

‘THIS MAN IS PYRAMUS’: A Pre-history of the English Mummers’ Plays¹

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Study of the prehistory of popular traditions is a currently unfashionable endeavour. Few students of folksong now worry about the ‘origins’ of the ballad, and this word is unmentionable among most students of English folk drama. The excesses of the ‘residualist’ school, which attempted to demonstrate that ‘the traditional beliefs and customs of the medieval or modern peasant are in nine cases out of ten but the detritus of heathen mythology and heathen worship’,² and that the death-and-revival action of the mummers’ plays made them the ‘survival’ of a fertility ritual, are understandably dismissed with impatience by the angry young men, and sometimes angrier young women, of a more recent generation of folklorists.³ But the prehistory of the mummers’ play actually starts in 1737, the date of the earliest record of a performance resembling the folk plays current in recent tradition, and penetrating that particular darkness need not take us back to the prehistory of our culture at large. The mummers’ plays have a fairly well-recorded continuous history through the last two-and-a-half centuries, and the following pages will explore the possibility that the tradition may already have been sustained a further two hundred years or more before that, taking us back into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴

Such an exercise in historical reconstruction has more than antiquarian significance. Social historians are becoming increasingly interested in the vital function of popular traditions and observances in the behaviour and attitudes of Englishmen of the late-medieval and early-modern periods,⁵ and drama-historians have long been aware of the contribution of traditional customs and folk drama to the emergence of the popular theatre in England over the same period.⁶ In the absence of adequate documentation for the early folk drama, however, both literary and social historians have often been obliged to project the better-recorded modern traditions wholesale into the past — a primitive and perilous application of the ‘regressive’ method contravening Peter Burke’s sensible dictum that this should not involve ‘taking descriptions of relatively recent situations and cheerfully assuming that they apply equally well to earlier periods’.⁷ Something more cautious, if not necessarily less cheerful, is required. The

oft-lamented paucity of evidence on the mummers' plays before the mid-eighteenth century may be due in part to the fairly obvious circumstance that most performances took place indoors, under essentially private and domestic auspices, and were therefore less likely to attract the attention of the authorities or the disapproval of preachers: two classes of record which have left us such ample documentation on the outdoor, public traditions of the great summer festivals — Mayings, Ales, Wakes. Nonetheless, as Alan Macfarlane has demonstrated, the personal, social, and economic lives of even the humblest Englishmen of the early-modern period are documented with surprising comprehensiveness,⁸ and if they did maintain a tradition of mummers' plays, we should expect to find some signs of it. I shall argue that this is indeed the case, and that the apparent absence of documentation is an optical illusion occasioned by an inappropriate perspective on the activities concerned.

Historical studies of the mummers' plays have generally focussed on aspects of what I should term their matter — individual characters, such as St George, Beelzebub, or the Turkish Knight, or particular sequences of action, such as the death-and-revival of one of the characters.⁹ Such studies tend to lead down strange by-ways, away from the mummers' plays, and perhaps inevitably so. For if the aim is to trace into the past a tradition of seasonal mummings in which St George engages in sword-combat with the Turkish Knight and a Quack Doctor cures the loser, then the chances of success are probably slim. The matter of recent folk-drama tradition is the least stable and consistent of its various features. Since ritual origins can no longer be assumed it cannot be claimed that the death-and-revival action, or any of the characters involved in it, or anything they say, must have been there from the start. Even the modern mummers' plays vary in their matter from the combat of the heroes, through the trial-and-execution of the Fool (Sword Dance Plays) to the Recruiting Sergeant material and Fool's Wooing of the Plough Plays, and we should properly include the matter of the 'Old Tup' and 'Old Horse' customs as well. Continental traditions, exactly parallel to the English mummers' plays in all other respects, present a variety of matters, secular and religious, as different from each other as they are from those of English folk drama.¹⁰ Fascination with the supposed ritual perspectives of the slaying, revival, and wooing motifs of the modern traditions has probably exaggerated the apparent uniformity of the materials, and may even have reinforced it, as collectors, operating with a definition of the genre based on its supposed origins, sought performances, or parts of performances, which were

compatible with the definition, and neglected those which were not. (Just as academic notions of what was 'authentic' in the music of folk songs led collectors to neglect the non-modal songs in the repertoires of folk singers, distorting the record in the process.)¹¹ Closer inspection of even the available texts and descriptions (particularly the latter) would probably reveal an unexpected variety of episodes, some of which may have loomed quite large in performance (the drunkard routine, for example).¹² And this impression of variety and instability increases as we move back into the eighteenth century, where we find not only St George and his antagonist, but less familiar characters, such as Peter, Paul, and Judas, in the mummers' plays Sir Walter Scott acted in as a youth, unexpected matter such as the 'miserable dialogues on Scripture subjects' reported from Cornwall, and the four-part medley of part-familiar part-unfamiliar material witnessed by John Jackson in Yorkshire in the middle of the century.¹³

The matter of the mummers' plays is the *least* significant of their aspects for charting their prehistory as a variety of traditional drama. Even if the combat, cure, or wooing scenes were to be definitively traced to some ancient ritual or (which is just as likely) a seventeenth-century stage jig or droll, this would be as significant for the history of the mummers' plays as are the ultimately Scandinavian origins of the Hamlet story for the history of revenge tragedy or the Elizabethan popular theatre. The definitive characteristics of the English mummers' plays are supplied not so much by their plots, characters, or texts, as by the auspices and context in which this matter is performed, and the dramaturgical mode of the performances, and with the acknowledgement that a price must be paid for the simplifications involved, I offer here a model for these aspects of the recent tradition, which will serve as a point of reference for the ensuing historical explorations.¹⁴

The overwhelming majority of the folk-drama performances recorded and described in the last couple of centuries — the mummers' plays — are winter-season calendar customs (All Souls, Christmas, New Year, Easter) involving perambulations of the community by small groups of local men, who, disguised or costumed, entertain the households they visit with an in part semi-dramatic show, in return for which they receive largesse in the form of refreshment or money, the latter sometimes devoted to financing a feast for the mummers and their associates on a separate occasion. Within a typology of auspices, therefore, the mummers' plays belong alongside other seasonal house-visit begging customs (*quêtes*) such as Souling,

Thomassing, Clementing, Pace-egging, and the like, from which they are distinguished by the semi-dramatic elaboration of the show offered to the households visited. It is correspondingly evident that from this fundamental perspective the modern mummers' plays are generically distinct from many of the earlier customs sometimes appealed to in reconstructing their history, in particular the civic or guild St-George-and-Dragon Plays or Ridings of St George's Day.

The context of our mummers' plays, the immediate physical arrangements for the individual performance (properly the 'mimetic context') is largely determined by the social auspices of the custom just outlined. The performance takes place in a room (hall, kitchen, parlour) of a house (public or private) which normally has other, everyday functions. No special arrangements are made for the performance, by way of stage or scenery, beyond clearing an approximately adequate area of floor-space of people and furniture, if necessary. The framework similarly determines certain features of the performance. By definition, a house-visit custom must start with an arrival, and end with a departure: both may be informal exchanges of greeting and farewell, or formalised in words and actions that form part of the show itself. The collection of money from the householder or individual members of the audience, the *quête*-proper, may be a detached, extra-dramatic item, or integrated into the show with a begging-song, or even dramatically motivated as a collection to pay the Doctor's fee (e.g. Greatham) or to provide a new cart for the horse (e.g. Antrobus).

Whatever its specific content, the show offered by the visitors can be resolved fairly readily into a sequence of three items, which I shall designate the Presentation, the Play, and the Entertainment. As just suggested, auspices and context more or less demand that the show open with some device which announces the arrival of the visitors, secures the good will and attention of the household (which is now transformed into an audience), clears an adequate acting-space, and gives some indication of what is to ensue. This is invariably achieved through a speech by the Presenter, although in the Sword Dance Plays the Presentation is elaborated to provide specific introductions to each character in turn, the Presenter calling them on to join in a circular march (and each character may further present himself to the audience as he does so). There follows the Play, the part of the show closest to the conventional drama, with dialogue distributed among specific characters, action, and even a rudimentary plot. The show is concluded by an Entertainment (which

may or may not be motivated by the plot of the play), usually consisting of song and/or dance, and, in the case of the Hero Combat Plays, by an uncoordinated sequence of comic, nonsensical, or self-descriptive speeches by a series of new characters who ‘haven’t been yet’.

