University of Alberta

The laughing storyteller: metafolklore about the origin of mummers' plays

by

Mathew James Levitt

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology

Fall 2011
Edmonton, Alberta

Abstract

There are a great number of stories told about the English folkplay tradition known as “mummers’ plays.” These stories, told by folklorists, historians, anthropologists, popular fiction writers, performers and audience members can be considered as part of a body of folk commentary or metafolklore. Within this body of metafolklore there are at least five types of narratives told to explain the origins of the tradition. While the historic/factual origins of the mummers’ play phenomenon remain inconclusive, it is possible to trace, if not the genesis, the development of each of the origin stories told about the tradition. What can be observed is the transmission of these narratives not only through space and time but across various forms of media and literature. I propose that, rather than considering scholarship and literature as external or objective forces that have had an influence on mummers’ play metafolklore, perhaps scholarship and literature can be considered as part of the body of metafolklore; as constituents rather than objective observers.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Marko Zivkovic. When I needed to wander, he let me, and when I felt lost, he always showed me the bread crumbs.

Next, without the humbling support of the Coventry Mummers and the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective, I would be nowhere. Never before have I felt so welcome. I owe both teams a great deal of gratitude and consider them to be participant-collaborators in this work. This thesis will always belong to them as well.

In particular I would like to thank Ronald Shuttleworth of the Coventry Mummers. He took me in as a guest and I ended up with not only a wise mentor but also a friend. As the keeper of the Folk Play Section of the Morris Ring Archive, Ron allowed me access to an invaluable wealth of knowledge, not only in his library but in the stores of his mind.

I would also like to specifically thank Randall Fraser of the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective. His passion for and dedication to this eccentric tradition has accentuated my own.

I would like to thank the members of my defense committee (Mark Nuttall, Andie Palmer, and Federico Spinetti) for their support and their critique. Their questions and suggestions have made a better paper. Likewise, without the support of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta, I would have had neither the ability nor the confidence to conduct this work.

The communities I worked within also deserve much thanks and appreciation. The villages around Coventry (Harborough Magna, Newbold on Avon, Bishop's Tachbrook, and Stoneleigh) and the Alberta Avenue neighborhood in Edmonton, Alberta, have been wonderful stages upon which to act.

I feel I must mention the very small but passionate community of researchers dedicated to understanding the mummers' play phenomenon as well as the very small but passionate community of performers and audience members dedicated to keeping the mummers' play phenomenon alive. Both communities have welcomed me with open arms. The people I have referenced in this paper have been my guides, helping me to begin to understand what I first found so bewildering, and reminding me that bewilderment was the flavor I first found so appetizing.

Table of Contents

An Introduction

"Well, - do I hit the matter archerwise?

Or have I missed my mark, and in your eyes

Stand forth a witch or prophetess of lies-

A strolling mummer, knocking at your door?"

(Aeschyylus' *Agamemnon*, 1. 1223, Butler's edition; quoted in Nemo (1864): 25)[1]

There are people who have written about mummers' plays who have said things like, *Imagine you are sitting before the fire at Christmastide, sipping cider or brandy or eggnog, and suddenly you hear a noisy ruckus outside your door…*The stage is set with a romantic air, indeed, both warm and chilling. And, aren't you intrigued? Sometimes they say something like, *In a pub down the street men are fighting, killing, and resurrecting each other with unapologetic merriment*…Actually, I've said that before (and I'll probably say it again) so as to captivate; to entrance; to spellbind. Does it work? You tell me. I've also heard things like, *The masked players perform their clandestine ritual of rhyme and song, asking only for food or drink in return.…*Who are these ghostly masked players? Good thing you asked; you were supposed to. You might hear, *Since time unknown the mysterious rogues have gone from home to home, pub to pub, spreading luck and cheer.…*Now might be the time that I should tell you something like, *Mummers' plays, or English Folkplays, or English Ritual Dramas, have existed as a kind of traditional performance since…The Hero-Combat or Quack Doctor variety generally follow a given plot sequence of announcement of arrival, character introduction, combat between Hero and Villain, death of Hero or Villain, resurrection of deceased by Quack Doctor, and song of sending forth…There are various theories regarding.…*But, I tell you, when the mummers' come, that's not how it is. It is not orderly. It is not explained. It's more like, *a rambunctious ensemble parade down a snowy lane; each dressed more curiously than the last, all with a mind for playful mischief…* Yes, it's all quite a performance. And not just the mummers' plays, but the stories told about them. In fact, that's what this whole paper is about; stories told about mummers' plays. Let me tell you some…

---

[1] *Agamemnon* was written by Aeschylus in the 5th century B.C.E. The edition translated by E.D.A. Morshead and published by Orange Street Press (1998) offers this translation of the same lines:
Say, is my speech or wild and erring now,
Or doth its arrow cleave the mark indeed?
They called me once, The prophetess of lies,
The wandering hag, the pest of every door—

To Begin With: A Ghost Story

Actually, speaking of stories, allow me to borrow a bit of prose from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*:

The ancient pagans were dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of their burial was signed by the clergyman, the archaeologist, the historian, and the chief mourners. The old ancient pagans were dead as a door-nail. Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a pagan. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the announcement; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will permit me to repeat, emphatically, that the ancient pagans were as dead as a door-nail. The mummers knew they were dead? Of course they did. How could it be otherwise?

Actually, borrowing prose from Charles Dickens is not an entirely unsuitable way to begin talking about mummers' plays.[2] Around the mummers and their plays has formed a conventional *metafolklore* of a ghostly and ghastly mood; a macabre discourse.

For instance, Steve Tillis (1999) writes of the "ghosts" of mummers' plays; how they might "send shivers up one's spine" (194). He refers not only to the characters of the plays, who, according to one performer, are "the ghosts of our forefathers," but also to the impressions that audience members have of the folkplays as something mysterious, solemn, unsettling and scary, even amidst its comic tones (190, 193).

E.T. Kirby (1971) tells a mummer story about ancient shamans being driven mad by ghosts, conducting séances, having out-of-body experiences, and escorting spirits to the underworld.

---

[2] Peter Millington (2002) proposes the term "Quack Doctor Play" for the folkplay genre that has the Quack Doctor as the "defining character," umbrella-ing the subtypes of Hero-Combat, Plough, and Sword Dance plays (6-7, 289).The mummers' plays I observed in England could generally be classified as Hero-Combat plays (there was also a Tup play), and the mummers' play I observed in Edmonton was an amalgam of the Hero-Combat and the Plough or Wooing play. Although Millington suggests that the term "Mummers' Play" or "mummers' play" is problematic (and I agree that it is), I will hereafter refer to the phenomenon as I experienced it as "mummers' plays," adhering to the common nomenclature used by the participants I worked with, but not desiring to imply some monumental, unvarying tradition so homogenous in its presentation as to warrant a "The." (See Millington 2002: 5-6 for more about the term "Mummers' Play," its development and usage, however fallacious). Many leading scholars in the field suggest terms like "ritual drama" or "folk play." These are all well and good, and perhaps even more accurate, but I will stick to the term as I heard it most often. I will refer to mummers' plays as a type of "folkplay," preferring this over "folk play" only because folklore is "folklore" and not "folk lore."

Gash (1998) also writes of the ghostly characters of the Mummers Play. He writes, "[the old woman] conforms to the archetype of winter and of death and is thus the representation of the old year, and she therefore has a very definite connection to the fertility rite" (8). Gash writes of the old traditional costumes as being representative of the "spirit of vegetation" (19).

In the documentary, *Mummers, Masks and Mischief* (Aughakillymaude Community Association Co. Fermanagh, 2005), one interviewee says, "…we were scared, actually. That's my first memory of mumming. That's the one memory I have. It was a scary thing" (06:46).

In Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native*, the author describes a mummer performance (1878:122-149). He writes, "They sang the plaintive chant that follows the play, during which all the dead men rise to their feet in a silent and awful manner, like the ghosts of Napoleon's soldiers in Midnight Review" (141).

In his 19th century pseudo-autobiographical work of fiction, *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, Washington Irving writes of his visit to a rural manor owned by "The Squire," a man who is devoted to preserving the "traditions" of old. He writes,

> When I returned to the drawing room, I found the company seated round the fire, listening to the parson, who was deeply ensconced in a high backed oaken chair, the work of some cunning artificer of yore, which had been brought back from the library for his particular accommodation. From this venerable piece of furniture, with which his shadowy figure and dark weazen face so admirably accorded, he was dealing forth strange accounts of the popular superstitions, and legends of the surrounding country, with which he had become acquainted in the course of his antiquarian researches…He gave us several anecdotes of the fancies of the neighbouring peasantry…These tales were often laughed at by some of the sturdier among the rustics, yet when night came on, there were many of the stoutest unbelievers that were shy of venturing alone in the footpath that led across the church yard.
>
> (1978: 957-958)

Irving continues,

> All these superstitions I found had been very much countenanced by the Squire, who, though not so superstitious himself, was very fond of seeing others so. He listened to every goblin tale of the neighbouring gossips with infinite gravity, and held the porter's wife in high favour on account of her talent for the marvelous. He was himself a great reader of old legends and romances, and often lamented that he could not believe in them, for a superstitious person, he thought, must live in a kind of fairy land.
>
> (958-959)

Once the ghost stories had been told, “That indefatigable spirit, Master Simon, in the faithful discharge of his duties, as lord of misrule, had conceived the idea of a Christmas mummery, or masqueing…” (959).

Kenneth Grahame tells a tale of visiting mummers and Christmas ghost stories in *The Golden Age*. He writes,

> Twelfth-Night has come and gone, and life next morning seemed a trifle flat and purposeless. But yester-eve, and the mummers were here! They had come striding into the old kitchen, powdering the red brick floor with snow from their barbaric bedizenments; and stamping, and crossing, and declaiming, till all was whirl and riot and shout. Harold was frankly afraid: unabashed, he buried himself in the cook’s ample bosom. Edward feigned a manly superiority to illusion, and greeted these awful apparitions familiarly, as Dick and Harry and Joe. As for me, I was too big to run, too rapt to resist the magic and surprise. Whence came these outlanders, breaking in on us with song and ordered masque and a terrible clashing of wooden swords? And after these, what strange visitants might we not look for any quiet night, when the chestnuts popped in the ashes, and the old ghost stories drew the awestricken circle close? Old Merlin, perhaps, ‘all furred in black sheep-skins, and a russet gown, with a bow and arrows, and bearing wild geese in his hand!’ Or stately Ogier the Dane, recalled from Faëry, asking his way to the land that once had need of him! Or even, on some white nights, the Snow-Queen herself, with a chime of sleigh-bells and the patter of reindeer’s feet, halting of a sudden at the door flung wide, while aloft the Northern Lights went shaking attendant spears among the quiet stars!
>
> (Grahame, *The Golden Age*, 83)

Peter Millington (2002) wrote: “it has become clear to me that there is still a need to lay old skeletons to rest, otherwise the old theories will continue to return to haunt us” (12).

But why has the tradition become haunted by a ghostly *metafolklore*? Why do so many who speak of mummers’ plays wax Poe-etic as they spin their tales? I wouldn’t be so bold as to say it had anything to do with that fact that one of England’s expert ghost-story authors was the Cambridge historian Montague Rhodes James, a contemporary of another man whose commentaries would haunt the tradition for a hundred years and more coming, one James George Frazer, of Cambridge, too (I will discuss his stories later on as well).

Rather, it is perhaps not so surprising that mummers’ plays should attract a ghostly sort of narrative. One audience member at a mummers’ play performance, a little girl, began crying when she saw the mummers. She was clearly disturbed by their presence and appearance. Two older audience members told me that, when their children had first seen the mummers years ago, they were positively terrified. In the village of Newbold, the church vicar told me that, some twenty

years ago, his two-year-old daughter was similarly disturbed when she first saw mummers perform. Despite their Rabelaisian comic revelry (or perhaps because of it), there is something eerie about the mummers. The macabre vernacular has even appeared accidentally in my own conversations with others. My friend told me that she found the word "mummer" to be a little strange, a little scary. She could offer no explanation of why this was other than perhaps it sounded like "mummy." Also, there is a woman who I do odd jobs for. She asked me, "How is your research about zombies coming along?" I stared at her blankly. "Oh, not zombies," she said, "I mean mummies." Turns out she really meant "mummers," but the incidental ghastliness of her confusion was at least mildly serendipitous.

I might also add that mummers' plays are folkplays, after all, which is to say they are folktales (I will discuss this more thoroughly later on), and tales told at Christmastide are sometimes blessed with a spectre or two. According to Eve M. Lynch (2004), "Christmas editions of magazines from the 1850s through the end of the century carried the obligatory and much-anticipated yuletide ghost story to chill the soul on an evening around the fire. Early leaders in publishing the genre were Dickens' *Household Words*, begun in 1850, and its successor *All the Year Round*. *The Cornhill Magazine, St James's Magazine, Belgravia, Temple Bar, Saturday Review, Tinsley's, Argosy* and *St Paul's* all contributed their share to a readership addicted to the thrill of momentarily losing rational control over the ordered Victorian world" (68).

In Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), his narrator says, "The story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as, on Christmas Eve in an old house, a strange tale should essentially be…" (283).

Charles Dickens' 1843 work, *A Christmas Carol*, is simultaneously a Christmas tale and a ghost story, and perhaps amongst the most well-known of each. Dickens also wrote, *The Haunted Man*, *The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton*, and *The Chimes*, among others, in this vein.

Even, somewhat appropriately, much of this "introduction" of sorts has been crafted in the mid hours of the night, after I have awoken from some hours of sleep, the world outside my window cast in a witchy glow of the corpse moon above it, my own ghostly reflection in the window haunting me as I write in the dark and stare into the illumination of my notebook screen. Fitting, I think.

And so, seeing as how it has for over a century been *en vogue* to talk ghostly about mummers' plays, I shall. And, to borrow prose from Charles Dickens:

There is no doubt that the ancient pagans of England are dead; dead as a doornail. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

What I mean to say is that it is remarkable that mummers' plays have survived so long considering they are the ruinous descendants of ancient pagan rituals. Or, at least, "remarkable" if you choose to believe *this* kind of story or *metafolklore* or *folk commentary* so often told about mummers' plays. On the other hand, if you choose not to believe this kind of story, perhaps what is equally remarkable is that so many choose to tell and believe in this kind of story considering the ancient pagans are, as I mentioned just before, dead as a doornail and have been for thousands of years.

Ronald Hutton, in his book, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (2009), explains how the ancient Druids of Britain are ultimately the imaginings of later sociocultures; namely, the Romans and the post-medieval Europeans (see p.1-49). Hutton says,

> The Druids may well have been the most prominent magico-religious specialists of some of the peoples of north-western Europe just over a couple of thousand years ago; and that is all we can say of them with reasonable certainty. They left no accounts of their beliefs and practices, and so our impressions of them depend ultimately on images produced in other cultures or at later periods…the basic material from which later concepts of Druidry were constructed. They are vivid and compelling, which is why their effect has been so enduring. They are also, without exception, problematic, controversial and probably fallacious, and there is no sure way out of the problems that they present to a historian.
>
> (1)

Within these imaginings we find all the conventional flavors recognizable in the narrative about mummers' plays that cooks up an ancient pagan origin for the phenomenon: mysterious acts, dangerous necessities, visceral cosmic urges, wicker men, straw, sticks, horns, and, of course, blood, soil, moon and sun. Hutton asserts that, really, we know nothing of the Druids of Northern Europe - the European "pagan" epitomes - and that there is little chance of some surviving thread of knowledge and custom tying our ways to theirs, whoever "they" were. But, it is probably worth mentioning that, in 1996, Hutton wrote an earlier book where he said,

> *It is certainly true that even if the English plays are an eighteenth-century tradition, they still preserve within them echoes of much earlier periods.* Several of the stock personalities are recognizably Tudor and Stuart favourites, while another, the quack doctor, performs much the same function and in the same way in a piece of early sixteenth-century religious drama. Most remarkable is the regular appearance of one

> usually named Beelzebub and characterized by the carrying of a club and frying-pan. *He can hardly be anything other than a pagan god-figure known in Ireland as the Daghda and in Gaul as Sucellus, and how he leaped one and a half millennia to turn up in an English folk play is a fascinating, and apparently baffling, question*. What does seem to be clear is that despite these touches the play concerned has at present to be left out of a discussion of pre-Reformation festivities. On the other hand there were certainly plenty of mummers around in fifteenth - and sixteenth - century England, in the broad contemporary usage of the term. It signified people disguised in festive costumes, and these, also known as 'maskers' and 'guisers', were a feature of the Twelve Days.
>
> (8, my italics)

Though he now questions it himself, espoused from within Hutton's earlier history is the story of ancient pagan origins, hiding in the corners, whistled for, and coming, lad.

So, isn't it remarkable that mummers' plays have survived from ancient pagan ways, or that people believe this even though the pagans are long dead, or that people like Ronald Hutton can tell us this story, suggesting that it might be true, even while they suggest that perhaps it isn't true? What is equally remarkable is that, even though the pagans are long dead, there are still pagans performing mummers' plays as a pagan ritual. Believe me, I'll tell you about them later.

Origin Stories

By now you might be wondering what a "mummers' play" is. I say "might" because, if you are reading this thesis, I'm assuming you do know what a mummers' play is. If you've never heard of one before, I would be surprised if you'd made it this far without asking. Originally, I was hesitant to provide a description of a mummers' play because I wanted to avoid creating in this paper some archetype or prototype of the tradition. Each and every performance is different and there are varying opinions on "what makes a mummers' play a mummers' play." However, based on the mummers' I have talked to and the performances I have observed, I do have some idea of what makes a 'typical' performance (which is not to say archetypal or prototypical). Randall Fraser, the director for the Alberta Avenue Mummers' Collective, asked me to provide him with a description of a mummers' play for a collection of his team's scripts. I wrote:

> Typically, a mummer is any disguised or costumed person. Costumes can range anywhere from dress suits to military uniforms to tattered rags. Masks might be white linens, black soot, straw baskets, or anything that hides or distorts the performer's face from his audience.

> It is hard to pin down a mummers' play in words, and various people have tried to establish requirements or conditions a performance must meet in order to qualify. Mummers I have spoken with say there must be a death and resurrection within the play, as well as a character – usually a quack doctor – to perform the resurrection. Some believe there must be a social commentary, a sense of lampoon or satire, a humorous equation at work. If I were to dress it down, I would say that a mummers' play usually goes like this: A group of people (commonly men) in costumes or disguises show up at a pub, a house, a village square, or any public place. One of them announces – more or less ambiguously – what they are about to do: perform a play (usually in exchange for some food, drink, or money). After introducing themselves, a hero (usually Saint, Prince, or King George) engages in combat with a villain (usually a prince or knight from a far-away land). One of them is killed. A healer enters (usually a quack doctor) and offers to revive the fallen man (usually for a fee). The dead man is then brought back to life by way of miraculous and outlandish cure. Another character or two may pop up here and there, a song is often sung, and the mummers' reward is collected from the audience. Particular plots will vary from performance to performance, but most will form a tapestry that, elegantly or not, weaves together these points of action.

And where do they come from? Good question. Or, I suppose I might say 'bad question,' because there is no definitive answer. There are answers – in the plural – but none rises above the others as triumphantly verifiable or scientifically proven or objectively accepted. As such, the 'origins of mummers' plays' as a topic of study has become a real source of polemics in the field. Bobbing throughout the discourse of scholars, performers, audience members, and anyone else who talks about where mummers' plays came from, there are, as far as I can gather, at least five kinds of *origin stories*:

1) The Begging/House-Visiting Narrative

2) The Mystery Play/Morality Play/Royal Pageantry Narrative

3) The Literature Narrative

4) The 17th or 18th Century Ink and Paper Narrative

5) The Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative

Peter Millington (2002) made a very similar observation. He states:

> Earlier researchers proposed three possible origins for these plays: a non-specific mystery play from the time of the crusades, some pre-Christian fertility ritual, and primitive shamanism. All three proposals were based on over-general comparisons, and relied on the key assumption that a continuous history can be traced back from before modern plays to the relevant era. However, in contrast with other customs, no evidence can be found for these plays before the 18th century, despite diligent searching. These theories are therefore disproved.

> Instead, it is proposed that the plays were attached in the early to mid 18th century to existing house-visiting customs. These were probably the source of the non-representational costumes that are sometimes worn. There is also evidence for the influence of the conventions of the English Harlequinade. The provenance of the scripts is unknown, but similarities between them suggest they ultimately derived from a single proto-text.
>
> (see Abstract)

I will consider the primitive shamanism narrative to be included in the "pre-Christian fertility ritual" or Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, and will also add to Millington's list the narrative that Millington himself tells, the 17th or 18th Century Ink and Paper Narrative, as well as the Begging Narrative, which he also tells. And, just for good measure, I'll throw in the Literature Narrative.

In their most basic forms, the origin stories go like this:

1) The Begging/House-Visiting Narrative: People used to go begging or visiting door to door and this has become mummers' plays.

2) The Mystery Play/Morality Play/Royal Pageantry Narrative: Upper classes (clergy and nobility) performed plays (mystery or morality or royal pageantry) which were adopted and adapted by the peasants and these have become mummers' plays.

3) The Literature Narrative: People wrote stories and characters that were made into plays that have become mummers' plays.

4) The 17th or 18th Century Ink and Paper Narrative: According to written records, people have been performing mummers' plays since the 17th or 18th century.

5) The Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative: Ancient pagans performed rituals and had beliefs that have become mummers' plays.

