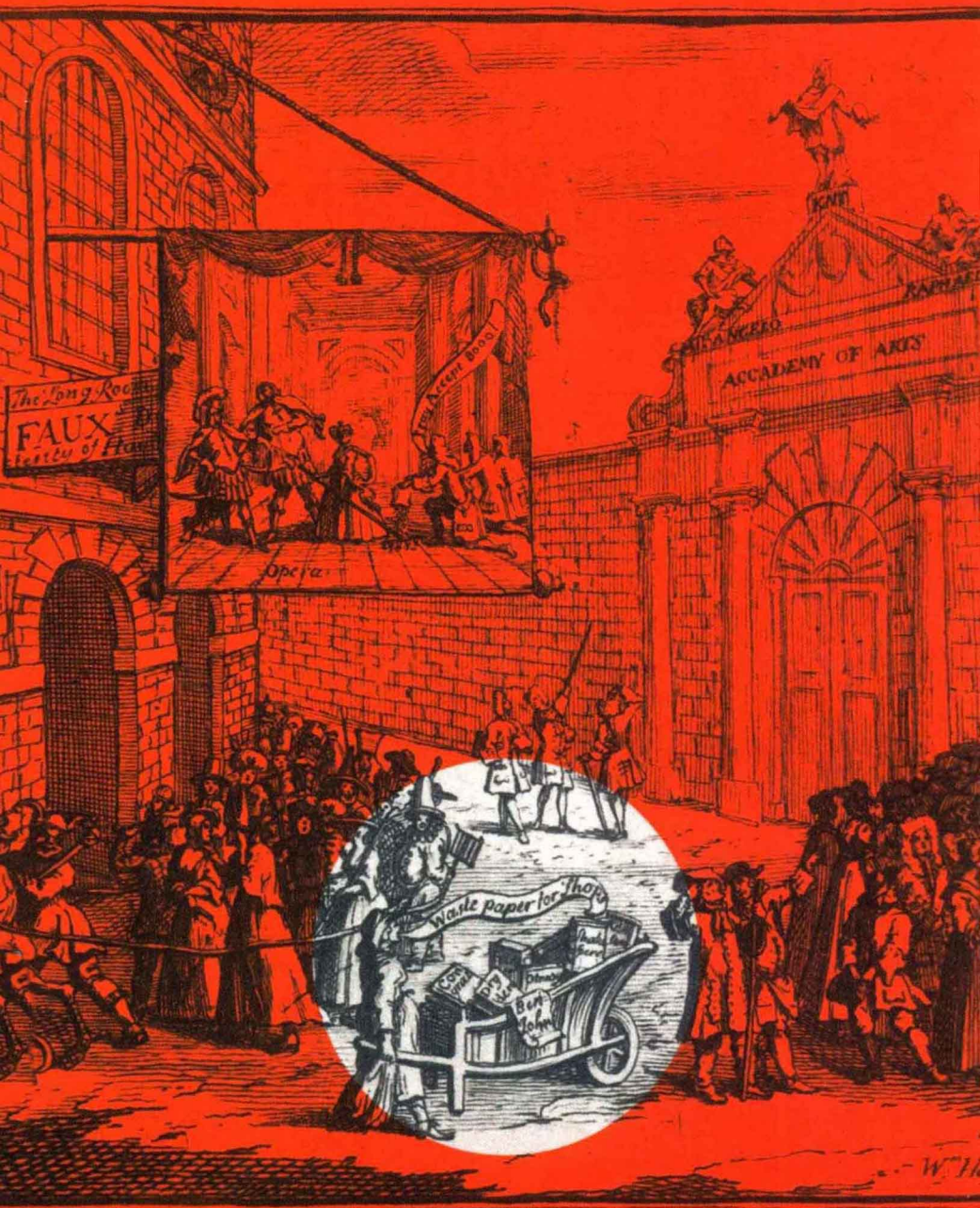
ENGLISH DRAMA

FORMS AND DEVELOPMENT



Edited by Marie Axton and Raymond Williams

English Drama: Forms and Development

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
MURIEL CLARA BRADBROOK

EDITED BY
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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY RAYMOND WILLIAMS

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Introduction

The problem of form is central to the history and analysis of drama. Yet it is soon clear that even the definition of the problem involves radical differences of theory and method. At one extreme, which can be called formalist, each work has its specific form, though there is then a deep divergence between those who assign the specific form to a specific experience and those who see each form as specifying the formal properties of some more general mode, either the dramatic mode itself or one of its generic variants. At the other extreme, which can be called historical, each work is specific but its form is a variable matter, over a range from pure examples of historically dominant forms, through cases of adaptation and combination of previously known forms, to instances of specific mutations of form, in discoverable historical situations.

