

# The St. George Play and Its Ritual Origination

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In his monumental work *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, Karl Young dogmatically asseverates that the drama in English had its origin in the Latin liturgy of the medieval church in Western Europe. He maintains that the drama began with the humble *Quem Quaeritis* Trope and flourished inside the Church "essentially free from the contamination of alien forms."<sup>1)</sup> Young continues, however, by mentioning that a great deal of dramatic activity was taking place outside the province of the worship service. During the time that the sacred drama was growing inside the church, Hroswitha, sequestered at Gandersheim, was quietly rewriting Terence, the many wandering mimes and minstrels of Europe were keeping alive the often ribald shows handed down from Roman times, and, perhaps most significantly, the peasantry of Europe were carrying on folk customs and festivals that they had observed from time immemorial. These folk customs, Young says, originated from "certain pagan ceremonies of a quasi-religious nature, the purpose of which was to secure the fertility of the earth, of animals, and of human beings through the use of sympathetic magic."<sup>2)</sup>

In England, the folk were no less active than those in any other part of Europe; the peasants were constantly observing feasts and festivals with which were associated a multitudinous variety of folk customs and entertainments. Many of these festivals took place in the spring,<sup>3)</sup> but a number of them also occurred at Christmas. Alan Brody divides the medieval English folk customs into three categories: the Sword Dance, the Wooing Ceremony, and the Hero-Combat.<sup>4)</sup> All three types are survivals of ancient rituals of sympathetic magic: "attempts on the part of man to force the power of nature to his will, to produce for him abundant harvests

and rich vintages.<sup>5)</sup> Indeed, a number of writers have speculated that these three types of folk activity were originally parts of one fertility ritual.<sup>6)</sup> For brevity's sake, I shall deal with only the last category, the Hero-Combat.

When one first encounters the Hero-Combat, which is also known as the St. George Play or the Mummers' Play, he is a bit mystified by the action, the often nonsensical dialogue, and the host of seemingly incongruous characters. To be sure, one writer has exclaimed, "The St. George Play has become like a patchwork quilt, taken from, added to and sewn up all wrong."<sup>7)</sup> But these enigmatic and often cryptic plays take on a startling significance and even a semblance of clarity when we see them as survivals of ancient fertility rituals. As Chambers says, "Their full significance only appears when they are regarded as fragments of forgotten cults, the naive cults addressed by a primitive folk to the beneficent deities of field and wood and river, or the shadowy populace of its own dreams."<sup>8)</sup>

The ritual origination of the St. George Play has been attested to for many years by the most impeccable scholars. Tiddy says that these plays "originated in religious ceremonies," and Chambers calls them "the *detritus* [sic] of heathen mythology and heathen worship."<sup>9)</sup> In more recent years, Northrop Frye, calling them "the drama of folk ritual," has said that these plays are "the drama of the green world, and its theme is once again the triumph of life over the waste land, the death and revival of the year impersonated by figures still human, and once divine as well."<sup>10)</sup> It has also been noted by many eminent scholars that the folk customs of all primitive societies bear a striking resemblance to one another. Hunningher says that the similar effect of the seasons is the reason for the similarities in folk rituals; Brody says that such rituals take a "common shape in many primitive societies...."<sup>11)</sup> And one need only mention *The Golden Bough*, Sir James George Frazer's compendium of various folk rituals and his tracing of similarities in them, to realize the great amount of work that has been done in this area.

As a result of the many similarities that have been found amongst the rituals of the world's primitive peoples, one standard method of

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analyzing the St. George Plays, as adumbrated by Tiddy,<sup>12)</sup> is to compare them to the folk rituals of other cultures in the hope of identifying the many mysterious elements that make up the plays. One nation whose rituals have been exhaustively studied is ancient Greece.<sup>13)</sup> Because of the aforesaid association of St. George Plays with folk rituals, the existence of similarities amongst primitive folk rituals, and the enormous amount of scholarship available on ancient Greek rituals, I shall attempt to show, by noting elements analogous to those of the Greek rituals, that the St. George Plays of England are indeed survivals of ancient fertility rites, and, in so doing, that the medieval hero St. George is a most appropriate choice for protagonist in such a ritual survival.

