

THESIS OF A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

László Barabás

DRAMATIC CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONAL STAGING IN MAROSSZÉK REGION DURING THE CARNIVAL - TIME

UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN, FACULTY OF ARTS

2008

Defining the theme, the aim of thesis

1. The research of traditional staging and dramatic customs in Hungarian folklore studies started with difficulty relatively late. The gathering and research in folk poetry done was made according to literary-aesthetic point of view took no notice of plays performed in carnivals.

Masks, motion, dances and generally the acting were not less important than speaking, singing and oral communication over that period of time. The research of carnival plays was undergoing a change mainly as a consequence of gathering and research-work of Ujváry Zoltán during the last decades.

However, from the very beginning, at the time of arising folkloric interest, several researcher, local ethnographic collector have done exploration work in the area of our biggest ethnic group, on the Székely people's territory, it is surprising the low proportion of the Transylvanian and Székely respect within the research of Hungarian national folk customs. In Marosszék, over the Székely areas folk customs are lesser-known special fields among the ethnographic studies.

2. The purpose of the thesis is the introduction, presenting and examining of dramatic customs in Marosszék region, during the carnival-time.

The studied circle has been restricted according to the topic, as it does not have the intention of presenting and analysing the complete carnival customs in the region, but one of its expressive and well-structured pieces. The goal of this study is demonstrating, explaining and analysing those dramatic carnival plays and customs whose main characteristics are the dissimulation in masks and dramatic art. In the whole territory of our fieldwork most carnival plays presented and customs performed belonged to this type. Hiding behind or wearing masks is not interpreted in a narrow way, but in a wider sense, as a disguise or a masquerade.

3. The regional limits and geographic borders of the research has been formed by doing gathering within the ethnographic region during the years in the territory of so called Marosszék. During the collecting and enquiring period the author has become more and more convinced about the great variety of carnival customs and the richness in play culture of this Transylvanian regional folkloric area, which can serve as a salutary not only in their local and individual characters, but general ethnographic, universal folkloristic and anthropologist moral and qualities can be found beyond that.

4. Besides presenting the most possible variations in synchronic segments and stereoscopic systems, demonstrating the customs and plays' formations in time was essential, furthermore arranging them in diachronic point of view as well.

The period of research extends from the first decades of the 20th century until our present days, as it has been cultivated for almost one hundred years. The intensive way of gathering and the special research work was started in 1982, more than quarter century ago. Hungarian traditional folk culture in Transylvania has being studied within the long term of research. The layers and occurrences of this unfinished period, which have been able to renew and are undergoing changes at present and fortunately have not disappeared yet.

a. Broad outline of the methods applied

1. Every effort was made to be exhaustive with introducing the repertory of plays and customs in the region. In order that the area could have been covered and because of the characteristic features of the micro regions the gathering work has usually been done in 10 or 15 research sectors. The total research network includes 126 settlements.

2. While doing collecting in villages the most important method was the participant observation: to be present on the occasion, customs or plays, from the preparation till the

finishing and after it as well, in order to keep a careful watch on it and to record all the possible component, the flashing and vanishing complexity. Taking photos and recording every occasion on tape were taken consideration as collecting methods in order that the most pictures and films could have been shot and saved on location as a document.

According to certifying the different customs and plays that could only be maintained or kept in mind, the questioning, and dialogues with informants, the interviews or the recalling narration of memories were used as a method. We intended to make the former participants speak, who used to take part in some dramatic traditions or customs. Those people were asked who were present in the past and the experts in plays, being able to preserve and recall the text of the plays Reviving of the performances had been acted out in different play-variants on the original or new spots with the assistance of former participants.

3. Questionnaire, including 17 question groups was used for putting usual custom conditions in writing. In this way important data could have been got about the carnival customs held or practised in the settlements. In methodological point of view it was very useful, as it was able to reflect spatial and temporal relationships of carnival culture.

Besides scripts or screenplays scenario-like linguistic appearances were also used as important methods, for presenting dramatic plays and customs. Those scripts were made with the method of paying attention, questioning and talking to people. We got information by means of attending, listening, talking or questioning about those plays they practise nowadays as well.

Those plays that could be brought up to mind most often were written due to the text of tape-recordings with the assistance of my conversationalist, using their own words, denomination and their oral performance.

