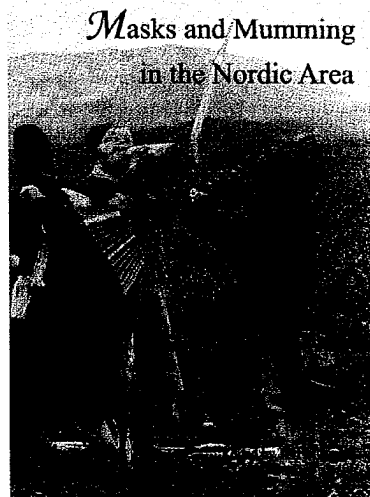


Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area

Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area. Ed. by Terry Gunnell. Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi 98. Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur. 840 pp., 41 maps, 159 illustrations, bibliography, index, list of contributors. ISBN 978-91-85352-70-8. 38 euros.

The current volume is the product of several years of meetings and research supported in large part by the Nordic Research Council for the Humanities (NOS-H) beginning in 1999 and culminating in this publication. The goal of this nearly decade-long work was to present a thorough overview of masked performance and mumming traditions in the Nordic region, broadly defined, and to allow contemporary scholars an opportunity to explore these traditions from the theoretical perspectives of modern folkloristics and ethnology. From the very inception of the project in the late 1990s, Terry Gunnell and Carsten Bregenhøj were the two driving forces behind this successful endeavor. By the end of the project, participants from all of the Nordic countries as well as researchers in British and North American traditions had participated in what were clearly fruitful scholarly exchanges. This large, handsome volume, produced under the auspices of the Royal Gustav Adolf Academy for Swedish Folk Culture (Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur) will stand as the definitive study of Nordic mumming traditions for the foreseeable future.

The volume consists of an introduction and two main sections. The introductory chapter, written by Gunnell, offers an excellent theoretical basis for the ensuing volume. Gunnell accurately recognizes the lack of any substantive modern scholarly engagement with the field of masked drama and mumming in the Nordic region (p. 30), and offers various theoretical insights into why scholars have shied away from substantive engagement with these traditions. Among these, he notes that the earliest scholarship on mumming traditions tended to focus almost exclusively on historical and descriptive accounts of outward appearances (p. 38). He situates von Sydow's introduction of functional approaches to folkloristics as an important development that reverberated throughout the study of mumming traditions, particularly in Scandinavia, with scholars turning their attention to the function of these traditions in the communities in which they were performed. Despite the focus of the functionalists on the deep contextualization of situated performances, Gunnell rightfully notes that, like the historical surveys before them, these studies could also suffer from a degree of impersonality (p. 39). The current volume is more than a corrective for the unfortunate lacuna that emerged from these earlier approaches to mumming tradition. Indeed, in the case studies, there is a



Delivery: info@ssp.nu

degree of immediacy in many of the fieldwork based papers that could easily be a model for work in other areas of folklore.

The first major section of the volume consists of seven surveys of mumming in the Nordic regions. These surveys include considerations of mumming traditions in Norway; Sweden; Denmark; the North Atlantic (predominantly Iceland, Shetland, Orkney and the Faroe Islands); Finland and Karelia; Estonia; and Greenland. These articles are comprehensive in scope, and provide an excellent historical overview of mumming and masked drama scholarship in each of these regions. The chapters also offer helpful overviews of the various traditions that dominate in these regions and their distribution. These richly illustrated chapters stand on their own as important individual contributions to the study of mumming in the north, and certainly provide an excellent grounding in the various mumming traditions of the Nordic area. Taken collectively, these essays provide an important insight into the processes of historical and geographic variation of the mask and mumming traditions, and offer the researcher and student alike a wealth of information.