Folk rituals do not develop in a vacuum; they are the product of men's minds as they consider the world around them, their dependence on that world and the forces that govern it, and their proper response to those forces. As primitive man looked at the vicissitudes of nature, her often seemingly capricious actions, and considered the dependence of his livelihood upon nature, he responded either by attempting to appease nature through sacrifice or by trying to control her through the use of sympathetic magic. As man matured in his outlook on nature, or as his dependence upon her lessened, so his customs and rituals changed or were discarded accordingly. Seeing the influence that a nation's social, religious, and economic conditions have upon its rituals, we should begin our study of the St. George Plays with a brief look at the society of medieval England. For, although the fertility ritual that forms the essence of the St. George Plays dates from pre-Christian times, the plays as we know them today are surely the product of medieval England.<sup>14)</sup>

Medieval England was primarily rural, with a large number of people dependent upon agriculture and livestock for their subsistence. The peasants were illiterate and highly superstitious. Augustine had introduced Christianity late in the sixth century, but, as a result of the stubbornness of long-held beliefs and the policy of absorption adopted by Pope Gregory, the people retained many of their pagan beliefs, often to the chagrin of ecclesiastical authorities. Martin Nilsson writes, "Christianity easily swept away the great gods, but the minor daemons of popular belief

offered a stubborn resistance.<sup>15)</sup> The peasants combined their old beliefs with the new Christian teaching they were receiving to form a strange admixture of practices and customs which were severely censured by the Church. To the high and holy feast days of the Christian calendar the people appended riotous May games, dances, and revelings, among which was the folk drama with which we have to do. As a result, many early clerics, especially Robert Grossteste, bishop of Lincoln, led reform movements, attempting to eradicate these folk customs which they viewed as pagan and immoral.<sup>16)</sup> But the continued existence of these folk rituals, yea, their immense popularity reveals not only that the peasant of medieval England had a propensity for frolicking, but also that he still felt the need, perhaps even unconsciously, to perform the rites of sympathetic magic necessary to insure the continued fecundity of his crops, his herds, and his family.

Since I shall be comparing the St. George Plays to similar fertility rites of ancient Greece, it is both interesting and pertinent to note the similarities between medieval English society and the ancient Greek society that fostered the fertility rituals which eventually gave rise to the elaborate Dionysiac rites and those performed secretly at Eleusis. The ancient Greeks were also a people dependent upon agriculture and livestock. They were also a rural and illiterate people given to excessive superstition. They also attempted to control the forces of nature through rites of sympathetic magic, albeit they did so more consciously than did the medieval Englishman. Indeed, the Greeks considered their fertility rituals of such importance that one writer has said, "The religion of the Greeks was primarily not a matter of belief at all, but only of practice."<sup>17)</sup> And, while the Greek bacchants did not have the Christian Church with which to contend, they did receive censure from the more pristine moralists of the day and even from the government.<sup>18)</sup> Yet, for all their excesses, these rituals were also performed in order to insure continued fertility and even immortality.

The Hero-Combat, or St. George Play, is known, says Violet Alford, "all over England, at least so far north as Forfar in Scotland, in Ireland and in the Isle of Man."<sup>19)</sup> Being thus widespread, with each village

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having its own version of the play, the variations and combinations that occur are almost beyond cataloging.<sup>20)</sup> The endless variety of the plays that have been written down makes selection of a representative play for analysis a bit difficult; but, for all their variety, the plays are all built around a similar plot inasmuch that a satisfactory analysis can be made by selecting one and occasionally mentioning significant variations from other plays.<sup>21)</sup> For this study, I have chosen to analyze the Lutterworth Play, which I have reproduced in the appendix, and will, from time to time, cite such variations as are relevant to our investigative excursion. To be sure, given the wide range of these plays and their long history of oral transmission, one is surprised to find that they are not more dissimilar.

The St. George Plays were traditionally performed at Christmas. One might question the efficacy of a fertility ritual in the middle of winter, but, as Professor Baskervill observes, "Possibly as a result partly of the confusion of the calendar due to the mingling of cults from peoples of various nationalities and occupations who celebrated the turning of the seasons at different times, customs appropriate to festivals ushering in the new year and promoting fertility are found from Christmas to Midsummer...." Baskervill also remarks concerning the "splitting up of the autumn festival period, which during the middle ages was largely absorbed by Christmas on the one hand or by midsummer festivals on the other."<sup>22)</sup> The association of the St. George Plays with the celebration of Christmas does not speak against their fertility ritual origination; indeed, this association reinforces the argument for such an origination. For the Winter Solstice, onto which Christmas was grafted by the early Church fathers, had long been associated with "light versus darkness, rebirth after lowest ebb." And, as Miss Alford writes, "ideas of fecundity" always surge "strongly at the seasonal feasts."<sup>23)</sup>

