

Chapter 2

FOLK PLAYS AND CEREMONIES

The traditions of the common folk, no less than those of the educated clerics and the professional minstrels, found their way into the religious drama.¹ It is often difficult to establish their presence because very little is known about them for certain; the first efforts to record them in any detail were not made until the eighteenth century. The clerics who produced the medieval records did not describe folk customs and rituals, though many persisted in taking part in them, despite repeated prohibitions. In fact ecclesiastical condemnations and proscriptions, which are never as explicit about the nature of what they are forbidding as about the fact that it must stop, are far and away the most important source of information on the subject. However, the attitude they express was not that of all, or even most, Church authorities. There is evidence to show that the folk games and observances were accepted, and even to some extent directed, by the Church's representatives.²

From the fragmentary and indirect information which is available it appears that rites and ceremonies designed to bring about and celebrate the natural processes on which the life of the community depended continued to exist from before the coming of Christianity, through the Middle Ages and in the centuries that followed, often until the modern era.³ Some were doubtless connected with the major thresholds in the life of individuals, like puberty and marriage, but these seemingly left no trace pertinent to the study of a communal form like drama. Many were certainly bound up with the course of the seasons and the related waxing and waning of the life forces, with food and survival, with death and rebirth.

1. Arnold Williams, *The Drama of Medieval England*, East Lansing 1961, 116-135.

2. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 190-93.

3. It appears that after being effectively excluded from the clerical culture, and hence lost to view, for several hundred years, the folk traditions came to the fore again in the eleventh century, in what has been called a "folkloric reaction," and from then on continued to penetrate into different forms of Western culture (Jacques Le Goff, "Culture cléricale et traditions folkloriques dans la civilisation mérovingienne" and "Culture ecclésiastique et culture folklorique au Moyen Age: saint Marcel de Paris et le dragon," *Pour un autre Moyen Age*, Paris 1977, 223-235 and 236-279).

Wickham sums up the position thus: "Loss of energy terminating in death, and the renewal of energy culminating in procreation, provided the constants and the polarities linking the old religious beliefs of successive generations and cults with those of the Christian fathers who themselves preached life eternal beyond the grave in the person of the risen Christ."⁴

Probably the best known of the folk plays which depict a death and revival are the English Mummers' plays and the related sword-dance plays. The origins of the sword-dance go back at least to the first century, when Tacitus described it as a favorite *spectaculum* of the German peoples, performed at all their gatherings.⁵ It is thought to be descended from a still older ritual in the form of a linked circular dance around a sacrificial victim, which may not have employed swords at all until the initial sense of the ritual grew dim, and first the swords and then a representational performance were introduced in order to make it more intelligible.⁶ Alex Helm indicates that not only the shorter "Rappers" but also some of the "Long Swords" in fact look nothing like conventional swords and adds: "There is some evidence for thinking that the so-called 'swords' had some former connection with the trade tools used in the performers' everyday work."⁷

Tacitus does not specify the precise form of the dance, only that it was performed by naked youths who leapt with great agility among threatening swords and spears. In 1350 it was described as a popular *ludus* in Nuremberg, and after that references to it are widespread, cropping up all over Europe. It was known in France and England at the Renaissance as the *danse des buffons*, and in a number of examples subsequently recorded in England, Germany and Bohemia the dancers include, or are accompanied by, comic or grotesque personages.⁸ In 1555 Olaus Magnus described in some detail the form the dance took in Sweden,⁹ and certainly by then it included the interlocking of the swords in the figure he calls *ross*, which later represented an execution and presumably already did so then.

The recorded forms of the dance vary, but they often include a clockwise circular motion symbolizing the sun's movement around the earth, a death and a resurrection. The dancers, who are five or more in number, at some point weave or mesh their swords together so as to create a rigid "lock" (Olaus Magnus' *ross*) and this is placed round the neck of a non-dancer, usually one of the comic characters but occasionally an

4. Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre*, 126.

5. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 191.

6. Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre*, 138.

7. Alex Helm, *The English Mummers' Play*, Folklore Society, Mistletoe Series 14, 1981, 20-21 and 107.

8. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, I 191-192.

9. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, II 270.

outsider. Sometimes the swords are withdrawn from the "lock" with a loud grating sound to signify an execution, the victim drops to the ground and is buried, and a doctor is summoned to revive him. Elsewhere it is after the dance that one of the comic figures is killed and then revived.¹⁰

Much emphasis is placed in the surviving texts on the dancers' sexual prowess and their victims' lack of it; and it has been argued that the circular "lock" is a female emblem and that the gesture of placing it over a male performer's head symbolizes union in the sex-act.¹¹ The combination of the death-and-revival with sexuality and with comedy links the sword-dance with the *Mastičkář* on the one hand and with many of the later folk-plays on the other. Referring to several of the Balkan masquerades where the victim bears a phallus, Jakobson remarked that "the theme of enlivening is deployed on two equipollent levels—the resurrection motif mingles with the phallic motif: while the latter is treated as a *pars pro toto*, the man in turn is presented as a mere *phallophoros*."¹²

It is probable that all the victims originally symbolized the life force in one form or another, and their death and resurrection celebrated its periodical waxing and waning, or decline and renewal; but by no means all are the "phallus-bearers" that Jakobson spoke of. Some seem to symbolize more particularly the fertility of nature, others energy or the life force in a general sense, and so on. Thus the "wild man" dressed in leaves and moss who was hunted, executed and then resuscitated by a "doctor" in Saxony and Thuringia, was rather a symbol of summer, the season when the fertility of nature reaches its zenith.¹³

Some of the symbols of regeneration might even be female. This is obviously the case in some of the many versions of the widespread ceremony known as the Expulsion or the Carrying Out of Death or of Winter, which was already mentioned in the eighth century as a relic of paganism and which still flourished in Central Europe at the beginning of the twentieth.¹⁴ As a rule, a female figure representing Death or Winter was carried in procession out of the town or village and destroyed. The remnants of this symbol of death might then turn into symbols of life and fertility, as when the straw that had made it up was scattered in a pasture so that the grass might grow more thickly,¹⁵ or placed under brooding

hens or geese in order to obtain healthy chicks or goatings.¹⁶ More often the Carrying Out of Death was paired with the Bringing In of Summer, a ceremony which might take place immediately afterwards or a week later. Here a procession brought into the town or village a symbol of summer, which might be a decorated tree, a female effigy or a live girl. When this representative of the summer, or of the renewed life of nature, is a girl who wears the clothes previously worn by the effigy of winter or death,¹⁷ the link between the two figures, and hence the pattern of death and resurrection which underlies the two-part ceremony, becomes particularly striking.

A thirteenth-century English document prohibits something called *Ludus de Rege et Regina*. It gives no description but Chambers thinks it refers to an ancestor of the diverse ceremonies later performed all over England on the first of May or at Whitsuntide, which were often known as a "king-play," "king-game" or "King's revel" and which, he believes, originally centered on a *quête* or collection.¹⁸ The folklore of Bohemia and Moravia included a multitude of ceremonies with names like "King's Game" or "King's Play" (the Czech word *hra*, like the Latin *ludus*, may mean either "game" or "play"), "Ride of the Kings," "Beheading of the King" and so on; many assigned parts to Queens as well as Kings, and some were actually called "Game (or Play) of the King and Queen": *Hra na krále a královu*, the Czech equivalent to *Ludus de Rege et Regina*. In several the King was "executed," sometimes after a chase, and the ceremony generally ended with everybody repairing to the tavern to dance.¹⁹

A group of these Whitsun "King's games," performed by Bohemian village lads, and particularly shepherd boys, share three significant elements which underlie considerable local variations: the representation of an execution (by drowning or beheading) of the old Shepherd King, the installation of a new one, and a *quête* in which the new King and his companions went from house to house begging for food. In at least one version the King possessed a certain regenerative power. When he was "beheaded" he plunged into the pond, subsequently emerging from it with his crown; by this act he "sanctified the water" which until then was "scurvy," in other words harmful. The surviving versions contain no allusions to any kind of sexual activity, either human or animal, but most entail some sort of competition—in agility, or speed in riding or running, or priority in getting a flock to a given pasture—and this is reflected even in the verses the boys sing during the *quête*; one of the songs promises the housewife that if she is generous she will have the upper hand over her

10. E. K. Chambers, *The English Folk Play*, Oxford 1933, 129-131.

11. Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre*, 138.