The theoretical issues raised in these positions, and in the many intermediate or eclectic positions, are relevant to the whole range of writing and indeed of all imaginative composition. But that they are especially relevant and in one sense inevitable in the history and analysis of drama is due mainly to the extraordinary richness, the extraordinary time-span, and in this sense – though definition is again difficult – the extraordinary persistence of major drama. We bring together, and in one sense are bound to bring together, in what can seem to be a tradition, dramatic works which to the most casual eye are radically different in form yet in which we can see both a community and a range of communities. The study of forms and their development is then necessarily part of the practical work, on whatever theoretical basis or at whatever level of consciousness of the theoretical issues involved, of every student of drama.

This point has a significant relation to the study of drama in the Faculty of English in Cambridge, to which all the contributors to this book belong

or have recently belonged. Cambridge English is most widely and influentially known for its emphasis on 'practical criticism', though members of the Faculty know – and with especial acuteness today – how varied and variable that emphasis has been and can be. For while, in the study of almost all drama, there are indeed 'words on pages', in this local and practical sense, it is or ought to be evident, as an inherent and defining fact about them, that they are not intended to be confined to printed pages and indeed, to put it more strongly, that the words on the pages are either a preparation or a record of that more specific composition which is a dramatic performance. Of course the pages vary. Sometimes, as in certain modern texts, the words are not only the words to be spoken in the performance but also detailed descriptions of dramatic scene and movement. Indeed the variability of this relation between 'text' and 'performance' is a central instance of the general and theoretical problems of dramatic form.

There are few who would deliberately deny this, but the study of drama in Cambridge has undoubtedly been affected by the unresolved character of this basic question. There are, of course, many for whom the simple formulation – 'the words on the page' – is simply shorthand for close reading and close analysis of what is actually written, and when this is the case it is not difficult to establish the need, in close reading and analysis of dramatic writing, to discover and understand the notations which indicate what is not always verbally present but is essential to the specific arrangement and composition, and, further, to discover and understand the conventions, those strictly formal elements, which are often not present, as words on the page, but which are essential to any significant or accurate reading of them. Notations and conventions have then undoubtedly also to be read, and in the case of drama this reading of notations and conventions involves study of the conditions of performance, ranging from the physical properties of stages to the nature of the occasion and of the audience, which, though in varying degrees, are inherent elements of the specific composition.

Two tendencies can however be discerned, in Cambridge and elsewhere, in the study of major drama. There are those who, whatever their other differences, take the words on the page as also the words on the stage, and extend their analysis and their history to the development of dramatic forms and to the most general conditions of performance. There are others who, in effect, and especially in relation to the conditions of performance, reject this extension as distraction, or, to put it another way, assimilate dramatic texts to the status of all other printed texts, and indeed to printed

texts which were intended from the beginning to be silently read. Everything of real importance, they argue, can be read where it is, on the page. It is a striking fact that these two tendencies have coexisted in Cambridge, both in the study of Shakespeare, where for half a century there has been important but radically variable work, and in the study of Tragedy, which again for half a century has been a major element of the Tripos and which is indeed now the only compulsory reading paper in Part Two of the Tripos, which can itself be identified as the most specific contribution to English studies now represented by Cambridge.

It is inevitable and perhaps even right, in existing circumstances, that a major faculty should include, even in its central work, radical differences of theory and method, though this is only certain to be an educational advantage if it is something more than passive coexistence and includes open and regular clarification and argument. But what has also to be said is that a school of English cannot be reduced, either in popular reputation or in formal account, to any one of its elements. The emphasis on 'practical criticism', as a feature of Cambridge English, is historically just, but there have been at least three other significant features, and it is by no means certain which of the four will eventually be identified as the most fruitful and influential. There has been the striking and persistent correlation of literature and social history, always controversial but always active. There has been the persistent if difficult enquiry into the relations between imaginative literature and moral and philosophical ideas. There has also, and of most immediate importance in the present context, been important and sustained work in the study of dramatic forms and their conditions of performance. Any adequate history of the Cambridge English Faculty has then to include all of these four kinds of work.

