

THE WILD MORISCO or THE HISTORICAL MORRIS

By Julian Pilling

THERE are a few stage works of around Shakespeare's time that include a morris dance in the action, among them the most important are perhaps Thomas Dekker's 'The Shoemakers' Holiday' and the Fletcher and Shakespeare 'The Two Noble Kinsmen'. So far as the morris is concerned these both have analogues; the shoemakers in 'George-a-Greene' and the motley crew in the Kinsmen in Beaumont's 'Masque of the Inner-Temple and Gray's Inn' of 1613. In these works there is little indication of how the dance should be done and, since they are works that are liable to be performed, it may be useful to try to seek what sort of performance of the dances would be appropriate.

The morris has been one of the most persistent dances in the western world, and here I take morris as the term for the conceit, for it has taken and takes many forms and it is a little difficult to define satisfactorily. The earliest reference that I know is given in 'Historia de la Musica Española' by M. Soriano Fuertes, 1855, where he quotes a morisca as having been done at the marriage of the Count of Barcelona to Petronila of Aragon, c.1149. No details are available here but from the fourteenth century onwards there is information of one kind or another that gives us a picture of what the dance was like.

It is an accident of history that the revival of morris by folk-dance enthusiasts in this century has been based on a dance found by Cecil Sharp in the south midlands. This is sometimes miscalled Cotswold Morris, for the sake of giving it a country setting; but morris, insofar as it is related to a particular place, is not a feature of the countryside but of the town; it needs an audience. The English Folk Dance and Song Society has been very much biased towards the Headington dance in its view of morris and this has created an imbalance, for this particular tradition has been accepted as the norm by many people and this warps judgements. The Headington type of dance has features that place its origin in the seventeenth century, probably at the Restoration. It has the standard features of the country dance of the period in its structure: up a double/chorus; siding/chorus; arming/chorus; and it takes some of the names of the steps from earlier dances: galley from galliard and foray from fleuret. It should also be noted that some parts of the dance are recent introductions; the hobby-horse, and the tune from Arbeau; both by courtesy of d'Arcy Ferrars at the end of the last century. He was a professional pageant master and a patron of the morris.

This feeling that the morris of the south midlands is the norm has led to many misconceptions. Cecil Sharp leaned over backwards to relate the steps of Arbeau's morisco to an unlikely step in Northamptonshire, the conclusion from this, that the Arbeau dance is a 'morris jig', is to imply that it is part of the schemata that this term would suggest. Julia Sutton's notes on the Arbeau dance are also biased by the midland dance, which is understandable as she takes her point of departure from an article by Barbara Lowe who sees an evolution in morris that just is not there in fact, but the view is popular having been pioneered by Sharp and Violet Alford. Barbara Lowe's scholarship is not questioned, it is her conclusions that I feel to be unsound.

The earliest morris of which we have reasonably sound knowledge is the circle of gesticulating men around a lady who holds the symbol of her favour: a ring or an apple. This is familiar from iconographical evidence: Israhel van Meckenem in particular in the fifteenth century. It had presumably grown old in 1575 when Queen Elizabeth watched a morris 'after the auncient style - six dawnsers and a maid marian and a fool' at Kenilworth. This dance would appear to be a kind of mumming where the dancers compete for the favour of the lady. In all the

representations the dancers are always doing something different from each other and are usually dressed differently. The fool is always present, sometimes a moor, sometimes a horse and sometimes Friar Tuck. The musician is always a tabberer. There is obvious relation to the maygames and to Robin Hood, perhaps it is this morris that is referred to in the 'Maids Morris' of Playford of 1690.

As the round morris declined we became aware of two different kinds of morris, one which belongs to a guild and one which belongs to a town. One could accept Vinckenboom's morris at Richmond in 1620 as of the latter while the one in Dekker is presumably of the former. The Richmond dancers are in a unilinear position, there are four dancers, three men and a man-woman while the fool collects money and the horse appears to be dancing alone, the tabberer plays as usual. There may have been bilinear dancing but there is, so far as I know, no direct evidence; one feels that there would be in the processions of the guild or the mayor, but one may be projecting backwards in time that which is now familiar. However one cannot preclude this and there may well have been influence from the other morris to be noted now.

The morris in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' and Beaumont's masque is one that has not been defined. Modern eyes may feel that it is pure anti-masque material but I suspect that there is more to it than that. Where did this particular type of dance come from and why does the schoolmaster call it a morris?