And whatever the specific matter of the Play itself — the names of the characters, the content of the speeches, the plot — a considerable degree of uniformity can be detected in the mode of its performance. As I have argued elsewhere,¹⁵ the dramaturgy of English (and continental) traditional drama is non-representational, presentational, and characterised by conventional, formalised patterns of action and movement. Little attempt is made to foster the dramatic illusion — fundamental to conventional drama — that what happens in the performance is distinct from the social reality in which the performance occurs. This is of course most apparent in the Presentation and the Entertainment, but also manifests itself in the Play, where the entries of new characters, rather than being dramatically motivated, are contrived by an explicit calling-on (‘Come in’), and, once on, new characters frequently begin by introducing themselves to the audience (‘In comes I’). Action and dialogue are similarly stylised and non-dramatic: often the characters speak their lines standing in a row, walking in a circle, or marching backwards and forwards; much of the dialogue is sung, and even physical action such as combat and slaying can be merely perfunctory or formally patterned.¹⁶ With characters in the play introducing themselves at the start or as they come on, and with other characters doing likewise in the Entertainment, many a mummers’ play is effectively a series of short self-descriptive or entertaining speeches, what German scholarship would distinguish as a *Reihenspiel*, occasionally, and often briefly, interrupted by something slightly more dramatic.

It is these features of the mummers’ plays, their auspices, context, and dramaturgy, which should provide the basis of a historical enquiry. Their primacy over the matter of the plays may be finally illustrated by the example of the German (and particularly the Nuremberg) *Fastnachtspiele* of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These encompass a sustained tradition of winter (Shrovetide) house-visits by small groups of disguised men, who perform, on an area of cleared floor-space in taverns or guild-halls, a play whose dramaturgical mode (identical to that of the English mummers’ plays) remains constant, but whose plot, characters, and text are written anew for each succeeding year.¹⁷ What follows, therefore, may be seen as an attempt to construct the prehistory of a variety of folk

theatre, rather than of a particular play, let alone a particular sequence of action.

We begin with a false trail based on nomenclature. On the basis of brief external references, it is actually possible to trace a tradition of winter-season house-visits by 'mummers' a couple of centuries back from the time of our familiar mummers' plays:

1862: Report by Mackenzie E. C. Walcott

'I have just witnessed a performance of the mummers in the hall of an old country house in the South-West part of Hants.'

1791: Household Accounts of Lord Sherborne of Sherborne, Gloucestershire, 26 December

'to two sets of Mummers at Sherborne 0 7 6'

1769: Diary of James Woodforde of Castle Cary, Somerset, 2 January

'We had the fine Mummers this evening at the Parsonage.'

1713: Diary of Ralph Thoresby of Leeds, 31 December

'Evening, had companie of brother Thoresby's children to close up the year; was disturbed with foolish, or rather sinful mummers, and was perhaps too zealous to repress them.'

1705: Household accounts of Throckmortons of Western Underwood, Buckinghamshire, 1 January

'To ye mumers at Xmas 00 02 00'

1619: Journal of Nicholas Assheton of Downham, Lancashire, 6 January

'Twelfth-day. At night some companie from Reead came a Mumming; was kindly taken, but they were but mummers.'¹⁸

This brings us within striking distance of the many late-medieval and sixteenth-century records of the custom known as 'mumming' in which, like the modern mummers, groups of men went about the streets at Christmas time, disguised (or at least masked) and intruded on the households of local residents. The custom was evidently felt to be a potential nuisance, as a number of the references occur in civic regulations

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banning the custom, or rather the use of masks in its observance. In 1555, for example, the Chester authorities, at the approach of the Christmas festivities, ordered:

that no manner person or persones go abrode in this cite mummyng in any place within the same cite ther faysees being coueryd or disgysed.¹⁹

Similar orders had been issued by the authorities of Bristol in 1479 and London in 1417 and 1418.²⁰ These local regulations are matched on the national scale by the Act of 1511 'against disguised persons and wearing of Visours', whose Preamble complains that:

lately within this realme dyvers persons have disgysed and appareld them, and covert theyr fayces with Vysours and other thyng in such manner that they sholde nott be knowen and divers of them in a Companye togeder namyng them selfe mummers have commyn to the dwellyng place of divers men of honor and other substantial persons; and so departed unknowen.²¹

That the custom could indeed be abused is suggested by the claim in a fifteenth-century chronicle that back in 1414 the Lollards had planned to assassinate Henry V by 'mommyng' at the royal palace of Eltham, 'and undyr coloure of the mommyng to have destryte the kynge and Hooly Chyrche'.²² Similarly in 1536 one John Fraunces of Beverley confessed that he and a group of associates planned to attack an enemy by going to his house in a group 'as it were a mumming' and having by this device gained entry, 'there to beat and coil the said persons there assembled'.²³ In the same period moralists saw mumming as an aspect of a riot of Christmas revelries conducive to crime and vice:

Who is ignorant, that more mischief is that time committed than in all the yeere besides? what masking and mumming, wherby robbrie, whordome, murther, and what not, is committed²⁴

while poets, more charitably, listed the custom among the merry activities of the season of good will:

Some youths will now a mumming go
Some others play at Rowland-ho,
And twenty other gameboys mo,
Because they will be merry.²⁵

The contextual similarities between the modern mummers' plays and these early mummings, together with the series of external references to mummers which bridge the period between them, are highly suggestive of continuity, but the appearance is, alas, misleading. The early mummings, like the modern mummers' plays, evidently involved Christmas-tide house-visits by groups of disguised men, but there is no certainty that they performed a play, or indeed any kind of formal entertainment. We know that the mummers reported in Hampshire in 1862 performed the familiar modern mummers' play, as the reporter goes on to describe it, and we may surmise the same about the mummers recorded in Sherborne in 1791 and Castle Cary in 1769 — mummers' plays have been noted in both these localities more recently.²⁶ But it cannot be assumed that the same applies to the mummers of 1705 and 1618, not to mention those of 1417. It is generally agreed that (as the etymology of the term would suggest) the mummers referred to in the earliest records, far from putting on a substantial, semi-dramatic show, remained silent.²⁷ It might be suggested that the mummers' plays developed through the introduction of drama into previously non-dramatic mummings,²⁸ but there is a further, and more decisive discontinuity: the purpose of the early mummings was not to gather largesse *from*, but to engage in convivial pastime *with*, their hosts (typically games such as dicing, or having their identities recognised). The mummings, in the terminology I have suggested for the field,²⁹ are not exactions but interactions, and their modern descendants are not the mummers' plays but the quite distinct interactive mumming and disguising customs of the kind familiar from Newfoundland tradition.³⁰ Indeed the 'mummers' plays' are only rarely so called by the 'folk' (performers and hosts) themselves, and the term may well be ultimately of academic provenance.³¹ If we wish to construct the pre-history of the mummers' plays, therefore, the last-but-one-thing we should do is to look for references to 'mummers' and 'mummings'. (As we have already seen the last thing we should do is look for St George or deaths and revivals).

The way forwards (or rather backwards), as already established, must be via the structure and dramaturgical mode of the show, or the auspices of its performances. These should ideally be traced together, but the historical records largely militate against it. We have records of seasonal perambulatory exactions which say little about what was performed in the course of them, and texts recording shows of a similar nature to the mummers' plays accompanied by little evidence on the auspices of their performance, or evidence suggesting auspices somewhat different from the

seasonal *quête*. These two types of evidence will therefore be pursued separately in what follows, while a concluding discussion will endeavour to bring the threads together, or at least determine how far we are from joining them into a convincing historical development.