12. Roman Jakobson, "Medieval Mock Mystery. The Old Czech *Urquert-artus*" in *Studia philologica et litteraria in honorem Leo Spitzer*, Bern 1958, 261; a number of death-and-revival ceremonies from different parts of continental Europe are cited by Helm, *The English Mummers' Play*, 45-49.

13. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, I 185.

14. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, I 184.

15. Čeněk Zfört, *Veselé chvíle v životě lidu českého* [Merry Moments in the Life of the Czech People], Prague 1950², 228.

16. Zfört, *Veselé chvíle* . . . , 237-238.

17. Zfört, *Veselé chvíle* . . . , 223, 230-231.

18. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* I 172-176.

19. Zfört, *Veselé chvíle* . . . , 329-359.

husband.²⁰ What the game is about seems to be something like energy or power in general, rather than fertility.

The victim's identity clearly matters less for the death-and-revival ceremonies and plays than the fact that he or she is killed and revived. This is especially evident in the type known as the Mummers' play. Thus in a Nottingham Plough Monday play the victim is a grotesque woman, Dame Jane, who is killed by Beelzebub when she tries to father a child on Tom Fool, and in a sword-dance from Durham it is a parish clergyman who is accidentally slain as he tries to separate the fighting dancers.²¹

The Mummers' play consists essentially of four parts: the presentation of two or more champions, their combat to the death, the revival of the dead man, and a *quôte*. In England the hero is generally called St. George, or King George, but the other combatants, who vary in number in the different plays, bear a wide range of names, some apparently old, some quite recent—Slasher, Turkish Knight, Giant Blunderbore, Bold Bonaparte, Lord Nelson, and King of Prussia, for instance. Sometimes there is a series of duels, each leading up to a death and a revival. Significantly, it is not always the hero who is victorious; in fact he is slain in about half the versions.²² The explanation for this seeming anomaly can be found in Kirby's statement: "The cure, not the combat, is the basic element in the performance."²³ Helm remarks that in some of the "Wooring" versions of the Mummers' play, the victim's death takes a form "which suggests ritual killing rather than ritual combat," and he adds "This would accord with the central theme of the actions, that one champion must die for the benefit of his community."²⁴

The Doctor who is summoned to perform the cure is a comic character manifestly in the same tradition as Master Severin, the hero of the *Mastičkář*. He boasts in ludicrous terms of his travels and his medical skills, and he sometimes has a servant or assistant, often called Jack Finney, who can be seen in certain respects as a paler counterpart of Severin's servant, Rubin, though he may actually revive one of the combatants when the play calls for more than one cure.²⁵

The method by which the Doctor works the cure is usually grotesque, though not scatological as it is in the *Mastičkář*.²⁶ Sometimes he

produces a large pill or bolus, comic simply by its disproportionate size. Often the treatment contains elements associated with fertility rituals of different kinds. One of these is the drawing out of a large tooth, found in a performance from Austria as well as in several from the British Isles.²⁷ In the absence of any folk-play texts going back to the Middle Ages, it is interesting to find a reference to the drawing of a great tooth in one of the medieval religious plays, the N-Town *Trial of Joseph and Mary*,²⁸ where Den, the grotesque Summoner, threatens the audience that unless they give him some money, "I wyl with-drawe my gret rough toth" (v. 126). Clearly the tooth-drawing here does not evoke a cure or revival but on the contrary dire and possibly fatal harm. But such a meeting of opposites is not unusual in folk traditions; thus in one of the folk plays where the slain person is a woman, her resuscitation takes a form which simultaneously evokes the birth process and its opposite, an abortion.²⁹

Although no examples of the Mummers' play were recorded before the eighteenth century, it is generally agreed that its origins are extremely ancient and that it always centered on a resuscitation. According to Tiddy, the doctor who carries this out "is only second in importance to the combatants themselves, and like them he appears to be a survival of the ritual; he is the medicine man of primitive races (. . .)."³⁰ Tiddy saw in this origin the reason for the doctor's comic aspect: "The medicine man of savage races is hated so long as he is feared, and his natural and inevitable fate is to become a target for witticisms as soon as that fear is no longer felt. There need be no scruple in accepting the burlesque doctor of our mummers as a ritual figure."³¹

Lack of evidence makes it impossible to trace the character's genealogy so far back,³² but that he was widely known in the Middle Ages

Doctor's lines in general (*The English Mummers' Play*, 26 and 106 n. 8). Stumpfl says that among the many scenes of killing and resuscitation performed in Spring by the Germanic peoples, the Doctor "not rarely" uses a healing ointment "which is also applied as in the *Mastičkář*," but he does not quote any sources or examples (Robert Stumpfl, *Kultspiele der Germanen als Ursprung des mittelalterlichen Dramas*, Berlin 1936, 249).