Classifying folklore has long since been a worthy but difficult pursuit. Be it the motif, the type, the morpheme, or the narrateme, the hunt for an irrefutable and objective identifier is and has been of great importance to the field of folklore scholarship. It comes down to a matter of accuracy; precision. We attempt to strip a piece of folklore down to its most basic and essential elements, thus making it distinguishable from all the others in its contrast; a species of its own; traceable, observable. The tedious and persistent study of those dedicated scholars such as Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson, Vladimir Propp, János Honti, or Hans-Jörg Uther, among many others, demonstrates both the necessity and frustrations of appropriate classification to a proper study of folklore. Because the quest for

accurate classification is also a problematic one (see Dundes 1997). Accuracy and precision are difficult to attain in a world of blending, melding, merging and converging stories, told by people and heard by people and, like people, folktales are messy, philandering, rule-breakers. Vladimir Propp, in his *Morphology of the Folktale*, cautioned against haphazard classifications of folktales:

> Before throwing light upon the question of the tale's origin, one must first answer the question as to what the tale itself represents.
>
> Since the tale is exceptionally diverse, and evidently cannot be studied at once in its full extent, the material must be divided into sections, i.e., it must be classified. Correct classification is one of the first steps in a scientific description. The accuracy of all further study depends upon the accuracy of classification. But although classification serves as the foundation of all investigation, it must itself be the result of certain preliminary study. What we see, however, is precisely the reverse: the majority of researchers *begin* with classification, imposing it upon the material from without and not extracting it from the material itself.
>
> (1968: 5)

He continued, writing that, "Clear-cut division into types does not actually exist; very often it is a fiction" (11). The pressure's on. I suppose I might be worried, or, rather, Propp might be worried about me. But I do not wish to classify mummers' play origin stories for future research *per se*. Rather, I wish to demonstrate *ad hoc* the transmission and circulation of origin stories so that we might see how they carry on throughout various media; passed from one teller to another. Just as Propp points out, in order to study mummers' play metafolklore, I have necessarily had to classify it. And, like he also says, a classification based on type or motif is useful as "a *practical reference*" (11). That is exactly what I am looking for: a way to pragmatically observe the transmission of stories about mummers' plays.

A common issue in folklore classification is the overlapping of one tale type with another (see Dundes 1997: 196). As soon as boundaries are created by a folklorist they are frequently transgressed by some rogue tale, making strict definitions problematic. Likewise, there are points of conflation between the origin stories I will discuss and one type can overlap and merge with another. For example, one of the Coventry Mummers (who I will introduce later), Grahame, had this to say in response to my questions about mummers' play origins:

> Mat: And, thinking back to, you know, back then when you first thought about it, or what you believe now – and this is strictly, you know, your own speculation, I realize that there's no "true" or "false" to it – But, where do you believe mummers' plays came from? How did they come to be?

> Grahame: My speculation would be that they do have some relationship to the seasonal birth-death syndrome. The fact that there's always a character that dies and is then revived, I suspect it goes back to the ancient roots.
>
> Mat: The kind of pagan ritual type idea.
>
> Grahame: I guess so, yes. Although I suspect what we actually do is just a seventeenth/eighteenth century pantomime – for want of better words – built on an ancient foundation, I suspect.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 15, 2010).

Likewise, my conversation with John, another Coventry Mummer, went this way:

> Mat: Thinking back then, or now, in your opinion, in your speculation, where do you think mummers' plays came from?
>
> John: Well, the earliest written records come from about seventeen…middle of the seventeen hundreds. But at that time, they suddenly found a large number all over the country that were with enough similarity so that there obviously links between whole groups of them, and within a local area they were even more closely related. You find the words come cropping up – variants - within the local areas. Where did they come from? I suppose if you take the true historians view, your records go back so far, so that's when they started. But the plays were old then, so, yeah, they must've had a much older origin than the…they go back to medieval times, I think.
>
> Mat: Do you have any idea of why people, you know, how the tradition came to be? Why do people do these plays?
>
> John: The usually given reason is that they're a ritual performance. It was the death of the old year and the rebirth of the new, which is the plot of the play, if you like. A character is killed and then brought back to life. So you can see some sort of ritual origins in that.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 23, 2010)

The origin stories told by Grahame and John represent a sort of axis of two narrative types: The 17th or 18th Century Ink and Paper Narrative and the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative.

The Trigg Morris Men's Mummers Play website explains,

> The Origins of Mummers Plays are believed to be rooted in the oldest of pagan ceremonies combined with the "Lord of Misrule" customs, and were a traditional part of Christmas at the Court of Edward III (1327-77). In the early Middle Ages the Church introduced Saints and Old Testament Prophets into the drama to produce Christian Miracle Plays, but perhaps it was the other way round.
>
> Despite the efforts of the Clergy and the popularity of the Miracle Plays, they never quite succeeded in ousting the old pagan Mumming Plays, which remain popular to this day. In these the players disguised themselves by blacking their faces or by wearing masks,

> and garments made from ribbon or strips of paper, a custom that still survives at Marshfield in Wiltshire. The practice is based on an acient belief that if the Mummers were recognized, the magical power of their play would be broken.
>
> Although there are many regional variations, the main plot of the traditional mumming play revolves around a battle between Saint George and an enemy who is variously called The Turkish Knight, Bold Slasher, or the Black Prince of Paradise. The climax comes when one or other of the protagonists is killed. The Doctor then intervenes and miraculously restores him to life. This simple story symbolizes the eternal struggle of good & evil, light & darkness, fertile spring & sterile Winter - an expression of man's preoccupation with the cycle of the seasons.
>
> (http://www.triggmorris.co.uk/mummers%20play.htm; accessed March 29, 2011)

Here, we find a melding of two narratives; the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative and the Mystery/Morality/Royal Pageantry Play Narrative.

Despite all these conflations, I believe the origin-types I have proposed do serve a purpose, even if it is a temporary one. Dundes (1997) writes, "The overlapping difficulties of the motif and tale type indices aside…the fact remains that the motif and tale type indices with all their faults remain indispensable for the identification of traditional folk narratives. Since identification is a necessary prerequisite for interpretation, we folklorists simply cannot do without these standard indices" (200). Although my classifications are not "standard," they exist in a similar vein; a common pursuit. They allow us to track the various strands of metafolklore; to see what story comes from where and who tells it. By doing so, we can see the various influences of literature and scholarship on metafolklore and vice versa; how tradition and folk commentary form a dialogue that informs both.

The five types of origin narratives that I will use in my study were, to put it bluntly, bluntly noticeable. My methodology in identifying these types was by no means technical. I simply read, and listened, and watched, and these are what emerged. Dundes (1997) tells us that "…a tale type is a composite plot synopsis corresponding in exact verbatim detail to no one individual version but at the same time encompassing to some extent all of the extant versions of that folktale" (196). The "basic forms" of the "origin stories" I have just offered up are just as Dundes explained: While they do not correspond in exact verbatim to any one individual version I have come across, I have tried to encompass or summarize – to some extent – all of their corresponding versions (or, as I would prefer to say, *tellings*).

Despite the classifications and technical terminology, these are, above all, stories told about the tradition. Most all of these origin narratives – these stories about mummers' plays – are told by mummers themselves. In fact, I encountered them

while I, "a modern-day detective," was "trying to solve a centuries-old mystery" (see Nick Lees' newspaper article, "Mysterious mummers hit town this weekend," *Edmonton Journal*, 5 Jan 2011). What Nick Lees meant was that over the winter of 2010/11 I worked with two groups of mummers – the Coventry Mummers and the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective.

The Story about the Coventry Mummers

As I flew over the Atlantic, the flight attendant asked me why I was travelling to England. I told him I was going to study mummers. He had no idea what a mummer was. When I arrived at Heathrow, the customs agent asked me why I was in England. I told her I was going to study mummers. She had no idea what a mummer was. At the visitor's centre in Coventry, the lady asked me why I was in Coventry. I told her I was there to see the Coventry Mummers. Bewilderment betook her. Even at the village pub where the mummers were about to perform, a lady asked me what all the commotion was about. I told her. She had no idea that such a thing was happening in her own community. Even in the villages where the mummers had been performing for decades there were villagers who had no idea that, in the pub down the street, men were combating, killing, and resurrecting each other with unapologetic merriment (see, I told you I would say it again).

And yet, upon seeing the mummers perform, those same villagers vowed that forever more their Christmastide celebrations would invariably include an observance of the mummers' play. They all agreed that, although they had never before seen anything of the like, "the mummers' play" was recognizably something old, something English, something traditional. Even more, every participant I spoke to seemed to have a somewhat different idea of what mumming was, where it came from, and what it means, including the Coventry Mummers.

The Coventry Mummers were founded by Ron Shuttleworth in 1966. He started the team "before I knew anything about mummers, basically" (Personal Interview, Coventry, Dec 11, 2010). A couple of years later, Ron began amassing material about folkplays, which eventually grew into perhaps the most extensive and comprehensive collection in the world – the Folk Play Section of the Morris Ring Archive. Ron had been hanging around the folk music scene and had seen morris dancers performing at various festivals. Some of the morris teams were performing using a "masked beast, which is basically an animal head on a stick and a man under a cloth" (Ronald Shuttleworth, Personal Interview). He found the creature intriguing and decided to build one himself. Ron is from Darbyshire, and he realized that there was such a beast hailing from his home, the Darby Tup, or

ram. Ron took his Tup along with him camping and one of the fellow campers, a morris dancer, told Ron that there was a certain play attached to the creature. The campers decided to put on a rendition of the Darby Tup play for a laugh. When Ron got home he went on to find out more about the spectacle. Ron was helping to run a folksong club at the time and asked around the club if anyone was interested in putting on the play. Enough people came forward to put a team together; hence, the Coventry Mummers. The Coventry Mummers discovered that a Hero-Combat play text (a play in which a protagonist and antagonist engage in battle, usually leading to the death and revival of one or both characters) had been collected from a local village, Stoneleigh, and decided to revive the play by performing it at Christmastide in the village. They "got a taste for that," and eventually developed a repertoire of Hero-Combat plays from local villages and the surrounding areas that they still perform to this day.

The Story about the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective

Randall Fraser (no relation to J.G. Frazer) and I sat on a restaurant patio. We had just met and were talking about mummers' plays and why each of us was interested in them. We had been put in contact with each other by Christie Morin, the lead organizer of the Arts on the Ave Deep Freeze Byzantine Winter Festival (is that the name? I still don't know the real name; some flurry of words about festivals and coldness and seasons and old things and old places and artistic people), whom I had been put in contact with by Dorothy Ritz, the graduate-school liaison at Grant MacEwan University, from where I graduated with my BA in anthropology.

I remember Randall telling me that he had become, how did he put it, possessed? Infected? Overtaken? Certainly he didn't say *haunted*. Perhaps something more subtle. Let's say, he had become *involved* with mummers' plays. I asked him how he became involved, and he told me a story that more or less went like this:

The Arts on the Avenue organization formed as part of a grassroots revitalization initiative aimed at the Alberta Avenue (118th avenue) community in Edmonton, Alberta. For the past few decades, the community has suffered from crime and a loss of "life and drive" and, as a result, low property values (Randall Fraser, Personal Interview). Because of the low housing costs, artists have been "quietly moving into the neighborhood." Eventually, a number of these artists came together to form the Arts on the Ave initiative in an attempt to bring new verve to neighborhood. The initiative aims to create safer streets, enrich the area's sense of history and culture, attract economic development, and establish environmental well-being. As part of this initiative, the Deep Freeze Byzantine Winter Festival

was organized to, amidst cold and darkness, bring people out into the streets and, in a sense, take back the neighborhood from the unwanted crime that had settled there through vibrant social and cultural activity.

In 2009, Christy Morin, the producer and director of the Arts on the Ave Deep Freeze Byzantine Winter Festival, had a friend suggest to her that she should have mummers perform at the festival. Morin's friend was under the impression that mummers' plays were a Ukrainian tradition and, because Alberta Avenue has a strong Ukrainian population, and because the festival was, in a sense, trying to evoke an "Old World" feel, it seemed only suitable that mummers become a part of the festival. Morin approached Mark Henderson, a local Shakespeare theatre's artistic director, about putting together a mummers' play performance. Instead, Henderson suggested Randall Fraser. Morin and Henderson asked Fraser if he would be interested, and he begrudgingly accepted, on the condition that Henderson act in the play. Henderson agreed, and so Fraser became the director the Edmonton's first mummers' troupe. While doing research for an upcoming radio interview, Fraser became increasingly fascinated by the tradition and its themes. A team was put together, consisting of four actors and a director, Fraser. They spent a week writing the play, which was grafted onto pre-existing plots, themes, and stock characters they had gleaned from other traditional mummers' play texts, but imbued with modern social commentary, humor, and a definitively local character; a process that Fraser considers "true to the tradition." The team performed at the Winter Festival, and, in Fraser's words, "It was pretty incredible." Although the audience was small, they seemed to enjoy it, and so it was decided that a mummers' play would be performed again the next year, and the year after that, and, it is planned, next year, again, there will be mummers in Edmonton.

Stories about Stories: Metafolklore and Folk Commentary

"He had said he had nothing to tell me about mumming, yet within seconds he had told me a story" (Lichman 1982: 110).

In Marshfield, England, while conducting field research for his PhD thesis, Simon Lichman (whose supervisor was another folk play researcher, Henry H. Glassie) had many stories told to him. Answers eliciting hard data were hard to come by. "But," he tells us, "what I did have, without realizing it, were a lot of stories. Whenever I would ask questions about a particular mummer's part, or costume, the mummer, or past mummer, would answer me by telling about a gardener. At first I thought that this was the last information I wanted to receive yet again, until I realized that people were using it as a way of introducing information about the

mumming tradition" (Lichman 1981: 200). Lichman explains that, "These stories or myths of origin are the metafolklore, providing atmospheric context in which the play-tradition exists, extending its folkloristic energy way beyond the two hours of a Boxing Day morning. Repertoire and elaborateness of stories depends on the teller's proximity and involvement with the mumming tradition" (Lichman 1982: 106-107).

While researching mummers' plays, Lichman had stumbled on a cauldron of metafolklore or folk commentary; stories about tradition, about folklore, about folkplays. These narratives told him not only about the tradition per se, but the people who participated in it – the performers and the audience members. The participants were not only those who saw or performed in the play, but those who told or heard the stories about the play. Minton (1999) explains that "Folklorists who have borrowed Dundes's concept of metafolklore have profitably followed his lead in applying that term to one group's folklore about their own traditions" (43-44). This metafolklore or "folk commentary" represents "an impulse that may inform a great deal of lore passed from one people to another under circumstances hardly conducive to such transactions" (ibid). Although mummers' plays are usually performed formally – that is, as a punctuated event – the performance of stories about mummers' plays are often informal and impromptu. Lichman states that, "The history of the tradition and the performers' aesthetic are transmitted orally to each successive generation of mummers through these stories. There is no ritualized story-telling event" (Lichman 1982: 107). He goes on to say that, "Presenting information in this way enables them to enlarge the scope of my initial questions that had been designed to illicit 'hard' data or to verify facts. In the long run, these 'facts' proved to be but details, significant, but uninteresting when compared with discussion about the meaning of tradition, the utilization of secular myth, and origins" (Lichman 1981: 200-201).

So, is it correct to label stories told about the mummers' play tradition as *metafolklore*, thus implying that folkplays are, themselves, folklore? Steve Tillis (1999) explains that,

> Rather than positing this or that form of folk drama, and then extrapolating from it certain characteristics that might then be used to define the concept itself, I have defined the constituent forms of folk drama so that my rethinking will encompass all forms – however various they might be – that might reasonably qualify as, at once, folklore and drama.
>
> (195)

He goes on to say,

> While the dramatic nature of the Mummers' Play has often been questioned, no scholar that I am aware of has dared to suggest that the play is not folklore. Consideration of the play as folklore, however – paying special attention to the idea of variation in repetition as it can be found in each of the various categories of performance traits involved in the play – yields a number of insights, not only about the Mummers' Play in particular, but about the analogical group of folk drama in general.
>
> (195)

Simply put, just as mummers' plays are a tradition, they are also folklore. They are performed for an audience or *told*, they change over space and time with each *telling*, they embody local character, and they are, essentially, narratives. As Dan Ben-Amos (1971) explains, "The social context, the cultural attitude, the rhetorical situation, and the individual aptitude are variables that produce distinct differences in the structure, text, and texture of the ultimate verbal, musical, or plastic product. The audience itself, be it children or adults, men or women, a stable society or an accidental grouping, affects the kind of folklore genre and the manner of presentation" (4). And, just as folkplays are folklore, stories about folkplays can be considered metafolklore.

Vansina (1985) writes, "In most cases…such commentaries are created long after the original tradition had been in existence. They explain archaisms of speech, allusions which are no longer understood, customs which no longer exist, and the like. They testify at least that the tradition which they explain has not been altered" (11). Folk commentaries and metafolkore, or stories about traditions, are often established after the tradition is in place in order to explain its peculiarities and convey continuity and efficacy. Vansina goes on to say that these commentaries "are, moreover, indispensable for the study of the cosmological concepts of a given culture." The narratives a people have about their traditions may often say more about the people than the life history of the tradition (see Dundes 1966).

Metafolklore is part of a tradition in that it informs a tradition; it tells the participants about the tradition and what it means, where it came from, and its significance. To simply watch a mummers' play tells the audience member nothing of its origins. One might glean something from the noticeable death and resurrection motif of the Hero-Combat play, but what this death and resurrection signifies will remain mysterious if not for some strand of metafolklore to articulate its context. If one truly wishes to "know" what mummers' plays are about, he invariably turns to books, journal articles, internet websites, video documentaries, other audience members, performers, etc. These media will provide him with stories; with narratives that say something like, *The English*

Mummers' Play harkens back to…and was performed by…in order to… In this way, the metafolklore is a performance of meaning in some ways even more so than the play itself. Each telling of what the tradition is about is a performance, too; a performed narrative, however informal and impromptu it may be. These narratives are performed not only by participants in the plays – mummers and audience members – but by those who have themselves heard stories about the plays, including writers and scholars, who are, then, participants in the body of metafolklore and, as such, participants in the body of the tradition.

In terms of literary theory, it is incorrect to say that one strand of metafolklore or origin story is "righter" than any other. Dundes (1966) tells us that

> There is no one right interpretation of an item of folklore any more than there is but one right version of a game or song. (We must overcome our penchant for monolithic perspectives as exemplified in monotheism, monogamy, and the like.) There are multiple meanings and interpretations and they all ought to be collected. One could ask ten different informants what each thought a given joke meant and one might obtain ten different answers.
>
> (508)

Multiple meanings, multiple interpretations, different answers and no one right version. Hence, I would say, the various origin stories told about mummers' plays, and the legitimacy of each, at least in a literary sense.

The Mummers' Play Origin Stories

1) The Begging/House-Visiting Narrative

Gary, a member of the Coventry Mummers, told me this kind of origin story. He said:

> I think it's a begging tradition…and I think there are other begging traditions in this country which involve some sort of performance – it could be a dance, it could be a song, it could be a play – and I think it was done at times of the year perhaps when living was hard, when weather was so severe that fisherman cannot earn a living from the rivers, that the ground is too hard to work for agricultural people, builders cannot work because the clay is not setting in…the bricks, etc. etc. And I think they looked elsewhere to get some money, beer, or food, or all three, in fact. I could only go to what I have read and that it's going back hundreds of years, and I think probably all from the same origin: mummers, morris dancing, and all the different sorts of morris dancing, carol singing; I think probably there in the same sort of origin. And they probably all…well, perhaps a lot of them would have done it in disguise because I think some of them might have been quite ashamed, really, that they had to resort to that. So, the blacking of faces, which today is sometimes misunderstood, I think they would take soot from a fire or the carbon from a burnt candle or something, and I don't think it would be a solid black face like it is today

> in some dances, I think it would have been a smearing round, and they would do anything to try and change their appearance. Certainly it's quoted by Shakespeare, mumming was well known to him and some of his writings and the way that his stanzas are done was in the same sort of tradition as mumming; it's short and rhyming to enable voice projection, so it's not complicated.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 10, 2010)

According to this narrative, the begging led to shame or embarrassment, which led to disguises to conceal identities and luck-bringing so as to establish a sense of reciprocity. In exchange for food, drink, or money, the mummers would bless the home with luck or good will. This, then, led to a custom of house-visiting, where it became fortunate for a home to have the mummers come.

