

The Morris Dancer

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Groep Morris-dansers voor „De Meihof" tijdens den Zomervacantie-cursus 1933 van het N.C.B.V.

THE MORRIS DANCER

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Cover Picture: Photo: Morris Dancers at the Meihof (The May House), Holland, during the Summer School 1933.

At the 2014 Jigs Instructional, the three Editors agreed to remind readers what sort of material would be accepted for each Ring publication. In the case of The Morris Dancer, it is any article, paper or study which expands our knowledge of the Morris in all its forms. It is better that the text is referenced, so that other researchers may follow up if they wish to do so, but non-referenced writing will be considered.

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Editorial

This edition of *The Morris Dancer* is a particularly lengthy one. It contains articles by authors well-respected in their field, well researched and for me, makes this perhaps the best edition I have had the honour to edit so far. I have always tried to be both interesting and challenging in the selection of material for the *Dancer*, and not avoiding a bit of controversy is a good start in achieving such an aim. I hope you will find the following pages as interesting and informative as I do.

Is Morris Dancing Kitsch?

It has been said that folk art becomes kitsch when appropriated into an urban setting. The Morris (in particular Cotswold Morris), which is an expression of a localised rural culture and a portmanteau of all that is expressed in the social construct of English village life, is not immune from this phenomenon. Anna FC Smith's excellent piece (reproduced below) argues that revival Morris, like the yodelling traditions of Switzerland, was appropriated by middle class Victorian collectors, tidied up for urban tastes and has become kitsch as a result. The problem is that kitsch is difficult to define. Most contemporary writings concerning kitsch study the phenomena in relation to art, particularly avant-garde art and not folk culture. However, reinterpreting Greenberg (1939) into our context, kitsch will not concern itself with the processes of folk customs, only with its effects. That is, the early collectors of the Morris were less concerned with the rural context of the tradition and more with appropriating it into their own nationalist agenda.

Most definitions of kitsch tend to stress popular appeal, sentimentality, lack of intellectual content and lack of taste. However, we are all familiar with kitsch tourist souvenirs, cow bells and pottery trinkets, purporting to be memorabilia typical of the folk art and customs of the country or region you are visiting. England is more than complicit in this cultural phenomena, as any visitor to central London will know, having been witness to model double decker busses, Beefeater T-shirts and snowdomes containing models of Big Ben.

But does this apply to the Morris? Smith's juxtaposition of Swiss yodelling and Morris dancing is a compelling look at the appropriation of two folk cultures and the resulting legacy of kitschification. In a sense, the appropriation of Swiss yodelling, initially to prevent its demise, is a mirror of the way in which the Morris was appropriated in England and here Smith's piece is on the money. However, whereas Swiss yodelling is a well-known facet of Swiss culture, widely known outside Switzerland, Morris dancing (although viewed by many UK nationals as cringingly embarrassing, just as the Swiss may view yodelling) is very much less widely known beyond the UK and thus less seen as a cultural phenomenon which acts as a kitsch symbol of an imagined English past, repackaged for the tourist industry.

Having said this, Smith's argument is compelling but, I would suggest, applies largely to Cotswold Morris. If folk art really does become kitsch when appropriated by middle-class city folk and repackaged for modern urban audiences, this does not address the wholly urban Morris Traditions: North-West Morris, Sword and even 'Fluffy Morris'. Nor does it address the rising popularity of Border Morris and Molly, folk traditions re-grown with contemporary cultural tropes and owing very little to its rural origins.

Smith's rather throw-away suggestion that Morris dancing is also 'camp', may well open another discussion. Smith's mention of camp in this context may well be correct, since camp is more often associated with performance than its close companion: kitsch. Camp performance can be seen as ironic, self-consciously artificial, affected, deliberately outrageous, sentimental and vulgar. Whilst this may apply to many Border Morris performances I have seen which are more burlesque than Morris, Border remains a compellingly wholly urban entertainment. Camp or kitsch or both, Border Morris's appeal is undeniable, just as many items we buy to decorate our own homes, although kitsch, possess aesthetic qualities which transcend the all the elements of the definition.

So is the legacy of Cecil Sharp kitsch and camp? Not necessarily in my view, since it doesn't tick many of the boxes within the definitions. It is difficult to shoehorn the very varied cultural phenomena that fall under the Morris umbrella into Smith's argument, no matter how compelling. But this does not take anything away from her excellent and ground breaking essay, I look forward to further studies into this aspect of our tradition.

