

Session 2

Performativity and Performance

1. SCARBOROUGH FAIR (HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES)

“Scarborough Fair” (as sung by Martin Carthy, recorded 1965)

Are you going to Scarborough Fair
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
Remember me to one who lives there
For once she was a true love of mine

Tell her to make me a cambric shirt
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
Without no seam nor needlework
And then she'll be a true love of mine

Tell her to find me an acre of land
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
Between the salt water and the sea strand
And then she'll be a true love of mine

Tell her to plough it with a lamb's horn
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
And to sow it all o'er with one peppercorn
And then she'll be a true love of mine

Tell her to reap it with a sickle of leather
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
And to thrash it out with a bunch of heather
And then she'll be was a true love of mine

Are you going to Scarborough Fair
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
Remember me to one who lives there
For once she was a true love of mine

Evolution of the **riddle song** from

- *supernatural* to
- *homilectic* to
- *amatory* meanings

“The Elphin Knight” forerunner of “Scarborough Fair” (printed in 1673):

The elphin knight sits on yon hill,
Ba, ba, ba, lilli ba
He blows his horn both lowd and shrill.
The wind hath blown my plaid awa

[...]

‘I wish that horn were in my kist,
Ba, ba, ba, lilli ba
Yea, and the knight in my arms two.’
The wind hath blown my plaid awa

She had no sooner these words said
Ba, ba, ba, lilli ba
When that the knight came to her bed
The wind hath blown my plaid awa

[...] [riddles are being asked and answered]

‘My maidenhead I’l then keep still,
Ba, ba, ba, lilli ba
Let the Elphin knight do what he will’
The wind hath blown my plaid awa (Child 1957, I, 15)

“Wittingham Fair”, manuscript dating to ca. 1855

dialogue of two voices:

- 4: Three hard questions he has putten to me
Parsley sage grow merry in time
But I’ll match him with other three
Before he shall be a true lover of mine

Whittingham Fair.

Re- mem-ber me to one that lives there, for once she was a true lover o mine -

2^d Tell her to make me a cambric shirt,
 Par-ely, x e - - - - - time,
 Without ever a seam or needle work,
 Then she shall be a true lover o mine.

3^d Tell her to wash it in yonder well,
 Par-ely, x e - - - - - time,
 Where it never sprung where never pain fell,
 Then she shall be a true lover o mine.

4th Three hard questions he's putten to me,
 Par-ely, x e - - - - - time,
 But I'll match him with other three,
 Before he shall be a true lover o mine.

5th Tell him to buy me an acre of land,
 Par - x e - - - - - time,
 Between the sea, & the sea-land,
 Then he shall be a true lover o mine.

6th Tell him to plow it with a hunting horse,
 Par x e - - - - - time,
 And sow it with the sickerly corn,
 Then he shall x e - - - - - o mine,

7th Tell him to shear it with the hunting leather,
 Par x e - - - - - time,
 And bind bind it up in a pea-cock feather,
 Then he x e - - - - - o mine,

8th Tell him to thrash it on yonder wall,
 Par x e - - - - - in time,
 And never let one corn of it fall,
 Then he shall x e - - - - - o mine.

Transformations from “The Elphin Knight” to “Scarborough Fair” as sung by Carthy:

- loss of supernatural connotation
- new opening stanza situating the audience as mediators
- introduction of a complex temporal relation of past, present and future
- new refrain (amatory or supernatural connotations?)

“Folklorists and students of plant mythology are well aware that certain herbs were held to have magical significance and were used by sorcerers in their spells and conversely as counter-spells by those who wished to outwit them. The herbs mentioned in the refrain of this song (parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme) are all known to have been closely associated with death and also as charms against the evil eye.” (Carthy 1965)

‘Demonising’ female sexuality in the “Elfin Knight” and “Scarborough Fair”

2. PERFORMATIVITY (LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES)

John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1975)

constatives (statements that are either true or false) vs.

performatives (statements that perform “conventional procedures” which are either successful (“felicitous”) or not (“infelicitous”), i.e. change the state of the world or don’t):

“I now pronounce you man and wife”

“I hereby christen this ship Queen Elizabeth”

“Infelicity is an ill to which *all* acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all *ceremonial* acts” (Austin 1975, 18-19, italics in the original).