In one of these kinds, the history and analysis of dramatic forms and their conditions of performance, the work of Muriel Bradbrook has been defining and pre-eminent. Over her whole working life she has contributed very generally to the work of the Faculty, but the most significant thread is the work which began with *Elizabethan Stage Conditions* in 1931 and was continued with the remarkable *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* in 1935. The titles of these early works sufficiently indicate the position and interests from which her work on drama was begun. They have influenced successive generations of students and scholars, and beyond this properly academic influence have provoked and helped in defining and sometimes solving more general questions of dramatic form and performance. There has been a lifetime's contribution as a scholar, but there has

also been this significant emphasis, most notable in such later works as *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy* (1955; revised 1973), *The Rise of the Common Player* (1962) and especially *English Dramatic Form: a history of its development* (1965).

All the contributors to the present volume have been colleagues of Muriel Bradbrook in the Cambridge English Faculty. In coming together to write a book on the occasion of her formal retirement they have been moved by the spirit of *Festschrift* but have also tried to write something more than a *Festschrift*, in the spirit of her own most significant work. The problems of English dramatic forms and their development are of outstanding importance both in the history of all English writing and in the history of world writing. At the same time, from the very richness and variety of the material, every general question and every preliminary historical outline moves into the complexity of local definition and specific variation. It is doubtful how far the contributors would agree in matters of general theory and method; the reader will observe at least implicit differences. But two general features of the book can be affirmed. First, that its emphasis is historical, both in the simple sense that its chapters range from medieval drama through all the centuries of English drama down to our own, and in the more specific sense that the problems of form, however strictly and locally defined, are normally considered in relation to specific historical circumstances, whether social, dramatic or theatrical. Then, second, there is an important continuity of attention, on work widely separated in historical time, to the complex relations between actual audiences, actual styles of drama and those alternative and sometimes conflicting traditions which the simple concept of tradition so often obscures. Much more would need to be done if all the significant material for a history of the making and development of English dramatic forms was to be brought together, in the necessary actuality of detail. Yet the book can be seen as a conscious pointer, in the spirit of Muriel Bradbrook's own work, one of the titles of which it deliberately echoes, towards the definition and development of such work, and to its necessarily collaborative character.

All detailed editorial work on the volume has been done by Marie Axton. I am grateful to her, as co-editor, and to my fellow contributors. Our common gratitude to Muriel Bradbrook is implicit in the book but can also be made explicit in our common pleasure that she is still, in every real sense, our colleague in this developing work.

Cambridge, September 1976 Raymond Williams

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Folk play in Tudor interludes

RICHARD AXTON

THE HISTORICAL PROBLEMS OF FOLK PLAY

The early kinds of English folk drama are uncertain; they float formless in a dim region of our dramaturgy visited only by historians and folklorists. The terms, however punctuated, cling uneasily together, looking for mutual support and definition: folk-drama, 'folk' drama, folk 'drama'. Apart from the difficulty of defining folk and drama, the factual problems are substantial ones: at any single place or time the evidence is too thin on the ground to support a solid reconstruction of medieval popular drama comparable with the church's great edifice of 'textual' plays. And by the time texts of popular plays are available, that is, by the time of printing, it is too late: the plays are, as the folklorists would say, 'contaminated' and 'literary'.

Early students of the field, working in a golden Frazerian age, delighted in cultural promiscuity, ranging thousands of miles and years for comparative materials, and did not blush to stand honest English ploughlads, Saint George and 'Bonapurt' in a line with Thracian Dionysos. Such generous syncretism is easily criticised; it is harder to forswear the footnotes which it garnered. The work of E. K. Chambers and C. R. Baskervill half a century ago has left us a rich store of reference.[1] These scholars tackled the historical problem of folk drama from both ends, treating nineteenth-century mummers' plays as survivals of a lost pagan drama whose 'ritual' significance had become obscured. They thus ignored any current function or meaning the plays might have. They also assumed a continuity in popular practices which can sometimes be verified from very early sources. (A prohibition, *c.* 1250, forbidding Oxford clerks to dance in summer in churches and public places, wearing masks or dressed in leaves and flowers,

does not imply innovation but the reverse.[2]) Clearly there was a time before Shakespeare when the hobby-horse was not forgot.

