

ROUGH MUSIC, ROUGH DANCE, ROUGH PLAY:
MISRULE AND MORRIS DANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

England is home to a distinctive vernacular dance called morris dance. One of the reasons that it is unique is because it is a secular dance that is displayed rather than performed as a medium for socializing. Questions often arise from audiences when they try to decode its symbolism and the purpose of its presentation.

Several interpretations have emerged since morris dance was revived by successive waves of enthusiasts. After reviewing the study and culture of pre-modern and modern morris dance and its cultural milieu and its principal venue, Whitsuntide (also known as May Day), a potential interpretation is proposed – misrule. The title of my dissertation recalls the famous essay on the theatrical display of misrule by E.P. Thompson titled “Rough Music” (1993).

Using the research that has emerged from the study of carnival behaviour by Mikhail Bakhtin and liminality by Victor Turner, the basic conditions of misrule are reviewed and illuminated. Then the symbols and behaviour of modern and premodern morris dance are subjected to comparison and contrast with the result that modern morris dance will be shown to have departed significantly from the premodern template of misrule. This departure may help to explain the dilemma of the current popular criticisms levelled at morris dance today. However, a complication is raised in which the new misrule interpretation may not prove useful after all because it cannot be applied to the morris dance culture as it currently exists.

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Stemberger offered remarkable assistance in the last years of the writing of this paper from his double vantage point as a long-time morris dancer and a distinguished member of the Linguistics Department.

Is there a single married person such as myself who cannot envision even one foot of travel down this torturous road without the support of his or her wife or husband? Such an intense level of cooperation is a crucible, where emotions and commitments are blended and tested beyond a reasonable measure. To my wife, Linda, I dedicate this book.

Mistakes and misinterpretations are mine alone, but revelations I happily share with all readers. Several of my English associates and friends in the morris dance world are sceptical about the ability of a non born-and-bred English person's ability to understand the nuances and overtones of English contemporary and historical cultural practices such as morris dance. I concur. My thesis is meant to stimulate thought for insiders and outsiders alike, and I happily await the comments of both to advance my theory forward in whatever manner it might go.

PREFACE

“The only constant is change.” (Heraclitus)

Although this study takes a close look at the tradition and heritage of a choreography and culture called morris dance, at its heart it is an investigation into the nature of change. Few people today question the wisdom of this natural occurrence, articulated by such disparate, seminal philosophers as Heraclitus (circa 535-475 BCE) and the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BCE).¹ Rather than question its existence or veracity, the challenge for me is to determine its movements and consequences so that we may better understand its functions and delimitations.

What was already complex in the study of change has been made even more multi-layered by post-modernism’s scepticism of the observation and recording of change, casting doubt on the truth of any such reportage and its frequent recourse to nostalgia. Hence a litany of disarming literature such as *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) and *the Invention of Culture* (1976, revised 1981) that shakes the very roots of our assumptions about the past.² These pioneering deconstructions have resulted in many studies that declare tradition to be largely a figment of imagination. The authors of *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (1989), *The Imagined Village* (1993), and *Imagined Communities* (1983) argue that memories of the past are themselves in

¹ Heraclitus’ aphorism, the only constant is change, was quoted by Cratylus and recorded by Plato, circa 360 BC (*Cratylus*) and Diogenes Laertius in circa 225 BC (*Lives of the Philosophers* Book 9, Section 8). To illustrate his point, Heraclitus used the analogy that one can never step in the same river twice. The Buddha declared that “all things are impermanent” (Sanskrit, annitya) throughout the fifty-one years of his teachings and writings.

² See *Reinventing the Invention of Culture*, a retrospective tribute to Roy Wagner’s seminal study, in the journal *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Cultural and Social Practice*, volume 46, issue 1, Spring 2002 (University of Adelaide, Australia).

a constant state of change, largely due to the hegemonic struggles of the time, and can never act as a reliable witness for the way things were. The ultimate disparagement was coined in the word “fakelore”, first voiced by Richard Dorson, a folklorist writing in the 1950s (Bendix, 1997: 277-78).³ The word was echoed in the controversial study titled *Fakesong* (1985) by Dave Harker following his examination of the folk songs collected in England by Cecil Sharp and others. As I will describe in the following pages, morris dance has been subjected to the same kind of rough judgement.

With the postmodern caveats derived from critical theorists in mind, is it possible or even meaningful to discuss negative change in a given tradition? No matter how valid it may be from the cultural relativist point of view, can some cultural moments of change be described as detrimental, as I do in this examination?

My study of this question and others was founded on the classic methodology of Participant-Observation, first explored by Franz Boas in America and Bronislaw Malinowski in England, and rooted in the interpretive understanding, *Verstehen*, of Max Weber (1864-1920). I have participated in morris dance for twenty years, and I have also been a keen student of its theories and performance practices. I even engaged in a twenty-first century form of ethnography by becoming an active voice on an electronic bulletin board (aka, listserv) devoted entirely to morris dance (The Morris Dance Discussion Listserv) and read around the world.

³ Richard Dorson used the word “fakelore” during his study of the folk stories of Paul Bunyan, fabricated by a lumbar company, and the alleged status of folk hero accorded to Henry Ford, on page 20 of his textbook *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

I will not attempt to present a systematic and comprehensive description of the many forms of English morris dance and their continental and non-European counterparts. My principal area of examination is morris dance from the Cotswold area of England. Neither will I measure the various opinions of morris dance among the insiders and their audience members using the tools of ethnography, although I will describe what I believe to be one of the strongest representative samples of the various views of morris, the Vancouver Morris Men. My goal in this dissertation is to lay a theoretical foundation for future studies of vernacular display dance that could include systematic ethnological research. The result will, I hope, be a fresh look at morris dance that the participants and their observers can use to measure their experiences and conclusion

CHAPTER 1

The Study of Morris Dance

Overview

Morris dance is unique to England where it has existed in one form or another for five hundred years. It is usually referred to as a type of folk dance, albeit with the caveat that it is ceremonial rather than social in nature (Simpson and Roud, 2000: 245).⁴ In the last 100 years morris dance has been exported to several Commonwealth countries and the United States. The groups that practice and perform morris dance usually call themselves sides, clubs, or teams. One estimate suggests that there are 531 teams in England, 3 in Wales, 9 in Scotland, 150 in the USA, 20 in Australia, 13 in Canada, and 6 in New Zealand, with some 13 teams scattered elsewhere in the world, including British expatriates in Hong Kong.⁵ These teams are largely the result of revival movements dating from the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. Only four teams have a history that extends further back than the revival movements (Garland, 1991: 11).⁶

⁴The term *folk dance* has been superseded by the term *vernacular dance* in academic circles. *Folk dance*, like the words *primitive dance*, has been the subject of a debate that highlights the descriptor's patent inadequacies. However, the word *folk* is far more common than *vernacular* in popular parlance. See "Dance, Folk," by Owe Ronstrom, in *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*, (Santa Barbara, CA, USA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1977) p. 177.

⁵http://morrisdancing.wikia.com/wiki/Morris_teams_directory which includes the Hong Kong morris team. In 1986, I met the Hong Kong Morris Men in Vancouver which was one of the stops on their combined performance/holiday tour in the West Coast. Much to my surprise, I discovered that they were all English engineers temporarily assigned to Hong Kong, and not the ethnic Chinese people I had been anticipating.

⁶The four teams are found in the English villages of Bampton, Abingdon, Chipping Camden, and Headington Quarry, all in the English midlands, but Chandler (1993a: 207-22) cites evidence that is far more nuanced, suggesting that the term "survival" may be an over-simplification.

Morris dance now (and in the past) features three or four couples arranged in parallel lines called a set. The couples are not configured according to gender. In fact, throughout the history of pre-modern morris dance, almost all morris dance teams were comprised of males only.⁷ Even in modern morris dance teams comprised of females and males, the choreographic couples are usually assigned randomly. The choreography of the dances requires individuals, singly or in couples, to move in a synchronous manner, often trading places and then returning to original positions while rhythmically stepping in unison. Patterns of travel are chosen from a multitude of choreographic tracks which are all completed in the time of the basic structural units of the music, usually sixteen beats (and therefore sixteen steps) in length.⁸ One choreographic and music structure seamlessly joins the next until the structural form of the accompanying music is completed. After four or five non-stop repetitions of the music, the dance is completed, often within the space of five minutes. The patterns of movement are the primary event in the choreography, while the stepping is secondary. In addition, the dancers use jingle bells tied around their legs, and sticks or handkerchiefs held in their hands, to enhance the rhythms and metres of the music and choreography. They also wear identical costumes in common so that they are identifiable as a performance unit.

The performance team may also be comprised of individuals who don't necessarily dance, and who are known collectively as "peripherals", for want of a

⁷ The one interesting exception to this point of information is the female team from the village of Spelsbury, Oxfordshire. See Chandler, 1993b: 201, and more importantly, "Morris Dancing in Spelsbury: An Analytical Essay," by Keith Chandler in *Oxfordshire Local History*, volume 1, number 7 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 2-13.

⁸ In common musical parlance, the structures are eight bars long, with each bar containing two beats, either in cut time or 2/4 time. The resultant duple metre can either be in simple time (one beat equals two sub-beats) or compound time (one beat equals three sub-beats).

better term.⁹ They include announcers, collectors, and theatrical characters, some of whom are dressed as animals somewhat in the manner of mascots. The most prominent of these theatrical characters is the Fool. Although the word “peripheral” was coined to describe these members of the team who are usually found on the periphery of the dance set during its performance and public presentation, it also unfortunately suggests that they are secondary to the dance.¹⁰ The latter definition seems to hold for most dance teams today. In fact, many teams have completely abandoned these team roles (Barrand, 1991: 111-12).¹¹ However, the presence of these ancillary performers is far from inconsequential, as will be shown later. In particular, the Fool is often the subject of extensive descriptions and advice for potential team dancers willing to take on the role (Barrand, 1991: 111-121; Dommett, 1986: 103-122).

The music for the dances is provided by musicians, often called musos, who today are volunteers with a status and membership that is equal to the dancers.¹² The

⁹ The term “peripheral” has an unknown provenance, although I believe it is recent. The Ring booklet titled *The Morris Tradition* introduces the terms “fools and animals”, which ignores the collector, a crucial non-dancing member. Cecil Sharp (1911: 27) uses the term “characters”, a nomenclature picked up by the great modern morris dance scholar, Roy Dommett (1986:1, 103), again down-playing the peripheral role of the collector. Chandler (1993a), perhaps the greatest morris dance scholar in modern times, never identifies the non-dancing members as a self-contained group although he writes extensively about each peripheral member including the collector.

¹⁰ The word “peripheral” does not adequately describe the Fool who occasionally steps out of the periphery, and into the dance, either in the set or as a jig dancer in solo or duo setting.

¹¹ One example among many is the educational book titled *Welcome In The Spring: Morris and Sword Dances for Children* by Paul Kerlee (Danbury, CT, USA: World Music Press, 1994). The author prepares a teacher for establishing a morris dance team in a typical grade school in the USA. He says nothing about the peripheral characters. The same is true of the excellent educational book provided for English schools by The English Folk Dance and Song Society, titled *Understanding Victorian Society Through Dance* (London, UK: EFDSS, 2000). Edited by Diana Jewitt, the example of morris dance choreography says nothing about peripheral characters, even parenthetically (2000: 55-57). One of the reasons the book is generally so excellent is the great diversity of children of ethnic origin, boys and girls, all of whom are incredibly sweet looking.

¹² The Oxford English Dictionary state that *muso* is British derogatory slang for music enthusiast, perhaps akin to train-spotter. <http://www.allwords.com/word-muso.html?SearchType=3&Keyword=music> The slur has been turned on its head and given the lead

musicians sometimes double as dancers, taking turns with other musicians in the team. One or more musicians stand in a casual arrangement just a few metres from the top end of the dancers' set position, playing acoustic music instruments without benefit of amplification (unless the musicians and dancers find themselves in a formal setting like a stage). This predilection for live music who are also fellow team mates is a hallmark of the morris dance community, given that many amateur and professional folk dance groups from Europe and the rest of the world often rely on pre-recorded music or hired musicians.

Modern musos usually adhere to the ideal of playing by ear, in keeping with the immediacy of the performance of the dancers. It is extremely rare to see sheet music on a music stand at a dance performance. The melodeon (a button-keyed accordion probably invented in 1821 by Christian Friedrich Ludwig Buschmann of Berlin) is the most popular accompaniment instrument, followed closely by the concertina (invented in 1844 by Charles Wheatstone in England) and then the traditional violin. An interesting combination called pipe (a recorder with three finger holes) and tabor (a drum with a snare on the bottom), played by one person, is the first known instrument for morris dance, with roots that go back to medieval times (Baines, 2001: 770). Also known as the whittle and dub, it had a long tradition of morris dance accompaniment before it was superseded by the violin in the 1840s (Chandler, 1993a: 173), which in turn went out of fashion in favour of the free-reed accordion types mentioned above (Gammon, 2000: 330).¹³

banner on a new magazine in England devoted to young musicians of all styles who are dominating the music interests of the English public. <http://www.muso-online.com/uk/index.php>

¹³ When George Butterworth, an associate of Cecil Sharp (Karpeles, 1967: 116) and a well-known composer, travelled the English countryside in search of pipe and tabor players, he was only able to

The music is comprised of melodies in duple compound metre (jigs) and duple simple metre (reels and dotted rhythm hornpipes). They are rudimentary in tonality and structure, yet clever in subtle compositional ways, making them appealing to both a broad segment of the public and the knowledgeable performers. The melodies are governed by major tonality, but the repertoire has extensive examples of minor keys better described as Mixolydian, Dorian, and Aeolian modes.¹⁴ Accompanying chords (usually tonic, dominant and sub-dominant) played by melodeons and concertinas are created from the implied harmonies of the melodies but they are not considered crucial to the realisation of the music.¹⁵ Many of the melodies have ancestries that are the equal of the history of morris dancing, often originating as popular songs.¹⁶ The

find one elderly man, Joseph William Powell. See Russell Wortley and Michael Dawney, “George Butterworth’s diary of morris dance hunting”, in the *Folk Music Journal*, III, 3 (1977), 193-207. Joseph Powell is seen on the cover of Russell Wortley’s 1964 tutor, in the company of the Bucknell Morris Men.

¹⁴ This aspect of traditional melodic theory has been a long-standing topic in the traditional songs of England, but is not often mentioned in discussions of dance music. The one exception to this trend is found in essays by Vic Gammon and Ricky Rooksby, who refer to the music theory of “folk tunes” rather than “folk songs” in *The Folk Handbook: Working With Songs from the English Tradition* (New York, NY, USA: Backbeat Books, 2007). See Gammon’s “An Introduction to Folk” (pp. 6-22) and Rooksby’s “The music of the folk song” (pp. 54-60).

¹⁵ Cecil Sharp harmonized the melodies when he transcribed the melodies for piano for the purposes of early performances of morris and country dance (Sharp, 1907-24). Maude Karpeles, Sharp’s amanuensis, praised Sharp’s punctilious arrangements (1967: 214-15), but in a later publication of 1973, she acknowledged that the ideal music notation for English folk music was monophonic in keeping with the manner in which it was played by the informants (Karpeles, 1973: 89). Authors such as Peter Kennedy (1951, 1997b) have decried the harmonisation of dance melodies, saying that the practice dilutes the rhythmic intensity encapsulated in the performance practices of the monophonic performers. Many authors have quoted Jingy Wells, the legendary director of the Bampton Morris Men, who believed that the music played by pipe and tabor was superior to other accompaniment instruments, precisely because it provided incisive rhythm and clarity of melody, minus the baggage of harmony. (Chandler, 1993: 176).

¹⁶ Although there is no comprehensive study of the provenance of the tunes in morris dance collections, one of the indirect primary sources for this information is Claude Simpson’s *The British Broadside Ballad and Its Music* (New Brunswick, NJ, USA: Rutgers University Press, 1966), with an extensive critique and corrigenda provided by John Ward in the *Journal of the American Folk Music Society*, volume 20, number 1 (1967), 27-86. Other indirect sources include Jeremy Barlow’s *The Complete Country Dance Tunes from Playford’s Dancing Master, 1651-ca. 1728* (London : Faber Music, 1985) and *Early American Secular Music and Its European Sources, 1589–1839: An Index*, compiled by Robert M. Keller, Raoul F. Camus, Kate Van Winkle Keller, and Susan Cifaldi, <http://www.colonialdancing.org/Easmes/index.html> A remarkable article devoted to the history and variety of one tune, “The Morris Tune” written by John M. Ward, is found in the *Journal of the*

tunes are generally eight bars long (consisting of 16 beats, or 8 pairs of beats mirroring the left and right motion of the feet), and constructed of two or three repeated eight-bar melodic phrases. The whole is repeated several times, with an introductory repetition, thus amounting to approximately five minutes of a single music and dance event. At a usual performance lasting from half an hour to an hour, approximately ten dances (and therefore ten melodies) will be performed.

The ambiance of a typical morris dance performance is purposely informal, with strong preference given to public outdoor locations such as market squares. Morris dancers share much with buskers. The spontaneous nature of the appearance of the morris dancers is sometimes described by morris teams as *guerrilla morris*.¹⁷ The reality of the outdoor performance is usually quite different than its appearance. Normally the organizer of the gathering has planned ahead, seeking permissions to dance from the local authorities, ranging from park commissioners to mall owners. The happenstance witnesses (i.e., audience) of a morris dance gathering may elect to stay for only a moment, or they may decide to watch the entire presentation. Because audience members have not planned ahead or paid for the opportunity to observe the dance presentation, they are in a unique position to judge the entertainment provided by the morris team. The judgements and opinions of the dance performance are as

American Musicological Society, volume 39, number 2 (summer 1986) pp. 294-331. For a critique of Ward's thesis, see Forrest, 1999: 286-88. Important electronic alternative source are *The Fiddlers' Companion* <http://www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers/index.html> and *The Digital Tradition* incorporated in the *Mudcat Café* in 1992, <http://twceedsblues.net/mudcd/dtnotes.html>.

¹⁷ For example, the performances of the morris dance teams at the 2006 Folklife Festival in Seattle was advertised as Guerrilla Morris (http://www.nwfolklife.org/P_F/grids/McCaw-schedule.pdf) implying that the dancers would appear at some indeterminate point within a certain time frame, performing dances and programs at their whim. It's likely that the term *guerrilla* was borrowed from the 1965 California *agitprop* theatre groups who used the term to describe their San Francisco street theatre, performed without announcement or audience preparation. See "Staging the Revolution: Guerrilla Theater as a Countercultural Practice, 1965-1968," by Michael William Doyle in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

spontaneous as the performances, free of the bias that is attached to an outlay of money for performance tickets and the anticipated expenditure of (precious) leisure time.

During the seemingly spontaneous public presentation, information about the performance, the tradition, and the dancers may be provided by a designated team announcer or through flyers. When the information is forthcoming from an announcer, it can range from mini lectures to humorous repartees. Another source of on-the-spot information is the casual conversation that often transpires between members of the team and audience members before, after, and even during the presentation, in keeping with the casual nature of the event. Alternatively, nothing may be said or presented, leaving the audience members to fill in any gaps of understanding with their individual imaginations or previously acquired knowledge.

One of the primary roles of information provided by a team announcer or flyer is to give the audience an immediate opportunity to understand the reasons why an unfamiliar group of people in costume would be providing a public spectacle. The resulting comprehension would conceivably mitigate an audience's indifference or bemusement, or enhance its pleasure. Given that the information could favourably colour or influence the emotional reception of the audience members, the relationship of performance information to audience reception is paramount, as I will attempt to illustrate.

Morris Dance, Then and Now

Today's performers of morris dance are markedly different than their counterparts in the England of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even though

their choreographies are almost identical.¹⁸ For the purposes of this discussion, I will refer to the former as modern morris dancers, and the latter as premodern.¹⁹

Although the first record of morris dance in England dates to 1448 (Heaney, 2004: 513-15), premodern morris dance and its modern manifestation largely originates after 1750 according to John Forrest (1999: xvii) or 1660 as reckoned by Keith Chandler (1993a: 23). After experiencing a wave of popularity that peaked about 1850 (Chandler, 1993b: 17-18), morris dance went into decline due to a major shift in popular taste in music and dance, rapid urbanisation in all areas of England, and the Great War. Another reason which is particularly relevant to this paper is the political enfranchisement of most of the working class, making busking, begging and other improvised welfares increasingly redundant (Strong, 1996: 453). Morris dance activity was reduced to a handful of teams until its “discovery” and then revival by Cecil Sharp, beginning in 1899.²⁰ Today, modern morris dance is practiced by more people than when it was performed in its premodern golden age.

¹⁸ It should be noted that some morris dance teams create new choreographies that have far more complex movements than traditional choreographies, but their general appearance adheres to a traditional format of structure.

¹⁹ My use of the word *premodern* does not follow the usual definition which divides Western history into the ages of premodernity (sparked by the invention of print), modernity (parallel with the Industrial Revolution) and postmodernity (cultural plurality and relativity in an age of information). My use of the term *premodern* brackets the outer limits of the Victorian and Edwardian Age and its Industrial Revolution, beginning with the Civil War (1642-46), and ending with World War I (1914-18). My usage of the term *modern* will cover the age from the end of World War I until the present, with an emphasis on the present.

²⁰ Cecil Sharp, a classically trained musician and music educator, encountered a morris team (Headington Quarry) purely by accident in 1899 while visiting family and friends outside of Oxford. After being deeply impressed with their dance melodies, he became a passionate advocate of English folk music, joining the English Folk Song Society in 1901. However, it was only in 1908 that he became a student and spokesman for morris dance. In 1905, Mary Neale began a program of morris dance instruction taught by William Kimber, the director of the Headington Quarry morris men, after receiving a personal introduction provided by Sharp. At first Sharp cooperated with Mary Neale, but later he competed with her for the mantle of ultimate authority, ultimately gaining the upper hand (Judge, 1989: 550, 555).

Premodern morris dancers were drawn from proletarian classes (Chandler, 1993a: 101-17), whereas modern morris dancers tend to come from the middle class, often with backgrounds in academic institutes (Dommett, 1986, I/1: 71; Kightly, 1986: 167; Barrand, 1991: 140). The proletarian morris dancers of old were seasonal or underemployed labourers who supplemented their incomes by busking, performing morris dances for money on the street (that is, *pay for play*). Modern morris dancers pursue morris dance as an avocation. A few modern teams also collect money but only for the purposes of supporting their recreation or charitable interests, not to supplement their personal incomes. Both modern and premodern morris dancers enjoyed the benefits of social bonding that comes from long-term membership in such an organisation, but the dancers of old considered the fraternal side of the team to be purely secondary to the role of income supplement.²¹ The need for these kinds of improvised sources of income for premodern dancers in times of unemployment and underemployment was alleviated as the twentieth century dawned and workers began to enjoy the kinds of social legislation they had been demanding.

Another key difference between premodern and modern morris dance teams is gender. Premodern dancers were almost exclusively male, whereas modern morris dance is as likely to be comprised of females as males, either in all-women teams or mixed teams (Simpson and Roud, 2000: 246-47). The participation of women in modern times reflects the theme of gender equality in modern Western society. The freedom for females to fully participate in morris dance is a perfect fit with the role of avocation embedded in current morris dance communities.

²¹ The legendary story often cited by morris dancers and verified by historians is the scandal created by the morris musician, Thomas Hill, who choose to continue his touring activities and income share instead of returning home to attend to his child's funeral (Chandler, 1993a: 203).

Morris dancers today, as in premodern times, learn the dances from oral-aural transmission, passed on by morris dance veterans with the most experience.

However, the transmission has been supplemented with print information and the systemisation of the oral-aural instruction which has had a profound effect on the understanding of morris dancing by the dancers, swinging back and forth from uniformity of expression in the name of tradition, to individual creativity.

Modern morris dancers have access to choreographic information in print and then video formats dating back to Cecil Sharp's first book of instruction, published in 1907. Because print documents of dance choreographies are essentially mnemonic devices at best, aural transmission still maintains a central position, but instead of vernacular lines of transmission, the print transmissions were sustained first by a centralized cadre of certified instructors and a program of graded instruction. The system of tuition was begun in 1909 by Cecil Sharp when he founded the School of Morris Dancing within the Physical Education Department of Southwest Polytechnic Institute, later called the Chelsea Physical Training College located in London (Webb, 1999: 30). The examination system was transferred to the English Folk Dance Society when the EFDS was founded in 1911.²² The result of this process of education was a uniformity of performance and a standard of excellence that one would find in a college or university.

The Ring, an organisation of morris dance teams founded in 1934 as an alternative to the institutionalized morris dance of Sharp and his successors, de-emphasized the element of central authority by eliminating graded examinations in

²² For a description of the 1921 syllabus, see "EDSS (sic) Examinations and Syllabi," by Andrew Bullen in *American Morris Newsletter*, volume 26, number 2 (August, 2006).

their ranks (Absom, 2003: 293-99). A team wishing to be admitted to the Ring organisation was simply required to be recommended by a team that is already a member of the Ring.²³ Although the Ring, like the English Folk Dance and Song Society, made print transmission available to its members in the form of *The Handbook of Morris Dancing*, compiled by Lionel Bacon,²⁴ the virtual elimination of centralized, graded standard-settings allowed oral-aural transmission to re-emerge, resulting in variations in style that naturally result from word-of-mouth transmission (Boyes, 1993: 202).²⁵ The most famous examples of this deepening trend were the yearly tours of the villages begun in 1924 by early EFDSS-trained morris dancers in a loosely organized group called The Travelling Morrice. The dancers travelled to many of the villages that once had morris dance teams and discovered the life and times of the dancers, even encountering the occasional premodern dancer, now very elderly. Following the ongoing success of the Ring, the EFDSS graded exams were discontinued although the date of termination is unknown.²⁶

The repertoires of dances in premodern and modern teams reflect another key difference. Premodern teams, usually directed and maintained by a network of family

²³ See point 8 in the constitution of the Ring. <http://www.themorrisring.org/Cons.html>. When the Vancouver Morris Men were inducted into the Ring, they were also requested to perform a solo dance at the Sunday service of the yearly Ring gatherings at Thaxted, and to sing a choral folk song at the convention dinner the evening before.

²⁴ The book of morris choreographies was written by Lionel Bacon in 1974 and revised in 1986. It contains almost 400 morris dances from over 20 locations, an expansion of its predecessor, Cecil Sharp's five volume set of morris dance instructions published between 1903 and 1913, which had about 70 dances from 12 villages.

²⁵ Interestingly, the process of reception and variation accords with Cecil Sharp's Darwinian, three-part theory of the evolution of folk music: continuity, variation, and selection. Ironically, the process of the evolution of a folk culture was discouraged in the context of his strict realm of tuition. For a summary of his theory, its detractors and supporters, see Simpson and Roud, 2000: 322.

²⁶ The process of the development of the Ring was hand-in-hand with their decision to restrict their organisation to men only. The reasons for this decision have generated a great deal of controversy which I will not be reviewing here. See Georgina Boye's *The Imagined Village* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1993).

members, performed up to a dozen dances that had their own unique and identifiable markers and gestures from an existing pool of *common features* and *distinctive features* (Chandler, 1993a: 122-25).²⁷ *Distinctive features* were unique to the team and by extension, their home village. The short-hand description of these village markers was summed up in the name of the village where the team resided. For example, the morris dance tradition of Bampton, named after the town of Bampton-in-the-Bush, ten miles southwest of Oxford and a very famous site of premodern morris dancing, has a style that is known for its crisp, staccato, upward handkerchief flourishes on the downbeats of bars one and three of the A phrase of their musical accompaniments.

Village teams within geographical regions also exhibited markers, sometimes called *common features* that were common to all the village teams in the region. These regional genres are Cotswold Morris, named after the far hills and intervening Wychwood plains west of Oxford (Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire), Border morris, found on the English side of the Border with Wales (Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire), Molly dance, featured in East Anglia (Cambridgeshire), and finally North-west morris, in and around the Lancashire Plain (Lancashire, Cheshire, and West Yorkshire).²⁸ Coincidentally, the four genres are tied to four different high days

²⁷ The question that remains unanswered is the reason why teams differentiated their choreographies. Did the variations in choreographies happen because of the imperfect nature of transmission, or because each team consciously varied their choreographic markers in order to make themselves unique? For example, this question may have played a part in the Cotswold morris dancers who encountered each other at Whitsuntide celebrations where they would compete for prizes and money. See Chandler, 1993a: 89-92.

²⁸ Micheal Heaney's 1995 exhaustive bibliography of morris dance catalogues information according to the genres mentioned above. For an overview of the genres see Kightly, 1986: 170. Kightly includes unique, one-off genres that defy categorization, such as the dances of Winster and Bacup. Several display dance genres such as Garland, Stave and Ribbon dances are slightly outside the purview of morris dance and are not included in this paper. See Dommett, 1986, volume 3 and 5. I have also not

in the traditional English ritual year (Roud, 2006; Laroque, 1991). Cotswold morris peaked at Whitsuntide in the Spring (fifty days after Easter), Border morris was active in the days leading up to Boxing Day, Molly Dance concentrated on Plough Monday in early January (following Twelfth Night), and North-west Morris was most prevalent in the summer, during the Wakes Festivals. On these high days, community-wide festivals would take place and entertainment including busking would be prevalent – perfect opportunities for morris dancers. They rarely performed outside of these windows of opportunity, rehearsing for a few weeks preceding their community’s high day. Several years or decades of a similar regimen would allow the repertoire to deepen. Each regional genre also exhibited a host of *parachoreographic* codes above and beyond their common choreographic markers.²⁹ For example, Border and Molly morris dance were notable for their use of blackface during their ambulatory dance tours.

Modern teams assemble their dances from the choreographies of some 24 existing premodern teams collected and recorded by Sharp and others.³⁰ The modern teams imitate as closely as possible the details of the premodern choreographies, rather than create an entirely new sub-genre. For example, the Vancouver Morris Men have performed dances from the villages of Bampton, Eynsham, and Sherborne. Some modern teams extend their premodern repertoires by composing new dances

included the huge genre of linked sword dancing which is distantly related to morris dance, but not included in this paper for lack of space.

²⁹ I am adapting the term *parachoreographic* codes from the concept used in linguistics, paralinguistics, used in linguistics. Paralinguistics encompass all the features such as accompanying hand gestures, not associated with phonetics, phonemics, syntax, etc. The author most associated with research in paralanguage is Fernando Poyatos of the University of New Brunswick. See his three-volume study, *Nonverbal Communication Across Disciplines* (2002).

³⁰ A summary list of the 24 premodern villages from which many modern morris teams draw from, is found in Barrand 1991: tables 1 and 2, pp. 156-59.

based on the templates of premodern choreographies. The new dances are often more complex than their premodern models, reflecting in part the vastly greater amount of rehearsal time enjoyed by modern dancers when compared to premodern dancers. The former often practice year round whereas the latter restricted their practices to a month or so of weekly rehearsals before their yearly seasonal performances.

Because regional *common features* and their parachoreographies are so different, modern teams tend to either specialize in the dances of only one region, or do two or more regional genres at separate times of the year, roughly within the season associated with the regional genre.³¹ The Vancouver Morris Men perform Cotswold dances from May to September, and Border dances from October to April, with an interlude at the end of December to perform Molly dances. In contrast, the famous Shropshire Bedlams perform their Border-inspired choreographies year round. By far the most common regional morris is Cotswold, the first genre to be collected and the subject of the most printed documents. The Cotswold genre is the subject that is referred to in this dissertation.

The conscious borrowing of village traditions, some of which still have functioning, even revived morris dance teams, raises interesting questions of appropriation without permission, the subject of a future essay.³² More to the point at hand, the act of assembling a potpourri of premodern village traditions raises questions of the integrity of village styles. Modern morris teams generally perform a

³¹ Some teams, particularly in North America and Australia, create new choreographies which are sometimes a pastiches of traditional choreographic and para-choreographic features.

³² Within the Bacon *Handbook of Morris Dances* are several village traditions that are purposely left out by special request of the modern-day dancers in the villages. They include Abingdon (page 1) and Chipping Camden (page 129), two of the premodern teams that continued through to modern times. Interestingly, the two other surviving village traditions, Bampton and Headington, are freely available and are some of the most popular dance choreographies in modern morris.

selection of village sub-genres and even regional genres according to their level of difficulty and novelty, a concept created by Cecil Sharp when he founded his School of Morris Dance in 1909. Each village's *common* and *distinctive features* are maintained but other village variations, such as tempo, recorded faithfully by Cecil Sharp and later incorporated into the Bacon Bible, tend to be ignored. The only voice I know of that has cautioned against this style of *ensalata* repertoire is Tony Barrant (1991: 154), who believes that "there are many aesthetic advantages to restricting the team to a single, unified repertoire or tradition," but I personally know of no North American team, and only a handful of English teams, that have followed this advice.

As mentioned above, modern morris teams engage in morris dancing, both in rehearsal and in performance, throughout the year. The density of performances increase around certain traditional high days, such as May Day, but activity only slopes off gently to a modest level of year-round activity, unlike the premodern teams who stopped altogether. This regimen of constant rehearsal and performance creates a heightened demand for an enlarged repertoire and constant maintenance of team interest that was unheard of in premodern teams (Barrant, 1991: 137-45).