With regard to the show, it is relatively easy to establish a late-medieval and early-modern tradition of sub-dramatic entertainments in the same dramaturgical mode as the modern mummers' plays and matching their structure in everything but the play-proper. A typical example is the fifteenth-century text now known as 'A Mumming of the Seven Philosophers',³² improperly so, in terms of the typology established here, since there is no indication of convivial interaction between performers and hosts, and the former are evidently not silent. An association with Christmas festivities is nonetheless indicated by the text's MS heading, *Festum Natalis Domini*, and, like the mummers' plays it opens with a speech by a Presenter, later designated *Nuncius* in a marginal note. After a stanza (the text is in rhyme royal) in praise of Christ and an invocation of the festival celebrating his birth, he explains the occasion of the mummers' visit:

Senek the sage that kyng ys of desert,
 Regent and reowler of all wyldernesse,
 Sendeth gretyng with all entier hert
 Vnto yow hys brother, kyng of Crystmas;
 lettyng yow wete with hertly tendyrnes
 What longeth now vnto youre astate royall
 That ye be now to so sodenly call. lines 8–14.

This does (unusually) give some hint as to the auspices of the performance: evidently the Christmas revels of a household (which might be domestic or institutional, say aristocratic or collegiate) organised under the leadership of a Lord of Misrule ('kyng of Crystmas', line 11) chosen from among its members. Frustratingly, however, rather than explained directly the visit is motivated by a fictional narrative, here the desire of Seneca to provide wise advice on the duties of kingship to his fellow ruler. After two more explanatory stanzas from the *Nuncius* there follow seven one-stanza speeches spoken by the other performers in turn in the guise of Philosophers, the speeches labelled *Primus philosophus*, *Secundus*, *Tertius* and so on in marginal notes. Given the occasion and the character of the 'kyng' it is offered to, the advice must have a certain tongue-in-cheek quality ('rule your body with a good diete', line 51), and indeed the speech of the seventh and last Philosopher offers what amounts to an

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Philosophers' text, may also preserve the semi-dramatic shows of early seasonal house-visit. A particularly promising candidate is the set of verses on the Seven Deadly Sins discovered in a mid-sixteenth-century Archdeacon's Visitation Book from Norwich.³⁴ It consists simply of a series of seven-line stanzas each warning man against one of the Seven Deadly Sins, presumably to be spoken by a figure representing the Sin in question, whose name is prefixed to the stanza dealing with it. There is a final stanza (prefixed *Seven*), presumably spoken by all the Sins together. There are no external or internal indications of the auspices and context of performance, and David Galloway suggests they may be 'extracted from a moral play' or from 'a playlet, complete in itself'. Since the text, in performance, constitutes a *Reihenspiel*, the latter suggestion seems the more likely, and specifically in the context of a house-visit show. That incursions by guised figures comprising a series of speeches by each of the Seven Deadly Sins did exist in the sixteenth century is confirmed by the insertion of just such a 'shew' in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*³⁵ and something similar seems to have inspired William Dunbar's dream-vision poem on 'The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis'.³⁶

A whole cluster of texts which might merit investigation from this point of view is at hand in the medieval and sixteenth-century sets of verses on the Nine Worthies.³⁷ When the descriptions of the Worthies and their exploits are expressed in the first person, dramatic presentation seems appropriate:

I Julius Cesare, 3oure hegh emperour,
In fryth and in feld full faire was my fame;
Of Rome and romans I bare ay the floure,
and thus capud mundi Was I called be name.

I Alisaunder conquerd to paradys zete
sauē the ile of women all the world I it wan
In a chayre thai me sent a lauedy of state
Wytnes of Arestotyll that dwelt with me than.

I am Ector of troy and dub of degre
agany hethyn haue I hedyde at anys
I conquerd the grekys to the grek see
And emang thame I dyed and thare lyes my bonys.³⁸

(The other Worthies are Joshua, David, Judas Machabeus, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey.) While it has been suggested that some of these sets of verses were intended to accompany pictorial representations of the

Worthies on tapestries and the like, dramatic presentation seems just as likely, particularly in view of the *Reihenspiel* structure, and indeed the two forms may have influenced each other.³⁹ It may even be that some depictions of the Nine Worthies, in which they parade at the end of the hall, may represent customary dramatic performance.⁴⁰ Certainly they did figure among the pageantry of Royal Entries, carnivals, and civic shows, etc., and a not very successful attempt to perform a *Reihenspiel* of the Worthies, in a context resembling the house-visit, is made in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*.⁴¹ Two of the English sets of verses on the Nine Worthies (one fragmentary) occur in the fifteenth-century commonplace book of Robert Reynes of Acle, in Norfolk, a compilation which already enjoys a modest celebrity for its extracts from village plays. They occur, furthermore, in the segment of the MS containing matter relating to the local St Anne's Guild, some of which may have been performed at guild feasts.⁴² There may be more direct links between the Nine Worthies and the mummers' plays: Horst Schroeder has pointed out that the Worthies and their self-descriptive speeches occur in a German Sword Dance Play from Lübeck (the same verses appearing in a low German *Prose-Alexander*), while in Britain two of the Worthies, Alexander and Hector, figure in recent traditional drama.⁴³

To this picture can be added the indirect but invaluable evidence of Ben Jonson's 'Masque of Christmas', performed at court in 1616. While it belongs to the period of the most spectacular court masques (many of them by Jonson himself), 'Christmas his Show', as Jonson calls it in his MS, is not a regular masque, but rather a parody of a city festival show, which, its fictional creator, 'Gregory Christmas', explains:

was intended for Currier's Hall, but because the weather has been open, and the livery were not at leisure to see it till a frost came that they cannot work, I thought it convenient, with some alterations and the groom of the revels' hand to't, to fit it for a higher place
lines 19–23 ⁴⁴

and so he has brought his show to the court. Jonson's 'masque' in effect dramatised the attempt of Christmas and his fellow citizens to perform their show. Shorn of its many extra-dramatic interruptions, this show reveals itself as something very similar to the recent English mummers' plays, particularly the Presentation of the Sword Dance Plays, consisting of a Presenter's speech by Christmas as the others process into the hall, followed by an introduction to each of the performers in turn — a Calling-

on — sung by Christmas as the others march round in a circle to the accompaniment of a drum and fife. Christmas then calls forward the first performer, who begins his speech, but dries up after a few lines, and the show collapses. Eventually they pull themselves together sufficiently to execute a dance, and Christmas sings the Farewell, promising to return again next year. For the humour of the piece to work, the court must evidently have been able to recognize this as the kind of show put on by seasonal visitors, and as my summary indicates, it evinces close correspondences in its presentational dramaturgy and patterned structure and movements to the action of the mummers' plays.⁴⁵

The texts just discussed go some way to demonstrating that by the later Middle Ages and the sixteenth century there had emerged a variety of Christmas house-visit custom in which guised or costumed visitors offered their hosts a show comprising some or all of the following elements: Presenter's Introduction, Calling-on, speech-sequence (*Reihenspiel*), dance and song, Presenter's Farewell. Looking back to the model of the recent mummers' plays offered earlier, this reproduces the context and dramaturgy of the custom, and the entire mummers' show, with the exception of the play-proper. Just when and how the play became a part of the show is a question which must be deferred until further consideration of the precise, and differing, auspices for these festive incursions.

We usually learn of such occasions in the historical records under two distinct circumstances related to the financial aspect of their auspices. To the extent that the custom was (as now) an exaction, involving the transfer of money or resources from hosts to performers, it will figure (if they keep financial records at all) in the expenditure of the former, and in the receipts of the latter. And to the extent, similarly, that the custom involved (as now) house-visits, the hosts are domestic or institutional (educational, ecclesiastical) households, whose financial records indeed do, at festive seasons, record payments to groups of local men who are evidently not professional minstrels or players.

