THE DRAMA REVIEW

INDIGENOUS THEATRE

	3	Introduction
Marjorie Young	5	Performance in Polish Villages
E.T. Kirby	22	Indigenous African Theatre
Suresh Awasthi	36	The Scenography of the Traditional Theatre of India
Mimi Gisolfi D'Aponte	47	A Passion Play Near Amalfi
Theodore Shank	56	A Return to Aztec and Mayan Roots
Carlos Morton	71	The Teatro Campesino
Charlotte Rea	77	Women for Women

HISTORICAL SECTION

Lenora Champagne	88	Aragon's "Au Pied du Mur"
Louis Aragon	89	"Au Pied du Mur" (script)

THEATRE REPORTS

	108	Iowa Theatre Lab's "Dancer Without Arms"
	110	ProVisional Theatre's "America Piece"
	112	"The Trojan Women" at LaMama
	114	A Ru-howzi Evening
Richard Schechner	116	TDR Comment: A Critical Evaluation of Kirby's Criticism of Criticism
	119	TDR Index
	120	New Books

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Indigenous Theatre Issue

An Introduction

Like painting, sculpture, and music, theatre as an art form tends to be international. The same standards apply all over the world. We have a single global audience with common taste and common ideas about performance. Thus, Grotowski's theatre and ideas were never thought of as strictly Polish (although that aspect, of course, could be considered) and they had a rapid and widespread influence, being interpreted in similar ways in many different countries. In the same manner, forms and techniques of The Living Theatre and the Open Theatre were taken up by groups all over the world, developing an international style that is hardly distinguishable from country to country. Contemporary art is not regional or nationalistic.

There are kinds of theatre, however, that exist not for the sophisticated, cosmopolitan, international theatre audience but for special, limited audiences. Webster defines "indigenous" as "born, growing or produced naturally in a region or country; native," and we may refer to performance that developes in terms of a limited audience as "indigenous theatre." (Some speak of "folk theatre," but this term is more limiting than "indigenous theatre" and may be felt to imply condescension.) This issue of *The Drama Review* is devoted to theatre that may, in one way or another, be considered to be indigenous.

Although religious ceremonies and rituals of various kinds are clear examples of indigenous performance, we are concentrating in this issue on presentations that are not considered to have theological efficacy. Some of the pieces that are described have religious subject matter and are related to particular religious observations, but almost all of them exist as theatre rather than as performances of worship.

It can be said that theatre often takes on the forms it does because of the particular needs and desires of its audience. To the extent that this is true, we may expect to find that performances created for a special and limited audience involve uncommon and unusual forms. Thus, the study of indigenous theatre is important for the performance analyst, who is presented with great variation in the creative process, in the relationship of the performance and its audience, in the use of space, in visual and verbal material, and in all aspects of theatre. It can also be important for contemporary practitioners, such as members of Teatro Campesino, who are searching for new methods and approaches. Although women's theatre does not consider itself indigenous, it is an example of how directing a performance at a particular and limited, rather than mass, audience can give special character to the work.

M.K.

[The following text by Michael Kirby is a response to the TDR Comment by Richard Schechner that appears on Pages 116, 117, 118 of this issue. The title of Schechner's comment is "A Critical Evaluation of Kirby's Criticism of Criticism."]

Most of the ideas ascribed to me and attacked by Richard Schechner are not mine and are not contained in the article he supposedly has read. He asserts, for example, that my attitude is revealed in the sentence, "Unfortunately, no society (or readership) is completely homogeneous." In the context of the article, it should be quite apparent that the situation is unfortunate for the teachers and critics I have been discussing in the preceding paragraph (T63, p. 64). It is their need and desire for homogeneity, not mine, that explains the "pressure" that is the subject of the next sentence. Even if Schechner missed the intended irony and sarcasm—perhaps his own "band of cognition" is too narrow—there is no logical way, in the context, to ascribe this view to me. On the other hand, he could have noticed many sentences and passages that argued against homogeneity and supported diversity. It was one of the basic themes of my article.

Nor did I claim objectivity for myself, as he says I did. I was quite aware that certain of my arguments

were based on unprovable assertions. That is the nature of morality, and I was, in part, making moral claims. I said at one point, "But let us put aside moral arguments"—referring to those I had presented— "... Since they are subjective ..."

Any reader can verify that, after attacking negative criticism on moral grounds, I did not "retreat" to "the cliché of positive criticism,'" as Schechner states. I say quite clearly that "There are other moral standards that weigh against both negative and positive criticism ...," and I discuss them.

Schechner claims that I disagree with him about "open forums of opinion" and suggests that I want to suppress discussion and argumentation. This claim, too, is absolutely false and, as in the other cases, the opposite of what I believe and have said. In T58, for example, I attempted to promote public polemics by proposing debates in *The Drama Review*. Not even Schechner accepted the suggestion, and the idea was abandoned, but my position was clear. In a like spirit, I welcome this exchange about my article. (However, it is disappointing to me, as editor, that the only response to our Criticism Issue comes from someone associated with TDR; it is embarrassing that the presentation is so intramural.)

In his complete misreading of my article, Schechner apparently believes that I am against all criticism and, therefore, all discussion and debate. Yet I wrote that "To suggest that the criticism of art is useless and even harmful does not mean that all criticism should be abolished." I specifically mentioned social and political criticism, but Schechner still defends the criticism of "beliefs, social structure, politics" as if he had not read my piece. There are many things that can be argued and discussed that do not touch upon the personal and private nature of the artistic experience itself. This is one reason I referred frequently to science: the attempted objectivity of scientists has not eliminated analysis, discussion, charges, and debate. (Of course, Schechner also raises the wrong question about science. There is no need to ask whether science is indeed objective; it is enough to ask whether it attempts to be. My point was not that a theatre analyst could be objective but that he, like the scientist, should try to be objective. I discussed this at some length.)

When Schechner talks about social and private experiences, he again misunderstands or chooses to ignore the way I was using the term "private." Nobody would dispute the fact that theatre involves audiences and is, therefore, social to some extent. My point is that the value attributes of experience, even though they may be derived in situations that are public and social, are ultimately private. That is not, as Schechner asserts, an article of faith. He makes no attempt to attack the evidence that people in the same situation not only have different value responses to the same stimuli but that the perceptions to which value adheres are not the same: our perceptions as well as our values are ultimately private. (If this concept has developed "only rather recently," the same can be said for many important innovations and ideas.)