27. Alan Brody, *The English Mummers and Their Plays*, London 1970, 58-59; Kirby, *Ur-Drama* . . . , 142-143.

28. K. S. Block ed., *Ludus Coventriae, or the Plaie Called Corpus Christi*, Oxford 1922 (reprinted London 1960), 124-135.

29. Brody, *The English Mummers* . . . , 59.

30. R. J. E. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play*, Oxford 1923, 76.

31. Tiddy, *ibid.*

32. Stumpfl's later attempt to document his thesis that the quack of the medieval Easter plays and the Doctor of the folk plays and customs was descended from the medicine man of the Germanic tribes (Stumpfl, *Kultspiele* . . . , 243-251 and 259-260) proved nothing except his failure to find any real evidence that might substantiate it.

20. Karel Javorník-Eibon, *Prostonárodní české písně a říkadla* [Czech Folk Songs and Rhymes], Prague 1937², 66-67.

21. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 1209-210 and 207.

22. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 1213.

23. Ernest Theodore Kirby, *Ur-Drama: The Origins of the Theater*, New York 1915, 142.

24. Helm, *The English Mummers' Play*, 17.

25. Chambers, *The English Folk Play*, 58-59.

26. However, according to Helm, the recorded English texts show especially clear signs of bowdlerization in the cures of the Sword Dance versions and in the

is proved by the fact that a definite kinship with the mummers' doctor is exhibited by the comic charlatans of several of the medieval religious plays. The most striking English example is the quack Mayster Brendyche of Braban in the fifteenth-century *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*,³³ as was pointed out by Tiddy who added: "To those who allow the Mummers' Play only as much antiquity as can be strictly proved, the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* must be a problem of considerable difficulty."³⁴ The farcical *Spice Merchants* represented in a number of Easter and Passion plays from Central Europe also bear a distinct resemblance to the Doctor of the Mummers' play.

There is at least a strong likelihood that the figure of a comic Doctor who revived one or more dead persons was known all over Europe as part of the living theatrical tradition at the time the *Mastičkář* and the other religious plays with their burlesque charlatans were being written. Familiarity with this tradition would inevitably color an audience's perception of these characters, whether they were endowed with a share of the folk Doctor's power to resuscitate the dead or whether, by a typical comic reversal, they were portrayed instead as liable to bring their patients into the grave; many, like the hero of the *Mastičkář*, are credited with producing both kinds of effect.

The English folk plays also present certain more direct parallels to the *Mastičkář*. Not only does the Doctor of the Mummers' plays usually claim that he has travelled widely and that he can cure all sorts of diseases, as Master Severin claims partly in person and partly through his servant Rubin (Mus. vv. 323-328; 58-70, 116-127, 137-193). As in the *Mastičkář* (Mus. vv. 277, 283), the character who calls for the Doctor's help frequently announces that the dead man is his son,³⁵ in one instance he describes him as "my only dearly beloved son,"³⁶ a phrase which recalls certain New Testament references to Christ³⁷ and so links up with Isaac's role in the *Mastičkář* as a parodistic figure of Christ. On two occasions when the dead man is resuscitated he proceeds, like Severin's client Isaac, son of Abraham (Mus. v. 310), to announce that he has been asleep. In the Greatham Sword Dance play he says:³⁸

*Good morrow gentlemen, a-sleeping I have been;
I have had such a sleep as the like was never seen;
But now I am awake and alive unto this day. . . .*

Very similar words are used in the Ampleforth play.³⁹ Even more strikingly, two other plays (from Whitley and from Netley Abbey) refer to Father Abraham, though they present him not as the victim's lamenting father but as the victim himself.⁴⁰

Such curious coincidences seem to hint that despite the corruptions which obviously crept in during the centuries before it was written down, the dialogue of the English Mummers' plays may have preserved traces of a broader European tradition going as far back as the Middle Ages; the references to Father Abraham in connection with the dead victim and the apparent biblical echo in "my only dearly beloved son" which link them with the play from Bohemia suggest that the various strands of the tradition did not begin to diverge until after the original pre-Christian folk ritual underwent a certain degree of Christianization.