On occasion, rather than specifying merely 'the men of X-town' or the like, the entry is more informative about the nature of the performance. On this basis (as with 'mummers', but more pertinently) it is possible to string together a sequence of such records from fairly recent times (in touch with recorded folk traditions) to within reach of the early-modern or late-medieval periods. For instance payments to 'morris dancers' are made around Christmas time to the Monsons of Burton, Lincolnshire (1790–1771), the Throckmortons of Weston Underwood, Buckinghamshire (1705

and 1701), the Townshends of Stiffkey (1636 and 1635), the Gaudys of East Harling (1633), and the Coningsbys of Felbrigg (1603), these last three all in Norfolk.⁴⁶ These are not the Thames Valley Whitsun dancers of recent tradition, but probably more akin to the perambulations of the 'molly' dancers of East Anglia (who more tend to clash sticks together) or even the sword dancers of the North East (in turn related to a variety of mummers' play), who are sometimes referred to as 'morris' dancers. Even more reminiscent of the modern mummers' plays, given the nineteenth-century association of the Wooing Plays with the plough-trailing custom, are the payments of the Almoner of Durham Priory to men from local parishes 'bringing in' (*induccione*) or 'trailing' (*trahentibus*) a plough in the post-Christmas seasons of 1377/8, 1378/9, and 1412/13.⁴⁷ Meanwhile a parallel to the probable auspices of the 'Seven Philosophers' show just discussed is offered by the 1415 payment to 'men from Ropley' for 'dancing and singing in the hall before the boy bishop' on Holy Innocents' Day at Winchester College.⁴⁸

To learn why at least some of these perambulations were undertaken we must turn to the records of the performers themselves, or at least of the institutions on whose behalf they acted, namely the parishes. For it is evident that many Christmas-season *quêtes* were not (as in more recent tradition) for the benefit of the individual performers, but 'gatherings' as the term was (that is, of money, not the gathering together of people), for the benefit of the parish — be it for charitable purposes, the upkeep of the church, or the maintenance of a devotional 'light' in it. The performers might well be rewarded with a feast, supported by their *quête* (and by such refreshment as they were accorded on the way), but the bulk of the proceeds went to the parish, and its receipt is duly recorded in the financial accounts rendered each year by the parish wardens, often accompanied by an indication of on what it was dispersed.⁴⁹ Thus the records of households and institutions of payments *to* plough-trailers is matched by parochial receipts of money *from* 'the plough', and then further by payments for 'the plough-light' and the like.⁵⁰ At Snettisham (Norfolk) expenditure on a 'swerdawnce lyght' (in 1541 and 1542) suggests a gathering by sword-dancers, either independently or in association with the plough-trailing which also features in the accounts.⁵¹

Indeed we are now in a position to hazard a scenario for the history, if not of the mummers' plays, at least for the *customs* with which two of the recent major forms have been associated: the plough-trailing (host to the Wooing Plays) and the Sword Dance *quête* (which can feature a beheading-

and-cure, a 'sword dance play'). Both customs probably (the plough-trailing certainly) go back at least to the later Middle Ages (the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) as parochial gatherings whose proceeds, after deductions for the gatherers' feast, were devoted to good purposes within the community. When the latter were made redundant at the Reformation (the 'lights' were extinguished as popery and other purposes were financed by the levying of local taxation), the customs continued in some areas under informal auspices, with now the sole purpose of provisioning a feast (and facilitating whatever merriment the perambulation gave rise to in itself). As they stand the records do not show whether these perambulatory shows had a dramatic or even sub-dramatic (say *Reihenspiel*) element from the start or acquired it at some post-medieval stage, and if so when.

The situation is more complex in the case of the most widespread form of mummers' play, the Hero Combat Play, for it is not easy to identify the host custom of which it is a part. Subtract the Wooing Play from a plough-trailing *quête* and the latter remains (plus whatever dancers and fools accompany it), in a non-dramatic form which is found alongside the dramatic (and with a wider geographical distribution) throughout recorded folk tradition. Similarly the sword-dance *quêtes* have long evinced parallel dramatic and non-dramatic traditions (and a few in between) with and without a beheading-and-cure. But subtract the dramatic interlude from the Hero Combat Play and you are left with a perambulatory show comprising (depending on local tradition) a few songs, a bit of dancing, perhaps a series of comic speeches by outlandishly guised figures: but this is an entirely hypothetical form, not, to my knowledge, documented on the ground in folk tradition.⁵² If there was once a host form, and if (like the plough-trailing and dance-*quête*) it had late medieval antecedents, these are most likely to be found in the gatherings of another parochial group, led by the village Christmas Lord or Lord of Misrule. These too figure among the records of expenditure of the households visited, Cambridge colleges for example making payments to the 'King', 'Bishop', or 'lorde of myssrule' of local parishes, and among the sources of income of parishes.⁵³ The Father Christmas who invariably presents the Hero Combat Plays would in this case be a Victorian surrogate for the parish Christmas Lord.

Pending the discovery of an early record unequivocally stating that a party of Christmas gatherers performed a distinctly dramatic show, or of an early text unequivocally introduced as performed by Christmas gatherers, this line of enquiry can be taken no further, but there is another, combining discussion of both show and auspices, which pursues

another set of (usually seasonal) house-visit customs, or indeed some of these same customs from a different perspective. For when a group of villagers visited local residents with a Christmas show, dramatic or otherwise, they may have done so as gatherers under parish auspices, but when the household was that of their landlord (noble or institutional; later the squire), the encounter had another aspect instead (or as well), under manorial rather than parochial auspices. Whatever else it was, the visit would say something about the relationship between landlord and tenants/employees: the latter offering seasonal good wishes and entertainment, for former responding with hospitality (admission and refreshment). Even in fairly recent tradition there seems to have been an identifiable parallel of tradition of mummers' plays performed specifically at the household of the local landlord, by his tenants or workers, often to grace his own domestic Christmas revels (or some other celebration), the circumstances sometimes provoking a somewhat more elaborate show than that put on during the regular *quête* in farm kitchens and cottage parlours.⁵⁴

There is, I suggest, a class of customs best termed 'courtesy visits', either independent or concurrently functioning as *quêtes* or gatherings, designed (in this the opposite of a *charivari*) to confirm and cement relationships between a specific superior household and a local, dependent, institution or community. A revealing confirmation of this dual aspect of winter perambulations at an early period is provided by the picturesque Christmas custom of parading (on a decorated pole of the like, accompanied by guised figures and music) the body of a wren like in a preceding 'wren-hunt'. This has of late, in England and Ireland, been emphatically a *quête*, but sometimes with the aim of financing a feast for the performers. Early French records specify the participants as the local youth-group or *bachelorie* (led by the slayer of the wren who has thus qualified to be the festive lord), and that the wren was a customary due owed to the local magnate, its presentation, with elaborate ceremony, eliciting a traditional contribution to the young people's feast, the amount sometimes specified in the customals regulating manorial relationships.⁵⁵

Returning to the early English texts and records, it seems very likely that the 'Seven Philosophers' show, particularly in the light of the Winchester record, was performed under such courtesy-visit auspices. This is certainly the case, if only in Jonson's constructed auspices, with 'The Masque of Christmas', an offering from city to court, and there is a precious miscellany of texts which display both some of the structural and

dramaturgical characteristics of our mummers' plays, and substantial (if internal) hints of performance under courtesy-visit auspices.

Least interesting in itself, but fairly informative with regard to auspices, is a lengthy poem in praise of William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester, from about 1451, evidently designed for performance in his presence.⁵⁶ It comprises a single, but long, speech by a Presenter, praising the recipient of the entertainment and introducing a party of silent visitors, 'straungers of tendre yeres' who, having 'fervens and desyre' to meet and greet the bishop, have besought the speaker to lead them to him. It has all the marks of a courtesy done by a subservient institution (evidently with choirboys) to a lord (in this case ecclesiastical) who is asked to return 'To shewe theym the faouere of your magnifycence' (lines 105–112). This presentation was evidently to be followed by some kind of entertainment, the speaker promising that he and his fellows 'wol peyn vs as we can to doo youre herte gladnesse', and that 'to your dysporte our myght we woll constreyne' (lines 116, 120), and the ceremony also involves the offering of a token gift, a 'lily' (line 128), on whose symbolism the Presenter has commented at length.