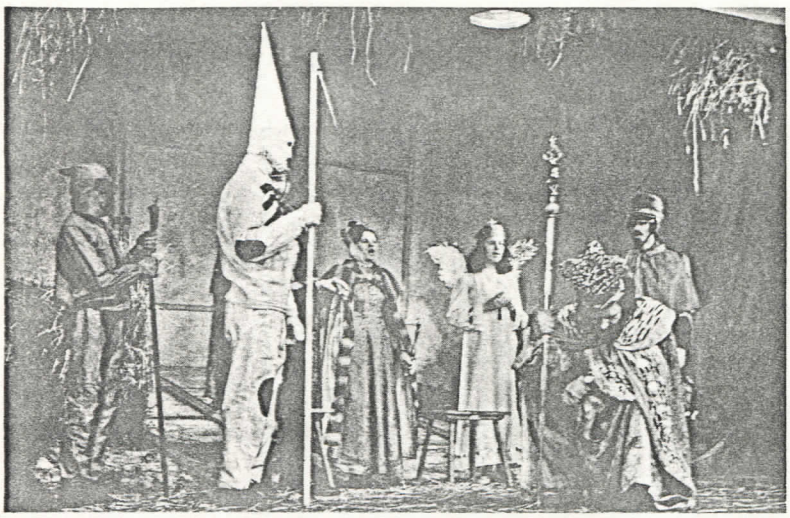
Over and over, Schechner puts into my mouth words I did not say. He explains that he is "suspicious of Kirby's faith in 'documentation.' Documentation is not objective, but selective ..." I did not say that documentation had to be completely objective or that it always could be. At one point I wrote about one of my examples, "The important point is not that a certain element of subjectivity has entered but that the words do not imply value." And I discussed analysis and documentation as selective processes.

If, in the major portion of his discussion, Schechner sets up straw men, making false claims and assertions in order to be able to dispute them, another part of what he writes is merely irrelevant. (Based on his piece, I could, of course, make general assertions about Schechner's character and personality, as he has about mine, but I would prefer to leave such judgments to the reader.) In my article, I distinguished between "criticism" and "analysis," finding fault with the former. Schechner's interest in the social sciences leads him to suggest one way (among many) of approaching the analysis of theatre. I support that type of analysis, among others, but it has nothing to do with my arguments.

Finally—although there is much more that could be said—it is saddening for me to read someone who has a reputation for promoting new ideas falling back on the supposed authority of Aristotle and of Renaissance humanism. They may mark important steps in our history, but the past offers no authorities that must bind us. Man must now step forward again. I am asking for esthetic tolerance, and when it comes it will have none of the negative characteristics that Schechner ascribes to it. It will be similar to the religious tolerance that has grown steadily, at least in academia, since the Renaissance. When the step that eliminates value judgments in art is finally taken, the primitive, naive, arrogant, immoral, and destructive criticism of our times will seem quaint and perhaps even humorous. Schechner's "Evaluation" is not good scholarship, good analysis, or good criticism. And I am well aware that those are value judgments.

Michael Kirby

Performance



The King Herod Play

in Polish Villages

The Vagabonds

Serdecznie pozdrawiam, Marjorie Young

By Marjorie Young

An unusually rich variety of forms of performance linked to seasonal, religious, and rural celebrations still survive in certain Polish villages, especially in the southern region. These performances are not staged for tourists as "folk theater" but are part of

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The top title photograph is from the *King Herod Play* at the moment when the King is dying. Photo by Stefan Deotyszewski courtesy of Polska Kultura Ludowa. The bottom photograph is of a Vagabond troupe performing in a Polish village. Photo by Piotr Baraçz.

an authentic, on-going peasant tradition. They survive in surprising strength. Their existence does not seem to be well known among Poland's urban populace, perhaps due in part to the centuries-old schism between peasant and non-peasant classes in Polish culture.

Two examples of such performance are the King Herod Play, a short folk piece about the fall of King Herod performed by village school boys from door to door on Christmas Eve, and the mountain "Vagabonds"—groups of miners and farmers who dress up as gypsies, goats, horses, shepherds, Jews, Death, clowns, old men, devils and so forth, and run rhythmically through their village at New Year's, pausing occasionally to engage onlookers in improvised scenes, to play pranks, and to act out pantomime scenarios of probably pre-Christian origin.

The people involved in these events do not label their activity "theatre." Nor do they use a theatre vocabulary to describe what they do. The King Herod Players refer to themselves as a "team," not a theatre group; the Vagabonds call themselves a "gang." Both groups speak of "mutual fun," not performance, "participants," not actors. However, elements of theatre can be recognized in both of these phenomena. Both involve imitation or enactment of another reality. In both we find players and spectators, although the distinction between these two groups is often fluid. In addition to these basic elements of theatre, we also find gesture, props, instrumental music, song, costumed players, dance, and, in the case of the King Herod Play, a play of spoken dialog.

In both the King Herod Play and the Vagabond tradition, artistic aspirations are secondary to fulfilling certain needs closely bound to the life of a particular community of people. One function that they both serve is celebration. Because these celebrations take place every year at the same time and in the same place, they lend a rhythm to the lives of the people who participate in them year after year. And because they have taken place for centuries in approximately the same form, they give a sense of continuity to the life of the community—a sense of tradition. Through their performances, these players also give holiday greetings to their neighbors and relatives, flirt with their girlfriends, and create an atmosphere in which quarrels are suspended or forgotten.

The King Herod Play

The King Herod Play is a Christmas folk play that exists in a variety of versions and has been passed down for centuries from generation to generation by word of mouth. Its starting point is the biblical account of the wicked King Herod, who ordered the murder of all male infants in Bethlehem when threatened by the birth of Jesus. This episode provides a framework into which characters and events from Polish history are woven organically, including a Turkish soldier, a village Jew, a Polish cavalryman, a Field Marshal, the Devil, Death, and, in some versions, an angel, two gravediggers, the cavalryman's horse, and Rachel, the Jew's wife.

The King Herod Play has a tradition in several European countries, including East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania, and is part of a cycle of several Christmas folk plays. Numerous analogies between episodes of this play and medieval European drama have led scholars of folklore to postulate that it descended from a fragment of a Christmas mystery play. One source on the history of this tradition in Poland traces its origins to the crèche or *Jasełko,* which was brought to Poland in the 13th century by Franciscan monks and displayed in the church at Christmas. The wax, clay, and

wooden nativity scene figurines were eventually transformed into puppets. These puppets performed Christmas mystery plays, and the puppets as well as their performances came to be called *szopka.* When the monks themselves took the roles of the various personages, they created "living *szopka,*" which is a name still used in Poland to describe live performances of Christmas plays.