Morris dancers in both modern and premodern teams gather once a year to view each other's styles and technique. The name of the annual gathering among performers of the populous Cotswold morris is *ale*, named after *Whitsun Ales* originally conducted around the seasonal high day of Whitsuntide (50 days after Easter, occurring some time in May or early June). Modern teams perform for each other in a spirit of friendly rivalry, although the camaraderie is inseparable from the displays. Premodern morris teams also viewed each other at *ales* but in the context of

competitions, vying for a financial prize awarded by judges (Chandler, 1993a: 89-92). More important, the *ales* were gatherings of community members, not just morris dancers, for the purposes of celebrating the seasonal high day (Simpson and Roud, 2000: 388-89). Modern *Ales* are largely devoid of traditional context and act rather like conventions of like-minded hobbyists.

Modern and premodern morris dance musicians also reflect essential differences. Unlike modern morris musicians, premodern musicians functioned like contractors and were not considered part of the morris dance team. Their lives outside of morris dance have been little studied, although Keith Chandler has been correcting this oversight by engaging in research culminating in a series of preliminary articles titled *Musicians in 19th Century Southern England*, found in the electronic publication *Mustrad*³³ He has determined that the premodern musicians were principally involved in social dancing throughout the year, with brief forays into the world of morris dancing during the dancers' yearly busking tours. They were vernacular musicians who were largely self-taught, rising to high levels of proficiency in order to maintain their standing in the community and achieve financial success as social dance musicians.³⁴ When they were engaged in accompanying morris dancers, they received a lion's share of the busking income (Chandler, 2003a: 203). This outsider status is particularly marked when compared to modern morris musicians described earlier as full members of a modern morris side, whether they also danced or not.

³³ <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/>

³⁴ There are a few modern morris musicians who also perform outside of morris circles but they tend to be the exception rather than the rule, as in premodern musicians. Many modern musicians are also self-taught.

In sum, the motivations for conducting morris dance by premodern and modern morris dancers are different in several key respects, although they also share many attributes such as the pleasure of dancing and camaraderie. Modern dancers participate in the dance for reasons of recreation whereas premodern dancers viewed morris dance as an important source of income. This prime difference is embedded in many details of performance practices and culture which I have reviewed in the above sample.

Dance and Ethnomusicology

“The idea that movement is inferior to speech (and music) is a deeply embedded prejudice that is not easily overcome.” So says Drid Williams in her excellent monograph, *Anthropology and Human Movement: Searching for Origins* (p. 124). Thankfully, this is a depressing prejudice that is not held by some of the leading lights of ethnomusicology.

Dance in the domain of ethnomusicology occupies an ambivalent position. Mantle Hood made a passionate plea in his seminal text, *The Ethnomusicologist* (1971: 218), where he said, “My frequent mention of ‘music and dance’ is intended as a reminder that in many cultures the two subjects are inseparable; a true knowledge of either one requires the study of both.” He even went so far as to fashion an organology for categorizing music instruments that was inspired by Labanotation, the standard for dance notation (ibid. 144). And yet, his comment was contained in a footnote, and he did not raise the topic again in his book.

1964 saw the publication of some of the first texts for the formal study of ethnomusicology, one by Bruno Nettl (*Theory and Method in Ethnomusicology*), and

the other by Alan Merriam (*The Anthropology of Music*). Bruno Nettl declared that “the close relationship between dance and music can hardly be ignored” (Nettl, 1964: 53), and yet he did not explore that relationship. Alan Merriam’s monograph contained only passing references to dance (for example, on page 224 he places dance in one of his categories of function, under “physical response”). But in the early 1970s his cursory attitude towards dance was dramatically altered after witnessing the dances of the First Nations people in the American Southwest. His new point of view can be seen in the following observation:

Dance is culture and culture is dance...Our only reason for separating dance from the rest of culture is conceptual; our modes of thought force us to deal with reified entities. But, in fact, the entity of dance is not separable from the anthropological fact; the entity of dance is not separable from the anthropological concept of culture. (Merriam, 1974: 15-17)

Curt Sachs, a doyen of ethnomusicology, devoted an entire book to the subject of dance. His book *World History of Dance* (1933, translated 1937) was his first expedition into his life-long pioneer foray into a global view of music. Seventy years of hindsight allow us to see the book’s many flaws (see Hanna, 1979: 11), especially in his use of secondary sources, but there is no denying the new ground that it broke. He established the first theoretical query in world dance when he said:

If the dance, inherited from brutish ancestors, lives in all mankind as a necessary motor-rhythmic expression of excess energy and of the joy of living, then it is only of slight importance for anthropologists and social historians. If it is established, however, that an inherited predisposition develops in many ways in the different groups of man and in its force and direction is related to other phenomena of civilization, the history of dance will then be of great importance for the study of mankind. (Sachs, 1937: 12)

Even after the later shift to ethnology-centred theorizing, John Blacking came to some of the same conclusions as Sachs, after surveying the musical life of Venda children in South Africa. His article, entitled “Toward an Anthropology of the Body” (1977), is neatly restated in his 1992 contribution for the text *Ethnomusicology: an Introduction*, “Theory and Method: The Biology of Music-making”:

Transcultural musical communication can be explained in terms of...biologically based capabilities that enable people to make culture-free, aesthetic judgments....Only in (this) situation is there a possibility that two individuals might experience the same musical sounds in the same ways. And because those experiences would inevitably involve the same “movements” of the body, such music-making will probably need to consider music and dance (or structured movement systems) as a single category, as was, and still is, the case in many African and Asian societies. (Blacking, 1992: 313)

In 1975, John Blacking founded one of the first academic institutions to combine dance with music anthropology in a unified field of inquiry. This occurred at Queen’s University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, thanks to the inspiration and funding of Peter Brinson (1923 - 1995).³⁵ Brinson was a famous English commentator on cultural politics who lectured on ballet at Oxford, Cambridge and London Universities from 1954 to 1964. He then went on to develop a populist school of ballet called *Ballet for All* which re-examined the basis of classical and modern dance. Using this same perspective, he became a major force in dance education and

³⁵ His manifesto for the combined study of dance and music is fully amplified in the introduction to the book he edited, along with Joann Kealiinhomoku, entitled *The Performing Arts: Music and Dance* (The Hague, Netherlands; Mouton Publishers, 1973).

performance as a director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Council for Dance Education and Training (1971- 1992).³⁶

A summary of the interest of ethnomusicologists in dance was compiled by Judith Lynn Hanna in chapter 12 of *Ethnomusicology: an Introduction* (1992), titled “Dance”.³⁷ Professor Hanna is one of a number of dance specialists, or ethnochoreologists, who have approached ethnic or world dance from backgrounds in anthropology and western European art dance.³⁸ Ethnochoreologists are very conscious of the interest in dance expressed by the pioneers of ethnology-centred anthropology. In 1922, Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown simultaneously published their pioneering studies in ethnography – first-hand observations culled from accumulated field work. Malinowski, in his work with the Trobriand Islanders in the South Pacific, and Radcliffe-Brown, with the Andaman Islanders in the Indian Ocean, were both acutely aware of the centrality of dance in the isolated cultures of their research areas (Hanna, 1979: 11). Earlier scholars, such as Emile Durkheim (1859-1917), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903, who succeeded the pioneer of sociology, Auguste Comte), Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), the father

³⁶ He summarized his far-reaching thoughts in his book *Dance as Education: towards a national dance culture* (1991), written for an English readership. The Gulbenkian Foundation commissioned a ground-breaking study, *Arts In Schools*, which is a standard reference for dance education even today. (Brinson, 1991: 72). On page 3 he makes a brief reference to morris dance in order to set the stage for his argument that England has its unique folk dances, but seemingly no unique English art dance culture.

³⁷ It seems that there may be some reluctance on the part of ethnomusicologists to devote a full-time career to the study of dance, although many scholars do explore dance in their investigations of music culture. Spencer (1985: 3) suggests that the cause of the reluctance may lie in the insecurity that comes from having two left feet. Hanna (1992: 325) has wondered aloud if a bias was inherent in early “scholars (who) tended to be rooted in Anglo-Saxon culture (where) men’s dancing had effeminate, homosexual overtones”.

³⁸ A full account of the history of dance research can be found in Hanna, 1979: 11-12, and Williams, 2004: 130-148. One generalisation claims that dance anthropologists concern themselves with the search for dance universals and therefore human universals, whereas ethnochoreologists focus on individual dance cultures. See backnote 1 in Buckland, 1999: 52.

of British anthropology, and Sir James George Frazer (1851-1941), an armchair anthropologist who had a major influence on morris dance, were all impressed with the role of dance in primitive societies. E.B. Tylor described dance as a non-verbal language, presaging semiotics (Williams, 2004: 66-67), and Spencer saw dance as a classic example of stress relief and catharsis, a theory which is still current today (Spencer, 1985: 16).

A Survey of Bibliographies Devoted to Morris Dance Literature

Morris dance has been the subject of intense research and discussion for over a hundred years, resulting in a substantial body of literature. This literature has been compiled in several bibliographies of note.

The first complete bibliography was published in 1975 by Russell Wortley (1912-1980) and reprinted as a “first edition” in 1985. However, it has been progressively up-dated by Michael Heaney, beginning with a second published edition in 1995 and then extended into an on-going on-line bibliography posted by the English Folk Dance and Song Society and currently containing 213 entries. Heaney’s bibliography follows the annotated study of the geographic distribution of morris and related dances compiled by Cawte et al. in 1960 and 1961, itself a revision of an earlier geographical study by Needham in 1936. Another catalogue of sources and citations, compiled by Heaney and Forrest (1991), concentrates on references to morris prior to 1750. Finally, Theresa Buckland devoted an entire article to an overview of source material for morris and related dance in her 1983 essay, “Traditional Dance: English Ceremonial and Social Forms.” Like Heaney and Forrest, she amplified her information by placing it within the contexts of theories of

culture and reception. Every book published about morris dance in the last twenty years has contained extensive bibliographies, so it is difficult to single one book out from the rest, but certainly the insightful studies by Chandler 1993a and 1993b are singularly complete in regards to one particular genre of morris, Cotswold Morris.

Perhaps one of the most readable surveys of the historical literature of morris dance is found in John Cutting's casual monograph titled *History and the Morris Dance: A Look At Morris Dancing From Its Earliest Days until 1850*, published by Dance Books in 2005. The author frames the early history of morris dance by presenting its appearance in literary citations ranging from brief mentions to entries in encyclopaedias.

Cecil Sharp

Cecil James Sharp (1859-1924) is perhaps the most prominent name in the history of folk music and folk dance in England. He devoted his life to the discovery and dissemination of what he believed to be England's musical heritage embedded in its folk culture, as opposed to its *high art*. Although his career seems to be singular, he is now being placed in the context of a host of collectors who were equally passionate about English vernacular music.³⁹ One reason Sharp was unique among

³⁹ Perhaps the most definitive study of pre-Sharpian folk song collecting is E. David Gregory's *Victorian Songhunters: The Recovery and Editing of English Vernacular Ballads and Folk Lyrics, 1820-1883* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006). The next stage of collectors, sometimes called Edwardian collectors, other times as members of the First Revival (Simpson and Roud, 2000: 336-38), are grounded in the formation of the English Folk Song Society which was founded 1898. No definitive study has been made of this group, but a picture can be drawn from the definitive bibliography of English folk songs by David Atkinson, *English Folk Song Bibliography, 3rd edition* (2006), and found as a link on the web site of the English Folk Dance and Song Society: <http://www.efdss.org/songbib3.pdf>. Collectors and scholars of English folk song after Sharp's influences are cogently summarized in "One Hundred Years of the Folk Song Society," written by Vic Gammon, and found in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation*, edited by Ian Russell and David Atkinson (Aberdeen, Scotland: The Elphinstone Institute, 2004).

all the collectors before and after him was his single-minded effort to find a place for English folk music and dance in the national school curriculum (Cox, 1993). Also, his efforts were couched in a nationalist sentiment that trumpeted the essential nature of home-grown folk culture as a marker of Englishness (Blake, 1997: 44-45; Hughes and Stradling, 2001: 173-75). Sharp's life work in folk music education and contributions to English society were sympathetically laid out in a biography prepared by A.H. Fox-Strangeways and Maude Karpeles in 1933 (expanded and revised by Karpeles in 1967).

However, Sharp has not been without his critics. A controversy about Sharp's alleged class-ridden point of view was brought to a boil by David Harker when he re-examined the work of Sharp within a book he provocatively entitled *Fakesong* (1985). The charge, encapsulated in the title, is that Sharp misrepresented the proletariat by demeaning them as "folk," and that Sharp's scholarly output amounted to cultural appropriation. Later authors such as C.J. Bearman (2002) have countered with a renewed appreciation for the work of Sharp, while James Porter (1991) has sought a middle ground between the neo-Marxist critics and the recent apologists.

Sharp is also credited with being a singular voice in the study of morris dance and folk dance in general. In 1907 he published the first book devoted solely to the subject, entitled *The Morris Book: a History of Morris Dancing with a Description of Eleven Dances as Performed by the Morris Men of England*. It was printed by Novello and Company, a publishing house founded by Vincent Novello in 1830, and famous for devoting itself exclusively to a catalogue of English classical music and related subjects. With Novello as his publisher, Cecil Sharp devoted a major portion

of his life to the study of English folk dance and song with studies and compilations that spanned the height of the optimistic Edwardian Age (1890 -1914) through the Great War (1914-18) to the years of England's faltering economy and sombre prospects in the 1920s.

When Cecil Sharp investigated the state of morris dance from 1906 to 1914 he found it in a near total state of demise. So his study was also a mission to recover a lost heritage. He collected about 160 dances and their specific melodies (and published 83 of them) from fourteen village and family traditions from the English Midland Counties. He actually encountered only 3 living traditions comprised of functioning teams from the villages of Bampton, Headington, and Eynsham, amounting to 29 dances. The rest of his found choreographies came from individual men who were old and in most cases, infirm. These dance traditions are now collectively referred to as Cotswold dances.

The first book on morris dance, described above, contained dance notations composed by Herbert MacIlwaine with accompanying melodies collected by Sharp. The book's intention was to be first and foremost a tutorial guide for teachers who wished to use the material in the classroom. Although the descriptions are fairly complete in themselves, they work best as an aide memoire, another key role of his publications. This was a common model in the morris dance collections of Sharp, who followed this study with a further four volumes about morris dance that were published, and then revised, from 1909 to 1913. In other words, the intention of Sharp's research was not to contribute to dance ethnology or theory, but rather to

resuscitate a dying tradition by placing it in a new context in mass education and recreation.

In the same year as the printing of the final volume of morris dance instruction, Cecil Sharp also published a three-part instructional and overview of sword dances from the north of England. Like morris dance, they are also a form of folk dance created for display purposes rather than as a medium for socializing. The dancers are linked together in a circle by holding each other's "swords" or, more properly, wooden or metal flat rods. The stepping is rudimentary, but the choreography is quite the opposite as the dancers weave in and out of various complex configurations, all the while holding on to each other by grasping each other's swords. A linked sword dance literature has progressively increased, capped by Stephen Corrsin's 1997 examination of the history of sword-dancing in England and its European parallels. The groundwork for the European comparative perspective had been pioneered by Violet Alford (1962), although her theory of the pagan origins of linked sword dance, in part derived from Cecil Sharp, have not been supported (Corrsin, 1997: 8-9).

Both sword dancing and morris dancing are in need of an inclusive term, which would have the added advantage of distinguishing them from social dances. Many authors have struggled to find such a word with varying success. Both sword and morris genres are ceremonial and festive, with all the trappings of a ritual, and once restricted to performers of a single gender (male) and specific calendar occasions. Simpson and Roud (2000: 88) and Buckland (1983: 45) have settled on the word "ceremonial," whereas Cecil Sharp (1924: 35) and others such as Barrant

(1991: 3) have chosen “spectacular” in the sense of a theatrical “spectacle”. A case can be made for using the word “morris” as a descriptor for all forms of non-social dances including sword dances because the word has been employed for both the genres throughout English history (Kightly, 1986: 167), but the designation is only really useful for insiders. Another term often encountered is “display” (dances), but like the others, it does not fully encompass the genre.

Sharp also gave his attention to English folk dances that were purely social in nature, partly because he believed, correctly (as I will show), that they shed light on morris dance. He identified them as Country Dances, following the many publications of the same title, printed and sold from 1651 to 1728 by John Playford (1623-86) and his successors. His first foray into the subject area of English folk dance resulted in a publication titled *Eighteen Dances of Warwickshire, Derbyshire, Devonshire, Somerset and Surrey* which was published in 1909 (the same year as the 2nd volume of his morris dance instruction). It was the first of a six-volume set entitled *The Country Dance Book* published in sequence until 1922. The other five volumes were devoted to the Playford *Country Dance* collections, and a later, echoed tradition called Running Sets which he discovered in the Appalachian mountains of the United States during his collecting tour there. The five volumes of social dances were re-crafted into an educational format in 1912, aimed at the primary and secondary school system. This project was not to be equalled until 1949, when Douglas Kennedy published his *Community Dance Manuals*, book 1-7 (1949 to 1967), which included 130 English and American social country dances.

Sharp also published large collections of melodies associated with social (i.e., country) and morris dance entitled *Morris Dance Tunes* (1907-24) and *Country Dance Tunes* (1909-22), amounting to some 480 tunes (Atkinson, 2004).⁴⁰ Although his sources were the rural fiddlers that he encountered on his collection travels, he published them in arrangements for solo piano, in keeping with the role of the music as instructional material for public and dance schools.⁴¹ For both genres he developed a theory that the earliest melodies used in folk song and dance could be dated by their use of modes.⁴²

In 1924 Sharp completed a penultimate draft of an overview of his thoughts on dance in England and Europe in a book entitled *The Dance: A Historical Survey of Dancing in Europe*. His point of view, common at the time, was essentially evolutionary, seeing dances as a progression of form from simple to complex, reflecting the growing complexity of European society. Paul Oppe encouraged Sharp to solidify his standing as a folk dance specialist by publishing the study so it would equal his renown as a scholar of folk songs (Karpeles, 1967: 187). However, Sharp did not live long enough to see it in print. It was completed by Oppe who provided the planned illustrations, and as much of a final draft as an outsider can manage. Its

⁴⁰ The only other author to surpass this feat of collecting such a vast quantity of English dance melodies was Peter Kennedy who published six books under the general title of *The Fiddler's Tune-book: Traditional Dance Music of Britain and Ireland*⁴⁰ amounting to some 1000 tunes. He began his collecting in the '50s. These books are in addition to his magnum opus, *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (with the assistance of the American collector Alan Lomax), again following closely in the footsteps of Sharp. Other collections spontaneously continue to appear such as the Joshua Gibbons manuscript from Lincolnshire, dating from between 1823 and 1826 and only recently discovered (Sumner, 2003).

⁴¹ A collection of the most popular of these selections was re-issued by Maud Karpeles and Kenworthy Schofield in 1951, entitled *100 English Folk Dance Airs*.

⁴² Julian Onderdonk refuted Sharp's theory concerning modes in an article entitled, "Vaughan Williams and the Modes," in *Folk Music Journal*, 4/5 (1999), pp. 609-626. In the article, he explains that his survey of the songs collected by Vaughan Williams and Sharp shows that Vaughan Williams selectively chose modal melodies over tonal melodies because of his agenda to promote the antiquity and therefore validity of English folk-song.

hasty preparation and casual musings were reminiscent of Sharp's 1907 book *English Folk Song* which also went to press in a rush. Despite the sweeping title, its material mainly draws upon theatrical and courtly dance sources of Western European, and especially English, history. Sharp was intrigued by the prevalence of folk dance in the courts and salons where they were re-imagined and re-fashioned to suit the advanced dance techniques of the courtiers.⁴³

In summary, Sharp is justly famous for his study of folk song texts and melodies, but his attention to dance is not as well known. This disparity is seen in the contrast between the number of entries in the above bibliography of morris dance (213 items) and the definitive bibliography of English folk song (508 items) discussed below.

Sharp's writings about English folk dance have also been subject to the similar re-assessments. However, the literature is modest compared to the above, with only one stand-alone article that grapples with Sharp's scholarship, written by Townsend (1988: 53-79). One of the criticisms stems from Sharp's belief, common in his day, that the dances originated in pagan ritual, a subject I will return to in this dissertation. And like his folk song publications, he has also been accused of doctoring the original choreography for the sake of consistency and his perception of a norm. He was prone to categorizing collected dances in terms of purity or degeneracy, depending on pedigree of their transmission and region. His criteria were ultimately based on his personal biases (Townsend, 1988: 66-67).

⁴³ Nigel Allenby was able to realize Sharp's ambition in his *Folk Dance of Europe* (1991) which is encyclopaedic in scope. It is only exceeded by the multi-volume *International Encyclopedia of Dance* (Cowan: 1998).

Sharp's Contemporaries, Predecessors, Successors, and Rivals

Cecil Sharp was not alone in his efforts to revive morris dance. His constant companion and eventual amanuensis was Maud Karpeles (1885-1976) who joined him in his explorations in 1911 and continued his work following his death. Boyes (2001: 171-95) and David Atkinson (2001: 99-101) have prepared excellent summaries of her life. Her interest in morris dance was peripheral compared to her work in collecting folk song, although she did chart new territory in morris dance by providing some descriptions of North-west Processional dance and Border dance that Sharp had largely ignored (Boyes, 2001: 179).

Even more significant to the revival of morris dance at the time of Sharp was Clara Sophia Neal, a.k.a. "Mary" Neal (1860-1944). She crossed paths with Sharp and his revival activities in 1905, first as a respected associate, then as a rival, and finally as a loser in the battle to claim authority as the source of morris dance knowledge. Her story, fully documented by Roy Judge (1989), is almost as crucial to the early history of the first revival of morris dance as the name of Cecil Sharp, mainly because her enthusiasm for the morris dances that Sharp had collected was a prime motivator for Sharp to investigate morris dance beyond just its melodies. Mary Neal used morris dancing to provide an outlet for the energies and enthusiasms of young underprivileged women who were members of a club called the Esperance Guild located in a working class district of London. She had struck upon the idea of using morris dances after speaking with Cecil Sharp in 1905, then doing a stint as a morris instructor at the Chelsea School of Physical Education in 1907, ultimately forming a network of morris dance teachers and students called the Esperance Morris

Guild (1910-14). At the Chelsea school, she was ultimately displaced by Sharp in 1910, one of the first snubs she was to suffer due to the influence of Sharp.

With her principal dancer, Florence (Florie) Warren, she had been invited to teach morris dance in the United States in 1910, six years before Sharp's extended field trip in 1916-18. But even in America, Neal was dogged by Sharp's disapproving warnings. Planned meetings between Neal and her American contacts cancelled because of Sharp's negative commendations sent by telegram. In the end, the conflicted relationship between the two antagonists culminated in the withdrawal of Neal from active participation in the morris revival. The nature of the controversy centres on Sharp's insistence on standardized instruction in a scholarly and formal conservatory system, whereas Neal imagined that morris dance instruction would be in the context of a relaxed and casual recreation with the inevitable variation in morris stepping. It is interesting to see how this vision ultimately became the nature of morris dance today, contrary to Sharp's vision (Simpson and Roud, 2000: 256).

There were a few tentative efforts at researching morris dance before Cecil Sharp appeared on the scene, but their contributions were minimal at best. Percy Manning, an Oxford Don, sponsored the revival of the morris team in Headington Quarry, a village just outside Oxford (Manning, 1897). This was the team that Sharp encountered in 1899. Manning's interest in the team was more in keeping with the long tradition of arm-chair scholars known as antiquarians who often noted their efforts in their constant companion, *Notes and Queries* (founded 1849, see Simpson and Roud, 2000: 261). D'arcy Ferris (1855-1929) had an entirely different agenda as the producer of pageants highlighting aspects of an imagined rural England that has

now come to be known as the “Merrie England” movement, originating in the early 1800s.⁴⁴ During his preparations for a pageant in Bidford (a town closely associated with Shakespeare and nearby Stratford-On-Avon) in 1886, he encountered a moribund morris dance tradition that he resurrected and organized with a mix of old and new choreographies and melodies. Sharp encountered members of the team in 1906 because they had maintained their dances long after D’arcy Ferris’ pageants. Assuming they were authentic, Sharp faithfully recorded their dances and included them in his first book of morris dances, published in 1907. When he learned that they were largely a figment of Ferris’ imaginative pastiche, he withdrew the dances from the second edition of the book, published in 1912 (Sharp, 1912: 8).

A full-length study of Cecil Sharp’s successors in the world of morris dance has not been attempted. The most prominent of his disciples, Douglas Kennedy (1893-1988), carried Sharp’s torch as the succeeding Director of the English Folk Dance Society (1924-1932) and then as the Director of the amalgamated English Folk Dance and Song Society (1932-1961). Douglas Kennedy shifted the emphasis from morris dance to social country dance and from the scholarly study of dance to the pragmatic use of dance as recreation. Even then, the weight of attention on dancing per se was a major source of friction within the constituents of the succeeding English Folk Dance and Song Society, which was more interested in the “song” component of the society. The emphasis on recreational dance in the EFDSS is discussed by Kennedy himself (1949: 19-20; 1971: 80-90) and then by the authors of his eulogy, Roy Judge and Derek Schofield (1988: 520-36).

⁴⁴ Another, related term is Ye (The) Olde England, which refers more to medieval culture rather than the renaissance bucolic state of mind.

Another important voice in the later development of morris dance is Roy Dommett, who functioned rather like a Johnny Appleseed. He has produced hundreds of freely-available morris dance tutorial and fact sheets that are based on his own extensive researches. More important, he has made them freely available in photocopy form, distributing them as he created them. Eventually they were compiled by Anthony Barrand (1986) in a five-volume collection entitled *Roy Dommett's Morris Notes*, volume 1-5, although Dommett continues to generate one and two-page descriptions and summaries devoted to a multitude of morris topics. When he visited California and the Northwest in 1997 he deposited another 400 pages of morris dance notes to the archives of a local morris community, Berkeley Morris, which were almost the equal of the first five volumes.⁴⁵ While he is not widely published, his voluminous manuscript collections are respected and valued for their opinions because of his level, first-hand observations and intelligent interpretations. One certain indicator of the respect accorded to his research is the “indebtedness” of Lionel Bacon, the author of perhaps the single most important manual of morris dance instruction who said his gratitude to Roy Dommett’s research and collecting “cannot be overstated” (1974:vii).

Another important milestone in the history of morris dance following Sharp was the founding of the Morris Ring in 1934, an association of morris dance teams that did not follow the regimen of Sharp’s English Folk Dance and Song Society. The Ring took a dramatic step in disavowing allegiance to the system of morris dance accreditation that Sharp had instituted. They followed the template established by the

⁴⁵ Last report was that the original documents were in the hands of Randall Cayford of the San Francisco morris community. Roy continues to generate one and two page descriptions and memoirs which are now available on the WWW at <http://www.opread.force9.co.uk/RoyDommett/>

original morris dancers with instruction and information freely exchanged through aural transmission among its members without recourse to arbiters of standards. This concept was expanded to include a comprehensive printed collection of morris dance choreographies entitled *A Handbook of Morris Dances*, compiled largely by Lionel Bacon in 1951 (described above). The Ring also emphasized the original, casual nature of morris dancing by recommending outdoor venues such as folk festivals, and local greens and commons. Its founding in 1934 was not without controversy, partly because of its policy of barring female dancers.⁴⁶ This controversial policy has dogged the Ring up to the present day, with criticisms of sexism countered by arguments in support of male-only friendship societies. To counter this obvious exclusionary policy, female dancers formed their own organization, named the Morris Federation, in 1975.⁴⁷ Another morris dancing collective, Open Morris (founded 1979)⁴⁸, was formed to provide membership to morris dancing teams comprised of mixed gender teams, a policy imitated shortly afterwards by the Morris Federation (in 1980). All three organizations are still in the midst of their early history and have yet to receive full-length studies, although Georgina Boyes has “pressed charges” against the Ring by outlining some of its controversial elements such as its alleged sexism in her book *The Imagined Village* (1993: 152-195).

⁴⁶ This policy is not without irony, considering that in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, the people who turned out in huge numbers to learn morris dance from the certified teachers of Sharp and Neal were almost exclusively female, including the teachers.

⁴⁷ <http://www.morrisfed.org/mf/infoform.htm>

⁴⁸ <http://www.open-morris.com/>

The Second Revival

The efforts of Cecil Sharp, Mary Neal, and their disciples to disseminate morris dance are usually described as a First Revival. However, Sharp's conclusions and results were tainted by his premises that were rooted in a pagan origin theory (to be discussed presently). After World War II, morris dance and English cultural studies in general, was influenced by the historicism of the New Left that had recently emerged. The roots of this intellectual movement were mostly found in the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). This profound shift in the cultural wind of English folk music and dance has recently been summarized by Michael Brocken in his ground-breaking publication, *The British Folk Revival: 1944-2002* (2003). The impact of this new style of thought was first felt in folk song circles, led by Ewan MacColl and Albert Lloyd. They mandated their folk clubs to restrict themselves to English traditional song, rejecting any folk music from America no matter how enticing, because of a perceived flood of unwanted American influences drowning English vernacular song traditions.

The "second revival" was foreshadowed in the morris dance world by the decentralisation of the authority of the English Folk Dance and Song Society by the Ring. The members of the Ring were determined to re-create the original localized nature of aural transmission (Brocken, 2003: 46-47). However, the revival morris dance teams continued to favour the theory first propounded by Sharp that morris dance was a vestige of a fertility ritual.

The scholarly study of morris dance was an entirely different matter. Perhaps the greatest name in the study of morris dance is Keith Chandler (1993a, 1993b)

whose brilliant studies of Cotswold morris dancing is clearly founded on punctilious historical research. His occasional collaborator and equally passionate scholar, Mike Heaney, has also been in this vanguard. Rather than reinforce old stereotypes based on conceptions of idyllic lifestyles, Chandler methodically examined the records of a host of morris dancers and their cultural milieus by first establishing a gazetteer of names, locations, and anecdotal information from the informants, and then establishing trends and motivations. John Forrest, also with the assistance of Heaney, has prepared the ground for and expanded understanding of morris dance by publishing studies of the development of early morris dance in his *The History of Morris Dancing: 1458-1750* (1999)⁴⁹. Each of these books was presaged by a host of articles in journals, especially the *Folk Music Journal*, the annual publication of the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

A Third Revival

There is a trace of a third revival of morris dance originating in the youth movement of the 1960s. One of the markers of this faint cultural trait is the average age of morris dancers, which tends to be within the 40-to 60-year old bracket, dating from those early years.⁵⁰ This demographic is usually referred to as the baby boomers, and I count myself one of them. There is no specific literature to track the origins and movement of morris dancing among this group, aside from comments in Schofield (2004: 46, 82) and Brocken (2003: Chapter 6) in the context of folk song.

⁴⁹ John Forrest has also opened an interesting avenue of comparative morris dance research by examining the morris dance-like traditions found in Central America and New Mexico, thanks to the Spaniard conquistadores in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In particular, see his monograph *Morris and Matachin: a study in comparative choreography*, Sheffield, UK: 1984.

⁵⁰ http://www.thedonkey.org/Recycling/janet_survey.html

Schofield (2004: 44, 46) singles out two revival teams for special mention, Chingford Boys' Morris⁵¹ and Hammersmith Morris Men⁵², the latter being perhaps the most famous morris dance team in England. Each of them made significant appearances as youthful, fresh, and irreverent dancers in 1966 and 1967. This third revival seems to have ridden the crest of the world-wide movement that originated in America as the counterculture movement, popularly known as hippie culture.

In Britain the counterculture came about as a reaction to post-war austerity. The invention of the teenager came late to Britain and it was only in the 60s that young people had any money of their own to spend. They looked around and saw that everything was controlled by old people – those hypocrites intent on maintaining the status quo as if World War II had never happened...activists looked on hippies with disdain. They couldn't see how these people could spend their time taking drugs, making music, meditating and contemplating the void when (Americans) were being murdered by their own government in a nondeclared war. (Miles, 2004: 10).

Morris dance teams were not usually comprised of hippies, but even today they share some of the same values, particularly the reverence for the environment and even *Mother Nature* (as evidenced by their May Day celebrations, to be discussed shortly) and an irreverent attitude to authority and standards of public behaviour.

In England, a cluster of significant media explorations occurred at somewhat the same time. The first of these moments was the hit record entitled *Liege and Lief*, the first rock interpretation of English folk music, arranged and composed by members of Fairport Convention in 1969. It has been voted "The most important folk

⁵¹ Founded by Peter Boyce who taught at Chingford County High School. Some of its alumni formed the impressive Albion Morris Men in 1972, led by Ashley Hutchings for the purposes of an LP entitled *Morris On*.

⁵² The team was founded by Hugh Ripon in 1964, with a golden age of accomplishments lead by the famous musician and dancer John Kirkpatrick until his departure in circa 1970.

album of all time” by BBC2. The key member of the band was Ashley Hutchings, who was aware of the intimate relationship between English folk song and folk dance, motivating him to generate another LP entitled *Morris On* (produced in 1972). It had a profound effect on the morris community with its electric mix of rock techniques and music instruments playing traditional Cotswold dance melodies. Ashley Hutchings’s musical innovations constituted a popular mainstream confirmation of the surging interest in morris dancing among this demographic. Another LP entitled *The Complete Dancing Master* (1974) followed shortly thereafter, presenting the other side of the English folk dance coin, Country dance. Rather late in the New Age but still highly valued was another of Hutchings’s startling fusions, *Rattlebone and Ploughjack* (1976 LP). It is an affectionate look at the newly emerging revivals of new morris dance genres, Welsh Border and East Anglia Molly dancing. The LP was recorded with the same clever blend of narration and music as the other LPs.⁵³ Ashley Hutchings’s contributions to England’s folk music and dance culture have been covered by Brian Hinton and Geoff Wall, in *Ashley Hutchings: The Guv’nor and the Rise of Folkrock, 1945-1973* (2002).