But it is obviously hazardous to assume that folk drama remained unchanged through several centuries. In particular, we are separated from the medieval folk drama by the English Reformation. In the course of the sixteenth century popular culture was eroded precisely at the points where it was attached to official religious ceremonies.[3] The reformation and abolition of many church festivals and practices, the suppression of community religious plays and processions, also struck at the popular dramatics sheltering under the same umbrella. Pressures to conformity in devotional practice, the simultaneous growth of London-based government, the spread of standard English, the publishing of polemic and educational drama for playing by professional troupes – these were some of the factors working to produce a new self-consciousness about popular dramatic culture and the forces implicit in it. Folk play became a point of reference for the new drama in the era of print.

Popular playing was seasonal and festive; it involved disguise, impersonation and boisterous activity, rather than the representation of a story. It was linked with the major feasts of the Roman Catholic year, particularly with night vigils and processions, and often took the form of licensed misrule. During the decades of strong anti-Roman feeling, of iconoclasm and social unrest, popular drama came under a new scrutiny. The same wind blew it in contrary directions, depending on whether it was seen as anti-church or anti-state. At the same parish church the destruction of *tabernacles* (centre-pieces of devotional plays) sometimes coincided with the organising of shooting and wrestling games and the buying of 'interlude books'. Throughout the sixteenth century churches continued to receive 'silver' from *ales*, from processions with the plough, and from *Mays* (the games, plays and dancing associated with leafy bowers built in churchyards or against churches); and sometimes churchwardens paid for bells for Morris dancers. Elsewhere, a dragon was taken away without the consent of the parishioners.[4] Responses to folk drama were deeply ambivalent. Sir Richard Morison, writing a programme of reformatory propaganda for Henry VIII in about 1536, approves the traditional 'hoptide' (i.e. Hocktide) plays of women's rule, 'wherin it is leaful for them to take men, bynde, wasshe them, if they will give them nothing to bankett'. The exemplary expulsion of Danes, which the play is supposed to celebrate, can urge common people to throw the 'bisshop of Rome out of this Realme'. On the other hand, Morison disapproves of Robin Hood plays because of their encourage-

ment to civil licence; he suggests they be replaced by straight propaganda:

> In somer comenly upon the holy daies in most places of your realm, ther be playes of Robyn hoode, mayde Marian, freer Tuck, wherin besides the lewdenes and rebawdry that ther is opened to the people, disobedience also to your officers, is tought, whilest these good bloodes go about to take from the shiref of Notyngham one that for offendyng the lawes shulde have suffered execution. Howmoche better is it that those plaies shulde be forbodden and deleted and others dyvysed to set forthe and declare lyvely before the peoples eies the abhomynation and wickednes of the bisshop of Rome, monkes, ffreers, nonnes, and suche like . . .[5]

Both Morison's examples of traditional popular drama are based on the disruption of normal order. A century earlier, in 1439, Peter Venables was accused in Derbyshire of using Robin Hood's disguise for nefarious purposes, 'beyng of his [i.e. Robin Hood's] clothinge, and in maner of insurrection wente into the wodes in that county like it hadde be Robyn Hode and his meynee'. Similar accusations are quite frequent in the 1520s and 1530s.[6] At Wymondham in Norfolk, the traditional play (for which, in 1539, the Kett family helped make a giant, armour, and devil's shoes) provided cover for Kett's rebellion ten years later.[7] On the other hand a Calvinist satirist writing in 1569 thought a penny or two spent 'to see a play of Robin Hood, or a Morisse daunse . . . were a great deal better bestowed [than] uppon those apishe toies of these good Priests'.[8]