After the Christmas plays left the church, they eventually made their way to the small towns and villages where they merged with the village tradition of caroling from door to door during the winter solstice, and were preserved in oral tradition long after their disappearance in the city. As they were passed down from father to son, characters and events from the local surroundings were freely added or substituted.

In Poland, the episode about King Herod was stressed so much that it developed into a separate play that was often performed in isolation from the rest of the Christmas story. One explanation for the emphasis on Herod can be inferred from the fact that he was portrayed not so much as the specific biblical King Herod as he was a feudal tyrant. Thus, by enacting his downfall and death, the peasants in a certain sense enacted the death of their own oppressor. The players themselves and the tradition of performing this play came to be called *Herody,* which means simply "Herods." On Christmas Eve children are reminded that "the Herods are coming tonight."

In Poland, the King Herod Play survives most strongly today in villages near Cracow and Katowice. It survives in a variety of versions even within a single village and varies considerably from performance to performance. Bits of dialog, characters, and even whole episodes are added or deleted each time it is played. One reason for this constant fluctuation is that the play is preserved not in written form but in the collective memory of the village community. That certain roles are largely improvised results in further variations. The form of the performance also changes as the players adapt to the spatial area and objects in each home and to the particular audience.

(The following description of a performance of the King Herod Play in a village cottage is not a documentation of one performance. It was constructed from correspondence and taped conversations with a "team" of players and their families and neighbors in the village of Bojków, near Katowice, and from my observations of performances by about thirty groups of "Herods" at the festival in Bedzin.)

On Christmas Eve in Bojków every village cottage becomes a potential place of performance. After sharing the traditional Christmas Eve meal, families linger at the dinner table—grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, as well as parents and children. Straw has been loosely scattered under the table in remembrance of the manger bed. Off to one side of the table stands the Christmas tree.

Suddenly, the caroling of a group of approaching "Herods" is heard amid the jangling of bells and the clanking of the Devil's chains. Conversation ceases. The children shriek in excitement and hide under their chairs. As the head of the household opens the door, the cavalryman steps forward and asks, "Will you accept King Herod into your house?" The host nods and welcomes them in. The Herods resume their caroling as they enter and group themselves into a chorus at the entrance to the dining room.

King Herod wears a silver-colored shirt loaned to him by a local police officer and gold and silver robes borrowed from the village priest. Around his neck hangs a large metal plaque with an embossed wingspread eagle—the national emblem of Poland. Black crayon marks above his lips form a mustache, and strands of black yarn glued to his chin create a beard. On his head sits a crown cut out of heavy scrap metal and loosely draped with strands of orange, white, and blue beads, and gold and silver se-

King Herod's crown.
Photo by Brad Johnson

quins. The crown has been in the player's family since before World War II, surviving even their uprooting and resettlement after the war.

The Polish Cavalryman is dressed in his great uncle's army uniform, with white fringed epaulettes and medals and ribbons decorating his chest. A silver tinfoil stripe stretches down each side of his pants. The long metal sword that he carries at his side was used by one of his ancestors in the 1830 uprising against the Czar. On his head, he wears a tall, cylindrical cardboard hat. The Field Marshal and the Turk also wear military clothing. The Field Marshal wears a fireman's hat, while the Turk distinguishes himself by an elaborate headdress of gold-colored glass balls.

The Jew-Rabbi's costume consists of an over-sized suitcoat fastened at the waist by a towel, and a sheepskin mask to which a wispy silver-gray beard is attached. A pillow has been stuffed in his back to create a hunchback effect, and a battered black felt hat has been shoved on his head so low that it almost reaches his glasses. In his left hand, he carries a large "bible" as a symbol of his learnedness.

The Devil wears a black sheepskin coat turned inside out and a sheepskin mask covering his entire head. A red felt tongue protrudes at the mouth and ram's horns stick out from his head. The Devil carries a bell-tipped pitchfork and long chains which he rattles with every step.

Death is dressed in a white sheet and a skull-shaped mask, and carries a white wooden scythe.

As the chorus of players stands singing at the entrance to the room, the family members turn their chairs to face them. The play flows organically out of the caroling by opening with a carol prolog. The carol depicts the scene of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem—the catalyst for the play's action. After singing the carol, the players remain standing at the entrance to the room until each of their roles is called for.

First the Cavalryman steps forward and announces:

King Herod rules in this house
*As he always has and always will.**

Then the Field Marshal steps beside the Cavalryman, introduces himself as a servant and minister of the King, and requests a chair for the King. This cue is well-known to the spectators; one of them gets up immediately and places a chair between the Cavalryman and the Field Marshal. The chair becomes King Herod's throne. King Herod steps forward and sits down on the chair, where he remains throughout the entire performance. His attendants stand on either side of him. Rapping his tinfoil-tipped sceptre on the floor, King Herod announces:

I'll take a seat
But I must be on my guard,
For I have heard sad tidings

---

*All lines of text quoted are translations of portions of a text of a King Herod Play that was given to me by players in Bojkow. In the original Polish text, most of the lines are rhymed.

That the Holy Virgin
has given birth to a son.

After proclaiming his power as "ruler of heaven and earth," he gives an order to his attendants:

Go to the town of Bethlehem
and cut off every little head—
beginning with my own son.

The Cavalryman exits the room to carry out the order. When he has gone, the King orders the Field Marshal to call in the Jew-Rabbi.

The Jew runs into the room, kisses each girl in the family, and stands before the King. With his entry, the tone of the performance shifts to comedy. The King poses a series of questions that he answers with riddles, puns, and nonsense. Their dialog includes the following:

King: Jew, how old are you?
Jew: Oh—as many years
as there are patches in this house
if you count each patch
as three years.
King: Jew, do you own a store?
Jew: Yes, sir, I have a store.
King: And what's in it?
Jew: A shoemaker's needle and soap,
pipes and creams,
and a piano on which you can saw wood.
King: Did you fight in the war?
Jew: Yes, I did.
King: Well, tell me something about it.
Jew: Frost—40 degrees,
and snow up to my waist.
I grovelled in the potatoes and rye.
King: Did they kill you?
Jew: No, they didn't kill me.
But 200 guns were aimed at me,
And I jumped in the hay.
Sir, it was like this:
A bullet struck the fence,
while I hid under the fence,
A bullet struck a barrel,
while I sat on top of the barrel.
A bullet struck a bed,
while I hid under the bed,
and covered myself with a blanket.