These Hero-Combat Plays were acted out by groups of men who went from house to house or to various places agreed upon by the mummers. The fact that only men were allowed to participate in the St. George Plays is not without ritual significance. Many explanations have been offered, but Brody argues most logically when he says that men have

traditionally been regarded as "the priests, the primitive agents of magic." He quotes an early twentieth century mummer as saying, "There be plenty else for them that be flirty-like, but this here mumming be more like parson's work."<sup>24)</sup> The mummers were reluctant to reveal the stations at which they would perform for fear of breaking their luck, a superstitious attitude clearly reminiscent of a time when the plays had greater magical significance. If one of the players gave out the secret it might endanger the crops of every farmer in the village. This peripatetic method of acting was also employed by the ancient Greeks in their fertility rites. Nilsson says that young men walked over their villages hoping to spread a "magical" influence over the area; E. O. James mentions that "Stations were made at the shrines along the Sacred Way to Eleusis, and on occasions buffoonery occurred."<sup>25)</sup>

When the mummers reached the agreed upon station, one would draw a large circle in which to act out the rudimentary drama. Beatty sees nothing in this but the marking off of an elementary stage, but the circle has traditionally been a symbol for excluding evil spirits so that good magic could be performed, as it was among the ancient Greeks.<sup>26)</sup> If the play was to be performed inside, the presenter entered the house or tavern and asked that a space be cleared. The mummers were evidently dressed in ordinary clothes, but covered from head to foot in long strips of cloth, thus concealing their identity. Here again we see an attempt at secrecy and anonymity. Many times the mummers blackened their faces, especially the person representing the Turkish Knight. Tiddy opines that this desire for mystery and anonymity is yet another survival of the ancient fertility ritual, and Brody calls these rudimentary garbs "non-representational ritual disguise[s]."<sup>27)</sup> Down through the years, the customs changed from ones that attempt to conceal the players' identities to ones that more nearly represented the characters being portrayed, as the ritual nature of the plays became less important. The action of the plays has traditionally been divided into five parts: the Presentation, the Dispute, the Lament, the Cure, and the *Quete*.<sup>28)</sup> I shall here make use of these divisions, as they will facilitate an orderly explication of the plays.

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The Presentation is the short opening scene of the play. The presenter, who has almost as many different names as there are different plays, asks indulgence of the audience to present the play and then introduces the main characters. The presenter in the Lutterworth Play is called Captain Slasher; in other plays he is called Bold Slasher, Bold Striker, Foreman, Headman, and, in many instances, Father Christmas. He is, in general, not a very well-drawn character, merely serving to introduce the principals and occasionally narrate parts of the presentation. In the Lutterworth Play, Captain Slasher seems to be merely a precursor to the Turkish Knight, and the King of England seems to be the real presenter. At least, Captain Slasher is never heard from again, and the English King takes over the presenter's duties. The idea of George being the King's only son obviously has Christian overtones; such a relationship occurs in many of the plays. An addition such as the King of England is not uncommon in the mummers' plays; indeed, over the years, a number of famous characters, including Cromwell, Bonaparte, and the King of Egypt, have appeared in various plays. Their appearance, however, is always localized and, with few exceptions, unique to the play in which they appear. In the play from Heptonstall, Yorkshire, a rather late accretion is shown in the appearance of a sufragee.

But again, the most important part of the Presentation is the introduction of the two combatants, St. George and the Turkish Knight. These characters are obviously of medieval origin, and nothing is known about the identification of the combatants before they were sainted and knighted by medieval Englishmen. The first combatant is called Prince George in the play that we are analyzing, and in several others he is called King George. These changes from the original St. George are not surprising, considering the later influence of the four Hanoverians and the propensity of the folk to make such changes, as is evidenced by the many variations upon the common plot that are extant. The presence of St. George is still felt, however. In the plays from Cinderford, Gloucestershire and Icomb, Gloucestershire, in neither of which St. George is present, he is still referred to by the characters in the play. The presenter at Icomb cries out, "We was come round this merry Christmas/To act activity

of young, activity of age, / Some of the funniest activities as ever was acted on King George's stage." Obviously St. George, be he called Prince or King, is the dominant figure in a majority of the extant Mummers' Plays.

But one might ask, "Why was St. George chosen as protagonist by the unlettered folk? What connection has St. George with the idea of fertility, if any? Does his presence work in favor of the theory for the ritual origination of these plays?" In the next several paragraphs, I hope to answer these questions and to show, by reflecting upon a number of the various legends associated with St. George, that there are several reasons why he is a most appropriate choice for protagonist in a medieval reworking of an ancient fertility ritual.<sup>29)</sup>

According to the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould, St. George was born in Cappadocia in A. D. 285,<sup>30)</sup> but beyond this we know almost nothing about this extremely popular saint. Strangely enough, because of this dearth of factual information about St. George, a great number of floating legends have been attached to his name, thus accounting for most of what we know of him today. Christina Hole has written:

Because the saints lived in the hearts of the people and were regarded by them as patrons and protectors, it was inevitable that legends of all kinds should gather round their names. The real incidents of their lives were heightened and embroidered by lively storytellers. Gaps in their known histories were filled in with details that seemed probable or suitable to pious narrators, and floating folk tales were sometimes added to their traditions, as in the case of St. George....<sup>31)</sup>

The large gap in the personal history of St. George became a receptacle for every floating legend or dying myth that needed a name to which to attach itself. Baring-Gould says of St. George: "The popular traditions concerning him are sacred myths of faded creeds absorbed into a newer faith and re-coloured."<sup>32)</sup>

Perhaps the earliest legends that were associated with St. George,

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and those which inextricably linked him with the ideas of fertility and rebirth, were those contained in the Greek and Latin *Acts* written in the sixth century. These *Acts* relate the various tortures inflicted upon the good saint by the Emperor Diocletian. According to the Greek *Acts*, the saint suffered for seven days, each day's torture being enough to kill an ordinary man, but from which he was miraculously healed and revived. The Latin *Acts* would have him suffer seven years, during which 40,900 people were converted by the miracle of his perpetual revivification. These *Acts* were declared spurious by Pope Gelasius in 494, but not before the legends had been circulated throughout the churches for many years.<sup>33)</sup>

St. George's reputation as a warrior saint, which alone would certainly make him an appropriate choice for protagonist in the Mummers' Plays, began with the return of the Crusaders. As these Crusaders returned from their Holy Wars in the East, they spread the legend of St. George throughout Western Europe. He is credited with miraculously aiding the Christian forces at Antioch and Jerusalem in 1098. He is said to have delivered Richard I and his forces from the Saracen cohorts near Acre in 1191, and his name eventually became the battle cry of the Crusaders. Churches were dedicated to him in England before the time of Alfred the Great, and his feast day was made a holiday in England in 1222. He superseded Edward the Confessor as patron saint of England around 1330.<sup>44)</sup> His reputation as an able warrior and as a destroyer of evil was reinforced by the immensely popular *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, completed in 1270.<sup>35)</sup> This fabulous work first introduced the legend of St. George and the dragon, which I will discuss a bit later.

One must remember that the folk of the Middle Ages felt a special closeness to the saints, much as the ancient Greeks had felt toward their heroes. Indeed, much has been made of the fact that the saints are merely Christian versions of the Greek heroes.<sup>36)</sup> The folk looked to the saints for intercession and for protection, so that, when the Crusaders returned with tales of the valiant St. George, this Eastern saint quickly became the most popular saint in England.

St. George was not only regarded as a symbol of rebirth and known as an especially competent warrior, but was also believed to have the power

of producing fecundity in plants, animals, and humans. He is said to have caused dried wood to sprout,<sup>37)</sup> and the Ethiopian Christians wore amulets depicting St. George, believing that he would give women many healthy babies, would give men virility and strength, and would protect the general populace from all sorts of disease.<sup>38)</sup> Moslems also revered St. George as a symbol of fertility and credited him with having never tasted death.<sup>39)</sup> And, in a very detailed discussion, Frazer traces various fertility myths associated with St. George from Syria to Transylvania to Sweden.<sup>41)</sup> I have discussed the legend of St. George at length, but it seems most pertinent to do so. Knowing that St. George was associated with rebirth, with combat, and with an enormous number of fertility myths, it is not improbable that the medieval British folk were aware of some of these associations, especially when one considers the spread of his fame through the Church, by the testimony of the Crusaders, and almost certainly by word-of-mouth in those elaborate fairs that the British held, to which merchants came from all over Europe and the Near East.<sup>41)</sup>

After the entrance of St. George and the Turkish Knight, who is also a relic from the Crusades, and after the exchange of several highly contemptuous speeches, as in our Lutterworth example, the two warriors fight. This combat and the subsequent death and resurrection are the most important parts of the action. This action is central to the fertility rite, just as it was to those of the ancient Greeks. The ancient Greek rituals contained a combat between "the Light One" and "the Black One," symbolizing the struggle between summer and winter, life and death.<sup>42)</sup>

In the same way we see St. George, a symbol of summer, life, and fertility doing battle with the black-faced Turkish Knight, a symbol of winter, death, and barrenness. St. George became "a vegetation spirit...that in the first stage is living, then dies with each year, then thirdly rises again from the dead, raising the whole dead world with him..."<sup>43)</sup>

Here we find a puzzling occurrence: many times St. George is killed, as in our Lutterworth example. St. George is victorious in a majority of the plays, but sometimes he is defeated, and, in other plays, it seems not to matter who is killed. Young attributes this indifference as to the success or failure of St. George to "the fact that the germ of the play is

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not the romance or realism of the story, but the symbolism of death and revival in themselves."<sup>44</sup>) Yet it seems equally feasible that the variations represent two types of rituals, one in which Summer drives out Winter, and one in which Summer is killed only to be resurrected. But regardless of who emerges victorious, there is always the knowledge in the back of the auditor's mind that the defeated foe will come again, and this ritual of sympathetic magic is intended to produce an orderly rotation of the seasons as much as it is intended to hasten the arrival of spring and insure a good harvest.