Smith's look at the Morris as kitsch raises the question of the repackaging of tradition. Georgina Boyes' article *"Folkdance as Tradition": Douglas Kennedy and the Van der Ven-ten Bensels* shows how, due to such repackaging, tradition can be appropriated for aims far removed from the idea of simply preserving and promulgating a nation's folk traditions. Left to itself, the Morris may well have died out or remained a local curiosity, danced a couple of times a year for the entertainment of the dancers and a few local folk simply 'because that's what we do on May Day'. Shifting such customs from their roots into an evocation of National Culture moves the practice into the realms of propaganda, vulnerable to manipulation by those with an agenda and, so it seems, the manipulators themselves becoming vulnerable to further levels of manipulation. I read Boyes' piece with great interest, already having a little background knowledge of the direction some wished the culture of England to take during the years between the two World Wars and how folk dance played a part in this.

In view of the controversy the Van der Ven's activities raised at the time, it is worth quoting from Eddie Dunmore's Editorial of Volume 3, No. 6, January 1999:

"The article on Elise van der Ven-Ten Benseel has been sitting in the files for an outrageously long time and it seemed to me to be worthwhile for inclusion. Certainly we all enjoy 20-20 hindsight and are able, perhaps, to see where our predecessors failed. Where we fail ourselves and them is in applying contemporary ethics and values to the actions of a different era. This is as true of the period between the two wars as it is of the period when Sharp and the other collectors were in full swing."

In order to set Boyes' article in its full context, not only is it worth bearing the above in mind, but at Boyes' suggestion, I have included a complete reprinting of the relevant sections from Vol 6, No. 3. I believe it would be helpful if you read that material first.

The Morris Dancer relies on the good will and hard work of those interested in all aspects of the Morris genre. I thank all the contributors for their thoughtful work both in this and all past issues. Keep up the great work and please send me your material for consideration.

Mac McCoig Editor January 2020

[Editor's note]The following is reproduced from MD Volume 3, No. 6, January 1999. Eddie Dunmore's note prefacing the Elise van der Ven-Ten Bensel article continues:

'Among the papers I was passed by Rusty [Ewart Russell] was a C5 envelope bearing the following rubric:

"This envelope contains an article by Antony Heywood, of the Helmond MM; it is a translation from a book by Dr Elise van der Ven-ten Bensel about the EFDSS in the thirties with Douglas Kennedy's views about the authoress and her Nazi sympathies. IT MUST NOT BE USED without DNK's permission while he is still alive; in any case his letter about the extract must be printed in full, simultaneously. The EFDSS would have to be acquainted with the proposed printing. EJR, November 1984"

Editor's note [Eddie Dunmore]: With the events that created the reasons for this embargo now being 60 years past, earlier this year I contacted Antony Heywood to find out if he had any objections to its publication. He was kind enough to send me an updated translation of the article. I have used it here, together with all the other contents of the envelope.'

[Anthony Heywood] A lengthy article appeared in "De Volkdansmare", the journal of the N.C.B.V (Dutch Central Office for Folk Dancing) in Autumn 1938 (vol.7 No.1). I have prepared the following précis of a translation I made, containing points of interest to Morris dancers today.

FOLK DANCE AS A TRADITION

By Dr. Elise van der Ven-ten Bensel

Translated and abridged by Antony Heywood.

"I learned to dance the morris, when I stood on the kitchen table, four years old" – William Kimber at the EFDSS Staff Conference July 1938.

It is valuable to attend the EFDSS Staff Conferences to see how the folk-dance revival in England is stimulated from the centre. These annual gatherings bring together 30 or 40 of the leading teachers of English folk dancing from Great Britain and America for a week of discussions and intensive practical training. We Dutch can learn a lot from the EFDSS. Their inflexibility, long-windedness and school marm attitudes lead to inaction, lack of expansion and a drastic decrease in the number of male dancers.

However, the winds of change are blowing. The feeling is growing that the community dance can have no vitality if it is taught as the preserved remains of an earlier culture without any connection with contemporary life. What was once a tradition must become tradition again with all the qualities of traditional folk heritage. Tradition means evolution and the EFDSS has been too rigid in the performance of traditional dances since Cecil Sharp wrote them down. Since last year, examination candidates have been able to choose their position in a sword dance team instead of having to stick to the same position.

As for sword dancing, Miss G. Hall from Yorkshire came to this year's conference to instruct the Boosbeck sword dance. She teaches sword dancing in various northern mining villages and comes into regular contact with traditional dancers. She put over the spirit of the sword dance with the emphasis on team work and the rhythm of the steps. Putting these ideas into practice is difficult as was apparent from a performance by a team (including Miss Hall herself) at the end of the course.

As for Morris, Dr K. Schofield had brought along William Kimber. Dr Schofield is the only member of the EFDSS Council who is researching the folk background of dances and one of the few who dances regularly. Their presence meant a revolutionary reappraisal of the way in which the EFDSS had hitherto dances Headington. Cecil Sharp collected them, as we knew from the first two volumes of the Morris Books, he knew little or nothing about the Morris dances in other villages. This lack of comparative material meant that the notations were sometimes insufficiently clear. Moreover, as Sharp remarked in his introduction, the members of the team couldn't always agree about the sequence of steps or figures.