Unlike the Cavalryman and the Field Marshal who recite their lines with liturgical solemnity and stand stiffly in front of the King, the Jew varies his pitch, hops about freely, taps his stick on the floor, and illustrates his tales with pantomine gestures. As he speaks of "grovelling in the potatoes and rye" during the war, he lies down and

crawls about in the straw on the floor. After completing his questioning, the King asks the Jew to sing, whereupon he turns to the audience and launches into a series of short songs. One of his songs goes as follows:

My wife was Jewish
and refused to eat pork,
so she died of hunger,
and I must hop for her soul's sake.

At this point a woman in the audience calls out, "Hop, Jew, hop," to which he replies, "Just a minute, Ma'am," and then hops about the room, shifting from one foot to the other, while the accordion urges him on and the spectators clap their hands. Sometimes the Jew continues to sing for as long as twenty minutes, depending on his mood and the response of the audience. Finally, the King orders him to leave. He does not leave the room but scampers about among the spectators. He grabs and kisses the girls, soiling their dresses with his coal-dust-covered hands, and "steals" vodka and cakes from the holiday table. Throughout the rest of the performance he remains among the spectators and continues to play pranks.

Following this comic interlude, the Cavalryman returns and, standing squarely before King Herod's throne, reports his failure to find "the son of He who created the world and your kingdom." The King sings a lament and then predicts that he will fall at the hand of the Turk. At that moment, the Turk enters and faces the King. He boasts of his victories in wars and challenges Herod to a duel on his "pagan sword." The Cavalryman intervenes, saying:

O Turk, hold your tongue,
Or your head will fall from your neck.

To which the Turk replies:

I fought against the Tatars,
I fought with the Muscovites,
Now I'll fight the Cavalryman.

The Turk and the cavalryman clash swords several times. As the Turk's sword touches the cavalryman's chest, the cavalryman kneels down on one knee and bows his head. Visible action ceases. The cavalryman remains on bended knee while the King, the Turk, and the Field Marshal become a chorus again, and narrate his fate in a mournful song. Some of the spectators join in:

The Cavalryman rides through the meadow.
Blood drips from his hands,
wounded, bleeding,
still holding his battle standard high.

The Cavalryman falls from his horse
under the guelder rose tree
and the guelder rose
swaddles him like a mother
and sings a lullaby,
lullaby, lullaby.

The Cavalryman then sings a solo in which he tells his horse to go home and ask his mother to dig him a grave and to hold a Mass in his honor. He rises to his feet and leaves the room.

The mood shifts once again to comedy as the Devil hops his way into the room, clanking his chains and thumping his bell-tipped pitchfork on the floor. Like the Jew, the Devil is a comic figure who freely improvises, mostly by playing pranks. Between his lines and sometimes throughout the entire performance, he grabs the girls and pokes the children with his pitchfork, pulls frosted cookies off the Christmas tree and stuffs them into his pocket. Standing before the King, the Devil says:

On my hand
I wear a large golden ring.
Hurricanes and thunder
Strike in my palm.
There's nothing like hell:
You live there in warmth,
And you can drink one liter of vodka after another.

The King orders him to go to hell, whereupon the Devil summons Death to his aid.

Death enters the room with slow deliberate steps, and, speaking in a quivering ghost-like voice, begins a dialog with the King:

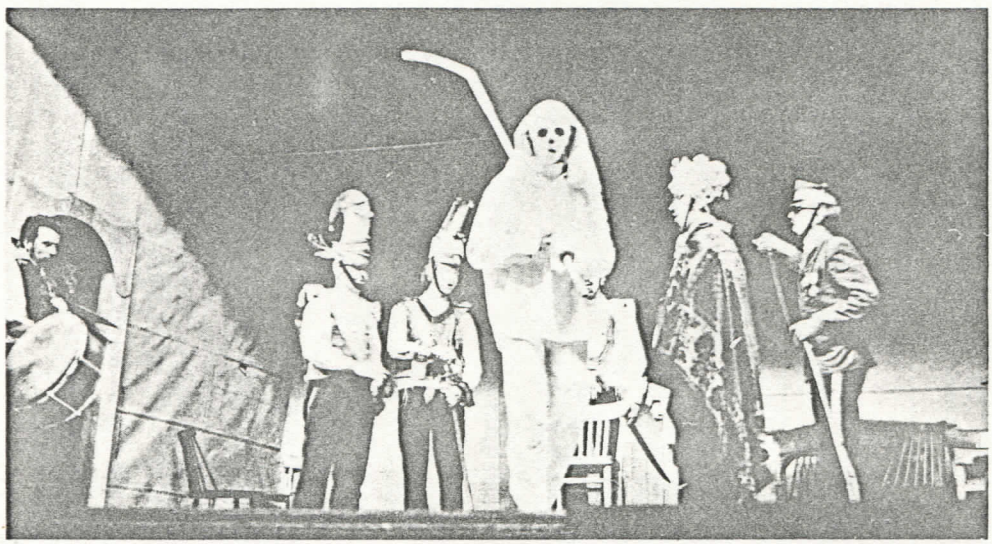


Photo by Françoise Diano-Skotnicka

Death: I, Death, the bright-boned one,
Walked through forests and mountains
And wore out seven pairs of shoes
Before I found you, King Herod, in this house.

King: Little bones,
Control your wrath
Take my purple robes
To cover your bare bones.

Death: I've never worn robes,
And I never will.

I'll behead a King
the likes of you.
King: Little bones, spare my life
Take half my kingdom.
Death: I won't give in to you.
King: Take my whole kingdom.
Death: I won't give in to you.
You've demanded too precisely
Now your head will fall.
On the order of God
I'll cut off the skull of the King!

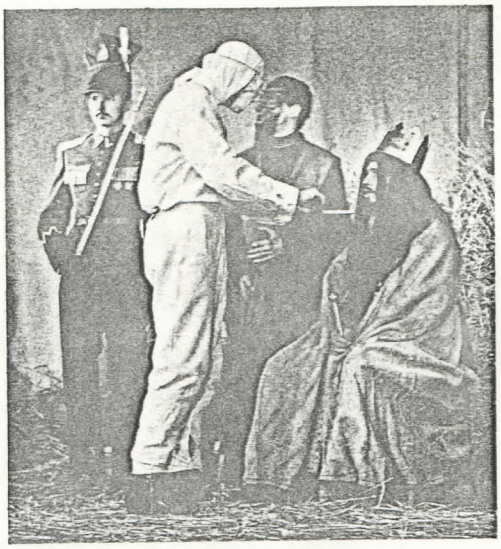


Photo by Stefan Deptuszewski

Death touches her wooden scythe to the King's neck. The King leans over and kneels on one knee, indicating that he has died. The Devil jumps about gleefully and offers to take his body, while Death agrees to take his soul. Together they take King Herod by his hands and lead him away. The story has ended.