It is impossible to single out any single article in this section for specific praise, as all of these surveys hew to remarkably high academic standards. The maps accompanying the Norwegian and Finnish chapters are of exceptionally good quality, and quite useful as illustrations of the distribution of various traditional practices. Similarly, the photographs in the Danish section and in the Swedish section are of particular note, as they provide rich visual testimony to the diversity of these traditions across many decades. The Greenlandic survey is quite interesting as it encapsulates the

cultural tension between indigenous peoples and their cultural expressions in the context of colonial rule. The Estonian chapter is equally interesting, as it brings to the fore the notion of the Baltic Rim as a cultural region; while this conceptualization of the Nordic region is well known in the Nordic countries, it will likely be a surprise to readers not well attuned to the region. The only thing perhaps missing from this survey section is a brief comparative overview—but, given the wealth of materials, the informed reader can make his or her own comparative surmises. The bibliography at the end of the volume—an incredible resource in itself—offers a wealth of information to bolster any such further comparative endeavors. Had the volume simply included these survey articles, it would have guaranteed itself a place in the pantheon of classic reference works in Nordic folklore studies. Fortunately, the volume extends well beyond these masterful survey articles and includes an equally important section of theoretical articles.

The second major section of the volume, simply entitled 'Articles', consists of a series of studies, or 'case studies', that provide critical depth to the substantive historical materials presented in the first section. This second section is broken into five subsections, each comprised of several articles. These sections include 'Themes in Mass and Mumming', essays that are largely theoretical explorations of the analysis of performance traditions; 'Local Case Studies', the largest section, including six excellent articles based on substantive fieldwork throughout the Nordic area; 'Related Traditions in the Nordic Area', a series of three articles that make a convincing case for the interrelatedness of folk expressive culture; 'New Traditions in Masks and Mumming' which, with only two articles, is the smallest section of the second part of the volume; and 'Comparable Traditions in Neighboring Countries', in which the three articles comprising this section helpfully expand the comparative scope of the volume into Scotland, Ireland and Newfoundland. This comparative addendum in some ways mitigates any reservations one might have had concerning important comparative tie-ins not included in the first section.

Each of the articles in the second section could stand well on its own as an individual journal article. Taken together, the articles set up an intriguing dialogue that crosses not only cultural and linguistic boundaries, but also boundaries through time and space. It would be quite difficult to single out any article for particular consideration in a review as brief as this. It is worth noting that the articles do not cleave to any single theoretical paradigm. Instead, various mumming traditions—from *Julebukk* traditions in Norway to carnival traditions in the modern Icelandic secondary schools—are explored from a variety of theoretical points of view. As a result, at the end of this nearly three hundred page section, one has had

the opportunity to explore a wide variety of critical approaches to specific mumming traditions. Coupled to the exhaustive surveys at the beginning of the volume, this theoretical smorgasbord is a remarkably successful strategy.

The only negative comment one can possibly make about this remarkable compendium is its heft—one could easily imagine the work split into a more manageable two volume boxed set, with the first volume consisting of the well researched and extremely useful surveys of mumming traditions from the various Nordic regions, and the second volume consisting of the in-depth, analytically sophisticated and critically important articles. Such a division, however, would add to the cost of the work, and probably would have precluded the inclusion of the numerous maps and figures that contribute substantially to the intellectual weight of the work. Indeed, it is remarkable in an age of ever decreasing publishing budgets that Gunnell was allowed to include as many photographs, drawings and maps as he was. The quality of the maps and photographs is first rate. Given the nature of mumming traditions, the inclusion of photographs—particularly interesting archival and contemporary photographs of actual mumming performances—is absolutely crucial. Although nothing can ever supplant first hand experience of a folk performance, the photographs bridge this necessary gap quite well, and offer the student of mumming an opportunity to view many of the phenomena so expertly explored in the various articles. Similarly, the inclusion of large, informative maps helps illustrate aspects of the distribution of various mumming traditions in the north, and also helps one situate the various oikotypes of mumming practices. While future developments might make it possible to concatenate these maps into some form of computer interface, the current maps at least help delimit the regional scope of traditions explored in these various articles. Another possible enhancement to the volume would have been the inclusion of the entire work as a pdf file on disk, which would allow for rapid discovery of related phenomena described in the text, yet the excellent index attenuates the need for any such electronic finding aid. One final enhancement would have been the inclusion of short video clips on DVD in an accompanying sleeve—again one can only suspect that production and distribution costs would have been prohibitive. These are, of course, minor quibbles and speak more to the success of the volume: one cannot help but become utterly absorbed by the world of mumming presented here with the result that one looks up from reading only wanting more.

