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The Origins and Development of English Folk Plays

Millington, Peter Thomas (2002) *The Origins and Development of English Folk Plays*. PhD thesis, University of Sheffield.



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Abstract

This thesis concerns those English folk plays whose plots are centred on the quack doctor character. Earlier researchers proposed three possible origins for these plays: a non-specific mystery play from the time of the crusades, some pre-Christian fertility ritual, and primitive shamanism. All three proposals were based on over-general comparisons, and relied on the key assumption that a continuous history can be traced back from before modern plays to the relevant era. However, in contrast with other customs, no evidence can be found for these plays before the 18th century, despite diligent searching. These theories are therefore disproved. Instead, it is proposed that the plays were attached in the early to mid 18th century to existing house-visiting customs. These were probably the source of the non-representational costumes that are sometimes worn. There is also evidence for the influence of the conventions of the English Harlequinade. The provenance of the scripts is unknown, but similarities between them suggest they ultimately derived from a single proto-text. A full-text database of 181 texts and fragments was built for investigation using cluster analysis, distribution mapping and other computerised techniques, some of which are novel. The cluster analysis has generated a new classification for the play texts that both confirms and extends the established typology. Comparison of the attributes of the clusters, aided by distribution mapping, has resulted in a putative genealogy for the plays that is presented for discussion. Trellis graphing has revealed a core of common lines that can be assembled into a viable script. This represents a reconstructed proto-text, although it requires consolidation with further evidence. Bibliometric analysis suggests that more archival research is needed in the century ending about 1750, which is the key period for the genesis of the plays.

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The origin of English drama seems vague. There is no certain evidence proving its origin. However, it can be traced back from century of succeeding Norman Conquest to England on 1066. Many historians believe that drama came to England along with them. There was information that when the Roman where in England, they established vast... The Miracle plays were presented in all large town city in England. It was arranged to exhibit the whole story from creation to the Day of Judgment in a cycle. There were four famous cycle existed in England.