The influence of ancient folk customs on the medieval drama was vastly overrated by certain scholars, who contended that pagan rites and ritual plays constituted its chief source and the mainspring of its development. The most prominent of them was Stumpfl, who endeavored to prove that this source was specifically Germanic. In order to underpin his thesis, and without discriminating between facts and conjectures, he amassed a vast quantity of material produced by ethnographers, archeologists, philologists, historians of ancient religious and classical antiquity, etc. His argument was typically circular. The first step was to "reconstruct" a broad outline of a Germanic cult drama out of a hodgepodge of elements derived from old traditions, prehistoric rock carvings and later customs. Since he recognized that there was no way to establish that this hypothetical drama continued to exist and develop until the coming of Christianity, his second step was to assume that the Christian religious drama must derive from "cultic prototypes," which in their turn must be inferred precisely from this Christian drama. Stumpfl realized that his reasoning was circular, but believed that the results would justify the method.⁴¹ With regard to the *Visitatio sepulchri* plays, for instance, he argued that the three Marys owe their dramatic existence principally to the three matron deities venerated by the pre-Christian Celts and Germans.⁴² Stumpfl's general theory was refuted.⁴³

39. Chambers, *The English Folk Play*, 149.

40. Brody, *The English Mummers . . .*, 53-54 and 133.

41. Stumpfl, *Kultspiele . . .*, 214.

42. Stumpfl, *Kultspiele . . .*, 331-333.

43. Some important points of the debate are summed up in Frank, *The Medieval French Drama*, 43; see also Sticca, *The Latin Passion Play . . .*, 27.

33. Norman Davis ed., *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, London 1970, 74-78.

34. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play*, 105.

35. Chambers, *The English Folk Play*, 39.

36. Brody, *The English Mummers . . .*, 52.

37. "This is my beloved Son," Matthew 3:17 and 17:5, Luke 9:35, II Peter 1:17; "Thou art my beloved Son," Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22; "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . .," John 3:16; "God sent his only begotten Son into the world . . .," I John 4:9.

38. Brody, *The English Mummers . . .*, 144.

It is now widely agreed that the main source of the medieval drama was the established ritual of the Church. But that is not to say that other traditions and forms did not contribute significantly, above all to the vernacular or mostly-vernacular plays. In so far as some figure descended from the pagan medicine man was alive in the medieval consciousness, perhaps as the "hero" of folk death-and-resurrection rites or plays, it may well have influenced the portrayal of the Easter play Spice Merchant and would inevitably have colored the spectators' perception of him. In the same way Hunningher is certainly right when he points out that the Spice Merchant owed much to the professional mimes, though his attribution to the mimes of the main responsibility for the rise of medieval drama as a whole⁴⁴ is untenable.

Since there is good reason to believe that folk customs, in a more or less Christianized form, occupied an important and popular place in the life of medieval society, not only among the laity but also among large sections of the clergy, it may not be too fanciful to detect traces of them in certain medieval plays, both secular and religious. Thus in the early *Ludus paschalis* from Vich,⁴⁵ the chant the Marys sing on their way to the sepulchre includes the line *Nostra surge surreccio* [Rise, our resurrection! v. 65], conjuring Christ—whom they suppose to be still dead—to rise back to life. Axton makes the point that "This remarkable incantation can best be understood as mimetic magic, intended to induce the yearly miracle."⁴⁶

This may be connected with a theme which recurs in Mary Magdalen's vernacular speeches in the bilingual Czech-Latin plays, that of the Marys intending to "heal" or "cure" the dead Christ with their ointments. It occurs in two separate scenes, first as the three Marys approach the sepulchre and then just before Christ appears to Magdalen. On the first occasion the third Mary, who subsequently turns out to be Magdalen, sings the Latin stanza *Sed camus unguentum emere*, the same as in the *Martickář* (Mus. vv. 254-256), and then paraphrases it in spoken Czech. For instance, in what Máchal calls the "First Play of the Three Marys," she says:⁴⁷

*Pospěšme masti koupiti,
Ješto můžem zaléčiti
Rány našeho tvůrce milého
Od židuov umučeného*

44. Hunningher, *The Origin of the Theater*, 62-84.

45. LOO V 1663-1668. The manuscript was long attributed to the abbey of Ripoll but is now known to be from Vich (see note in LOO VI 456).