The players reassemble to sing carol greetings of thanks to the host family, wishing them "health and happiness, on earth as in heaven." The spectators do not clap, but instead treat the players as guests in their homes. As Mieczyslaw Koszka, the man who played King Herod for eight years in Bojków, explained: "The people who accept us into their homes on Christmas Eve do so warmly and sincerely. Afterwards, they share food and drink with us, wish us well, and invite us back the next year. Thus, our reward does not come from dry applause but from the good times we share together."

("Those good times are sometimes so merry that we do not make it beyond four or five houses," added the Devil—after asking me to turn off my tape recorder.)

As the Herods leave to go on to the next cottage, some of the children in the family follow them out the door and remain with them the entire evening. It is usually from among these early enthusiasts that a new group of Herods is formed, carrying on the tradition after the older Herods leave for army duty.

"Adventures" and Variations

When the King Herod Play is performed, mishaps sometimes occur due to the players unfamiliarity with the room. On one occasion, the Jew entered by doing a somersault and knocked over the holiday dinner table as he landed, causing plates of cookies and bottles of vodka to come crashing to the floor. On another occasion, the Devil caught his tail in the coal stove as he jumped his way into the room, tipping it over and spilling coal all over the floor. These occurrences are not regarded as "mistakes" or even "interruptions" but as "adventures" that add to the fun of celebration. Like the pranks of the Jew and the Devil, they are absorbed organically into the performance.

Sometimes live animals are drawn into the entourage of characters. Often the Jew leads a goat with a bell around his neck or carries live geese in a cloth sack slung over his back. Bleating and squawking mingle freely with the dialog. The presence of animals draws the children out of their seats and into the playing area, which leads to further adventures.

In some versions, a two-person hobbyhorse accompanies the Cavalryman. In others, an angel stands behind the King and speaks to him as his conscience, which he tries to ignore. These versions depict the King's struggle between good and evil and in this respect resemble medieval morality plays. Sometimes the Three Kings come to announce the news of Jesus' birth to King Herod.

Some groups of players carry a miniature puppet stage with them or *szopka,* which curiously resembles an Elizabethan stage. While two players hold the *szopka,* the others perform in front of it. While they perform, it serves as a kind of abstract set. After the live performance, the puppets sing and dance and sometimes enact short scenes.

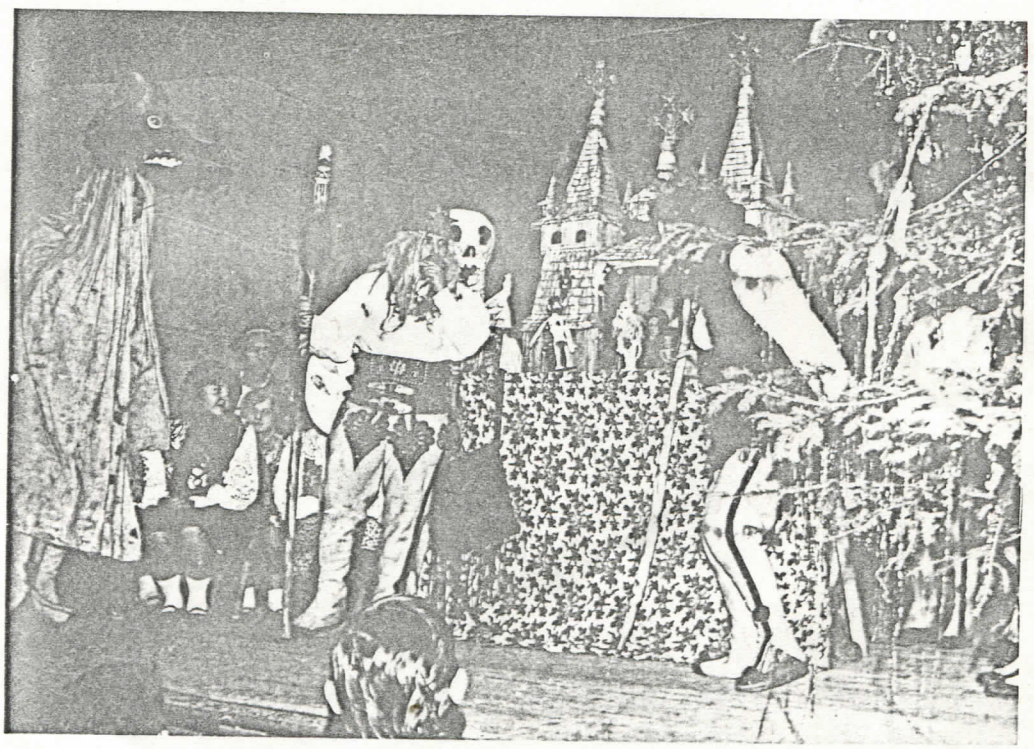


Photo by Francoise Diano-Skotnicka

* * *

In almost every version of the King Herod Play, the sequence of events and the combinations of eras, settings, and characters is somewhat fragmentary and illogical. For example, a heroic Polish figure stands beside King Herod in 4 B.C. The reason for this illogic is rooted in the fact that the play did not result from the careful conception of a single artist but from a somewhat haphazard conglomerative process by an anonymous collective, spanning several centuries. At some point in its development characters from the local life were added or substituted for those in the biblical story. When these folk types entered the play, they developed according to their position in the story and the local character traits they brought with them. Hence, the Jew is both a wise rabbi of Jerusalem whom Herod consults concerning the whereabouts of the birth of Jesus—and a comical village merchant. The Cavalryman is a loyal servant of King Herod who murders innocent children—and at the same time a heroic Polish knight. The King is both King Herod of Bethlehem—and a feudal tyrant. Because of this dual nature of the characters, we find throughout the play an oscillation, on the one hand, between the biblical story, time, and setting, and, on the other, Polish village life in various centuries.

The events of the play's story are not narrated or enacted in explicit detail. The play's sparse dialog and minimal gesture are nevertheless able to evoke whole episodes in the imaginations of the spectators because they know the story so well. Thus, when King Herod tells the Cavalryman to "cut off little heads," the audience knows that he is asking him to slay all male children in Bethlehem. These lines and many others in the play require a familiarity with the story to be understood. That familiarity usually exists because the spectators are not a random audience but are members of a particular group with a particular tradition.

On the other hand, whether or not the story is logical or complete is of little concern to the spectators. They do not bring to the play the expectation of understanding it or finding meaning. Instead, their aim is to share a familiar pleasure with their family and friends. Because this is their expectation, elements can be added or changed without "disturbing" the performance. If the family becomes tired, the players sometimes cut the play short; if requested to do so, they may repeat the play.