After the war, the EFDSS teaching of his pre-eminently male Morris dancing was exclusively in the hands of London ladies. Thus the EFDSS had little or no contact with traditional dancers and so mistakes remained uncorrected. The coming of the Morris Ring changed this. Sides made tours through the Morris villages and met surviving dancers and musicians. Thus Kenworthy Schofield found that William Kimber, musician and dancer of the last Headington side, performed certain things differently from the way taught by the EFDSS. With understandable English reserve and shyness, being a mere countryman compared with the city ladies, Kimber had never voiced his criticism when he saw Headington dances performed by the EFDSS. But he spoke openly to the men of the Morris Ring and that was why Dr Schofield had brought him and his concertina to the Staff Conference.

Kimber began by telling us that he had never read "them books", because he could never make head or tail of them. It appeared that although he could tell stories about everything surrounding the Morris, when it came to the dance itself, he only knew how to dance and to correct our mistakes by showing the difference. It was a moving experience to learn that in the traditional way, without verbal instruction, picking it up by example and accompanied by his inspired playing. Much more than the technical corrections to the Headington dances, I valued Kimber's presence for this experience of what a folk dance tradition means. This illuminating demonstration of folk dance instruction convinced me that the last thing we should be doing is teaching dancing as if it were gymnastics or some other subject.

In brief, the technical differences in the Headington Morris were: the cross back step, as in Rodney, should be used in all Headington Dances; the step-hop-step-hop-step-and-together in "Blue-eyed Stranger", the variant proposed by Cecil Sharp (The Morris Book Part I pp 49-50) and seldom danced until now was the only correct way according to Kimber. In "Getting up Stairs" and "Laudnum Bunches" he insisted on a different rhythm and coordination of the arm movements than we were used to. "Bacca Pipes" was completely different.

Kimber is aware of his responsibility as being the only surviving member of the old Headington Side and our only authority on the "genuine" Headington morris. Is the memory of this 65-year-old always absolutely reliable? And what about traditional development? One of the properties of a

living tradition is that it is continually changing. Who can say whether we should be dancing the fixed EFDSS form, the Kimber form, representing the dance as it was in 1908 or 9 or something else?

The way in which the Morris Tradition develops was seen in Abingdon Abbey grounds on August Bank Holiday Monday when teams from Abingdon and Eynsham appeared. When these teams in deep decline, came into contact with the Morris Ring, they began to think: "If there is so much interest in our dances, why don't we reform and do them ourselves". This occurred in the Autumn of 1936 with some older dancers and some new ones in each case. Abingdon chose Major Fryer as squire but he took a back seat in order not to influence memories and natural developments.

Eynsham performed two set dances, a jig and a mummers play which they did with moving simplicity. The Abingdon men too performed many more dances than Sharp published, namely "A-nutting we will go", "Curly-headed Ploughboy", "Jockey to the Fair", "Princess Royal" and "The girl I left behind me". There are two dances which they will not yet perform because of differences of opinion about "how it used to be". They are "Maid of the Mill" and "Sally Luker". Their "Princess Royal" differs greatly from the way the EFDSS dance it, mainly in the arm movements and in the step which should be one-hop-two-three (as in Sherborne) and not one-two-three-hop. This dance also has the unique feature that the introduction is played completely differently. Neither Sharp or Miss Neal mentioned this fact. It is an open question whether the "Princess Royal" now danced in Abingdon is the same as that noted by Sharp in 1908 or whether it has developed since 1908. The latter seems the most likely and therefore there is no reason to keep the 1908 version. Obviously there are snags: where should we draw the line between traditional development and aesthetic intention especially when such changes take place outside the original environment belonging to such a dance.

This summer's experiences have reinforced my opinion that whatever our debt to the EFDSS, they have nonetheless failed to maintain contact between their urban activities and life elsewhere: this is due to their female regime and their failure to understand country folk lore.

The N.C.B.V. is run on the premise "Investigate everything and keep the best". Our international contacts enable us to pick up dance techniques much more quickly. Our knowledge of folk lore and folk customs of the Netherlands should enable us to build up a national Dutch folk dance movement which will eventually become a tradition.

Translator's note on the current situation in the Netherlands:

The N.C.B.V no longer exists. After the war, the author played little or no part in the organisation of English Folk dancing in the Netherlands and she died round about 1980. The organisation of English folk dancing (also Scottish and American) was taken over by the Dutch Folk Dance Foundation (NVS founded in 1946) which is known today as Voksdansvereniging NVS.

The Morris Dance Group in Helmond (founded in 1935) never had much to do with the NVS. The latter organised courses in Morris and Sword Dancing until the mid-eighties when the rise of the Utrecht Morris Team made that the main channel for the training new dancers. Both Helmond and Utrecht are members of the Morris Ring. Groups in Leiden and Eindhoven don't exist any more. The NVS still teaches Morris and Sword at its Whitsun and Summer camps (the teachers being Antony Heywood, Ægle Hoekstra and Philippe Callens). Bert Cleaver has taught three times at NVS

Christmas Courses. Bert Cleaver, Ivor Allsopp, Ray King, John Weaver and others have taught at weekend workshops at various times.