This show is very close in both structure and auspices (and date) to two of the more familiar 'mummings' or 'disguisings' of John Lydgate. Neither is a 'mumming' in the sense of a seasonal house-visit for the purpose of convivial interaction, but both are courtesy-visits in the sense applied here, designed to express the respects of visitors to hosts and perhaps suggest their mutual obligations. They were produced and presumably performed by members of London livery companies, the Mercers and Goldsmiths, for the Twelfth Night and Candlemas feasts, respectively, of the Lord Mayor of London, probably in 1429.⁵⁷ The performances, insofar as they can be reconstructed from the texts, conform to the Presentation-and-(sub-dramatic)-Entertainment structure, both starting with the Presenter's speech which amidst greetings and compliments announces and explains the arrival of the visitors, who masquerade respectively as 'certein estates' from abroad (*Mercers*, stanza 15) and King David and representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel (*Goldsmiths*, stanza 3). Some kind of display or entertainment is evidently to follow, unspecified in the case of the Mercers' show, while David and his Israelites hand over an 'ark' containing a scroll with wise advice of good governance, and apparently sing as they do so (stanza 5).

Closer than these rather literary (but nonetheless clearly traditional) productions to the world of village and manor-house is the Scottish

'Plough-Song', which links some form of beast-guise and perhaps even a slaying-and-revival with what must be an early form of the plough-trailing. As we have it, the text of the song is at one or two removes from traditional custom, surviving in manuscript and printed part-books associated with the provincial music school and polite domestic music-making of seventeenth-century Scotland. But the style of the music and the language of the text suggest composition around 1500, perhaps in the context of the Chapel Royal of James IV or a similar institution.⁵⁸ However this song seems to be a sophisticated transposition of a traditional show by visitors to the winter revels of the court or a noble household.

If it at all resembled the song this traditional show will have comprised an introductory presentation and calling-on of the performers by a single speaker (his words now shared or distributed among the two voices of the song), accompanied and/or followed by an elaborate physical display. The Presenter opens properly with respectful greetings to the lord of the household ('My hearty service to you my Lord / I recommend / as I suld accord') and goes on at once to introduce some kind of beast-figure designated as an 'ox', described as past his best and ripe for slaughter. This is presumably accompanied by some appropriate mimetic cavortings by the beast, but the slaughter is delayed as the Presenter expresses concern that the lord's plough would stand idle if a replacement were not first found. He therefore, and 'to do your Lordship more pleasour', suggests and goes about the calling-on of the lord's 'hyndis all', listing some twenty names — personal, occupational, or familiar — of figures who evidently come on ('before you ane and ane present') in turn as called. Their exact status — as hinds or oxen — is not exactly clear, but this corresponds too to the modern tradition, in which the plough is pulled by men who are clearly performing the function of plough-beasts (and are often called plough 'stots') but who are also very much themselves and not in beast-guise. Also obscure is the physical action following this presentation and calling-on, but the text implies two distinct if related items, the slaughter of the old ox, and the trailing of the plough in a circular procession, goaded on by one or more drivers. There follows an elaborate description of the plough, and the 'oxen' are instructed to 'wind about'.

In the mean time the Presenter's speech has offered fairly broad hints about the context of the show, and the relationship between host and performers, both of which are best characterised as manorial. The men named and called on are explicitly said to belong to the lord ('your hyndis') and to have rights of pastourage on his common ('all that hes domination

and pastorie of your common'). But while they are evidently manorial tenants or serfs, the Presenter himself is clearly envisaged as a specialist ploughman (like Langland's Piers) hired for work on the demesne under an annual contract which, he points out, is shortly to be renewed. In each case the performance functions as a reaffirmation (or demand for reaffirmation) of the ties between lord-host and dependents-visitors, perhaps symbolized by the slaying of the old 'ox' and his replacement by another: a demonstrative, 'courtesy' visit, in other words, or in Richard Axton's term, 'a ritual of social relationships'.⁵⁹

The 'prehistory' of our mummers' plays thus seems to comprise two major strands, its resolution ultimately depending on how they are linked. As seasonal perambulations, the mummers' plays seem to go back to the parish gatherings; as a particular kind of show, to the courtesy visits of dependents to a superior household. And while this may be a reflection of the configuration of the records, the latter seem to have been the more dynamic auspices with regard to development and elaboration, dramatic and otherwise. For it was the courtesy-visit, it seems, that under a particular set of circumstances developed into the court masque, largely with the introduction of scenic spectacle and machinery from other segments of royal pageantry (tournaments, triumphs, and the like). The court masque does not, as sometimes suggested, develop out of the mummers' plays,⁶⁰ which are dramaturgically more sophisticated than any disguising or masque prior to the end of the sixteenth century (and anyway not documented until much later). Nor does the court masque evolve from simpler 'mummings'.⁶¹ The mumming, in the usual early sense of the term, is not so much simpler as generically different: courtly disguising and masquing belongs, if sometimes artificially, to a tradition of courtesy visits; the mumming comprises interactive conviviality.⁶² Indeed it was the introduction of an interactive feature from the mummings — the 'taking out' of the ladies for dancing by the masquers — into an existing tradition where visitors normally maintained a respectful distance, that caused such a fuss when Henry VIII instigated it in 1512.⁶³ Some other set of circumstances, probably rural rather than royal, brought together the courtesy-visit show and the parochial gathering, probably, as already suggested, through the dual status, as *quête* and gesture of deference, of the villagers' incursion into the manor house.

And it was probably under the latter, great-house auspices, where there was more time and greater incentive for a special effort, that the 'play' — i.e. the dramatic interlude — entered the show. This would have been

facilitated by juxtaposition with, and hence the absorption of material from, the semidramatic games and gambols, and the fully dramatic interludes, already forming part of the household revels into which the visitors temporarily intruded.⁶⁴ This in turn would explain the undoubted parallels that exist between the modern mummers' plays and a number of early interludes: the combat-slaying-revival sequence of the Hero Combat Plays, for example, is anticipated in *Mankind*, *Wit and Wisdom*, and *Aristippus*, and the Fool's Wooing of the Wooing Plays in *Fulgens and Lucrez* and *A Satire of the Three Estates*.⁶⁵ It is also significant that the structure (following the Presentation) of our mummers' plays — dramatic play plus semi-dramatic entertainment — reproduces the sequence of interlude-plus-masque apparently conventional at household revels in the sixteenth century.⁶⁶

That household revels may indeed have provided the auspices for the 'birth' of the mummers' plays is finally suggested by what — extraordinarily and unexpectedly — is the closest early analogue of the mummers' plays I have encountered, the show put on by Peter Quince and his fellow Athenian mechanicals at the conclusion of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.⁶⁷ This show is performed, as an offering from a company of dutiful dependents, at the household revels celebrating the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, jointly with those of the two young couples whose love-tangle has been sorted out in the main romantic plot: an occasional festivity which Theseus has repeatedly demanded be marked by traditional 'merriments' and 'mirth' (1. 1. 12–13; 19; 32–40; 56–7). 'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisbe' (5. 1. 56–7) is among the 'sports' (5. 1. 42) offered by his master of revels ('our usual manager of mirth', 5. 1. 35). We are on familiar ground, in other words, despite the Athenian colouring, and wedding revels, like royal visits, were among those occasional auspices which called forth activities (feasting and dancing) and performances (interludes and masques) more normally associated with seasonal festivals.