And yet, although the play is not really about St. George, but about fertility, one cannot help but wonder, "Where is the dragon?" In most plays he is only mentioned. Why does St. George fight a Turk when dragons were even more well known as symbols of evil?<sup>45</sup>) Frazer even says that the fight between St. George and the Dragon symbolizes "the victory of summer over winter."<sup>46</sup>) The answer may be found in Prince George's speech near the end of the Lutterworth Play. He says, "My head is made of iron, / My body is made of steel." This speech is common to many of the plays, but is usually given to the Turkish Knight or to Beelzebub. Perhaps these speeches are intended to associate the antagonist with the dragon. Or perhaps, as Violet Alford suggests, the dragon was simply too difficult for the mummers to portray.<sup>47</sup>)

The next action of the play is the Lament. In the Lutterworth Play, the King of England recites the traditional jeremiad. Many times the mourner refers to the slain as "son," but this again is probably a Christian intrusion. Brody remarks that the Lament of the Mummers' Plays "is an important analogous link between the men's ceremonial and the primitive rituals of Europe."<sup>48</sup>) And, with trepidation, I would like to quote Miss Weston's mentioning of a point that might otherwise go unnoticed: that, as with the wailing of the women of ancient Petra over the annual death of Tammuz, "the true reason for this universal mourning was the cessation, or suspension, by injury or death, of the reproductive energy of the god upon whose virile activity vegetable life directly, and human life indirectly, depended."<sup>49</sup>) Whatever the case, mourning has always been associated with fertility rituals.

Immediately following the Lament is the Cure with its quack doctor, which served as a bit of comic relief for the audience. The doctor enters, speaks at length of his travels and his iatric prowess, and engages in sometimes elaborate buffoonery with a character named Jack Finney. And yet this medical braggadocio who ultimately revives the slain combatant also has ritual significance. Stanley Edgar Hyman says that such ritual survivals are significant "because they embody sometimes in trivial or playful form, the serious usages of earlier stages."<sup>50)</sup> This doctor does seem to be a playful descendant of the powerful medicine man of primitive races. Tiddy explains the decline in respect for the doctor thusly, "The medicine man of savage races is hated so long as he is feared, and his natural or inevitable fate is to become a target for witticism as soon as that fear is no longer felt."<sup>51)</sup> The doctor in the Lutterworth Play seems to be more staid and more powerful than any of the other doctors of the plays, in that he raises St. George with just a word. The others use some pill or potion.

The final section of the Mummings' Play is the *Quete*, in which a host of fanciful characters takes part. Brody defines *quete* as any kind of "perambulatory collection."<sup>52)</sup> In the Lutterworth Play, Beelzebub and a clown enter and a sing a song.<sup>53)</sup> In other plays, a large assortment of clowns and fools appear and perform buffoonery and sing. Many of these characters seem to be borrowed from the Morality Plays, but the character Beelzebub has ritual significance as well. His standard speech begins, "In comes I, old Beelzebub / over my shoulder I carry my club, / And in my hand a frying-pan." Many scholars have seen this club as a phallic symbol, reminiscent of the phallus-bearing processions of ancient Greece.<sup>54)</sup> Seeing the importance of phallic symbols in ancient Greek rites, and knowing that phallic worship was practised in pre-Christian Britain,<sup>55)</sup> one does not have to be a fanatic Freudian to see the club as a phallic symbol. It has also been suggested that the frying-pan is a symbol for the female sexual organ.<sup>56)</sup> This is not improbable either, because we know that in the plays the pan is more frequently called a "dripping pan," and Dripping Pan is a name long used in England to refer to an especially fertile field.<sup>57)</sup>

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Brody compares the entire *Quete* to the Phallic Processions of ancient Greek rituals, pointing out that the male and female characters of the *Quete*—the females being men dressed in women's clothing—are but remnants of the Sacred Marriage Ceremony, which is more elaborately expressed in the Wooing Plays.<sup>58)</sup> It is also interesting to note that the collection itself can be compared to a similar practice of asking alms in the ancient Greek Thargelia, a springtime fertility festival.<sup>59)</sup> It is with this asking of alms that the Mummers' play ends.