1st November 1984

Dear Douglas,

Please may I ask a Past Squire of the Ring, and the Past Director of the society to go through the enclosed article, sent to me by Antony Heywood, formerly of Cambridge and Greensleeves morris club, and now of Helmond.

Myself, I found it very interesting; but I am anxious to know if you think it may cause offence to the Society if I put it into the Morris Dancer: particularly to you, who were Director of the Society at the time, and will have known the lady. I have enclosed Antony's two letters, and a stamped envelope for the return of the papers.

I am giving you work, I know; but I think that you should be able to see this piece before any use is made of it.

Continue to flourish,

Ewart

7/11/84

Dear Ewart,

Thank you for sending me the enclosed papers. I would have been apoplectic if the translation of Mrs van der Ven had been published in your magazine or other of the Ring's auspices.

She and her scholarly husband were certainly taken with Sharp and his Society in the year they visited England – the year before his death. Soon after his death the society was invited out to Hilversum and Oostereek to hold an instruction course and give displays of mens morris and sword and country dances, after which there were regular visits by Elise v d V to our holiday courses as she was determined to qualify as an EFDS teacher and take the examinations. She was very competent at all forms and could be ranked as a good dancer, except that she was forceful rather than rhythmical,

Maud Karpeles, my sister in-law and adviser during my apprenticeship stage as Director, thought highly of Elise as an organiser and leader but I never trusted or liked her for she showed very early that she was a fanatic supporter of Hitler and the Nazi cause.

In the summer of 1938, she attended the Summer School in Stratford-on-Avon when a true specimen of Hitler Youth entered the course and progressed rapidly in every department – always under her

wing. I asked him whether he intended to follow up his initiation by attending in 1939. His answer was “Sicherlich – es ist viel nötig” (Certainly, it is most essential).

Subsequently I learnt both he and Elise were being groomed as “gauleitern” (departmental leaders), he at Stratford (after invasion) and she at Hilversum and Arnhem after the Nazis handed over and returned to base. Elise would have made an efficient boss of an internment camp.

During the development of the International linkages of the EFDSS and other European Folk Societies, Elise represented Holland and was very active. In effect in 1939 neither she nor the Storm-trooper came to the 1939 Stratford.

When the Germans invaded Holland, the van der Vens enjoyed the fruits of collaboration. Elise with appetite but her husband, who only feared for his academic position, was seduced by the facilities granted him to teach and publish his books.

At the end of the war (1946), Maud and I were invited to the Dutch Embassy in London to give our views on the case of the Van der Vens since they were already under arrest as collaborators. We could not whitewash Elise but we spoke for the husband as a harmless individual only weak in surrendering his patriotism to his academic advantage. So he was free to continue his studies & teaching while Elise was kept in house arrest until her death – I cannot recollect in which year.

I give you this as background to the translation with its acid remarks about London ladies and the shortcomings of the EFDS. All our staff, even while Sharp was still alive, had direct instruction from Bill Kimber. He knew very well what was in “them books”, on the morris and we had seen sides which Bill had “produced” in Headington and in Oxford, including the City Police. The Society worked with Bill right up to his death and he appeared every year at the Albert Hall if he was well enough to travel and play his ‘tina.

The effect of the Sharp campaign and the Society was stimulating revivals before and during the First World War and Eynsham and Abingdon were showing revivals before Sharp’s death. There would have been no general revival of the morris if Sharp had not happened on Headington in 1899. And we who started in 1911 when the Society was formed had seen Bampton and noticed the process of change and variation in the annual Whitsun outings. WE might have been conservative in our style and technique but we always have had traditional samples to guide our policy and teaching.

Personally I have always visualised the Morris & Sword and other ‘Team’ traditions as comparable with the process of evolution and change in living forms generally.

The van der Ven picture is a travesty of the truth and her advocacies are those of a twisted and indeed spiteful nature.

I could go on at greater length but I hope I have said enough to categorise the translated article as damaging and if published likely to mislead its readers. Kenworthy Schofield would have been the first to demolish her structure. He and I were both reformers of EFDS policy and practice but neither of us would want to take the credit for releasing the Morris from the classroom back onto the market square & village green. And no-one, not even the London ladies can be blamed for the educational methods generally in use at the end of the 19th Century.

But it is not the argument but the particular mouthpiece that I want to see demolished at this time.