The most striking thing about the show itself is the performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' not as an independent play but as an interlude (as it is indeed referred to, 1. 2. 5–6; 5. 1. 154) within the familiar three-part show comprising a Presentation, the interlude itself, and a non- or sub-dramatic Entertainment. And each of these has more specific parallels with the mummers' plays. The Presentation consists of three sections — two speeches interrupted by a procession. Quince, as 'Prologue' or Presenter, opens the show with a speech which, when allowance is made

for his mis-punctuations, is designed to announce the imminent entry of the actors, to explain their purpose, and to obtain the attention and good will of the spectators (5. 1. 108–17). The claim for attention is visually and audibly reinforced by the processional entry of the interluders led by a trumpeter,⁶⁸ and the Presenter then continues (126–150), like the captain of a company of sword-dancers, with a sequence of introductions of each of the performers in turn, identifying the characters they play ('This man is Pyramus') and sketching their roles in the plot of the interlude. The show ends with what is probably a substantial Entertainment, which in the text however is indicated merely by a brief snatch of dialogue between Bottom and Theseus, the former characteristically confusing his verbs:

Bottom Will it please you to see the epilogue, or to hear a
Bergomask dance between two of our company?

Theseus. No epilogue I pray you come, your Bergomask.

lines 338–47

The Bergomask was apparently a somewhat grotesque clownish dance, ostensibly characteristic of the peasantry of Bergamo in Italy, and is said to have been a favourite with the *zanni* of the *commedia dell'arte*. As the name (and the *commedia*) suggests, the performers probably wore masks, and they probably sang a (doubtless bawdy) song as they danced — so Bottom may have been right in suggesting it could be heard — accompanied by appropriate movement of mime.⁶⁹

Thus far the show corresponds to the courtesy-visit performances already examined, but goes beyond them, and matches the modern mummers' plays, in encompassing a fully dramatic interlude. And like the mummers' plays 'Pyramus and Thisbe' itself is characterised by an intensely interactive mode (i.e. the exchange of repartee with the audience, well documented in recent fieldwork), and by an explicitly presentational dramaturgy. For even though they have been adequately introduced in the Presentation, all characters except hero and heroine take the trouble to offer explanatory self-descriptions on their first appearance in the interlude: 'I present a wall'; 'I am a lion fell'; 'Myself the man i' the moon do seem to be' (155, 218–19, 236). It is entirely in keeping with this mode, although probably a gratuitous exaggeration on Shakespeare's part, that Wall also explains to the audience that his part is over and he is now leaving (202–3).

It is strictly speaking irrelevant, but nonetheless an intriguing bonus, that despite being a dramatisation of a pre-existing narrative the interlude contains a couple of sequences of action analogous to the matter of the modern mummers' plays: a wooing-dialogue and a slaying followed by a

revival. Since Pyramus (as Bottom) has to get up again for the show to continue (with the Bergomask) the parallel to the revival of the mummers' plays has perhaps been made rather too much of,⁷⁰ and more relevant, as indicative of the audience's expectations of an interlude under such auspices, is Theseus' suggestion on the death of Pyramus that 'With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover' (298).⁷¹

Purely as an experiment, in the context of street-theatre performance rather than scholarly enquiry, I once took Theseus up on this suggestion, and had Thisbe, as she laments over the body of her slain lover, instead of killing herself, call for a doctor using the words of the lament for the slain hero in the mummers' play from Alderley, Cheshire. The result is of correspondingly dubious scholarly value, but nonetheless astonishing. The join is dramatically and metrically invisible, and the constructed moment may stand as at least symbolic of the compatibility between the drama of the Elizabethan courtesy visit and the modern mummers' plays:

These lily lips,
This cherry nose,
 These yellow cowslip cheeks,
Are gone, are gone!
Lovers, make moan;
 His eyes were green as leeks.
Now Pyramus
is dead and gone
 What will become of me?
His body's dead,
His ghost is fled,
 No more of him we'll see.
Is there never a doctor to be found
To cure a dead man of his wounds?⁷²

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NOTES

1. Originally written more than a decade ago, this paper appeared informally under the title 'The Early English Mummers' Play: A Contextual Reconstruction', as *Pre-Publications of the English Department of Odense University* 31 edited H. F. Nielsen (December, 1984). My own researches subsequently

demonstrated that its central thesis (the emergence of the dramatic mummers' plays from the non-dramatic medieval mumming) was untenable, and the substantially revised paper here printed is the result. The new title speaks of mummers' plays in the plural, since despite substantial similarities in structure several distinct customs are evidently involved, each with its own history. The hyphenated 'pre-history' indicates that in addition to exploring the history of the mummers' plays before the first explicit record, the paper itself is a preliminary to a fully-fledged historical reconstruction. In two of its many earlier phases it was also presented to the Medieval English Theatre Meeting at St Martin's College, Lancaster, 30 March, 1996, and the International Conference on Traditional Drama, National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, University of Sheffield, 6-7 March 1998.

2. E. K. Chambers *The Medieval Stage* 2 vols (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1903; reprinted 1967) I 94.
3. See for example Theresa Buckland 'English Folk Dance Scholarship: A Review' in *Traditional Dance 1* edited Theresa Buckland (Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education, Alsager, 1982) 3-18, Georgina Smith/Boyes, 'Social Bases of Tradition: The Limitations of the "Search for Origins"' in *Language, Culture and Tradition: Papers on Language and Folklore presented at the Annual Conference of the British Sociological Association, April 1978* edited A.E. Green and J.D.A. Widdowson (CECTAL Conference Papers Series 2: Institute of Dialect and Folklife Studies, School of English, University of Leeds; Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, 1981) 77-87; 'Excellent Examples: The Influence of Exemplar Texts on Traditional Drama Studies' *Traditional Drama Studies 1* (1985) 21-30; 'Cultural Survivals Theory and Traditional Customs: an examination of the effects of privileging on the form and perception of some English calendar customs' *Folk Life* 26 (1987-8) 5-11.
4. I have examined the problems and opportunities involved in such historical approaches in general terms, in my study 'Early English Traditional Drama: Approaches and Perspectives' *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 25 (1983, for 1982) 1-30, and specifically in relation to the mummers' plays in 'Cork Revisited: A Reconsideration of Some Early Records of the Mummers' Plays' *Traditional Drama Studies 3* (1994) 15-30. For valuable historical reviews of early English seasonal customs and their persistence in later folk traditions see Ronald Hutton *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford UP, 1994) and *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford UP, 1996).
5. For example Robert W. Malcolmson *Popular Recreations in English Society* (Cambridge UP, 1973); C. Phythian-Adams *Local History and Folklore: A New Framework* (Bedford Square Press for the Standing Conference for Local

- History, London, 1975); David Underdown *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford UP, 1985); E.P. Thompson *Customs in Common* (Merlin Press, London, 1991).
6. C. L. Barber *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton UP, 1959; reprinted 1972); Robert Weimann *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre* (John Hopkins UP, Baltimore and London, 1978); Richard Axton 'Folk Play in Tudor Interludes' in *English Drama: Form and Development* edited Marie Axton and R. Williams (Cambridge UP, 1977) 1–23.
 7. Peter Burke *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Temple Smith, London, 1978) 83. The problem is endemic to standard histories of the significance of custom such as Francois Laroque's *Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge UP, 1991).
 8. Alan McFarlane *Reconstructing Historical Communities* (Cambridge UP, 1977).
 9. For example E. K. Chambers *The English Folk Play* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973; reprinted 1969) 170–74 (St George); S. Piggott 'The Character of Beelzebub in the Mummers' Plays' *Folklore* 40 (1929) 193–5 (and see Alice B. Gomme's note with the same title in 292–3); Venetia Newell 'The Turkish Knight in English Traditional Drama' *Folklore* 92 (1981) 196–202; Alan Brody *The English Mummers and their Plays* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1971) 3, 10, etc. (death-and-revival).
 10. I have explored these parallels and their implications in my paper 'Ritual and Vaudeville: The Dramaturgy of the English Folk Plays' *Traditional Drama Studies* 2 (1988) 45–68.
 11. See Vic Gammon 'Folk Song Collecting in Sussex and Surrey, 1843–1914' *History Workshop* 10 (Autumn, 1980) 61–89 particularly 68–71.
 12. Thomas Pettitt 'English Folk Drama in the Eighteenth Century: A Defense of the Revesby Sword Play' *Comparative Drama* 15 (1981) 3–29. Drunkard-routines occur in the plays from Keighley (Yorks), Islip (Oxfordshire), and Castle Cary (Somerset).
 13. For sources and further discussion see Pettitt 'English Folk Drama in the Eighteenth Century'.
 14. While local exceptions will readily come to mind, my model is intended to be valid for the three major varieties of English folk drama, the Hero Combat, Sword Dance, and Wooing Plays, as well as some minor forms, such as the Old Tup and the Old Horse, and roughly corresponds to the state of these traditions around the end of the nineteenth century, the period from which the bulk of the accessible material derives. The standard review and index of local traditions is E.C. Cawte, Alex Helm, and N. Peacock *English Ritual Drama. A Geographical Index* (London: Folk-Lore Society, 1967). For a massive new