Peter Millington tells this kind of story, too. According to Millington, the story comes from Mike Preston who told it in 1971 after being "inspired by the collection of essays on Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland edited by H. Halpert and G.M. Story (1969). These essays did not address origins, but they did show that Quack Doctor plays and non-play house-visiting customs existed side by side under the same name. This led Preston to suggest more generally that it was the house-visiting that was the original custom, to which the plays had been added later as an elaboration" (Millington 2002: 47). Millington's telling of Preston's origin story goes like this:

> Firstly, the plays arose in the early to mid 18th century, and were attached to non-play house-visiting customs that had existed for a considerable historical period beforehand. They were probably added as an extension of the entertainment that was already part of these house-visiting customs. The non-play customs were probably the source for non-representational costumes, and possibly also for some supernumerary characters. They were certainly the source for the dates of performance and the actors' collective names.
>
> (Millington 2002: 285-286)

2) The Mystery Play/Morality Play/Royal Pageantry Narrative

I asked Calvin, a member of the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective, "With all the various theories that you heard, and there is a number of them, was there one theory or narrative that kind of stood out amongst the others that seemed the most probable or the most alluring or the most interesting?" Calvin said:

> There is one and unfortunately I don't know if it's real or not because when I went to research it on my own I didn't find anything about that. I was either told or I read – this was a few years ago so my memories a bit sketch – that there are some accounts where people believe that members of the royalty or nobility actually incognito put on these plays at times, and went around to the peasants and got money off of them. I don't know

> how true that is, and maybe it's just something I fabricated in my head, but that's something that stood out with me. I thought that was sort of neat…that, like, King Henry the 8th or somebody could have just went out among his peasants and nobody would have been the wiser.
>
> (Personal Interview, Edmonton, February 11, 2011)

The narrative Calvin told is a variation of the theory which proposes that mummers' plays may have come from medieval religious-type plays performed by the clergy. These plays were called morality or mystery plays and they were meant to promote and convey religious and moral teachings through plot, characters, and action. Another theory states that mummers' plays were once royal pageantry plays performed by and for members of the nobility. In either case, these plays were eventually taken up by the peasantry and developed into the form we recognize today. Although he questions the theory himself, Brody (1970) explains,

> Before the Cambridge scholars suggested the idea that the play might be the fragmented remains of a pre-Christian ceremony, the general belief was that it had its genesis in some medieval mystery or morality play which had been transformed over the years into a mindless, seasonal charade by the folk. But even if its earliest appearance had occurred as late as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, why has there not been any evidence found which we can point to with any certainty as a reference to the men's ceremonial? Why do we have to wait until the end of the seventeenth century, when it had already, apparently, degenerated into simply 'the drollest piece of mummery'? There are earlier references through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to 'mummers,' 'morris dancers' or 'players,' and even to Robin Hood Plays, but not one of them affords evidence about our men's ceremonial, and certainly nowhere do we find a hint of the all-important death and resurrection.
>
> (10-11)

One William Sandys suggested that these plays, which later appeared as chapbook narratives, had originally depicted adventures and battles from the Holy Land during the Crusades (W.Hone, 1827, col.123). This medieval mystery/morality play origin story was popularized by W. Hone in the early 19th century (Millington 2002: 16-17). The story Hone promoted has obviously, to some extent, endured, as it appeared to me in a hotel lobby that afternoon in February.

3) The Literature Narrative

This origin story is, essentially, the proverbial case of the chicken and the egg, and it starts with chapbooks. Chapbooks are small, inexpensive, woodcut-illustrated books containing everything from jokes, riddles, songs, folk tales, romances, battles, adventurous travels, and biographies and fiction to poems,

fortune-telling, demonology, religious and moral teachings, romance, etc. Chapbooks commonly contained woodcut illustrations to accompany some short boisterous story. Chapbooks were wildly popular and were peddled throughout the countryside by chapmen, who also commonly sold a variety of small household items, maps, and almanacs (Weiss 1969: 1). There are many chapbooks which tell narratives that very closely resemble in plot, character, and themes, those of mummers' plays. These Chapbooks reached their zenith of popularity around the same time that the mummers' play phenomenon begins to appear in written texts, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Ashton 1882: vii). According to Peter Burke, literacy rates in Europe had begun to climb and were actually quite high by then (1978; 1994: 253). This at least provides fodder to the theory, suggesting that many people would have been able to read chapbooks and thus adapt them into folkplays. It has been proposed, then, that either the chapbooks were retelling the folkplays in book form, or the folkplays were retelling the books in play form. The problem is that the appearance of the chapbooks coincides with the appearance of the plays. So, the question arises, which came first?

In the case of such popular stories depicting national heroes like Saint, Prince, or King George, it becomes quite difficult to isolate oral tradition from written tradition from dramatic tradition. Spufford (1981) tells us that Richard Johnson's 1596-7 epic, *Seven Champions of Christendom*, which likely spurred many chapbooks of its own, was a "successful novel" as well as an "elaboration of the story that had commonly and regularly been acted within living memory in the 1590s. But the story that [Johnson] may have heard or seen played as a boy in the 1570s had already been heavily influenced at an earlier stage by the written word" (229). Which performance influenced which? Was there an original?

In 1924, C.R. Baskervill wrote, "Indeed one of the greatest difficulties in dealing with the ritual elements of the plays lies in the fact that the very features in which these elements are clearest show a strong literary influence exerted at various periods..." (229). Millington tells us that "Through identifying literary sources for large segments of text," C.R. Baskervill's "analysis of the plays showed that much of the text is relatively recent in origin, i.e. 16th century onwards, and that: '... The dialogue reflecting the old ritual motive of the wooing came to be simply made up from dialogue ballads, jigs, and similar sources' (C.R.Baskervill, 1924, p.238)" (Millington 2002: 30-31).

Even so, Baskervill still held to the view that "mummers' wooing plays are clearly older than the jigs. Festival plays from the Balkans, especially from Thrace, with similar rival wooings and ritual acts with choral song instead of

dialogue, suggest a great age for the type of folk play" (C.R.Baskervill, 1929, p.250, in Millington 2002: 31). The idea espoused by Baskervill that mummers' plays are of "a great age" and ritual in origin is a popular one, and it has been since writers and academics really started discussing folkplays in the early 19th century. It is also the idea that has, for many current academic researchers, become laughable, naïve, and romanticized. Before we discuss the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, we should first take a look at why many researchers think it nonsense. This is the story they tell:

4) The 17th or 18th Century Ink and Paper Narrative

Peter Millington (2002) tells us of a collector from Nottingham, one Sydney Race (37). In the 1920s, Race suggested that, rather than mummers' plays coming from some ancient pagan source – the popular theory at the time – perhaps they originated during the 1700s and gained popularity throughout the 19th century as popular literature began to tell the masses about the strange and romantically folksy phenomenon.

Fifty years later, the theory of 17th or 18th century origins became increasingly popular amongst folklorists and historians as two things became available: more written evidence from those centuries and a distaste for conventional "old school" or survivalist approaches to folklore. As an example of such evidence, a few lines taken from a mummers' play performed around Exeter crop up in 1738 (Hutton 1996: 75). Then, in a chapbook that belongs to the decades between 1746 and 1769, the earliest full-text mummers' play appears (75). The chapbook was meant for people who wanted to arrange some kind of Christmastide performance and provided them with the characters, plot, and dialogue to do so. With the formation of groups such as the Traditional Drama Research Group – which came together in 1981 – skepticism about pre-Christian origins grew increasingly mainstream (Millington 2002: 49). This "New Folk Drama Studies" school of thought stuck to hard evidence – ink and paper traceable to a reliable source – and re-examined the texts that had been accumulated during decades of folkplay research. The development of technologies that allowed for computer analysis of texts has provided what some believe to be further evidence for the new origin story. Thus, researchers like Peter Millington (2002) offer this kind of origin story for mummers' plays:

> Although more historical research is needed, concerted effort over that past thirty years…has failed to find any records of Quack Doctor plays [a type of mummers' play] or similar precursors before the 18th century. This lack of records contrasts strongly with records for other customs, such as morris dancing and Mayday, where abundant pre-18th

> -century records have been found. This is enough to show that the historical continuity required by the survivalist theories of origin does not exist. They are therefore disproved.
>
> (284)

There you have it: The Emergence in Ink and Paper of the 17th or 18th Century Narrative. But despite the popularity of this theory in modern folkplay scholarship, many scholars of the "New Folk Drama Studies" are not concerned with "origins." They prefer instead to study the current functions and processes of the tradition; how it lives within living communities; the folkplay of the present. The New School folklorists who tell this origin story belong to a certain academic zeitgeist described by Roy Judge (1979), who writes,

> Stuart Piggott (1968) has offered a useful lead…In dealing with the Druids he suggested a distinction between two groups of problems. One he described as objective, being the historian's attempt to construct 'a past-as-known within the limitations of the evidence available'. The other was subjective, being 'that very dangerous thing, a past-as-wished-for, in which a convenient selection of the evidence is fitted into a predetermined intellectual or emotional pattern' (3 in edition of 1974).
>
> (69)

While the many may prefer the "past-as-known within the limitations of the evidence available" kind of story, there were and are indeed those who find Piggott's latter kind of story more entertaining. This is not to say that they *intentionally* fit the evidence into a "predetermined intellectual or emotional pattern," but that they have been captivated by the performance of a narrative that has, for them, really captured the spirit of the thing.

5) The Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative

In his book, *Introducing the Folk Plays of England,* Ronald Shuttleworth tells us:

> Speculation about the origins of the plays no longer seems fashionable in academic circles, but this is an area which still greatly interests the general public. Unfortunately it also involves the fewest facts and most guesswork.
>
> Since earliest times death and regeneration has been apparent to man in his surroundings. The cycles of the Sun, the Moon, the Calendar, vegetation, animals and Man himself were so clearly important, that re-birth or resurrection has had a central place in many religions and ceremonies the world over. Its presence in the Folk Play, together with the seasonal nature of the custom leads to the conclusion that the origins of the ceremony are ritualistic and 'religious' in so far as the participants believed that they were influencing forces normally beyond their control. Even today people have the vague feeling that there is some 'luck' involved in which they can share by contribution to the collection.

(10)

In Coventry, I spoke with Brian, one of the Coventry Mummers, and his wife, Rita.

> Mat: Where do you believe mummers' plays came from?
>
> Brian: I don't really…from pagan ritual…you know, I suppose is the main thing. It's got to go back to that sort of thing…sort of like a midwinter pagan tradition, I would say. Nobody really knows, but to me that seems to be the obvious place where it originated from.
>
> Mat: Rita, do you have any different thoughts?
>
> Rita: No, I agree with Brian. The death and resurrection around the Christmas plays is the…the death of the winter and the resurrection of the spring. It goes back…who knows?
>
> (Personal Interview, December 16, 2010)

Another Coventry Mummer, Paul, told me a similar story when I asked him about the meaning and origins of mummers' plays.

> Paul: What drew me to the mumming plays when I first saw them was that it was good fun. And what held me to mummers' plays was when I found out that, not only was it good fun, it was our heritage, our tradition. *And it also had meaning; the folkplay had a meaning* [my italics]. And this I became interested in. So first of all it was the entertainment value and the good fun and the camaraderie that drew me to the mummers, and, secondly, the thing that hooked me with the mummers was this was a worthwhile thing to do; that it was important; that our traditions be carried on.
>
> Mat: What is the meaning of the mummers' play?
>
> Paul: The meaning of the mummers' plays, in England, is the…it's the celebration of the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new year. So it's about the death of the old year and the birth of the new year. So mumming plays will have a death and resurrection. So you'll have an antagonist, a protagonist, who fight, and when one is slain, a doctor is called on to cure. And so that symbolizes the bringing on of the new year. And traditionally, they were done, of course, around the new year and also at Easter time with the Pace Eggers. And they were done by workers who, seasonal workers, who had no work at the winter time in England. People worked on the land and their work wasn't so much…And they had to go and get money, basically, to survive. And so the mummers' tradition came about that they used to do these plays, and at the end of the play they'd take a collection and also get refreshments from the people of the tour they were on.
>
> Mat: So is it, in your opinion, is it a begging tradition or is it a seasonal ritual, is it both?

> Paul: I think it's both. To me, the tradition of the mumming play is both a tradition of seeing out the [old] year and bringing the new one in, and, also, conveniently at the time, it's a tradition of getting reward for that; a way of getting a reward so that…to sustain you through the winter months, basically.
>
> Mat: How long do you think people have been doing these plays for?
>
> Paul: I think mumming plays in England have been…have pre-Christian roots. So they are of pagan origin. And, of course, throughout the many years they've been performed in England, influences, Christian influences, have altered the plays. So you cannot say they're Christian mystery plays, certainly not. That is a completely different tradition. But they are…they have been influenced by peoples' beliefs, as everything is influenced by peoples' beliefs. So, in a play you would have the death and resurrection, of course. The death and resurrection, of course, in a mumming play could be symbolized as the death and resurrection of Jesus and redemption. And also the personalities of the play would be changed to St George, who fought the dragon, so it would be the battle fought over evil. And, of course, other plays you'd have Prince George or King George, who was probably an English hero, to be the protagonist. And the antagonist would be the traditional what we would see as the enemies in England at the time.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 26, 2010)

This kind of story has been told for nearly two hundred years. I will now provide a pedigree of sorts tracing the narrative through different pieces and forms of literature, websites, and video documentaries. Although this pedigree will go on for some pages (if you check the Table of Contents you can see how long and, if you wish, use it as a stepping stone to skip ahead, or map to find your way past it, or whatever metaphor you prefer to avoid reading what lies ahead), it is but a synecdoche; a representative part of the greater situation, a sip of the wassail bowl, a glance at the smorgasbord.

The Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative told about mummers' plays seems to first appear in the written record a century or so after mummers' plays themselves seem to first appear in the written record. Perhaps the earliest record of the narrative appears in William Hone's 1827 work, *The Every Day Book: or, Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements, Sports, Pastimes, Ceremonies, Manners, Customs, and Events, Incident to Each of the Three Hundred and Sixty-Five Days, in Past and Present Times; Forming a Complete History of the Year, Months, & Seasons, and a Perpetual Key to the Almanack; Including Accounts of the Weather, Rules for Health and Conduct, Remarkable and Important Anecdotes, Facts, and Notices, in Chronology, Antiquities, Topography, Biography, Natural History, Art, Science, and General Literature; Derived from the Most Authentic Sources, and Valuable Original Communications, with Poetical Elucidations, for Daily Use and Diversion*. Writing of the Scottish

Guisards' play performed at Hogmanay, Hone states: "The performance of religious mysteries, which continued for a long period, seems to have been accompanied by much licentiousness, and undoubtedly was grafted upon the stock of pagan observances" (Vol. II-Part II: column 14). Although Hone continues to build on his theory that folkplays derived from mystery or morality plays, here he suggests that perhaps the ancient ancestry is of a pre-Christian nature. Along with an incredibly verbose title, we can accredit Hone as an early teller of the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative.

Fifty-three years later, we find a telling of the narrative that is literary in nature, contained within a work of fiction, English novelist and dramatist Charles Reade's 1870 work, *Put Yourself in His Place*. He writes,

> It was old Christmas Eve, and the Mummers were come. Now, of all the old customs Mr. Raby had promised her, this was the pearl. Accordingly, her curiosity took for the time another turn, and she was soon seated in the dining-room, with Mr. Raby and Mr. Coventry, awaiting the Mummers. The servants then came in, and, when all were ready, the sound of fiddle was heard, and a fiddler, grotesquely dressed, entered along with two clowns, one called Tommy, dressed in chintz and a fox's skin over his shoulders and a fox's head for a cap; and one, called the Bessy, in a woman's gown and beaver hat.
>
> (Reade, *Put Yourself in His Place,* 1870: 306-307)

Reade then informs his readers that the performance is of pre-Christian elements:

> 'King George!' said he. 'Bosh! This is the old story of St. George and the Dragon, overburdened with modern additions.' As to the dance, he assured her that, though danced in honour of old Christmas, it was older than Christianity, and came from the Goths and Swedes. These comments were interrupted by a man, with a white face, who burst into the assembly crying, 'Will ye believe me now? Cairnhope old church is all a-fire!'
>
> (Reade, *Put Yourself in His Place*, 1870: 308)

Ten years later, in 1880, J.S. Udal started writing about mummers as a means of "preserving one of the most interesting forms of our national folk-lore – folk-lore, indeed, which before the rapid march of education and beneath the iron hand of the School Board bids fair to rank ere long amongst the things of the past" (87). Udal references Strutt (1831), Brand (1841), and Fosbroke (1843), all whom suggest that the word "mummer" derives from the Danish word "mumme" or the Dutch word "momme," both meaning "disguise," and thus convey some common ancestry with the European mainland. Brand (1841) and Fosbroke (1843) both state that the British Mummers Play derives from the "ancient Saturnalia" (Udal 1880: 87-88). The narrative of pan-European development and ancient pagan

origins had begun to take root. In the notes regarding the discussion that followed Udal's reading, we see some seeds being sewn:

> (c) Mr. Alfred Nutt suggests that the incidents of the mumming-plays were those common to Folk-Tales all over Europe. There were the two heroes, of whom the weaker first engages in combat: the stronger one (in this case St. George, the hero of the Goldenlocks cycle of Folk-Tales in so many European countries) then overcomes three successive champions. This threefold combat is especially characteristic of Celtic Folk-Tale. So, too, is the life-restoring leech (stated in the play to be an Irishman), who is met with in the Mabinogion and in Campbell's Popular Tales, and whose special function it is to bring back to life the champions slain by the hero. The final fight between Father Christmas and Old Bet may possibly be a reminiscence of the struggle for the magic fish or beast between Ceridwen and Gwion in the Mabinogion, between Fionn and his foster-father in the Ossianic Heldensage, and between Sir James Ramsay or Sir Patrick Farquhar and the magician in Gaelic Folk-Tale. It would be interesting to find Folk-Tale incidents of a specially Celtic nature existing in a genuine English county, one too where the Folk-Tale itself had probably been long extinct.
>
> (114)

Mr. Alfred Nutt suggests both an ancient Celtic and pan-European ancestry (where folk-play derives from folklore). Also in the discussion notes we find:

> (d) Mr. Hyde Clarke writes: The mask is found in all epochs and in every region. Although in the present day simply a disguise in Europe, that is not its original or sole reference. In the tombs golden masks are found, and in Egyptian burials outside reproductions of the face of the deceased. There is reason to associate the mask with the Ka, or incorporeal double of the body, of higher functions and more sacred character. This is the foundation of our own superstition of what in life is the fetch of a man, and after death the ghost. The mask is a characteristic of sacred and popular festivals. It is thus that it becomes traditionally associated with mumming, though in our day not an essential. The form of the mummings laid before us is necessarily adapted to the epoch at which it was assumed, and when it replaced some older form.
>
> (115)

Mr. Hyde Clarke suggests that the mummers' plays of his time were replacements of "some older form," and metonymically implies some ritualistic practice as being that "older form." Mr. Clarke finishes by saying, "One of the changes of our epoch in connection with Folk-Lore is the extinction of this popular or unwritten drama-just as we lose that of the ballad and the epic, as indeed we lose the tale-teller and the fairy tale" (115).

And Now, The Ghosts of Cambridge: J.G. Frazer and the Survivalists

And now we come to J.G. Frazer, the gravity of his telling of the narrative so powerful that some have cast him as the first teller of this story, or, at least, the first real *good* teller of the story (see, for example, Glassie 1975:56). It was Frazer's *The Golden Bough* that perpetuated the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative into popular culture, making it so widespread that the assumption of it as a given became commonplace.

The success of Frazer's telling hinged on the fact that he was able to articulate the zeitgeist of his time and place; he did, in a sense, tell the story to a most receptive audience. John B. Vickery (1973) writes that "It is, of course, a truism that any work is the product of its age. Nevertheless, this is particularly true of *The Golden Bough*, for it sums up so many strands of nineteenth-century thought and feeling" (4). He goes on to say that,

> Frazer's attention to the tribal sense of community came at a time when urbanization had permanently destroyed England's sense of community. Indirectly, therefore, he contributed to the age's growing nostalgia for village life by giving the impulse an enormous historical perspective. The history of mankind – the chronicle of its passage from pastoral nomad to urban cipher – appeared as a kind of secular expulsion from the garden of nature and redemption a reversion to the primitivistic.
>
> (28)

As Roy Judge (1979) points out, "It is difficult to overstate the influence of *The Golden Bough*. It offered a pattern which was immediately and attractively available, and it proceeded to dominate attitudes and thinking to a remarkable extent. The vegetation drama, ritual death and resurrection, the sacred tree, became accepted elements in the standard works produced by, for example, E.O. James, Violet Alford, and Douglas Kennedy" (71).

Frazer's work contains a remarkable affectation for the themes of ritual, sacrifice, the death and resurrection of ancient gods, and the transmission of these themes to modern religious and customary folk practices. He suggested that a pan-human belief in an archetypal god of vegetation, whose death and resurrection was symbolic of the seasonal rhythms, was behind many of humanity's ethereal practices over time and space. In the abridgement of his classic work *The New Golden Bough*, Frazer opens his section on "The Mummers' Play" by writing, "The custom of periodically killing the human representatives of the tree-spirit has left unmistakeable traces in the rural festivals of the peasantry in Northern Europe" (1959: 249). That one line summarized decades of suspicions held by storytellers - both scholars and fiction-writers alike – who told of the origins of

mummers' plays. As such, Frazer's opus cast popular audiences spellbound (Ackerman 2005: 80).

Frazer's educational background in Classics no doubt influenced his perceptions. For years he studied the ancient peoples of the classical world and became well-versed in their history, religions, and sociocultural practices. But despite his great interest in the classical world, he was also a "deconverted" rationalist with a "covert purpose: to employ what seemed to be an objective, scientific method in order to hammer the last nail into the post-Darwinian coffin of religion, to show once and for all, by bringing together data on myth, ritual, and belief from all over the world and throughout recorded time, that religion was a noble but in the end misguided effort on the part of primitive humanity to understand the nature of reality" (Ackerman 2005: 72). But even if Frazer was waging a war of reason on the archaic superstitions of the world, he does seem to revel in the subject matter. His attempt to kill and preserve the gods of the world is juxtaposed by his simultaneous invocation of them through the romance of his words. Strangely enough, despite his intentions, whatever they happened to be, what Frazer has left us with is not a funerary eulogy of the gods but a resurrection spell; a narrative that has allowed storytellers – scholars, popular authors, neo-pagans, etc. – to successfully perform for their audiences a narrative that truly fixes "the mummers' play" as a remnant of Ancient Pagan Ritual.

Frazer's greatest influence was William Robertson Smith (Ackerman 1991: "Series' Editor's Foreword"). Smith believed that the killing and consumption of a totem god at certain times of the year was the primeval practice of ancient religions. In the preface to the first edition of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer explains that 'the central idea of my essay – the conception of the slain god – is derived directly, I believe, from my friend [Robertson Smith]'" (Ackerman 1991: 42-43). Smith also thought that it was ritual rather than belief than drove men to their actions; that *doing* was much more vital than *believing* and, as such, practices could continue even if an understanding of them did not. In this way, Smith, and Frazer as his protégé, along with E.B. Tylor, were foundational to the survivalist theories of the Cambridge School of classical anthropology and folklore (40).