With affection and best wishes,

Douglas Kennedy

11th November 1984

Dear Antony,

I sent the translation of Dr Elise van der Ven-ten's work to Douglas Kennedy, as he was so much concerned with the affairs of the EFDSS at the time of which she wrote, and as she referred to "their inflexibility, bureaucracy and schoolmarm attitude", I thought it wise and proper to let him see the translation before anything else was done. His reply makes it clear that he would have been deeply offended by the printing of the article; and undoubtedly the EFDSS would have been offended. I don't want the magazine to be the cause of increasing difficulties between Ring & Society.

I am retaining the article in the files here with a note on the envelope that it is not to be used without Douglas Kennedy's permission while he is alive; in any event, not without printing his letter in full alongside the translation.

That done, Antony, thank you very much for taking so much trouble to find material for the magazine, when so little comes in for a choice to be made.

Yours sincerely,

Ewart

“Folkdance as Tradition”: Douglas Kennedy and the Van der Ven-ten Bensels

Georgina Boyes

About the Author

Georgina Boyes is a Folklorist who has specialised in traditions of performance, including dance, song and customs. Her book, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Politics and the English Folk Revival* won the Katharine Briggs Folklore Award and has now been re-published in a new, illustrated edition.¹ The author of over eighty academic articles, she has also presented and written series and features for radio, film, television and live performance. “Folkdance as Tradition” is (probably) the last in a series of articles which she has published on the interaction of politics and the Folk Revival in the inter-war years, which includes “Potencies of the earth”: Rolf Gardiner and the English Folk Dance Revival,² and “Dancing Spies: Nazi attempts to infiltrate the English Folk Revival.”³ Now living in Belgium, she is finding the shared history of England and the Low Countries a great stimulus to research – particularly on historical issues such as the Great War⁴ and sword dance.⁵ Georgina is currently researching an article on Ralph Vaughan Williams in the context of the Folk Revival for a forthcoming book on the composer for Cambridge University Press.

1. *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival*. 2nd Illustrated edition; Leeds: No Masters Co-operative, 2010.
2. “‘Potencies of the earth’: Rolf Gardiner and the English Folk Dance Revival,’ in Rolf Gardiner: *Folk, Nature and Culture in Interwar Britain* ed. Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011.
3. “Dancing Spies: Nazi attempts to infiltrate the English Folk Revival,” in *Ballroom, Stage & Village Green: Contexts for Early Dance, Proceedings of 2014 Early Dance Conference, Bath* edited by Segal and Bill Tuck. NP: Early Dance Circle, 2015
4. “‘They went with Songs to Battle’: Songs as Lieu de Mémoire of the Great War.’ *The Low Countries: Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands*. Yearbook No. 22.; Rekkem, Belgium: Ons Erfdeel vzw, 2014.
5. “‘Our actors will appear...’: Popular Culture and Early Records of English Dance,’ 2011 Annual Lecture for the Early Dance Circle, The Artworkers Guild, Queen Square, London for which she was awarded Life Membership of the Early Dance Circle. Available at <http://www.earlydancecircle.co.uk/>

“Folkdance as Tradition”: Douglas Kennedy and the Van der Ven-ten Bensels

In February 1999, *The Morris Dancer* re-printed “Folkdance as Tradition”, an article originally written in 1938 by the Dutch folk dance expert, Dr Elise van der Ven-ten Benseel (1892-1982).¹ A report on her attendance at that summer’s English Folk Dance & Song Society’s Staff Conference for members of her *Nederlandsch Centraal Bureau voor Volksdansen* [Netherlands Central Bureau for Folk Dances], the article had undergone a rather complicated journey to reach an English audience. It had been discovered, translated and abridged by Antony Heywood, who had danced with Cambridge and Greensleeves Morris Men and was now a member of The Netherlands’ team, Helmond Morris Men. Heywood felt that ten Benseel’s account of William Kimber’s comments on variation in the Headington dances still had relevance for contemporary morris.² When he first submitted his

translation to *The Morris Dancer* in 1984, however, the magazine's then Editor, Ewart Russell (1914-1989) raised immediate concerns. Forwarding the proposed article to Douglas Kennedy (1893-1988) – a former Squire of the Morris Ring and Director of the English Folk Dance & Song Society – Russell explained that whilst he “found it very interesting”, he was “anxious to know if you think it may cause offence to the Society”, ending “I think you should be able to see this piece before any use is made of it.”³ Russell's instinct proved correct. Kennedy's response was blistering. He “would have been apoplectic,” he wrote, “if the translation of Mrs van der Ven had been published in your magazine or other of the Ring's auspices.”⁴ Russell therefore wrote to Heywood thanking him for his offered contribution, saying he would keep the article on file but “with a note on the envelope that it is not to be used without Douglas Kennedy's permission while he is alive; in any event, not without printing his letter in full alongside the translation.” The article's references to members' “inflexibility, bureaucracy and schoolmarm attitude” at a time when Kennedy was “so much concerned with the affairs of the EFDSS,” Russell explained, could have caused deep offence to him and the Society more generally.⁵