The St. George Plays are indubitably medieval reworkings of ancient fertility rituals, and their long and stubborn survival attests to the fact that they satisfied a basic human need, at first a serious one and later a more jocular one. Of the Greek fertility rituals, Cicero writes, "They have sweetened our characters and softened our customs; they have made us pass from the condition of savages to true humanity. They have not only shown us the way to live joyfully, but they have taught us how to die with a better hope."<sup>60)</sup> In much the same way the Mummers' Plays met a similar human need of the medieval English peasant. Regardless if he were conscious of it or not, the listener saw in the resurrection of the seasons the hope of a resurrection for himself. These simple plays made the fell hand of death easier to bear, and this quality is the reason for the plays' tenacity. They would never have survived as long as they did had they only been yet another form of entertainment. But, as was stated earlier, as man's outlook on life and nature matured, he found less need for his old forms of magic. The mummers are gone, and their plays are performed by schoolchildren, if they are ever performed at all. And, although the progress of science has done much to change men's minds about the world in which they live, let us hope that the passing of the Mummers' Plays signifies that men have finally realized the truth of that Pauline injunction, which the medieval folk, being steeped in pagan tradition, could not fully grasp, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (I Corinthians 13:10).

### NOTES

1) Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), I, 7.

2) Young, I, 10.

3) For a lengthy discussion of May Day and other spring festivals, see E. K. Chambers' *The Medieval Stage* (Oxford: University Press, 1903), I, 116—181.

4) Alan Brody, *The English Mummers and Their Plays* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 5. For a detailed discussion of the Sword Dance, see Chambers' *The Medieval Stage*, I, 182—204, and his *The English Folk-Play* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 123—131. The Morris Dance, which is often categorized with the Sword Dance, is also discussed by Chambers in *The English Folk-Play*, pp. 150—153 and even more fully by Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert C. Macilwaine in *The Morris Book* (East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England: E.P. Publishing Ltd., 1974), pp. 7—17. Both dances are discussed in Cecil J. Sharp's and A. P. Oppe's *The Dance* (London: Halton and Truscott Smith, Ltd., 1924), pp. 4—6, and more succinctly in *Folk Dances of the British Isles* (New York: A. S. Burns and Co., 1948), pp. 33—39, by Anne Duggan, Jeanette Schlottmann, and Abbie Rutledge. The classic study of the Wooing Play is by Charles Read Baskerville, "Mummers' Wooing Plays in England," *MP*, XXI(1924), 225—272. An interesting parallel to the English Wooing Play is to be found in R. M. Dawkins' description of a Thracian Wooing Play in *JHS*, XXVI(1906), 191—206.

5) Arthur Beatty, "The St. George or Mummers' Play: A Study in the Protology of the Drama," *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters*, XV, pt. 2(1906), 321.

6) Brody, p. viii; A. P. Rossiter, *English Drama From Early Times to the Elizabethans* (London: Hutchinson House, 1950), p. 16; and Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (New York: Peter Smith, 1957), p. 99.

7) Violet Alford, *Introduction to English Folklore* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1952), p. 89.

8) Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, I, 94. Rossiter echoes this opinion, quoting R. G. Collingwood as saying that a folk play appears " 'useless, meaningless, perhaps even a trifle absurd, unless and until we read it in the light of a past equivalent to which it points back' " (p.11).

9) R. J. E. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 70; Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, I, 94.

10) "The Argument of Comedy," in *English Institute Essays: 1948*, ed. D. A.

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Robertson, Jr. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1949), p. 67. See also Brody, pp. 54—55; Beatty, p. 273; Weston, pp. 81, 96, 119—120; Richard Axton, *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), p. 35; and Christina Hole, *Saints in Folklore* (New York: M. Barrows and Co., Inc., 1965), p. 29. C. L. Barber calls them “fossil fragments” in *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1963), p. 15.

11) Benjamin Hunningher, *The Origin of the Theatre* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 86; Brody, p. 55.

12) Tiddy, p. 62.

13) The classic tomes are Jane Ellen Harrison’s *Themis* (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), her *Prolegomena* (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), Gilbert Murray’s *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (London: Watts and Co., 1935), L. R. Farnell’s *The Cults of the Greek Stages*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), F. M. Cornford’s *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (London: E. Arnold, 1914), and J. C. Lawson’s *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1964).

14) Charles Read Baskervill writes that “the greater part of the dialogue belonging to the complex forms of actual folk drama found among the modern mummers was the product of the centuries from 1200 to 1500.” in “Dramatic Aspects of Medieval Folk Festivals in England,” *SP*, XVII (1920), 20. See also Hunningher, pp. 102—103.