46. Axton, *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages*, 68.

47. SSDPL 99.

Let us hasten to buy ointments
with which we may heal
the wounds of our dear creator
tortured to death by the Jews

The theme is expressed yet more strikingly on the second occasion, in the paraphrase of Magdalen's traditional song Latin stanza *Cum venissem ungere mortuum* [When I came to anoint the dead man], which translates this first verse *Když bych přišla léčit mrtvého* [When I came to cure the dead man].⁴⁸ The oxymoron *léčit mrtvého* [cure the dead man] calls attention to the marvellous or supernatural character of the act envisaged.

A parallel to the first example can be found in the N-Town *Announcement to the Three Marys*,⁴⁹ where Mary Magdalen says: *Go we with salvyz ffor to leche* [Cryat that thohyl wounde (vv. 3-4), and Mary Jacoby:

*To my londe my love my ffrende
Ffayn wolde I salve A spende
and I myght aught A-mende
his woundys depe and wyde. (vv. 47-50)*

Here Christ's death is evoked only metonymically, through references to the wounds he suffered in the course of the Passion, so there is no verbal clash to compare with *zaléčiti/rány . . . umučeného* [heal the wounds . . . of (the one) tortured to death], or with *léčiti mrtvého* [cure the dead man]. But previous plays about the Crucifixion and the Burial, as well as the speeches of all the Marys in the present scene, establish the fact that the wounds were fatal and the Marys expect to find a dead body. So their desire to *leche* or *A-mende* it with their *salvyz* reflects the same sort of thought process as the Czech oxymoron.

The idea that the Marys intended or hoped to "cure" or resuscitate Christ has not the slightest foundation in the gospel. It may have arisen from a certain confusion between two parallel situations traditionally represented at the same time of year, the mourning for the dead Christ which is turned to joy by the revelation of his resurrection, and the mourning for the slain folk hero which turns to joy when the mourners obtain his resuscitation by some "magic" means.

In the Resurrection plays just mentioned, the idea that the Marys might help to restore Christ to life does not go beyond a desire they express to themselves. But some of the plays which present a Spice

48. SSDPL 102.—Virtually the same speech appears in three other plays, SSDPL 106-115, 117-125 and 140-175.

49. Block ed., *Ludus Coventriae . . .*, 327-333.

Merchant akin to the folk Doctor take it a step further and make it a factor in their encounter with him. Sometimes the Marys simply ask if he is skilled in medicine (Wolfenbüttel Spice Merchant episode⁵⁰ vv. 43-46; Innsbruck Easter play vv. 934-935, 969-970), a question which is revealing enough in itself since knowledge of medicine is irrelevant to the merchant's orthodox function as a supplier of embalming unguents or spices; elsewhere they expressly ask for, or are offered, an ointment which will heal Christ's wounds or restore him to life (Berlin fragment⁵¹ vv. 106-109, 114-120; Melk Spice Merchant episode vv. 443-446, 478-479). Sometimes the Spice Merchant claims that he can heal or revive a dead man (Ailsfeld Passion play⁵² vv. 7578-7580; *Passion du Palatinus* vv. 1895-1899), but neither he nor the Marys even hint that he might use this power to resuscitate Christ. In this respect it is significant that while the *Mastičkář* brings out the Spice Merchant's life-restoring power more graphically than any other version of the episode, since it alone actually shows him resuscitating a dead person, it keeps this folk element separate from the Marys' purchase. Though he ostensibly performs the resuscitation in order to prove to them what he and his wares can achieve, neither he nor they refer to it when they discuss the ointment with which they mean to embalm Christ's body.

The comic charlatans of both secular and religious plays are obviously in the first place parodies of the diverse apothecaries and physicians who actually earned their living in medieval society by promising to cure all kinds of sickness. But some of their more extravagant claims, especially the power to resuscitate the dead, may well have reminded the spectators of the comic life-restorers who both claimed and exhibited such powers in the familiar folk plays and rituals. If this happened, the memory of the folk performances would naturally have modified the way the audience perceived the more literary dramatic works.