In this confusion two main drifts are discernible: folk play had become an 'issue'; it was also gradually being choked. A zealous town council deprived Coventry of its traditional plays (including *hocking*) in the 1560s. Chester's religious plays were stopped by the Privy Council in 1575; thereafter successive mayors reformed the Midsummer *Watch* too: the dragon, men in women's apparel, 'naked boys', the devil-in-his-feathers, all disappeared. By the end of the century the loss was strongly felt. In *Albions England* William Warner laments a rhythm and a richness of life broken at the Reformation. His simple Northern spokesman is 'no friend to monke or frier', but mourns a time when,

> At Ewle we wonten gambole, daunce, to carrole, and to sing,
> To have gud spiced Sewe, and Roste, and plum-pies for a king:
> At Fasts-eve pan-puffes: Gang tide gaites did alie Masses bring:
> At Paske begun our morrise: and ere Penticost our May:
> Tho Roben hood, liell Iohn, frier Tucke, and Marian, deftly play . . .
> At Baptis-day with Ale and cakes bout bon-fires neighbors stood:
> At Martelmasse we turnde a crabbe, thilke tolde of Roben hood.
>
> (3rd edition 1592, Book v, ch. 24)

By Warner's time many grosser aspects of folk 'playing' had been purged; a good deal too had been reformed and absorbed into 'official' literary entertainments: the Coventry hocking reappeared, with a rustic *bride-ale*, among Queen Elizabeth's Princely Pleasures at Kenilworth in 1575 (see below, p. 35). Folk play was later encapsulated or transformed by Nashe and by Jonson in his masques and was sent back to the provinces, spruced up by the metropolitan stage as jigs.[9] Copying manuscripts of the Chester plays and shows became a minor industry and, with the 'yeerely celebration of Mr Robert Dover's Olimpick Games upon Cottsold Hills' (commemorated in *Annalia Dubrensia* (1636) by Michael Drayton and others), antiquarianism set a paternalistic hand to the plough for the preservation of the 'folk'.

FOLK DRAMA BEFORE THE REFORMATION

Baskervill hypothesised that English folk plays were formed when the traditional *games* of ploughmen or shearmen were taken as *play* offerings to the obligatory feasts held by their overlords. This theory (for which Baskervill had no textual evidence) has recently received support from the identification of a plough play from about 1500.[10] The song text describes an intricate ballet performed by plough 'hinds' for their 'laird', to whom they offer their service in return for pasturage rights. In the action of the drama a tired 'old ox', impersonated by the leader, is 'broded' to death by the sticks of a circle of dancers. The head is removed and set on a 'new ox' and members of the team, called by rustic or heroic names, are renamed as oxen and 'bound' together before the plough. The company is blessed and the team moves off. The play is an offering, its action affirming social bonds, duties and rights.

Such offerings were not always respectful, and the bulk of the medieval evidence shows authority suspicious of folk dramatic practice. Welsh villagers observed by Giraldus in the twelfth century celebrated a saint's day by dancing in church and churchyard and performing mimetic versions of their workaday tasks: 'the hands of one laid to the plough, another driving oxen as if with a goad'; others 'sheared sheep' and 'spun'.[11] Gerald notes that these occupations have been forbidden on holidays. It seems that the dancers mock authority and they are later made to show their penitence. It is as likely that medieval churchmen condemned popular *ludi* because they felt themselves threatened as to suppose that their concern was simply for the souls of the participants. One motive can perhaps be located in the

irrational fear of masks and disguise, often connected with paganism and witchcraft.[12] There was also the fear of civil unruliness. A proclamation by the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London in 1418 charged that,

> no manere persone, of what astate degre or condicion þat euere he be, duryng þis holy tyme of Cristemes, be so hardy in eny wyse to walk by nyght in eny manere mommyng, pleyes, enterludes, or eny oþer disgisynges, with eny feynyd berdis, peyntid visers, disfourmyd or colourid visages in eny wyse, vp(*on*) peyne of enprisonement of her bodyes.[13]

Offering *to* can easily become offering *at* and it may be a perennial function of folk drama to express the social antagonism of a lower class against 'authority'. (A recent sociological study of Christmas mummings in Newfoundland has described the use of seasonal disguise and nocturnal visitations within a small community as a licensed form of name-calling. The intruder has freedom to mock from behind his mask but must reveal himself before moving on to the next house.[14])