There is a book entitled 'The Passionate Morrice', printed by Richard Jones in 1593, the only indication of an author being the initial 'A'. This work is not about dancing but of a group of lovers staying at a house and the author's philosophising on couples and their aptness for each other. Why should the book then bear this title? I think we may see the answer in this morris of Gerrold the schoolmaster.

When they enter they are five countrymen and Gerrold and five wenches, one of the countrymen is dressed as a monkey. One of the wenches has not turned up, Cicely, the sempster's daughter; this causes consternation and bids to stop the dance. Fortunately the jailor's mad daughter comes and they persuade her to join them. When Gerrold introduces them they are in pairs, though he does not make it as complete as it is in Beaumont's anti-masque. There they are, after the Pedant, a May-Lord and May-Lady, Servingman and chambermaid, Country Clown or Shepherd and Country Wench, an Host and an Hostess, a He-Baboon and a She-Baboon and a He-Fool and a She-Fool. In other words they are in pairs and each appropriate to its kind. This is indeed what 'The Passionate Morrice' describes, different pairs of lovers in their types. In the 'Kinsmen' a maypole is inferred and the presence of the May-Lord and his Lady hark back to the ring morris and the courting of the lady as in the Betley window perhaps, but here each has his lady. The couples suggest also the modern 'Bringing in the May' ceremonies such as we see at Helston. (A photograph of the Helston dance that I have, taken at the turn of the century and before the phenomenal success of Peter Dawson's singing of Katie Moss's 'The Floral Dance' on the new gramophone record, shows but six couples, an interesting sidelight on the escalation of a custom.)

The Fletcher, Shakespeare and Beaumont morris is what Stubbes the Puritan had in mind in the oft-quoted passage. Here there is a certain amount of grotesqueness while the bringing in the May echoes all the romanticism of the nineteenth century. This morris of the copartners perhaps influenced the bilinear dance.

A latter-day reminder of this copartner morris is noted in 'The Illustrated News of the World' on April 24th 1858: '... by far the most interesting from its novelty was the Morris Dance, in which an equal number of both sexes took part; there being in all eighteen performers, including several of the most celebrated professional clowns a reproduction for a holiday occasion of a custom which once existed in some parts of merry England, but has long fallen into desuetude.' This took place at Crystal Palace.

Here we come up against the 'woman' problem in morris. In the ring morris the lady was sometimes a real lady and sometimes a man or boy thus attired, in the copartners' morris there are equal numbers of both sexes. Modern purism has postulated that morris must be male to fit a folkloric hypothesis, while there may well be a case to be made out, there does remain the girls' morris, sometimes a major event as the 'Milkmaids dance' (Judge: 'Jack in the Green', available September 1978) and sometimes on the fringe as the girls' carnival morris of the north west is at the present time. (For the moment I am ignoring the latterday 'women's morris' that is a self-conscious imitation of the men's revival clubs of the 'Morris Ring' organisation; the men's dance here is therapeutic rather than ceremonial and the women's manumissionary.)

Much of the later bilinear morris would seem to have been influenced by the copartner morris. Winster in particular, here we have one side for men and another also for men but referred to as the ladies' side as well as the King and Queen and other characters. In the grotesque versions of the copartner morris the less elegant females may well have been men but it seems likely that the May-Lady, like the Lady of the Ring, Maid Marian or whatever she was called was either a presentable lady or a boy thus disguised. Perhaps she is still with us as Miss World.

The ring morris, the town and guild morris and the copartner morris could all be part of court entertainment and in addition there were dances devised for occasions, all these come under the heading of morisco. Sometimes they were ceremonial affairs and sometimes they veered to the wild morisco, the charivari and the horseplay.

The dance currently known as 'Las Hachas' is classified by Mabel Dolmetsch as a morisco for it is similar to one mentioned by Isabella d'Este in 1502 and thus designated. In 'Nuove Inventioni di Balli' by Cesar Negri, from which this dance is taken, it follows a similar but simpler torch dance for six ladies. Mabel Dolmetsch's notation is an arrangement of the original but the differences mainly concern the presentation as originally it was for a special occasion. We may ask what are the qualities that make this dance a morisco, for it is the only notation that we have, to the present, of such a dance of the period.

Here we are tending to play the pleasant game of elusive definitions for we are asking what is the essential quality of a morris, and we do lack our first need, that the dance be so originally termed. Although anticipating a little may I suggest the following table as features typical though not necessarily essential. Here they are given in relation to the torch dance.