A particularly interesting indication of the New Age tone of the Third Revival is found in the provocative and quirky movie *The Wicker Man* which presented the prevailing notion of the pagan origins of English folklore in 1973. The movie presented the idea that a remote village in the Hebrides was performing ancient pagan rituals of sacrifice for the purposes of insuring the arrival of the spring. The rumour of the sacrifice of a child was brought to the attention of the Law, which sent an officer

⁵³ Since the recording *Morris On*, there have been additions entitled *Son of Morris On* (1976), *Grandson of Morris On* (2002) and *Great Grandson of Morris On* (2004), all with the same blend of rock sounds and Cotswold morris dance melodies.

to investigate. In the end, it was he who was sacrificed in an enormous wicker statue, designed after an illustration from 1676 which was based on a record of a Druid rite seen by Romans at the time of Caesar (Rogers, 2002: 15-16). In the movie, six ritual dancers are seen in procession, although they are linked sword dancers rather than morris dancers. There is also an extended scene involving the pagan elements of the May Pole with ingenuous comments about its phallic symbolism. In the interview that accompanies the DVD version, the actors and directors express sympathy with the basic idea of pagan, specifically alleged Celtic customs, believing that the observances represented a time when humanity was in tune with the seasons and their mysterious transformations. The movie continues to exert a powerful hold on the imagination of a portion of the populace as seen in the *Fortean Times* e-magazine (<http://www.forteanimes.com/exclusive/wicker.shtml>) .

Morris Dance before the Revivals

The history of morris dance in the centuries before its revival at the hands of Cecil Sharp (and Mary Neal) could be easily mistaken for an activity that was exclusively performed in the rural “outback” of England’s “green and pleasant landscape”. This is certainly how Sharp found it when he accidentally stumbled across the Headington Quarry Men. However, scholars have discovered a scenario that was far more intertwined and complex between various levels of urban and rural society.

Against the backdrop of Robert Malcomson’s singular book, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (1973), discussions of morris dance are described as an uneasy movement back and forth between the bourgeoisie and

proletariat. One of the most prominent scholars of Victorian-Era morris dance, Roy Judge, conducted a systematic study of the historical records of urban morris dance at the time, resulting in several articles (1984, 1996, 1997) that focused on a genre of morris dance in a highly urban, theatrical context – the Merrie England movement that idealized Renaissance England at the time of Elizabeth the first for the stage. Simultaneous with these faux stage productions was the existence of morris dance among the working classes. The entire age was swept up in the successes of Queen Victoria, and the popularity of English traditional customs in the latter half of the 1800s is recognized in morris dance. Chandler (1993b: 17) shows a graph of morris dance activity in villages that reflect the general enthusiasm for the age’s successes, culminating in Queen Victoria’s Golden jubilee in 1887 and Diamond Jubilee ten years later.⁵⁴ An excellent source of information about dance in its “real” and staged settings in Victorian England, including morris, was assembled by Diane Jewitt for the English Folk Dance and Song Society as a teaching resource – *Understanding Victorian Society through Dance: ‘from monarch to mudlark* (2000). Other important background sources to the age are found in Clapp-Intyre (2002), Jackson-Houlston (1999) and Scott (1989) who have investigated the appropriation of the music culture of the working class by the middle class, and Pearsall (1973, 1975), Russell (1997) and Bailey (1998) who present insider views of the same process in music halls and summer outdoor entertainments.

Morris dance history tends to fall either before or after the Civil Wars (1642-45), the battle between religious factions within parliament leading to the execution

⁵⁴ The reverence for this golden age is clearly evident in Canada, which has set aside a day in May as Victoria Day.

of Charles I (1649) followed by the Commonwealth, or Interregnum (1649-1660) when Cromwell ruled the country as Lord Protector. As a Puritan, in a country dominated by Puritans, he oversaw the banning of public pleasures such as the theatre, and even holidays such as Christmas. This turbulent period of time when “the world turned upside down”⁵⁵ greatly affected the course of morris dance and its related social mirror, Country Dance. Essentially, both were subject to suspicion and aversion, although neither was actually banned. Hutton (1994) and Underdown (1985) have delved into the cultural context in their provocative studies entitled *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: the ritual year, 1400-1700* and *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660*, respectively. These titles point to one of the themes in this thesis concerning morris and misrule. An important insight into the attitude of the Puritans towards dance is offered by Bruce Daniels (1995), writing about the same generation of Puritans who were living in the New World. They followed the same strict code of behaviour as their English counterparts, including dance, in a delicate balance described by the author in the title *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England*.

Morris dance before (and shortly after) the Interregnum is explored in exemplary detail by John Forrest in his monumental 1999 study *The History of Morris Dancing, 1458-1750*. The history encompasses the English Renaissance which describe morris dance in urban settings, ultimately in the courts. Forrest’s book is supplemented with Mike Heaney’s earlier article *Kingston to Kenilworth: Early Plebeian Morris*. Both Heaney and Forrest shared this same research area, as seen in

⁵⁵ This melody in the form of a ballad with an extensive history is discussed in Barbara Babcock’s excellent collection of essays entitled *The reversible world : symbolic inversion in art and society* (1972).

their joint article of 1991. Another supplement is Jane Garry's 1983 overview of the literary references to morris dance, which extend from secondary dramatists and commentators to William Shakespeare, who was obviously well acquainted with morris dance.

The actual roots of morris dance are a matter of speculation because of a lack of hard evidence, but all the clues point to Spain and their *moresco* celebrations of the sixteenth century (Cutting, 2005:45-53). The single most important scholar who has written on the general subject is Max Harris. The theatrical depiction of the battle of the moors and Christians in Spain radiated across Europe and the world. Max Harris first investigated the historical and modern forms of *moresco* in an article in 1994, and then expanded the information to include its most vibrant off-shoots in the New World, explored in his book *Aztecs, Moors, and Christians: Festivals of Reconquest in Mexico and Spain*. John Forrest generated an exciting article in 1994 in which he compared morris dance to morris-like activity in Central and SW North America, bringing an unusual perspective to the Spanish origins of morris dance, variously known as *moresco* and *matachin*. Forrest established the fact that morris dance activity permeated countries other than England, particularly Latin America. Philip Heath-Coleman (1985) offered a cogent rejoinder to Forrest's conclusions that, on the surface, were critical of some of the conclusions, but in the end, supplemented the growing awareness of the Latin American off-shoots. Forrest continues to be an active researcher in Latin American *moresco* and told me in private correspondence that New World Morris has barely been explored, and represents the next great area of research. The Spanish origins of *moresco* had a deep and lasting influence on

English and European linked sword dancing (Stephen Corrsin, 1997). They lend credence to the theory that variations of *moresco* are found throughout Europe in an almost bewildering variety. Its main characteristics are its rowdy, carnivalesque ambience and its theatrical tenor involving staged performances of antagonists duelling with each other in a choreographed manner.

The Hermeneutics of Morris Dance

The study of morris dance usually focuses on its history but there is another diachronic theme that is central to an examination of morris dance – the hermeneutics of its symbolism. This introspection is restricted to its observers and revivalists. The dancers in the villages and urban local communities continued to dance for money and enjoy themselves without any thought of its symbolism.

The exegetical meaning of morris during the first revival was centred on its alleged vestigial Celtic paganism, as shown in the writings of Sharp and his successors (Sharp, 1911:11-14). Some of the characteristics of the fertility interpretation resembled neo-pagan philosophies examined in England by Ronald Hutton (1999) and in America by Sarah M. Pike (2001) and Sabina Magliocco (2004). Both acknowledge the influence of Sir Frazer. Examples from web sites and personal experience will illustrate how this exegesis is so entrenched in modern times. The pagan interpretation has been cogently reviewed and criticized by almost every author specializing in morris dance in the last 30 years, most notably by John Forrest (1999) and Ronald Hutton (1996). The roots of this theory are found in a monumental collection entitled *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Meaning* (1890) written

by Sir James George Frazer (1851-1941).⁵⁶ He was following a thread of thought first developed by the German pioneer folklorist and ethnographer Wilhelm Mannhardt. Frazer's theories of prophylactic magic had such a profound effect on European critical thought that even to this day they are debated and discussed (Simpson and Roud, 2000: 134-35).⁵⁷ A summary of the content and controversies in Frazer's descriptions of the nature and polygenesis of magic practices are found in Robert Ackerman's *The Myth and Ritual School: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* (2002) and an anthology compiled by Robert A. Segal entitled *The Myth and Ritual Theory* (1998). Stephen Corrsin drew a direct link between Frazer and Cecil Sharp in his brilliant article entitled "The Founding of English Ritual Dance Studies before the First World War: Human Sacrifice in India...and in Oxfordshire?" (2004).

A second and earlier exegetical meaning of morris was derived from a Victorian concept of Merrie England and has also been subject to intense criticism. Ronald Hutton's book *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, mentioned earlier, explores the actual ground upon which the Victorian nostalgia was constructed (Simpson and Roud, 2000: 235-36). One of the most articulate expressions of the land of Merrie England was created by Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) in a ballet called *Victoria and Merrie England*. Written in 1897 with the assistance of the lyricist and choreographer Carlo Coppi, it was highly successful, being mounted at

⁵⁶ When *The Golden Bough* was first published, it was set out in two volumes. Between 1906 and 1915 he expanded his information to a vast collection of twelve volumes.

⁵⁷ In some respects, the work of Frazer was continued by Joseph Campbell. Although Campbell never cited Frazer as one of his sources, they both used comparative mythology to uncover synchronic themes. Because of the enormous respect given to Campbell by the youth movement in the sixties, Campbell's legacies can be seen in the pagan mythology some morris dancers espouse.

the Alhambra for six months, two times per evening. It even met with enthusiastic approval by the Prince of Wales and other members of the English court. May Day celebrations and Morris dances are staged in Scenes II, one danced by men, the other by women.⁵⁸ This production was followed by an opera in 1902 written by Sir Edward German (1862-1936), titled *Merrie England*, with May Day activities and morris dance in the finale of Act I. Again, great success followed its premier performance as it became the most-performed light opera of the twentieth century.⁵⁹

The first famous criticism of *Merrie England* was voiced by Kingsley Amis (1922-1995) in his book *Lucky Jim* (1954). His caustic story is often described as one of the first quintessential expressions of a 1950s group of English writers and social commentators called the Angry Young Men. The publishers described the book thus: “Jim Dixon has accidentally fallen into a job at one of Britain’s new redbrick universities. A moderately successful future in the History Department beckons. As long as Jim can survive a madrigal-singing weekend at Professor Welch’s home, and deliver a lecture on the pleasures of ‘Merrie England’.” During his lecture, he has such an adverse intellectual and emotional reaction to the theme that he vomits during his talk. Even to this day, mentions of Ye Olde England will often turn to invective by the man or woman on the streets of England. The *Merrie England* concept is often subsumed under the term *Rural Idyll* which has been thoroughly described and critiqued by Rapport and Overing (2000: 315-21). The keynote studies of the slippery slopes of nostalgia and the selective memory of the past have been written by

⁵⁸ A CD recording with extensive liner notes of the ballet was produced in 1993 by Marco Polo (DD 8.223677).

⁵⁹ A CD recording with excellent liner notes was produced in 1960 by Classics For Pleasure (7243 75767 2 7).

Maurice Halbwachs (1941, translated 1992) and Le Goff (1977, translated 1992) with new contributions provided by David Lowenthal (1985), the pre-eminent scholar of the imagined pasts of Europe, Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (1989) and Svetlana Boym (2001) who writes about the “hypochondria of the heart: nostalgia, history and memory”. England is well represented in the genre with Patrick Wright’s *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (1985), Christopher Shaw and Malcom Chase’s collection of essays titled *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (1989) , and Robert Hewison’s mordant 1987 book *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*. The back cover of his book reads “With Deliberate provocation Robert Hewison sets out to protect the present and the future of life in Britain from their most dangerous enemy: a creeping takeover by the past”.⁶⁰

Both hermeneutics had the unexpected consequence of providing a litany of innuendo and misinformation about morris dance as an agent of fertility or an idyllic vestige of a mythic Merrie England in modern times. These ad hoc explanations of the meaning of morris dance by modern morris dancers have resulted in harsh and biting criticism which will be reviewed in chapter 2. Recent literature that has addressed some of these conflicts of interpretations includes a set of essays entitled *Step Change: New Views on Traditional Dance* (Boyes: 2001), particularly the article by Elaine Bradtke whose title sums up the dilemma I am addressing: “Molly Dancing: A Study in Discontinuity and Change.” However, the most important

⁶⁰ A parallel debate occurs in a world I occupied many years earlier – Early Music. A re-assessment of the *raison d’etre* of authentic music performance practices is the subject of John Butt’s *Playing with History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and the acerbic book *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer’s History of Music for the Twenty-First Century* by Bruce Haynes (Oxford, US: Oxford University Press, 2007).

critique to address the issue of the conflict was published by Georgina Boyes in 1993. Her seminal study, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology, and the English Folk Revival*, mentioned earlier, was a bombshell in morris dance circles because it challenged the most deeply held views of the morris establishment and generated heated debate with accusations of misogyny (Boyes, 1993: 210).

A conflicted cultural expression that is parallel with morris dance is May Day celebrations which figure largely in the seasonal nature of morris dance. A comprehensive bibliography of May Day information was compiled by Roy Judge and published in 1999. Judge has devoted most of his life to the study of May Day in England. Some of the high points of his studies were his examination of a May Day and morris dance in Oxford, England (Judge, 1986), the May Day rituals at the hands of Lord Tennyson and a lesser known author, Flora Thompson (Judge, 1993), and his faithful recreation of the facts about May Day celebrations performed by chimney sweeps (Judge, 1979). Alun Howkins assessment of the historical records of Whitsuntide, morris dance's most important day, has also contributed important insights (Howkins, 1973, 1981). My personal observations and resultant notes of May Day in New Westminster, British Columbia, have allowed me to experience the conflict first hand as I compared their festivities with the May Day activities of the Vancouver morris community. These insights will comprise a large part of chapter 2.

Morris and Misrule

It is my intention to introduce a new hermeneutic called "misrule" which accommodates several key aspects of historical morris dance. The study of misrule begins with Mikhail Bakhtin in his revolutionary study entitled *Rabelais and His*

World (1968). His concept was expanded by Stallybrass and White (1986) who introduced the technical term “transgression” to more accurately describe the cultural concept. Natalie Zemon Davis (1975) and William R. Lafleur (1986) were inspired to find superlative examples of misrule in France and Japan, respectively. Several books have investigated this theme in English culture without specifically mentioning misrule, such as *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* (1985), *Rites and Riots* (Pegg, 1981), and *Maypoles, Martyrs and Mayhem* (Cooper and Sullivan, 1994). Some of the greatest theorists of English labour history, notably E.P. Thompson (1968, 1993), and its successor, English Cultural Studies, provided glimpses into the carnivalesque atmosphere of many labour protests in the past. One of the greatest moments of English labour misrule, The Luddite Revolution, has been described by Kirkpatrick Sale (1995) who provided a detailed examination of some of the elements of misrule found in labour unrest and action. Even further back in time, the copious record of misrule during the renaissance in England is recounted in detail by Francois Laroque in his book entitled *Shakespeare’s Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage* (1991). This brief overview of the misrule literature in England will be fully amplified in chapter 3 and 4.

CHAPTER 2

Morris Dance and Signification

The work of culture is the process whereby symbolic forms existing on the cultural level get created and recreated through the minds of people. It deals with the formation and transformation of symbolic forms.
(Obeyesekere, 1990: xix)

Preface

“Yes, that’s all very interesting, but what does it mean?” I often heard this query from a local reporter or interested members of an audience during our team’s informal, outdoor morris presentations. People seemed to be more curious about the symbolism of the dance rather than its choreographic intricacies or musical accompaniment. The first question would sometimes be followed by a hasty guess that the identity of the dance was Irish or some continental European country. Never England. All the movements and trappings of the dance teams were symbolic, but the basis of the symbolism could only be poorly guessed at.

Dancers in general very rarely problematize their performance art because their direct experience of the dance provides sufficient justification and motivation for them. However, observers of dance sometimes do not share the same visceral knowledge. Ideally, a dance performance for just such an outsider is enhanced, or at least made comprehensible by providing an explanation of the elements of the dance “text” (i.e., choreographic and extra-choreographic features) and context. Both text and context benefit from an explanation of their symbolism, perhaps the most potent component of the cultural event. What does the dance represent, in terms of emotional, intellectual and kinaesthetic content? How does it function as a marker of

a cultural movement, nation-state aspiration, or creative act? The interpretation(s) made available to the public would be in addition to the observer's (and often performers) own private interpretations, acquired through random associations, group affiliations, etc.

The acquisition of the meaning of symbols in a given dance, or choreology in general, ranges from systematic study in an educational setting, all the way to the most casual of encounters such as word-of-mouth, program notes or advertising. The analytical route to an understanding of a particular dance's symbolism can be accessed through the framework of Symbology, as developed by Victor Turner, or *semeiotics*, either in the form of semiotics as envisioned by Charles Peirce, or the theory of semiology developed by Ferdinand de Saussure.⁶¹ Symbology grew out of comparative anthropology, while the latter two disciplines are derived by analogy from deep analysis of language.

Interpretations of the symbols of dance can exist entirely in the private world of the imagination, and within the public level of exegesis by dint of their shared, agreed-upon meaning.⁶² Although audience members may individually construct a vast array of personal interpretations and enjoyment during the observation of dance,

⁶¹ I am using the term *semeiosis*, to encompass the work of Saussure and Peirce although the latter used *semeiosis* and *semiosis* interchangeably. *Semeiotikos* is the root origin of my term, derived from classic Greek, meaning the study of interpretation of language as a system of signs.

⁶² The concept of symbolic *exegesis* was theorized by Victor Turner. "Symbols are attributed with having three different dimensions: the operational, the exegetic, and the positional. The operational dimension shows the simultaneous meaning between the symbol and its use. The exegetic dimension consists of the explanation of the symbol's meaning by the actors within the system. The positional dimension explains the relationship between symbols." This summary is derived from "The Syntax of Symbols in African Religion," by Victor Turner, in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences*, Vol. 251, No. 772, "A Discussion on Ritualization of Behaviour in Animals and Man" (Dec. 29, 1966), pp. 295-303. Exegesis is a term more commonly associated with religious academic studies where scholars examine texts and agree on an understanding of the meaning of a text. The opposite for them is eisegesis which is a personal interpretation. Also see Dolgin and Kemnitzer 1977: 190.

knowledge of the exegetic symbolism is assumed (rightly or wrongly) to have the most complete level of appreciation, and the greatest degree of communication between the dancers and the witnesses. (Firth, 1973: 207-40).⁶³

The textual symbols of morris dance consist of choreographic gestures and extra-choreographic features which greatly resemble Fernando Poyatos' parallel concepts of *linguistics* and *paralinguistics* respectively.⁶⁴ The choreography of morris dance is repetitive, geometric, and limited (similar to its accompanying music). Conversely, the non-choreographic elements of morris dance are rich and highly variegated, providing nuance and signification. Both domains are made significant by the symbolism that is attached to them by observers and participants. A taxonomy of some of these symbols will be detailed in the following pages.

The prevailing exegetic interpretation of the symbols of morris dance hangs on its alleged pagan (i.e., pre-Christian) powers of fertility, benefitting nature and even humans (Simpson and Roud, 2000: 121). The source of the signification of morris dance fertility symbols is allegedly found in European prehistory, confirmed by coincidences and parallels in contemporary Western folklore and non-Western ethnology. The common understanding of the symbolism of fertility is not supported by evidence or agreement by scholars of morris dance (and anthropology, for that matter) but the interpretation continues to permeate the culture at home and abroad.

⁶³ There has been some speculation that Firth worked with Sir James Frazer during an internship at the London School of Economics. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raymond_Firth, (retrieved on February 26, 2007). Firth offered a sympathetic critique of Frazer's work on pp. 124-26 of his book *Symbols: Public and Private*. Frazer was a source of some of the current exegetical meaning of morris dance.

⁶⁴ The scholar most associated with the study of language and paralinguistics is Fernando Poyatos of the University of New Brunswick. See his *Nonverbal Communication across Disciplines*, in three volumes (Amsterdam ; Philadelphia, Pa. : J. Benjamins Pub. Co., c2002) and *Paralinguistics: A linguistic and interdisciplinary approach to interactive speech and sounds* (Amsterdam ; Philadelphia, Pa.: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 1993). I am applying the terms to an entirely different language from speech and its written forms.

Some morris dancers and their supporters continue to champion the symbolism as a mythology relevant to the twenty-first century's relationship to the earth's natural beauties and endangered ecology, while others use the fertility symbolism as a form of humour and innuendo. The implication of the latter nuance suggests that the dancers may not (or may) actually believe in the prophylactic powers of morris dance, but regardless of their intentions to be ironic, the theory they send up has taken on a life of its own in the media and the general public. Their tongue-in-cheek deliveries appear to be taken seriously, even if the morris dancers don't believe their own words. Just to cite one small example among many, a reporter for the *Western Morning News* (27.8.1999) quoted a morris dancer without comment when the dancer was quoted as saying, "...a morris man's hat is very fertile – women would certainly be liable to get pregnant if they put it on, he said. The hat is a very potent, pagan symbol".

A second understanding of morris dance which is almost exegetic in its pervasiveness is largely found in the English media. It is negative, even hostile. The very symbols which generate meanings of fertility and fecundity or Merrie England in some sectors of morris dancing also contribute to a demeaning representation in the press. For example, the media sometimes question the behaviour of morris dancers as a dubious sexual trait. Kieran Cooke, in her newspaper article "Capering about in car parks", refers to the choreographic gestures of the dancers as "prancing" (*Financial Times*, Weekend edition, March 25-26, 2000: FT XIX). Sue Arnold, writing in the *Observer* (16.3.2003), told her readership that that morris dance occupies the bottom

of her list of “Most Despised Activities”.⁶⁵ Many more examples will be illustrated in the next pages.

A Reflexive View: Received Aural Knowledge

When I began to participate in morris dance in 1986, I found myself immersed in a very pleasurable hobby particularly suited to my new interest in English folk culture. The core activity, dancing, was new and rather foreign to me but the attraction of its English cultural context and the company of a group of like-minded men overcame my reservations. Because of the rough-and-tumble ambiance and dynamics of morris dance, it never struck me how unusual it was to be participating in an all-male folk dance corps. However, as I learned more about dance cultures both high and low, I came to realize that a dance company comprised of over a dozen males was highly unusual in folk, popular, and classical dance circles.⁶⁶ I also discovered that an all-male morris dance team was the exception rather than the rule in the modern world-wide morris dance community although the gender restriction was in force during most of the history of morris dance in England.

From the very beginning, I trained to be both a dancer and musician, with no thought to applying my research skills to my new avocation. I had it in the back of my mind that I was living Mantle Hood’s 1960 dictum of bi-musicality (Hood, 1960;

⁶⁵ Future research may uncover the same kind of invective directed at an ethnic dance somewhere in the world, but in my many examinations I have never encountered it. If anything, most countries and ethnic groups take great pride in their representative dances and shower respect and praise on those who maintain them.

⁶⁶ There is one unique team that has actually practice morris dance and classical ballet, the Bow Street Rapper and Morris Dancers. They are the male corps of England’s pre-eminent Royal Ballet, housed in the Royal Opera House on Bow Street. The Bow Street Morris Men performed on the “streets” of Vancouver’s EXPO 86 and were witnessed by some members of the Vancouver Morris Men. The Vancouver men decided that the Bow Street dancers exhibited choreographic athleticism was well beyond the normal bounds of an everyman morris dancer but the dancing was traditional in every other way.

Bailey, 1995: 331-48), but my principal intention was to become a fully engaged and accepted participant without any thought of emic research.⁶⁷ I approached the activity as a hobby, like most of the other members of the dance team.

During the first few years, I learned about the symbolism, the meaning of morris dance through a process of intellectual osmosis from the veterans of the team. Mainly, I picked up my information from the announcements of a designated member of the team. While the dancers and musicians caught their breath between strenuous Cotswold-genre dances, a chosen veteran would announce the name of the next dance and the meaning of our morris dancing in general.

I and the public (and other new dancers in our team) learned that we were dispensing fertility and luck reminiscent of the prophylactic magic conducted by aboriginal and pre-historic peoples. The luck we were dispensing ranged from the good fortune of sunny weather instead of rain and wind, all the way to becoming pregnant, merely by witnessing morris dancing or perhaps being touched by a dancer. Our dance uniforms symbolized our role as bearers of fertility. The white pants and shirts represented the purity of our intentions while the colours of the baldrics and the ribbons on our hats and arms symbolized the fertility of the surrounding world that was coming into flower. We were in harmony with nature's signs of the onset of seasonal fertility. The dances alternated between choreographies that featured sticks the length of baseball bats and handkerchiefs held loosely in each hand. The handkerchiefs that we held and flourished on regulated beats were used to flick the

⁶⁷ Bi-musicality was a term coined to resemble those who were bi-lingual, not only in speech but in thinking. Mantle Hood believed correctly that a musician who learned a music instrument from a foreign land in addition to his own Western European Classical Music instrument would develop a triangulation of cognition which would inevitably enrich his or her perception of music in general.

devil in the eye. The sticks that we pounded in unison on the ground, the bells that we wore around our ankles, and the very action of our stamping and dancing feet, encouraged the seedlings in the earth to awake and come forth.

The statements regarding the team's prowess as agents of fertility and phenology were usually made in a joking, light-hearted manner by the roster of announcers. The droll manner of presentation hinted at a tone of scepticism about the alleged powers, but the pronouncements were never disputed or problematized by any of my team mates. No other public explanations for the existence, history and symbolism of morris dance were ever given that I remember.⁶⁸ No matter the announcer's use of innuendo or rhetoric, the face value of the announcements was laden with talk of fertility and luck.

The announcements provided by the Vancouver Morris Men became more immediate and relevant on the weeks and days surrounding May 1st, a high day with alleged roots in ancient Rome and prehistoric Goidelic (i.e., Gaelic Celtic) and Nordic (i.e., northern European) countries.⁶⁹ In fact, there is no archaeological or literary evidence to support the existence of pre-historic Nordic and Celtic May Days (Hutton, 1996: 218, 408-11), and the physical or literary link between the Roman festivity and the existing traditions is lost, if it ever existed. Nevertheless, in Goidelic and Nordic countries there are vernacular May 1st customs first observed in medieval times and continuing to this day. The celebration seems to actually extend from the

⁶⁸ I have noticed over the years that the Vancouver Morris Men have blunted their commentaries and innuendos about fertility and luck, but they have not entirely abandoned them. For example, a few members of the VMM continue to blacken the faces of nearby female audience members who interact with them when they dance Border Morris and Molly, two genres that involve the use of black make-up smeared all over the faces of the dancers. The reason given for the smudging, delivered and received with much laughter, is that it will bring luck, and even fertility.

⁶⁹ I use the term *Nordic* as defined by Joseph Deniker (1852-1918), an anthropologist who coined the term to describe ethnic groups in the north, rather than a single biological "race".

time of dusk on the day before, to dawn and several hours on May 1st, given that Nordic and Celtic countries seemed to have reckoned their calendars by the moon (<http://www.ealdriht.org/tide.html>).

In Goidelic countries, the day came to be known as Beltane, following the vernacular terminology of Ireland and Scotland (but not England) first collected in 1424. The night featured bonfires and the following morning was given over to the gathering and displaying of tree and bush flowers (Hutton, 1996: 218-25). Central and Northern Europe refer to the eve of the day as *Walpurgis*.⁷⁰ Walpurgis Night was haunted by witches so outdoor fires also figured in the celebration, as did the gathering of flowers in the dawn of the next day.⁷¹ Finally, the Roman holiday in late April and early May called *Floralia* celebrated the goddess *Flora* (Gk, *Chloris*) by collecting and distributing tree flowers.⁷² Interestingly, Flora was also the patron goddess of prostitutes, which echoes the bacchanalian overtones surrounding women's participation in many May 1st celebrations.⁷³

⁷⁰ The word "Walpurgis" is derived from the name of Saint Walpurgas (ca. 710-799), a female missionary who emigrated from Wessex in Saxon England to assist the Anglo-Saxon St. Boniface in his work to convert Germany to Christianity. There seems to be no surviving nomenclature for the occasion that preceded the term Walpurgis. Certainly there is no relationship between the saint and her nameday.

⁷¹ Walpurgis Night has been a recurring theme in Western European Art Music, and Romantic literature. Thanks to its association with the legend of Faust, particularly as described by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (*Faust*, part 1, 1806 and part 2, 1832). *Faust* was adapted for an opera setting by Charles Gounod in 1859, but before that Felix Mendelsohn composed a *secular cantata* titled *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* (Opus 60) in 1831, based on another description of Walpurgis by Goethe in a ballade of the same name (1799). The durability and popularity of the Walpurgis concept is seen in the Walt Disney 1940 movie *Fantasia* where the night is played out on the summit and surrounding valley of Mount Brocken in Central Germany, one of the traditional locations for the mythic events of Walpurgis Night. Brahms was one of the last romantic composers to use the theme of Walpurgis Night in his *Walpurgisnacht*, found in his *Ballades and Romances* of 1878.

⁷² (<http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/rome/a/ludiflorales.htm>). The well-known observance of Valentine's Day is also likely related to the Roman Ides of February which was a day of celebration known as Lupercalia, almost entire concerned with fertility customs. New Years Day was another Roman observance of a legal nature.

⁷³ Chloris and Flora are best known in their metaphorical twinning and transformation in the large painting titled *Primavera*, by Sandro Boticelli circa 1482. Chloris in a diaphanous gown has tree buds

May 1st features in England's seasonal customs beginning ca. 1240 CE leading right up to modern times (Hutton, 1996: 226). It is seemingly a permanent fixture in English arts and letters, from Chaucer⁷⁴ and Shakespeare⁷⁵ to vernacular customs⁷⁶. The two principal themes found in May Day are the familiar collecting of flowers in the early hours of dawn for display and distribution, and the antithetical behaviour of the night before, occasionally labelled Mischief Night. The yearly evening events of April 30 have a faint ring of bacchanalia as young adults carouse in anticipation of the frolic to the fields in the faint light of pre-dawn to collect the flowers for the morning celebrations (Roud, 2006: 140).⁷⁷

One question about these seasonal May Days that is hotly contested is the reason why the observances and celebrations take place. One faction believes that the events of May Day and its eve are vestiges of fertility rituals that prompted new growth of temperate biospheres each Spring. Human celebrants act either in sympathetic harmony or as an agent of religious phenology. The theory of Fertility Ritual as the heart of May Day is founded on a triangulation between existing May Day activities, archaeological and mythological studies of pagan religions in pre-

streaming out of her mouth while Flora, her alter ego, scatters Spring blossoms and wears a gown adorned with images of flowers and a garland of flowers in her hair.

⁷⁴ The Knight's Tale (ca. 1387): For May wole have no slogardrie a-nyght; The sesoun priketh every gentil herte, And maketh hym out of his slepe to sterte, And seith, 'arys and do thyn observaunce,' This maked Emelye have remembraunce To doon honour to May, and for to ryse. Also see "Chaucer's May 3" (i.e., references to Floralia) by John P. McCall in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (Mar., 1961), pp. 201-205.

⁷⁵ Henry VIII, Act 4, Scene 4 (circa 1603): as 'tis to make 'em sleep On May-day morning; which will never be"

⁷⁶ Anonymous: Hooray, hooray, the first of May, outside sex begins today

⁷⁷ A full accounting of English May customs is seen in *May Day in England: an introductory bibliography* by Roy Judge (Folklore Society Books Bibliographies no. 1, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Leaflet no. 20, London, UK: 1999).

historic Europe, and contemporary pre-literate cultures (Turner, 1975: 47-50).⁷⁸

Others firmly deny that a concern with Fertility is the basis for May Day, stating that it is impossible to know for certain what the motivations might have been, citing any explanation as armchair speculation. Morris dance is embroiled in this debate. I will be outlining alternative explanations for those who do not wish to call upon the fertility card, or those who dismiss it whenever they hear the Fertility explanation.

Many morris teams, including the Vancouver Morris Men, attend neo-paganist celebration of Beltane, usually as guests rather than organizers. Even if they say nothing about their alleged agency of Fertility, their mere presence is welcomed with enthusiasm. In regard to the one team I can speak about with certainty, the Vancouver Morris Men, some dancers may have been sceptical about their participation as agents of fertility, but their ambivalence to the host's declaration of May Day fertility was never contentious to the point of disruptive. The host and other non morris dance guests who were the organizers of the event seemed to take the occasion with a very light touch. But they certainly did not scoff at the ideas concerning Fertility when they made their announcements.