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*c.* 1400) the Green Knight's boisterous challenge of Arthur's court to a Christmas 'game' can be seen as the courtly transformation of a folk mumming, coming as it does to interrupt the feast. It is as such an 'enterlude', fitting the Christmas season, that the king tries jestingly to pass off the frightening events. In the course of the finely wrought narrative two recurrent patterns of the folk drama are completed: the hero faces the monster and survives beheading; the 'vileyn' who comes to dispraise the feasting nobles removes his 'mask' and gives friendly blessing. The reverberations of the 'eldritch challenger' in Elizabethan drama have been suggested by Muriel Bradbrook in *English Dramatic Form*.[15] The line runs through Dunbar's May-time prologue, *The manere of the crying of ane playe*, in which the grandson of Gog Magog, slayer of King Arthur and phallic champion in search of a wife, urges the 'noble merchandis everilkane' to take bow and arrow and 'in lusty grene . . . follow furth on Robyn Hude'. This monster of lust and violence is tamed by the offer of a boozing can into dispensing blessings on 'madin, wyf, and man' in the name of the 'Haly Rude'.[16]

The radical ambivalence of these folk play creations towards both Christianity and authority could be illustrated at length in the French medieval drama, where Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de la Feuillée* (*c.* 1276) provides a model repertory of popular themes and conventions. The play has been seen by Mikhail Bakhtin as the carnival expression of proletarian feeling; I prefer to view it as a literary poet's transformation of a traditional revue. Either way, there can be no doubt that this strange drama is

subversive of both *ecclesia* and *urbs*.[17] In Adam's play Christian belief and pagan licence, respect for authority and holiday misrule are crammed oddly and explosively together. The play's occasion (apparently the coincidence of a summer festival of the Virgin Mary with a non-Christian 'feast of mothers') supposes a formal hostility of the sexes, such as was practised in the fifteenth-century Coventry hocking plays. Thus the men in the play leave the acting-place in order to light candles at the shrine of the Virgin, while the women, led by an old *dame* who has been shown to be 'miraculously' pregnant, follow the fairy sisters, threatening violence to any man they find to have maligned them. Husbands complain of wives, fathers complain of sons. A fool enacts an obscene cow-and-bull game (known in Irish wake games[18]) with his father, and gets beaten. Voices are raised against all forms of restraint, family, city, church. Popes, magistrates and nobles are named in scorn. Tavern law is set up in opposition to the church, whose representative, the monk, is cheated and beaten; his relics are stolen and mocked, his authority parodied by the taverner. Certain formal features of the *Feuillée* are also characteristic of the English tradition, as it can be glimpsed through fragmentary records and clerical condemnations: the construction of an arbour of greenery; feasting and drinking; the fact that the audience is nocturnally visited by perambulatory actors who bestow 'luck' or curses; the dressing-up and carrying of human effigies; the use of at least one fantastic headdress and wearing of little bells. The play has a loose, improvised appearance in its alternation of formal set-piece and topical reference, and it lacks story.

Adam's play cannot be matched in English for its scale. From the same period we have only the *Interludium de Clerico et Puella* and *Dame Sirith* (both *c.* 1300), two versions (for actors and for solo mime) of the same fabliau wooing. These professional entertainments, *for* the people rather than *by* the people, skilfully manipulate the stereotypes of blasphemous fool-lover, bawdy old hag and 'nice' lady, spicing the whole with anti-religious humour.[19] Evidence from the fifteenth century is fuller and allows one to sketch in a tradition of English folk play in the half-century before the Reformation. 'Comedies' among the 'foolish vulgar' concerning Robin Hood are scorned by a historian of the 1440s and a fragmentary text survives from about 1475. It is all that remains of a play that may have been performed annually by servants in the Paston household.[20] In common with other early Robin Hood plays it is constructed around physical combat and shows the flouting of law and the redress of social differences. The story of the first fragment comes from the ballad of Guy of Gisborne;

the extant text deals only with Robin's resisting arrest and killing of Sir Guy, and with the Sheriff of Nottingham's capture of Robin's men. The dialogue is simple and formulaic, the merest induction to a series of physical contests. In sixteen lines Robin and Guy have met, competed at bow shooting, cast stones, heaved the axletree, wrestled, fought with swords to the death. Robin then disguises himself in Guy's clothes. Why he must cut off Sir Guy's head and bear the head in his hood is never made clear. In the next 'scene', the sheriff overcomes and binds all Robin's outlaws, threatening to hang them. Presumably Robin later rescues them.

