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1. Mair Jose Benardette, **Hispanic Culture and Character of Sephardic Jews** (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, second edition, 1982).
2. Ibid.

The English Mummers' Play. By Alex Helm. Foreword by N. Peacock and E. C. Cawte. Pp. 116. The Folklore Society Mistletoe Series, vol. 14, 1980. \$45.00. Cloth.

Calus: Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual. By Gail Kligman. Foreword by Mircea Eliade. Pp. 209. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. No Price.

Reviewed by Paul L. Tylor.

Why review these two books together? Because they provide a similarity in subject matter and a contrast in substance. Alex Helm and Gail Kligman are offering us in-depth studies of seasonal rituals acted out in European country villages by troupes of disguised or costumed men. These ritual actors present a scripted performance: that is, a performance with a traditional form and content known by both the actors and their audience. There are further similarities between the English Mummers' Play and the Romanian Calus. In both, a fool and a female impersonator are important characters. In many variants, the death and resurrection of one of the characters is a central feature of the dramatic action. In both England and Romania the stage of the performance is the community itself as the troupe of actors make their rounds of the village and give their performance in homes, yards, or other fixed spots.

There are on the other hand some key differences between the two ritual traditions. The English Mummers present a play text of rhymes mixed with much stylized action.

In some, but not all, of the English Mummers' traditions the play is associated with the performance of a sword dance in which six or eight men are joined in a linked ring. The most visible feature of the Romanian **Calus** is the body of vigorous and virtuosic dances performed by the men. The seven, nine, or eleven **Calusarii** are primarily dancers. The dramatic skits intermingled with the dances are mostly the province of the mute or fool. One important regional, and perhaps more archaic, form of the **Calus** does not involve drama, but rather focuses on the ritual healing of those possessed by the **iele**, the dangerous female spirits or fairies who are especially active during **Rusalii**, the season in which the **Calus** is performed.

This brings us to another major difference between the two traditions: the season of performance. The **Calus** is performed during **Rusalii**, a time that is measured each year from the date of Easter. The most important day of the season coincides with the day of the church calendar known as Whitsunday. The English Mummers' Play, by contrast, is not as tightly associated with any date on the calendar. The most common season of appearance is the Christmas season; but All Soul's Day, Plough Monday (a winter holiday that anticipates Spring), or the Easter season are also times in which Mummers may appear in some localities.

The season of the performance is connected with the problem of the meaning of these rituals. It would seem that both the Mummers and the **Calusarii** perform for the benefit of the communities (though there are certainly also personal motivations involved). It is in the interpretation of the meaning of these ritual performances that the two books under review diverge greatly.

Helm's work is a large attractive publication in which pictures, drawings, maps, and play texts accompany a discussion that summarizes and evaluates the massive amount of collection and research to which he devoted his adult life. Before his premature death in the late 1960s, Alex Helm had compiled enough material on folk drama and calendar customs to fill thirty-five volumes. With E. C. Cawte and N. Peacock, he published several geographical indices on ceremonial dance and drama and related customs. **The English Mummers' Play** is an interpretive and detailed discussion of the material indexed in **English Ritual Drama**. The book

reviewed here is organized around the three major types of plays identified in that index: the sword dance play, the wooing or bridal play, and the hero-combat play.

The central thesis of Helm's discussion is that these are not literary texts or curiosities, but ceremonies which involve the death and resurrection of one or more of the actors. Helm's comparative analysis of the three types led him to speculate that the wooing plays were the oldest. In his judgement, these are essentially life-cycle dramas that have to do with human fertility. Following the orthodoxy of the Folk-Lore Society and the English Folksong and Dance Society, he concludes that the key for understanding all three types of plays is a common ritual pattern in which someone must die for the good of the community and must then be revived. Helm further speculates that this action was originally mimed, and that "texts developed as understanding dwindled." (p. 10) The changes that the ritual underwent as part of the "flow of Folk Culture" are essentially unimportant. The basic ritual remains constant. It is a deep-rooted religious ritual with parallels in many primitive societies and religions of antiquity. Unfortunately, however, "it is almost completely misunderstood by performers and witnesses alike." (p. 1).

English language scholarship on European folk rituals and calendar customs has been dominated by the approach represented by Helm. Gail Kligman, an anthropologist from the University of Chicago, brings a breath of fresh air to the field.² Kligman makes use of all the tools provided by recent anthropological research into the nature and meaning of ritual. She announces at the start that she interprets the *Calus* as both a ritual process and a social process. Her opening chapter is a lengthy and thorough discussion of the whole text of the ritual, including beliefs, behavior and material objects. Relying on Clifford Geertz's style of 'thick description,' she makes use of explanations and interpretations offered by *Calusarii* themselves. A most revealing exchange is reported in the second chapter that reviews past scholarship on the *Calus*. In this context, Kligman relates an argument between several older and younger dancers on whether the *Calus* was born of the *iele* (the female fairies) or of men.

What Kligman presents is a composite picture of the

ritual **Calus**, but she does not ignore the many local variations in specific parts of the ritual, especially in the esoteric rites by which the troupe of dancers is banded together and then disbanded. One is left wondering, though, to what extent individual traditions relate to this composite or generalized form. In separate chapters, Kligman discusses in depth the two major regional oikotypes. The first is that found in the province of Oltenia in which the ritual healing of those possessed by the **iele** is accomplished vicariously through a trance into which one of the **Calusarii** dances himself at the order of his **vataf** or leader. The second regional form is found in Muntenia where dramatic skits are more prevalent. These range from horseplay on the part of the fool, to satirical plays on topical issues (such as politics or sexuality), to plays which feature the death and resurrection of one of the dancers. Much of this material is indeed suggestive of human sexuality and fertility.

Kligman does not follow the line of the English students of folk ritual and digress into discussions of ancient fertility rituals. The material with which she works is more recent data collected in the field. She attempts to interpret the symbolism of the **Calus** within the context of the symbolic structure and belief system of Romanian folk culture, as expressed in the temporal and spatial organizations of the world view of the people she observed. The conclusion she reaches is that the **Calus** is a ritual reversal of the normal social order which is strongly divided into male and female domains. The **Calusarii** are mediators between male and female, between the living and the dead, and between the **iele** and humans.

Finally, Kligman attempts to interpret the meaning of the **Calus** in terms of the modernization of Romanian society as represented by industrialization and the ideology of the socialist state, one of the most interesting aspects of her study. Unfortunately, the discussion in this final chapter is too short. One can only wish that such an approach were more fully developed, and adopted by others, especially English students of folk rituals and calendar customs. Kligman's reliance on thick description is a needed corrective to the common attitude that contemporary Mummer's and their audience almost completely misunderstand what they are about.

NOTES

¹ **English Ritual Drama** (London: The Folklore Society, 1967).

² See, for example: Henry Glassie, **All Silver and No Brass: An Irish Christmas Mumming** (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975); and the special issue on folk drama of the **Journal of American Folklore**, edited by Thomas A. Green, 94(1981).

Folklore and Oral History. Edited by Neil V. Rosenberg.

St. John's Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1978. Pp. xx + 101. No price given.

Reviewed by Joseph P. Goodwin.

The three years between the second annual meeting of the Canadian Aural/Oral History Association in 1975 and the publication of this book containing some of the papers presented at that conference represent an unfortunate delay. Materials dealing with both folklore and oral