15) *Greek Folk Religion* (New York: Peter Smith, 1961), p. 16. See also E. O. James’ *Christian Myth and Ritual* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1965), p. 269.

16) For a full discussion of the Church’s battle with such folk customs, see Chambers’ *The Medieval Stage*, I, 90—94. See also Hunningher, p. 85.

17) Walter Woodburn Hyde, *Greek Religion and Its Survivals* (New York: Cooper Square, 1963), p. 4.

18) For an account of the government censure, see George Ryley Scott’s *Phallic Worship* (London: Luxor Press Ltd., 1966), p. 127. Aristophanes alludes to the moralists of the day and their practice of chiseling off the prominent phalli of statues central to the worship of deities of fertility in *Lysistrata* (11. 1355—57).

19) Alford, p. 88.

20) The Revesby Sword Play, for example, contains elements from the Hero-Combat, The Wooing Play, and the Sword Dance. See J. Mitchell Morse’s “The Unity of the Revesby Sword Play,” *PQ*, XXXIII, (1954), 81—86.

21) The largest collection of folk plays is a 35 volume collection that is housed, unfortunately, only in the private collection of Alex Helm in Congleton, Cheshire,

England. The most available collection in one volume is Tiddy's *The Mummers' Play*, which contains 33 plays or play fragments. A large number of plays are also to be found in the issues of *Notes and Queries* published from 1850 to 1880. Chambers publishes several plays in *The English Folk Play*, as well as a bibliography of 159 sources of individual plays. One would hope that a substantial collection of these plays will soon be forthcoming.

22) Baskervill, *SP*, pp. 25—26, 31.

23) Alford, pp. 5,6.

24) Brody, p. 21.

25) Nilsson, p. 28; James, p. 32.

26) Beatty, p. 276; Nilsson, p. 28.

27) Tiddy, pp. 75—76; Brody, p. 26.

28) This is Chambers' division, as used in *The English Folk-Play*; Brody uses only four divisions, deleting the Presentation.

29) A copious account of the various legends associated with St. George is to be found in the following three articles by John E. Matzke: "Contributions to the History of the Legend of St. George, Part I," *PMLA*, XVII, IV (1902), 464—535; "Contributions to the History of the Legend of St. George, Part II," *PMLA*, XVII, I(1903), 99—156; and "The Legend of St. George: Its Development into a *Roman d'aventure*," *PMLA*, XIX, III(1904), 449—478. Joseph Szoverffy records a number of rather extratraditionary legends of St. George in his "The Master of Wolves and Dragon-killer," *SFQ*, XIX(1955), 211—229.

30) *The Lives of the Saints* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1914), IV, 308.

31) Hole, pp. xii—xiii.

32) *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 93.

33) Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints*, pp. 302—304.

34) Hole, pp. 23—25.

35) R. L. P. Milburn, *Saints and Their Emblems in English Churches* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. xxxiii. The most fabulous and perhaps the most popular treatment of the legend of St. George and the dragon is the work of Richard Johnson, which was completed in the late 1500's. This work has been published in chapbook form as *The History of the Seven Champions of Christendom* (Portland, Oregon: Richard Abel & Co., 1967). It has also been retold by W. H. G. Kingston in *St. George and the Dragon* (New York: The Limited Editions Club, 1949).

36) Nilsson, pp. 18—20.

37) E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*

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(Cambridge: University Press, 1928), III, 924, cited in C. Grant Loomis' *White Magic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1948), p. 94.

38) E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1930), p. 181.

39) Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, p. 96.

40) Sir James George Frazer, *The Magic Art*, Vol. II of *The Golden Bough* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1935), pp. 324—348.

41) P. H. Ditchfield, *English Villages* (New York: James Pott and Co., 1901), pp. 261—262.

42) Nilsson, p. 36. See also Cornford, pp. 56—60.

43) Murray, pp. 32—33.

44) Young, p. 12.

45) See Loomis, p. 65; Milburn, pp. xxxvi—xxxvii; Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, p. 101; C. G. Jung, *Four Archetypes*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 15—16; the Reverend Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Principal Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints* (Baltimore, Md.: John Murphy and Co., 1866), p. 102.

46) Frazer, *The Dying God*, Vol. IV of *The Golden Bough*, p. 107.

47) Alford, p. 89.

48) Brody, p. 54.

49) Weston, p. 44.

50) "The Ritual View of Myth and the Mythic," *JAFI*, LXVIII(1955), 462.

51) Tiddy, p. 76.

52) Brody, p. 14.

53) For a discussion of the musical aspects of the Mummers' Plays, see A. L. Lloyd's *Folk Song in England* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), pp. 97—98.