The Cambridge School, including the Ritualists, who thought that myth existed only to legitimize ritual and, as such, asserted that *doing* rather than *believing* was at the heart of human practice, and the Survivalists, who believed that modern practices derived from older ones, "concluded that drama evolved from certain magical fertility rituals performed in the worship of a deity who died and was reborn. Dionysus was the Greek exemplar of this class of gods, called by Jane Harrison 'eniautos-daimons,' or 'year-spirits'" (Ackerman 1991: xi).

Henry Glassie (1975) tells us that when the Survivalists "came upon an abstract piece of theater like the mumming it was natural for them to imagine that it might once have been a fuller work, portraying not only a death and rebirth, but – in order to accomplish its magical mission more efficiently – the entire human life cycle laid out in neat sequence like an eighteenth century biographical novel. Viewed from the tower of their taste, mumming did look like a fragment" (59).

He continues, saying:

> The anthropologist and folklorists of the nineteenth century could not help but be affected by the romantic philosophies announced with such fury and beauty by thinkers like William Morris. Parts of the romantic message they left aside. Other parts they connected with the prevailing scientific concern of evolution and built into a theory of survival. Foreign societies were viewed as relics from man's social beginnings. Folk arts were viewed as relics of prehistoric spirituality. We call these old thinkers the survivalists and could leave them on their antiquarian perches high in our family tree, were it not for the survival of their ideas within modern works on mumming. The prime concept of the survivalist theorists of mumming has its source in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and parallels the thinking of those scholars who locate the origin of all myth in ritual – an idea that fares miserably today. *Once upon a time, we are told, there was a fertility ritual that efficiently structured the agricultural year by means of magical mimicry. Latter day mumming is but an irrational fragment of this ritual, having drifted into modern times through the inertia of the peasant mentality.*
>
> (Glassie 1975:56, my italics)

Frazer certainly influenced E.C. Cawte, Alex Helm, and N. Peacock, for they invoke his narrative directly in their *English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index* and imply that they do indeed believe in the story he tells: "By the term 'English Folk Play' we mean one or other of three types of Play in the English language, defined later (p.37), which we believe to be a form of the ceremony of revitalization discussed by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, and by others" (1967: 11). Frazer and the Survivalists didn't so much *invent* the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative as tell it convincingly – at least among popular audiences – thus propelling it forward through time. Brody, even as he writes about the story, is telling it himself. It is then told by Forbes, who quotes Brody, and by Siefker, and by numerous others.

Other People Who Tell the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative

T. Fairman Ordish (1891), one year after the publication of *The Golden Bough*, writes, "the obvious direction of inquiry will be into the condition of things amid which they [medieval Christian miracle-plays and mysteries] were introduced, into those pagan performances of a dramatic character which they were devised to

supplant" (318). Ordish goes on to say, "And may we not conclude that had it not been for the introduction of Christianity we should have had in the North a drama corresponding to that of Greece, a direct outcome of the mythology of the Eddas and the rites and the worship of Odin? The constituents existed: the combination was wanting. Now it is the survivals of those elements in the folk-lore and traditionary customs of our country that I venture to call English folk-drama" (319). Despite any issues we may take with the particulars of the developmental process Ordish proposes (including a Nordic influence or origin), he does in any case propose a pagan origin for English folk-drama. The narrative that Frazer made famous just one year before haunts Ordish's scholarly study. In another work, Ordish (1893) writes, "We should then have in St. George and Slasher the renamed representatives of the two champions, Summer and Winter, whose contest was a principal feature in the Spring festival" (158). This is a common revelation contained within the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative. He also implied some inherent value to the pagan origins, associating "racial character" and English identity to the ancient pagan past. He writes, "It seems to me that this is to give our drama a more illustrious lineage, and a more natural origin, than by ascribing it to the miracle-plays of the Middle Ages" (1891: 322; 329). Ordish is formally supplanting the once common narrative of medieval origins with the snowballing pagan origin story. On this he writes, "In the following pages I shall not emulate the example of writers on English dramatic history, who ascribed the origin of our drama to the medieval miracle-plays in a truly traditional manner. If they could be questioned as to why they did this, I feel persuaded they could give no better answer than that which ever delights the ears of the folk-lore collector: 'Because our fathers did it'" (314).

P.H. Ditchfield, in his *Old English Customs, Extant at the Present Time, An Account of Local Observances, Festival Customs, and Ancient Ceremonies yet Surviving in Great Britain*, first published in 1896, wrote of his lament at the disappearance of the pastoral customs of the English countryside (1968: 3):

> Many writers have mourned over the decay of our ancient customs, which restlessness of modern life has effectually killed. New manners are ever pushing out the old, and the lover of antiquity may perhaps be pardoned if he prefers the more ancient modes. The death of the old social customs, which added such diversity to lives of our forefathers, has not tended to promote a reign of happiness and contentment in our village communities, but rather to render rustic life one continuous round of labour unrelieved by pleasant pastime. The causes of the decline and fall of many old customs are not far to seek. Agricultural depression has killed many. The deserted farmsteads no longer echo with the sounds of rural revelry; the cheerful log-fires no longer glow in the farmer's kitchen; the harvest-home song has died away, and 'largess' no longer rewards the mummers and morice dancers

(1-2)

He wrote, “Popular customs contain the germ of history; and however rude and uncouth they may be, if we look beneath the surface we find curious and interesting stores of antiquarian lore which well repay the labour of the explorer” (4). He went on to say,

> In Pagan institutions we must ground many old customs and rites, which, traveling to us through an infinite succession of years, have been sadly distorted and disfigured in their progress. Old Paganism died hard, and fought long and stubbornly in its struggle with Christianity. How often do we find the incorporation of some ancient cult and Pagan custom in many observances sanctioned by years of Christian practice?...Nor is it uncommon to find survivals of old forms of nature-worship, of various cults of hero or demigod, of propitiatory offerings to the spirits of woods and streams…

(4-5)

Ditchfield places mummers’ plays in this category, writing,

> The ‘Lord of Misrule’ has been dead many years and been decently buried, through when alive he did not always merit that epithet. The Yule-log is no longer drawn in state into the baron’s hall, but we have still some fragments of ancient revels preserved in the mummers’ curious performance…I have repeatedly witnessed the performance of Berkshire mummers, which is probably the remnant of some ancient ‘mystery’ play, which time and the memories of old Berkshire folk have considerably altered.

(8-9)

Although he does mention “some ancient ‘mystery’ play,” in the context of his lamentation, he no doubt means to imply a common pagan thread.

In 1903, E.K. Chambers wrote:

> For if the comparative study of religions proves anything it is, that the traditional beliefs and customs of the mediaeval or modern peasant are in nine cases out of ten but the detritus of heathen mythology and heathen worship, enduring with but little change in the shadow of an hostile creed. This is particularly true of the village festivals and their ludi. Their full significance only appears when they are regarded as fragments of forgotten cults...

(E.K.Chambers, 1903, p.94, Quoted in Millington 2002: 23)

Chambers went on to say,

> With regard to the main drift of this chapter, the criticism presents itself; if the folk-plays are essentially a celebration of the renouveau of spring, how is it that the performances generally take place in mid-winter at Christmas? The answer is that... none of the Christmas folk-customs are proper to mid-winter. They have been attracted by the

> ecclesiastical feast from the seasons which in the old European calendar preceded and followed it, from the beginning of winter and the beginning of summer or spring.
>
> (E.K.Chambers, 1903, p.226, Quoted in Millington 2002: 24)

R.J.E. Tiddy (1923), too, espouses a version of the story. He writes,

> Yet the Mummers' Play, degenerate and undeveloped though it may be, bears distinct traces of a ritual origin, and also enables us to draw certain conclusions as to the taste of the peasantry in the drama. At a very early period English literature, like all literature, was entirely of the folk and entirely communal. Like the literature of the Greeks, it originated in religious ceremonies. In the Norse mythology vegetation gods can clearly be descried behind the splendid panoply of heroism with which a later and nobler imagination has invested them, and the agricultural religion of England was no doubt a primitive form of the Norse mythology. In the ceremony of primitive religion various means were used to secure the fertility of earth and flocks and tribe; and in England at least two separate means of attaining this end were practiced.
>
> (70)

Tiddy goes on to describe how the English Sword Dance and Morris Dance are "survivals" of "primitive" rites involving the destruction of an enemy by the destruction of his representation, the battle between "between the old year and the new, between the waxing and waning life of the earth," and "means of securing fertility" by means of (gastronomic) contact with "the spirit of life" (71). According to Tiddy, "Even after the pagan ritual had lost much of it authority through long familiarity with Christianity, the invincible conservatism which everywhere is the main characteristic of the tillers of the soil would be sufficient to ensure its continuance" (72-73). He explains further that

> If we are justified in making any deductions from the folk plays that survive, we may take it as certain that the pagan ritual included an heroic figure who slew his antagonist and that this antagonist was afterwards revived. It should be observed that in the Mummers' Play, although the victor is sometimes a national hero and his antagonist a foreigner, it is by no means an invariable rule for more sympathy to be shown for the victor than for the vanquished. In certain cases it is definitely the vanquished with whom sympathy is shown, and this fact in itself is a very important testimony to the ritual origin, for ritual recognized no moral superiority of the conqueror as compared with the conquered.
>
> (74)

Tiddy explains that there is evidence of ritual origins in the characters themselves, including the King, the Bold Slasher, the Doctor, the Man-woman, and the Fool or Beelzebub (74-77).

Charles Read Baskerville (1924) describes the "mummers' play" as "surviving from ancient pagan rituals" of Europe and England (225, 226). He writes that "the plays are almost certainly survivals of pagan rites" (226).

Again, we leave the realm of the scholarship and enter the realm of fictional literature. As I mentioned earlier, Thomas Hardy gives a detailed account of a mummers' play in his *The Return of the Native* (1878:122-149), based primarily on the memories of his elders. And just as soon as we left scholarship, once again we enter it thusly: Ruth Firor (1931) called Hardy's inclusion of a mummers' play in *The Return of the Native* a *locus classicus*, demonstrating, at least at the time she was writing, the influential effect of the piece of literature on the perceptions of the tradition (197). Firor, in her "short preliminary explanation of the origins and evolution of the mummers' play" (197), writes:

> The word mummer is probably from the Danish 'Momme,' and signifies 'one wearing a mask.' It harks back to a ritual origin, to dances in which men in animal masks performed the ceremonial of the death of the old year, and resurrection of the new, dances which resulted in the Greek feasts which preceded the Roman Saturnalia, and helped to give the latter what religious significance they possessed. These ritual dances were magical in a twofold sense: the killing of the old year, and bringing him to life again in the form of a dramatic presentation is on the principle of sympathetic magic, that by imitating processes of nature, one can actually influence and direct them; and this part of the ceremonial survives in the sword dances of Northern England today. The second ceremonial rite – the securing of the fertility by eating the representative of the spirit of life, and the acquiring of his vitality by actual contact with or assimilation of him survives in the Feast of Kidlington Lamb, in Oxfordshire. [Here the author references Reginald J. Tiddy's *The Mummers' Play*, 70-72]. The one central fact in folk-drama is the death and revivification of one of the characters – a rite once magical in nature, accompanied by the dancing men with faces blackened or hidden with animal masks. In these ritual dances, common to the primitive religion of all Europe and the British Isles, the victim was originally a sacrificial animal, or, even earlier, a human representative of the tribe chosen for this high martyrdom. The English sword dance recalls the procession at Dent, where Frigg and Wodan, giants symbolic of the opposing seasons, were carried through the town, and a sword dance hovered about a victim, who was finally allowed to go unharmed. [Here the author references T.F. Ordish's "Folk-Drama" in *Folklore*]. The English Plough Monday Play preserves this bit of ritual in the swordplay about the fool's neck and in his pleas for mercy, now farcically funny, but once a solemn ceremony. In origin the mummers' play was dance and dumb-show, without dialogue or dramatic action suited to words.
>
> (198-199)

Firor weaves her telling of the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative intertextually with those of Hardy (who bases his writings on orally transmitted memories), Tiddy,

and Ordish, demonstrating the narrative's presence in the fictional and the nonfictional; the oral and the written.

Again referring to Thomas Hardy's telling of a mummers' play, James Gindin, in *The Return of the Native: An Authoritative Text, Background & Criticism* (1969) writes,

> The mummers' play, like the celebration that evolved into Christmas itself, was originally a pagan celebration of the New Year, worshipping the return of the sun and the imminent death of winter. As it survived into the Christian era, the mummers' play incorporated Christian symbols, such as Saint George as the hero and the Turkish Knight or Saracen as the villain, both originating at the time of the medieval Crusades. The central theme common to all versions of the folk drama, including that presented by Hardy, is the revival of the dead, represented either as a revived figure of sun and spring in purely pagan ceremonies or a revived Crusader who is both killed and brought back to life within the play and who symbolizes Christian virtue. Appropriately, a physician, an agent of revival, is an important character in all these dramatizations of life over death.
>
> (397)

So Gindin is commenting on Hardy's folk commentary, essentially corroborating the author's narrative with his own. Together, Gindin's and Hardy's entangled folk commentaries perpetuate a, by now, well-established, almost institutional, metafolklore. In fact, the metafolklore concretizes into definition with Gertrude Jobes' *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* (1962). Jobes defines the "Mumming Play" as:

> A play with masked figures containing a dance with a mock fight; originally a fertility ritual. Origin probably the same as that of the Sword Dance. In Christian countries performed at Christmas time. Father Christmas is stage manager and introduces the characters, chief of whom is Saint George. Other characters are Beelzebub, Big-Head-and-Little-Wit, Doctor, Humpty Jack, a Turkish Knight and his mother Moll Finney. The action is a symbolic representation of the death and rebirth of the year, and the object of the ceremony is to restore the spirit of vegetation to life. Compare Morris Dance.
>
> (1136)

There are a number of interesting allegations contained within the definition. First, Jobes asserts that the Mummers Play or "Mumming Play" is not only descended from a fertility ritual but still performed in order to revitalize the flora of the earth. Jobes also categorizes the play as a homogenous phenomenon having given characters with given roles. The author also implies a shared ancestry with the Sword Dance and the Morris Dance. Both Chambers' *Book of Days* and Frazer's *Golden Bough* are in the author's bibliography, and she likely based her definition on at least some of the material contained within the two works.

In their influential work of folkplay scholarship, *English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index*, Cawte, Helm and Peacock (1967) invoke Fraser's narrative directly: "By the term 'English Folk Play' we mean one or other of three types of Play in the English language, defined later (p.37), which we believe to be a form of the ceremony of revitalization discussed by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, and by others" (11). The authors write, "The Balkan performers first enacted fertilization in front of the houses, then they represented death and resurrection. When they followed this by sowing seed and invoking a bumper harvest, they were clearly using sympathetic magic. This seems to be very near the original religious rite" (24). The authors deal with a number of assumptions, the most obvious being that there was an original fertility ritual, the second being that the Balkan folk performances have descended from this ritual. They go on to say, "It seems entirely reasonable not only to regard our British plays as the remnants of a magical fertility ritual ceremony, but also to think that they once resembled the Balkan performances even more closely than they do know" (24). According to the authors, though, the perpetuation of fertility magic was unconscious, embedded within the traditional folk performances that were integral to traditional pastoral life yet superfluous to every day survival. They write, "…people working close to the land realise more clearly than most the need for fertility of crops and animals, although it is not suggested for one moment that towards the close of the nineteenth century – or even much earlier – the performers seriously considered or understood the primitive ritual they were continuing" (25). The authors, after describing the origins of the Sword Dance and Bridal/Wooing Plays, write,

> The preliminaries in the previous two types suggest that these ceremonies are the remains of the oldest and most primitive customs left in this country. The [Hero-Combat] play, although more widespread, has been modernised and bowdlerised to a great extent, and this is no doubt due to the prevalence of chapbooks, and the acceptance of this type in the Victorian nurseries…It is again suggested that once the original purpose was lost, the prime motive became financial gain. In England the action was gradually shortened so that the number of performances (and the money collected) could be increased, whilst in Ireland, where it is custom to perform in an open space, the text has become longer and longer so that more passers-by can be encouraged to make a contribution…If our contentions are true, the ceremonials of recent years are remaining portions of a much longer action…which may have covered most of the British Isles.
>
> (27)

In *The English Mummers and their Plays; Traces of Ancient Mystery,* Alan Brody (1970) establishes an ancestral lineage between supposed ancient revitalization rituals and modern mummers' plays, thereby endowing the folk performances

with an ancient mystique - with "traces of ancient mystery," a reference to Sir Walter Scott's 1808 epic poem *Marmion*, which says, "…Who lists may in their mummers see, traces of ancient mystery…" Brody writes about tracing drama back to its ritual antecedents, and in so doing presents a cohesive telling of the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative:

> With the passage of time, however, the edges blur. Christianity replaces paganism in the religious consciousness. The church takes over the responsibility for the spiritual health of the community and the concept of the men's ceremonial as effective, magical, and necessary recedes. The people grow sophisticated and the procession and performance that once brought fertility to the land and the tribe become simply a luck-bringing perambulation. In the farms and fields it still retains traces of its ancient mysterious source. In the court it evolves into pure entertainment with the lyricism and splendor of the masque. Communication grows between villages once virtually isolated from one another. The Sword Play takes on figures of the Hero-Combat. The Hero-Combat borrows action from the Wooing Ceremony. The Combat of the Wooing Ceremony gradually follows the shape of the Hero-Combat. A sense of nationalism grows along with religious consciousness and the mythic *daimons* and heroes melt into legendary historical figures and near-contemporary heroes. Industry replaces agriculture as the major support of the community. The factories do not look to the land and the change of the seasons to thrive. Whole communities fragment. Wars take away the men who perform the plays…What is so extraordinary is that the process has taken so long; for it is almost a thousand years since there was any reason for the men of the town to meet on one night of the year, to hide their faces, to move from station to station through the town and, in the centre of the magic circle, to re-enact the death and resurrection of their earth, the eternal pattern of the seasons.
>
> (126-127)

In 1971, E.T. Kirby (1971) proposes a theory that he believed would deliver folkplay research from the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative that had haunted it for so many years. He states that the "Cambridge school" narratives involving seasonal conflict, death and resurrection are "no more than a fiction, a romanticization and, in method and its application, an egregious error of considerable consequence" (276). He offers, instead, that mummers' plays, and, specifically, the Quack Doctor character who provides the resurrection, derived from ancient shamanic practices. Narratives involving ancient rituals, mysticism and magic are exchanged for narratives involving rituals, trances, curing sessions, and séances. Both, I might add, hinge on some notion of ancient paganism. Kirby's story about the mummers play is not very far off from the one he proclaims as "fiction." Whether a ghost story is about ancient Celts or ancient shamans, it remains a ghost story still. Kirby writes,

> The shaman, it was believed, was a person who had been driven mad by the spirits, who thus caused him to become a practitioner of the characteristic rituals. The psychic trauma,

> which was a complete nervous breakdown, prepared him for participation in trance states that were his means of curing the sick. A second function, associated with the first, was officiating at (or, literally, proctoring) ceremonies or dances in which the trance state was undertaken by others. The primary function, then, of a shaman is to deal directly with the obscure causes of man's most crucial eventualities, sickness and death. The shamanistic curing session or seance at which he performs this function is characteristic of primitive societies, and the world-wide distribution of the phenomenon allows us to base our observations on a general, archetypal pattern which is by no means imprecise. The shaman effects his cure by either of two means. If the patient is unconscious, the shaman goes into a trance in order, supposedly, to leave his body, travel great distances to the sky or to the underworld, and catch and bring back the patient's soul. This is the method of cure for "soul loss." He may also thus escort the soul of a dead person to the other world. If the patient is conscious, the shaman goes into a trance to summon his spirits and confer with them about the nature of the illness. He must then "travel" in trance to locate the spirits that have caused the sickness, and in his performance he often battles the disease in an ecstatic enactment of conflict. Most often the shaman performs the cure itself by extracting a "pain" from the patient in the form of some small object that he then exhibits to the audience. Objects extracted include "bits of stone, quartz, iron, tin, old teeth, etc." (the Sema Naga of India); "a piece of skin, a stick, a piece of bone or of quartz" (the Kwakiutl of North America); "a thorn, a pebble, a worm, or a hair" (the Jivaro of South America) or "bits of wood, bone, and stone" (the Arunta of Africa).
>
> (277)

Ghosts, out of body experiences, mystery, death, amazing cures, human intervention in cosmic affairs; the narrative Kirby presents is a thematic doppelganger to the one he refutes. Kirby may have been influenced by Ordish, who wrote in 1891: “The Doctor, who heals the combatants when they are supposed to be slain in the fights that always take place, was no doubt originally a magician, and the long staff which he usually carries supports that conclusion” (331), or by Tiddy, who wrote of the Quack Doctor in 1923: “He is the medicine man of primitive races, and in origin is an unusually gifted savage who assumed control of the ceremonies...” (p.76). If he was influenced by either, then his shaman narrative truly is the offspring of the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative.

In *Folklore and Customs of Rural England*, Margaret Baker (1974) says of the performances, “All had central themes of antiquity, concerned with primitive vegetation rites symbolising the death and rebirth of summer, played out through presentation, combat, cure and collection” (97).

Although, as Peter Millington has explained, the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative had begun to wane amongst folklorists and historians within certain academic

circles at this time, the origin story clearly continued to persist elsewhere, such as the realm of literary criticism.