IP Dances called morris or morisco etc. -			
1. Ceremony	+	6. Man/woman	-
2. Travellers	+	7. Fool	-
3. Male	+	8. Hobby horse	-
4. A costume	+	9. Tabberer	- (?)
5. Dancing <u>to</u> an audience	+	10. Other characters	+
11. Dance figures to include:			
a. Rounds	-	(? suggestions of this.)	
b. Processing	+		
c. Hey	+		
d. Lines crossing	+		

To my mind there are sufficient features to justify calling the dance a morisco.

It will be seen that I do not include blackening of the face as a requisite, it has occurred but rarely and is part of the costume. It has been made overmuch of for the sake of fitting an etymological justification of the word morris when one should be content with the general meaning of 'outlandish'. At different times morris/morisco will have had different overtones and it is likely that confusion may always have existed, just as it did in the sixteenth century with 'antic' and

maybe that is why Ben Jonson borrowed 'anti' from the church and claimed his invention, specifying 'anti-masque' to give status to something that was palpably 'antic'.

The sword dance has run a separate road from morris though every now and then they come together, thus some consideration of it is necessary. Present day understanding treats them alike.

There are two kinds of sword dance, the linked and the clashed. We see the linked in the dance of the cutlers in a German sixteenth century drawing and in the dance of the Perth Glovers. These guild dances are both very elaborate affairs, but the dance in Breughel's 'Kermesse of St. George' shows it in a form more familiar to modern eyes. The references to the linked dances are nowhere near so common as those to morris. I see no reason to doubt the linked dance as a sword dance or to search for other uses for the swords as Melusine Wood did, suggesting that the 'rapper' was originally a 'scraper' for animal skins, an extremely unlikely phonetic loss, there is nothing wrong with 'rapier' which is still used. Everyone knows the dance as a sword dance and all representations show it as such. The dance is an 'enclosing' dance and shares features with some of the later garland dances and 'ball de cercolets'.

The clashed sword dance is more frequently mentioned as it was an acceptable war-game. We have the notation of the mattachins and an excellent dance it is. Arbeau seems to prefer the name 'Bouffons', which is suggestive of low comedy and more in keeping with Will Kemp than the Saliis and the Curetes that he uses in his preface; how the other dances differed from Arbeau's we do not know but 'mattashins' appears to have been used for any sword clashing dance.

Fynes Morison, writing from Ireland about 1600 says, '... they dance about a fire commonly in the midst of a room holding withes in their hands, and by certain strains drawing one another into the fire; and also the matachine dance, with naked swords, which they make to meet in divers comely postures. And I have seen them often dance before the Lord Deputy in the houses of Irish lords; and it seemed to me a dangerous sport to see so many naked swords so near the Lord Deputy and the chief commanders of the army in the hands of the Irish Kerne, who had lately been or were not unlike to prove rebels.' Here we have an enclosing dance and a clashing dance. In the accounts of the revels, 1582: 'Sundry feates of Tumbling and activitie were shewed before her Ma^{tie} on New yeares daie at night by the Lord Straunge his servants. For w^{ch} was bought and Imploied xxj^{tie} yards of cotten for the Matachine iij ells of sarcenet and viij paire of gloves.' And again on 'St. Stephens daie at night at Grenew^{ch} 1584, xxx^{tie} ells of sarcenet for fowre matachyne sutes.' Arbeau allowed men or women to participate, but only in even numbers; despite the high-flown references he regarded it as entertainment more than ceremony.

Apart from the preliminaries to the linked sword dance clashing occurs in the midland morris and the 'ball de bastons' of Catalonia and some similar dances. An Aberdeen morris of our period mentions staves and on 'Newyeres daie 1576' there was a 'plaie of powles.' My feeling is that all these are rhythmical accompaniment rather than Pyrrhic quality and that modern versions are to be found in the sabre dances of the Turks and the Ukrainians. It may be noted that Arbeau's dance included a hey among its figures.

The animal disguise dances may be considered since baboons and horses are to be found with the morris. Although the horse has a separate ceremony its place in the morris is assured, though occasional as with other characters. Horse dances and deer dances exist as pantomimics but I would seriously question suggestions of anything primitive. There is no ritual in morris and it is in no way a 'ritual dance'. Dances of the morris type have always been subject to conscious revival. Sometimes it is the dance as before and sometimes it is the new dance but always it is our old customs being revived. The tradition of morris is the tradition of revival. We see this in the quotation about the Crystal Palace dance in 1858, the year before

Cecil Sharp was born, and when he collected the Headington dance from William Kimber it was the dance that had been revived by the folk-lorist Percy Manning and the EFDSS treated Kimber as if his voice were that of folk memory. Sharp was the ultra-romantic who believed the morris of the south-midlands to have existed unchanged throughout history, he firmly believed that the galliard was an off-shoot of his morris-eternal. Violet Alford was no less guilty though her writing does not have Sharp's naivety, she being more pantopragmatic. Her explanation of gaps in the chain of evidence is given: 'Folklorists have to accept long intervals of time between authentic glimpses of the customs they are studying. This is because a practice, once common property, done by everyone, was not considered worth writing about.' This is hardly academic and it puts conclusions at risk. It also contains the romantic notion of a golden age when everyone was singing folksongs and dancing folk dances.