Within ethnography the traditional, data-collecting description was more often replaced by that kind of description, which contained systematizing and defining, as there were a close relationship between them. Meanwhile studying such cases, the subjective version – called anthropological compact description – was experimented, built on the custom elements.

4. Besides the methods mentioned above we could make good use of the general results and approach of folklore studies and ethnography. First of all in the fields of specialised literature and the complex questions of provincial division in people's culture. Moreover a unified view has been created in folklore, social ethnography and the territory of manual culture and in the cartographical method. It is also has to be taken into consideration that carnival culture – the complex social-cultural event, like the world of carnival customs – must be studied with interdisciplinary view and methods in a modern way by the folklore.

b. Listing the thesis results.

1. Defining “Marosszék” region and establishing its inner regional structures.

In the course of geographical definition a century was omitted by the science. The ethnographic- regional partition of the settlements has been a non-clarified problem in former Marosszék and in the county of Maros-Torda furthermore in present Maros county. On the bases of different systems like settlement history, dialectal and folkloric occurrences and special characteristics /houses and barns, the roofed gates, the tights, the fair districts, attitude to their land, local identity, village-mocking and annual customs / the thesis defines and creates the conceptual class of Marosszék region. It included the territory of the original, traditional, Marosszék as a kernel, on the other hand several region joined to it, for example some villages lying on thenorth and south of Szászrégen, along the bank of Maros in this county, also a few settlements founded in Kis-Küküllő valley and the former Udvarhelyszék and its county as well, where the majority of inhabitants are Hungarian.

The characteristic of Marosszék region have developed in such a way that is has become a contact zone in the sense of ethnographical- cultural between the county's territories

and the Székelyföld. Otherwise it has become a link between the cultures of Hungarian people living in Mezőség /Western Transylvania/ and the Székely citizens who are Hungarian and live in Eastern Transylvania. The connecting, linking quality was manifested in different ways as both dialects, both local identity and other characteristic features have been divided into two dominant mezzo-zones: have been structured in Western Mezőség-like and an Eastern Székely-like area. The western part made its deeply into the residence of the Székelys, while the eastern part withdrew to a smaller territory. As for the religious faith / denominational division – it has also become a contact zone in between the majority of roman-catholic Székelys in the East and the Calvinists in the West-Transylvania. In the region at the border of the Calvinist and Roman Catholic church, there Unitarian majority village spread/extended.

Based on the analysed fact the gathering area is divided into 5 characteristic sections: Marosszéki Mezőség, Marosmente, Nyárádmente, Küküllő region, Sóvidék. Most of the small lands are divided into micro regions, village groups. The inner divisional parts of the region can be easily caught in the spatial order of the dramatic costumes and folk dramas too.

2. The casual customs are on the basis of systematisation.

By reason of gathering and researching work the most frequented period in the calendar in case of dissimulation is the carnival. Over these days the main attitudes were controlled by life and ideological approach that regulated the dissimulation in masks. In villages at Marosszék region this activity was kept in spinners in the whole period of carnival. The other occasion that has to be noted is the wedding in the time of carnival, however the importance of this activity is less significant. The end of the carnival is full with different formations in masks. The scene of the amusement in this case is the street in spite of previous occasion where folks go into spinners. The formation of the game is procession.

The customs of mask plays at Marosszék above are classed into three larger groups by measuring the occasions. First type of play/show is a few times performable, informal, and most of the time spinner and indoor related asking-to-be-allowed-to-in forms of dramatic carnival plays. Second model is several performing customs that tightly connected to the end of the carnival, by expressing dramatic scenes. Into the third group belongs to those mask plays that physical appearance is not linked with the recent traditions, but in their nature, mask characters and structure, yet it ranks these performances among them. In this sense carnival means the manifestations of inversed world, carnival freedom and unimpeded mask play. These are considered typical carnival practices.

3.The gathering work reveals 915 plays and versions, which prove that the casual mask customs are really valuable side of the culture in the area. The regional custom-corpus is very focused in both Transylvanian, both Pan Hungarian and maybe both European respect as well.