In his 1986 article, "Hardy's Mummers," published in *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 41(2), Robert Squillace writes, "The history of mummers' plays is today a matter of general scholarly agreement [footnote 2]" (1986: 172). His footnote reads "The following books give similar accounts of the pagan ceremonies from which mummers' plays originated and the subsequent accretion of other material: Alan Brody, *The English Mummers and Their Plays* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1969, 1970); Alex Helm, Norman Peacock, and E.C. Cawte, *English Ritual Drama* (London: Folk-Lore Society, 1967); R.J.E. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Plays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923); E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933)" (173). It is clear to see where Squillace got his story. And so he passes it on as:

> The plays originated in a pagan ritual, performed around the time of the winter solstice, in which a god-personification of either the year or the sun was symbolically killed and resurrected to ensure fertility in the spring. During the Christian Middle Ages the ritual evolved into a Christmas ceremony, the events of the crusades and the legends of St. George infiltrating the ancient form. Depictions of individual combat between Christian and Saracen generally replaced the ritual action of killing the old year; all dead knights on both sides were resurrected at the play's end by a comic doctor. St. George anachronistically appears as the chief crusading knight in the plays, probably because the most widespread versions of his life detail his murder and resurrection in Egypt. When printing became cheap enough to reach the rural poor, who maintained the mummers' play long after it lost fashion at court in the sixteenth century, such popularizations of Christian legends as the 'The Seven Champions of Christendom' influenced mumming. Eventually, historical events of local importance entered many of the plays; thus communities along the southern coast of England often replaced Beelzebub with Buonaparte [sic] and St. George with King George, while Oliver Cromwell wandered into Irish versions. Also, the amount of slapstick humor in the plays increased over the centuries.
>
> (172-173)

Although he refers to the scholarly suggestion that Hardy was evoking the pagan fertility ritual aspect of mummers' plays, Squillace ironically refers to the narrative that he has invoked by saying, "Critical unanimity, however, does not guarantee accuracy…" (174). Squillace must not have been familiar with the New School of folklore studies and its opposition to the narrative or he would not have claimed "critical unanimity" for the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative. Never the less, the point of his comment remains astute.

In 1988, Chris Brookes, one of the founding members of the Newfoundland Mummers Troupe, published his memoires in *A Public Nuisance: A History of the Mummers Troupe*. In his account, he writes,

> When the Mummers Play arrived in Newfoundland in the sixteenth century, it was already ancient. It may have evolved from early solstice ritual. If so, then its original practitioners, feeling the days grow colder and shorter, and seeing the sun growing weaker and weaker in the sky at the time of the winter solstice, conceived the event as a cosmic battle between light and darkness – a battle which the sun was clearly losing. So, in order to give the sun a helping hand, they performed a ritual with characters representing light and darkness. Light was killed by darkness, but miraculously rose back up to life again. The idea, of course, was that the sun in the sky would follow this example and renew itself too. For in this theatre, performers did not *symbolise* light; they *were* light. A modern Western concept of character representation did not exist…while some of the dramatic imagery of earlier beliefs was co-opted by mainstream Christianity, other ceremonial elements of those beliefs continued as 'folk tradition' long after their official religious status had been supplanted. Slowly, their original meanings became forgotten, and they were practiced 'for good luck,' or simply because 'that's what we always done, boy.' Ritual became custom.
>
> (16-17)

Although Brookes does suggest the narrative as a possibility rather than a certainty, he appears to gain some amount of meaning from this story. He goes on to write,

> Suppose for the sake of argument that the Newfoundland Mummers Play was an evolutionary hand-me-down from this kind of ritual theatre. Then what interests me is this: politically speaking, its premise lies in the collective belief that reality is transformable…that the extra-theatrical reality actually can be transformed by collective effort of will. The whole purpose of its theatre is to mobilize and focus that collective will.
>
> (17)

The narrative describing ancient ritual origins empowers mummers' plays, for Brookes at least, as a performance that has the ability and the purpose to create change; cosmically or politically.

In her excellently told yet quasi-academic work, *Santa Claus: Last of the Wild Men*, Phyllis Siefker (1997) tells a tale of the Wild Man; an ancient god-turned-ghost who haunts modern Christmas revelries. According to Siefker's narrative, the Wild Man was "Originally a beast-god who reminded people of the cyclical nature of the world, of death and rebirth, this Wild Man was part of fertility performances through-out Europe. He was a godhead so strong, so universally worshipped by 'pagans,' that Christianity found him *the* major impediment to its

goal of European salvation" (6). She writes, "The Wild Man festivals themselves continued throughout the British Isles on days as May Day and Plough Monday, the Monday after Twelfth Night, when farm work resumed. These British community festivals that evolved from the Wild Man festivals are known collectively as mumming plays" (88). The author goes on to say, "Our best reports of the old Wild Man fertility rituals and their surviving remnants come from the British Isles, where a concerted effort was made in the early and mid-1900s to collect these plays before they disappeared from memory. Reginald Tiddy and E.K. Chambers did the cornerstone work on English mumming plays in the early 1900s, and Alan Brody in *English Mummers and Their Plays* added hundreds of plays to Tiddy and Chamber's compendium in the late 1960s" (89). Siefker's story is a familiar one, and she draws on the narratives told by those early folklorists that have become, in many circles, the popular understanding of mummers' plays.

Aside from scholarship and fictional literature, the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative has made its rounds in neo-pagan circles as well. In her how-to book, *Make Merry in Step and Song: A Seasonal Treasury of Music, Mummer's Plays & Celebrations in the English Folk Tradition*, Bronwen Forbes (2009) writes,

> For today's Pagan, the longsword dance is a ritualized representation of the sacrifice of the Dying God or Sacred King, as in the legends of Tammuz, Osiris, Balder, Lugh, and John Barleycorn, to name a few. Ritual human sacrifice is a subject most people are uncomfortable with, especially twenty-first-century Pagans. Throughout history, so many indigenous peoples and religious minority groups (including Jews and Christians at various times) have so often been wrongly accused of sacrificing people, especially children, that as followers of pre-Christian and/or indigenous faiths we tend to avoid or deny the topic entirely. This is perfectly understandable, but to not look honestly at our heritage and our past, even the bloody and unpleasant parts, is to not fully accept the cycle of potential within each one of us. As we will shortly see when the longsword dance is combined with the mummer's folk play, dying for the land, the King, or the people, is merely a midpoint in the story. It is the completion of the sacred cycle, the rebirth or renewal – in the form of a new baby, next year's crop, or the rejuvenated hero – that makes the death so very important and so very sacred. Scholars know that the ancient peoples of what is now England and Scotland practiced ritual human sacrifice…In addition, the Celts are known to have been headhunters.
>
> (4)

Forbes goes on to say, "Unfortunately, no concrete historical or archaeological evidence exists to confirm that the Sacred King or his substitute was sacrificed every seven years or some multiple of seven years. *Accounts to the contrary are merely wishful thinking on the part of certain credulous early folklorists*" (5, my italics). She then writes, "Religious historians speculate that *if* the sacrifice of the

King was ever practiced, it would have been in Neolithic times" (5). She continues,

> However, there is a great deal of *folkloric* evidence to support the concept of the sacrifice of a Sacred King. The strongest piece of evidence is probably the longsword dance, especially when performed in the context of the mummer's play, the traditional folk play depicting death and rebirth. After all, if an act is being simulated – mock wedding, mock sacrifice, mock feast – there is an excellent chance it was once done for real, and the mock version is a later symbolic substitution for the once very real thing.
>
> (5)

Forbes references one performance of the narrative as proof of the legitimacy of her own: *The story has been told before, so my telling is of something true*. She intertextually weaves one telling (the performance of the play) into her own (a commentary about the play) in order to establish the continuity, legitimacy, identity, and efficacy of her own performed narrative so that it can be *successful*. Forbes even begins each of her chapters, which open with a dramatic account of the next ritual to be discussed, with the phrase, "…TRACES OF ANCIENT MYSTERY…," intertextually referencing Sir Walter Scott's 1808 epic poem *Marmion* as well as Alan Brody's well-known work (which also references the phrase) and the narrative he espouses.

The Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative is not only told through the written word. In the video documentary, *Mummers and Masks: Sex & Death & Pagan Magic* (Lindum Films/ Batter Included 2002), the narrator exclaims, "This is not the modern Christmas you see in the shopping mall. This is the old one, with sex, death, and pagan magic; the Christmas behind the Christmas we know" (0:04:40). The narrator says, "This is more than just having a drink and good time with neighbors. It's thought to be a fragment of an ancient celebration that goes back well beyond the birth of Christ. It came to Newfoundland with the first settlers from England and Ireland centuries ago" (0:08:24). To a visual backdrop of ancient ruins, masked men in white cloaks, and green rocky shores (Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry, Eire, December 26th), the narrator says, "…You won't find the source of mummering in a beehive hut or on some archaeological dig . This is a living tradition, locked in the people. Tantalizing glimpses of ritual behavior surface on the day after Christmas" (0:09:00). Of the Wren Boys tradition, the narrator asks, "There's a sword, there's a white horse, we've seen a billy goat, but why are these celebrations still named after a bird? There's no textbook answer. But we know that at one time, the wren had to be ritually killed at midwinter all over Europe. A generation ago, the tradition was common across Newfoundland, too. Was it an ancient sacrifice to call back the sun and hasten

spring?" (0:14:47). Of Aughakillymaude Village Mummers Troupe, the narrator says, "A new generation is discovering the mysteries of a ritual drama that harks back to the middle ages and beyond" (0:20:21). The narrator speaks as some children perform a death and resurrection scene, "In Hollywood splatter movies, when you're dead, you're dead. But in this ancient pagan drama, when you're dead, you get a doctor" (0:20:03). Jim Ledwith, of the Enniskillen Mummers Festival, explains, "It's all about fertility. And this theme is common, believe it or not. It's common throughout Europe, this symbolism of life, death, rebirth, and the sequence of a play being performed in midwinter when the night and the earth is at a complete dead" (0:20:47). In the film, Chris Brookes, the founder on the Newfoundland Mummers Troupe, explains,

> This dead person has got be made alive and hopefully up in the sky the sun is watching this. And there's light and dark in the sky, which are doing the same thing; having a kind of a battle. And light's got to win and we have spring…It's not like a piece of theatre that you see in the arts and culture centre and pay your ticket price for. I think millennia ago it actually meant that the sun was going to come back and we were going to make it come back. I think these days it's about bringing light into a house.
>
> (0:27:37)

In the documentary, *Mummers, Masks and Mischief* (Aughakillymaude Community Association Co. Fermanagh, 2005), the narrator (Breandán Ó Dúill) begins by saying,

> Seasons change…the years pass by…Throughout Europe, over thousands of years, many colourful, exciting, and often macabre rituals evolved and developed around the measurement of time and the tracking of seasonal changes. Such rituals often asserted a victory of life over death, celebrating vitality, growth, and fertility. Today we can experience an echo of this ancient past in the masked, mischievous tradition of mumming.
>
> (0:01:12 to 0:02:09)

Críostóir MacCárthaigh, of the Dept. of Irish Folklore U.C.D., says that the "battle is the core element of the play. The plot all, as simple as it is, hinges around this combat. You're spilling blood. You're paying the debt of nature. So you're enabling, you're laying the ground work for, the New Year to begin" (07:48). The narrator says,

> In staging a miraculous return to life, the mummers play, traditionally performed midwinter, celebrates the victory of life over death. This cycle of nature was celebrated by our ancient ancestors, who built this passage grave in New Grange over five thousand years ago. It is only in the darkest depths of December that light enters New Grange,

> marking an end to the death and decay of winter and a time to look forward to growth and rebirth in nature"
>
> (0:13:33)

If the mummers' play of history never held this meaning, it seems to now, at least for the film makers and some of the mummers they feature in their documentary. And, judging by narrative they perform through the video medium, they wish it to for their audience as well.

There are numerous online sources that promote the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, and, of those, many are websites that belong to mummer teams. Ron Shuttleworth told me that it is quite possible that the narrative is a form of promotional propaganda; a way of luring in the curious with a romantic and uncanny story. Ron is likely correct. I also asked Gary, of the Coventry Mummers, about the use of this narrative in documentaries and on websites.

> Gary: I've heard narrators and I've heard mummers and I've heard morris dancers go and create this air of mystique behind what they're doing to talk it up, perhaps some of them actually believe it, but I'm sure some do it to talk it up and create this air of mystique around…"the performance"…but whether they actually believe it or…there's a mixture I would guess. It certainly makes good viewing on the DVD if you've got that sort of spin on it, really. I think some people may be worried about it if they thought it was an actual extension to a pagan festival. I generally don't. When people ask me I just say it goes back hundreds of years and that it's a begging tradition, really. But I do point out that it is people dying and being brought to life again. There's a lot more being brought to life than actually remaining dead, should we say, in the plays.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 10, 2010)

For instance, the website, "From the Green Wood: The Art and Imagery of David Lawrence" advertises "The Mummers' Play: A Midwinter Ritual," an "Illustrated Book and CD Describing the North Curry Tradition." Immediately the bait is cast:

> You may wonder what is the Mummers' play, and what is its meaning. This is what there was before there was Christmas. The Winter Solstice and the Turn of the Year was then celebrated by a play of ritual and symbolism. Here we have the fight between Summer (St. George) and Winter (The Black Knight). You shall see Summer killed by Winter and then Summer's rebirth by extraordinary means. And then you will see the death of Winter. This is the story of the Seasons. There is (supposedly) humour in this play but its true meaning lies much deeper. For, now we are in the midst of winter…' So begins the North Currey Mummers Play, which has been performed on Boxing Day since 1990: bringing to life an old Traditional British Folk Play. The players have appeared annually in this village in Somerset ever since – and now draw a large audience to witness this Midwinter Ritual: Now Re-Live this Exciting Drama in the comfort of your own Sitting Room…"

(http://www.fromthegreenwood.com/Mummers/Mummers%20Play.htm, accessed March 29, 2011)

For 26 years, there has been a festival held in Denver Colorado called the Winter Solabration. One of the features of the festival is a mummers' play performance. Of the performance, Chris Kermiet asks us, "What Is a Mummers' Play, Anyhow?" He tells us:

> Mummer's plays originated in England, and were generally performed during winter months, often around the time of the Winter Solstice. The first plays we have any record of were written down in the 1700's, but they were certainly performed before then. In fact, the lines are usually in rhyming couplets as a memory aid, and existed in an oral tradition harkening back to an earlier English pre-history. All mummer's plays have one theme in common: death and resurrection—the death of the old year and the rebirth of the new. The dying and reawakening of the earth, the triumph of light over darkness, of summer over winter.
>
> The earliest plays had a victim who was killed, and then magically resurrected. Sometimes the victim was one of the actors. Often, it was a slow-witted member of the audience (perhaps not entirely chosen at random). Although pagan in origin, after the Christianization of the British Isles, these folk plays absorbed or acquired many Christian characters. The hero often became St. George, and the villain became the Dragon…

(http://www.wsolstice.org/information.htm#mummers, accessed March 29, 2011)

Kermiet then weaves in a bit of Kirby's spin on the narrative – the one about the shaman…

> One of the most important characters is the Clown, or Fool. After the Doctor fails at reviving the victim, someone has to bring him back to life again. Why does the Clown wield the magic? This may be a direct link to early Celtic shamanism, where the shaman was a divinely inspired madman—one who could break out of the patterns and unwritten rules of a culture. In other words, a clown—since only clowns have that power.

Kermiet finishes his tale with a convention well-favored among his fellow storytellers; a kind of mummers' play raison d'etre: "But someone always gets killed, and then brought back to life. Light triumphs over darkness, and life goes on" (http://www.wsolstice.org/information.htm#mummers, accessed March 29, 2011).

Kermiet also posts a link to the *Mummers, Masks and Mischief* documentary, which we have already discussed. In the case of metafolklore, one storyteller's narration is likely more successful if he can reference another similar one. Novelty and authenticity, it would seem, are poor bedfellows.

Judging by these websites, books, and documentaries, The Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, although passé among many researchers in folkplay scholarship, is not

doing all that poorly among the lay folk, some of whom are indeed performing the folkplay - and likely telling stories about them – for audiences. But for many, like Randall Fraser, the founder of the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective, the story about mummers' play origins has become a palimpsest of media and theories. On January 12, 2011, I interviewed Randall about some of his views on mummers' plays and the origins of the tradition. I also asked him where his views came from and why he believed them to be true.

> Mat: Also, how did you glean that? Where did that come from? I'm interested in, you know, are these perceptions coming from scholarship, are they coming from popular writing, are they coming from literature, are they coming from all those sources, that kind of thing?
>
> Randall: Kind of, yeah, I mean, where does all this come from, how did I get to it, is kind of what you just described in a lot of ways. I mean, it started with, you know, google "mummers"… And the first that came up, actually, one of the very first things was the reference to this being the history, the root, of 'mum's the word.' **[Note: The "mum's the word" element was obviously relayed to the other members of the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective, forming a key piece of their commonly told origin story, as it has been mentioned to me by the others.]** So I went, 'Ah, that's funny.' So, of course, originally, mummering was a panto; was totally silent, or, you, with sound effects and things, but there was no dialogue, no text. And that kind of made sense. But I realized it moved on and, you know, I was looking at all the different names that came up for it…Japers…I'd have to go online now or get my stuff out to figure out all the names again. But it was, yeah, it started online, I got some references, went to the library, dug through, talked to people, said, 'Well, what do you know about it?' 'Well I know that my Newfoundland friends are always talking about it,' 'Well I know there's something they do in Philadelphia,' 'I know that…' So it really was just every little lead. It was one of those funny situations where, you know, as soon as you start on something, it's like, or, as soon as you buy a car, you see that car everywhere. So it was like, as soon as I sort of put mummers in my brain, suddenly I was coming across references and sources and information. How did I get to the kernel of that, was, just looking at the thing…how many times certain elements were repeated, like death and resurrection. Well, in all the references, that I read, death and resurrection was a core element, so I went, Okay, that's the thematic seed. Boom, that's the thing that everything turns around. That it's always community based. Well, it's always, everywhere that I was able to find it, it wasn't being done by a professional theatre company, so it wasn't being done by anybody that that's their "job," it's always something they just did. You know, 'Oh, it's Christmas! Must be mummers' time. Oh, it's Easter. Must be time to pull out the closet, you know, the decorations for the mummers' play,' you know. And I thought, oh, okay, so the next element is that it's community driven; it's people just doing it…And then, when I found the comparison to caroling, that just sort of…What that gave me was the hook to decipher it for people when I was talking to them, because they'd say, 'Ah, what's a mummery? I don't know. What does that…How does that make any…" It's like a funny word, to begin with, and when people hear things they can't reference immediately they just…[stares blankly]… stare at you funny. But when I was able to say, 'Well, you know going caroling at Christmas?' And they go, 'Oh yeah! That's great! I love that. We used to do that at Grandma's. Don't do it anymore…' 'It's like that, except you do a skit or a

play.' 'Oh, okay. I get it.' You know, suddenly I was able to get it across to people and then that opened it up into…we made into something we could talk about then, once they had a frame of reference. **[Note: The caroling aspect forms another key part of the AAMC origin narrative, as the other members have relayed this as well.]** And, for myself, too, I guess, when I look back at it, you know, until I sort of had that seed of that idea, I was sort of like, 'Well, how does this land?' You know, so…So I guess that's really where it all came from for me. It was just a little bit of everything, everywhere, you know. But, it started online and then it started unfolding. People said, 'Oh, I heard you were interested in…I got this funny little book, na na na.' 'Oh, hey, cool, cool. Can I keep it?' 'Nooo!' [Laughs] You know, that kind of thing. And then, you had given me some literature to read and I read all that stuff, too. So there, yeah.

Mat: Is there a theory that you gravitate towards? And, if so, why do you think?