In a post-Reformation text, printed by Copland *c.* 1560 ('verye proper to be played in Maye games') Robin and Friar Tuck vaunt and fight with staves. Robin fails to make the friar bear him over the water and is thrust in. Each calls his men to combat, but they are reconciled when Robin gives the friar a 'Lady fre' (presumably a grotesque, played by a man). Friar Tuck rejoices in his sexual prowess, telling the audience:

> Go home ye knaves and lay crabbes in the fyre
> For my lady & I wil daunce in the myre for veri pure joye. (lines 149–50)

A further episode (or an alternative 'game') repeats the territorial combat with Robin and a potter, whose wares Robin has broken and from whom he demands 'one penny passage to paye'. Here Robin is a 'good yeman' and a 'gentylman' (there is even the suggestion of Roman tribute in the penny) and he is worsted at the potter's hands. Little John undertakes a fresh combat on Robin's behalf as the play ends. Robin here seems to be villain, but the function of the play remains the same: the redress of social inequalities. Binding and beheading, capture and release are recurrent actions in these early English folk plays. Their style is vigorous, an assertion of virility by dancing and combat using sticks.

It will be apparent that even very simple and naive forms of folk play may involve some conscious transformation of traditional forms for a specific social context. The Scots plough ceremony survives as a courtly amusement in a repertory of songs which has been associated with the royal chapel. Copland's lusty friar, though he has a long dramatic ancestry, appears in a post-Reformation printing. Early in the fifteenth century Lydgate transformed the matrimonial 'flyting for maistrye' of 'rude upplandisshe people (compleynyng on hir wyves, with þe boystous aunswere of hir wyves)' into a Christmas mumming at Hertford fit for a king. Contemporary clerical dramatists recognised the entertainment value and thematic potential of the folk drama which offered them ready-made modes

of action with which to characterise evil within a larger design. The folk-play antics of the vices in *Mankind* (mock-beheading, showing the big-head devil, collecting from the audience, naming local gentry) have been commented on before, as has the intrusion of a quack-doctor and his boy in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (*c.* 1470).[21] In the earliest printed plays – didactic interludes intended for popular playing by professionals – folk play traditions are assimilated and reformed in a number of new ways, before being returned to the folk as a kind of instruction.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF FOLK PLAY IN THE INTERLUDES

Youth is demonstrably one of the most popular moralities (written *c.* 1515 and printed six times by the 1560s).[22] The dialogue is vigorous, formulaic, allusive, referring to a known tradition of acting, rather than evoking character. That Youth himself is a folk play hero and Morris dancer is suggested by the formulaic detail coupling leaf and ale, body gesture and hazel stick:

> My name is Youth I tell the
> I florysh as the vinetre . . .
> My hearre is royall and bushed thicke
> My body plyaunt as a hasel styck . . .
> My chest bigge as a tunne
> My legges be full lighte for to runne
> To hoppe and daunce and make mery . . .
> I am the heyre of my fathers lande . . . (AIv)

In the course of Youth's choosing his companions, this folk play energy is shown to run headlong from pride and wrath into gluttony and lechery. Charity sets out to instruct the audience, greeting them by 'Jesu that his armes dyd sprede', but Youth enters with a roistering challenge, 'A backe, felowes and give me roume!' brandishing a dagger, and chases him 'out of this place'. Youth struts about, enjoying his power over the 'place' and over the audience. There can be no action until a new character is 'called on'. Riot is summoned in a sequence reminiscent of the calling of Tityvillus in *Mankind*; he looks for a combat with Youth, but seems to be hindered by a grotesque mask: 'But my lyppes hange in my lyght'. He is welcomed 'in the devels waye' and answers the old riddle correctly:

> *Youth.* Who brought the hither today?
> *Ryot.* That dyd my legges I tell the. (A4)

In the cryptic dialogue of this antic crew a whole gamut of topics is hinted