Kennedy's letter, however, had offered a rather different rationale for his objection to the article. Its descriptions of the role of William Kimber and “the process of change and variation” among traditional teams like Eynsham, Abingdon and Bampton and within the EFDSS were, he wrote, misleading. But it was the source of these views, Elise ten Bensel herself, that incensed him. Citing her “twisted and indeed spiteful nature”, he declared, “it is not the argument but the particular mouthpiece that I want to see demolished at this time.” Briefly outlining the history of links between the EFDSS, Elise ten Bensel and her husband, Dirk-Jan Van der Ven (1891-1973), Kennedy went on to highlight a specific concern about ten Bensel's views – “I never trusted nor liked her for she showed very early that she was a fanatical supporter of Hitler and the Nazi cause.” At the Summer School in Stratford-upon-Avon which followed the July Staff Conference, he revealed, “a true specimen of Hitler Youth entered the course and progressed rapidly in every department – always under her [ten Bensel's] wing. I asked him whether he intended to follow up his initiation by attending in 1939. His answer was “Sicherlich – es ist viel nötig.” (Certainly, it is most essential). But as Kennedy explained to Russell, he later received information which was even more disquieting –

Subsequently I learnt both he and Elise were groomed as “gauleitern” (departmental leaders), he at Stratford (after invasion) and she at Hilversum and Arnhem after the Nazis handed over and returned to base....

When the Germans invaded Holland, the van der Vens enjoyed the fruits of their collaboration. Elise with appetite but her husband, who only feared for his academic position, was seduced by the facilities granted him to teach and publish his books.

The Van der Ven-ten Bensel's actions during the occupation had repercussions. In 1946, Kennedy reported that he and his sister-in-law, the Folklorist and collector, Maud Karpeles (1885-1976) who also knew the Van der Ven-ten Bensels, were invited to the Dutch Embassy in London. Asked to “give their views on the case of the Van der Vens” who were, Kennedy wrote, “already under arrest as collaborators”, his verdict was unequivocal:

We could not whitewash Elise but we spoke for the husband as a harmless individual only weak in surrendering his patriotism to his academic advantage. So he was free to continue his studies & teaching, while Elise was kept in house arrest until her death – I cannot remember in which year.⁶

After a long and full life, recollections of events that had taken place more than forty years before might not be expected to provide absolute accuracy. It is hardly surprising that Kennedy's letter describes some episodes and issues related to the Van der Ven-ten Bensels that are at odds with information held on record. Equally, his knowledge of happenings in The Netherlands during the German occupation cannot be first-hand. Allowances for forgetfulness, misinterpretation and absence of personal experience must, therefore, be fed into readings of this account of the association between the Van der Ven-ten Bensels and the EFDSS. And there is also the specific question of Kennedy's judgements on the couple: Van der Ven "harmless" and "weak", "but free to continue his studies & teaching"; ten Bensel a "fanatical supporter of Hitler" and potential quisling *Gauleiter*, ultimately placed under lifelong house arrest for collaboration. Again, records in Germany, The Netherlands and England offer evidence that sheds light on their histories and provides substantially different accounts of their activities and fates. The story is, in many ways, more complex and dramatic than even Kennedy's letter suggests. This was a remarkable period in the history of the Folk Revival in England – before it can be fully appreciated, a wider range of facts need to be assessed. So, who were the Van der Ven-ten Bensels and how did they come to be associated with the English Folk Revival?

The Van der Ven-ten Bensels – Active in two Folk Revivals



Dirk Jan Van der Ven. Picture supplied by the author



Elise Van der Ven. Picture courtesy of Fotocollectie Gelders Archief

Dirk Jan Van der Ven and Elise ten Bensel played a formative role in the study and revival of folk dance in The Netherlands. Van der Ven, "one of the most renowned Dutch folklorists in the twenties and thirties", was the Chairman of the Folklore Division of The Netherlands Bureau of Anthropology. Innovative and entrepreneurial, "he was the pivot of a whole series of activities, including folklore courses, lectures, conference meetings, [and] folklore excursions". A pioneer Folk Life specialist, author and film maker, he was a founder member of the Society for creating The Netherlands

Openlucht Folk Museum in Arnhem, which opened in 1918 and brought together vernacular buildings and material culture from across the eleven Dutch provinces. In 1919, he organised the *Vaderlandsch Historisch Volksfeest*, a seven-day folkloric national celebration which attracted more than four hundred thousand visitors to the Museum. His timing was particularly opportune. The *Volksfeest* came at critical point in the history of The Netherlands, offering a patriotic counterbalance to political unrest with uncomfortable echoes of the all too recent Russian Revolution. Some of Van der Ven's fellow researchers felt this approach to Folklore Studies was over-popularising, complaining that the "hopping crowds" of village dancers at the *Volksfeest* presented what should be small-scale, community expressions of national folk culture "as a form of entertainment". Van der Ven, however, was unrepentant - for him, the *Volksfeest* was his "finest hour". Unsurprisingly, therefore, this "glorification of rural culture" won him support - and visits to the *Volksfeest* - from Ministers, the Presidents of the States General, Commissioners of the Queen and dozens of mayors. A serious traffic accident in 1914 had led to the loss of his right hand and the need to produce most of his written works via dictation - despite this, he went on to be "an exceptionally productive folklorist and publicist in numerous fields", holding positions "in all kinds of folk organisations".⁷