⁷⁸ Victor Turner (1920-83) is in the vanguard of modern anthropological study of rites of passage and age, which includes fertility rituals. Among Europeanist anthropologists, the theme of prehistoric, mythical and symbolic agents of fertility is subsumed under a controversy over the theoretical source of the rituals. It has been theorized that prehistoric sedentary agriculturalists were said to have immigrated to Europe from the Middle East, along with their goddess religions, during the Neolithic Age. They were later over-run by proto-Indo-European pastoralists who over-turned the goddess cults with male god religions, relegating the goddesses to dependent, secondary players. Both, in their own ways, emphasized fertility rituals made manifest by gender differences. See Miriam Robbins Dexter, *Whence the Goddesses? A source book* (New York, USA: Teachers College Press, 1990) and Brian Hayden, *Shamans, Sorcerers, and Saints: a Prehistory of Religion* (New York, NY: Smithsonian, 2003). Dr. Hayden is a professor of archaeology at Simon Fraser University who hosts a yearly celebration of Beltane which the Vancouver Morris Men attend. The origins of the modern-day understanding of the pre-historic fertility cult is also rooted in the controversy surrounding Wicca (witches). See Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: a history of modern pagan witchcraft* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Morris Dancers as Agents of Fertility

Canada

In 1991 a local CBC television reported on the May Day dawn events that were hosted by the Vancouver Morris Men. The yearly tradition, first begun in 1990, was (and is to this day) conducted on the grassy stretches of a local park that is bounded by upscale heritage houses on the south and west, and the brow of a hill overlooking English Bay and the sleeping city to the north and east. A camera crew was present for the entire event and filmed the highlights, which were then edited for broadcast later that night. The evening news anchor introduced the video presentation and explained to the public that morris dance was once thought to be a necessary component to the day because it “brings up the sun” and insures the fertility of the new season. The two-minute video presentation was followed by the weather report in which the weatherman, in a mood for light banter, mockingly alerted the news anchor to the danger of even touching male morris dancers because of their aura of potent fertility.

Later that year, another television news team, CTV productions, filmed the Vancouver Morris Men during their outdoor performance at Granville Island. The news anchor began the segment with an observation that, “Surprisingly, the epitome in fertility dancing comes from the green and misty island of Britain... The ancient British tribal rite – morris dancing”. The following video segment had a voice-over saying, “It may not look like a fertility dance, but it is. It predates Christianity, sort of a Druidical jam session celebrating the flowering of Spring.” An audience member

was randomly approached and asked for an opinion. “The first time I saw them, I thought these guys were drunk, and out of their minds.”⁷⁹

An influential book for Canadian children, and a well-known resource in school and public libraries, is *Let's Celebrate! Canada's Special Days* by Caroline Parry. On page 131, the author declares that morris dancers “dance the sun up” and that “Morris, as the dance is called, was traditionally done in the late spring to make the crops grow.” Further, “there are all kinds of dances for welcoming the spring. Some are variations of Morris or maypole dances, to make the seeds grow or to honour the trees...”

The *Oracle* educational web site of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Civilization.ca, states “the Morris Dance, of English origin, descends from pagan fertility dances (rites). In the Middle Ages, Morris-dancing was, without a doubt, the most popular dance in rural England. Morris-dancing was never featured at court, probably because of its ritual connotations.”⁸⁰

Note that these last two examples are unique sources for primary and secondary school children (and their instructors), so the influence of these sources is incalculable, despite not being a statistically significant sample. In the wider context, one can find Google references to “morris dance fertility” in the number of 359,000 hits (as of February, 13, 2007).

⁷⁹ The CBC and CTV video segments are in the possession of the squire of the Vancouver Morris Men and were circulated for years as a promotional video.

⁸⁰ http://www.civilization.ca/educat/oracle/modules/cbegin/page03_e.html#england, created in September 27, 2001, retrieved February 12, 2007. The statement about the absence of morris dance in court is also clearly wrong. See Forrest, *The History of Morris Dancing 1458-1750*, Chapter 3 “Royal Court” (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto, 1999).

England

The spiritual home of morris dance, England, also has its share of fertility-based explanations, both inside and outside the morris and folk dance communities.

If one logs on to the Web-based UKstudentlife.com, a resource for university students interested in studying in England, and enters morris dance, the captions under four photographs of morris dancers say, “Fertility symbols are used:… flowers… leaves… and young women too.”⁸¹ Even standard English references are equivocal. The Encyclopedia Britannica on-line version says “It is principally a fertility dance, performed especially in the spring,⁸² whereas the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* has the following neutral definition of morris dance, “traditional dance by persons in fancy costume, usu. as characters in legend(sic), with ribbons and bells” (Sykes, 1976: 709).

Even some of the very latest scholarly studies in England (aside from morris dance research) invoke the symbolism of fertility. For example, John Connell and Chris Gibson, authors of *Sound Tracks: popular music, identity and place*, confidently summarized a received theory about morris dance that states, “...its origins were in African fertility dances that had long before spread to Europe” (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 36). Web sites that advertise local morris teams sometimes declare the same misinformation. The Ironmen morris team from Ironbridge, Shropshire, declare that “fresh flowers and feathers in the hats hark back to ancient times, when dances were performed as fertility rituals,” while citing

⁸¹ <http://www.ukstudentlife.com/Ideas/Album/MorrisDancing.htm>

⁸² <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article?tocId=9372640>

historical references unrelated to the fertility imperative, indicating to me at least, a striking contradiction.⁸³

These statements exist alongside web sites such as Wikipedia which offer neutral descriptions of the mythical origins of morris dance. By avoiding the topic of the fertility cult that is embedded in the theory of the pre-historical origins, the topic of the symbolism and meaning of morris dance is abandoned. Instead the sources cite historical evidence of occurrences while avoiding any references to pre-history and paganism. In the Wikipedia web site just mentioned we find the following information:

Before the English Civil War, the working peasantry often took part in Morris dances, especially at Whitsun. In 1600 the Shakespearean actor William Kempe famously morris danced from London to Norwich, an event chronicled in his *Nine Days Wonder* (1600). The Puritan government of Oliver Cromwell, however, suppressed Whitsun Ales and other such festivities. When the crown was restored by Charles II, the springtime festivals were restored. In particular, Whitsun Ales came to be celebrated on Whitsunday, as the date coincided with the birthday of Charles II. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morris_dance)

The Morris Ring, the oldest of the three morris dance organisations in England, has also adopted the same historical stance, as seen on their web-site:

There are records of Morris dancers associated with festivities such as church ales, of purchases of bells for 'persons that daunced the moorys daunse' in church accounts, of church wardens maintaining and even hiring costumes, and in the hill districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire dance teams used to (still do!) help carry rushes to church. However the pagan connection was mostly made by Victorian folklorists, before that the Puritans did their best to stamp out 'maurice dauncers',

⁸³ <http://www.ironmenandseverngilders.org/ironmen.htm>

and viewed their opponents as 'pagan'. Nevertheless there is a persistent idea that our dances welcome in the spring, are a ritual fertility dance, and that the waving of handkerchiefs and banging of sticks, or blacking of faces 'scares evil spirits' or 'brings good luck'. A modern Morris dance doggerel goes "We do it by day, we do it by night, this dance is our fertility rite"; this is certainly a very good story-line and always worth a few beers! (<http://www.themorrisring.org/more/church.html>)

The interesting aspect of this explanation, to me is the humorous tone that implicitly condones the statements of some teams that continue to front the fertility theory in the face of overwhelming critical theory that repudiates it.

The lack of prehistoric conjecture and its resultant hiatus of explanation of the symbolism inherent in morris dance have been adopted by some morris dance teams who completely avoid the issue by describing the origins (and therefore symbolic meaning) as "lost in the mist of times".⁸⁴ Others take an even more radical stance by forcefully declaring their neutrality in terms of "shut up and dance", abandoning the theory of fertility origins or any other theory that would explain the symbolism and meaning of morris dancing.⁸⁵ When they perform in public the morris dancers who have adopted this policy assume that the dancing itself is sufficiently informative and does not require any explanation of its purpose. This is a key point that I shall return to.

⁸⁴ One example among many is found in the web site titled *Mainly Morris Dancing: links to morris and related sites* (maintained by the Bristol Morris Men). <http://www.mainlymorrisdancing.org.uk/history.html>

Also see "introduction" in the Morris Ring's web site <http://www.themorrisring.org/tb/gb/intro.html> where the words are placed in quotes (without citation) illustrating how ubiquitous the statement has become.

⁸⁵ The concept of "shut up and dance" has been adopted by modern choreographers and choreologists but in entirely different circumstances. They have tackled the incompatibility of language and dance, saying that language in whatever form simply cannot translate the symbolism of movement into a meaningful verbal construct. This debate was taken up by the Susan Leigh Foster in her book *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (Middletown, CT, USA: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

The random samples I have described above could be amplified with a rigorous search for similar expressions using a broad spectrum for ethnographic inquiry and a demographic examination of their distribution and prevalence. Such an investigation would include countless personal experiences from observers and dancers such as myself.⁸⁶ But even the few (and highly public) negative and confusing public comments I have outlined above are sufficient to suggest that a second look at the symbolism of morris dance is in order.

English Criticisms of Morris Dance

“The closest thing the English have to a national dance, morris-dancing, is a clumsy pub-sport practised by men in beards and shiny-bottomed trousers.”
(Paxton, 1998: 11)⁸⁷

Morris dance is fraught with problems of reception in England, where it is ridiculed, such as in the example quoted above. The disparagement of morris dance will surprise some who recall a balmy spring or summer day and a chance encounter with a team of morris dancers busy at their work in some sort of idyllic, outdoor setting.⁸⁸ They may have watched with a mix of bemusement and puzzlement, but probably not with negative feelings in mind. Observers of morris dance on a regular basis, however, are aware of dark clouds above the idyll.

⁸⁶ For example, I own a T-shirt that says “Vancouver Morris Dancer” on the front. One morning, as I was busy with errands while wearing the shirt, I stepped into my bank and immediately received a comment from the very English teller, as determined by her accent. She was evidently pleased to see an expression of England on a person far from her original home and laughingly asked how I felt being a symbol of fertility.

⁸⁷ On page 11 and 12, the author lists his idiosyncratic collection of fond images and symbols that, for better or worse, evoke England in his mind. Morris dance is nowhere to be found in the list.

⁸⁸ This image and its positive reception is a key symbol in the 2004 movie *Bride and Prejudice*, where a young South Asian woman dreams of her perfect wedding in an English village in Spring, complete with a team of morris dancers cavorting on the village green beside the church.

The above quote is one of many that are culled from the English media and daily encounters. The judgement posited by the quote is particularly damning because it is from one of the most popular of several populist books recently published that addresses the question, “What does it mean to be English?” The new genre attempts to explore and explain the culture of England by English social commentators.⁸⁹ These books followed in the wake of plans for the devolution of the United Kingdom, also known as Great Britain, which came to a head in 1999 when Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales founded their own assemblies, leaving England without its own assembly.⁹⁰ The author of the quote, Jeremy Paxton, is a BBC media personality who has a keen sense of English sociology and culture. In 268 pages of cogent argument and sharp intuition, backed up by 14 pages of bibliography, he ranges far and wide in his search for identity markers that point at the national identity of England. Despite the lack of critical theory and ethnographic data, his many reviewers say his aim is accurate.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Some other books that have explored the same theme are *Watching the English* by Kate Fox (London, UK: Hodder, 2004), *True Brits* by J.R. Daeschner (New York, NY: Overlook Press, 2004), *Notes from a Small Island* by Bill Bryson (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1995, following in the footsteps of Paul Theroux’s 1983 book *The Kingdom by the Sea*) and *the Magic of Spring: my year of learning to be English* by Richard Lewis (London, UK: Atlanta Books, 2005). The first two books only mention morris dancing in passing. Fox (pp. 387-33) juxtaposes respectable, middle-aged morris dancers with reference to its fertility agency. Daeschner (p. 169) quotes a local who finds the “jingle-jangle ankle-slapping” morris dancers effete. Bryson (and his spiritual predecessor, Theroux) make no mention of morris dance. Lewis (chapter 5) is the only author to extensively explore morris dance, he actually joins a team, but his ambivalence is seen throughout the book. For example, his encounter with a morris team on May Day dawn in chapter 8 “A Bunch of May”.

⁹⁰ The houses of parliament had been established in 1707 as the Treaty of Union which bound England and Scotland together. Wales had been incorporated in the 16th century by legislation titled Law of Wales Act (1536, 1543). Ireland was added to the mix in 1603 after protracted struggles that never abated. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devolution_for_England .

⁹¹ The book received a 4/5 star rating in Amazon.co.uk, which also lists the favourable reviews of several national print media. The book also contains favourable descriptions from reviewers for the Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, The Observer, and The Times.

Another example of media scorn for morris dance is found in the highly visible world-wide reference, *World Music: the rough guide*. The writer for the English component, Colin Irwin⁹², wrote:

Morris dance is at the very heart of clichéd English imagery. It hasn't yet been rescued from ridicule and perhaps it never will be. However, for all its apparent absurdity, it's quite amazingly popular, and there is, after all, something spectacular and heart-warming about the sight of the men in their whites waving bells and hankies, re-enacting some obscure fertility ritual. ...it has evolved into an eccentric culture entirely of its own...May Day is the traditional start of the morris season and even if you can't stomach the dancing, it has always provided excellent music...

You may laugh, but its serious stuff.
(Irwin, 1994: 36)

This cynical review appeared in the 1994 first edition of this youth-oriented music guide, and it was singularly scathing when compared to the many other overviews of ethnic music within its covers. The various authors in *World Music: the Rough Guide* were generally respectful of all other traditional musics and understandably excited and positive about modern expressions of each country's "world beat". But no such tolerance was directed towards morris dance. When the book reappeared in a larger, two-volume expanded version in 1996, Colin Irwin's side bar (ibid: volume 1, page 66) was left intact. The comment about "obscure fertility ritual" links the alleged symbolism of morris dance to its absurd nature.

The negative image in England of morris dance is encountered in everyday life as well. Jenny Howard of a morris women's team in England named Bedfordshire Lace Ladies' Morris describes a typical training session for office employees where

⁹² Colin Irwin is a popular English columnist who writes for The Guardian and The Sunday Times.

the training facilitator was hired to provide tips on motivation. This encounter was described in a posting in the Morris Dance Discussion Listserv which posts around the world.⁹³

“He gets up to ‘enthusiasm’ and begins talking about the NZ Rugby team and their haka; you just **know** that any minute now he’s going to say ‘And what have we got? – morris dancing! Ha! Ha!’ So you brace yourself and sure enough, right on cue out he comes with it, and gets a huge laugh, which drowns out your mock-indignation “Oi, watch it, mate”.

But he doesn’t stop there. He goes on “You can just see them all, can’t you, with their little bells and hankies (strikes affected pose)” and on...and on...and on...

You can’t say anything, because the howls of mirth are too loud. You can’t walk out, because you need to be there for the rest of the talk and you’ll look stupid if you sneak back in. So you sit there and listen to 380 people ridiculing you and your friends, or you can think of something else to do...
(MDDL: JE Howard, 30/06/02, Re: Contempt)

The advertising industry in England is known to take advantage of this negative perception. One of the most famous examples is an advertisement for Heineken beer:

Picture the scene, sunny Sunday Summer’s day,
English country pub garden, man alone with his pint
sitting at a table, enjoying the tranquillity, relaxing.
Then, from behind him comes the sound of accordions,
bells and sticks clashing, raucously ruining his day.
Man drinks from his glass of ice cold lager.
Dancers start hitting each other over the head until no-
one left standing and peace and quiet is restored.
”Heineken refreshes the parts other beers cannot reach”
(MDDL: K.R. Hallam, 29/01/04, Re: morris and
English beer ad)

⁹³ <http://web.syr.edu/~hytelnet/mddl/>

The latest aspersion to be cast in the press is from Glasgow, Scotland's Sunday Mail (3/13/2005) where George Mair, commenting on a theory that morris dance originated in Scotland, says:

It's enough to make the most patriotic Scot set fire to his kilt – it seems we are to blame for inflicting Morris dancing on the world.

One could imagine that a Scottish commentator might make unflattering comments about an English cultural expression, but the words “inflicting morris on the world” suggests a common front of suffering.

Finally, a quote, or rather a mis-quote, occasionally cited in the press and elsewhere, points to the same dilemma:

“There are two things I will never try in life,” said Sir Thomas Beecham, “Incest and Morris Dancing.”

Although it is usually attributed to Thomas Beecham, in point of fact, it was Sir Arnold Bax (1883-1953) who made the following statement in *Farewell My Youth* (1943), quoting “a sympathetic Scot (who) summed it all up very neatly in the remark, ‘You should make a point of trying every experience once, excepting incest and folk dancing’.” The Thomas Beecham quote was used by Kieran Cooke in the distinguished *Financial Times* mentioned earlier. The mis-quote extends misunderstanding twice, from Bax to Beecham, and from folk dancing to morris dancing. The confusion of Bax and Beecham is understandable, given their reputations for being controversial, but the misplaced “folk dancing” with “morris

dancing” illustrates an enmity, despite (or in addition to) the humorous tone of the article.

Even within the world of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, we can read some very severe criticisms. Steve Roud, honorary librarian of the Folklore Society in England and an editor for the EFDSS journal, is an excellent example, as seen in his review of a cassette tape of the music and voices of the Bampton Traditional Men under the leadership of Francis Shergold, considered one of the key transmitters of traditional morris dance.⁹⁴ On the tape we hear a comment concerning the fertility function of the Bampton Morris Men. To quote Mr. Roud:

...it is sad to hear the (Bampton peripheral character) cake-bearer explaining the cake and sword in terms of pagans and sacrifices. Academic folklorists of the past and present-day revivalists must share the blame for peddling such blatant and pernicious nonsense.

May Day in the Lower Mainland: Two Contrasting Ethnographies

My first experiences of May Day began with the Vancouver Morris Men in 1990. In 2002, I conducted a first-hand investigation of May Day activities in New Westminster, the sister city of Vancouver. New Westminster celebrated the 137th anniversary of its May Day activities last year (2007), making it the longest continuously running May Day in the British Commonwealth. This includes all the May Days in the land of the original May Day event, England, where the various May Days were interrupted by the World Wars.

My visit to the May Day celebrations in New Westminster gave me an excellent opportunity to experience the two sides of May Day, the one presented by

⁹⁴ See *Folk Music Journal*, volume 6, number 2 (1991), pp. 264-65.

the Vancouver Morris Men and many other morris teams around the world since the mid-1970s with its overtones of fertility cult, and the Merrie England May Day as re-enacted by New Westminster citizens since 1870.

Vancouver

In 1990, I had learned that morris dance activities climaxed on May Day when many morris teams around the world celebrated the day by dancing around a maypole. As I learned more about the modern-day custom, I decided in 1991 to coordinate a mounting of a May Day celebration with the morris men.⁹⁵ By “May Day” I am referring to the pre-dawn hours of the first day of May, an occasion which will be explained in more detail.

I used the template of morris dance teams in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and even England. We used a local park⁹⁶ that overlooked English Bay in Vancouver, and we were assisted by a female friend who offered to be a May Queen, given that the event was otherwise dominated by men.⁹⁷ The plan was to arrive at the park before Sunrise at 6 AM. We would dance in the dewy grass as the sun edged its way over a mountain to the East.⁹⁸ Some times we danced in a drenching downpour and never saw the sun. No matter, the day still became light. We sang some May Day

⁹⁵ I was not the first to mount a May Day for the Vancouver Morris Men. In 1990, Steve Cleary had coordinated a May Morn dance-out which only involved dancing. My conception of May Day set the morris dance in the context of a full May Day event.

⁹⁶ Trimble Park

⁹⁷ At some point in the mid 90s, the women in Vancouver who were morris dancers also began to participate in the May Morning celebrations, even to the point of electing the May Queen from within their ranks.

⁹⁸ Mount Seymour.

songs acquired from the Watersons' highly influential 1965 LP, *Frost and Fire*.⁹⁹ And of course we raised a Maypole with ribbons flying from the top like a wind sock. As the sun hoisted itself well into the morning sky by 6:30 AM, we adjourned to a coffee shop for breakfast, and then off to work after a quick change of clothes.

The ideology of the event was playful in nature, with a philosophical stance that seemed to share much with New Age and Neo-pagan thinking. I had inherited this understanding from the most vocal members of the Vancouver Morris Men, and from many other morris dancers that I had met in the company of the Vancouver Morris Men when we would meet other teams on exchanges. Years later, I was to discover via the World Wide Web that a great number of teams thought in neo-pagan terms as well. Some morris dancers would probably beg to differ, claiming that there are as many interpretations of morris dance as there are dancers. But the over-all theme of morris teams I had met was centred on the fertility theory.

The philosophy within the morris dance community about its May Day is similar to morris dance in general. Although it has elements of a rational and humanist point of view, not in any way related to an organized religion of any kind, the over-arching theme of the day seemed to take a pleasure in bucolic nature and its seasonal rhythms. Morris dancers' May Day has much in common with neo-paganism in its focus on acknowledging the primacy of the natural environment, even if that belief system is described in a humorous manner. For example, the dancers declare, sometimes with a wink, that they are "dancing up the sun" on May morning. Their hankies "poke the devil in the eye" as they flick them during the dances. Their jingle

⁹⁹The LP, produced by Topic Records, was transferred to CD format in 1995. *Hal 'n tow* appears on cut 7. The Waterson's 1975 companion CD of English traditional ritual songs, *For Pence and Spice Ale*, also produced by Topic Records, was also transferred to CD in 1993.

bells and sticks pounding the earth (during dances that require sticks instead of hankies) both “awake the seeds of the earth”. Fertility also extends to nearby women, if they should be kissed by a dancer. Although I never met a dancer who actually believed these statements, they do reveal a preoccupation.

The Maypole is a central symbol in this alleged pagan ritual. Its symbolism is almost sacrosanct in neo-pagan circles, a cultural phenomenon that has been particularly active since the mid-sixties when the alleged Age of Aquarius was spontaneously founded by hippies in North America and England. Sir James Frazer viewed the Maypole as a symbol of the tree spirit which had been worshipped in ancient times.¹⁰⁰ In truth, trees do figure in worships of various kinds around the world so his speculation is not far-fetched. Others, following the example of Freud, saw the Maypole as a phallus, reinforcing its symbolism of fertility.¹⁰¹ Even though there is no empirical evidence to support either of these interpretations, they are still commonly understood.

The Vancouver morris men are proud of its history of observing May Day for the last 17 years. According to the website of the Seabright Morris Dancers, crack-of-dawn May Day was introduced to North American morris teams by Roger Cartwright in 1975 at Cambridge, Massachusetts. Several English members of the Morris Dance Discussion Listserv cited dates ranging from 1972 (East Surrey Morris Men and Offley Morris Men) to 1975 (Helga Morris and Red Stags) as some of the first times that teams began dancing at dawn. No one was able to specify who founded the

¹⁰⁰ For example, in Greek mythology, trees are sometimes occupied by spirits called dryads.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Canopy/1956/maypole.html>

tradition or why. And like their North American counterparts, the English dancers were not concerned if nobody watched them dance.¹⁰²

New Westminster

In 1995, I discovered that Maypoles were raised and “danced” for over 100 years in the nearby city of New Westminster. Suddenly the hoary date of the Maypole raised by the Vancouver Morris Men appeared faintly ridiculous when compared to New Westminster’s history. The maypoles were wrapped by dancing children on a Friday of the third week of May, not the first of May. And their day-off from school occurred during the day and not the “sacred morning”. If there was any Freudian interpretation in the minds of the parents who watched their children in delight, it was inconsequential and certainly not announced as such during the May Day proceedings I witnessed. And most important, there was no morris dancing to be seen.

In order to experience New Westminster’s May Day celebration, I attended the event in Queen’s Park Stadium in New Westminster in 2002. I was in the company of about 300 parents on bleachers on the north side, and some 1000 screaming grade school children in the east bleachers. As a fanfare was played by a local high school, a procession made its way across the grass, headed to a large stage in the middle of the field. It was comprised of the May Queen and her escort, her maid servants, children gentlemen, and an assorted band of beaming adults who represented the city, the school board, etc. I cast my mind back to the May Days of the Vancouver Morris Men, witnessed by an old man and his dog and a few early-

¹⁰² For a hilarious, insightful and rare description of a morris May Morn which happens to take place in England, see *The Magic of Spring: My Year of Learning to be English* (London, UK: Atlantic Books, 2005), pp. 1-2, 123-46.

morning runners in the first years. Before the stage stood about a dozen Maypoles which was circled by children, mostly girls in trim if old-fashioned white dresses and some boys in white shirts and pants. During the May Day ceremonies, they performed folk dances, which were English Country Dances, and four Maypole dances that had them circling the Maypoles holding ribbons which became wrapped. Their movements were skipping or stepping ceremoniously to music provided by the band. The highlight of the dancing portion of the program was a quadrille performed by aged Gentlemen called the Royal Lancers, in company with the May bridesmaids. Apparently this dance had been done “since time immemorial.” This was followed by a few speeches, and then the fun truly began. The rest of the day was given over to the well-known Sports Day, mostly in the form of foot races. The children in the bleachers cheered and screamed for their school’s representative. I spoke with a mother seated near me who was very proud of her daughter’s participation and told me she was the fourth generation in her family to do so. I later learned that the entire day has been in the stewardship of the elementary school system for decades. A large and aging folder is passed from one elementary school principal to another within a circle of about 12 teacher administrators. The package contains bullet-proof directions and contacts for organizing the day with a minimum of effort and disaster. It also contains the music and the dance instructions. I have not seen the package, but it is a research project that I would relish.

My next research excursion was to the Irving Museum just blocks away from the May Day proceedings I had witnessed. The museum is named after a riverboat captain who had built himself a magnificent Queen Ann house overlooking the river.

An alcove has been set aside where the entire history of the May Day has been meticulously documented and cherished items are on display. What struck me about the display was not so much the content and arrangement as the fact that I had never seen or heard about a similar display in Canada or even a cursory look through England. Further down the hill one finds the public library and a VHS video produced by Archie Miller, one of the foremost historians of the area. He has also chronicled New Westminster May Day.

All research trails ultimately lead to Beatrice Cave-Brown-Cave, a much-loved music and dance pioneer instructor in the city. She lived till the grand old age of 104 and was honoured at the May Day ceremonies right up till 1983, at the age of 100. She is honoured because she introduced English folk dances to the May Day ceremonies back in 1915. Kevin Barrington-Foote, a professor of music at Douglas College, has studied her teaching, music-making, and, most importantly, her contributions to the cultural life of the city in the form of English customs. During my research in the archives of the records of Ms. Cave-Brown-Cave, I was immediately struck by the fact that she is one of the very first graduates of the English Folk Dance Society founded by Cecil Sharp in England in 1911. She immigrated to Vancouver in 1913, so in effect, we in Metro Vancouver in distant British Columbia had one of the pioneers of morris dance and English folk dance in our midst.¹⁰³

No doubt Ms. "Bee," as she was popularly known, introduced the idea of Country Dances to New Westminster's May Days, but the concept of dancing around the Maypole is recorded in the city at an earlier date. New Westminster's Maypole

¹⁰³ I also discovered that Ms. Cave-Brown-Cave had a dance teaching studio in Vancouver which seemed to have escaped the attention of Professor Barrington-Foote. It opens up new vistas of research.

dancing and music was introduced by J.T. Scott in 1870, along with a few other people, all of whom have left extremely limited biographies and information. However, we have a photo of the first May Day, held on the cricket grounds, and it has enough clues to suggest that dancing was involved. One can see the New Westminster Firemen's brass band at the ready, and a circle of gaily clad girls assembled near the Maypole, complete with a crown to signify its royal overtone. The picture is obviously a posed photo but in an 1887 photograph we actually see the girls dancing.

Another candidate for the introduction of May Day celebrations in New Westminster is the American Elizabeth Burchenal (1877-1959). She was a New Yorker who became deeply involved in a movement that concentrated on physical education for women, and for children in the form of playground activities. And rather than adapt male sports for women, she created a physical culture based on folk dance. In 1905 she was hired to develop a physical training program in New York called the Girls' Branch. Three years earlier Ms. Burchenal had toured Western Europe and Great Britain, researching folk dances. Unfortunately, we have no information about the details of her dance studies in England, but she most certainly saw Maypole dancing, because it figured largely in her adaptations for New York in 1910. Like another great morris dance pioneer, the English social activist Mary Neal, she concentrated her efforts on physical education for the disadvantaged, principally among the new immigrants. Her efforts had a lasting effect in two areas. Her gender-specific Maypole dancing was adopted by the Seven Sisters Women's colleges, especially Vassar, in the '20s and the '30s. They grafted the myth-making and free-

form dance of Isadora Duncan on their May Day dancers, resulting in ranks of miniature Greek goddesses marching and skipping around Maypoles in perfect formation. Another of her lasting legacies is the International Folk Dance craze that was huge throughout North America. There is even an International Folk Dance club here in Vancouver.¹⁰⁴

Unfortunately we have no record of the influence of Ms. Burchenal in New Westminster. Nevertheless, there are several elements of her adaptation, such as the white sylvan costumes of the May Queen and her entourage, which gives one pause to consider the possibility. Further research in her folk-dance books of 1909, 1918, and 1942 may reveal Maypole melodies that are found in the New Westminster school collection.

So if we must look earlier than Sharp and Burchenal for the roots of New Westminster's May Day and its music and dances, where do we arrive? The Merrie England movement.¹⁰⁵ The most telling evidence for this association is one of the pieces of music used for the procession. It is entitled *Amo Amas*, composed by a "Dr.

¹⁰⁴ Linda J. Tomko has compiled an extensive retrospective of Elizabeth Burchenal in her article "*Fete Accompli: gender, 'folk-dance,' and Progressive-era political ideals in New York City,*" in *Corporealities: dancing knowledge, culture and Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.155-76.

¹⁰⁵ Future research may reveal if there was any conflict with the labour movement which also used a day in May they called May Day to celebrate their social, political and economic achievements. "The first of May date is used because in 1884 the Federation of Organized Trades and Labour Unions, inspired by Labour's 1872 success in Canada, demanded an eight-hour workday in the United States, to come in effect as of May 1, 1886. This resulted in the general strike and the U.S. Haymarket Riot of 1886, but eventually also in the official sanction of the eight-hour workday. May Day is designated International Workers' Day. It is indeed a thoroughly international holiday - the United States is one of the few countries in the world where it is not an official holiday. In the 20th century, the holiday received the official endorsement of the Soviet Union; celebrations in communist countries during the Cold War era often consisted of large military parades and shows of common people in support of the government.

Arnold". This person is likely Samuel Arnold (1740-1802), an English composer.¹⁰⁶ One of his specialities was music composed for special events at the new outdoor parks such as Vauxhall Gardens, which featured entertainments which pre-dated Merrie England May Day pageants.

The Merrie England movement was a romantic and nostalgic throwback to the activities of the proletariat and ruling classes in the English renaissance that was created and engineered by Victorian England's upper and middle classes. Thanks to the efforts of the Rational Recreation movement, the earlier Whitsuntide customs were purged of their rowdy nature and placed in the hands of educators, dancing masters, and stage choreographers who presented a wholesome version, acceptable for children to enact.¹⁰⁷ The appearance of a Merrie England pageant in the far-flung colony of British Columbia is yet another example of the world-wide colonial dissemination of English imperialist culture during the last years of the Victorian Era. Merrie England May Day celebrations were found in several cities in British Columbia – Clinton (1868, two years before New Westminster), Ladner (1896), Kaslo (1899), Fort Langley (1922), Port Coquitlam (1923), and Prince George (1926).¹⁰⁸ There does not seem to be the same record of May Day activity in any other province of Canada, including the bastion of English Canada, Ontario.

¹⁰⁶ It is found in Walter Shaw's book on Maypole Dances (Curwen publication: 1910) which conceivably would be held in the hands of Ms. Bee when she arrived in 1913. On the other hand, she may have simply found it in the Firemen's band repertoire.

¹⁰⁷ One of the highlights of this initiative was engineered by John Ruskin who devised a May Pageant for teachers at Whitelands Teacher Training College in 1881, complete with girls in white satin, dancing an skipping around Maypoles to the sound of Renaissance ditties like "Now is the month of Maying" by Thomas Morley (1589).

¹⁰⁸ Further research is needed in this subject area. One of the questions it would answer is the reason why Merrie England May Day celebrations seem to be absent from the usual descriptions of May Day in the capital of British Columbia, Victoria, and British Columbia's largest city, Vancouver. One of the complicating factors in this research is the prevalence of celebrations on Empire Day (the Friday

The scholar most associated with the Merrie England movement is Roy Judge (1929-2000). He was particularly well-placed to investigate May Day and morris dance because he had been a member of the Oxford University Morris Men and its adjunct team, the Ancient Men. His doctoral thesis, *Changing Attitudes to May Day, 1844-1914*, illustrates his second academic passion, the investigation of the facts behind the legends of May Day.

The history of New Westminster conforms almost exactly with the accounts of Merrie England May Days in Victorian England as outlined by Roy Judge (1991). He found that the May Days created in the enthusiasm of the Merrie England movement were begun some time in the 1830s. If one were to attend the modern May Day events in a typical performance such as the one conducted in Ickwell, Bedfordshire (founded 1872) or Knutsford, Cheshire (founded 1864), one would find virtually no difference between those events and the celebrations in New Westminster.

Conclusion

Two thoughts came to mind as I considered my encounters with the neo-pagan May Day mounted by the Vancouver Morris Men and the Merrie England May Day seen in New Westminster. Both May Days presented me with an opportunity to triangulate my understanding of the place of morris dance in the customary observance of May Day.

before Victoria Day long week-end), and Victoria Day, both officially founded in 1901 (the year of Queen Victoria's death). New Westminster's May Day celebrations eventually moved to Empire Days from early May first, presumably around 1901, a day created largely for children to observe in their schools.

I was now able to re-position morris dance in a bigger picture, using the information about the alleged vestigial fertility cult that I had seen in various media of the modern morris dance community with the first-hand observations of New Westminster's May Day. In doing so, the criticism of the media became more understandable.