Randall: Well I've…I think the way I…what I've been thinking about, and this has been, you know, as I've started discovering this, you know, people saying, 'It started da da da da da!' And I'm sort of like, 'Okay, that's, yeah, hmm….' And then discovering that there was all these theories was sort of leading me to think, well, they're probably all true within their perspective; within their paradigm of thinking. So, scholars tend to go for what is written down, right. Extant plays. So in terms of extant plays, yes it started in the seventeenth century, thereabouts. In terms of thematic roots and the evolution of it as a particular form, I think it probably, in the forms that it exists now, I mean, when you look at the form that it exists now, you see people like us doing it at a festival. Now, we have people coming to us in this case, but essentially it's still a bunch of community members – because we all either live or work in that neighborhood – are…we're presenting for our friends, you know. That's, so it's still keeping with that. Whereas you go to Philadelphia, or Cincinnati…I think…wherever…Philadelphia I think it is…To them it's more of a parade. Like they…and it's a big parade! I mean, oh my gosh! It's amazing what they do. They've taken it to the level of Carnivale or Mardi Gras, you know. It's extraordinary. But it has almost nothing to with what we originally perceived. But it came out of some root…And then you go back, 'Well, okay, so did it all go all the way back to the pagans and the druids and all that stuff?' and I think…I think they're all right within their perspective of learning, because they come from a particular group of people doing a particular kind of study and, you know, if you're partial to a particular era, you're always going to say that this is where this is from, you know. To pinpoint it, you know, it's hard to say. The fact that it almost always appears around Easter or the Winter Solstice, so, those are both times of transition, right? And they're times of rebirth transition, specifically. So the new year, the end of the nights getting shorter, or the nights getting longer, the beginning of days getting longer, Easter of course is the beginning of spring, and then all of those elements. And so those make me think that they go as far back as our celebration of those transitions. And so, if you want to go…how far back have we been acknowledging…aware of and acknowledging and celebrating those times of the year and those transitions in our world, I would say that they go back that far because that's what the makes the germ really…that's where the seed of transformation of life into death or death into life, something dies, something's reborn, and the fact that it's tied to those…You don't really see them happening in, you know, at the Summer Solstice, you don't seem them happening at the fall equinox, you see them at times of major celestial change, I guess, for lack of a better word. So I thought those two elements

> together kind of make me think that they go quite a long way back, and probably even further back than the morality plays of the medievals and back to the pagan times, in terms of its roots. In terms of its actual form, I think the morality plays and the…mystery plays of, you know, medieval Europe really kind of hold that. Although I had this harebrained idea in my mind that if…you could probably find some equivalent to it in Egyptian, Mesopotamian, all those ancient worlds. I'm sure that if you go back to studying Greek history, there's an element of that being presented then. If you go back to Roman history, there's probably an element that you could find if you went looking. If you go back to Mesopotamians, and the Babylonians, if you go looking, I'd bet you you would find seeds or other versions of that same idea of community sharing, of a particular time of year, and a particular psychological stage of tran…you know, where you'd have to let go of something to get the new thing. It's something has to die, some form has to die, so that a new form can take its place. And, you know, I think they've…Just to some that up, within their own spheres they're all correct, but I think it's actually larger. I think if somebody really wanted to go really far with the roots, they could go back to every culture that's ever existed, you know.
>
> Mat: Getting into like that human archetype…
>
> Randall: That this is something archetypal, yeah. That this is…And it's tied very strongly to the fact that we are an earth circling a sun with a moon circling us. You know? And it was particularly auspicious and became one of the central turning points of our play that, this year, we had a lunar eclipse on the solstice, full moon. You know? It's not going to happen again for…and this is…here's an interesting thing…either way you look at it, none of us are going to be alive the next time that happens, so that was, like, awesome. And then it was attached, that it happened at that time, surrounding that particular turning point was like, well, it's kind of got to be in the play, you know. And it becomes the centre point for our little story, or, a specific…a turning point for our story.
>
> (Personal Interview, Edmonton, January 12, 2011)

Now that I have discussed some of the various origin stories told about mummers' plays, I will take the liberty of suggesting another.

A Modest Proposal: The Untraceable Origins of Folklore

Vansina (1985) writes of tales and performances, "there never need have been a single moment when a single person created a new tale" (53). The author goes on to say,

> Improvisation on an existing stock of images and forms is the hallmark of fictional narrative of all sorts. Such tales develop during performance. They never are invented from scratch, but develop as various bits of older tales are combined, sequences altered or improvised, descriptions of characters shifted, and settings placed in other locales. Unlike poetry and its sisters there is no moment at which a tale is composed. Innovation is only incremental from performance to performance. Therefore such tales, which do contain quite a bit of historical information, are difficult to use. One does not know what refers to which period. A tale such as 'Puss in Boots' in Europe obviously contains archaic elements – but of what period? Similarly, tricksters' stories elsewhere also contain

> archaic elements – recognized because they could not apply to life today – but we don't know of which age.
>
> (12)

Oral traditions such as tales and epics (and perhaps mummers' plays) display no definable point of inception and are given to incremental adaptation, taking place from performance to performance. They contain elements that convey some mysterious yesteryear, such as "Merry Ole England," but these a-historical timescapes are impossible to place because they are the homogenization of ages and of imagined pasts (see Judge 1991; 1993; 1997). According to Vansina, poetry is the only oral tradition that can be traced to a prototypical original (16). "In all other cases archetypes cannot be reconstructed, or, indeed, as for tales and some epics, an original never existed." In this way, the concept of "an original" and "variants" or "versions" is misleading. Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1980) explains that no tale can be disembodied from its particular telling, or performance, and that the concept of a prototypical tale that precludes and informs all variant performances is a false one. Smith writes,

> In short, the origin of '*the* story of Cinderella' has not yet been determined. Moreover, in the view of most modern folklorists, it cannot be determined: not because the evidence is so meager – or so overwhelming – but rather because it becomes increasingly clear that to ask the question in that form is already to beg it.
>
> (218)

Smith goes on to say that "there can be no ultimately basic sets of relations among narratives, and thus also no 'natural' genres or 'essential' types, and thus no limit to the number or nature of narratives that may sometime be seen as versions or variants of each other" (222). According to Smith, "For any particular narrative, there is no single *basically* basic story subsisting beneath it but, rather, an unlimited number of other narratives that can be *constructed in response* to it or *perceived as related* to it" (221). Thus, the patterns that seem to indicate some singular ancestor for mummers' plays, according to this literary theory, would be an illusion of *relations* based upon the particular interests of the perceiver (222). Vansina (1985) goes on to say, in the case of epics,

> A concept of an 'original' makes no sense here. Strictly speaking, where there is no original there can be no variant…even though epic pieces are related to each other. To reconstruct an ideal form would merely be to establish a list of elements common to the messages of the examined performances, which always are but a percentage of actual performances over, say, a generation. Yet such comparisons establish at lease what the total field of discourse is in a given epic, in terms of plot, setting, personages, themes, and obligatory episodes and formulas.

(51-52)

Although there may be common elements to all performances, such as, in the case of the Hero-Combat Play, the battle between a hero and villain that ends in death with an ensuing resurrection, “we cannot think of an archetype, and we cannot claim for certain that the parts common to all versions existed in an original” (54). Indeed, to purport the “Hero-Combat” folkplay type altogether suggests some ancestral relative common to all “versions” or “variants.” This may not be the case.

This might appear to be an ironic (or idiotic) suggestion considering I have just spent the last 35 pages discussing the different *versions* of the *types* of mummers’ play origin stories told by different people. What I am suggesting, however, is not that there are not multiple *types* of narratives told about the origins of mummers’ plays but, rather, that there may not be an “original” mummers’ play at all, at least not in the sense of some spontaneously invented or immaculately conceived source. If we were to follow mummers’ plays back through time, instead of ending up at some Ur-performance, we might be left to wander, following trails of breadcrumbs that lead to nothing more than more breadcrumbs. Perhaps, just perhaps, there is no mother bread loaf; no cottage to go home to.

In terms of a “typical” performance, Vansina (1985) writes, “the historian is faced with a source whose versatility severely limits any conclusion from any performance with regard to the past. On the other hand, one performance is as good a source as the other” (53). When trying to discover the mummers play of old, if there was one, every performance is equally valid, especially when considering the commentary about the performance; the story told about the tradition (which is, too, a performance; a tradition) (see Dundes 1966: 508). No one performance is “purer” than another because there may not be any “pure” source material.

Dick, who has been performing with the Coventry Mummers for 33 years, told me:

> But we do also understand that that script was only what was recorded on that performance on that day at that very time and, as you know, a mummers’ play you’ll perform in the morning at nine o’clock with the same people, and by three o’clock in the afternoon you’re doing the plays and they’ve completely changed, or a lot of it has actually changed. So saying just because you’ve recorded that sequence, and that becomes tradition, and you have to keep to that script is a little bit…I mean you’ve got to be a little bit relaxed with that because it’s an oral tradition…it changes, and even if you change the characters [performers], you’ll still change it because each character [performer] has got his own emphasis and his own little ways of saying the same line,

> he'd still say a couple of words in a different way, you know. So it's the oral tradition, I think, you've got to understand that it changes. But you wouldn't go in and actually sit down, "I'm going to re-write it," but if somebody's performing and if they put an extra line in during that performance, that's what normally happens. But you wouldn't actually sit down and say, "Right, we're going to re-write this, and we're going to change it," because, you know, it has to develop as you perform. And I think you're still keeping the tradition that way…That is how the tradition always went. If you were doing this play a hundred years ago, the same thing was happening. They'd get out in the morning and in the afternoon or the next day the play would be slightly different.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 18, 2010)

Maybe the nature of the mummers' play phenomenon is adaptation; evolution. Just as a biological species or a folktale slowly changes over time in unnoticeable increments, so too might a folkplay evolve. And, just as there is no clear point of origin for a species or a folktale, so too might the mummers' play phenomenon have no discernable historic origin; no definable point of genesis. At one glimpse in space and time the phenomenon appears one way, and at another glimpse it appears as something else. I believe this hypothetical origin story deserves more attention than I can offer it here and I do plan to explore the idea in the future.

The Life History of Metafolklore

The Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative has become a source of polemics. For some, the debate divides "serious scholars" of the subject from "neo-pagan romanticists." Peter Millington (2002) wrote:

> One unifying factor for the TDRG [Traditional Drama Research Group] was that the original members all shared a skepticism of the life-cycle theory of origins for the plays. It would be fair to say that some of us were embarrassed by these views, and by the people who espoused them. Such people were effectively discouraged from joining the Group, and this probably have caused some alienation and conflict, although it did allow members to focus on new areas of research.
>
> (10)

Millington (2002) also writes: "because of the pre-eminence of 'death and resurrection' in the ritual theories, plays without this theme were largely ignored. Consequently, the English folklorists' view of what constituted a folk play became very narrow…" (11). For example, in 1924, A.R. Wright wrote that the folkplays "cover a fairly wide area, and bring out clearly the underlying identity of the play, and the obviously single origin of the versions, despite the numerous minor and superficial variations found even in villages which are neighbour. *The essence of the play is, of course, a combat and the revival of the slain,*

possibly of ritual origin" (my italics, A.R.Wright, 1924, p.97. Quoted in Millington 2002: 29).

Scholars were not and are not the only storytellers who focus on "death and resurrection." I asked the members of the Coventry Mummers and the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective, "What makes a mummers' play a mummers' play?" Nearly every one of them told me a story that went something like, 'a mummers' play is a play that has death and resurrection as its plot and thematic crux'. Remember the storyteller's favorite convention; the mummers' play raison d'etre?

For example:

> Mat: What are the essential elements of a mummers' play that make it a mummers' play?
>
> Gary: For me, the hero-combat performance. Well, there's the five characters: the introducer…the hero, then you've got the adversary, you've got the doctor, and then the summer-up and collector. So that's five basic elements. But then they are woven, perhaps, into greater bits…the death and…it's not a resurrection…it's a death and coming back to life, by the doctor. So, sometimes they're taken away dead but very often they're brought back to life again, and everybody lives happily ever after really…That's an essential element of the play and how to recognize it. There are obviously some differences in some plays that make it a little bit more hard to recognize, but the elements are still there if you can look for them.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 10, 2010)
>
> Mat: What makes a mummers' play, a mummers' play?
>
> Brian: I'd say the only really common theme is a death and a resurrection. I think every mummers' play that I know of, you've got that in it. You get slight variations of types: the Hero-Combat play, Saint George style play, and you've got the Darby Tup, which is a form of beast play…and from East Anglia you've got the Plough-Wooing play, where the same again, somebody gets killed and brought back to life again.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 16, 2010)
>
> Mat: So what, in your opinion, makes a mummers' play, a mummers' play?
>
> Dick: A mummers' play, a mummers' play…
>
> Mat: How would you recognize it if you saw it?
>
> Dick: Normally we would recognize it be the characters…A mummers' play, normally, is about death and resurrection. You normally have a couple of leading characters, there's normally a fight, there'll be a cure, and there'll be a few little humorous bits in between…and the plays actually change and the characters change slightly, but that's the basics. There is a bit a fight, a bit of humor, a doctor or somebody that comes out that has

> a resurrection, and then a few humorous bit and then a bit of a dance and a sing-off…And for me, that's what a mummers' play…the basics are…
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 18, 2010)
>
> Mat: Do you have any idea of why people, you know, how the tradition came to be? Why do people do these plays?
>
> John: The usually given reason is that they're a ritual performance. It was the death of the old year and the rebirth of the new, which is the plot of the play, if you like. A character is killed and then brought back to life. So you can see some sort of ritual origins in that.
>
> (Personal Interview, Coventry, December 23, 2010)
>
> Mat: What, in your mind, what are the essential elements of a mummers' play? What makes a mummers' play, a mummers' play?
>
> Jon: Um, I'll try to rank them, too.
>
> Mat: That'd be great [laughs].
>
> Jon: Number one, tongue-in-cheek. Number two, writ in a week. Number three…social comments. Or, although that could go into tongue-in-cheek…but, social comments. Number four, death and resurrection. Did I say "stock characters" yet? Number five, stock characters. So I think that's, you know…Number six, rhyming? Does it rhyme? Does it always rhyme?
>
> (Personal Interview, Edmonton, February 18, 2011)

These mummers believe and tell that folk commentary – that mummers' plays center on a death and resurrection – even if they don't believe in the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative. So, is there any connection between the theme and the narrative? Did the death and resurrection theme stem from the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, or perhaps did the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative stem from the death and resurrection theme? Before we regrettably venture into some chicken-or-egg paradox, it must be remembered that the death and resurrection theme is not a given; it is by no means a universally accepted objective truth. The Coventry Mummers above may have been speaking in the context of their Christmastide plays (which are, primarily, Hero-Combat plays) and not their wooing plays, in which death and resurrection are not so prominent. And, as Peter Millington has implied, the death and resurrection theme is not the be all and end all of the mummers' play phenomenon. Rather, the fundamentality of the death and resurrection theme is, like the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, metafolklore; it is a folk commentary about the tradition; something people say about what they do. While the death and resurrection theme may be a popular plot convention within the performances of the plays (i.e. Many play performances contain a death and

resurrection), its real fundamentality appears to be a plot convention within the performances of mummers' play metafolklore (i.e. Many people who talk about mummers' plays say that death and resurrection is fundamental). Here we see how metafolklore becomes incredibly complex. Not only is there the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, there is also the A Mummers' Play Is A Folkplay About Death And Resurrection Narrative. A person can easily believe in and tell one of these narratives and not the other (like some members of the Coventry Mummers and Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective), or both (like some members of the Coventry Mummers and Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective), or neither. It is interesting to consider that the A Mummers' Play Is A Folkplay About Death And Resurrection Narrative may have evolved from the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, or vice versa, but now neither narrative is dependent on the other for its survival. The two narratives may be memetically related but live independently. On the other hand, there may be no real "genealogical" connection between the two other than that both share death and resurrection themes. Let me explain: In the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, the idea is that the plays derive from some ancient pagan ritual that centered on death and resurrection as its cosmic design. So death and resurrection are a major theme of this metafolklore. In the A Mummers' Play Is A Folkplay About Death and Resurrection Narrative, the idea is that mummers' plays always (or most always) deal with death and resurrection. So, again, death and resurrection are a major theme here. Perhaps the seeming connection between ancient pagan rituals and the death and resurrection theme is based more on shared themes than historic continuity. Dundes (1997) reminds us that although two narratives fall under a shared motif heading, this does not necessarily imply any genetic relation (197).

It is also interesting to consider how metafolklore influences performance. Those performers who tell the A Mummers' Play Is A Folkplay About Death and Resurrection Narrative will likely include a death and resurrection in their mummers' play performance, otherwise their performance wouldn't look so much like a mummers' play, at least not to the performers. Likewise, if every play an audience member had ever seen contained a death and resurrection as its thematic crux, it seems likely that they would tell the A Mummers' Play Is A Folkplay About Death and Resurrection Narrative.

For the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective, adaptability and relevance to the community are essential to a mummers' play. As John pointed out, social commentary is part of what makes a mummers' play a mummers' play. If a play is performed in Edmonton, Alberta, in 2010 and the social commentary is about nineteenth-century Warwickshire, there is a good chance of confusion. Thus a

new play is written every year, with inside jokes, satire, and social commentary particular to the performers and audience members who will participate in the play. For the Coventry Mummers, adherence to tradition is central, especially when performing the Christmas plays in the villages around Coventry. Small gags are inserted and the odd remark is made here and there, but the Coventry Mummers consider themselves "custodians of tradition" and so they keep each villages' play largely intact. Despite the living and changing idiosyncratic nature of their performances, the Coventry Mummers do not rewrite their Christmas plays every year but carry on the tradition forms they have inherited.

Just how and in what ways metafolklore interacts with play performance is, for me, unanswered. While certain interactions are clear, like those mentioned above, others remain ambiguous. It would be easy, for instance, if the Coventry Mummers all believed and told The Begging/House-Visiting Narrative and, as such, only begged and house-visited. Yes, they do "beg" for money, food, and drink, but so does Bronwyn Forbes, according to her book (2009: 34), by collecting money for charity following her performances. She tells the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative, so wouldn't it be fine if she and her fellow performers dressed in fur and feigned some sacrifice in the woods? Why does Forbes have St. George – a religio-nationalistic character – as her protagonist and not some leaf-clad wild man? Of course, a true study of these things would not benefit from such grossly conspicuous evidence and we are forced instead to deal with subtleties that do not yield such obvious clarities. It is my hope that such a study will take place, or is taking place, that will further illuminate the complex relationship between metafolklore and performance.

The Experience of Narrative: Constative and Performative Utterances, or, Why People Believe What

> The truths of storytelling are not the truths of reportage. The truths of reportage finally depend upon their correspondence to an externally verifiable reality that happened. The truths of storytelling may incorporate the so-called real event but they don't depend for their effect on the fact that a researcher can corroborate the event occurred. They have to come alive in the imagination of the viewer and, for that to occur, the necessary precondition is that they come alive in the imagination of the storyteller…
>
> (David Milch, in "An Imaginative Reality: a discussion with David Milch and Keith Carradine about the melding of historical and fictional characters," *Deadwood*)

As David Milch explains, factual corroboration is not essential to a good story, nor does it ensure a story's success with an audience.

Alan Dundes (1966) tells us that folk commentary is a “raconteur’s asides” (511-512). At what point does anecdote transform into reportage, or hearsay into history, or history into metafolklore? Does folk commentary or metafolklore depend on facts, or is there something else at stake? In what way does a story hinge on truth or success? What, then, make a “good story”?

According to the speech theory developed by J.L. Austin (1962), facts are *constative* in nature; that is, they are meant to be informative and can be evaluated as either true or false; adhering to an objective, corroborative reality (see also Jacobsen 1971: 357). However, there are speech acts that can be considered *performative* in nature, meaning that the speech act or narrative is not so much true or false as it is successful or unsuccessful in its ability to capture a genuineness of belief, intention, or meaningfulness. Rather than being informative, performative acts are *transformative.* In a sense, they establish an agreed-upon experience of reality between parties that can only be evaluated based on the genuineness of the intentions of each party to participate in the reality that has been or is being performed via the speech act or narrative.

Bruner (1983) explains that, “Stories, like ritual, are transformative insofar as they are experienced and performed (Turner 1982). Just as a story is never actualized except in a particular telling, the full power of a story is never felt unless it is realized in an experience” (73). Such a story can be told by a people about themselves, intertextually incorporating the narratives and tropes of others that are seen as meaningful. There are, according to Austin (1962), certain requirements a performative procedure must meet in order to be successful. First, “The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked” (34). Second, “The procedure must be executed by all participants correctly” (35). Third, “The procedure must be executed by all participants completely” (36). In this way, Smith’s narrative can exist in a state that ‘fact’ tends to find inhospitable; that is, as real for some and unreal for others. The hinge is agent participation. Austin explains that a performative act is successful if it can be judged as ‘happy’ by those experiencing it. Likewise, as Bruner (1983) tells us, stories are not transformative unless they are realized as experience (73). This only comes about when the story heard corresponds to the understandings which precede it; those understandings that compose are composed of the complex network of senses and memories we call biography.

According to Johnson (1993), “The self is defined by not only its biological makeup as a physical organism, but also by its ends, its interpersonal relationships, its cultural traditions, its institutional commitments, and its

historical context. Within this evolving context it must work out its identity" (150). The author goes on to say:

> MacIntyre describes the narrative context of our self-understanding and our action as follows: 'man in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, is essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship: I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. " MacIntyre regards a moral agent as a character in, and coauthor of, an enacted experiential narrative. An agent is born into a web of narratives, and he or she must define their own end (*telos*) by means of a narrative quest.
>
> (153)

In this way, life is a narrative. What informs and frames that narrative are the foundational aspects of place, belief, and action. These aspects are not necessarily *facts*, but *beliefs*. Metafolklore establishes a narrative about folk beliefs and traditions. In the case of mummers' plays, the stories told about them are considered by those who tell and believe them to be "historical" only in that they are stories about what happened and why and by whom.

But, as Paul Ricoeur (2004) points out, "The problem is posed that will be the torment of any literary philosophy of history: what difference separates history from fiction, if both narrate?" (241). On this, he answers:

> The pair historical narrative and fictional narrative, as they appear as already constituted at the level of literary genres, is clearly antinomical. A novel, even a realist novel, is something other than a history book. They are distinguished from each other by the nature of the implicit contract between the writer and the reader. Even when not clearly stated, this contract sets up different expectations on the side of the reader and different promises on that of the author. In opening a novel, the reader is prepared to enter an unreal universe concerning which the question where and when these things took place is incongruous. In return, the reader is disposed to carry out what Coleridge called a 'willful suspension of disbelief,' with the reservation that the story told is an interesting one. The reader willingly suspends his disbelief, his incredulity, and he accepts playing along as if – as if the things recounted did happen. In opening a history book, the reader expects, under the guidance of a mass of archives, to reenter a world of events that actually occurred. What is more, in crossing the threshold of what is written, he stays on guard, casts a critical eye, and demands if not a true discourse comparable to that of a physics text, at least a plausible one, one that is admissible, probable, and in any case honest and truthful. Having been taught to look out for falsehoods, he does not want to have to deal with a liar.