The "hero" of Rutebouf's *Dit de l'herberie* alleges not only that he can revitalize both male and female sexual organs (vv. 62-63) but also that he can resuscitate the dead (vv. 32-33); his counterpart in the *Herberie en prose*⁵³ displays a "box of youth" which rejuvenates people and promises to restore youth and virginity to any old woman who comes to him (11.58-62). It has been shown⁵⁴ that these early dramatic monologues directly influenced the treatment of the merchant from whom the Marys buy their spices in several of the French Passion plays,

particularly the *Passion du Palatinus*, the *Passion d'Arras*⁵⁵ and the *Passion de Semur*.⁵⁶

In all these plays the merchants claim that their wares can revive the dead, and in the one from Semur the claim is actually made twice; once by the *Apothecarius* when he is about to sell the repentant Mary Magdalen the ointment she means to pour on Christ's feet in Simon's house, and once by his son Noblet, before the three Marys come to buy the ointment with which to anoint Christ's body (Palatinus v. 1897; Arras v. 21421; Semur vv. 4876 and 8177). The *Expiciers* of Palatinus and Noblet of Semur also claim to promote sexual love (Palatinus vv. 1181-1888; Semur vv. 8183-8185) and the *Expiciers* promises, in addition, to rejuvenate any client (Palatinus vv. 1873-1879) and to "renovate" (*renovele*) old women (vv. 1890-1891), which probably implies restoring their virginity as in the *Herberie en prose*. All these powers claimed by the charlatans in the religious plays are characteristic of the doctors or life-restorers in the folk plays and customs. However, the Czech *Mastičkář* is the only known example of a medieval religious play in which the quack's promise to bring a dead person to life is actually carried out.

Folk traditions of one sort or another may be the source of many different elements to be found in the medieval religious drama. Thus the *quête* which is introduced into the middle of the English morality called *Mankind*⁵⁷ is a typical feature of folk performances; the solo *spiel* addressed directly to the audience by a figure representing a dramatic character, which distinguishes a range of cycle-play figures from Noah to Pilate, forms a basic type in folk tradition; and the wild dances prescribed for some of the devils reflect at once the dances with which the folk celebrated certain festivals of pagan origin and the preachers' exhortation of them as diabolical and tending to damnation.⁵⁸ Proverbs and popular sayings occur in many of the religious plays, notably in the Wakefield pageants which also employ such traditional tales as the story of the men of Gotham, or of Moll and her pitcher of milk, or of the sheep-stealer and the trick whereby he tries to conceal his theft.⁵⁹

The significance of such borrowings from different traditions has sometimes been misunderstood. The point to be made is that each of the religious plays is the product of a particular intention, not of the blind pressure of rival traditions jostling for a place in a performance both

55. J.-M. Richard ed., *Le Mystère de la Passion, texte du manuscrit 697 de la Bibliothèque d'Arras*, Paris 1893.

56. Roy, *Le Mystère de la Passion en France* . . . 3-203.

57. Mark Eccles ed., *The Macro Plays*, London 1969, 153-184.

58. Richard Axton, "Popular Modes in the Earliest Plays" in Neville Denny ed., *Medieval Drama*, London 1973, 12-39.

59. A. C. Cawley ed., *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*, Manchester 1958, xxiii.

50. Richard Fronsing ed., *Das Drama des Mittelalters I*, Stuttgart 1891, 60-62.

51. Wilhelm Söulmann ed., "Berliner Bruchstück einer Rubinscene," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 63 (1926) 257-267.

52. Fronsing ed., *Das Drama des Mittelalters II-III*, 1891-1892, 548-864.

53. Furet, *Mimes français* . . . , 69-76.

54. Michel Mathieu, "Le personnage du marchand de parfums dans le théâtre médiéval en France," *Moyen Age* 23 (1968), 39-71.

popular and officially sanctioned. Whether it was written by one person or by several, the finished work expresses a certain intent, at once esthetic, celebrational and didactic, and in that sense at least has an "author." It is this "author" who decides whether an item from another tradition, be it folk or minstrel or any other, can make the play more apt to accomplish its purpose, and how it can do so most effectively. It is important to know whether or not a given element derives from a popular custom, for instance, because it throws light on the background against which the audience would have perceived it.⁶⁰ But it is only a first step to understanding the function it serves, or the meaning it bears, in the play itself.