Performance Area and Audience Participation

When the Herods perform there is no fixed borderline between spectators and players; no curtain, stage, or differentiation in lighting divides them. The chair used as Herod's throne creates a somewhat fixed center of performance, and the costumed players by their presence create areas of performance. As the players move about the room, the performance area shifts with them. As they do so, and as the spectators participate freely, adding dialog and songs and responding to pranks, the whole room at moments becomes a single area of play in which player and spectator are almost indistinguishable.

Throughout the performance, the players and spectators interact freely with little embarrassment or hostility. One reason for this lack of hostility is that the players and spectators are not strangers to one another but are neighbors and relatives. Therefore, they tend to trust each other and to tolerate actions that in the anonymity

of an urban theatre would be likely to arouse confusion and anger. The girls do not mind if the Jew grabs and kisses them, because he is not a stranger but Jack from down the street. When the Devil rubs a spectator with coal dust, the spectator may show playful anger, but rarely does he become afraid.

Besides knowing the players, the spectators tend to be familiar with the performance, having seen it every year of their lives and perhaps even having played in it themselves. They know, therefore, what to expect and are less apt to feel manipulated by a feeling that "the players know something the audience doesn't know." It is true that they will be surprised by the improvised pranks, but at least they *expect* pranks and tend not to be afraid.

Because the performance of the King Herod Play takes place in the familiarity of a gathering of family and neighbors to celebrate a holiday in their homes, the atmosphere in which the players and spectators confront one another is from the outset one of friendliness and acceptance. These players *begin* their performance from conditions of intimacy, whereas theatre creators in an urban setting desiring intimacy with their audience must *create* that intimacy.

Player-Role Relationship

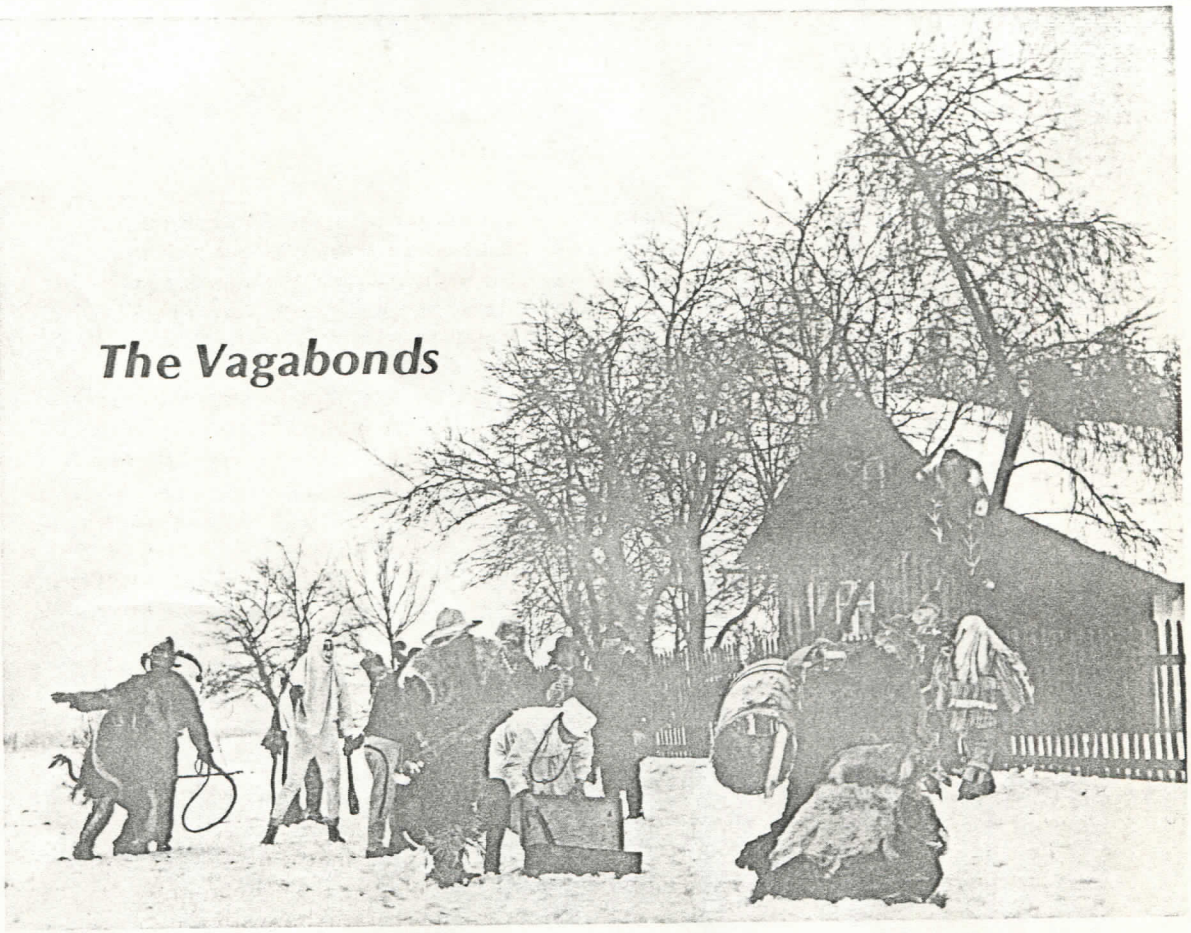
The members of the Bojków "team" of Herods are studying to be railroad workers and coal miners. About two weeks before Christmas they gather at one of their homes to assign roles and practice. Although some attempt is made to match particular personalities with particular roles, the assignments are basically arbitrary. In fact, every member learns every role so that they can trade parts if they wish as they go from house to house. When the boy who plays the Field Marshal reaches his girlfriend's house, he may exchange his rather subdued and dignified role for that of the Jew or the Devil so that he can flirt with her. If King Herod's voice weakens after several performances, he may switch roles with Death. If the Cavalryman has had too much to eat or drink to sing his solo properly, he may trade roles or simply speak his lines rather than sing them. All of these adjustments are made freely and naturally, without any sense of having made a mistake. Perfecting one's part is secondary to having fun.

Collective Direction

No single person acts as a director of the King Herod Play. Instead the players collectively work out the general form of the performance. The spectators by their participation shape the form, length, and spirit of each performance to such an extent that one could call them co-directors. Not only do they sing, add dialog, and encourage improvisation, but occasionally they will even stop the performance to tell the players "how it should be done." Thus, the players direct the performance during its preparation, while both players and spectators direct it collectively at the moment of performance.