(261)

I would argue that the participants of metafolklore – the reader and writer or teller and hearer – enter a contract of either a constative or performative nature. If constative, the teller agrees to accurately recount – to the best of his ability – factual data. If performative, the teller agrees to accurately describe or articulate – again, to the best of his ability – both participants' shared sense of identity, sense of the world, sense of existence in cosmos; in a sense, their shared ontological themes, motifs, and sensations. The teller agrees to describe the performance so as to establish an experience of that performance that is meaningfully shared by the participants.

Let me give you an example. If a person were to say, "Mummers' plays are about death and resurrection," no one could possibly say he was wrong if, for him, mummers' plays were indeed about death and resurrection. One could, however, say that his utterance was unsuccessful if neither he nor anybody else believed what he was saying. Likewise, if someone said, "Mummers' plays are pagan; they celebrate and ritualize the rhythms of the seasons," that person's metafolklore would be successful if, for him and his audience, his statement accurately described a shared experience of mummers' plays. For those neo-pagans who perform mummers' plays as part of their solstice rituals, mummers' plays are indeed pagan and the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative articulates their reality. For those who think of themselves as humble performers, bringing merriment door-to-door in exchange for some food, drink, or money, mummers' plays are a begging tradition, and the House-Visiting/Begging Tradition Narrative is apt. Certainly, today, there are those who tell each type of narrative because their experience of the tradition varies, and could we suggest that it was any different in the past? Such a question might have no answer, at least not right now, but we might consider that mummers' plays, since they have been performed and watched, have been talked about in different ways, just as they are now.

Both J.G. Frazer and Randall Fraser are performing narratives of a zeitgeist and negotiating identity; they are telling stories that, for them, describe the experience of reality as they know it. The origin stories told as part of mummers' play metafolklore are important to those who tell them because, as Zerubavel (2003) states, they "articulate identities" (101). He explains,

> The special mnemonic status of beginnings is quite evident from the disproportionately high representation, in our general memories from college, of the first few weeks or our freshman year. It also explains the significant role of 'origin myths' in defining social communities as well as in solidifying the legitimacy of political regimes. *Origins* help

> articulate identities, and where communities locate their beginnings tell us quite a lot about how they perceive themselves.
>
> (Zerubavel 2003: 101)

He goes on to say that "…'deepening' our historical roots also helps to solidify our identity as well as legitimacy. In the same way that taller buildings require deeper foundations, pedigrees assume greater solidity the 'deeper' they go back in time" (Zerubavel 2003: 102). This helps to explain why the belief that mummers' plays are ancient in origin is so popular. The older the folkplays are, for some, the more legitimate they are. Even more, "Trying to establish 'deep' pedigrees might also entail reviving old, sometimes extinct group identities" (Zerubavel 2003: 103). For instance, the Druids, Celts, or Ancient Pagans.

In his BA Honors paper, Gash (1998) states, "It is my intention to show that the HPE [Heptonstall Pace Egg folkplay] is part of a continuing tradition" (20). Although his work is an excellent academic and ethnographic study, it is also a telling of a story; a performance with a performative design, deemed either successful or unsuccessful in the ability of its narrative to create for its audience an experience of either belief or disbelief that the HPE is a genuine tradition with ancient roots. The same can be said of the other works mentioned above. They are performances of narratives, each with a performative intent to create some experience or perception of reality for its audience.

These stories (including films, academic studies, modern popular accounts, and neo-pagan impressions) are not only *about* mummers' play performances, they are performances in and of themselves. As each story is told, it influences the perception of the tradition and invokes a desired experience for the audience. Like the folk dramas, the narratives are meant to create a certain reality for those who participate in them.

Eli Rozik (2002), in his *The Roots of Theatre: Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin*, writes,

> What is behind the spell cast on both scholars and layfolk alike by the ritual theory of origins? There is probably a deep reason for its widespread acceptance. I believe that in general people are inclined to adopt answers willingly, even for questions for which there are no ready answers, if these fire their imagination. A preliminary solution could well be that the charm of this theory lies in its metaphorical value: deriving theatre from ancient ritual, particularly from magic religious practices, lends the theatre a magic, *uncanny*, and numinous aura, which seems to correspond to the spellbound fascination that people experience in the theatre. The question is whether or not, with regard to theatre, words such as 'spell,' 'charm,' and 'magic' are true metaphorical descriptions of its nature.
>
> (x)

I would venture to say that Rozik is probably right, to some extent and in some cases. The narratives people tell and weave themselves into create for them a web of identity. If this web harmonizes person to experience, then the narrative proves successful. Mummers' plays may not have descended from ancient pagan life-ways, but they certainly are a ritualistic activity of revitalization and resurrection for the folks on Alberta Avenue for whom the phenomenon is helping to bring their community to life.

There did not appear to be any general uniformity of belief amongst the Coventry Mummers or the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective. Each participant believed in the origin narrative he or she chose (or none at all) and was generally unconcerned with what the others believed. It seems, therefore, incorrect to simply say that participants will believe in the metafolklore that best serves their purposes. It does appear that this is sometimes the case, though, especially when we see the origin narratives told by performers who are, essentially, trying to entice and captivate their audiences, or by neo-pagan observers who are trying to invoke certain desired sentiments through their enactment of mummers' plays. If one desires a pagan ritual, it is therefore convenient to believe that mummers' plays are of pagan ritual origin. As Rozik succinctly explains, if one desires a thrilling performance, then a belief in the thrilling origin of the performance serves the desire. Just why exactly a person will believe and tell one story over another is not something we can easily identify. The relevance of a narrative to a person's ontological identity is no doubt highly complex in nature. Origin narratives change and interweave and evolve, adapting to new knowledge, experiences, and identities. For many of the mummers I spoke with, the issue of origin stories is no real issue at all. Perhaps this is because, for them, uniformity relies not on belief but on intention. Why must we all believe the same origin story about what we do if we all agree on the importance of what we do?

Oddly enough, the issue of origin stories is much more fervent amongst scholars than mummers. Then again, scholars are, in a way, participants in the tradition as well – as performers of metafolklore; tellers of stories about the tradition. Zerubavel (2003) writes,

> As we very well know, each of the different parties waging such heated mnemonic battles tends to regard its own historical narrative, which is normally based on its own typically one-sided 'time maps,' as the only correct one, which is quite understandable given the unmistakably partisan political agenda it is specifically designed to promote. A more dispassionate, nonpartisan, and therefore impartial historical account would require some willingness to consider *multiple narratives*, which inevitably imply the possibility of entertaining multiple perspectives on the past.
>
> (Zerubavel 2003: 109)

Zerubavel goes on to suggest that "…there are not only many different patterns of organizing the past in our heads but also various different methods for arranging each of those specific patterns. Only a pronouncedly multiperspectival look at

several such ‘maps’ *together* can provide us with a complete picture of the inevitably multilayered, multifaceted social topography of the past” (2003: 110).

Is there room in folkplay scholarship for multiple, parallel origin stories? Constatively, perhaps not. But when metafolklore is considered performatively, as stories which are told by people for people whose experiences of the world are best articulated by those stories, then surely we can accept that multiple identities – multiple tellers and multiple audiences - necessitate multiple tellings.

The Scholar as Storyteller

When we, as academic researchers, come across a story told by and for a group of people, what is our immediate response? Do we seek to verify its validity with the factual, objective world, or do we seek out its purpose; its meaning? The answer likely depends on the nature of the story, as well as the nature of the research. Those truly fanciful tales told to the folklorist or the anthropologist by the hearth need no verification because they do not impinge on the scholar’s sense of reality; there is no threat, no contention for what is real, especially among academic peers. Rather, it is the story that challenges what the scholar believes about himself, about the world, which he must vigorously address. He tells his story in journals, in books, in monographs, at conferences, and he no doubt believes it to be true, or, at least, that it *may* be true. His story, to him, makes sense. It fits the evidence; fits the world as he understands it. Creation myths and origin stories are utterly important to those who tell and believe them, and, in the case of scholars, this does not change. Although academic theories are informed by evidence, they never the less represent a proponent scholar’s understanding of the world; an ontological framework constructed with materials of experience and identity. A scholar professes a theory because it can be organized along pre-existing lines of evidence and narrative themes.

The problem with mummers’ plays and the stories told about them is that the metafolklore of the layfolk directly can, and does in many instances, directly challenge the metafolklore – or scholarly theories – of the academic, and vice versa. It is, therefore, the scholar’s prerogative to intervene; to tell the origin story or creation myth as he understands it. But, in doing so, is he *interfering*? By telling his own stories – his own theories, is the scholar damaging the “natural evolution” of the metafolklore of those who participate in the mummers’ play phenomenon – including the mummers, the audience members, and the people who talk about mummers’ plays? Are scholars who tell stories that contradict those of the participants becoming some kind of Violet Alford?

Simon Lichman (1982) describes how, in 1932, folklorist Violet Alford went to Marshfield, in the Cotswold Hills of southwest England, to investigate the village's traditional mummers' play. She had been told about the folkplay by her brother, Marshfield's Vicar. Alford's brother had overheard his gardener reciting lines from the folkplay, and, knowing of his sister's interest in such things, informed her of the event. Alford went to Marshfield and orchestrated a revival of the village's mummers' play. But, for Alford, "the villagers were incidental—caught in time—the possessors of something that they did not quite understand" (107). Despite the mummers' suggestions, Alford would not condone any pragmatic changes to the play and wished to cut out any elements of song, speech or plot that she perceived as "Victorian accretion" (108). For Alford, the performance had to remain "traditional," adhering to her concept of what a mummers' play should be. Lichman explains how Alford's intellectual presence has influenced the village's performance of their mummers' play and its metafolklore for decades since. Had Alford never gone to Marshfield, what would have become of its mummers' play? What stories would the villagers tell? What right did Alford have to participate, as she did, in the life history of Marshfield's mummers' play? Alford has not been the only scholar to influence mummers' play metafolklore. Indeed, every word written, published, and spoken, has the potential of influencing the body of metafolklore told about folkplays.

But can we, as scholars, avoid influencing the "natural evolution" of the things we study, if there is such a thing? This question became paramount in my mind as I conducted my research and I found myself becoming tangled in the very process I was trying to study. Randall was asking me about mummers' plays, where they came from, how they developed, what they meant; Nick Lees was interviewing me for the *Edmonton Journal*, asking me the same questions. Frederick from *Alberta Prime Time* was putting my image on air, enticing me to formally acknowledge the strangeness of the phenomenon and its presence in Edmonton that he had felt upon reading my and Randall's interview in the *Edmonton Journal*. Some of the audience members I interviewed following the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective's Saturday night performance quoted nearly word for word from the newspaper article and, in one participant's case, claimed that she "just knew it," as though it was, for her, common knowledge; common folk commentary.

I was studying the influence of scholarship and literature on mummers' plays and their metafolklore and here I was being asked to give my scholarly opinion – tell my scholarly story – about mummers' plays for a director of a mummers' troupe. I was being asked to tell stories that would then be told in a story in a newspaper that would no doubt be read – and was read – by audience members. I was, in effect, living my topic of study directly. This was only magnified by the fact that a video journalist happened to read that story in the newspaper – about the "modern day detective" that I apparently was – and was compelled to investigate it for himself and broadcast it across the airwaves.

I became paranoid about interfering with natural processes; that my influence (however slight) might somehow affect the development of the mummers' play tradition in Edmonton. What if I said the wrong thing, or expressed the wrong opinion, or wrongly critiqued the wrong metafolklore? I felt like the proverbial time traveler who must take care not to change the normal flow of events, or the Star Trekian space traveler who must adhere to the Prime Directive: not to interfere with the natural development of other sociocultures.

If a participant believed in a particular origin story – thus informing the meanings of the tradition for him – and, because of something I said to him, happened to change his beliefs – and thus his perceived meanings – what, then, might I say for myself? The prospect of doing such a thing seemed wretched and clumsy. The idea that I, as a scholar, might hold some sway over what participants think about their tradition…But herein lies the crux of my study. What are scholars to do about this? It seems there is a great responsibility to not only discover and reveal truths but to, above all, adopt the Hippocratic Oath and 'do no harm'. To me, polemically attacking and dismantling an origin story – perhaps beloved to the tellers and the believers – seems harmful, at least to the tellers and believers. The narratives people build around themselves and fit themselves in to - like narrative webs - are inextricable from their identities. To pluck the strands of one is to shake the other.

In a section of his PhD thesis called "Farewell Survivalism," Peter Millington (2002) describes the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative as being based on "poor definitions, flawed methodologies, untested assumptions, etc." and calls the shift away from the narrative in scholarship as "praiseworthy" (54). In the next section, "Moving On," Millington (2002) writes, "*Having disposed of survivalist theories of origin*, the inevitable question arises, what is there to replace them?" (55). He answers, "not a great deal." The problem with supplanting one narrative is that another must be sought out. When one narrative becomes unbelievable, *unsuccessful*, where then to turn? On another note, who are scholars to "dispose" of a beloved narrative?

I wondered how a participant who believes and tells a form of the Ancient Pagan Ritual Narrative would react to this kind of position. Do participants care what the scholars say? Is it damaging to their beliefs when academia tells them that what they believe is a farce? I decided to ask Randall Fraser.

Randall said:

> My first reaction is the scholars who assert that the Mummers tradition only began in the 18th and 19th centuries are often bound by the limitations of their field, in that only varifiable facts can be referred to and so get lost in the maze of quoting and re-quoting older sources. They haven't got a clear understanding of the interconnectedness and natural evolution of how something starts out as a community function, then a novelty,

> and slowly over time becomes a tradition.
>
> I would say that it was in the 17th/18th centuries that a formally recorded tradition solidified enough and technology had progressed far enough that it could be documented and recorded.
>
> People who only believe what is written and think that what is written is law are the cause of a lot of misunderstanding due to the fact that many of the people writing about many of these subjects we [are] recording hearsay and word of mouth information to the best of their recollection at the time, along with their particular attitude towards the subject. The bible is a great example of this.
>
> How's that, now I'm not calling anyone a narrow minded git, haha.
>
> (Personal correspondence, 2 Feb 2011)

I also came to wonder what a scholar thinks about all this. So, with only a couple weeks before this very thesis was due, I decided to ask one; or, rather, a number of them. First, I sent an email to Peter Millington:

> Dear Peter,
>
> It has been a while since I emailed you, but I have a question that I would very much appreciate your opinion on.
>
> As part of my research, I have of course been reading up on your research - which has been very fascinating and valuable to me. I am wondering what your opinion is on the issue/concern regarding academic opinion vs. participant belief when it comes to the origins and meanings of British folk plays. In your PhD paper you write that the TDRG (which I am happy to say I am now a member) "shared a skepticism of the life-cycle theory of origins for the plays. It would be fair to say that some of us were embarrassed by these views and the people who espoused them" (2002:10). In the section of your paper titled "Farewell Survivalism" you write that the theory is based on "poor definitions, flawed methodologies, untested assumptions, etc." (54) and, later, that we have "disposed of survivalist theories of origin" (55). I am not at all questioning your research or evidence. Rather, I am interested to see how/if you consider those participants who still do believe in the theory and find it meaningful in their lives.
>
> Any comments you can offer me would be greatly appreciated. Thank you again for all your help.
>
> Best,
>
> Mat Levitt

(Sent March 19, 2011)

He replied:

Dear Mat,

It's good to hear from you again. The implication of your question appears to be that you are making progress with your research. I hope so. It's good to hear that you are now a member of the TDRG.

I suppose that my views on the people who still espouse the pagan ritual theory of origins for folk plays could be summed up in three words - grateful, challenging and tolerant.

The gratitude comes from the fact that it was this theory that inspired many of the early scholars to do all the collecting that they did. Although their core motivation may have been misguided, they felt that a custom of such ancient ancestry needed recording and preserving. And in some cases they also hoped that they would be able to use this information to reconstruct the putative Ur-ritual.

This is an analogous situation to the Mormons and family history. As you may already know, the Mormons believe in post mortem baptism of their ancestors, and this has inspired them to compile comprehensive and impressive databases of genealogical information, embodied in their familysearch.org website. Family historians may or may not share the Mormons' belief in post mortem baptism, in fact some may be openly antagonistic to it, but they are nonetheless grateful for their online information.

Many of the people who still espouse ritual origins do so due to lack of up to date information. A typical scenario would be where a group is performing their local play, drawn from an old book from the time when these theories were the received wisdom. They often go no further than this source (why should they) and are therefore unaware of the latest research.

Another typical situation, in England, is where a group was established thirty or more years ago as a spin off from a folk club or morris dancing side. Again, this would be at a time when ritual origins held sway (doubly so for morris dancers), and the views have simply been passed on to new members of the team without question and/or without any feeling of the need for an update.

A third, rarer situation applies to some of the long standing "traditional groups," where visiting "expert" folklorists have told them that their custom comes from a pagan ritual. Who are they to question an expert? So they pass on that view to anyone who asks.

I encounter the first two situations fairly often, and I tend to challenge their views in a low key sort of way. I might just respond "if you say so" or "I'll think we'll have to agree to differ on that one," which often elicits questions in response. Sometimes I will ask them "have you got any documentary evidence for that?" which again often leads to a discussion. When this happens, I usually find my interlocutor is receptive to information

on the latest research, and we both go away happy.

There are some groups where the pagan rituals are integral to their act. They may well know that the theory has no foundation, but they are not about to let the truth get in the way of a good story. For instance, the Owd Oss Mummers, with whom I performed in Nottingham in the 1970s generally finished their performances with the tongue in cheek announcement "This play is an ancient fertility ritual, and if you put some money in the hat it will guarantee you fertility for the rest of the night." (Of course, being fertile for the rest of the night was the last thing that some audience members wanted!).

At the present time, a good example of this integration of "pagan rituals" with the show are the Aughakillymaude Community Mummers of Derrylin, Northern Ireland, led by Jim Ledwith. Jim is very much into this and their performances have gradually been accreting every Celtic pre-Christian ritual going, however incongruous or anachronistic. (For instance, jumping over mid summer bonfires in straw costumes.) I guess you may have seen the "Mummers, Masks and Mischief" documentary on Youtube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxQ5BcY8feI). The commentary and vox pops are full of this sort of thing, often contradicting each other, and often couched in tentative phraseology that should sound alarms. It is an academic nightmare, but, it is a good show, and that is primarily what it was intended to be. I don't think any amount of reasoned argument would steer Jim away from his path, but you know, I don't mind.

For the last group of people who espouse ritual origins, their theory is quite literally a matter of religion. I am talking here of neo-Pagans, Wiccans, and other New Age groups. The Wiccans in particular have built mummers plays into their annual cycle of rituals, taken as they are by the symbolism of death and revival in the plays. Well it's as valid an artistic interpretation as any.

As with many religious people, they are not amenable to reasoned argument, as if they are afraid that the invalidation of one of their tenets would cause their whole belief system to collapse about their ears. Several times, when I have mentioned neo-Pagan views on folklore I have received feedback from adherents picking me up on arcane points that seem to be important to them. There is a limit to how much I am prepared to argue with them.

I remember once having a long discussion at a folk festival with a woman - possibly a story teller - who was very much into the religious significance of death and revival in the plays. When I pointed out to her that the symbolism of the hero-combat, and death/wounding and revival was so generic that it could apply to any superhero cartoon on children's Saturday morning TV (Batman, Superman, and the like), her triumphant "precisely!" told me that there would be no point in trying to argue further.

When it comes to performance, I find that New Age groups tend to take themselves far too seriously, performing in a ritualistic and mystical style. Their fellow travellers seem to appreciate this, but other people tend to find it disappointing. (See my notes at: http://www.mastermummers.org/faq.htm#styles.) Myself, I try to remain impartial.

Well, I guess I've rambled on rather. I hope you find something useful in my musings.

Please get in touch if you need me to clarify anything.

Best wishes

Peter

(Received March 20, 2011)

Then, I sent an email to the Traditional Drama Research Group:

Dear Gentlemen,

First I would like to thank you all and say how pleased I am to be a recent member of the TDRG.

Second, I have a question that has arisen from my research and that I am trying to tackle in my MA thesis. I am studying the various "origin stories" told about British folk plays, where these stories came from, who tells them, why, and how scholarship and literature influences these stories. As such, I have of course come across a number of different participants who believe and tell different origin stories. If any of you would be so kind as to offer any comments on the question that has arisen, I would be quite grateful.

Question:

What is your opinion regarding the consideration of the personal and meaningful beliefs of folk play participants when proposing academic theories about the origins and development of folk plays?

If there are any questions for me, please do ask away. I am hoping to perhaps quote this correspondence in my thesis. If you do not wish to be quoted, please let me know. Thank you again for any help can offer.