The most vivid discovery I made was the complete absence of morris dance in the Merrie England representation. Roy Judge (1984, 1993, 1997) found isolated examples of morris dance during the age of Merrie England recreations, but they were all on stage, embedded in light operas and ballets reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan. No less of a revelation was the overshadowing of the modern morris fertility theory with the post-Merrie England celebration of community in general. It could almost be said that the morris dancers of the third revival were attempting to "take back" the morris dance of Merrie England and before that, the dance conservatory style of morris dance, by mounting it in its original setting – pagan custom.

Be that as it may, May Day and morris dance do share some common ground in England's cultural history, as will be shown in the next chapter. However, their association has nothing to do with fertility, and everything to do with community celebration of the misrule variety.

CHAPTER 3

An Alternate Interpretation: Misrule

Having established the controversy regarding the theory of morris dance as an agent of fertility, I would like to suggest that morris dance and its symbolism were at one time driven by another cultural factor, misrule. For this second view, we turn to Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 - 1975).¹⁰⁹

Mikhail Bakhtin and Carnival

Bakhtin burst on the Western European literary scene in 1968 when his study of Rabelais, composed in the late 1940s in the Soviet Union, appeared in a translation and commentary by Krystyna Pomorska.¹¹⁰ The English translation, entitled *Rabelais and His World*, was a startling re-examination of one of the most difficult literary giants of the Western canon, Francois Rabelais (c.1490-1553). Rabelais' one claim to fame was the five books that comprise the story of Gargantua and his son Pantagruel, written between 1532 and 1535.¹¹¹ The five-book series generated considerable

¹⁰⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin's writings and the ever-growing number of related studies that they have engendered have spawned a centre for the research of Bakhtin, called the Bakhtin Centre, located at the University of Sheffield. It was founded in 1994 within the department of Slavonic and Russian Studies, although the centre acknowledges that its limits of research extend far beyond the particular focus of the department See <http://www.shef.ac.uk/bakhtin/>.

¹¹⁰ Bakhtin's other ground-breaking studies have explored postmodern themes of intertextuality and heteroglossia or simultaneous polysemy, which he called polyphony. His critical theories place him with the great postmodernists, particularly Jacques Derrida.

¹¹¹ The first translation into English by Sir Thomas Urquhart (book 1-3) with marvellous illustrations by Gustav Dore, followed by Peter Le Motteux (book 4-5) in the seventeenth century. Modern translations range from the 1893 Victorian edition by W.F. Smith, who avoided translating all the many risqué references by leaving them in their original French language form, to that of the admirable modern standard, J.M. Cohen (London, UK: Penguin, 1955). Two exemplary and prominent literary studies of Rabelais' book were conducted by Samuel Kinser in his book *Rabelais's Carnival: Text, Context, Metatext* (Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 1990), and Michael Holmquist (and Katerina Clark) in *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MS, USA: Harvard University Press,

contemporary interest throughout Europe because their contents satirized the Roman Catholic clergy of the time, and in so doing, lent credence to the people's growing dissatisfaction with the church, ultimately sowing the seeds of revolt for the advent of Protestantism.¹¹² But his writings also gave fresh expression to the freedom offered by the forces of enlightenment seeking new moods of human behaviour that were legitimate yet separate from Christian values. *Gargantua* echoes Shakespeare's Falstaff, and even Plato; *Gargantua's* dialogue with his son mimics *The Republic*. Neither Plato nor the progenitors of the mythic Falstaff are paragons of Roman Catholic behaviour.

The atmosphere that pervades *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is larger than life, and in a constant state of boisterous agitation. Everything the protagonist encounters in the book is subject to ridicule or indulgence, particularly the church and its related cultures. The tone of the novels is troubling even to modern readers because of its ribald character, occasionally bordering on offensive. The novel seems to be remarkably incongruous with the growing forces of enlightenment that sought out logical and dispassionate avenues of change to bring about a more open society. Society, as depicted by Rabelais, appears "open" already, despite its restrictions, because it functions in ways that allow it to circumvent the authorities and their conventions while existing within them. It is this inherent contradiction which has proved impenetrable to literary critics:

1984). It was not singular in its sardonic criticism of the Roman Catholic church. Erasmus had written a similar humorous diatribe entitled *In Praise of Folly* in 1509, but the tone of Erasmus' book is measured and logical, unlike Rabelais. One measure of its difficult nature is the fact that it is one of the few members of the literary canon that has not been interpreted by the film industry. There are no movies with *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, as there are with Rabelais' nearest model, Jonathan Swift.

¹¹² Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) gave voice to the growing movement of discontent on October 31, 1517, when he published his critique of the church called The 95 Theses. This day is called Reformation Day, a civic holiday in Slovenia and several provinces of Germany.

Of all the great writers of world literature Rabelais is
the least popular, the least understood and appreciated.
(Iswolsky, 1968: 1)

Bakhtin was the first commentator to finally locate the “con-text” of Rabelais’ counter-hegemonic “text” as a literary document rooted in the concept of “carnival”.¹¹³ With this insight he was able to harmonise the reception of the novel’s contradictory audiences, the working class and the ruling class. Essentially, he interpreted the semiotic language of Rabelais from the point of view of the working class culture, rather than the standard canonic thought of the intellegencia (Bakhtin/Iswoldy, 1968: 473). Bakhtin’s literary analysis of Rabelais also had a hidden agenda that was no less significant. He was responding to the conditions of the USSR under the dictatorship of Stalin and the Russian response to the contradictory components of living within the frame of the alleged people’s government and yet suffering severe repression, even though he was a fully vetted member of “the people”. Finally, Bakhtin treats Rabelais’ text as an ethnographic record in which there is a profuse amount of detail about European carnival activity and un-self-conscious behaviour.

On the surface, carnival is a day-long public celebration common in Catholic countries. It precedes forty weekdays of Lent and its regimen of abstinence leading up to Easter Saturday.¹¹⁴ During the weekdays (but not the four inclusive Sundays),

¹¹³ The visual dimension of carnival was captured in the same century by Dutch painters like Hieronymus Bosch and the Brueghel dynasty. An excellent example is the allegorical painting *The Battle (Fight, Combat) between Carnival and Lent* (1559) by Pieter Brueghel the elder (c. 1525-1569). Samuel Kinser has conducted a detailed study of the relationship of the painting to Rabelais book, and in the process established a post-Bakhtin point of view, in his book *Rabelais's Carnival: Text, Context, Metatext*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1990)

¹¹⁴ Easter, and all its satellite dates, are movable on the calendar, using a complex system of calendar calculations called Computus. The day falls on the Sunday following the first New Moon after the Vernal Equinox, March 21st, usually between the middle of March and the middle of April. All the other Christian high days associated with Easter I calculated either forward or backward from that date.

Christians are required to remind themselves of the suffering of Christ during his forty day retreat and fast in the desert, and the last days of his life. Abstainers refrained from eating meat and its by-products. As has been shown by several historians, Lent coincides with a period of deprivation when winter supplies of food are nearing an end and the new crops have yet to come to fruit. Hence the derivation of the word “lent”, *lencten-fasten*, meaning Spring fast (e.g., Laroque, 1991: 104). More relevant to this discussion, the rules of lent also forbade public entertainments such as the theatre.¹¹⁵

The day before the long period of abstinence is usually called Mardi Gras (“Fat Tuesday”), a reference to the last opportunity to consume stocks of meat and its quintessential cooking agent, lard (“fat”). A second name for the day, *carnival*, popularly understood to mean “meat absence”, also points to the same proscription.¹¹⁶ Coupled with the prospect of sexual restraint, the historical public response was to organize feasts that often culminated in excess and occasional debauchery. Rather than private affairs, the celebrations were very public and organized according to the prevailing customs and local mores. Carnival behaviour coalesced into parades and processions in which the members of the public would dress in outlandish costumes, often wearing masks, dancing, making music, and indulging in all the other aspects of revelry. Many processions featured ribald and noisy musical-theatrical events in the

¹¹⁵ Sex was also proscribed during Lent, so I have wondered if that proscription had some bearing on the seemingly obsessive regard given to fertility and fecundity during Mardi Gras.

¹¹⁶ The origin of the name “carnival” is disputed. According to one theory, it comes from the Latin *carrus navalis* (“ship cart”), referring to a cart in a religious parade, such as a cart in a religious procession at the annual festivities in honour of the god Apollo. Other sources, however, suggest that the name comes from the Italian *carne levare* or similar, meaning “to remove meat”, since meat is prohibited during Lent. Another theory states that the word comes from the Late Latin expression *carne vale*, which means “farewell to meat”, signifying that those were the last days when one could eat meat before the fasting of Lent. See the Wikipedia entry for carnival at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnival>.

form of short skits of a satirical nature. Carnival participants were usually from the working and poor classes (i.e., the proletariat), and the observers (the “audiences” for the theatrical productions) tended to be members of the elite and ruling classes (i.e., the bourgeoisie).

Carnival itself is a member of a family of cultural expressions now commonly called *festival*. They could be found on almost any day of the calendar, whenever the populace had reason to bond together in celebration.

In the social sciences, festival commonly means a periodic celebration composed of a multiplicity of ritual forms and events, directly or indirectly affecting all members of a community and explicitly or implicitly showing the basic values, the ideology, and the worldview that are shared by community members, and are the basis of their social identity (Falassi, 1997: I, 296).

The study of festival culture began with Emile Durkheim, the father of sociology. In his 1912 book *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, he introduced his concept of *collective effervescence*, one side of a binary opposition that was sacred, as opposed to the other side, consisting of to the everyday, the profane. His dichotomy of secular and sacred behaviour has not held up to scrutiny because festivals often combine both (Falassi, 1997: I, 296). This is particularly true of the events where morris dance occurs. Stoeltje (1992: 262) believes that *festival* is a later stage in the transformation of *ritual* from sacred display to societal play. Additionally, for Stoeltje, the patriarchal component to most ritual activities is diluted and even removed when converted into the communal play of festival.

Rites of Individual Passage

Falassi invokes Arnold Van Gennep as the pre-eminent theorist of the processes related to festival culture (ibid: 298).¹¹⁷ He cites Van Gennep's book *Rites of Passage* as the centrepiece of festival behaviour.¹¹⁸ The rites of passage (aka life-cycle custom) are various forms of ritual in which an individual progresses from one stage of life to another by experiencing, and replicating, ceremonial activities that concretize a person's individual experience and group status. It also allows the community to witness the progress of the individual through three phases: separation (*séparation*), transition (*marge*), a period of limbo in which various rituals take place that mark the changes, and then a reincorporation (*agrégation*), newly defined inwardly and outwardly. During the transition, individuals or collectives find themselves in a temporal shift described by Falassi (1967) as *Time Out of Time*. Within this temporary frame, an alternate social reality is formed under extreme dynamic conditions. The individual and his community interact in ways that are entirely unknown in the mundane reality surrounding the event. Inherent in this process is a form of regeneration that provided a community and society in general with a sense of renewal. Another element common to rites of passage is the emotional tension akin to a crisis mentality. It would seem that this mood is partly explained by expectation and partly by the possibility that the transition will fail in

¹¹⁷ The essay titled *festival* that appears in the 1997 publication *Folklore: an encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art* ((Santa Barbara, CA, USA: ABC-CLIO Inc.) is extracted word-for-word from Falassi's introduction to his 1967 book of compiled essays titled *Time Out of Time*, but without the extensive footnotes of the latter.

¹¹⁸ See Van Gennep, 1960: 10 where he cites the rites of passage as his choice for study from among a host of rituals and ceremonial patterns.

some way, due to miscalculation or mishandling of the ritual processes. Hence, the transition period is often accompanied by heightened, extreme emotions.¹¹⁹

Van Gennep named the transition zone *liminal* (Van Gennep, 1960: 11), a term which was adopted and expanded by the great symbolist anthropologist, Victor Turner. The word *liminal* is appropriately derived from the latin word for “door-step” or “threshold,” *limen*. The word also has the spirit of caesura, a pregnant pause in time when possibilities for change of status and awareness are brought to a head. Turner further divides the moment into *liminal*, when the change is relatively benign (e.g., heightened expectations preceding an announcement of acceptance into a club after a period of probation), and *liminoid*, when transformation induces deeply felt emotions, such as a first kiss (Rapport and Overing, 2000: 229-36). Within the state of *liminality* the witnesses and participants look upon the novitiate with equanimity and expectation, reflecting back a communal spirit Turner called *communitas*. He discovered the role of *communitas* during his ethnography in Africa where he became particularly interested in conflict resolution. It was the exploration of their unique processes of resolving community tensions that led Turner to the theories of Van Gennep because his observations of community interaction directly echoed Van Gennep’s concepts of Rites of Passage.

Victor Turner (1917-83) is a founding member of the British School of Symbolic Anthropology, coincidentally working at the same time as another anthropologist concerned with symbology, Clifford Geertz (1926-2006). Unlike the earlier structural functionalists, beginning with Emile Durkheim, Turner viewed

¹¹⁹ Van Gennep’s elaboration of the three-stage process purposely avoids any discussion of emotional content such as ecstasy, in keeping with the Positivism that was the dominant view of the time. Essentially, he was a positivist in search of social structures and taxonomy.

societies as conflicted rather than essentialized by an organic or structural system of social cohesion. The central question from his point of view was the manner in which societies successfully dealt with their inherent conflicts bred from opposing points of view such as class structures, religious beliefs, etc. He uncovered social mechanisms for conflict resolutions during his African ethnographic research, realizing that the mechanisms were articulated and manipulated through the medium of symbols. One of the crucial constellations of symbols of conflict resolution he recognized was a given society's rites of passage. They had a key role in conflict resolution partly because they acted as a voice of change and self-expansion, one of the vents for the blockages that occur during conflicts.

Taking the theory of liminality developed by Van Gennep, he developed a theory of Structure and Anti-Structure, the latter being a temporary reflection of the former allowing for symbolic interpretation to become a two-way street where transformation creates an avenue for expression and articulation. The essence of Turner's Anti-structure was the possibility of spontaneous creativity at its heart, unfettered by the conventions imposed by the Structure (Erickson, 1999: 133).¹²⁰

Rites of Group Passage

Turner amplified van Gennep's theory of Rites of Passage and liminal behaviour in groups of people (Van Gennep, 1960: 26-40). Associations of people negotiating and experiencing liminal transitions ultimately led Turner to become a theoretician of the anthropology of theatre, a fascination that occupied almost all of

¹²⁰ The concept of creative expression is reminiscent of Gregory Bateson's *energy source*, the engine of imagination, in his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, p. 126 (Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1972). Further, see "agent and agency" in Rapport and Overing, 2000: 3.

his research time in the latter half of his life (e.g., 1974, 1982, 1986). Essentially, Turner realized that theatre and the theatrical experience have all the earmarks of liminal behaviour, and for that reason helped explain how theatrical conditions could allow transformative experiences to occur for performers and for audience members.

Professor Turner became a pioneer of a new academic area of study called Performance Studies, with Richard Schechner (1934-) as its principal voice (Bial, 2004: 2).¹²¹ The focus of their highly varied interests was *performativity*, the actions that frame, present, highlight, or displays a liminal event. The word “performance” has also taken on a huge panoply of meanings, ranging all the way from “ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music) and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media and the internet” (Schechner, 2002 : 2). In doing so, he invoked the classic line from Shakespeare, “all the worlds a stage” (*As You Like It* : 3/2, 139-42), reflecting the Renaissance view termed *Theatrum Mundi*. The scholars of performance studies have introduced a third component to the classic binary in cultural studies, *text* and *context*, by investigating *behaviour*. Their credo is summed up in the notion that a proper examination of a cultural artefact must involve its enactment, the *liveness* of its

¹²¹ Schechner began his collaboration with Turner in 1977 and then went on to become head of the department of Performance Studies at New York University and editor of the journal of performance studies, TDR (The Drama Review). Soon he was joined by Northwestern University (1980s) and University of Sydney, Australia, and University of Wales, Aberystwyth (Hughes-Freeland, 1998: i), and together they formed the PSI, the Performance Studies International, in 1997 along with some 500 interested individuals and departments, ranging all the way from Speech Communication specialists to Medieval Studies.

presentation.¹²² In their journal, *TDR* (The Drama Review), a great number of ethnic performativities from European and other cultures have been described and analysed.

Another thread in the world of Performance Studies is provided by folklorists, particularly the work of Richard Bauman of Indiana University (Carlson, 1996: 17). Whereas the members of PSI were focused on Modern Theatre and Modern Dance as the testing ground of their thoughts, the folklorists were continuing to plumb the depths of traditional folklore and its processes. Professor Bauman contributed a summary of his insights in an essay entitled “Performance” in a book he edited, *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: a communication-centered handbook* (1992).¹²³ He emphasises the communication aspect of performance studies, which he terms *heightened communication*. His concern is also how *texts* become interpreted for the purposes of communication, and how competence is an underlying factor.¹²⁴ He identifies four characteristics of performance (or more correctly, performativity): temporally bound (e.g., seasonal), spatially bound (e.g., a stage), a program of action, and an element of *reflexivity* in which the performers and the audience are well aware of the artificial nature and conditions of the performance elements. They resemble “reality” in one way or another, but they are not “real.” This is a theme that was central to the writings of the anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, who coined the term *metacommunication* to

¹²² The perspective of the study of behaviour over static theory is very reminiscent of the work of Christopher Small who coined the word *musicking* to describe his theory of music-making embedded within musicology and music theory, and even went so far as to privilege musicking over the other two perspectives. See *Musicking: the meanings of performances and listening* (Middletown, CN, USA: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

¹²³ Richard Schechner provided an essay entitled *Drama Performance*, pp. 272-81.

¹²⁴ Bauman’s immediate source of insights regarding competency come from Noam Chomsky’s distinction between performance and competence in linguistic behaviour, but the topic is central to Ferdinand de Saussure’s binary description of *la parole* (i.e., usage) and *la langue* (e.g., grammar).

represent the nature of self-awareness during one's process of communication (see Bauman, 1992; 45).

Finally, special mention must be made of the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman who developed theories related to personal theatre, or presentation of self in certain social conditions that required reflexive behaviour constructed with forethought (e.g., job interview, guest at a dinner, etc.). These situations are entirely liminal in nature. He concentrated on what he perceived to be symbolic interaction that was conducted according to the tenets of dramaturgy – the art of theatrical presentation. His book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, written in 1959, theorized that actions and behaviour were not only learned but also subject to levels of competency and dimensions of context. His term for the latter condition was *frames* which is now an accepted piece of core vocabulary in sociology. The relevance of his insights to this study is the complete lack of distinction he makes between the presentation of self and the presentation of symbols and concepts on a “stage,” whatever that may be.¹²⁵

Rites of Season

The theatrical experience of group liminality most relevant to this study is the Rites of Season (aka calendar customs, seasonal customs). Van Gennep touched on this topic in his 1908 seminal book *The Rites of Passage* when he observed that

¹²⁵ Many of his concepts echo the concerns of Jacques Lacan (1901-81) and his “fiction of the self”. See *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, published in French as part of a set of essays in 1956, then re-published in book form in 1966 as *Ecrits*. It is now available in several English translations.

societies mark times during seasonal changes when their economies are most likely to be affected (van Gennep, 1960: ix, 179).

In various so-called primitive societies, rites have been frequently recorded that describe rituals enacted for the purposes of assuring prosperity or even just survival by invoking the protection or proactive assistance of spirit beings. The prevailing theory, as mentioned above, is that as societies become more sophisticated, their seasonal rituals become secular festivals. But at the earliest stage, anthropologists are comfortable with invoking the word “fertility” when they describe “pagan” rituals that are concerned with rejuvenating the earth or the community.

The seasons and their associated rituals in various societies are subject to many layers of recurring points (Laroque, 1991: 306-09). The most obvious layer of the turn of the year is the solar calendar, sometimes tempered by the cycles of the moon. In many societies in the northern hemisphere, the seasons of the sun (beautifully described by Ronald Hutton, 1996, as the “stations of the sun”, echoing the sacred imagery of the Catholic Church’s rituals) directly influence the swing from fruitfulness to infertility and back again as it occurs in the agricultural year.¹²⁶ Even pastoral societies are influenced by the seasons as their herds must be managed in terms of available food stocks and cycles of husbandry. This layer is overlaid with the sacred rituals and observances conducted on high days which mirror the cycles of the sun. Over time, some of the sacred high days on the sacred cyclic layer transform into yet another layer consisting of secular and even legal holidays (Simpson and Roud,

¹²⁶ Books of Hours from medieval authors was a major source of calendar imagery and symbolism for medieval Europe. The most famous was *Les Tres Riches Heures Du Duc De Berry* (composed 1412-1416) that visually documented the liturgical hours of the day, and days of the year. For a survey of various Books of Seasons, see Marie Collins and Virginia Davis, *A Medieval Book of Seasons* (New York, NY, USA: Harper Collins, 1992).

2000: 44-45). But before the secularisation of high days, one finds festivals and ceremonies that on the surface appear to either celebrate the fruition of the earth, or share in the anxiety of periods of economic and agricultural drought. A popular conception of these difficult times is that groups sometimes band together to perform ceremonies that attempt to influence the spirits in the heavens or the earth that allegedly controlled the seasons and their consequences for humans.

The study of calendar high days and their attendant group behaviour in England is an all-consuming subject for English folklorists. The most recent effort, Steve Roud's *The English Year: A Month-by-month Guide to the Nation's Customs and Festivals, from May Day to Mischief Night*, dating from 2006, follows a long history of glossaries and almanacs that go back to the nineteenth century (Buckland and Wood, 1993: 12-16). The same theme was adopted by Francois Laroque when he presented his research entitled *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*. The remarkable coincidence of customs found in Shakespeare's time and modern times is impressive, although it has been said time and again that the details of the traditions have most certainly changed over time.

The Study of Misrule

What emerges from an examination of the calendar customs called the Rites of the Seasons is a pattern of group behaviour that follows the principal of liminality in one particular manner called misrule. Misrule is a term not readily employed by folklorists and anthropologists, but its patterns are determined by noting their frequent

occurrences in the literature.¹²⁷ They have been alluded to by Dale Cockrell in his book *Demon of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Their World* (1997) and Stephen Nissenbaum in his brilliant study of 19th century Christmas customs in America, *The Battle for Christmas* (1997, and a Pulitzer Prize nominee). Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries uncovered the same fragments of information in England, outlined in their book (and television series) *Christmas Past* (1987). Hallowe'en has also been subject to the same style of analysis, as seen in Nicholas Roger's book *Halloween: From Pagan Ritual to Party Night* (2002). "...Halloween's capacity to provide a public space for social inversion or transgression held it in good stead at a time when other potentially raucous holidays were becoming more institutionalized and domesticated" (Roger, 2002: 9). These are only a few, albeit singularly notable sources that would comprise a vast bibliography on their own right. One of the reasons for the absence of a unified body of information about misrule may be its close analogies, festival and carnival, which are discussed extensively, as I indicated above.

An exceptional study of aspects of misrule, without actually using the nomenclature, was provided by Barbara Ehrenreich in her book *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (2006). Although her main focus of attention is on Europe and North America from earliest history to modern raves, her point of view finds echoes in far-flung cultures and distant memories. Her thesis is hinged on

¹²⁷ There is no entry for misrule in *A dictionary of English Folklore* (Simpson and Roud, 2000) or *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art* (Green, 1997). Neither is it found electronically in the Web's most common information site, *Wikipedia*. The term fares no better in anthropology. For example, in *Social and Cultural Anthropology: the key concepts* (Rapport and Overing, 2000) the word does not even appear in the index, even though the book contains an extensive discussion of liminality (pp. 229-36).

the presumption that collective social action in the form of joyous activity (especially dancing) was a constant threat to the civil order and social hierarchy that was defined by the ruling classes. Despite its widely varying manifestations, her discovered common thread was the constant efforts to suppress the actions of the crowd of the masses when they gathered together to share their collective happiness and mutual strength in numbers. She extends this thesis to include colonial powers that transformed or banned outright the same kind of expressions in their colonies. In both cases, the gatherings could seamlessly move into a condition of revolutionary action, given the right circumstances. A secondary analysis traces the collapse of the wisdom of collective behaviour following the discovery of the “self”, that is, individuality, in the seventeenth century (2006: 137). Rather than acting as a liberation as advanced in Buddhism, the result was a wave of melancholy that became endemic. Although the discovery of the “inner self” was highly valued by the enlightenment, it came at a price – isolation, despair and loneliness. Durkheim, mentioned above in connection with festival, labelled the problem *anomie*, the depression brought on by the loss of group identity and a resultant motivation to commit suicide.

There are two particular elements of her exposition that are relevant to morris dancers. First, the author identifies dance as a prime component of the expression of collective joy. Second, there are absolutely no references to an alleged pagan origin of dance, now “lost in the mists of time”.¹²⁸ In other words, morris dancers who

¹²⁸ The expression is the most frequently used panacea in morris dance circles for offering the myth of the pagan origins of morris dance without having to justify it. “The Morris comes to us through the mists of time,” according to the official statement of the Morris Ring, the pre-eminent organisation of morris dance in England.

vouchsafe the integrity of the pagan origins of their dance will find nothing to support their theory in this book, and many reasons to doubt their theory.

Natalie Zemon Davis and Ronald Hutton are two sources that devote single chapters to the subject of misrule but their object of interest is very particular and their context is also very specific. Natalie Zemon Davis's chapter 4, "The Reasons for Misrule" (Davis, 1975: 97-123) features one of several aspects of crowd behaviour in Early Modern France, mainly in the sixteenth century. "It is sometimes expedient to allow the people to play the fool and make merry," said the French lawyer Claude de Rubys at the end of the sixteenth century" and with these first words, Davis records an extensive litany of exuberant seasonal festivals and their characteristics.

She is particularly fascinated by the Feast of Fools, also known as Abbeys of Misrule, conducted by minor clerics within the church. After reviewing the possible pagan theories of Sir James Frazer and a general theory of *homo ludens* (seemingly conceived without reference to Huizinga) where individuals and societies have a need to be playful, the author settles on Victor Turner and Rabelais as reliable sources of analysis for the many historical examples of misrule that she found (Davis, 1965: 101-103). She fine-tunes the analysis by identifying the principal players in misrule – youth. She then sees a decline in unruly behaviour in the rites of misrule as the youth take their place in the various establishments of urban society and aspire for positions in the ruling and middle classes, rather than mock them, during the seventeenth century. In the process, the rites of misrule become controlled and domesticated, although they never faded from French culture.

There are two conflicting theories of the efficacy of misrule for the mental well-being of the general public. One theory, alluded to above, suggests that once-a-year misrule activity acts as a valve turned off momentarily, allowing the people to vent their frustrations and anger in a harmless manner. Misrule can barely be described as socially acceptable behaviour by the rulers, but it is tolerable in that it is somewhat controlled, and the pent-up social pressures appear to harmlessly vent. Naturally this process is not as acceptable as direct political action on the part of the people, so misrule tended to dissipate or become domesticated as enlightened social legislation became enacted in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Another theory, articulated by Terry Eagleton, suggests that misrule was used to advantage by the rulers in order to lull the people into a false sense of power (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 13-14, 26). Likely there is no certain resolution of this dichotomy of interpretations.

Ronald Hutton's attention to the subject of misrule is centred on the seasonal activities surrounding "Christmastide" (Hutton, 1996: 95-111). He lists several dozen examples of festival behaviour in early modern England that all point to misrule. For anybody familiar with English traditional customs, the multiple examples of festival activities, particularly mumming (i.e., folk theatre), are well known. The pattern is familiar, consisting of unannounced visitations, entertainment provided by the invaders often in disguise, rewards provided by the householders, then an exit, only to go on to the next home. "...festival disguise may in places have been expressions of merry-making, but was generally, by the nineteenth century, another part of the considerable number of ritualized means of making money or earning hospitality at

midwinter” (Hutton, 1996: 96). However, the manner of entering the homes was far from obsequious or polite. “They entered houses without warning and expected to receive food and drink as a right” (ibid.). On page 99, Hutton relates nineteenth century practices to medieval precedents in the form of the same Feast of the Fools and Boy Bishops conducted by young clerics and coincidentally described by Davis, using medieval and later examples in France. Most of the evidence for these festivities is in the form of formal proscriptions from senior church authorities. The author traces the variation and evolution of misrule as symbolised by one inverted authority figure, the Lord of Misrule, through to the seventeenth century. Like all similar revelries, misrule was banned by the Puritans during the Commonwealth. “What killed the taste for those figures among the English ruling classes was an experience of genuine ‘misrule’ and political inversion in the form of the Civil wars and Revolution of the 1640s. When the traditional political and social order was restored in 1660, almost nobody felt much like simulating that experience any more” (ibid, 109). Any traces that he finds are thoroughly domesticated. Hutton is a traditional historian in that he does not cite any Critical Theory to support his arguments. Perhaps more important, he does not generalize his use of the word misrule to the many, many other occurrences of misrule-like-occurrences that he describes in the rest of the seasonal year.

Lord of Misrule

The overt use of the word misrule is seen most commonly in the term Lord of Misrule, nominally the director of the events surrounding a festive occasion marked

with all the characteristics of misrule (Hutton, 1996: 105-7).¹²⁹ The late fifteenth and early sixteenth century saw a proliferation of Lords of Misrule at the royal courts of England, presiding over Christmas festivities, particularly on the penultimate night of the Twelve Days of Christmas, Twelfth Night. The most prominent of these appointees was George Ferrers, commander of the Christmas celebrations of Edward VI (1537-1553). During his brief reign (he died at the age of 15), the boy king was indulged by his regencies with a constant round of entertainments designed to distract him from the political machinations of his keepers (Hutton, 1996: 106). The ambiance of Ferrers' productions (1551-53) consisted of entertainments that seemingly were conceived to be spontaneous and wondrous, the inverse of the ordinary (Twycross, 2002: 162-64). Various productions duplicated the court in mirror, with minors taking on the roles of major figures. Inversion is one of the key elements of misrule.

Misrule entertainments were similar to the events crafted by the Master of the Revels, a court appointment. The office originated in the 15th century and evolved from the responsibility of mounting courtly entertainments to a government position that oversaw and even censored theatrical productions, beginning in the seventeenth century. Both the Lord of Misrule and Master of the Revels focused on theatre as their medium of entertainment. The Revels consisted of a variety of disguisings and masques that resembled dumb shows with narrators, whereas the theatre of Misrule featured direct interaction between the audience (the court) and the players (courtly

¹²⁹ The scholar most associated with the study of Lords of Misrule is Sandra Billington. See her books, *A Social History of the Fool* (New York, NY, USA: St. Martin's Press, 1984) and *Mock Kings in Medieval Society and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1991). The earliest studies of the Lords of Misrule were by Enid Welsford. See *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (Gloucester, MA, USA: Peter Smith, 1966). Also see Paul Williams, editor, *The Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honour of Enid Welsford* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1979). The Lord of Misrule is also allied with the Trickster archetype, one of four (along with Mother, Rebirth, and Spirit) that was identified and elucidated by C. G. Jung.

youth). Unlike the Revels, the misrule entertainment consisted of mocking the king's entourage and follies.

The satirical humour of mocking the king resembled the age-old tradition of the court fool or jester, another template for the Lord of Misrule. Elizabethan England was notable for its court and theatre Fools. The first prominent name was Will Somers (d. 1560), Fool to Henry VIII, followed by Richard Tarleton (1530-1588) the favourite free-lance Clown of Elizabeth I, Richard Tarleton (1530-1588). These men laid the foundation for Shakespeare's great comics, then known as Clowns, Will Kemp (fl. 1600) and Richard Armin (c. 1563-1615). Their form of humour was irreverent and flippant, but rather than alienating their audiences, courtly or otherwise, they were acknowledged and appreciated for their outspoken iconoclasm.¹³⁰ They were imminently successful as professional, year-round Lords of Misrule because they derived most of their humour from sending up the establishment, almost as if they were rulers in their own right.

Although the courtly Lords of Misrule faded from the court, their spirit was enthusiastically adopted by members of the upper classes and lingered throughout the sixteenth century. John Stowe (1525-1605) gave us the most complete record of the Christmas Lords of Misrule found within aristocratic households in his book *Survey of London* (1598). The most prominent Kings for a Day (at Christmas time) was found in the Inns of Court, the great London law schools that provided a general

¹³⁰ A key source of information about Richard Tarleton (with examples of Tarleton's Jest-books) was written by James Halliwell, in his 1844 book *Tarleton's Jests and News Out of Purgatory* (London, UK: Shakespeare Society). An excellent contemporary accounting of Kemp and Armin, as well as summaries of the life and times of Tarleton and Somers is found in David Wiles' *Shakespeare's Clowns: actor and text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

education for the young men of the upper classes. Accounts speak of riotous behaviour following in the wake of games, feasting, and disguising. Following the cultural upheavals of the seventeenth century Interregnum, the Lord of Misrule underwent significant changes culminating in a harmless game in Victorian times called the King of the Bean in Victorian England. The popular Christmas game is still played in some households today. The King is chosen randomly by accidentally finding a bean embedded in a piece of Christmas cake. The lucky recipient may command his guests to do any entertaining act no matter how frivolous or even scandalous that evening. His rule ends when the party is over. All the elements of misrule are retained, albeit in a harmless manner. The only difference seems to be in the random manner of choosing the King, and even then, the principal of inversion takes place when the King transforms from an equal to a master.