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documentary resource see Steve Roud and Paul Smith 'James Madison Carpenter and the Mummers' Play' *Folk Music Journal* 7:4 (1998) 496-513, and for a recent review of the mummers' shows and their structures Steve Tillis *Rethinking Folk Drama* (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1991, chapter 7.

15. 'Ritual and Vaudeville'.
16. This dramaturgical mode sometimes extends to the costumes of the performers, which take the form of coverings of paper strips, ribbons, or straw, effectively obliterating the identity not merely of the performer, but of the character he is impersonating.
17. Thomas Pettitt 'English Folk Drama and the Early German *Fastnachtspiele*' *Renaissance Drama* NS 13 (1982) 1-34. The English mummers' plays similarly share auspices, context, and dramaturgy with the equivalent modern continental customs, and not their matter.
18. Sources as follows: 1862: M.E.C. Walcott's communication in *Notes and Queries*, 3rd series 1 (1862) 66; 1791: Account Book of John Villar, valet to James Dutton, first Lord of Sherborne, for the years 1775-1799, cited in K. Chandler 'Morris Dancing in the Eighteenth Century: A Newly-Discovered Source' *Lore and Language* 3.8 (January, 1983) 32; 1769: Diary of Reverend James Woodforde, cited in Robert W Malcolmson *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850*: (London: Cambridge UP, 1973) 27; 1713; *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby* edited Joseph Hunter, 2 vols (H. Colburn and R. Bentley, London, 1830) 198; 1705: Throckmorton Account Book, Berkshire Record Office, D/EweAl, kindly located by the County Archivist and cited with the permission of Richard Wellesley, M.C; 1618: *The Journal of Nicholas Assheton* edited F.R. Raines (Chetham Society, Manchester, 1848) 74-5.
19. *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* edited Lawrence M. Clopper (Toronto UP, 1979) 56. For a discussion of this custom, see Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2002) chapter 4 on 'Mumming'.
20. Glynne Wickham *Early English Stages 1: 1300-1576* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1959; reprinted 1966) 203; *Memorials of London Life* edited H.T. Riley (Longmans, Green for the Corporation of London, London, 1868) 668 and 669.
21. Chambers *Medieval Stage* 1 396 note 1.
22. Chambers *Medieval Stage* 1 395 note 3. This may however have been a ghost occasion invented by late-fifteenth-century historians: see Twycross and Carpenter *Masks and Masking* 99 note 43.
23. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* edited James Gardner (Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1965) 12:1 97.

24. Phillip Stubbes *The Anatomie of Abuses* preface by Arthur Freeman (The English Stage: Attack and Defense 1577-1730: Garland, New York, 1973; facsimile reprint of Richard Jones, London, 1583) sig. 07a. The brevity of this notice, in contrast to Stubbes' lengthy and celebrated accounts of the Lords of Misrule, Mayings, and Ales, illustrates the point made earlier on the reduced visibility of the mummings compared to the public, out-door summer customs.
25. George Wither 'So, now is come our joyfullst feast' (printed 1622) in *Specimens of Old Christmas Carols* edited Thomas Wright (C. Richards for the Percy Society, London, 1841) XLIII.
26. B.C. Cawte, Alex Helm, and N. Peacock *English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Guide* (Folk-lore Society, London, 1967).
27. For early references implying silent mummings see entries under *Mumming* and *Mumming* in *OED*.
28. As I suggested in an earlier version of this article (see above, notes 1) elaborating on, or rather (and misguidedly) simplifying Michael J. Preston's suggestion in 'The British Folk Play: An Elaborated Luck-Visit?' *Western Folklore* 30 (1971) 45-8.
29. See *Custom, Culture, and Community* edited Thomas Pettitt and Leif Søndergaard (Odense UP, 1994) Introduction, particularly 13, and Thomas Pettitt 'Folk Drama' and 'Mumming' in *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art* edited Thomas A. Green, 2 vols (ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, 1997) 1 205-212; 2 566-67.
30. *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* edited Herbert Halpert and G. M. Storey (Published for Memorial University of Newfoundland by University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1969); Martin Lovelace 'Christmas Mumming in England: The House-Visit' in *Folklore Studies in Honour of Herbert Halpert* edited Kenneth S. Goldstein and Neil V. Rosenberg (Memorial University of Newfoundland, St John's, Newfoundland, 1980) 271-81; Don Handelman *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge UP, 1990) chapter 7 'Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland'.
31. For other conventional designations see Chambers *English Folk Play* 4-5.
32. *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* edited R.H. Robbins (Clarendon Press, Oxford, second edition 1955; reprinted 1968) 120.
33. See Pettitt 'Ritual and Vaudeville' and 'English Folk Drama and the Early German *Fastnachtspiele*'.
34. David Galloway "'The Seven Deadly Sins": Some Verses from an Archdeacon's Visitation Book (1533-51)' *REEDN* 4:1 (1979) 9-13.
35. *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* edited John D. Jump (Revels Plays: London, 1962; reprinted Manchester, 1978) Scene 6 lines 104-169.

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36. *The Poems of William Dunbar* edited W. Mackay Mackenzie (The Porpoise Press, London, 1932; reprinted 1966) 57. See Enid Welsford *The Court Masque* (Cambridge UP, 1927) 75.
37. Horst Schroeder *Der Topos der Nine Worthies in Literatur und bildender Kunst* (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1971) prints and discusses most of the verses concerned.
38. Schroeder *Nine Worthies* 136; fragment written in a fifteenth-century MS of Henry Daniels' *Liber uricrisiarum*.
39. Schroeder *Nine Worthies* 157–161; R. S. Loomis 'Verses on the Nine Worthies' *Modern Philology* 15 (1917–18) 211–219.
40. See Schroeder *Nine Worthies* plate 1.
41. Schroeder *Nine Worthies* 128–199; *Love's Labour's Lost* edited Richard David (Arden Shakespeare: Methuen, London, 1968) 5.2.541–664.
42. *The Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes of Acle* edited Cameron Louis (Garland, New York and London, 1980) 51 and 53 (Nine Worthies Verses) and compare 81 (Speech of 'Delight' from village play) and 86 (epilogue to a play announcing an Ale).
43. Schroeder *Nine Worthies* 157–160 (we need not agree with Schroeder in assigning priority to the folk play); Alex Helm *The English Mummings' Play* (Brewer for the Folklore Society, Woodbridge, 1980) 91 (Alexander); Chambers *English Folk Play* 30, 60, etc. (Hector).
44. 'Christmas his Masque' in Ben Jonson *The Complete Masques* edited Stephen Orgel (Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1969).
45. These parallels have been documented by C.R. Baskervill 'The Sources of Jonson's "Masque of Christmas" and "Love's Welcome at Welbeck"' *Modern Philology* 6 (1908–9) 257–69, and astutely discussed in their contemporary context in Leah Sinanoglou Marcus 'Present Occasions and the Shaping of Ben Jonson's Masques' *English Literary History* 45 (1978) 201–55.
46. Helm *English Mummings' Play* 7 (Monson); Throckmorton Accounts, Berkshire Record Office, D/EweA1; *Records of Plays and Players in Norfolk and Suffolk 1330–1642* edited David Galloway and John Wasson (Malone Society, Oxford, 1981) 97 (Townshend), 5 (Gaudy), 6 (Coningsby). The Townshends also rewarded 'ye hobbie horse dancer' in 1636.
47. Entries from Almoner's Accounts kindly supplied by John McKinnell, and forthcoming in REED *Durham*; those for 1377/78 and 1412/13 are briefly noted in C. R Baskervill 'Dramatic Aspects of Medieval Folk Festivals in England' *Studies in Philology* 17 (1920) 19–87 at 37. Compare the injunctions of 1548 banning the practice on 'Plough-Monday' of 'drawing' a plough accompanied by an 'assembly or rout of people' in *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the*