Julia Sutton seems to think that Arbeau's Morisques is a remnant of the ring and lady morris, but there the emphasis is surely on the gesticulating and hand attitudes, while Arbeau's boy is merely displaying pedal dexterity. I think it be better considered morris on antic grounds as many of the court moriscos were. I feel that one cannot in any way associate ceremony with this dance as one can with, say, the Manx and Highland dirk dances and gillie callum. What is interesting is the tune which is the ubiquitous 'No Man's Jig', the universal morris tune. It would have seemed to be so then and hence its use. William Kemp's self-advertisement from London to Norwich must surely also fit in here.

The modern morrises of England displaying archaic features are, despite elaboration in the nineteenth century, the processional of the North West and the morris of the Welsh border. The first shows the bilinear form with lines crossing and the latter the serpentine hey form. It would seem that each of the historical forms of the dance have contributed a figure to the modern dance. The Rounds of the midland dance from the ring morris, the hey from the unilinear dance delineating boundaries and the cross morris from the copartner morris. Perhaps that is a little visionary but somewhere in morris there must be a constant and I feel that it is a constantly changing constant, mobilizing and demobilizing.

Historically the hey is the most often mentioned feature of the morris, this can either be the serpentine movement or the reel figure, le treske perhaps of Robin et Marian. The second is the caper. In the midland dance this is a step to slow time music while in the northwest, it refers to the crossing of the two lines. Perhaps there is no conflict because in the midland dance one often crosses with a caper and it may be that a difference of emphasis has grown.

What then can be said for the dances for the two plays?

THE SHOEMAKERS' HOLIDAY

- Dress: Morris coates are well testified, they are in two contrasting colours, red and green, white and green, red and blue, black and white, red and yellow, yellow and green. (Yellow ribbons were given at Capt. Robert Dover's Olympick Games from 1612 onwards as 'Dover's Favours'. They were worn at court and symbolised the revived 'merry England'.) A hat with a feather such as Kemp wears, or his tabberer, and pellet bells. The long sleeves of the coat provide the extension to the hands. One dancer may be dressed as a woman though I feel almost certain that Dekker would have made capital from this if it had been so.
- Formations: Either a single line or a double line, i.e. as Vinckenboom or as Negri.
With the single line: Serpentine, hey, rounds.
With the double line: Procession, hey, rounds, cross over.
- Step: A little difficult as there is no indication, we are really before

the period of the general polka step even though the author of the satirical 'Jullien's Grand Polka' says that it is only our old steps coming back again. I feel that they should be simple and confined to walking, skipping and slipping. If a caper is required it should be taken from a contemporary jumping step as the galliard and not from a modern version of morris. Say a capriol.

Music: The musician should be a tabberer of course. Simple popular tunes of the period are most suitable. Nonsuch is a typical galoubet tune that has the phrase repeated in the fifth but it tends to be linked to a specific dance to folk-dance ears. 'Boys and girls come out to play' has a long popular history being a dotted version of 'Angelus ad Virginem'. 'Stanes Morris' is a greensward tune more suited to court society than here.

THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN

Dress: Since the dancers are all specific characters there is little difficulty here. The assistance that Beaumont gives is needed.

Formations: Gerrold says: 'Sweetly, by a figure, trace and turn.' I take 'trace' to be cognate with 'tresse', 'tresque' (F) and 'treccia', 'tresca', (I) and to mean 'hey'. There is obviously a maypole as Gerrold asks for one for the next time, he also gets money that he can afford to paint it so one presumes the 'barber's pole' type of decoration. The dancers are in couples and as such may approach the maypole, perhaps changing sides or turning each other as they process. They may dance round the pole in couples and then in a ring. Subsequently they do a circular hey to lose one another and then each finds his own. They may well turn partners and, if Stubbes is to be trusted, kiss and disappear into the greenwood.

Step: As before, any capers for men only.

Music: As above. If this part of the play is taken as pastoral then greensward tunes would be acceptable. My own feeling is for realism because of its grotesque quality.

In both these works it is very clear that the dancers were dedicated to their task. In the 'Kinsmen' it would seem that the men's partners were other than their wives. The shoemakers have a very realistic morning after!