The inner structure of the carnival mask customs and plays at Marosszék are formed by the following topical groups and play categories:

- Carnival dramatic plays: - plays performed in animal masks	149	
- Mythical figures performed in masks	130	
- Turning-points of life plays	180	
- Genre figures in masks		245
- Plays of current events	71	
Altogether:	775	

Dramatized custom plays during carnival time:

- Symbolic marriage at the end of carnival	18
- Old maid and old chaps mocking /stump drawing/	37
- Carnival's funeral	18
- Marching in the streets in carnival	21
- Fights between king Konc and voivode Cibere	25

Altogether: 140

According to the quantity of samples, in Marosszék there were much more plays demonstrated during the whole period, than in the last days of the carnival. The carnival's custom culture in this region is very colourful, it is dominated by a lot of plays. The plays or customs, having archaic and magical-ritual roots appear in significant proportion. The latest layers are represented by those plays in which social groups, typical people and genre-figures appear.

4. The results of the cartographic- method reflect well the spatial structure of carnival custom-culture in this region and the widespread of plays and the characteristics of micro-regions and groups of villages. In western part of Marosszék, where the majority belongs to Calvinist church – here Mezőség-like, county-like dramatic plays performed in spinning houses are the most typical in the whole carnival time. The eastern-Székely parts the neighbourhood of Szász settlements, where the population is multicultural as for their religious faith. In these villages dramatic custom-plays are the most popular ones, shown at the end of carnival. They are performed while marching in the streets. Its reasons are rooted in the society and church history. Dissimulation in mask, acted in carnival time can be seen as a communication-system in the point of communication. The concrete customs performed in masks can be called communication events. The components of the system are the figures being acted out in different masks, in one hand. On the other hand the persons, players, participants, by whom the projects, the performances are being animated, acted. Third elements are the rules and instruments of the communication, namely the codes.

Through the plays repertoire in Marosszék we can reveal the temporary actors and the vocabulary belonging and used by the figure. In the cases of dramatic plays, according to the themes of the acted figures, the order followed the system of the world so it was begun with the animal masks and mythical figures through the symbolic characters, then came the people representing otherness, finishing with a picturesque montage of everyday life.

Dramatic customs existing in carnival time are being arranged to similar thematic order.

According to ordering of carnival characters, two roles were separated in people's terminology: the beauty carnivals and the ugly masquerades. The beautiful and ugly categories were in connection not only with the clothing and appearances of the persons taking part, but it referred to the action, behaviour, speaking and communication as well. These roles, belonging to these two spheres of actions have strictly been separated. Some places they could have been played only on a special day of the week and it was categorised how people could have waited for the actors as well. This kind of distinction has grown fade for today and the figures have become ambivalent or plurivalent roles.

The roles have created a dynamic system. Changing, rearranging, disappearing, birth and death of new carnival characters were in continuous progress.

6. The participating individuals and groups in masks were defined by traditional standards of values and way of thinking in staging. They had to stick to the rules more severely in the series of custom plays than in the former stages of acting dramatic plays and

dissimulation in masks in the past than our present days. In custom plays occurred at the end of carnival time, only men were allowed to participate in the performances. In these men-type rituals married and unmarried guys opposition is the main characteristic. Dramatic plays were attached to the spinning houses or were performed door by door during the carnival time and they were more different according to genders and ages of participants. This division was completed by outward appearances and inner features that were important rules. The last one, can be called the competence of actor, furthermore his acting or performing ability is one of the most important criteria in traditional folk staging.

The former generational and sexual restrictions have already been solved or seem to be for today. The female sex has become dominant in the subject order during carnival time not only in preparation, but in the term of active staging as well. Custom plays shown at the end of carnivals were not touched by this procession, though they did not become as characteristic.

7. Masks, clothing and the belonging accessories form plentiful expressive structure in carnival plays. These are the most prominent instruments of transformation and being somebody else. In above plays the real masks replacing the whole face (e.g. "wood" or "pot" heads) are hardly represented. In most cases people perform in facemasks, head hiding and covering masks (e.g. lace, ribbon or ragged masks). Ethnologically the most noteworthy disguises are the Kibedian leather masks. The traditional way of mask preparing is the soot, flour and grease spreading over the faces, moreover the feather sticking. Nowadays on one hand the masks of modern world have showed up, on the other hand these masks and disguises have become emblematic fancy dresses and indications of costumes. The traditional carnival clothes together with the accessories still appear in ritual custom plays, there are more possibilities for innovation in case of dramatic plays.