Both spectators and players are guided by a sense of tradition, which they acquire by watching the performance year after year. Tradition sets loose parameters around the fluctuations of each performance. The co-directors also base their decisions on a desire to enhance the fun of each performance. These goals—to carry out the tradition and to increase the fun of celebration—supersede any attempt to create art as a sphere of its own.

The Vagabonds



A sense of tradition and a desire to add to the fun of celebration likewise guides the gangs of Vagabonds, who create another form of winter village performance involving procession from door to door. These players zig-zag through the hills at New Year's. They perform outside in the snow as well as inside village cottages in a spirit far more raucous and chaotic than that of the Herods. This tradition survives in a handful of villages in the mountainous region around Zywiec, south of Cracow. Most of the players are farmers and miners, ranging in age from about twenty to sixty. The Polish word for this tradition is *Dziady,* which refers both to the players themselves and the tradition. In this discussion, the words Vagabond and Vagabond traditions are used as approximately equivalents. The word *Dziady* means old men, beggers, bumblers, vagabonds; it also means the ancient popular ceremony of calling forth the ghosts of the dead.

The origins and precise history of the Vagabonds can only be hypothesized. Like most folklore, the Vagabonds seem to embrace several layers of accumulated tradition. The spirit of license and the presence of certain scenarios seems to link this type of performance to pre-Christian mythic-ritual ceremonies belonging to a symbolic repetition of Creation—of the passage from chaos to cosmos—at the turn of the New Year. These ceremonies include rituals aimed at ensuring a successful harvest, personal good fortune, and the passing of winter. Links to the medieval Feasts of Fools and other forms of medieval theatre have also been postulated. Some contemporary Vagabond players claim that their lively pranks and commotion commemorate a time during the 14th century when a settlement of shepherds from the south Carpathian mountains plundered villages near Zywiec. Another group claims it commemorates a moment in the 17th century when villagers grabbed hatchets and pitchforks and prevented a party of invading Swedes from entering their valley. This particular group

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The photograph above is of a Vagabond troupe arriving outside a farmhouse in Poland.

of Vagabonds takes special care not to cross the bridge in their village, which supposedly marks the point where the Swedes were held off.

The Vagabonds perform on New Year's Eve day from early morning until after midnight and again on New Year's Day from mid-afternoon until late evening. Their performance consists of a random conglomerate of scenes of ritual origin—mostly through pantomime—and improvised actions and pranks. Each experience of this tradition varies considerably. The following sketch of a Vagabond "run" is based on taped conversations with players from the villages of Cieçina and Pietrzykowice, on articles and books, and on observations of performances at the festival in Bedzin.

In the early morning on New Year's Eve day about thirty Vagabonds assemble at the village brewery. The players come in their costumes, which they have prepared weeks in advance, using sheepskin coats turned inside out, sleighbells, fur, papier mâché, ears of corn, beads, strips of colored blotting paper, cardboard, rags, and sheets. Their masks are made by the village mask-maker.

Photo by Piotr Baraçz

Photo by Stefan Deptuszewski

When the whole group has assembled, they begin their run into the hills. The gypsy leads the way, followed by the two horses who wear large Napoleonic headdresses and move inside rectangular wooden frames covered with patterned blankets. Others in the entourage follow at random. Death swings her cudgel to the right and left while the Devil slides down a hill. As the Vagabonds lash through the hills and valleys, they separate and then meet periodically at the homes of their acquaintances, which in these mountain villages are often far apart. Thus, their run is similar to a cross-country run. As they run, the jangling of sleighbells fuses with the music of accordions and the cracking of whips.

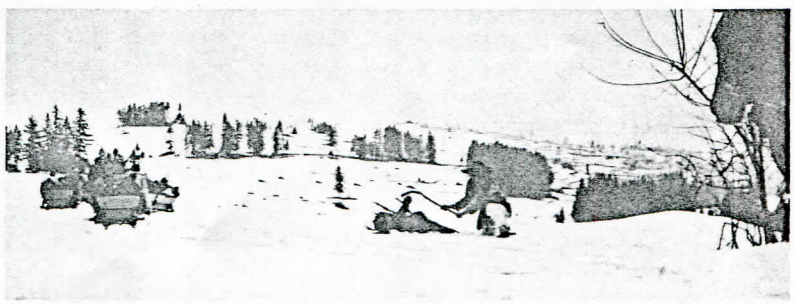
Gathering bystanders become spectators to the performance as the Gypsy and the Jew squat down in the snow, and the Gypsy reads the Jew's fortune for the New

Photo by Piotr Baraçz

Year. Just a few feet away, the Devil stands threateningly behind the chimney sweep, ready to poke him with his stick, while two horses whirl about in a trance-like dance. A bear chases a woman into a barn.

In another section of the village, the Devil and the Plowman engage in a duel in the snow. As a sleigh full of villagers passes by, their play becomes performance.

Photos by Françoise Diano-Skotnicka



Gradually, the group reassembles at a village cottage where the door stands open in expectation of their arrival. As the sounds of bells and whips become more and more audible, the family gathers excitedly and waits for the motley entourage to tumble into the vestibule. The priest leads the way, sprinkling drops of "holy water" as he enters. The horses, soldiers, shepherds, old man, chimney sweep, and Death follow him. Gradually, two gypsies and two devils elbow their way through the door. The accordion player takes his place in a corner of the room and begins to play, while the family of spectators mills about freely with the players.

As short scenes emerge out of the romping and chaos, the room becomes noisy and crowded. Several actions take place at the same time or freely overlap with one another. The horses jump about at a dizzying pace, whinnying and jangling the bells attached to their wooden frames. One of them falls to the floor, initiating a scene of probable magic origin. The shepherds and the soldiers stand on either side of him and, holding their whips to the floor, jerk the horse's reins in an effort to make him stand up. He remains immobile. One of the shepherds asks the gypsy woman to invoke a magic spell, whereupon she stands over the horse and showers him with incense from her magic lamp. While she does this, her husband, the gypsy, squats down on his knees and shoes the horse, using pantomime gesture. Once again the soldiers and shepherds jerk his reins. This time, he rises. They help him to his feet, and he begins to dance about the room again.

Meanwhile, two other gypsies have settled on the floor in a corner of the room where they squabble and tell fortunes with their playing cards. Suddenly, they rise to their feet and sing short songs. They walk about the cottage, "stealing" books, plates, and pictures, and asking the host to "buy" the items back—with vodka.

The Devil and the bear are still outside and can be seen frolicking in the snow under the window. Suddenly, the bear rushes into the room, bumps into one of the gypsies, and rolls around on the cottage floor. He grabs one of the girls, drags her out the door, and tosses her into the snow. Next the Jew enters, carrying a goose "stolen" from the host's barn in a cloth sack slung over his back. When some space clears, he hops about the room and engages the family in dancing and singing.