The use made of such borrowings is extremely diverse.⁶¹ In the case of elements taken from a secular tradition, for example, it may be simply their secularity that is turned to advantage in the portrayal of secular or diabolical characters.⁶² But a much more complicated semiotic process may be involved.

The Chester *Adoration of the Shepherds*⁶³ draws on the popular tradition for three major themes: the shepherds' concern with their sheep's illnesses and the medicines with which to cure them; an extravagant feast of markedly coarse foods; and a wrestling match. These are carefully integrated into the comic naturalism of the shepherds' activities; but at the same time they clearly invite a symbolic interpretation. Most scholars agree on that, though not on what they symbolize. A recent study argues that they "can best be understood (. . .) if they are seen as displaced metaphors or physical profanations of qualities traditionally associated with the eucharistic Host," that their ultimate referents are sacramental and ritualistic, and that their function in the play is to objectify "the psychological process of spiritual enlightenment experienced by

60. An example of how far the aim of this kind of research may be misunderstood is furnished by Černý, when he criticizes Jakobson's study of the *Mastičkař* on the ground that, in his concern with the traces of pre-Christian folk traditions, Jakobson overlooked the actual nature of the *Mastičkař* itself; extending his censure to other scholars who follow the same line of investigation, Černý declares that for such people "The work of art and its intention has ceased to be interesting in itself, all that is interesting is what is hidden behind it, not what the author himself wrote but what the analyst has found or is seeking" (Václav Černý, "Od bonifantů k mastičkářům": From *Bonifantex* to Apothecaries, *Sborník historický* 9, Prague 1962, 111). But Jakobson's analysis serves precisely to bring to light the sense of the work as a whole by drawing attention to the special meaning or resonance that certain of its elements would have had for the original audience, for whom the episode was part of an Easter play, performed at a time proper both to the religious celebration of the Resurrection and to the folk celebration of the return of new life and fertility in nature, and for whom the two kinds of celebration were inextricably intertwined.

61. Williams, *The Drama of Medieval England*, 133-135.

62. Axton, "Popular Modes . . .," 39.

63. H. Deimling and J. B. Matthews eds., *The Chester Plays* 1, Oxford 1892, 132-160.

all faithful Christians who are summoned into communion with the Real Presence of their Savior."⁶⁴

The plot about Mak and the stolen sheep which occupies much of the Wakefield *Secunda Pastorum* or Second Shepherds' Play⁶⁵ derives from a folk-tale, the outline of which it proved possible to establish with some degree of assurance.⁶⁶ Since this is a longer and more structured item than the borrowings discussed so far, it furnishes a yet more illuminating example of the transmutation such a loan is apt to undergo when it becomes part of a religious play. By using a story popular among his audience the author ensured on the one hand that they would enjoy watching his play and on the other that they would notice the changes he brought to it. The dramatization differs from the other known versions of the tale in a number of ways which tend to heighten its parodistic correspondence to the nativity of Christ presented immediately afterwards.⁶⁷ Successive generations of scholars have studied the semiotic effect the borrowed folk-tale produces on the Nativity play. They differ in their specific interpretations, but they tend to demonstrate ever more clearly and incontrovertibly that the Mak episode is not an extraneous addition, designed to encourage a rustic spectator to attend to a solemn representation of the gospel story but an intrinsic and essential part of a complex but unified play in honor of the Nativity.

A similarly masked but vital unity characterizes the *Mastičkař*. It uses elements borrowed from popular tradition as well as from professional entertainment and even from liturgical drama in order to produce an uproarious, indecent and seemingly blasphemous farce which is at the same time an integral part of a religious play in honor of the Resurrection.

64. Peter W. Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle*, Chicago and London 1982, 118-121.

65. Cawley, *The Wakefield Pageants . . .*, 43-63.

66. R. C. Cosbey, "The Mak Story and Its Folklore Analogues," *Speculum* 20 (1945), 310-317.

67. Arthur Brown, "Folklore Elements in Medieval Drama," *Folklore* 63:2 (1952), 65-78.