Best,

Mat Levitt

(Sent March 21, 2011)

Ronald Shuttleworth replied:

Ave Matt,

I am not sure whether I can contribute much of value. I think that one needs to approach the reported 'beliefs' of so-called peasantry by 'educated' enquirers with extreme caution. From personal experience as a manual worker in a rural environment (forestry) and a village upbringing I can tell you that although such people may think a bit slower, there is nothing inferior about their conclusions. Country people can be just as wily and devious

> as any and may take a sly satisfaction in 'sending up' and misleading toffs and townees. Also I suspect that they were often asked leading questions and just gave the answers that they thought would please the enquirers. A good example of this, I believe, is the response of Sam Bennett of Ilmington to Cecil Sharp's interest in Hobby Horses associated with Morris dancing. In my imagination, he gets Sharp to describe what he is looking for and offers to make enquiries, Then he is down to his tool-shed with a copy of a Racing paper to get busy with a fret-saw and come up with the abomination still in use by that team.
>
> Also one should not discount ideas originating with local antiquarians. Years ago, my wife was compiling a list of traditional events for a camping magazine, in which she wanted to include usable directions and times of occurrence. I still have the reply which she received from David Goulbourne of Antrobus Soulers in which he said that they were spirits of the past and should appear un-announced. Anyone wanting to see them should turn up at their starting-point and follow them from there. (However when they 'appeared' they were likely to find the car-park roped off for them to perform) It is pretty certain that this idea originated with Major Boyd, a folklore type who took a keen and authoritarian personal interest in the team.
>
> As an active mummer for over forty years I know that we come up with whatever fanciful explanation we think will enhance audience response. I suspect that traditional teams were little different. After all, it seems to be a begging custom and any association with 'luck' or whatever might improve the welcome.
> When asked why we mummed at midwinter, I used to say 'You will have noticed that recently the sun has been growing weaker and appearing for a shorter and shorter time each day. If we did not do this now, it will finally go out altogether'.
>
> I wish you luck.
>
> ***Ron.***

(Received March 23, 2011)

And a Zen master once said, *If you're not laughing, you're not getting it.*

So perhaps, realistically speaking, it really doesn't matter. For many of the mummers I spoke with, a plurality of origin stories is in no way problematic. Each telling, each performance of a mummers' play, is as equally valid as another, whatever its meaning happens to be for its participants. As Dundes (1966) has already told us, there is no "one right interpretation" or "one right version" (508). When neo-pagans perform a mummers' play, it is a pagan ritual. When a modern folklorist talks about a mummers' play referenced in an 18th century text, that performance does indeed emerge from an 18th century text. If Vansina and Dundes and Smith are right, we might not be able to say that mummers' plays were *originally* anything because there is no definable origin. Or, rather, each performance is its own origin and, thus, the stories told about it are undisputable.

Michael Preston has pointed out to me, "I've read a lot of historical play-texts and commentary, and I don't remember performers being interested in "origins" until they were asked that kind of question. It's the kind of question that can result in

getting the answer the questioner wants" (Personal email, March 26, 2011). Now, of course some participants – like Bronwyn Forbes or Paul Kenny or Randall Fraser or Peter Millington or even Preston himself when he suggested that folk plays originated with house-visiting customs – are interested with origins because in many ways the origins provide the context of meaning; *we are pagans, we are beggars, we are…*

> Mat: So you mentioned that when you first saw mummers' plays that you thought it looked like a lot of fun, you didn't really know much about it. What drew you to it? Was it just that it looked fun and was entertaining or was there something else about it that drew you to it?
>
> Paul: No, it was…What drew me to the mumming plays when I first saw them was that it was good fun. And what held me to mummers' plays was when I found out that, not only was it good fun, it was our heritage, our tradition. And it also had meaning; the folkplay had a meaning. And this I became interested in. So first of all it was the entertainment value and the good fun and the camaraderie that drew me to the mummers, and, secondly, the thing that hooked me with the mummers was this was a worthwhile thing to do; that it was important; that our traditions be carried on.
>
> Mat: What is the meaning of the mummers' play?
>
> Paul: The meaning of the mummers' plays, in England, is the…it's the celebration of the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new year. So it's about the death of the old year and the birth of the new year. So mumming plays will have a death and resurrection. So you'll have an antagonist, a protagonist, who fight, and when one is slain, a doctor is called on to cure. And so that symbolizes the bringing on of the new year. And traditionally, they were done, of course, around the new year and also at Easter time with the Pace Eggers. And they were done by workers who, seasonal workers, who had no work at the winter time in England. People worked on the land and their work wasn't so much…And they had to go and get money, basically, to survive. And so the mummers' tradition came about that they used to do these plays, and at the end of the play they'd take a collection and also get refreshments from the people of the tour they were on.
>
> Mat: So you were saying that there's a seasonal ritual aspect to mummers' plays. When you're up there performing, do you feel that…Are you aware of that? Does that come into your mind?
>
> Paul: Yes, I am aware of the seasonal aspect of the mumming plays. I'm aware that the pagan festival of Wassail, which was performed…which was a celebration of the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, was basically a part of what we are doing. And, I mean, the Christmas greeting would be, "Wassail." And Yuletide, of course, is another pagan influence in that season. So basically I think when people saw the sun going away, getting lower and lower in the sky, there was always a thought, 'Is it coming back?' And when it started to come back, then that was a good time to celebrate the coming of the new year and what it would bring…crops being able to be harvested again and harvest time will be again. So it is very…that thought always comes into my mind when I'm playing a mummers' play…No matter what time of year. We also do plays, obviously, throughout the year. But the Christmas plays especially that thought comes into my mind.

(Personal Interview, Coventry, December 26, 2010)

As Paul points out, the *meaning* of the tradition drew him in as a participant. He also mentions that the meaning does come into his mind while he is performing mummers' plays, thus implying that the origin story relevant to his interpretation of meaning. For others, however, it does not matter nearly as much:

Mat: Okay. Do you have any idea of how far back exactly it goes?

Max: No…

Mat: Do you just not…

Max: I just don't know any further. See, I'm not really an expert on the history of it.

Mat: Does it matter to you where they came from?

Max: No, not really. It's just something that we enjoy doing and we try to keep the tradition alive.

(Personal Interview, Coventry, December 17, 2010)

Mat: In your opinion, in your beliefs, where do you think mummers' plays came from?

Setch: I have no idea.

Mat: No idea, hey?

Setch: No…read Ron's book. I haven't even read it myself. I'm really not that interested in the history of it, only that Henry the VIII banned it because mummers were considered rogues and vagabonds. I don't know if the others have told you this, but, of course mummers used to set a play, and that would gather a crowd. Of course, then pickpockets would go round the crowd. So they were banned. Where the plays we do know, or where they came from or how old they are, Ron is probably your best bet on getting that information. I think the St George play we do, for instance, is a compilation of a lot of plays; a lot of St George plays…Although it's a traditional play and all the words are traditional, it comes from a compilation of a lot of old plays. And one or two plays we do have been penned by the mummers themselves, so they're not tradition plays, they are new mummers plays…

Mat: So, just back-turning a little bit, so you're not concerned with the history of mummers' plays; it doesn't matter to you?

Setch: No, it doesn't matter to me at all. I just enjoy the crack, really.

(Personal Interview, Coventry, December 17, 2010)

So, to answer my question about the moral and academic legitimacy of scholarship's influence on mummers' play metafolkore, I suppose I would have to suggest that scholars who study mummers' plays are, in a sense, participants. We are participants in the body of metafolklore about the tradition; we tell and hear stories about mummers' plays and, from what I can gather, most of us care about the subject. No matter how removed we might feel – like some hovering zoologist – we are all kinds of Violet Alfords. The scholar, as a performer of metafolklore, is a participant in a tradition; a member of the *folk*. According to Alan Dundes (1966), "Even folklorists themselves are a group and must in the strict theoretical sense be considered a 'folk' with its own in-group jokes and rituals" (232). He writes,

> Folklorists not only enjoy studying tradition but they themselves often tend to be bound by tradition in their studies. Just as the materials of folklore pass from generation to generation, so also do the theories and methods of students of these materials pass from generation to generation of folklore scholars.
>
> (227)

Within the body of mummers' play metafolklore, however, scholars are not the exclusive members of "the folk." Alan Dundes (1966) explains that,

> …the term 'folk' can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor. It does not really matter what that linking or isolating factor is – it could be a common occupation, a common language, or common religion – but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own…A member of the group may not know all the other members of that group, but he probably will know the common core of traditions belonging to it, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity.
>
> (232)

In this case, what "links" the folk together is a tradition of storytelling; an common interest in mummers' plays and where they came from. Mummers' play origin stories have been passed down over generations, from mummer to scholar to writer to mummer and back again, over and over. By talking about the tradition, the scholar becomes *involved*. It seems inevitable that scholars and writers will influence the metafolklore they become involved in for it encompasses them as well. The storytellers, whatever station they happen to inhabit, are constituents of the phenomenon; they are within it and influenced by it. Just as the death and resurrection milieu of the mummers' play phenomenon influenced Frazer who influenced Helm who influenced Brody who influenced Forbes who likely influenced at least some participants of the mummers' play phenomenon, a memetic trail of intertextuality and allegory can likely be traced from any story about the tradition to stories told before it, possibly leading to some academic who was no doubt influenced by his own socioculture's zeitgeist; his own *folk*. There is a dialogue in place, even if it exists primarily in print, about mummers, beggars, clergymen, noblemen, chapmen, and pagans. Whether these characters are, in the eyes of the storyteller, protagonists or antagonists, true

theories or false theories, heroes or villains, they are stock characters none the less, and they do battle by our words. They die and are, inevitably, brought back to life by some other storyteller.

As participants in the tradition, scholars, too, have a right to tell the story they most believe in. Michael Preston told me, “Of course, one should respect the beliefs of modern performers, but there's no need to believe them” (Personal email, March 26, 2011). This statement is as apt as it is candid and applies to all participants – performers, audience members, scholars, etc. People will believe what they believe, and hearing a story that says differently will not necessarily sway them. An opposing storyteller can just as easily be considered “naïve” or “a narrow minded git.”

But aside from the current tradition of metafolklore, can we ever really know the stories told about mummers’ plays by those who participated in them before the influence of scholarship and literature? Did the participants tell one of the narratives I have discussed here or were there other stories? Perhaps what we can say is that they told a story that, for them, was captivating, entertaining, and successful.

And, for the storyteller - be he a scholar, writer, mummer, audience member, or just someone who likes to talk about men who fight, kill, and resurrect each other with unapologetic merriment - another bit of prose borrowed from our friend Dickens:

Some others laughed to see the belief in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.

And a Zen master once said, *If you’re not laughing, you’re not getting it.*

Methodology, I Guess

This work began with readings in anthropological, folkloristic, literary and historical scholarship. The authors I have referenced here are those who, in a sense, have led me through the streams of metafolklore I have in turn presented for you, the reader. Throughout the course of my research I made contact with a number of folkplay researchers and have included some of our correspondences and emails. The authors of these emails were fully aware of my use of them in this paper and gave their full permission for their inclusion. Most emails have been provided in their entirety in order to provide context for the reader. Where I have not provided entire emails and instead used quotes, it was because I felt that the full email itself was not relevant to the content of this paper.

I conducted a number of interviews with members of the Coventry Mummers, the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective, and audience members of both. All interviewees were made aware of the focus and purpose of my work and gave their full permission for the inclusion of the interview data in this paper. During the interviews, while I did have specific areas of inquiry in mind and had a standard set of questions for performers and audience members, interviews did follow the direction of the conversation and different questions would arise. Where I have not provided exact quotes (such as page…), these references were based on recollections of casual conversations that were not formally recorded.

Although in some cases I have not provided family names, I have not created pseudonyms for the participant-collaborators mentioned in my research. The members of the Coventry Mummers are all mentioned on their website and are already in the public eye. The members of the Alberta Avenue Mummers Collective, likewise, have chosen to allow their names to stand. In the case of audience members and friends of mine I have mentioned anecdotally, I have not used names at all in order to protect their identities and because I felt that names were not relevant to the data collected.

Bibliography and Citations

Ackerman, Robert. *The Myth and Ritual School: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists*. London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1991.

Ackerman, Robert, ed. *Selected Letters of Sir J.G. Frazer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Ashton, J. *Chapbooks of the Eighteenth Century*. London: Skoob Books Publishing; original publication by Chatto & Windus, 1882.

Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

1962.

Baker, Margaret. *Folklore and Customs of Rural England*. Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1974.

Baskervill, Charles Read. "Mummers' Wooing Plays in England." *Modern Philology* 21.3 (1924): 225-72.

Ben-Amos, Dan. “Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 84.331 (1971): 3-15.

Brody, Alan. *The English Mummers and their Plays; Traces of Ancient Mystery*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.

Brookes, Chris. *A Public Nuisance: A History of the Mummers Troupe*. St. Johns: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1988.

Bruner, E.M. “Ethnography as Narrative.” In Turner, V.W., and Bruner, E.M. Ed. *The Anthropology of Experience*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983, pp. 139-155.

Bruner, E.M., and Gorfain, P. “Dialogic Narrative and the Paradoxes of Masada.” In Bruner, E.M. Ed. *Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society.* Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press Inc, 1983, pp. 57-79.

Burke, Peter. *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe.* Rev reprint ed. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994.

Cass, E., et al. “The Peace Egg Book: An Anglo-Irish Chapbook Connection Discovered.” *Folklore* 114.1 (2003): 29-52.

Cawte, E. C., et al. "A Geographical Index of the Ceremonial Dance in Great Britain: Part One." *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 9.1 (1960): ii-41.

Cawte, E. C. "Even More about the Mummers' Play." *The Journal of American Folklore* 87.345 (1974): 250-2.

Cawte, E.C. "More on the "Mummers' Play."" *The Journal of American Folklore* 85.338 (1972): 375-6.

Cawte, E. C., Alex Helm, and Norman Peacock. *English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index*. London: Folk-lore Society, 1967.

Chambers, Robert. *The Book of Days; a Miscellany of Popular Antiquities in Connection with the Calendar, Including Anecdote, Biography & History, Curiosities of Literature, and Oddities of Human Life and Character*. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1862; 1967.

E.K.Chambers. *The Mediaeval Stage*: Vol.1. London: Oxford University Press, 1903

Dean-Smith, Margaret. "The Life-Cycle Play Or Folk Play: Some Conclusions Following the Examination of the Ordish Papers and Other Sources." *Folklore* 69.4 (1958): 237-53.

Deadwood. HBO Home Video, 2008.

Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol*. 1843.

Ditchfield, P.H. *Old English Customs, Extant at the Present Time: An Account of Local Observances, Festival Customs, and Ancient Ceremonies yet Surviving in Great Britain*. London: Methuen & Co., 1968.

Dundes, Alan. “Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism.” *The Monist* 50 (1966): 505-516.

Dundes, Alan. “The American Concept of Folklore.” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 3.3 (1966): 226-249.

Dundes, Alan. “The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique.” *Journal of Folklore Research* 34.3 (1997): 195-202.

Firor, Ruth. *Folkways in Thomas Hardy*. University of Pennsylvania: 1931.

Frazer, J.G. *The New Golden Bough*. Ed. Dr. Theodor H. Gaster. New York: S.G. Phillips, Inc., 1959.

Gash, D. *Resurrection or Bust: Mumming in the Nineteen Nineties*. University of Hull, 1998.

Grahame, Kenneth. *The Golden Age*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005. Original Publication by John Lane. London and New York: The Bodley Head, 1899.

Forbes, Bronwen. *Make Merry in Step and Song: A Seasonal Treasury of Music, Mummer's Plays & Celebrations in the English Folk Tradition*. Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2009.

Gailey, Alan. "Chapbook Influence on Irish Mummers' Plays." *Folklore* 85.1 (1974): 1-22.

Glassie, Henry H. *All Silver and no Brass; an Irish Christmas Mumming*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975.

Halpert, H. and Story. *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland ; Essays in Anthropology, Folklore, and History*. Toronto: Published for Memorial University of Newfoundland by University of Toronto Press: 1969.

Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native*. 2001 Modern Library Paperback Edition. New York: The Modern Library, Original Publication 1878.

Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native: An Authoritative Text, Background & Criticism*. A Norton Critical Edition. Ed. James Gindin. New York: Norton, 1969.

Hardy, Thomas. *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall at Tintagel in Lyonnesse: A New Version of an Old Story Arranged as a Play for Mummers in One Act Requiring no Theatre or Scenery*. 1923.

Helm, Alex. "In Comes I, St George." *Folklore* 76.2 (1965): 118-36.

Helm, Alex, and Folklore Society. *The English Mummers' Play*. Vol. 14. Woodbridge, Suffolk, Eng.: Published by D.S. Brewer and Rowman and Littlefield for the Folklore Society, 1981; 1980.

Hone, William. *The Every Day Book: or, Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements, Sports, Pastimes, Ceremonies, Manners, Customs, and Events, Incident to Each of the Three Hundred and Sixty-Five Days, in Past and Present Times; Forming a Complete History of the Year, Months, & Seasons, and a Perpetual Key to the Almanack; Including Accounts of the Weather, Rules for Health and Conduct, Remarkable and Important Anecdotes, Facts, and Notices, in Chronology, Antiquities, Topography, Biography, Natural History, Art, Science, and General Literature; Derived from the Most Authentic Sources, and Valuable Original Communications, with Poetical Elucidations, for Daily Use and Diversion*. 1827.

Hutton, Ronald. *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Hutton, Ronald. *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Irving, Washington. "The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent." In *History, Tales & Sketches*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1983. Text Copyright by G.K. Hall & Co., 1977, 1978.

Jacobsen, K.H. "How to Make the Distinction Between Constative and Performative Utterances." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 21.85 (1971): 357-360.

James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw and Other Short Novels*. Ed. Fred Kaplan. New York: Signet Classics, 2007.

Jobes, G. *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols*. New York: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1962.

Johnson, Richard. *Seven Champions of Christendom*.1596-7.

Johnson, M. *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Judge, Roy. *The Jack-in-the-Green : A May Day Custom*. Ipswich Eng.: D. S. Brewer, 1979.

Judge, Roy. "May Day and Merrie England." *Folklore* 102.2 (1991): 131-48.

Judge, Roy. "Merrie England and the Morris 1881-1910." *Folklore* 104.1/2 (1993): 124-43.

Judge, Roy. "'the Old English Morris Dance': Theatrical Morris 1801-1880." *Folk Music Journal* 7.3 (1997): 311-50.

Kirby, E. T. "Mummers' Plays and the Calendar." *The Journal of American Folklore* 86.341 (1973): 282-5.

Kirby, E.T. "The Origin of the Mummers' Play." *The Journal of American Folklore* 84.333 (1971): 275-88.

Lees, Nick. "Mysterious mummers hit town this weekend," *Edmonton Journal* 5 Jan. 2011. Print.

Lichman, Simon. *The Gardener's Story and What Came Next: A Contextual Analysis of the Marshfield Paper Boys' Mumming Play*. A Dissertation in Folklore and Folklife. Presented to the Graduate Faculties of the University

of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1981.

Lichman, Simon (1982). “The Gardener’s Story: The Metafolklore of a Mumming Tradition.” *Folklore* 93(1): 105-111.

Lynch, E.M. “Chapter 3: Spectral Politics: The Victorian Ghost Story and the Domestic Servant,” p.67-86. In *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. N. Brown, C. Burdett and P. Thurschwell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Miller, Edwin Shepard. “Hardy’s Venerable Drama.” 568-581.

Millington, Peter. *Master Mummers.* 26 November 2009. 1 December 2009 <http://www.mastermummers.org/>.

Millington, Peter. ""This is a Mummers' Play I Wrote": Modern Compositions and their Implications." *Mumming Traditions in Cross-Border and Cross-Community Contexts*. Derry, 9-13 June 2003.

Millington, Peter. "Mrs Ewing and the Textual Origin of the St Kitts Mummies' Play." *Folklore* 107 (1996): 77-89.

Millington, Peter. *The Origins and Development of English Folk Plays*. PhD thesis. University of Sheffield: National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, 2002.

Millington, Peter. "The Truro Cordwainers' Play: A "New" Eighteenth-Century Christmas Play." *Folklore* 114.1 (2003): 53-73.

Minton, John (1991). “Cockaigne to Diddy Wah Diddy: Fabulous Geographies and Geographic Fabulations.” *Folklore* 102(1): 39-47.

Mummers and Masks: Sex & Death & Pagan Magic. Lindum Films/ Batter Included, 2002. Film.

Mummers, Masks and Mischief. Aughakillymaude Community Association Co. Fermanagh, 2005. Film.

Nemo, “Earl Russel, K.G., and the Foreign Office,” *Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection* (1864).

Ordish, T.F. “English Folk-Drama.” *Folklore* 2.3 (1891): 314-335.

Ordish, T. F. "Christmas Mummers." *Folklore* 3.4 (1892): 550-1.

Ordish, T.F. “English Folk-Drama II.” *Folklore* 4.2 (1893): 149-175.

Pettitt, Tom. "Customary Drama: Social and Spatial Patterning in Traditional Encounters." *Folk Music Journal* 7.1 (1995): 27-42.

Piggott, Stuart. "The Character of Beelzebub in the Mummers' Play." *Folklore* 40.2 (1929): 193-5.

Piggott, Stuart. *The Druids*. Harmondsworth, 1968; 1974.

Preston, Michael J. "The British Folk Play: An Elaborated Luck-Visit?" *Western Folklore* 30.1 (1971): 45-8.

Preston, Michael J. “The British Folk Plays and Thomas Hardy: A Computer-Aided Study.” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 40 (1977): 159-182.

Propp, V. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Second Edition. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.

Readman, P. “The Place of the Past in English Culture *c.* 1890-1914.” *Past and Present* 186 (2005): 147-199.

Ricoeur, P. *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Shuttleworth, Ron. *Introducing the Folk Plays of England*. Coventry: Self Published.

Siefker, P. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1997.

Smith, B. H. “Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories.” *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 213-236.

Smith, Georgina. "Chapbooks and Traditional Plays: Communication and Performance." *Folklore* 92.2 (1981): 208-18.

Spufford, M. *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1981.

Squillace, Robert (1986). “Hardy’s Mummers.” *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 41(2): 172-189.

Tiddy, R.J.E. *The Mummers' Play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923.

Tillis, S. *Rethinking Folk Drama*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Traditional Drama Research Group. *Folk Play Research Home Page*. 31 March 2009. 1 December 2009 <http://www.folkplay.info/>.

Turner, V.W. *The Drums of Affliction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

Udal, J. S. "Christmas Mummers in Dorsetshire." *The Folk-Lore Record* 3.1 (1880): 87-116.

Vansina, J. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Weiss, H.B. *A Book About Chapbooks: The People's Literature of Bygone Times*. Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, Inc., 1969.

Zerubavel, E. *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.