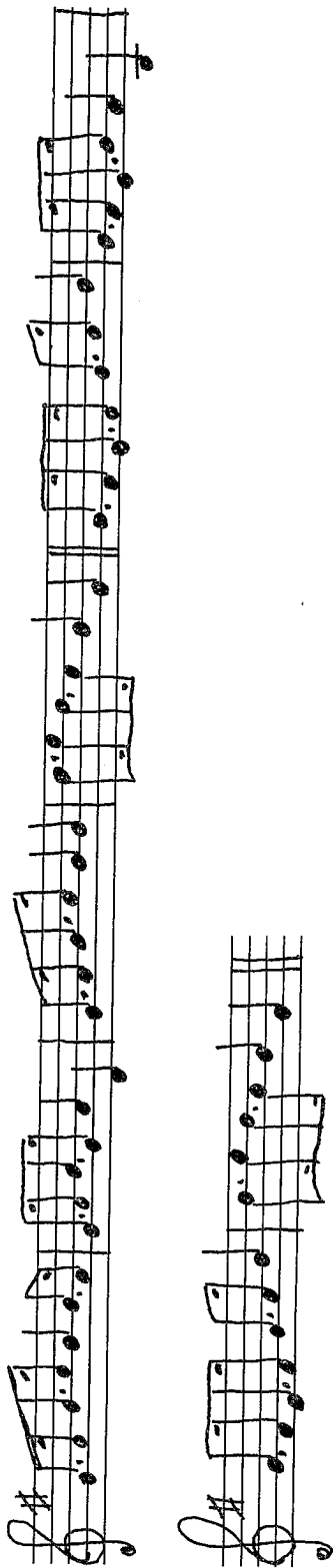
I quote three tunes that I think are not otherwise available. The 'Literary Dustman' would seem most apt. The Alman Moreis appears to go with the Mersenne tune as a saltarello!

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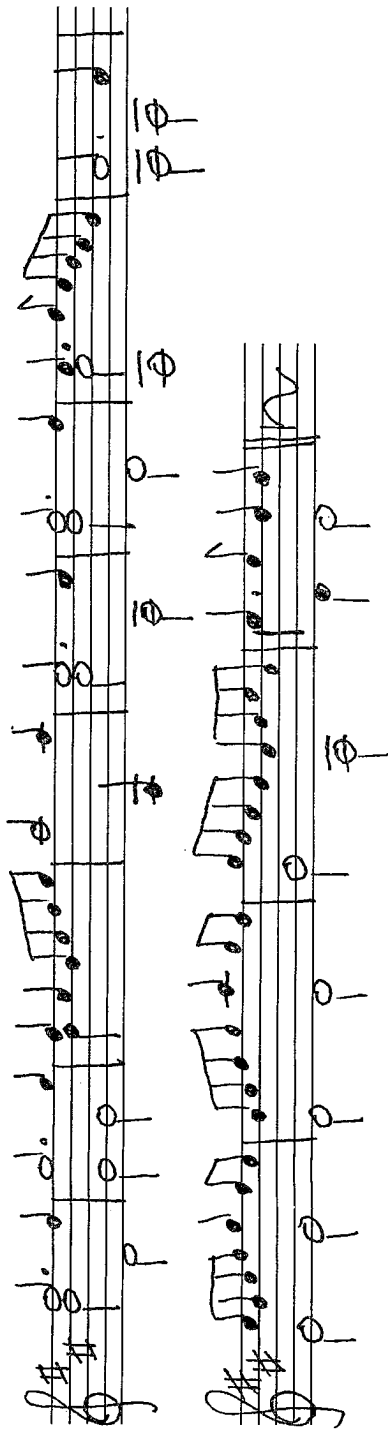
Works not implicated directly in the text:

Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society,		
	Vol. II 1935	Alford. P.41 et seq.
	Vol. VIII No. 2 1957 ..	Lowe. P.61 et seq.
The Dance		Sharp & Oppé E.P.
Sword Dance and Drama		Alford Merlin 1962
Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland		Breathnach Talbot 1971
La Musique de Danse		Machabey. Presses universitaires de France. 1966
Guia de Festes Tradicionals de Catalunya .. .		Amades Aedos 1958
Rushbearing		Burton Brooke & Chrystal 1891

Yorkshire Morris Dance. The Literary Dustman 1610 (from 'The Bagpipe' by Gratton Flood)



Ane Alman Moreis (No.57 of 'Ancient Scottish Melodies', Dawney 1838)



La Moresque. Marin Mersenne 'Harmonie Universelle' 1636