In his later lectures, Austin asserts that also conventional statements (and thus all utterances)

“are speech acts no less than all these other speech acts that we have been mentioning and talking about as performative” (Austin 1979, 249).

three different levels of utterance:

- the locutionary act (‘sense’ and ‘reference’)
- **the illocutionary act** (the conventional ‘force’ of an utterance)
- the perlocutionary act (the effect on the hearer)

John R. Searle (Austin’s student)

moves away from ideas of ritual framing and context to claim towards a theory of words and action as “a rule-governed form of behaviour” (Searle 1969, 17)

Jacques Derrida’s critique of Austin and Speech Act Theory (1982)

Starting point:

“a performative utterance will, for example be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance – a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use [...]. All this we are excluding from consideration.” (Austin 1975, 22, emphases in the original)

Derrida: ‘parasitic’ uses are the norm rather than the exception

the force of language is conditioned by its ‘iterability’ (rather than ‘conventional forces’ bound to specific speakers in particular situations)

3. PERFORMANCE (CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES)

The need to combine ideas of the (abstract) ‘iterability’ of language with ideas of the (concrete) ‘embodiment’ of language:

“there is no language outside of the spatially and temporally situated execution of its vocal, written or gesticulatory articulation” (Krämer 2002, 331, my tr.).

“even the simplest linguistic exchange brings into play a complex and ramifying web of historical power relations between the speaker, endowed with a specific authority, and an audience, which recognizes this authority to varying degrees, as well as between groups to which they respectively belong.” (Bourdieu 1991, 46)

Song and Lyrics as Social Ritual (ethnographic perspectives)

Stanley S. Tambiah:

Rituals are ‘performative’ in three different ways:

“in the Austinian sense of performative wherein saying something is also **doing something as a conventional act**; in the quite different sense of **a staged performance that uses multiple media** by which the participants experience the event intensely; and in the third sense of **indexical values [...] being attached to and inferred by actors during the performance.**” (Tambiah 1979, 119, my emphasis)

!! The particular context of performance not only enables the ‘performativity’ of words and sound, but performances at the same time rely on performative (indexical) input to keep up or establish a theatrical or ritual frame. !!

John Miles Foley (drawing on Richard Baumann’s research in ‘ethnopoetics’):

The meaning of performed language is conditioned by the

- **performance arena**
- **register**
- **communicative economy**

Martin Carthy's "Scarborough Fair" and performance arena

"sets up, or represents, an interpretive frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood, and [...] this frame contrasts with at least one other frame, the literal." (Baumann 1977, 9)

The 'folk music world' and the folk revival in the 60s (cf. McKinnon 1993)

Careful 'constructions' of informality: club session or festival no PA, no difference between singer and audience, relaxed but concentrated listening

register (the 'keying' of performance):

"each speech community will make use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means from among its resources in culturally conventionalized and culture-specific ways to key the performance frame, such that all communication that takes place within that frame is to be understood as performance within that community." (Baumann 1977, 16)

"the search to revive the 'music of the people' has resulted in a movement of intellectuals and the middle class. [...] the 'music of the people' cannot be readily taken back to them. It does not fit into working men's clubs for instance, and has to remain the refuge of the folk clubs" (MacKinnon 1993, 59).

'low and rustic' imagery, 'rough' and conversational singing style, little technical processing -- keying honesty, immediacy, and a continuity with the musical tradition of the 'folk'

communicative economy

"speaks of the dedicated, focused relationship between the register and its traditional, performance-centred array of meanings" (Fowley 1995, 53).

The singer as story-teller, ironic distancing, 'male bonding'

"we need, on the one hand, to avoid the pull of performance as open-ended free display [...] and, on the other, the pull towards oversedimentation (we can only perform what has been prescribed): to some extent, the performative is always along the lines that have been laid down, and yet performativity can also be about refashioning futures." (Pennycook 2007, 77)

Martin Carthy's folk version of "Scarborough Fair" as (nostalgic) "re-enactment" or (forward-looking) "revival"?

Carthy interview statements: Folk against the stasis of classical music:

"what we have [in the revival] is the song in a stage of its development. We have an enormous amount to do with the way it's developed [...]. It's not a finished article. I think that the attitude of the people who are listening to the Brittens and the Vaughan Williamses, is that what they are being presented with is a finished polished article, and that's not what I think"

Against the commercialisation of rock:

"the music industry is a pack of dogs, fuck em! They just look at it as you being a product and that's all there is to it; I don't think that's the way to treat music. Music has to be free, now and again it frees itself, but then of course it goes and puts itself in thrall again"

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