- Period of the Reformation* edited W.H. Frere and W.McC. Kennedy, 3 vols (Longmans, Green, London, 1910) 2 175.
48. Chambers *Medieval Stage* 2 246. On the probable status of the visitors see C.R. Baskerville 'Dramatic Aspects of Medieval Folk Festivals in England' *Studies in Philology* 17 (1920) 35.
 49. It is appropriate therefore that recent revivals of such perambulatory collections should be in support of hospitals and local charities.
 50. For discussion see Christina Hole *British Folk Customs* (Hutchinson, London, 1976) 157–8 and M.W. Barley 'Plough Plays in the East Midlands' *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 7:2 (1953) 68–95 at 70.
 51. *Records of Plays and Players in Norfolk and Suffolk*, edited John Wasson and David Galloway (Malone Society Collections 11: Oxford, 1980) 85–95, not noted in Stephen D. Corrsin's now standard survey *Sword Dancing in Europe: A History* (Hisarlik Press, Enfield Lock, 1997).
 52. There are substantial regional exceptions to this rule in the pace-egging (Easter) and souling (All Souls, November 2) *quêtes* of the North of England, which have parallel non-dramatic and dramatic traditions (the latter involving a fully-fledged Hero-Combat-and-Cure interlude), but it would be inappropriate to generalize from this to the Christmas traditions common to the country as a whole.
 53. *REED: Cambridge* edited Alan Nelson, 2 vols (Toronto UP, 1989) 2 710–11; 734–6; *Records of Plays and Players in Norfolk and Suffolk* 8, 20, 81, 93–5, 100–102.
 54. For example the plays from Revesby (Lincolnshire), Thame (Oxfordshire), Alderley (Cheshire), Bramshill (Berkshire); for sources see E.C. Cawte and others *English Traditional Drama: A Geographical Index* (Folk-lore Society, London, 1967).
 55. Edward A. Armstrong *The Folklore of Birds* (Dover Publications, New York, second edition 1970) chapter 9, 'The Wren Hunt and Procession' particularly 144–9.
 56. 'A Poem Presented to William Waynflete as Bishop of Winchester' edited and discussed by Edward Wilson in *Middle English Studies Presented to Norman Davies* edited Douglas Gray and E.G. Stanley (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983) 126–51.
 57. *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate 2: Secular Poems* edited H.N. MacCracken *EETS OS* 192 (1934) 45 and 46. On their dates and occasions see Walter F. Schirmer *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century* translated by Ann E. Keep (Methuen, London, 1961; reprinted Garland, New York, 1977) chapter 13, and for discussion (in the context of the development of the court masque), see Glynne Wickham *Early English Stages 1: 1300–1576* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958) 191–207; Welsford *The Court Masque* 53–9.

58. BL Additional MS 33933 and Edinburgh University Library MS La III 483 (Thomas Wode's part-books, 1562–92): *Cantus, Songs, and Fancies* (John Forbes, Aberdeen, 1666). For the music and complete text (which is preserved piecemeal in association with the separate parts) see *Music of Scotland 1500–1700* edited Kenneth Elliott and Helen M. Shire (Musica Britannica 15: Stainer and Bell, London, second edition 1964) 30. The show behind the song is perceptively discussed by Shire and Elliott 'Pleugh Song and Plough Play' *Saltire Review* 2:6 (1955) 39–44 and Richard Axton *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* (Hutchinson, London, 1974) 40–42.
59. Axton *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* 42.
60. Margaret Dean-Smith 'Folk-Play Origins of the English Masque' *Folklore* 65 (1954) 974–86.
61. Enid Welsford *The Court Masque* (Cambridge UP, 1927); Wickham *Early English Stages* 1 chapter 6.
62. 'Artificially' in the sense that the court sometimes instigated and paid for the compliment. Such 'pseudo-visits' occur under courtly auspices as early as Lydgate's disguisings for Henry VI (distinct from the mayoral shows discussed above), while conversely genuine visits are sustained into the Jacobean period in the masques performed for the royal court by the gentlemen of the Inns of Court. See Twycross and Carpenter *Masks and Masking* chapter 7 on 'Courtly Mummings'.
63. Described in Hall's *Chronicle*, quoted and discussed along these lines by William Tydeman *The Theatre of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge UP, 1978) 78.
64. For further discussion of this aspect of the picture see Thomas Pettitt 'Tudor Interludes and the Winter Revels' *Medieval English Theatre* 6:1 (July, 1984) 16–27.
65. See, respectively, W.K. Smart 'Mankind and the Mumping Plays' *Modern Languages Notes* 32 (1917) 21–5; Robert Potter *The English Morality Play* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975) 13; Martin W. Walsh 'Thomas Randolph's *Aristippus* and the English Mummings' Play' *Folklore* 84 (1973) 157–9; C. R. Baskervill 'Conventional Features of Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece*' *Modern Philology* 24 (1926/7) 419–42 and 'Mummings' Wooing Plays in England' *Modern Philology* 21 (1923/4) 231. The thrust of most of these studies must now be reversed: the mummings' plays inherit material from the interludes rather than 'influence' them.
66. Ian Lancashire 'Orders for Twelfth Day and Night circa 1515 in the Second Northumberland Household Book' in *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980) 6–45.
67. William Shakespeare *A Midsummer Night's Dream* edited Harold F. Brooks (Methuen, London, 1979). My thanks to Hilda Ellis Davidson for suggesting the juxtaposition. What follows is offered with all the reservations appropriate

when using a literary source in a historical reconstruction: but when a play actually depicts the preparation and performance of a show this can be accorded some documentary status, in contrast to the merely thematic analogues (say between the flight of the lovers to the woods and Maying customs) which must be discerned against the background of independent historical evidence.

68. Sd at line 125, line 1: the elaboration of this (Folio) stage direction in some editions — for example *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* edited W.J. Craig (1905; reprinted Oxford UP, London, 1964) 5.1.sd at line 128, line 2 — to indicate that this is accompanied by a dumb-show is unwarranted by the text and context, and is presumably influenced by the (highly problematic) dumb-show preceding the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*.
69. Edward Berry *Shakespeare's Comic Rites* (Cambridge UP, 1984) 190; H.F. Salerno 'The Elizabethan Drama and the *Commedia dell'arte*' (Unpublished dissertation University of Illinois, 1956) 55.
70. See for example Alexander Leggatt *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (Methuen, London, 1974) 100; C.L. Barber *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton UP, 1959; reprinted 1972) 154 note 25 (continued from 152).
71. Noted by Brooks 120.
72. 5. i. 317-22; *Eight Mummers' Plays* edited Alex Helm (Ginn, Aylesbury 1971; reprinted 1978) 15-24 at 19. The Alderley text starts with the seventh line of the text (in which I have substituted 'Pyramus' for 'Slasher'), not as might be expected with the change in metre at 'Is there never a Doctor ...' It is equally irrelevant but so right that the Alderley mummers' play was traditionally performed at the Christmas feast arranged for his tenants by the local Lord Stanley, who must be a descendent of the patron of the late-sixteenth-century acting company to which Shakespeare probably belonged.