Lords of Misrule also occurred during seasonal high days other than Christmas. Philip Stubbes (c. 1555-c. 1610), a puritan pamphleteer and virulent critic of festivities, railed against the Lord of Misrule that oversaw May celebrations in his 1581 book *The Anatomie of Abuses* (Laroque, 1991: 26, 95, 151). "...all the wilde-heds of the Parish, conventing together, chuse them a Graund-Captain (of all mischeefe) whome they innoble with the title of 'my Lord of Misrule', and him they crowne with great solemnitie, and adopt for their king..."(Anatomie of Abuses, p. 147). A related misruler was the Summer Lord from which the mythology of Robin Hood evolved. Unlike the misrulers mentioned above, the Summer Lord was active among the rural working classes. His position was assigned on a yearly basis and his job was to preside over the festivities of Whitsuntide in late May (and sometimes

early June). He and his “court” officiated over the proceedings and bestowed awards on victors of village May games. Although the history of Robin Hood begins in medieval times as an errant knight who “steals from the rich and gives to the poor” in the manner of a Lord of Misrule, he becomes associated with May festivities in the fifteenth century (Holt, 1982: 159). A full accounting of Robin Hood as the Summer Lord is found in David Wiles’ *The Early Plays of Robin Hood*. The author says that “Robin’s role as a mock king is the area with which I have been most concerned. As a Lord of Misrule, Robin’s goal is pleasure, attained through sport, dancing (i.e., morris dance), and feasting. The barriers to pleasure erected by the everyday world are removed... Private ownership of woodland is flouted, as men play at being outlaws. Robin’s kingdom aspires to be a world where all things are held in common and all men wear a single livery. The power of the game lay in the fact that it created not a mirror image of the everyday world but an alternative to the hierarchical order of gentlemen, freemen of the borough, officers of the church and market inspectors”(Wiles, 1981: 56).

There is one aspect of the Lord of Misrule in the various guises that is particularly relevant. Group and individual misrule behaviour is not a vestige of anarchy. Misrule is governed by pre-meditated, temporary social structures. Many observers of misrule behaviour mistake misrule for anarchy because of misrule’s rambunctious and quasi-rebellious atmosphere. But in this case, appearances are deceiving. Despite the carnival ambiance, the dynamic elements of misrule emulate the administrative elements of rule. However, its very dynamism is in constant danger of transforming into anarchic chaos as the crowd’s (or individual’s) emotions boil

over into true rebellion. For this reason, and the obvious criticism meted out by misrulers, the establishment is very wary of the mere presence of misrule.

Nevertheless, they seem to be forced into a position of tolerance, partly because the administrators of Misrule negotiate broad terms of agreement for acceptable rowdy behaviour, and promises of containment by their own self-appointed directors, namely the Lord of Misrule. This form of negotiation has since been identified as “transgression” (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 6 - 26).

Misrule Theory

The predominant theory for the existence of misrule is that it functions as a social vent, akin to catharsis. Each year the working class becomes progressively more frustrated with their hierarchical position and consequent limitations and restrictions. The pressure builds to protest such a position being imposed from without, and on the pretext of participating in a festival, the working class pour out their frustrations and anger. The festival environment allows them to vent their feelings and, in theory, affords them a temporary reprieve from their anxieties. Supposedly satisfied and satiated, they return to their stations in life, happy to have articulated their concerns to “those above”.

A contrary opinion holds that the misrulers are allowed their one day of carnival by the rulers, so that the working class may safely vent its feelings without doing damage to society as a whole (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 13). The negotiations that allow the practice to occur are entirely at the whim of the rulers. Eagleton points out the line in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (I/5/88-89) where Olivia reminds Malvolio that “there is no slander in an allowed fool”. There is also a theory

of misrule that suggests long-term change does occur when the same issues are repeatedly played out until they are finally resolved in favour of the people (ibid, 14). Finally, some theorists believe that the process of misrule allows societies to play with notions of *Other*, thereby clarifying the *high* in the binary opposition of class and status.

There were some instances of misrule in England that in fact were true revolutions designed to create change, rather than expressions of the desire for change. England was prone to civil unrest during its Early Modern Period, fully described in *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* (David Underdown), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson), and *The London Mob: violence and disorder in eighteenth-century England* (Robert Shoemaker). They portray in detail the many political uprisings that occurred as the general public expressed their dissatisfaction with the government and the ruling elite. The protests and riots had elements that were carnival-like, giving them the atmosphere but not the true conditions of misrule.

In a case of art imitating life, there are several studies that outline the presence of misrule in the theatre among the audience and enacted on the stage, notably *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (Jean Howard, 1994) and *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* (Marc Baer, 1992). Both books outline the history of playwrights who articulated the vision of carnival behaviour and social disorder as mirrored on the stage and even in the halls, reminiscent of the same theory of carnival behaviour mentioned above where the people, in effect, rehearse the creation of political change.

Misrule Characteristics

By studying the history of misrule and its culture, it is possible to see four conditions that are always present when misrule occurs.

1. One day a year. (Cf. Rites of Season)
2. Those below rule those above.
3. Theatre of misrule.
4. Pay for Play.

I will now discuss the general characteristics of the four conditions and then relate them to morris dance.

One Day a Year

The cyclic occasion for misrule is most commonly a “high” day which has been agreed upon by the community as a marked day because of ecological conditions and societal needs. It is a “high” or “holy” day because its yearly activities stand out from the surrounding uneventful days.¹³¹ In addition, there may be several days or even weeks leading up to the high day when preparations are made and expectations grow. The preparations may include negotiations with the governmental agencies (the “rulers”) about various details of the festivities that are disruptive to the regular maintenance of the community.

Seasonal observances can be entirely artificial, such as North American and European New Year’s Day on January 1. The date was established by the Roman government in 153 BC to mark the occasion when Roman Consuls had their

¹³¹ An ingenious graph of European seasonal high days, further divided into secular and sacred days, is seen in Appendix 3 in Laroque, 1993: 309. The graph is in the shape of a circle, clearly showing the cyclical nature of the high days in a single year of seasons.

appointments renewed each year. The Roman Empire and its consulates faded from history but the day continued to be observed with its original role pre-empted by new organisations like the church. Because it maintained its profile as a high day, it attracted New Years' Festivities and even the occasional misrule function such as Hogmanay.

Occasionally high days are compromised by placing their celebration on the nearest week-end, a pair of days that lie outside the weekly calendar functions of financial institutions like banks, and governmental service departments. An even greater concession is found in some of the Spring high days that were originally hinged to Easter Day. The Spring liturgical calendar is determined by the calendar location of Easter Sunday. From that point, calendar high days are counted either back, as in the case of 40 days of Lent, or forward, as for example Whitsuntide, also known as Pentecost, 50 days following Easter Sunday, usually found from the middle of May to early June. Nowadays, Whitsuntide has been replaced by a long weekend holiday pinned to the calendar on a definite date in late May. In England it is called the Late Spring Bank Holiday, in Canada, Victoria Day, and in America, Memorial Day.

Occasionally a misrule event is not tied to a high day. For example, Cockrell (1997: 33) describes as well-known community piece of protest theatre called *charivari*, a mechanism for public condemnation by a community which can occur on any day of the year. An effigy, a stand-in, or even the real offender is carried around

the village on a rail or pole to the sound of banging pots and pans and the hoots and hollers of the misrulers.¹³²

Those Below Rule Those Above

The above expression is derived from the study of misrule in Japan. *Gegokujō* (those below rule those above) describes sudden, dynamic moments of change in premodern Japanese society, created by sudden changes of fortune by groups or individuals previously in a lower stratum of society (LaFleur, 1983: 138). One of the mechanisms for articulating such change was the concept developed by Zen Buddhists called *irui-chūgyō*. It was the “play” or ludization of movement within the six levels of transmigration, *rokudō*, usually from a lower to higher level of sentient awareness (ibid, 54). *Gegokujō* came to be applied to political and social actions of “the people” upon higher social classes in premodern society.

Those who conduct misrule activities are particularly difficult to identify because their status and definition has been tossed back and forth by political factions and classical historians for generations.

Classically trained musicians such as myself learn about the term *pesante* very early in our study of music rudiments and terminology. It is a stylistic designation that requires the performer to play in a heavy-handed manner with an emphasis on the downbeats as if dancers were wearing hob-nailed boots. *Pesante* is Italian for “peasant”, a designation dating from feudal times that describes the great number of rural people who lived off the land. It was also a term of derision, akin to “brutish,

¹³² The most famous study of charivari is by E.P. Thompson, “Rough Music,” in his book *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York, NY, USA: The New Press, 1993), pp. 467-538. I was pleased to see Canada mentioned in one of his many sources of information (p. 487). His title provided me with the inspiration for the title of this dissertation.

stupid, illiterate” etc. In Werner Rosener’s sweeping view of the history of the European peasant class, called *The Peasantry in Europe*, two points of view, both negative, emerge. The older idyllic writers saw peasants as deeply and happily immersed in community (*gemeinschaft*) in contrast to the deadening, impersonal life in the mechanistic urban society (*gessellschaft*).¹³³ The more recent view, ultimately rooted in critical studies, is that the rural people were severely limited in their options for agency because of their highly limited life experiences (Werner, 1994: 2-3). Their history is comprised of successful adaptation to various market economies, or resignation to the forces beyond their control, occasionally culminating in armed uprisings.¹³⁴

The term “peasant” shares many of the same symbolic attributes as “folk”, a word derived from the German word *volk* as defined by Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) to bolster his belief that all German-speaking people were cut from the same earth-coloured cloth. His web of identity markers, rooted in *volksgeist*, the soul of the people, give birth to the Romantic Nationalist movement in which the spirit of authenticity and spontaneity lie with “the people”, rather than the legacy of Greek and then Roman learning, filtered through the French Academy. Although Herder included all “people” in his paradigm, including kings and courtiers, the term came to be applied to the vast population living in simple circumstances, usually in rural

¹³³ This binary was created by Ferdinand Toonies (1855-1936), a German sociologist following a trend in the investigation of the alleged ills of urban life.

¹³⁴ See “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” and “Moral Economy Reviewed,” by E.P. Thompson in his book *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York, NY, USA: The New Press, 1993), pp. 185-351. For an assessment of E.P. Thompson’s analysis, see J. Stevenson’s “The ‘Moral Economy’ of the English Crowd: Myth and Reality,” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, edited by Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 218-38). The first example of people’s riotous protest in England is the Peasant’s Revolt which occurred in 1381.

villages. In this capacity, the term was adopted by the Englishman William Thoms (1803 – 1885) in 1847 when he created the concept of folklore during his avocation as a “gentlemen antiquarian”. From this terminology comes terms such as the “common people”, “the common man” and even the expression “plain old folk”. All the designations appear to reference people, mostly rural, who have a modicum of formal education in favour of aural education, and are recipients of a vast panoply of practical experiences at the intimate level of the extended family, village, or neighbourhood.

The nineteenth century term “working class”, as opposed to the middle class, and the upper (or ruling) class, was famously coined by George Freidrich Engel (1820-95) in his study of the desperate straits of the working class in England, entitled *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (Thompson, 1968: 209-10). Ultimately he collaborated with Karl Marx (1818-1883) who then coined the term *proletariat* to represent the working class in his study of class struggle, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). One important influence upon Marx that is particularly relevant to the study of misrule in England is George Hegel’s theory of dialectical materialism. The theory envisioned evolutionary progress as a struggle of thesis, then antithesis, followed by a higher resolution, synthesis.¹³⁵ Secondly, the *proletariat* were in opposition to *bourgeoisie* who owned the means of production, and the *petty bourgeoisie* who occupied a ground between the two opposing groups. Below the proletariat were the *lumpen proletariat*, the “rabble” who had no visible means of employment and were generally the desperately poor and criminals. Strangely, Marx

¹³⁵ Victor Turner mused about the possibility of a dialectical process in his concept of structure and anti-structure. See *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, page 203.

was contemptuous of the rural peasant class because they appeared to be highly conservative and reactionary (Werner, 1994: 4). What is central to this Marxist thinking is the emphasis on the people within urban environments. However, these ideas developed in the wake of the vast numbers of people who moved to cities from the rural areas of England, lured by changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. In 1801, 22 per cent of the population lived in cities, whereas by 1901 it had increased to 77 per cent (Mason, 1993: 12). This was concomitant with the population explosion that was occurring during the same decades.

Essentially, those who participated in misrule activities in the time period I am examining, from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, are most easily described as members of the urban working class. “Urban” can include villages as well as the capital cities, given that “urban” centres are characterized by concentrations of services and social amenities. E.P. Thompson, the great sociologist and champion of the working class, has devoted his life to defining and exploring the “moral economy of the crowd”, that is, of the working class. He was the first historian to give the history of the working class a central position of appreciation instead of the usual periphery where it was passed over in favour of accounts of political leaders and intellectual and artistic luminaries. He was particularly interested in the various riots of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that came about because of injustices in the marketplace. The cost of grain influenced by international trade and protectionism brought about the Corn Laws, instituted in 1815 and repealed in 1846 because of pressure exerted by the common folk. An even greater battle of wills was found in the Riots led by General Ludd, Captain Swing, the Rebecca’s Daughters and

other loose organisations that rebelled against the forces of unthinking capitalism during the efflorescence of the Industrial Revolution. In fact, E.P. Thompson and other leftist historians were echoing the writings of realists like Thomas Hardy and Flora Thompson who wrote realistically and yet with great affection about the ethos of the working class.

England has struggled with its class consciousness, and in the process spawned an accompanying literature. In David Cannadine's *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, the author says, "It is widely believed, both in Britain and abroad, that the British are obsessed with class in the way that other nations are obsessed with food or race or sex or drugs or alcohol" (Cannadine, 1999: xi). He reviews the history of class consciousness in England and concludes with an analysis that bypasses Marxist interpretation and favours psychology and sociology. Basically, he sees class awareness at the individual level defined in terms of "finely graded" hierarchies, which was a particular English response to the modern concern with individualism (Cannadine, 1999: 162). For the purposes of this study, the book highlights the continuing dynamism of class consciousness in England that stretches back in time to feudalism and perhaps even before.

"Those below" can also have completely different, even startling, configurations. For example, children are often cited in studies of modern Halloween. On October 31, they freely roam the streets in search of treats, making demands of householders with impunity. They also dominate the material consumerism of modern Christmas. Various ethnic others in colonized countries can also express themselves in misrule events by "taking over the streets" and celebrating their self

awareness. This festival behaviour is particularly pronounced in Central America and the Caribbean, as outlined in *Caribbean Festival Arts*, edited by John Nunley and Judith Bettleheim. One of the most interesting examples of this aspect of misrule is Jonkonnu, which combines West African spirit worship with English mumming (i.e., folk theatre), performed in and about Christmas Day, as in English mumming. Jonkonnu was even recorded among slaves in North America (Nissenbaum, 1997: 258-300).

When “those below” engage in misrule, the event appears to be an almost riotous affair where things appear to occur spontaneously. Such an ambiance reinforces the capricious nature of the event and the vivid emotions that are freely expressed. But a deeper look at any misrule even uncovers negotiation and compromise conducted beforehand by the rulers and the misrulers. For example, the anti-Rose Bowl parade in Pasadena, California, called the Doh-Day parade and held a month before the real Rose Bowl parade, is administered by one self-appointed director who negotiates with the city for parade permits, etc. (Lawrence, 1987: 125).

Often a Lord of Misrule, by actions if not by name, officiates at a Misrule event. For example, again in the Mardi Gras celebrations, but this time outside of New Orleans among the French-speaking Cajun and Creole people, we find *le capitaine de Mardi Gras*, maintaining a loose semblance of order and insuring that the carnival revelers do not overstep the boundaries of acceptable, negotiated behaviour. He does this with a whip, bringing to mind the *party whip* of parliamentary tradition, ultimately related to the *whipper-in* of fox-hunting, where a person is assigned the role of maintaining order among the hounds and keeping them

focused on the hunt. A whipper-in was also a feature of several Rushcart processions in the Northwest of England (personal correspondence, Howard Mitchell, Manchester Morris Men). The Rushcarts were wagons filled with freshly cut rushes that were spread on the floor of the local church each summer. The event became a general cause for celebration resembling misrule. The job of the rushcart whipper-in was to keep the human pullers of the Rushcart in line. Other famous nineteenth century Lords of Misrule already mentioned were Captain Swing, General Ludd, and the male “Rebecca and her daughters” (Hibbert, 1987: 477-95).

The Theatre of Misrule

Why “theatre” as a medium of expression in misrule? Misrule on first glance appears to be a form of protest, and in fact it often is. However, it is a covert expression in which the need or desire for change is implied, rather than enacted. It functions like a metaphor. Overt protest has all the markers of revolution and social disruption and is anathema to a well-ordered society, even if the society can accommodate dissonant points of view. Therefore revolutionary protest is a serious business and attempts to create a paradigm shift, and not just a new voice among many.

The form and function of theatre of misrule is parody, sometimes with an overtone of satire.¹³⁶ This medium of expression accommodates the cultural and class inversion inherent in misrule usually described as topsy-turvy. And the prime

¹³⁶ Linda Hutcheon (2000) is considered the foremost theoretician of parody, followed closely by Simon Denith (2000), although Margaret Rose (1993) laid the groundwork for both of them. All three of them see parody as a pervasive element in modern society, signalling postmodernism in most cases. However, unlike the general public, they trace the origins of parody to classical Greece and see it in every period of European intellectual history.

exponents of this form of theatre were the Lords of Misrule better known as Fools.¹³⁷ England has a long history of medieval courtly Jesters and thespian “clowns” featured in Elizabethan theatres (Baskervill, 1929). Two of the latter clowns that receive special mention are Richard Tarleton, a favourite comedian of Elizabeth I, and Will Kemp, Shakespeare’s principal comic (Wiles, 1987). In both cases, tricky Dick and wily Will would usually imitate and mirror their serious counterparts, risking disapproval and even accusations of sedition and treachery. But usually they could diffuse their critics by claiming they were only “fooling”.

The archetype of the Fool or Clown is as well-known to common culture as it is to academics, combining the wisdom of child-like simplicity with the guile of a village elder. The Elizabethan Fools evolved into the Harlequin type of Fool that was introduced to England by John Weaver (1673-1760), the famous ballet dancer and dance instructor who specialized in comic roles. Nevertheless, Harlequin became wildly popular at the hands of John Rich (1692 - 1761) who produced the first mime-theatre called Harlequinade, with himself in the role of the Harlequin, from 1717 to 1760, using the stage name “Lun” (cf. Luna). Harlequinade of course is derived from the Italian roustabout comedy series called *Commedia dell’arte*. Rich’s Harlequinade productions went on to become the much-loved Pantomime theatre commonly produced at Christmas time, and featuring parodies of many children’s stories (e.g. Robin Hood) with droll inversions such as the leading lady, called a Dame, who is actually a man (usually huge and burly) and the hero, usually played by a young woman. His spiritual successor was Joseph Grimaldi (1778 – 1837), son of a ballet

¹³⁷ The two authorities on this subject are Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (New York, NY, USA: St. Martin’s Press, 1984) and Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (Gloucester, MS, USA: Peter Smith, 1966).

master that worked in the theatre district in Drury Lane. His extremely popular slapstick style of humour and parody of upper class figures resulted in his designation King of Clowns, and the focus of attention and admiration by Charles Dickens. Grimaldi became the model in costume and behaviour of circus clowns, particularly the Auguste (German for “clown”) up to this day.

“Parody and irony, protest and satire, jest and licence.” This litany of adjectives from Denise Lawrence (1987: 124) is only one of many examples that circumscribe the typical misrule description. The feelings of frustration mentioned above are expressed in a covert manner, using the medium of theatre. The “theatre” is characterized by a rough and tumble atmosphere as in street theatre. Although masquerading can be featured, partly as a device for anonymity, the wearing of masks is not a prerequisite. The characters are portrayed for the purposes of mocking and ridicule. An inversion of the symbolism of authority and “normalcy” transpires. Parody rules the occasion.

The clearest manifestation of this basic element is found in mumming, the famous folk theatrical production found in many parts of England. A troupe of amateur actors in costume, occasionally in disguise, move about the community performing a short fifteen or twenty minute play in one act. The most common storyline is St. George and Turkish Knight. After being announced, sometimes by Father Christmas, St. George enters the performance space followed quickly by Turkish Knight. Shouts of bravado and challenge ensue, and then a battle of swords. Turkish Knight is killed. A doctor is called for, who then arrives and after much banter, brings the Turkish Knight back to life. Then a collection is taken by various secondary

characters. The play has been subject to intense scrutiny because it is, in the end, quite a mystery. For example, Turkish Knight is the antagonist and yet he is the one vanquished, and then brought to life, instead of Saint George.

The early scholars who compiled and interpreted this folk play believed it to be a garbled vestige of a pre-historic death-and-resurrection ritual. Later scholars believe it to be an example of misrule.¹³⁸ The story-line can be interpreted as a veiled threat to the audience that the denial of a collection can have consequences. The audience is usually comprised of householders and the theatre troupe members are the visitors who literally invade the home and impose their theatrical performance on the householders. It is a microcosm of the working class forcing their attention on the petit bourgeoisie.

The one author who has dealt specifically with parody in the domain of English folk music is Ian Russell (1988). He tackled the difficult problem of humour in vernacular songs of a bawdy nature. What he found was the power of parody at work and it proves to be a very successful and highly regarded medium of expression.¹³⁹ A parallel tradition of parody was found in the music halls where upper and middle class mores and foibles were often subject to the same scathing humour. “What obviously gave pleasure in the music hall world was the rich joke that such

¹³⁸ The first author to write a complete study of English mummers was E. K. Chambers (1933) who was heavily influenced by Sir Frazer, like Cecil Sharp. A complete and annotated bibliography of mumming is titled *The English Mumming Play: An Introductory Bibliography*, by Eddie Cass, Michael J. Preston, and Paul Smith. Also, see *An Introduction to the English Mummers Play* (London, UK: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 2002) by Eddie Cass and Steve Roud, and the entry for “mumming plays” in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore* (2000) by Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud.

¹³⁹ On page 75 he lists six characteristics of a parodic song which are just as applicable to dance.

proceedings afforded at the expense of society's high moralism and intrusive vigilantes" (Bailey, 1998: 145).¹⁴⁰

Pay-for-Play

The participants in mumming and related misrule activities actually expect payment for their performance; hence, a system of collecting, sometimes called *cadging* (perhaps derived from "cajole"), taken from hosts who are sometimes figures of authority or higher in social status, but occasionally they are simply happenstance observers. In most mummers plays, the collecting of money is built into the script of the play. "So, ladies and gentlemen, be at your ease/ and just give us mummers, just what you please". Other misrule genres pass around a hat or box, wordlessly, during or after the performance.¹⁴¹

Of course, the most obvious form of pay-for-play is popularly known as busking. Busking is often confused with begging, sometimes because buskers appear as poverty stricken as beggars, but the one central factor that distinguishes buskers from beggars is the fact that the former provide entertainment in exchange for a donation, whereas the latter offer nothing but the sight of their own distress. It functions at the most basic and urgent level of *use-value* (an artifact or cultural event has utility for someone), and *exchange-value* (the supply and demand of the marketplace) as discussed by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their vision of the

¹⁴⁰ Perhaps the most famous parody of English music history is *The Beggar's Opera*, written in 1728 by John Gay. The composer was taking Italian opera, particularly Handel's oeuvre, to task.

¹⁴¹ One of the most famous misrule collections is to be found at Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans. In circa 1960 it was decided that pretend money called doubloons would flow the other way, from the parade members to the observers. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Orleans_Mardi_Gras

culture industry. In this way busking shares much the same immediacy and attention as modern theories of advertising.¹⁴²

Busking in England has always been confused with begging and therefore become inextricably caught up in the latter's proscriptions by society and government. One of the earliest examples of government disapproval was from 1318 when the Mayor of London was charged with suppressing the roving bands of disguisers and mummers at Christmas time (Hibbert, 1988: 93). The tradition surfaced again in the English Renaissance when the government was struggling with the proliferation of vagrants and their constant calls for "alms for the poor". Harsh legislation was enacted in 1547 and 1571 which required vagrants to be shamed with a branding iron, burning a V in their forehead. Among the list of "sturdy beggars" were minstrels and players, classic buskers. (Cohen and Greenwood, 1981: 64).¹⁴³ Conditions only got worse as history moved into the Victorian Era, with its Poor Houses and abject poverty for those too proud to enrol. Busking musicians and music-sellers, notably the ballad-mongers, were among the many who lived

¹⁴² I was able to observe busking first-hand during my work at EXPO 86 in Vancouver, BC, in my role as Artist-in-Residence. During my six months of almost daily observations I witnessed countless times the demands of the situation where theatrical buskers were required to grab interest in the first 2 minutes and lock their audience into a constant state of curiosity for almost an hour. Musicians functioned in a different mode, where their music performance acted almost as a sound-track to the private lives and pleasures of the constantly passing audiences. The average length of attention given to musicians was about five minutes, just enough time to express gratitude for a musical respite and make a snap decision to donate money. I believe that morris dancing fits somewhere between these two poles.

I was fortunate to experience an epiphany of sorts when I watched the rise and fall of a brilliant juggler. He arrived on the site one summer week and quickly developed a reputation among the other buskers for having an extreme technique, juggling a dozen balls and other feats believed to be almost unimaginable. However, he disappeared from the site within a month because he was deemed to be unentertaining. In other words, technique alone was judged to be a poor substitute for charisma and "stage" presence. Performers with far less technical ability were far more successful in the very immediate demands of audience attention.

¹⁴³ In 1572, Elizabeth I followed up her harsh laws on vagrancy with the first legislated example of Poor Relief, a local tax that was converted into money for the poor today called the *dole* (Cohen and Greenwood, 1981: 64).

hardscrabble lives, made worse by the intense competition on the street.¹⁴⁴ Even Charles Dickens, a champion of the people, railed against them (ibid, 148). Charles Babbage (1791-1871), a mathematician and pioneer of computer technology, particularly hated street musicians, which he referred to as a “transparent object of begging” in his 1864 book *Passages from the Life of a Philosopher* (ibid, 151). The pressure of the buskers, musical and otherwise, became acute leading up to Christmas time, so a major element of the Rational Recreation movement was the replacement of busking with the organised welfare and donations provided in boxes on the new Boxing Day (Weightman and Humphries, 1987: 56-57).

¹⁴⁴ Paola Pugliatti recently wrote a brilliant book with exhausting detail, outlining the problems that theatre people had with the public’s perception of them as vagrants. See *Beggary and Theatre in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003).

CHAPTER 4

Misrule and Morris Dance

Having reviewed the evidence of morris dance in its neo-pagan and Merrie England settings, followed by a summary of a new hermeneutic, the principals of misrule, the task now is to place morris dance within the framework of misrule. Each of the four characteristics will be reviewed in terms of premodern and modern morris dance. My examples and discussions will be restricted to the Cotswold genre of morris dance, but it would be just as easy to draw the same parallels with the other morris dance genres.

Premodern Morris Dance and Misrule

One Day a Year

We know from the scrupulous work of Keith Chandler and others that the original Cotswold morris dance teams focused their dance presentations leading up to and during the day of Whitsuntide and its holiday festivities which occur in late May or early June. “The Whitsun holidays, along with those at Christmas and Easter, were probably the most widely observed of the yearly celebrations” (Malcolmson, 1973: 31). In effect, Whitsuntide is the polar opposite of Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday as it is called in England. Between the forty days before Easter signalled by its prelude, Mardi Gras, and the fifty days after Easter bracketed by Whitsuntide, lay

some one hundred days of sacred time.¹⁴⁵ The stretch of time following Easter is less stringent than the preceding forty days with its personal sacrifices, but after the Fifty Days of sombre reflection a jubilant mood of secular celebration is expected and called for. In character it has many of the same markings as Mardi Gras.

Whitsuntide, also known as Pentecost, is an ancient Christian liturgical high day celebrating the official beginning of Christianity when the Holy Spirit descended to earth instructing Jesus' twelve disciples to go forth and proselytize (Book of Acts, Chapter 2: 1-4). Christianity, with its various observances such as the one above was officially founded in 597 CE when St. Augustine arrived from Rome to convert the Anglo-Saxons.¹⁴⁶ The first mention of Whitsuntide is sometime between 1150 and 1500, in a manuscript with the reference number MSS., Dd. i. 1, p. 234, found in a set of manuscripts held by Cambridge University.¹⁴⁷

Whitsuntide is sometimes identified as May Day, which today is assumed to mean the first day of May. Actually, any day in May could be set aside for a High Day, a fact echoed by Thomas Morley's 1595 light part-song, *Now is the Month of Maying* (emphasis is mine). Neo-Celtics have conflated the first day of May with the Celtic celebration of the New Year described as Beltane (translated as "bright fire", a reference to the tradition of lighting bonfires), but there is no substantive evidence to

¹⁴⁵ There is a post-Easter time period of forty days called Ascensiontide, marking the final contact with Jesus before he ascended to heaven. However, the fifty day point is considered equally significant.

¹⁴⁶ There may have been earlier Christian communities among the resident Celts and Roman occupiers some two hundred years before the evacuation of England by the Romans in 410 CE. England was the home of three Christian martyrs, Saints Julian and Aaron (c. 304 CE) of Caerleon, Wales, and St. Albans (circa 3rd century CE) of the city of the same name, well before the adoption of Christianity by Emperor Constantine in 337 CE. The early Christians spread out to Ireland and Scotland as independent enclaves now collectively called Celtic Christianity. See Roy Strong, *The Story of Britain* (London, UK: Pimlico, 1998), pp. 18-27 and John Cutting, *History and the Morris Dance* (Alton, Hampshire, UK: Dance Books, 54-57).

¹⁴⁷ "This day Witsonday is cald. For wisdom and wit serene fald, Was zonen to the Apostles as this day." Dd. i. 1, p. 234

confirm an exact relationship between the lunar-based Celtic custom to the solar-based calendar date of the first of May or even the existing English custom (Hutton, 1996: 218-25).¹⁴⁸ There is an existing English (and continental European) tradition of “bringing in the May” (i.e., flowers that have recently bloomed on bushes and trees) on May 1st, but this tradition is more likely to have originated with the Roman day devoted to the goddess named Flora (Gk. Chloris) and therefore called Floralia, held between April 27 and May 3.¹⁴⁹ However, the connection is tenuous, given the fact that England fell into a period of dark times following the withdrawal of the Romans in 410 CE. Still, it is remotely possible that the tradition may have survived, first on the continent and then in England, in a transformation to a Catholic occasion called Mary’s Month, celebrated with flowers, although this tradition is not documented until the thirteenth century, almost a thousand years later.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ For example, the anonymous medieval round *Sumer Is Icumen In*, “Summer has come in”, dating from the late thirteenth century, celebrates the beginning of summer but does not mention Beltane or any of its associated traditions. For complete music transcription, translation and commentary see *Historical Anthology of Music*, edited by Archibald Davidson and Willi Apel (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1946) pp. 44, 220, and Richard Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New York: Norton and Co, 1978: 370-71), who places it in relation to similar rounds found in continental European sources.

¹⁴⁹ The goddess was the patron of flowers and general growth in Spring. There is likely a link between Floralia and Anthesphoria, the Greek flower festival that celebrates the re-emergence of Persephone (Latin, Proserpina), daughter of Demeter, from her six-month exile in Hades as the wife of Pluto. The well-known medieval French dance-song “Kalenda Maya”, allegedly written by the troubadour Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (1180-1207) is a singular direct reference to the first day (Calends/Kalends) of May but it also makes no reference to Celtic origins. Instead, it is a temporal setting for a love poem. The date around May first is appropriate because the gathering of flowers in the pre dawn of early May by young women includes the attention of young men and licentious interaction. See Hutton, 1996: 226-43. The music, text and commentary of *Kalenda Maya* is found in the *Historical Anthology of Music*, edited by Archibald Davidson and Willi Apel (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1946: 16, translation on p. 241 and commentary with additional bibliography on p. 219). Richard Hoppin points out that the song has a companion dance-song in the same collection, *A l’entrada deo tens clar* (“At the beginning of the fair season”) which makes a specific reference to the same concerns and interest, but in the month of April (*avrilozza*). See his *Medieval Music* (New York: Norton and Co, 1978), p. 274.

¹⁵⁰ See Geoffrey Chaucer (1334 – 1400), *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women*, for his poetic, beautiful epiphany to flowers. Some authors believe that his reference to the flower of all flowers alludes to Mary.

Regardless of the speculation surrounding the origins of May Day and Whitsuntide, the high day of Whitsuntide became a day of exuberant festivity, and a matter of record. In the fourteenth century Whitsuntide's activities caused some consternation among Catholic authorities because of its rowdy and even licentious content (ibid, 245).¹⁵¹ The fifteenth century witnessed a change of attitude on the part of the church when it adopted the proceedings of the secular Whitsuntide in order to incorporate them into their own fund-raising efforts called *church ales*, two words, hardly ever juxtaposed today, symbolizing the middle ground that was negotiated by Catholic authorities as they navigated between the wanton behaviour accompanied by ale and the community's devotion to its cultural centre, the church. Whitsuntide celebrations included feasting, music and dance, and competitive games. During the sixteenth century, we have a vivid account from one of the critics of month-long Maying, including Whitsuntide, from Philip Stubb (c.1555 - c.1610), who allegedly witnessed a typical procession that included a Maypole, followed by the construction of a bower (Hutton, 1994: 115-16).