54) See Brody, pp. 61—62; Rossiter, p. 23; Morse, p. 85; Axton, p. 38. For a description of the Greek ritual, see Nilsson, p. 36.

55) Scott, p. 184.

56) Brody, p. 62.

57) Margaret Baker, *Folklore and Customs of Rural England* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), p. 17.

58) Brody, pp. 67—71.

59) Nilsson, p. 37.

60) Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York: Mentor, 1963), p. 48.

APPENDIX

THE LUTTERWORTH ST. GEORGE PLAY

THE CHRISTMAS MUMMERS' PLAY.

Dramatis Personae.

1. Captain Slasher, *in military costume, with sword and pistol.*
2. King of England, *in robes, wearing the crown.*
3. Prince George, *King's Son, in robes, and sword by his side.*
4. Turkish Champion, *in military attire, with sword and pistol.*
5. A Noble Doctor.
6. Beelzebub.
7. A Clown.

*Enter Captain Slasher.* I beg your pardon for being so bold,  
I enter your house, the weather's so cold,  
Room, a room! brave gallants, give us room to sport;  
For in this house we do resort,—  
Resort, resort, for many a day;  
Step in, the King of England,  
And boldly clear the way.

*Enter King of England. (I am the King of England, that boldly does appear;)*  
I come to seek my only son,—my only son is here.

*Enter Prince George.* I am Prince George, a worthy Knight;  
I'll spend my blood for England's right.  
England's right I will maintain;  
I'll fight for old England once again.

*Enter Turkish Knight.* I am the Turkish Champion;  
From Turkey's land I come.  
I come to fight the King of England  
and all his noble men.

*Captain Slasher.* In comes Captain Slasher,  
Captain Slasher is my name;  
With sword and pistol by my side,  
I hope to win the game.

*King of England.* I am the King of England,

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As you may plainly see, These are my soldiers standing by me;  
They stand by me your life to end,  
On them doth my life depend.

*Prince George.* I am Prince George, the Champion bold,  
And with my sword I won three crowns of gold;  
I slew the fiery dragon and brought him to the slaughter,  
And won the King of Egypt's only daughter.

*Turkish Champion.* As I was going by St. Francis' School,  
I heard a lady cry 'A fool, a fool!'  
'A fool,' was every word,  
'That man's a fool,  
Who wears a wooden sword.'

*Prince George.* A wooden sword, you dirty dog!  
My sword is made of the best of metal free.  
If you would like to taste of it,  
I'll give it unto thee.  
Stand off, stand off, you dirty dog!  
Or by my sword you'll die.  
I'll cut you down the middle,  
And make your blood to fly.

[*They fight; Prince George falls, mortally wounded*]

*Enter King of England.* Oh, horrible! terrible! what hast thou done?  
Thou hast ruin'd me, ruin'd me,  
By killing of my only son!  
Oh, is there ever a noble doctor to be found,  
To cure this English champion  
Of his deep and deadly wound?

*Enter Noble Doctor.* Oh yes, there is a noble doctor to be found,  
To cure this English champion  
Of his deep and deadly wound.

*King of England.* And pray what is your practice?

*Noble Doctor.* (*I boast not of my practice, neither do I study in the practice of*) *physic.*

*King of England.* What can you cure?

*Noble Doctor.* All sort of diseases,  
Whatever you pleases:  
I can cure the itch, and pitch,  
The phthisic, the palsy and the gout;

And if the devil's in the man,  
I can fetch him out.  
My wisdom lies in my wig,  
I torture not my patients with excations,  
Such as pills, boluses, solutions, and embrocations;  
But by the word of command  
I can make this mighty prince to stand.

*King.* What is your fee?

*Doctor.* Ten pounds is true.

*King.* Proceed, Noble Doctor;  
You shall have your due.

*Doctor.* Arise, arise! most noble prince, arise,  
And no more dormant lay;  
And with thy sword  
Make all thy foes obey.

[*The Prince arises.*]

*Prince George.* My head is made of iron,  
My body is made of steel,  
My legs are made of crooked bones  
To force you all to yield.

*Enter Beelzebub.* In comes I, old Beelzebub,  
Over my shoulder I carry my club,  
And in my hand a frying-pan,  
Pleased to get all the money I can.

*Enter Clown.* In come I, who's never been yet,  
With my great head and little wit:  
My head is great, my wit is small,  
I'll do my best to please you all.

*Song (all join).* And now we are done and must be gone,  
No longer will we stay here;  
But if you please, before we go,  
We'll taste your Christmas beer.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

This play is taken from E. K. Chambers' *The Medieval Stage* (Oxford: University Press, 1903), II, 276—279. It is also to be found in J. Q. Adams' *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), pp. 355—356.