8. On the basis of the explored Marosszékian dramatic play facts, the appearing row of actions, interactions mostly have only symbolic meaning, these are considered ritual customs. The whole term of carnival actions is free performance by the means of playing in cultural and anthropologic sense. All these actions generally have miming features belonging to mimicry types and provide large possibility for the dramatic ability and creativity. The two ranges of act cannot be sharply separated /set apart from each other, these ranges appear at the same time and are linked together. The carnival mask dissimulation as act of playing and the way of behaviour can be described well with the notion of playful rituality.

9. Besides the dramatic act, the carnival ended dramatic customs and the whole carnival time performances differ from sphere and form, and also differ on the basis on the proxemical code. The former activities are place changing processes, marches these are outdoor events. This is the ritual sphere form. The plays joining to the spinner are held in closed space forms, indoor, stationary occurrences and eruptions. This is the sphere form of theatre. The relationship of procession and eruption are in constant movement at the carnival ended custom plays. The best example of this custom is the Carnival's funeral, performed in Alsósófalva, which consists of eruptional events built in a procession.

10. The play repertoire of Marosszék can also prove that the verbal code and communication is important, but not the only mode of expression in dramatic traditions at carnivals. In most of the ritual sphere, carnival ended custom plays the text code is not the dominant, but the motion, the action, songs and dances and also the object codes. However, within performing Carnival's funeral it becomes dominant. The verbal code of theatre sphere dramatic plays is more varied. One of the groups is created by silent plays. In more simple spinning plays, pantomiming scenes are shown.

It has been worked as a rule that the ugly, frightening figures were not allowed to speak or they could only speak in disguised voice /voice mask/. There is a wider range of talk shows with improvised texts than the previous ones. We can mention those plays in a

separated group, which are built up from other territories of folklore and consist of well-known or borrowed or readymade pieces of texts and formulas as well. They use wedding poetry, best men's poems, dance-words and rhymes as well. Funeral-songs, funeral parodies and merry-ballads are stereotypic formulas besides greeting and farewell texts. Wedding songs, brigand ballads and spinster-jeering places are provided in dramatic plays. The other accomplished class of text originated from the so-called higher culture and it is well known by the folklore carriers /the texts of church-wedding and funeral songs/. They are turned and coded into a carnival play. It is a lively text creating procession nowadays as well. The last group is built up by those shows that are placed above the former levels. Improvisation and borrowed or ready texts are unified in them and afterwards they are changed into a permanent, steady screenplay, organising them into fixed dialogues. Songs also can be organised into dialogues and into "musical comedy". Just like the carnival, parody or erotic texts can become an expressive way of speaking over the carnivals.

11. In traditional folk staging the performance itself is the central category. In a wider sense, phases before and after performances and their smaller sections moreover the total dramaturgy of traditional folk staging can be integrated into the communicational even. Accordingly in the plays repertoire the scripts of shows and the customs performed in masks are documented in different versions

The complete carnival staging event consists of three sections: foreplay/organisation and preparation/, the performance and the afterpiece that includes the follow up activities, such as dancing and entertaining together and a big feast. The performance was created from three linear sections. The first and the third ones give the frames. Most carnival plays began with asking for permission to enter the house. By this mean the contact between the plays world and the outside reality was created. The traditional plays had their special roles and text versions in order to make this link. The finishing, the return into real world can be distinguished well by acoustic and other signals or introducing the actors or with offering the audience, etc. In compositional point of view the framed play can be nominated as a short excerpt. In conclusion the most popular plays are the shorter or longer scenes. The appearance, introduction in masks or pantomimes can also be excerpts, but they can be formed by more oral text- and song motives. These play parts can flow into one another and can be repeated more times during the show by different figures dressed in masks. In the case of marching dramatic customs more play elements can run in the same time by the actors.

In the spinning theatre the general model, consisting of three pieces, was not realised in the same way like dramatised plays performed in the streets at the end of carnivals. In the first case the performance was brought to the audience who had a permanent, unchanging place where they could come together not only for the sake of performance but could take part actively in the events. In the second case they gathered in order to watch the moving show and perhaps for participating in this movement where the audience have to change place as well.

There used to be a traditional form in between as a "wandering theatre" visiting the houses one by one.