During this time period, many Whitsuntide accounts describe a Summer Lord, who acted as a Lord of Misrule. He was the centre of focus and the personification of the misrule of the day. Wiles (1981: 6) has identified many of his appearances in the person of Robin Hood, an adaptation of the legend of Robin Hood that seems to have

¹⁵¹ Philip Stubbs, writing in his 1583 book *Anatomie of Abuses*, was the most explicit in his consternation, saying, "I have heard it credibly reported (and that, viva voce) by men of great grautie and reputation, that of fortie, threescore, and or a hundred maides going to the wood ouer night, there haue scaresly the third part of them returned home againe undefiled" (Forrest, 1999: 129). I know of a modern-day common English expression that goes, "Hooray, hooray, the first of May, outside sex begins today".

originated as early as the thirteenth century.¹⁵² During the heyday of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, in the lull following the disastrous War of the Roses (1455–1489), the figure of Robin Hood was represented in a play that resembled a folk mummings play.¹⁵³ The resemblance is due to the fact that the play is very short and is almost entirely concerned with a simple plot revolving around a combat between Robin and one of a variety of combatants, with no character exposition or development whatsoever. And like a mummings production, Robin Hood and his fellow thespians functioned within all the parameters of misrule. Their performance was restricted to Whitsuntide, they performed a theatrical production that was a parody in the form of a topsy-turvy inversion of the Ruling Class, and the result of their efforts was a donation of money that they solicited immediately after their performance, in the manner of a busker.¹⁵⁴

Even the legend of Robin Hood has many elements that lie within the realm of misrule, being the archetypal story of a fallen yeoman who robs from the rich to give to the poor. What is particularly relevant to this paper is that Robin and his “merry band” resembled morris dancers. The connection between the two is via Friar Tuck and Maid Marian, two common figures found in the Robin Hood cycle, who

¹⁵² The story of Robin Hood has generated a huge amount of literature, and even a research centre called the Robin Hood Project, centred in the University of Rochester. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/RH/rhhome.stm>. The most recent instalment in this continuing fascination is *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, by Stephen Knight (Ithaca, New York NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 2003). Perhaps the first definitive study of the Robin Hood legend is by J.C. Holt, of the University of Cambridge. See his *Robin Hood* (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 1982).

¹⁵³ The earliest script for the play dates from c. 1475. See Wiles, 1981: appendix 4.

¹⁵⁴ Fragments of the Robin Hood mummings plays were still performed up until recent times. See Michael J. Preston, “The Robin Hood Plays of South-Central England,” in *Comparative Drama*, volume 10, number 2 (Summer, 1976), pp. 91-100. He found elements of the play in nine villages. Perhaps the most telling village that maintained the play was Bampton, the central village of the continuing morris dance tradition, as opposed to revival. The script of the play is found in *The Faber Book of Christmas*, edited by Simon Rae (London, UK: Faber, 1996) and photos of the play in a typical Christmas performance can be seen in *Christmas Around the World*, edited by Dawn Sheggeby (San Francisco, CA, USA: Collins Publishers, 1996).

seemed to have originally accompanied the morris dancers as peripherals, or Lords of **Morris** Misrule (Wiles, 1981: 21). In addition, Maid Marian was probably a male dressed in women's clothing, yet another theme found throughout English cultural history. Records indicate that the Robin Hood mummers production faded before the mid-1500s, hastened by its proscription in Scotland in 1555 and England circa 1564 (ibid, 28). The play and its context, Whitsuntide celebrations, were accused of being a breeding ground of foment and potential civil disobedience in the manner of misrule (ibid, 28). However, even though Robin Hood and his merry men may have disappeared, the merry men of morris dance, led by Maid Marian or Friar Tuck, rose in prominence and became even more common in popular culture.¹⁵⁵ Even Shakespeare acknowledged the association in his play *Henry V*, II, iv, 25 where he describes citizens "busied with a Whitsun morris dance..."¹⁵⁶

The collapse of Whitsuntide merriment and many other customs such as morris dance, is the subject of Ronald Hutton's book *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*. Essentially, morris dance and similar rowdy entertainments did not fit the mandate of the Puritans who had come to power during the English Civil War.

After the withdrawal of the church's sponsorship and blessing, Whitsuntide activities continued unabated. They seemed to have even attracted the attention of the

¹⁵⁵ An interesting problem, unfortunately never to rise above speculation, is the original status of the morris dance, which slowly worked its way from the courts to the urban centres, in comparison with the Robin Hood pageant which seems to have evolved the other way round, from the proletariat to the urban centres. However, given the earlier history of Robin Hood legends in courtly ballads, it is possible that the same passage from court to city and then country was negotiated by the Robin Hood balladry and pageant (even if the original legend came from a proletarian source). Certainly there are accounts of the performance of Robin Hood pageants at the court of Henry VIII in 1515 (Wiles, 1981: 17).

¹⁵⁶ In *Alls Well that Ends Well*, Shakespeare includes the following appropriate equation in a list of perfect associations: "as fit as a Morris for May Day". But as I indicated above, "May Day" can be any month in May, not necessarily May first.

courtly and urban intelligencia who began to describe the activities they saw in distinctly idyll language (Hutton, 1996: 256). Shakespeare joined the voices of appreciation in his description of a sheep-shearing festival in his pastoral *Winter's Tale* (Act 2, Scene 3). This is only one of dozens of examples that were recited and sung, in ensembles or in accompanied solos. Despite the continuing objections of the Puritans, Whitsuntide and other seasonal festivities were endorsed by James I in his 1617 *Declaration (or Book) of Sport* (Simpson and Roud, 2006: 262-63). However, all festivities (including Christmas) were finally banned by the Puritans in 1641 during the sitting of the Long Parliament. It was only after the return of Charles II that the popular entertainments came back into favour.

Remarkably, the celebration was so resilient that it was still a viable activity when it was reinstated by Charles II in 1660 as part of the aptly titled *English Restoration*.¹⁵⁷ As the seventeenth century folded into the eighteenth, Whitsuntide again rose in prominence to become the most popular holiday in the yearly cycle. At this time in English history, the records are far more extensive, with ample information about the prevalence and customs of Whitsuntide. If a person was to step back into those Whitsuntide celebrations, they would think they had entered a typical summer fair ground, rather like the Pacific National Exhibition. Multiple booths with foods, games, and services would line a “midway” or circle a field. An area would be set aside for athletic games. A maypole would be prominently displayed, decorated

¹⁵⁷ In this regard, it would be interesting to compare the proscription of the Potlatch as performed by the First Nations of the West Coast, a celebration and complex cultural expression that was also driven underground but never extinguished. See *The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial Case History* by Christopher Bracken (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997) and Jonaitis, Aldona (editor). *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch* (Vancouver, BC, Douglas & McIntyre, 1991), with Douglas Cole, Ira Jacknis, Wayne Suttles & Gloria Cranmer Webster.

with hoops of flowers called *knots* pronounced (and even sometimes written as) *nuts*

¹⁵⁸ And there would be a colourful array of buskers, including morris dancers. In other words, the morris dancers were peripheral to the proceedings, a point I will take up again.

As England moved into the Victorian Era, there were two, or perhaps three, Whitsuntide cultures. And the prime mover for these developments was the Middle Class who maintained deep connections with the Upper Classes, who they wished to emulate, and the Lower Classes from which they had emerged.

The first manifestation of the old Whitsuntide, set in historical precedent, was increasingly carnivalesque and constantly growing in popularity among the proletariat. Alun Howkins (1973, 1981) is the most prolific author of descriptions of the traditional Whitsuntide activities, based on extensive research in the Whit Sunday activities in the Cotswold country of the English midlands. Aside from the entertainments that were available, professor Howkins found frequent evidence of drunken and rowdy behaviour that often spun out of control. Also, some of the “games” such as bear and dog baiting, shin kicking, and other brutal spectacles gave him reason to pause before extolling the virtues of the “good old days” (Howkins, 1973: ii). Nevertheless, according to Malcolmson (1973: 150), “It should be emphasised that in comparison with some of the traditional recreations (such as blood sports), many fairs and parish feasts displayed a considerable staying power... In the

¹⁵⁸ “Here we gathering nuts in May.” One of the many extensive descriptions of a typical May Day was supplied by Thomas Hardy in his novel *The Return of the Native* (London, UK: Penquin, 1978: 451-54), likely from first-hand experience. More primary observations along with summaries of Whitsuntide celebrations are found in *Roy Dommett’s Morris Notes* Volume I, Part I (Haydenville, MA, USA: Country Dance and Song Society, 1986: 6-60). An excellent first-hand account is in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore*, pp. 388-89, edited by Simpson and Roud. Also see Chandler, 1993a: 57-80).

countryside fairs continued to serve important marketing functions, and most of them were able to survive as long as they retained some significant economic rationale.”

Morris dance was a prominent yet ancillary feature of the Whit Sunday festivities. Several villages had families who maintained the tradition, and as the future looked back, they named these traditions after their village residences. As mentioned earlier, the village of Bampton, just east of Oxford, has perhaps the most famous of these traditions. They are extensively described by Keith Chandler (1993a, 1993b) using historical documents such as local newspapers and countless interviews with the following generations that either witnessed the dance, or even participated. His work is infinitely richer than the ethnography of Cecil Sharp, thus opening Sharp to the criticism of valuing the “text” (i.e., dance) over the “context” (i.e., the bearers of the tradition), possibly because of his upper middle class origins (Porter, 1991: 115-18). For the purposes of this section concerned with seasonality, there is one important trait to mention. The morris men began rehearsals shortly after Easter Saturday and then performed on various days leading up to their final performances on Whit Sunday. Even today, the great day for the Bampton dancers is Late May bank holiday, which is the latest expression of Whitsuntide. Morris men would sometimes continue their tours of performances into June and then completely stop until the next Easter’s Eve.

The second form of Whitsuntide was a domesticated version of the carnivalesque event. This version was the result of several new cultural developments. The first influence for change was the reformers who wished to abolish the blood sports. They first articulated their concerns in an organisation called

The Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1803, which published a tract that suggested, among several items, that fairs should be regulated and even constrained (Malcolmson, 1973: 150). This emphasis on decorum in place of unrestrained behaviour was echoed by an initiative from the emerging Middle Class that wished to replace all rowdy exhibitions with Rational Recreation (also known as Rational Leisure). Many public celebrations and personal behaviours were profoundly transformed into ordered and rational events, ranging from football, which became encased in rules of sportsmanship, to Christmas. The latter was altered from an exuberant time of proletarian house-visiting with songs and dramas in exchange for food and drink, to a harmless and controlled event centred on children as the recipient of gifts. In effect, the proletariat was replaced by another disadvantaged class, children, a group which is much easier to control and manipulate (see Nissenbaum, 1996 and Weightman and Humphries, 1987).¹⁵⁹ The vast subject area of Rational Recreation is one of many aspects of the even larger area of study in England devoted to the study of vernacular culture spear-headed by E. P. Thompson and others, already described above in the description of the British Cultural Studies. When reading this literature one senses the work of intellectuals reclaiming the lost heritage of their proletarian forebears.

¹⁵⁹ Rachel Vorspen is the latest author to delve deeply into the subject of Rational Recreation, in her essay “ ‘Rational Recreation’ and the Law: The Transformation of Popular Urban Leisure in Victorian England,” in *McGill Law Journal / Revue De Droit De McGill*, volume 45 (2000), pp. 891-973. The pioneers of this area of study are Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973), followed by H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c. 1780-c. 1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), *Leisure, in The Working Class England, 1875-1914* (ibid, 1985), and a set of essays in Yeo, Eileen and Stephen Yeo, *Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590-1914* (Brighton, UK: Harvester Press, 1981). The domain in the greater picture of Europe was surveyed by Peter Burke in his book *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1978, 1994).

The results of the pressure of the Rational Recreationists on Whitsuntide is seen in the modern versions of “May Day” promoted by various Middle Class organisations now generally referred to under the over-all rubric of the Merrie England movement already described above. One of the foundational concepts was the mythic view of Whitsuntide by the poets and musicians of Elizabethan England. This trend was re-instated at the beginning of Victorian England by the Rational Recreationists who had constructed a *rural idyll* that was partly a figment of their imaginations stimulated by the Elizabethans, partly a conscious re-construction of popular entertainments to conform to Victorian middle-class ideals (Rapport and Overing, 2000: 315 – 21). In both cases, the proletariat were envisioned as tradition-bearers of a simpler way of life, possibly rooted in an idyllic pagan past. This trend was accompanied by a softening of the difficulties faced by the proletariat as they became the recipient of a growing number of enlightened legislations following their near civil war that came after the Napoleonic War in 1815 and the subsequent economic depression (Strong, 1998: 386). Further, the continuing trend of the Industrial Revolution required a compliant work force, and Rational Recreation was perfectly suited to insure such a condition. The final “rational” adjustment occurred when England declared in 1976 that the last week-end of May, the most representative time for Whitsuntide, would be a holiday designated by the prosaic title, Late Spring Bank Holiday.¹⁶⁰ (The celebrations of May first became rationalized in the same year as an official holiday called Early Spring Bank Holiday, held on the first week-end in May.)

¹⁶⁰ There is a further complication with the Late Spring Bank Holiday because of a national day of celebration on May 29, instituted in the seventeenth century and called Oak Apple Day. The day celebrates the return of Charles II to the throne and coincidentally, his birthday.

The result of the re-working of Whit Sunday festivals was the placid affairs that largely featured children (cf. Christmas). Children decorating the Maypole, using ribbon-wrapping techniques derived from John Ruskin's adaptation of traditional Maypole decoration, children processing from church to the genteel fair grounds, children participating in May Games such as running races, children dancing country dances in order rank and file, and children being elected May Queens and May Kings for a day. Ann Bloomfield (1990: 74-95) found a deeper cultural significance to the celebrations by tracing the agenda of the proceedings to the inculcation of British Imperialism at home in England and in its many colonies.¹⁶¹ Although Ruskin, a major cultural theorist and art critic who promoted the Merrie England movement, instituted the ribbon-wrapping in 1881 at a women's teachers college called Whitelands, there is evidence to suggest that it may have been started as early as 1815 (see Roy Judge, 1991). It is this model that was used for the Whitsuntide celebrations, also known locally as May Day, in New Westminster.

In all of these Merrie England recreations, morris dancing was completely absent. This was equally true in my study of Whitsuntide celebrations in New Westminster. Nevertheless, a number of scholars throughout the Victorian era and in earlier eras studied the activities of the then current morris dancers and, more important, the morris dancers of Elizabethan England as imagined by its poets. The most prominent of these was John Brand (1777), Joseph Strutt (1801), Francis Douce (1807), and William Hone (1827, 1832) who all dabbled in folklore "antiquities" (Cutting, 2005: 24-29). One of the interesting manifestations of their work was the

¹⁶¹ Also see *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953* by Jeffrey Richards (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2001).

appearance of morris dancers on the stages of Victorian dramas. The productions were a mix of Merrie England and English Pantomime themes, all in a whimsical and nostalgic frame with virtually no contact with the real morris dance tradition happening in villages (Judge, 1997: 339).

Those Below Rule Those Above

The earliest records of morris dance are quite confusing to the first-time reader. Rather than reciting the cant of an original peasant cultural manifestation, Forrest (1999: 28-46) and many others have discovered that the social status of the first morris dancers in England was decidedly upper middle class. For example, the very first mention of morris dancing in England on June 27, 1477 describes the activities of an urban guild (Forrest, 1999: 49). Shortly thereafter, the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII feature morris dancing either as a component of masquing or in a procession. The courtly social context accords with continental European descriptions of morris dance and related mumming and masking (see Twycross and Carpenter, 2002; and Corrsin, 1997). In England, the trend is often described as a progression from the court to the urban guilds who wished to emulate the court and its sophisticated interests, finally come to rest among the proletariat.

The morris dancers of the golden age I am referencing (1700-1900) have been meticulously documented by Keith Chandler who confirms the proletarian status of the average dancer (Chandler, 1993a: 106-115). His chart in figure 6.1 shows a sample of morris dancers whose occupations range from shepherd to carpenter. The profile fits perfectly with the population that has received the most attention by the British leftist Culture Theorists founded by E.P. Thompson, and elucidated in his

quintessential books *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) and *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (1993). The one mistake of demography that Sharp made was to locate the morris dancing proletariat in rural villages. Later research uncovered a treasure trove of proletarian morris dance in distinctly urban centres in the Northwest of England, now identified as Northwest Morris (Boyes, 1993: 101-2).¹⁶²

All the characteristics of the trend of morris dance to “descend” from the courts to the people seem to fit the general concept of *gesunkunes kultugut*, a theory of cultural movement developed by Hans Naumann-Krayer (1886-1951). During his investigations of the history of folklore, he came to the decision that folk culture did not “spring from the communal folk process” (as envisioned by Arnold van Gennep, the Cambridge ritualists, and even Cecil Sharp) but rather filtered down from the upper classes (*oberschicht*) who had the time, resources, and superior intellect to devise creative acts, to the lower classes (*unterschicht*) who imitated as best they could, suggesting that the process involved a kind of deterioration of information (El-Shamy, 1997: I, 419).¹⁶³ FitzRoy Somerset, also known as Lord Raglan, quite independently developed a similar theory in which the folk acquired the rituals of the religious and courtly intelligencia, reproducing them in a simplified and even

¹⁶² The same blind-sight from Sharp applies to folk song as well. See *Folk-Song in England* (New York, NY, USA: International Publishers, 1967) by Albert A. Loydd who shook the folk song world with his discovery of urban folk songs (pp. 317-411). This theme was greatly expanded by Roy Palmer, particularly in his books *A Touch of the Times: Songs of Social Change 1770-1914* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penquin, 1974) and *The Sound of History: Songs and Social Comment* (London, UK: Pimlico, 1988). These two publications are just a small (yet significant) sample of urban and rural songs. A complete accounting is published by David Atkinson and available online at the website of the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

¹⁶³ The theory of “sunken culture” was used by the Nazis to support their theories of racial superiority as embodied in “the folk”, resulting in a collapse in interest in the theory after World War II. The theory was also used to discredit oral transmission.

degenerate manner (ibid, 421). Although the theory casts aspersions on the creative powers of the folk, it has some merit worth considering. It has been compared to a modern phenomenon such as the Reagan trickle-down theory of economics and I personally see some of the modern elements of fashions and trends when they move outward from London, New York, and Tokyo. Burke (1994: 58-59) sees the passage as a two-way street, going from bottom to top.¹⁶⁴ One only has to recall popular culture such as hip-hop, which originated in the slums of Brooklyn. Forrest makes an eloquent and passionate argument supporting the concept that the proletariat exercised creative agency when they acquired the cultural activities of the upper classes (Forrest, 1999: 351-62).

Having defined “those below” the remaining question is the manner in which they “rule above” (i.e., conduct their misrule). As specified in chapter 3, the nature of the “rule” of the traditional dancers was seemingly spontaneous with an overtone of entitlement. The traditional dancers were able to exercise this kind of authority by dancing out of doors, which did not require permissions or prior arrangements. The most frequently cited reference was recorded in 1893 by T. Fairman Ordish, who reported an encounter he had with a “merry band” of morris dancers (actually molly dancers) in East Anglia some time at the turn of the last century.

But the great event of the day was when they came before some house which bore signs that the owner was well to do in the world, and nothing was given them.

¹⁶⁴ The cultural trend opposite to *Gesunkenes* (Sunken) *Kulturgut* is *Gehobenes* (gehoben – elevated, exalted) *Kulturgut*, according to Hasan Al-Shamy (*Folklore: An Encyclopedia...*, volume 1, p.419) and *Gestiegenes* (stiegen – rising) *Kulturgut* by Richard Dorson (*Folklore and Folklife*, p. 299). A good summary of the two-way passage of culture is given by Peter Burke in *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1994: 58-63). Richard Dorson (1972: 17) describes the Soviet rejection of the German theories of *Sunken Culture* in favour of their own agenda, the rise of the people’s culture – folklore, folk music and folk dance – circa 1936, just a few years after the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Bessy [a man dressed as a woman] rattled his box and the ploughmen danced, while the country lads blew their bullocks horns or shouted with all their might but if there was still no sign, no coming forth of either bread and cheese or ale, then the word was given.

The ploughshare driven into the ground before the door or window, the whole 20 men yoked, pulling like one, and in a minute or two the ground before the house was as brown, barren, and ridgy as a newly ploughed field.

We are not aware that the ploughmen were ever summoned for such a breach of the law for they believed, to use their own expressive language, "They can stand by it, and no law in the world can touch 'em, 'cause it's an old charter."

The "old charter" likely did not exist except in the minds of the population as an imperative of misrule.

Tom Pettitt wrote an extensive description of the occasions when those below ruled those above in a seminal 1995 essay titled "Customary Drama: Social and Spatial Patterning in Traditional Encounters". In an effort to free himself from the burden of the fertility cultists in regard to folk custom, theatre and pageantry he took a long, hard look at their ontology. His first conclusion is that "it can be argued that party games and skits, puppet plays, the harangues of mountebanks and street vendors, and even folk narratives have as legitimate a claim to be considered traditional drama as the Old Tup custom or the mummer's plays. It is all very much a question of degree – of class, money, and resources – rather than of kind." (Pettitt, 1995: 28, 29). This is equally true of morris dance, not because of the dance per se, but because of its performance (misrule) context. Pettitt continues his brilliant analysis by defining a new term for his domain, "encounter customs", divided into spatial patterns (e.g., parade, interception, house-visits, receptions) and more

important, social patterning. In this subject area he outlines the motivation of the “drama”, be it exaction (of money, provisions, or refreshments), interaction (convivial or mischievous), demonstration (reflecting a relationship, deferential or assertive) and/or intervention (in relation to the host). The operative concept in both these points of analysis is that the enactors impose their enactments on their hosts.

Traditional morris dance teams knew of two key venues to perform, as well as occasional unique opportunities. At Whitsun Ales and their associated Friendly Society Club Feast Days, they participated in the processions and then competed for prizes that would distinguish the best dance teams from the rest. In some instances, they would even be paid to participate (Chandler, 1993a: 66). The second venue would be “the street,” which would be located in several villages strung out on a tour (usually following the Whitsuntide celebrations). Unfortunately, there appears to be virtually no evidence of their manner of performance in the latter locales (see *ibid*, 95). However, the traditional (as opposed to revival) morris dancers of Bampton and Headington offer tantalizing glimpses of the process. On the Sunday of Late Spring Bank Holiday, they process throughout their villages, “invading” the gardens of substantial houses and dancing in front of pubs on the streets. In both cases, the impression given is that they simply occupy the spaces with impunity. In point of fact, arrangements are made ahead of time, and the “hosts” take some pride in their status as sites for invasion. Still, during my opportunity to observe the Bampton men dancing in the gardens, I couldn’t help noticing the inconvenience caused by the several hundred onlookers who accompanied the dancers and crowded into the substantial gardens with their expanses of lawns. Although the dancers are greeted

with pleasantries and they act with grace and civility, records indicate that it was more than their rough “folk” exterior and behaviour (in contrast to the gentility of their hosts) that was rough.

At the end of the last century, for instance, the Bampton men were accustomed to dance their way into the village from the outskirts, stopping at houses on the way to drink home brew. Often they became so drunk that they lost step and bumped into each other, after which fighting would start and the team would disband.

Similarly in the northwest of England, the morris dancers were generally considered to be the most unruly elements of the Wakes festivities, notorious for their drunkenness and brawling. (Pegg, 1981: 93-94)

Mummer troupes and similar associations have a very similar routine today, and throughout the past (Cass, 2002: 67-68).¹⁶⁵ The complete picture would resemble my dissertation title: rough music, rough dance, rough play.

The Theatre of Misrule

Traditional morris teams were always accompanied, and even directed, by a Clown figure.¹⁶⁶ Morris teams had many peripheral characters in Renaissance times, notably a Fool, a Hobby Horse, or a (male) Maid Marian, but after the Interregnum, the teams settled on one peripheral character, the Fool. Even today, the two most traditional teams from the village of Bampton and Headington have clowns. The Headington Morris Men’s Fool dresses in the same kind of clown costume as Grimaldi. Chandler has researched the role of morris Fool extensively and

¹⁶⁵ It is worth noting that morris dancers and their musicians could not possibly perform in a house, unlike a mummings troupe that has the option of entering a house, or performing in front of it. Many readers of fiction related to English customs have vivid memories of the performance at the entrance way of “the big house on the hill” in Ngaio Marsh’s fictionalized story of a murder mystery *Off With His Head* (Glasgow, Scotland: William Collins and sons, 1957) pp. 66-83.

¹⁶⁶ Anthony Barrand provides an extensive and detailed tutorial for developing a role of morris Fool in his book *Six Fools and a Dancer*, pp. 111-122.

discovered that they were central to the character of the morris team. The serious work of the dancers would be balanced by the foolishness of the Clown (Chandler, 1993a: 68-71). But beneath his madcap exterior was often the leader of the dance troupe, advising and correcting his dancers. He also acted as an interlocutor with the audience, giving voice to the morris team. His part in a morris presentation was considered so crucial and ubiquitous that it merited special merit and description from all commentators from Sharp (1911: 27) to Roy Dommett (1986: volume 1, part 1: 105-18). The Fool was as essential as the musician.

Another element of parody (and therefore entertainment) is conjectural and yet enticing. The Cotswold dances are very similar to many of the social dances published by Playford in 1651 and called Country Dances.¹⁶⁷ As mentioned earlier the Country Dances were not derived from the “country”, but from the upper class’s conception of the country in the manner of a rural idyll. Cecil Sharp was aware of the Country Dances, but he seemed to have been waylaid by the fact that the Country Dances still danced in England did not resemble morris dance, and seemed to be truly dances from the country. He then went on to study Playford’s publications in search of clues for the country origins of the dances and their possible association with the morris dances also assumed to be from the “country”, that is, the rural proletariat.

¹⁶⁷ The definitive, early study of Playford is by Margaret Dean-Smith, *Playford’s English Dancing Master, 1651* (London, UK: Schott, 1957), which has been followed by a plethora of studies produced by dance study groups like the Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society, notably the proceedings of their third conference held in 2001 in London, titled *Common Ground 3: John Playford and the English Dancing Master, 1651* (London, UK: DHDS, 2001). Dean-Smith’s work was followed by the excellent study of Playford’s dances by Kate Van Winkle Keller and Genevieve Shimer called *The Playford Ball: 103 Early English Country Dances* (Northampton, MA, USA: Country Dance and Song Society, 1994). Cecil Sharp published 6 books titled *The Country Dance Book*, from 1909 to 1922. The first book consisted of actual social dances from villages in Devonshire, Derbyshire, Somerset and Surrey. Four other books were free interpretations of dances from Playford and the final book was a set of dances that he had collected when he was touring Kentucky.

There has been considerable research into the origins of Country Dance, which is first mentioned in Elizabethan times, but the studies have proved inconclusive. Forrest (1999: 293-324) has completed an exhaustive survey of the Country Dance repertoire, particularly in the 1651 publication, knowing full well that many Cotswold morris dances have the same structure as a great number of Playford's Country Dances.

Even though no documentation exists to confirm or deny my speculation, I believe that the Cotswold dances were done as parodies of Country Dances, with choreographies performed by pairs of rowdy proletarian men, instead of demure bourgeoisie couples (Forrest, 1999: 353). Forrest (1999: 353) suggests the same when he says, "On occasion these morrises drew inspiration directly from elite sources, imitating ideas wholesale; at other times the dances parodied elite models transforming them into caricatures" (Forrest, 1999: 353). As Roy Dommett says in his analysis of the culture of morris dance, "The undercurrent of fun and holding up to ridicule is inherent in English humour. The collectors (of morris choreographies) may have missed or suppressed it; there is a clear analogy with bawdy song" (Dommett, 1985: 40). Even the use of white hankies by the morris men, thrust and flashed on downbeats, could be a parody of the handkerchiefs common to gentlemen of the court and guilds (Peri, 1992: 1-34).¹⁶⁸

In both cases, the cheeky commentary provided by the Fool, and the absurdity of seeing social dances performed by rowdy men, would have engendered one of the most important elements of Misrule – laughter. Descriptions of carnival events

¹⁶⁸ Another morris dance genre, Molly Dancing, is clearly built on the choreographies of social dances called Feast Dances. See *Truculent Rustics: Molly Dancing in East Anglia Before 1940* by Elaine Bradtke (London, UK: Folklore Society, 1999), p. 23-25. Dr. Bradtke has followed my same line of investigation in regard to the basis of misrule in morris dance, using Molly Dance as her sample ethnography.

invariably describe a positive and boisterous mood during the proceedings. It is this over-all tone that brought Johan Huizinga to the realisation that a more appropriate latin term for mankind was *homo ludens*, instead of *homo sapiens*, because of mankind's predeliction to "play" (Huizinga, 1955: ix-x). Play is one of the binaries of the constant misrule theme of inversion. As Bauman (1987: 94-98) explains in his article contrasting the seventeenth-century puritan off-shoot Quakers with the prevailing spirit of carnivalesque festivals like May Day, the heart of the contrast is in the distinction between frivolity and seriousness in countenance. The former aspect results in nothing more than memories of momentary pleasures, while the latter is the precondition for the fruits of the Protestant work ethic, articulated by Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1958). Even Bakhtin recognized the key role of laughter in the carnivalesque world-view of Rabelais (Bakhtin, 1984: 5).

Pay for Play

A little-understood aspect of misrule imperative is the demand for payment, either in foods or cash, in exchange for the parodies and mockeries mentioned above. The earliest references to morris dance by the guilds occasionally included the fact that the dances were fund-raisers for the activities of the guilds. When morris dance was an integral part of the church ales, it was as a vehicle for raising funds for the church. After the interregnum, morris dancers collected for the coffers of the revised Whitsun Ales and even the slightly later Friendly Societies. But the greatest reversal of intentions occurred in the golden age of morris dance (1750-1900) when the morris men collected money for their own pockets (Forrest, 1999: 32). In fact, it was well

known that a substantial amount of money could be had during a tour. A famous story was often told of a dancer who could not bring himself to go home to attend the funeral of his daughter because he dare not give up the lucrative income from morris dance that would sustain the rest of his family (Chandler, 1993a: 203).

The collecting of money fell to the cake-bearer in a typical Cotswold team. This man, a companion peripheral in addition to the Fool, had an unusual object that allowed him to collect money. It was a mace or even a sword that was held upright. Resting on its hilt and completely surrounding the blade was a circular pan holding a cake. In exchange for money for the morris dancers, the audience member would be given a piece of cake as a token expression of gratitude. This could very well be an inheritance of the same concept at sixteenth century performances of the Robin Hood play, where small paper rosettes were given to those who donated money.

The common term for collecting money in this manner is called cadging, a concept found in all customs that involved misrule visitations, etc. The collecting of money had the added distinction of separating the cadgers from the beggars; hence the term “pay-for-play”. Begging and its associated vagrancy was a serious societal problem throughout England’s history. For example, in 1572 the Poor Law was established which legislated strict, even cruel, laws to restrict and outright ban those who lived on the streets by their wits. Conversely, busking has also been a time-honoured activity in England, even if marginalized. David Cohen and Ben Greenwood, in their book *The Buskers*, have offered a detailed study of the history of busking in England, and found it to be prevalent and even an annoyance in all stages of history. The most common and most misunderstood variation on this principal is

Boxing Day, following Christmas Day. On Boxing Day, all the service employees who regularly visited homes for the purposes of making deliveries or offering services would go to each house with a box in order to collect a gratuity.

There is one aspect to cadging or busking which can be slightly sinister. In some cases there is an added element of extortion. If the host character does not provide an offering, there can sometimes be unfortunate consequences. A phenomenon known as Mischief Night, which occurs on All Hallow's Eve (i.e., Halloween) and before that, May Eve, may be linked to a kind of soft retribution applied to the occasional hosts who refused the welcome a cadging ensemble.¹⁶⁹

The final word on this subject usually goes to a Lady Fermanagh who wrote, "I can't help giving the Morrises money when they come for they tell me everybody doing it is the best way to send them going" (Chandler, 1993a: 66). One of the theories put forward to explain the collapse of the custom of morris dancing is that legislation was created to offer relief to the working poor when they were unemployed, such as the Workman's Compensation Act of 1906, the Old Age Pension of 1909, and the National Insurance Act of 1911 (Easton, 1964: 254-55).

¹⁶⁹ Certainly this is my memory of Halloween, when houses that were obviously occupied by people who refused to answer the door to us trick-or-treaters. They were summarily "punished" with mischief in the form of papering their bushes. The nights of Halloween and May Eve, generally named Mischief Night, are famous for the mayhem performed by older youths. However, I have not been able to find a link between misrule non-payment and unfortunate consequences in any literature or research. For information about Halloween mischief, see *Halloween From Pagan Ritual to Party Night* by Nicholas Rogers (New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 57-73. See Roud, 2006: 326-27, who accords the concept so much importance that he even incorporated it into the sub-title of his book, *the English Year: A Month-by-Month Guide to The Nation's Customs and Festivals, from May Day to Mischief Night*, Simpson and Roud, 2000: 241-42, and Kightly, 1986: 165-66.

Modern Morris Dance

Fast forward to the present. From the vantage of a participant observer within the Vancouver Morris Men since 1986, I have had an excellent opportunity to see a morris group function internally and externally as a participant in the life of Vancouver, the West Coast, and in the world-wide morris community.¹⁷⁰ This rare opportunity to be a member of such an active group also allowed me to participate in their three tours of England, which garnered many accolades and admirers.

The Vancouver Morris Men have an impressive breadth of activities and ambitions, assembling repertoires of dances in all the major genres of morris dance and mumming. Because of the extensive experience and high standards of this morris group, I believe my observations of morris dance are relatively complete and far-ranging, thanks to the team and its leadership, so I believe they can easily be described as a clear representative of a modern morris dance team.

Seasonal Cycles

The Vancouver Morris Men perform their morris dance traditions year round. In their early years, they focused exclusively on the Cotswold tradition, but that performance regimen has now been restricted to the summer months.¹⁷¹ The practices for the Cotswold tradition begin in April, similar to the traditional morris teams of

¹⁷⁰ The Vancouver Morris Men was founded in 1982. This date is about fifteen years after the first prominent revival teams of the third revival in the home country of England. The following observations are derived in part from my long-term association with the Vancouver Morris Men as a musician and dancer.

