsoever. I made this point tediously and at some length at last year's Traditional Drama Conference (1984) when I showed, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Dr. Katherine Briggs printed as collected from the field by herself a text which - down to typographical detail - had appeared some years earlier in a regional illustrated magazine. The latter, apart from several distinguishing but minor differences, had already appeared in Folklore. I showed that she may have taken her text directly from a typed mimeographed text copied from the regional magazine, in which case she may have had every reason, on the face of it, to believe it to be a dictated version of the 'traditional' text. On that basis her transcription is remarkably accurate, to the best standards of modern folkdrama research. Nevertheless it remains a faithful copy of a faithful copy of a published text previously printed (with minor variants) in Folklore.

I also showed that this custom - described by Dr. Briggs as primarily a summer mumming also performed at Christmas, which would make it unique among other mumming plays in the region - was in fact never performed outside the Christmas season except for a one-off festival performance (and given the fact that "never" is a problematical word in the absence of records, and when relying on oral testimony). I showed this on the basis of conversations with her one named informant, another old mummer, and two men closely bound up to the tradition through the mumming of their father, all supported by earlier published statements.

The moral is that specialisation does not free us from faults in our scholarship, and that material must be adequately supported and subjected to question no matter who presents it".

ROOMER: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP

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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 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. It includes 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 those working in the field of Traditional Drama. As such it relies heavily on participation by subscribers. Therefore, if you have any potential contributions we would be most grateful to receive them.

Back volumes of the newsletter are currently available at the cost of the annual subscription. For further information regarding ROOMER and the work of the TRADITIONAL DRAMA RESEARCH GROUP contact:

Steve Roud, 18 Amberley Grove, Addiscombe, Surrey. CRO 6ND (01-654-6233)  
Paul Smith, Laburnum House, Main Street, West Stockwith, Doncaster. DN10 4HB (0427-890042)

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