12. The dissertation certifies changes taking place in the customs in wider and narrower context also the changes that have happened in dramatic customs itself from the beginning of the first decades of 20th century. It reveals and reflects the relation between the permanent and changing elements and the renewing tendencies as well. We can distinguish more – shorter and longer – periods according to continuity, stopping or renewing or changing in functions. It is generally true that performances held in spinning houses and dissembling in masks from house to house have become sporadic, though it has not disappeared yet. This kind of playing has changed generation. From the adults, it has placed to the groups of

adolescent and mainly played by teenagers or children. This tendency is stimulated and helped by the school festivals organised to celebrate the carnival.

The carnival ended, permanently forming and changing marching in the streets have not have not come to an end. They are practiced in changing and forming in our days every year. It is a general tendency that they are dissolved in the common holiday and become the part of the village festive. The significance of performing a play has increased apart from closing the carnival.

13. Systemising the functions of carnival customs in masks, the dissertation emphasises the ritual, ethical-regular and their ludical function. As the ritual function has decreased, its ludical function has become the primary value, while the ethical-regular function has been preserved. At present functions of these plays the tradition preserving-cultivating function with expressing Hungarian and local identity, community and unity forming are manifested in them. Besides their cooperating function they give the opportunity of competitions and rivalry between smaller social groups locally. Nowadays happening is changes are taking place in carnivals life. It is turning to a fancy-dress party without dancing and special drama playing or staging – it is institutionalised and going through amplification. Today the carnival as the part of a village celebration represents only the local holiday.

14. In conclusion it can be declared that the researched period of dramatic customs and popular performances are neither petrified relics nor survival of times past, but social-cultural occurrences undergoing changes, current events and dynamic cultural creations

This dissertation with supplement photo documentation is the print and subjective interpretation of people's staging and playing performances during the carnival time within Marosszék in the last century, which is the outstanding achievement of Hungarian ethnic culture in Transylvania.

d. The author's publications relevant to the subject of dissertation:

- 1984 Farsangtemetés - alsósófalvi népi színjáték. In: Bölcsőringató. Az Igaz Szó Évkönyve. 97-103. Marosvásárhely.
- 1988 Rítusok arcai. „Ilyés, hát visznek megint?” In: TETT (a Hét melléklete), 4.sz. 44-48. Bukarest.
- 1991 Farsangtemetés a Sóvidéken. In: Történelem, régészet, néprajz. Tanulmányok Farkas József tiszteletére. 315-330. Debrecen.
- 1992/a Farsangi lakodalmas játékok Marosszéken. In: Kultúra és tradíció. Tanulmányok Ujváry Zoltán tiszteletére. 181-187. Miskolc.
- 1992/b Farsangtemetés a Sóvidéken. Egy székely népi dramatikus játék a XX. században. In: A Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság Évkönyve 1. 91-106. Kolozsvár.
- 1993/a Kalendáris szokások Siklódon. In: Néprajzi Látóhatár, 1-2 sz. 28-48. Miskolc.
- 1993/b Farsangbúcsúztató Erdélyben. In: Az iskolai színjáték és a népi dramatikus hagyományok. A noszvaji hasonló című konferencián elhangzott előadások. Szerkesztette Pintér Márta Zsuzsanna-Kilián István. 179-188. Debrecen.
- 1995 A kibédi farsang 1988-ban. Művelődés, 47. évf. 2.sz. 30-35.

- 1996/a A farsangi dramatikus játékok és szokások marosszéki változatai. In: A Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság Évkönyve 4. 44-96. Kolozsvár.
- 1996/b Farsang a Sóvidéken. U.o. 168-190.
- 1998 Forog az esztendő kereke. Sóvidéki népszokások. Mentor Kiadó. 32-61. Marosvásárhely.
- 2000/a Karácsonytól Pünkösdig. Marosszéki népszokások. In: Milleniumi megemlékezés. Juventus Kiadó. 255-271. Marosvásárhely.
- 2000/b Aranycsitkók, maszkurák, királynék. Erdélyi magyar dramatikus népszokások. Mentor Kiadó. 15-128. Marosvásárhely.
- 2003 „Kedves Ilyés, mit csináltál?” A farsang temetése. In: Hargitán innen, Hargitán túl. Székely népi humor. Palatinus Könyvesház. 263-270. Budapest.