¹⁷¹ For a brief period of time, the VMM attempted to conduct four genres of morris dance according to the season: Welsh Border Morris dance in the Winter with a brief interlude of Molly Dancing in January, Cotswold genre in the Spring, and Northwest Dance in the summer. These genres are roughly aligned to their original seasons, but the team eventually came to the belief that they were spreading their interests too thinly, resulting in a decline in technical skill and genre distinctiveness.

old. However, they continue to dance well into the summer, long past the days when the traditional dancers would have stopped for another year.

There is an increase in activity during the month of May, but Whitsuntide is not the reason why. The closest that Whitsuntide is observed is during the Canada-wide Victoria Day long week-end and America-wide Memorial Day. The former often has extensive “May Day” activities, but the VMM have chosen to observe the holiday in a modest setting in a nearby district with a turn-of-the-century house peopled by re-enactors with a sprinkle of bemused observers. Essentially the occasion is a leisurely dance-out and picnic. For the Memorial Day long week-end, the VMM usually attend a folk festival in Seattle with other morris dance teams but, again, the notion that Whitsuntide is being observed seems to be inconsequential. Essentially the occasions are opportunities to display dance skills and socialize with other dance teams. There are no ancillary activities that signal Whitsuntide.

The one major exception to their generalized performance schedule are the mornings of May first, already described. The VMM arrive at their agreed-on dance location at 5:15 AM, before the sun is up (rain or shine). They then proceed to dance a dozen or so morris dances (lately in the company of the Vancouver female morris team) until some time after 6:30 AM with occasional interludes for choral songs such as “I like to rise”. There is a perfunctory May Queen chosen in advance from among the female morris dancers. The understanding is that no audience needs to witness the event, although over the years a small number of stalwarts (which includes friends and relations of the morris men and women) attend the ceremony.

Morris May morning is repeated in many cities across North America and England, with some teams expressing pride in the complete lack of audience.¹⁷² Although there would appear to be a precedent in the custom of May Mornings in England, there are absolutely no records of morris dance, May Queens, or maypoles. Most important, morris dance is the centre of attention and not the gathering of May flowers. A series of postings on the Morris Dance Discussion Listserv suggested that random teams in England spontaneously decided to dance in the pre-dawn hours of May first, some time in the mid-60s. However, there seemed to have been a precedent in Oxford, England. A ceremony was developed in which a boys' choir from St. Mary Magdalen College sang Latin hymns from a tower at the dawn of May first, a custom that was founded in the late seventeenth century to celebrate the construction of the bell tower (Judge, 1986: 16). For the last hundred years the event has attracted a large following intent on hearing the choir. In 1923 the Oxford Morris Men, a revival team, decided to take advantage of the opportunity and dance for the assembled. Likely this is the first instance of May morning morris dancing.

Those Below Rule Those Above

On a typical day of performance, usually called a "dance-out", the twelve or so members of the team meet in a pre-arranged location. As mentioned earlier, outdoor performances are considered most preferential, minus stages and sound systems. Among the most preferred settings are the plazas on Granville Island in Vancouver, a public market square, with no vehicle traffic to disrupt the proceedings, either in terms of noise or the intrusion of cars coming and going from parking stalls,

¹⁷² For a scathing review of a May Morning morris event in England, see Richard Lewis, *The Magic of Spring: My Year Learning To Be English* (London, UK: Atlantic Books, 2005) pp. 123-146.

a typical experience elsewhere. (The intrusion of vehicles in the imagined space of a communal area like a public market is a common theme of annoyance for performing out of doors, in public spaces, that is common to most teams.)

The appearance of the team is considered optimal by the members if the team appears without any notice, performs vigorously and boisterously for about half an hour or an hour, and then disappears as quickly and mysteriously as their arrival. However, appearances are deceiving. Regardless of the spontaneous and even mischievous nature of the performance, the team's organizers have almost certainly made previous arrangements with the owners of the space, even if the owners are civic authorities. This kind of cooperation "behind the scenes" is necessary for one or more reasons.

Public spaces are very rarely truly "public". Rather, they are managed by individuals, companies, or societies who require certain considerations, particularly in regard to liability insurance. Their concern is the possibility that the team could accidentally injure themselves or a member of the public, or cause damage. This concern is not entirely unrealistic, given the use of sticks in several of the dances. When the sticks are clashed together, splinters and even entire sticks sometimes go flying out to the public which has arranged itself in a circle around the dancers, and occasionally slightly further away to parked cars. Another occasional concern is the presence of other street performers or buskers. There is an unwritten code of respect between street performers that the first person to arrive at the performance site is the rightful occupant, and any performer must be careful not to "invade" another

performer's site, particularly in terms of sound. These are just a few considerations that must be kept in mind when a morris team performs in an informal manner.

The above description of seeming spontaneity actually governed by negotiations and compromises is a perfect fit with the element of Misrule that specifies the manner in which "those below rule those above" through the medium of negotiations.

However, who are "those below" in this scenario? The membership of the Vancouver Morris Men is distinctly middle-class with representatives from engineering, the teaching professions, bus drivers, etc. Further, their morris dancing activity is an avocation, a hobby, a recreational pursuit. "Those above" are virtually the same societal level, although it's difficult to know for certain, given the public and mobile nature of those who attend the market. The only elements that distinguish the people of the morris team from the people in the audience are the costumes of the dancers, which resemble a uniform in that they are colourful and similar. In effect, the men of the Vancouver Morris Men are imposing their avocation on the public in the name of tradition.

I do not mean to dismiss the activities of the Vancouver Morris Men as a mere hobby. In the last twenty years, there has been serious scholarship directed at avocations. One of the earliest attempts to identify the constituency and concerns of avocationists who happen to perform music and dance (including morris dance) was by Ruth Finnegan in her 1989 (reprinted 2007) book *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English town*. Another milestone in the study of music avocationists is Mark Slobin's 1992 study *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West*. He found

that amateur music ensembles function very much as an affinity group where the performance medium is almost immaterial compared to the “agency” that is afforded the individuals and the group as a whole to bond and share (Slobin, 1993: 104-106). Without a doubt this is a major factor in the organisation of the Vancouver Morris Men (and all other music ensembles with which I have been associated). It has been my experience that the technical demands of technical achievement were in constant tension with the casual camaraderie of the group. This tension even translated into the choice of repertoire and the number and type of performances. The latest examination of avocationism comes from University of Calgary sociologist Robert Stebbins, *Serious Leisure: A Perspective for Our Time*.¹⁷³ He identifies three categories of leisure activity – serious, casual, and project-based – and concludes that amateur groups of all stripes do best when they successfully blend his three categories. More important, Professor Stebbins brings analytical rigour and deep insight into a typical human activity that is far too easily dismissed as inconsequential to real-life vocations and aspirations. The Vancouver Morris Men are an excellent example of the successful blending of all three aspects as it constantly re-invents itself. However, this reflexivity also illustrates the profound difference between the traditional morris men and the modern morris dancers (both men and women). While both constituencies both clearly enjoy what they do, premodern dancers were motivated by the pressures of economic difficulties and class exasperations whereas modern dancers are governed by the elements of leisure.

¹⁷³ He has also created a web-based journal and discussion group devoted to the same topic - <http://www.soci.ucalgary.ca/seriousleisure/>

The Theatre of Misrule

It is in this area of analysis that the Vancouver Morris men are clearly differentiated from the traditional morris dancers and their historical precedents. And in this regard, they have much in common with other morris teams in Canada, the United States, and even England. It is all a matter of absence. In the many years that I danced with them, they have never had a Fool. The substitute interlocutor is often an announcer drawn from the ranks of the dancers who informs the happenstance audience of the next dance to be performed, and some details of its provenance. The dynamic tension that exists between the mute seriousness of the dancers and the frivolity and mockery of the Fool is entirely absent. Although Fools are encountered in some North American and English revival teams, they are the exception rather than the rule. Some modern teams, including the Vancouver Morris Men, have revived the Renaissance penchant for a pretend animal peripheral which was always a man costumed as a "horse". The renaissance morris "horse" was abandoned in the transition of morris dance during the Interregnum. The presence of the animal peripheral was revived along with morris dance in the twentieth century, but in addition to horse figures, many other "creatures" were created, ranging from unicorns to lobsters. These animal creatures gambolled around the edges of the teams during their dance presentations and entertained children and adults with the mimed actions, imitating in a diluted manner the role of the Fool.

The parody and resultant humour of the Cotswold morris dance as a mockery of Country Dance is largely absent. When the original seventeenth, eighteenth, and even nineteenth century audiences witnessed morris dance, they were likely aware of

its topsy-turvy, humorous inversion. Country dance, the source of the parody, in its various permutations and variations were in general circulation until the end of the nineteenth century (Jewitt, 2000: 38-39). But audiences today have absolutely no reference with which to recognize the humour in the morris dance “take” on Country Dance. Except for an extremely small percentage of the population that practices country (and specifically Playford) dances as a recreation, the general public, with its modern ideas about dance is not even remotely aware of morris dances’ associations with Country Dance.¹⁷⁴

The only potential for humour is the banter of some of the VMM announcers who engage in light repartee. And for some viewers, the look of morris dance is ludicrous, and therefore reason in and of itself for laughter. This was the impression of a bystander video-taped by CTV when it was filming a dance-out of the Vancouver Morris Men at Granville Island. In front of the masses of viewers on the 6 o’clock news, he speculated that the morris dancers must be drunk.

Pay for Play

The VMM have a haphazard manner of cadging. If and when they decide to collect money, it often falls to a free dancer who circulates among the audience with a collection box. There is some ambivalence in the team about cadging because, unlike the traditional dancers of old, the members of the Vancouver Morris Men are middle class and are not in financial straits by any means. They own a Sword-cake, and occasionally commandeer one of the team to be a cake-bearer to hand out pieces of

¹⁷⁴ Professor Russell, mentioned earlier in reference to the genre of parody folk songs, makes an important point when he says that “without an element of humour at the expense of the original, an imitation cannot be termed parody (Russell, 1988: 72).

cake, but the team volunteer often forgets to collect money in exchange for the pieces of cake received by the public.¹⁷⁵

Summary

As can be seen in the above descriptions, the misrule imperative in premodern morris dance and its related customs is attenuated in modern morris dance. Currently it is filled with a mix of neo-pagan assumptions and serious avocational interests. Normally there would be no problem with this stage of the evolution of a cultural activity, but a problem is encountered. Modern morris dance is performed in public, so it communicates symbolism and knowledge, whether consciously or unconsciously. And it is not only the public who is receiving the information, so too is the media and the press. Whether morris dancers care to think about it or not, they are the bearers of a tradition and therefore responsible for maintaining its integrity. And as I have already pointed out, the current hermeneutics of pagan theory (or the older Merrie England theory) has no support in the literature and scholarship, and may even be damaging to morris dance as a representative of the folk dance traditions of England.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Busking has one important aspect which is separate from the mere pay for play imperative. When I worked as an Artist-in-Residence at Expo 86 in Vancouver, I remember being told often by buskers that the cash payment that one receives immediately after a performance was an immediate reality check. If the performance was appreciated, the money in the hat was a clear vote of success and accomplishment.

¹⁷⁶ The irony in this situation is that the morris dance tradition could easily align itself with the Labour Movement, either substantially or at the very least, in passing, and likely receive praise and support.

CONCLUSION

In chapter one, I defined two historical groups of dancers, modern and premodern, and then tracked the study of their respective histories and evolution through the vagaries of cultural change. I then rehearsed the interpretations of morris dance, ranging from vestiges of fertility cults to the Merrie England movement and the criticisms that both have engendered. This was followed by an introduction to a new interpretation based on the theory of misrule. Chapter two relived my journey of discovery as it wound its way through the first impressions and received knowledge of the vestiges of fertility cult inherent in the symbols of morris dance, through to the debunking of the concepts thanks in part to the literature but principally due to the experience of a May Day tradition in New Westminster and its complete absence of morris dance in its agenda. This gradual discovery of a parallel tradition was accompanied by a growing understanding that the English media and large segments of the English public were hostile to the morris dance in either of its Fertility Cult or Merrie England manifestations. Chapter three examined in detail the culture of misrule, followed by a side-by-side comparison of premodern and modern morris dance in chapter four with constant reference to the four conditions of misrule.

As can be seen in the previous survey, the Vancouver Morris Men (as a sample of a typical morris dance team) differ from their historical precedents, as to be expected in the life of a custom. The question that often arises is in regard to the authenticity of the custom in the hands of groups like the Vancouver Morris Men. On the surface it would appear that they are not “authentic”, given the apparent possibility of misrule functioning in the earlier forms of morris dance. Further, they

and others have wandered considerably away from the custom by implying by actions, or overtly stating in words, that morris dance is a fertility or good-luck custom.

Handler and Linnekin (1984) have become the benchmark of understanding authenticity in folklore during their encounters with multitudes of examples of change in customs and traditions. They dismiss the concept.

To posit a distinction between genuine and spurious traditions is to overlook the fact that social life is always symbolically constructed, never naturally given... (Handler and Linnekin, 1984: 281)

The origin of cultural practices is largely irrelevant to the experience of tradition; authenticity is always defined in the present. Rather, the latter is an arbitrary symbolic designation; an assigned meaning rather than an objective quality. (ibid, 286)

...it is best to think of tradition as a process that involves continual re-creation (ibid, 287)

Michael Owen Jones takes the view one step further by declaring that the construction of tradition exists solely in the domain of the individual, therefore atomising the argument to its smallest degree.

While many researchers are concerned with group practices, collective identity and cultural institutions, I prefer to examine tradition as symbolic construction in the activities and lifestyles of an individual who intentionally selects elements of what he or she conceives to be a tradition in order to fashion an identity articulated through various media. (Jones, 2000: 120)

Their view agrees with other post-modern realists (or sceptics, depending on one's point of view), most notably Hobsbawm and Rangers' *Invention of Tradition* (1983) and Roy Wagner's *The Invention of Culture* (1981).

However, I believe this perspective clashes with the view that morris dance has the potential to be a representative icon of the emerging definition of England (as opposed to Great Britain). This obvious role for morris dance is, surprisingly, the butt of sarcasm and humour among the culture watchers of England within the media. The post-modern thought of Hobsbawm and the others would have us shrug our shoulders when either the championing or defaming of morris dance as an ethnic symbol of England is raised. Another postmodern reaction is cultural relativism, where polysemy reigns. One of the most persuasive arguments for the conflicted and ultimately damaging role of postmodernism to the question of the representation of England in its music and dance was put forward by Mike Sutton of the School of Humanities, University of Northumbria. In his on-line essay, he concludes that the modern media has “alienated most English people from their musical traditions” (2000: 9/12). The musical choices made by the English people “are monitored, and manipulated, by the people who manage the entertainment industry” (ibid.). He goes on to define *Britishness* as “a matter of civic rights and obligations”, and *Englishness* as a matter of cultural (but not ethnic) identity.¹⁷⁷

I propose that the morris dance community can extricate itself from the constant barrage of criticism by continuing its internal campaign of purging itself of its cargo cult, the assumptions that morris dance has its origins in ancient fertility cults. Some teams (notably the Vancouver Morris Men) have de-emphasized their attachment to this theory, citing the common abrogation that the origins, and therefore

¹⁷⁷ The literature that explores the subject of English representation begins with *The Land Without Music: Music, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* by Andrew Blake (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997) and *The English Musical Renaissance, 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music* (2nd edition), by Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2001).

the core *raison d'être* are “lost in the mists of time.” In the morris community, the adoption of this response is to “shut up and dance.” In other words, a morris dance team appears in public, dances, and leaves without saying anything substantive to the audience. What remains, however, is a vacuum of information that bodes badly for England’s continuing project of searching for its new definition of itself in its past, and the constant harangues of the media.

I believe that the answer to this dilemma is to adopt the thesis that morris dance is yet another aspect of a long-standing, yet constantly evolving, cultural process called Misrule. The template offers realistic history that can be plumbed and exploited from the most respected and accredited cultural historians in the West. It can also provide light-hearted banter and surface explanations of origins that can easily satisfy the needs of the public. And it aligns with the struggle of disadvantaged communities who are forever being championed by the press.

If teams like the Vancouver Morris Men were to incorporate some of the “lost” markers of misrule, outlined above, they would present a less confused and muddled picture as they currently present when they dance in public. By doing so, they would open the door to an invigorating understanding of English proletarian creativity. If the same approach was adopted in England, the resultant clarity would likely resonate with the English public and accord with England’s emerging self-identity.

Coda

“We are not representing morris dancers,
we ARE morris dancers.”

These words from Graham Baldwin, the squire of the Vancouver Morris Men, challenge my pre-conceived notions of presenting morris dancing according to the thesis I have created in this paper. They hinge on a single word – re-enactment.

For Re-enactment

My thoughts on the presentation of morris dance were founded on many years of mounting concerts of music in venues ranging from evening recital halls to daytime gyms in grade schools. Further, all of my programs consisted of music that was unfamiliar to almost all my target audiences. My performances of Early Music and Japanese traditional flute music could even be counted as esoteric. As much as I personally appreciated the depth and sophistication of their musical content, I discovered that they received their best reception when they were enhanced with background information. At first I used the typical devices common to classical music, program notes and talks during the performances, a procedure I have seen countless times. However, the reception still seemed tentative, so I decided to frame the concerts in theatrical devices and conventions which I came to refer to as Theatre of the Recital. My strategy was to inform the public as well as entertain them. I did this by experimenting with a multitude of stage conventions, ranging from simple adjustments like memorizing the music so I could freely move, to full-fledged theatre

pieces involving scripts, costumes, etc. The goal was to place the audience into the context of the culture from which the program of music was extracted so that they could experience the music in as close a manner as the original listeners. I believe my efforts were successful, judging from my twenty years of concertizing in this manner, with many repeat performances and Canada Council support.

The differentiation of context and *text* (or content) is a constant theme in cultural studies. For Steven Lynn, the context consists of critical theories applied to literature (Lynn, 2001: 3-11). Marshal MacLuhan took a very radical stance on the subject when he declared that the medium (i.e., the context) was the message (i.e., text), negating the separate life of a *text*. The struggle of *text* and context lays at the heart of post-modernism and its lack of faith in the efficacy of *text* in the light of the context of multiple readers and the inevitable polysemy that results. For the purposes of this paper, the author who most exemplifies the problematic dichotomy of *text* and context is Edward Hall (1914-). He defined context in terms of High and Low culture context (Hall, 1977: 91). A High Context culture has a rich and relevant background known to all which therefore requires no explication. A High Context culture has a wide network of associations and understandings, often implicit, whereas a Low Context culture often reverts to explicit descriptions and analysis to compensate for a lack of general understanding and consensus. However, a Low Context event can even be completely context-free, as certain New Music performances appear to aspire. As I see it, morris dance, whose *text* is choreography, is a Low Context event in need of explanation because it is completely out of the frame of reference of most

members of the modern public (especially outside of England in Canada, Australia, etc.)

With this in mind, I looked at the Vancouver Morris Men as an ideal candidate for the same theatrical style of presentation. The staple of the VMM when in the public eye was to simply dance, with occasional announcements (and brochures) provided by a volunteer dancer who sometimes described the villages and even country from which the dances originated. In addition there was occasional banter about the fertility or luck that accompanied morris dancing, although this became less prominent in the later years of my association with the VMM.

It was my contention that the public performances of the VMM could be greatly enhanced with the regular use of a Fool and Collector, a key and indispensable feature of early morris. As they joke between themselves and with the dancers, and the audience about the dance and their reasons for appearing that day, the audience would learn the meaning of the symbols of morris dance. Further, if the side adopted the obvious markers of misrule exhibited by the early morris dancers, the theatre of the performance would be highly effective in communicating a realistic portrayal of English cultural history. In doing so, morris dancers would be able to contribute to the emerging definition of English ethnicity in a meaningful manner, because their theatrical markers would point directly to English traditional culture (as opposed to the imaginary world of the prevailing fertility cult).

Aside from my own intuitions about the usefulness of such a procedure, I was buoyed by studies in performativity. The principal of role-playing in theatre, ritual, and even in everyday life, as outlined by Erving Goffman, suggested that it was

entirely possible to present the misrule elements of morris dance in a theatrical manner that would suspend the disbelief of the audience through the use of theatrical conventions (Turner, 1987: 150).¹⁷⁸ Further support came from dramaturgy where the engagement of the actors in a play takes on a life of its own (Brissett and Edgeley, 1990:1-14). To quote Clifford Geertz (1983: 27), “it is the *making*, and not the *faking* of meaning that is fundamental”. In my scenario, the morris dancers’ choreography would be enhanced with the interlocutors represented by the Fool and the Collector.

Robert Cantwell (1993) has plumbed the depths of theory that drives the recreation of a particular tradition or custom, particularly the “three Ds” (dress, dance, diet) so frequently found in state-sponsored world festivals of culture. He coined the term *ethnomimesis* to describe the process of people bringing to life the heritage of their ancestors. The syllable “ethno” is self evident, but the term “mimesis” required careful explanation. He identified three characteristics (Cantwell, 1993: 5-7). First was the simple explanation that it represents the concept of imitation, philosophically rooted in Aristotle’s maxim of primary learning, “this is that”. As Cantwell says, “Imitation transcends social relations and goes directly to the imaginative interplay between people and the material circumstances in which they live.” The second condition is “impersonation (which) is...an embodiment, in a person, of a total sense of life, which is the cultural infrastructure of personality”. Finally, he defines the condition of “artistic illusion” that is at the heart of popular and elite cultural expressions in the arts. The anthropologist Michael Taussig has also championed the

¹⁷⁸ The idea of a “willing suspension of disbelief” was coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) in his set of essays titled *Biographia Literaria*, chapter fourteen, but it has echoed from early sources in western literature such as Shakespeare’s comment in *Henry V*, “make imaginary puissance...’tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings...turning th’accomplishment of many years into an hourglass”.

concept of mimesis in his book *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993). He looked for an alternate style of explanation in various cultures that differed from discourse and found that “mimesis is the nature that culture uses to create a second nature”.

Perhaps the most eloquent and detailed defence of recreating a custom or tradition is by Roger Abrahams in his singular article, “Toward an Enactment-Centered Theory of Folklore” (1977). He drew a distinction between *act* and *enactment*. The latter was seen as heightened expressions of the former which were rooted in the everyday. Both acted in a dynamic relationship akin to a dialectic (Abrahams, 1977: 100). “Each enactment is more than a rendering, direct or inverted, of social norms; it is an experience itself. Each draws upon a community’s concern with clumsiness, embarrassment, confusion and conflict of the everyday; but in forming and stylizing the reported events, it develops a ‘life’ of its own” (ibid, 97). He then goes on to differentiate ritual from play, despite the fact that they both share many salient points. “...for the players themselves, an individual transcendence occurs at times in which something like the experience, that Turner, following Czikszentmihalyi, calls ‘flow’” (ibid, 116). The latter scholar explored the well-known psychological realm of “losing oneself” (or more accurately, “finding oneself”) during a heightened state of being while performing a cultural activity like a performance art.

Finally, Nial MacKinnon makes a key point echoed by many when he describes the soul of revival as a core, synchronic template that is surrounded by diachronic innovations determined by the culture of the time (MacKinnon, 1994: 63).

By contrast, he sees re-enactment as an action which is framed or bounded, hermetically shielded from the present.

Against Re-enactment

I was accused of proposing to the Vancouver Morris Men that they re-enact the context of morris dance from one hundred to three hundred years ago and, in so doing, was asking them to “pretend”. The result, I was told, was that the members of the team would feel inauthentic and self-conscious, the polar opposite of Czikszenmihalyi’s “flow”, above. In effect, I was proposing that the team engage in “fakedance”, rather than “folkdance”, recalling Dave Harker’s incendiary book title *Fakesong* (1985).

Re-enactment is a term commonly used by organisations that wish to re-live battles at various times of history, but it can also refer to people who re-create the life and times of individuals in history. The most famous organisation that indulges in the pastime of re-creation of personalities and events is the Society for Creative Anachronism, founded in California in 1966. One of their achievements is the mounting of Renaissance Faires (sic) in which participants re-create a Renaissance village for the benefit of a paying public. Unfortunately they have been criticised extensively for their haphazard application of history to their individual projects. Even museums that are peopled with costumed employees avoid the theatrical convention of re-enactment and specify that their costumed “citizens” speak in modern terms about the actions of the past people they represent.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ This information comes from an interview I conducted with Lorraine O’Byrne, the curator of the Black Creek Pioneer Village in metro Toronto, on October 29, 2004. Her term for her costumed

Several English authors have taken great exception to the application of re-enactment to England's customs and traditions. One of the most acerbic critics of re-enactment is Robert Hewison in his study titled *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (1987), mentioned earlier. He begins by examining heritage cultural centres like the Wigan Heritage Museum and finds a "result that is entirely post-modernist; a re-working of an inherited vision but with all the self-consciousness of the intervention of the medium" (ibid, 132). "In the face of apparent decline and disintegration, it is not surprising that the past seems a better place. Yet it is irrecoverable, for we are condemned to live perpetually in the present. What matters is not the past, but our relationship with it" (ibid, 43). "Through the filter of the nostalgia we change the past, and through the conservative impulse we seek to change the present. The question then is not whether or not we should preserve the past, but what kind of past we have chosen to preserve, and what that has done to our present" (ibid, 47).

The same ground was covered by fiction writers as well. Julian Barnes explored the ramifications of re-enactment and how it can go terribly wrong in his novel *England, England* (1998). The author proposes a fictional theme park that encapsulates all the heritage markers of England such as the Tower Bridge and a village green in one "convenient location" on the Isle of Wright. The re-enactors begin to believe their personas are real, and mayhem ensues. Another author that rakes re-enactment over the coals is Kingsley Amis (mentioned in chapter 1). In his novel *Lucky Jim* (1954), the characters re-enact the Victorian niceties of Merrie

employees is "interpreters". The one exception to this general principal of "interpreters" is Williamsburg in the United States which has engaged re-enactors throughout their "living museum".

England by singing madrigals and playing recorders in their living room. When the protagonist is asked to join in the general merriment he is driven to despair and then a complete mental breakdown in front of his Merrie England hosts. The setting is a university campus and the people within the story are all academics, suggesting that the mentality of mindless re-enactment functioned at the most sophisticated and thoughtful level of society.

Closer to home, anthropologist Pauline Greenhill has investigated the unconscious hegemony and self-identity of three different English-Canadian groups in Canada, a sample set of interviewees, the animators of the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, and most telling, morris dancers. Her examinations were published in a book-length study titled *Ethnicity in the Mainstream: Three Studies of English Canadian Culture in Ontario* (1994a).¹⁸⁰ Her concern with the power and reification of “white” culture in a multicultural context illustrates one example of the kind of selective mediation that exists in the re-enactment of morris dance (Greenhill, 1994a: 159).¹⁸¹

Re-enactment has also reared its controversial head in the realm of state-sponsored folk dance companies, perhaps the most mediated of all folk dance forms. Anthony Shay (2002, 2006) is the foremost scholar of theatricalised dance as performed on world stages. His first study encompassed folk dance companies that

¹⁸⁰ Dr. Greenhill’s research in the Englishness of morris dance in Canada was published in the *Journal of American Folklore* (Volume 115, Number 456, Spring 2002) under the title “Folk and Academic Racism: Concepts from Morris and Folklore” (pp. 226-46) and before that, “On the Whiteness of Morris: An Illumination of Canadian Folklore,” in *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin*, volume 28, number 3, pp. 13-16. Both Pauline Greenhill and Georgina Boyes (*The Imagined Village*, 1993) have taken male morris dancers to task for their alleged misogyny. See Boyes, 1993: 210, and Greenhill, 1994b:160.

¹⁸¹ Another example of an unwelcome mediation that had unexpected and an even dark agenda was the colonial imperialism inherent in the Merrie England children’s celebrations documented by Anne Bloomfield in her article titled “Drill and dance as symbols of imperialism”, mentioned earlier.

perform ethnic dances from Russia (Moiseyev), Mexico (Ballet Folklórico), Croatia (LADO), Egypt (Bazaar), Greece (Doru Stratou Greek Dances Theatre) and Turkey (Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble), and his second book concentrated on amateur diasporan and special interest (non-related) ethnic dance associations in Canada and the United States. In all the scenarios he investigates, one problem constantly arises in that the representation that is seen on the stage (or in the International Folkdance club) is so mediated as to be almost unrecognizable to the original dancers, and more important, virtually unrelated to the actual political and social conditions of each country. This is a problem well known in Canada, where it is often referred to as the Three Ds – dress, dance, and diet, mentioned earlier. These three cultural components are often chosen to represent an ethnicity, partly because they seem to offer a quick view of a culture, and partly because they are easy to mount and bypass the difficult problem of translation. The obvious flaw is that their representations are facile at best, and misleading at worst.¹⁸²

The Verdict

In the end, it seems to me that the most efficacious action to take is non-action. In other words, theorists such as myself should leave well enough alone. Otherwise, we only frustrate the natural evolution of the tradition by imposing mediated conditions which in the end, only serve to disrupt the course of events that bend and renew a custom according to the culture of the time.

¹⁸² I once received a summary of a meeting of Canadian-Ukrainian dance organisation whose sole agenda was to determine if there was any way to re-constitute the choreographies so that they could once again resemble their original village contexts. Professor Andriy Nahachewsky of the University of Alberta has devoted his career to examining and unravelling this dilemma. See his essay “Participatory and Presentational Dance as Ethnochoreological Categories,” in *Dance Research Journal*, volume 27, number 1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 1-15.

We actually have an excellent example of morris dance that has evolved into the future with absolutely no mediation by antiquarians or re-enactors. There is a form of morris dance in the northwest of England called Carnival Morris. It is comprised of girls between the approximate ages of 6 and 16 who dress in costumes resembling cheer leaders. They often hold pom-poms in their hands with the result that their style of morris dance is disparagingly referred to as Fluffy Morris. The music that accompanies their dance is pop, techno or rave genres, played on loudspeakers. Carnival Morris is essentially competitive and takes place indoors for prizes and prestige. Occasionally they participate in summer civic parades; hence, their adjective “Carnival”, a reference to the exhibitions similar to the Pacific National Exhibition with its opening parade followed by several days of fun rides, produce and commercial exhibitions, and concerts of music. Their dances are derived from the regimented choreographies of a form of premodern morris called Northwest Morris that was current from the 1880s to the turn of the century. When young men lost interest in the morris dance, the key instructors offered their expertise to girls, who quickly accepted the tradition and converted it into the growing and vital activity that it is today. It is governed and organized by an association called the North of England Morris Dancing Carnival Organisation, and it is comprised of over 60 teams. In the north, if one inquires about morris dancing, the teams of young, energetic girls are almost the first thought that comes to mind. In a curious twist of fate, there are revival teams of premodern Northwest Morris dancers including all-female teams.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ It is worth noting that there is no literature about Carnival Morris except web sites and the occasional footnote in the literature. My guess is that the genre is far removed from the premodern “tradition”, coupled with the ubiquitous use of pop music and dance that creates a rave kind of ambiance, that it is completely off the radar of morris dance academics.

Another morris dance team that is breaking new ground is the group Morris Off. They are comprised of males and females in their twenties who have created a stage production for summer festivals that feature Cotswold morris dance and assorted mascot animals. Their costume is a mix of traditional white pants and shirts, but with modern touches such as ribbons hanging in unusual places on the shirts, and most interesting of all, no jingle bell pads attached to their legs. They are touted as the new face of morris dance, although it is too early to determine if they will be the engine behind a fourth revival.¹⁸⁴ Their movement will be competing with street dance teams like hip hop dance crews and b-boys (break dancers). The cache for street dance received a huge boost when the fictional Torrance Community Dance Group that was shown in the 1999 music video for a song by Fatboy Slim (aka Norman Cook), "Praise you" (directed by Spike Jonz). In many interesting respects, they possess the same cultural imperatives as morris dance misrule, but without the "baggage" of cultural heritage.

Although I described a template of morris dance which runs throughout the history of morris dance, based on the four elements of misrule, the latest manifestation of morris dance seems to have only faint echoes of the template, with many misrule factors replaced by the prerogatives of "serious leisure". The advantage of allowing morris dance to follow its course without the mediation of academics is the globalisation of the activity, reminiscent of several English sports like cricket and soccer which have taken on a life of their own, quite separate from the country of their origins. The morris dance community has already been in the throws of

¹⁸⁴ See "Dancing on English Ground," by Colin Irwin in *English Dance and Song* magazine, Winter, 2005: 16-17, and "Dancing 4 England," by Jon Brenner in *Froots* magazine, no. 258, December 2004: 23-25.

evolutionary change since the early 1970s as women become active and equal participants. Schofield (2004: 71, 76-77) recorded the clash of the male revival teams with the women clamouring to be taught morris dance at England's pre-eminent folk music and dance festival, Sidmouth. The outcome was the founding of a mirror organisation of the all-male Ring, called Women's Morris Federation (aka the Fed) founded in 1975.¹⁸⁵ The final stage of evolution in gender blurring was the creation of teams of morris dancing comprised of men and women, united in a third morris dance organisation called Open Morris. All three groups now actively cooperate when morris dance is discussed on the national stage, and are actively planning their representation at the Olympics, which will be stage in London in 2012.

¹⁸⁵ In 1983 they opened their membership to "mixed" teams of men and women. It has not escaped the ironic comments of some academic morris dance scholars who point out that all the teachers of morris dance produced by Cecil Sharp at his Morris Dance school during the first revival were women.

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