The current volume will have significant appeal to teachers and students of Nordic folklore, as well as to researchers in humor and folk ritual. Given Gunnell's own interest in performance and theater—and the inclusion of these considerations in many of the articles

and surveys—the volume will also appeal to those interested in theater and performance, its history and its manifestations in folk cultures throughout the world. Because of the important and substantive discussions of the history of mask and mumming scholarship in the first section, the volume will also appeal to scholars of other mumming traditions besides the Nordic region or northern Europe. Indeed, one can easily imagine a series of related volumes detailing Masks and Mumming in East Asia, in South Asia, in Africa, in South and Central America and so on. Such a global thrust would presage a significant advance in folklore studies, recognizing at once the human will to engage in theater, masked performance and mumming on the one hand, and the remarkable diversity—both historical and geographic—that characterizes masked folk performance throughout the world. Gunnell and his colleagues have set the bar very high in this excellent volume—it will be interesting to see if other folklorists are up to the task of expanding this type of comprehensive work on a global scale.

TIMOTHY R. TANGI IERLINI
University of California, Los Angeles

Narrating, Doing, Experiencing: Folklorists Facing Fundamental Questions

Narrating, Doing, Experiencing – Nordic Folkloristic Perspectives. Ed. by Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, Barbro Klein & Ulf Palménfelt. (Studia Fennica Folkloristica 16.) Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2006. 186 pp. ISBN 951-746-726-5. 29 euros.

Eight Nordic folklorists have applied themselves to fundamental questions in *Narrating, Doing, Experiencing – Nordic Folkloristic Perspectives*, edited by Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, Barbro Klein and Ulf Palménfelt. The subjects of the articles concern problems of human existence and society. An integrating factor is that narratives gained from face-to-face interviews form the material for all the articles. The intimate discussions, special characteristics of the narratives and problems related to the analysis present the reader with folkloristic questions about tradition, narration, aesthetics and ethics.

The 'narrative turn' which took place in many areas of science and life in the 1960s has elevated narration and narrating in Western societies to some sort of root metaphor. In her introductory article Barbro Klein examines the development of folkloristic research in the United States and Europe in connection with this turn. Interesting related facts are offered by the ethnography of speaking, a theory of verbal art as performance and ethnopoetics. Klein emphasises

that for the folklorist the narrative turn signified also a 'performance turn': folklore and types of verbal art began to be examined as forms of action.

The narrative turn has also influenced the strengthening of the position of I-centred narrative in Western folkloric research. Personal-experience narration is one example of such narration, where people express their experiences, their values, their joys and their worries. The narrative turn has been seen as a golden time for folklorists. In reading the articles in the book it is possible to glimpse the sort of perspectives offered by folkloristics to social and cultural discussions. A theme running through the articles is the relationship between family, community and society, which the writers analyse through the topics of birth and death, childhood and age, illness and war.

War

War and exile are the starting points for two of the articles. Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj has interviewed Ingrian Finns living in the neighbourhood of St Petersburg, Russia. Exploiting the ethnography of speech and performance perspective in her analysis, Kaivola-Bregenhøj also presents her own fieldwork experiences. The four women interviewed relate the turning points of their lives, war and exile. The laconic narratives are lent colour by the precise individual facts, the descriptions of activities and the linking of events to places. By temperament the narrators vary, but their narratives are linked in that they do not present their feelings in words. Instead of words, the feelings emerge as sudden bursts of emotion in the narrative setting. Although the narratives deal in depth with extraordinary personal experiences, they do not contain any moral judgements on the events. The writer leads the reader to consider how private grief is transformed into public sorrow.

Anne Heimo sets out in her article to investigate memories and sites of memory. Her material derives from the events of the Civil War in a small Finnish village in 1918. The interviews paint a picture of the recent history of the community as being multiform and multi-voiced. The narrators present the tangled relationships of the opposing sides. In dealing with recent history, narratives may also present suffering and death by means of humour. With her interest in the politics of memory, Heimo uses as the basis of her interpretation the observation that memory is spatially ordered and is thus related to the changes in the surroundings. In examining the connections of human experiences to place Heimo maps out the historical memories of the community and sense of place. With her article she involves herself in the discussion of how part of the community's historical memory derives from the places of memory.