The chimney sweep plugs up the chimney shaft, while an "old woman" wearing rags and a stocking mask over her face squats in the center of the room and feeds her rubber baby doll with a bottle. An "old man" recites humorous prayers on his chestnut rosary. He leads a goat by a chain. As the goat scampers around the room, the spectators spontaneously become a chorus, chanting, "Where the goat goes, the rye will grow." Death weaves in and out of the spectators, poking them with her cudgel and forcing them to dance with her.

For awhile this lively commotion distracts the householders from the pranks being played outside and in the barn. Suddenly, some Vagabonds enter the house, bringing the spoils of their pranks. A soldier brings rabbits and chickens into the house in a sack and lets them loose on the floor. The Devil and the Gypsy undo sheaves of hay and toss bits of it onto the Christmas tree. The clowns braid husks of corn into a huge tail and drag it into the cottage, while the chimney sweep drags chairs and benches from the living room out into the fields. The doctor and the shepherds take apart the host's wagon and reassemble it on the cottage roof.

"One year we put the male rabbits in the same cage with the female rabbits," recalls a Vagabond from Cieçina. "The next day they were in such a good mood that the host could not figure out what had happened. We also let a young horse out of the barn. She became so frightened by our masks that she ran like crazy and gave us all a good run as we tried to catch her."

Thus, animals are brought into the homes of people; people are chased into the homes of animals. House furniture is brought outside, while snow and hay from outside are brought inside.

Gradually, the commotion of performing, dancing, and playing pranks comes to a halt. After sharing in vodka and cakes with the family, the Vagabonds stampede off into the hills and go on to the next cottage. Several gangs of Vagabonds weaving in and out of the valleys transform the whole village into pandemonium. When two gangs of Vagabonds meet, it is the custom that they fight. In the late evening, they ap-

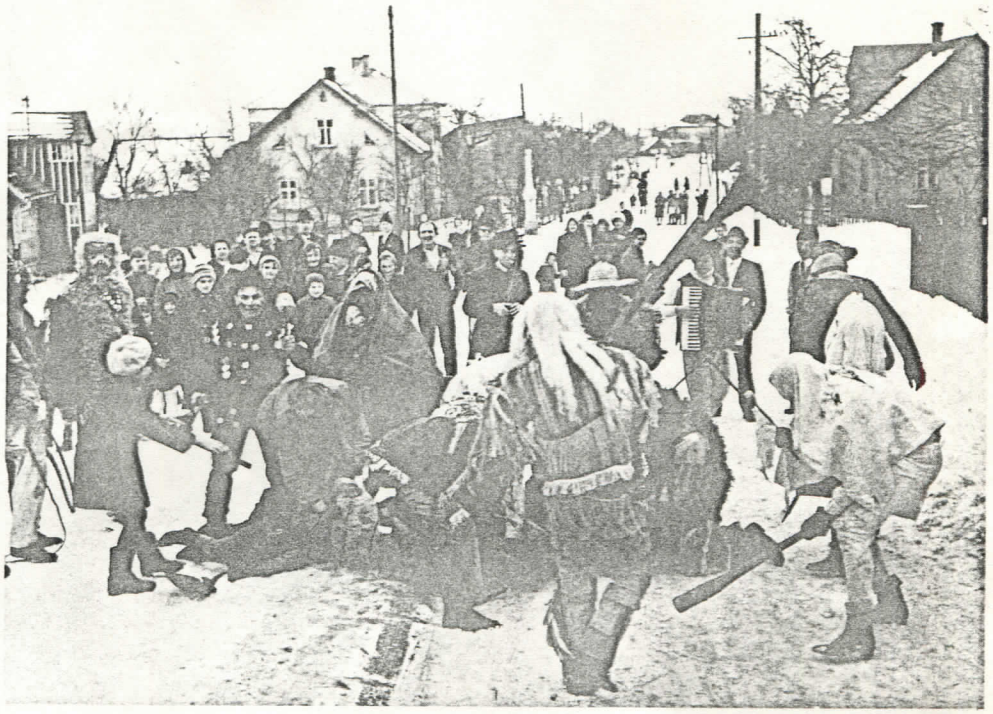


Photo by Piotr Baraçz

pear at New Year's Eve balls. The orchestra strikes up a polka, the Vagabonds choose partners, and for a few minutes the party becomes a masked ball. When the dance has ended, the Vagabonds quench their thirst and speed out again into the night. In the early afternoon of the following day—New Year's Day—they begin their run again, and continue through the evening.

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In the Vagabonds' performance there is no plot line; no story is told. Several unrelated actions take place simultaneously, side by side, much like a Happening. The sequence of actions and their spatial juxtaposition are not guided by a text or a plan. They emerge through the spontaneous initiative of the characters.

The players learn their roles through watching their predecessors. They do not switch roles during the course of their run, because every role enables them to play

pranks. In fact, the costumes are disguises that give license to playing pranks—much like Halloween costumes in the United States.

The costumed players by their very presence create areas of performance—in the cottages, in the barns, in the hills. They do not bring in scenery or props. Instead they interact with the village environment. Snow on the fields provides a place to sit down. Hills can be rolled down; trees can be climbed. Barns provide a place in which to hide

Photo by Piotr Baraçz

or make mischief. Furniture can be dragged about and sheaves of hay can be undone and scattered. As several gangs of Vagabonds weave in and out of the valleys creating pandemonium wherever they go, they transform the entire village into a single area of play.

The spectators are drawn into the action even more freely—and more roughly—than in the King Herod Play. They dance, sing, add dialog: they are chased, tossed about, grabbed, pushed, poked. Like the Herods, the Vagabonds interact with their neighbor-spectators to some extent, according to their personal relationships. They flirt with their girlfriends and, if they are angry with them, they toss them into the snow.

* * *

By the lively spirit of their flirting, singing, dancing, and playing, both the King Herod Players and the Vagabonds create an experience with the families they visit that makes the celebration of a holiday merrier and more complete. "The Herods go with Christmas like bread goes with butter," explained one Bojków villager. As the players go from house to house, they create an atmosphere in which individual family celebrations of a holiday become a community celebration. That this community knows that these forms of celebration have been carried on every year by their fathers, grandfathers—indeed by centuries of ancestors—strengthens their feeling of belonging to a tradition. As one Vagabond remarked, "Such is the custom. I don't remember from where. My father did it, and so we continue. That's the way it always was and that's the way it always will be."