Van der Ven and ten Bensel, who had been sweethearts as teenagers, married in 1916. Their earlier lives were marked by difficulties which had long term effects on their later attitudes. Van der Ven's speculator father had been declared bankrupt in 1904 and suffered a mental collapse, leaving Dirk Jan, at 14 years of age, as virtual head of a family living in greatly straightened circumstances. He began writing for local newspapers, rapidly gaining a reputation for his articles on nature conservation and Netherlands' life. Ten Bensel's father, a medical representative, had died aged 32, when "Lies" was 5 and her brother a year younger. Now a single parent, her mother supplemented her widow's pension by working as a milliner in her sister's shop in Arnhem. Both Van der Ven and ten Bensel therefore, shared the position of the eldest child in a family fighting against poverty and loss of status with an absent father – a history which offers some explanation for accusations of their being over-concerned with money-making as adults.

An anglophile and fluent English-speaker, ten Bensel studied English and French and, in 1914, spent time on teaching practice at a boarding school at Skegness in Lincolnshire. After qualifying she taught English at secondary level. Then, in a period when "Experience has made it clear that university studies must remain the exception for women,"⁸ ten Bensel enrolled for a doctorate at the University of Amsterdam. Her thesis, a comprehensive work on *The Character of King Arthur in English Literature*, was completed and published in January 1925. Van der Ven had left formal education at the age of 18 after completing a *hogereburgerschool* [High School] diploma. He had aimed to study for a doctorate at Leyden University but set his ambition aside in order to take jobs that would bring sufficient financial stability to marry his beloved Lies. In this case, therefore, the apparently conventional dedication of ten Bensel's thesis, "*Aan Mijn Moeder en Mijn Man*" [To My Mother and My Husband], can also be taken as a reflection of his uncommon support and assistance in this "exceptional" experience.⁹ From 1927 the couple made a home and base for dance-teaching activities at De Meihof in the village of Oosterbeek, near ten Bensel's birthplace in Arnhem.

The Van der Ven-ten Bensel's work on traditional dance originated with the "hopping crowds" of the 1919 *Volksfeest*. Fieldwork between 1915 and 1918 on the Frisian island of Terschelling by the ethno-musicologist Jaap Kunst (1891-1960) had already led to the publication of four volumes of

local folksongs, dances and folklife.¹⁰ Building on this, Van der Ven invited Frisian dancers to appear at the Volksfeest, where their performance of the 'Skotse Trye' in the Open Air Theatre was a great success.¹¹ It was, however, an invitation to a wedding party in Geesteren in their home province of Gelderland the following year which provided the couple's opportunity to collect dances on their own account. Here, older villagers' performances of dances like 'De Driekusman' and 'Peerdesprong' proved there was a living repertoire to record. Most significantly, from 1921, Van der Ven's partnership with the classical composer, Dr Julius Röntgen (1855-1932), led to the production of an innovative series of seasonal films on Dutch folklife, documenting spring, summer and harvest work, dances and customs. Although the films were silent, Röntgen (a friend of Percy Grainger) provided accompanying music, including his own arrangements of traditional dance tunes collected from an elderly musician called Brinkerink. Showings of the films in various parts of the country had the effect of stimulating performance in rural areas where traditional dances were still known and creating a demand for more information and instruction from a range of organisations in towns and cities. When ten Bensel gave a paper at the Commission Internationale des Arts Populaires (CIAP) in Rome in October 1929, she tells us that she had the privilege of being able to offer an overview of important dates and events in The Netherlands which represented four years of collecting, preserving and reviving folk dances.¹² A Netherlands Folk Dance Revival was underway.

As *De Volksdans Herleeft!*, ten Bensel's book on the early Revival in The Netherlands explains, there were parallels with other European Folk movements, including that in England. But The Netherlands also offered significant contrasts. When the English Folk Revival began to seek out material to expand the repertoire of dances beyond living or memorate traditions, ten Bensel wrote, Cecil Sharp looked to the past and more formal dances from John Playford and his successors' late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century series of instruction books. In The Netherlands, however, enthusiasts turned to existing rural dances from neighbouring countries – ten Bensel writing of research and participant observation at many folk dance parties in town and countryside providing "vivid memories of a four-month stay in Sweden" in 1920.¹³ It was a visit to Germany the following year, however, that eventually led the couple to a critical series of meetings:

...in 1921, our interest in folk dance brought us the same year to the old Bavarian town of Rothenburg, to see the 'Schäflertanz' - a stick dance, related to the 'morris'. The leader Herr Schletterer told us of a young Englishman, then a student in Cambridge, who had recently found no difficulty in taking part in the 'Schäflertanz', which in many ways resembled the English morris. The enthusiasm with which Rolf Gardiner, when he came to meet us in 1922, told of the revival of folk dances in his country, brought us as long ago as Easter 1923 to the English folk dance course.¹⁴

It seems Rolf Gardiner (1902-1971) was equally enthusiastic about his new-found Dutch friends. Immediately after taking over editorship of the magazine, *Youth*, in October 1923, Gardiner published an article by ten Bensel, with a contribution from Van der Ven advertised for Summer 1924.¹⁵ More practically for their work in folk dance, Van der Ven-ten Bensels also gained an opportunity to access the founding sources of the English Revival directly:

...my husband and I had the great privilege of being personally introduced by Cecil Sharp to a folk dance course at Aldborough in England, one of the last of which he himself was in charge. We were so struck, not only by the beauty and richness of forms of the

dances, but also by the way in which Cecil Sharp and his helpers brought these dances back to their people, that we enthusiastically commended them by word and in writing in The Netherlands.¹⁶

Work with the English Folk Dance (& Song) Society¹⁷

For Dirk Jan Van der Ven and Elise ten Bensel the visit began a long and close association with the EFDSS. Over the next few years, the couple had not only become members, but by 1931 ten Bensel was teaching at the EFDS Summer School at Malvern Boys' College and had contributed an article on Dutch folk dances to the Society's journal.¹⁸ By 1932, she was listed among the Society's distinguished group of nine Foreign Corresponding Members, whilst the following year saw her bring a party of around twenty "Friends of De Meihof" to the EFDS Summer School in Hereford.¹⁹ And when the EFDSS organised its first International Festival in 1935, both Van der Ven and ten Bensel gave papers at the accompanying conference: Van der Ven spoke on "Dutch Traditional Dances in Connection with Dutch Folk Rites," a showing of his seasonal films with a commentary about the customs they depicted; whilst ten Bensel delivered the opening lecture, "Aspects of Folk Dance in Different Stages of National Development". Professor J. L. Myers, the Chairman of the Conference commented "We could not have had a more helpful and instructive beginning to our discussions. The problems of revival have been very clearly shown."²⁰ As Kennedy's letter confirms, ten Bensel was also treated as a member of staff, taking part in the Summer 1938 EFDSS Staff Conference – she says she was "*de eenige niet-Engelsche deelneemster*" [the only non-English participant] – and she almost certainly taught at, as well as attended, the Summer School which followed.²¹

Exchanges with the Society, however, did not only pass in one direction. In the profusely illustrated *Volkdans Herleeft!*, ten Bensel includes many photographs of English dancers - at the Openluchtmuseum theatre, in the garden of De Meihof, in the mayor's office at 's-Hertogenbosch, "The popular English folk dance teacher Miss C. Anderson" is even pictured, ladle in hand, dressed as

Fotobureau Gazendam - Arnhem



Groep cursisten van den zomervacantie-cursus 1933 tijdens de ochtend-rust

a chef to take part in De Meihof's Epiphany celebrations.²² And as well as displays by the semi-detached formation of The Travelling Morrice in 1926 and 1928,²³ Ivor Allsop's article on Richard Callender (1893-1949) notes:

There had been a number of visits to the Netherlands by teams of dancers from the English Folk Dance Society beginning in the autumn (Fall) of 1924, the year Cecil Sharp died. In the week after Easter in 1932 a group of sixteen members of the now English Folk Dance and Song Society arrived at the Hook of Holland to be greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Van der Ven. There were thirteen dancers, two musicians and a singer in the party.²⁴

This group included both Douglas Kennedy, shown "triumphantly" holding up 'the Lock' during their performance of Earsdon Sword dance at Kasteel Maurick in Vught, North Brabant²⁵ and Richard Callender, who returned to teach an Easter Course at De Meihof in 1936. And when, at the Morris Ring Meeting held in Thaxted on 10th June, 1939, Callender accepted the Staff of Office on behalf of "Dutch Morris Men" – perhaps Allsop adds, the team were from De Meihof.²⁶ Through regular exchanges, courses and tours such as these, The Netherlands became the closest partner of the EFDSS in continental Europe during the pre-war years. As ten Benseel pointed out in her opening address to the EFDSS 1935 International Folk Dance Conference:

As for the Netherlands, many of you may know how greatly indebted the Dutch folk-dance revival is to the splendid work of Cecil Sharp and his followers on in The English Folk Dance and Song Society.... with the assistance of many members of the staff of the E.F.D.S. it has gradually spread so that now several thousands of young Dutch people dance English folk-dances, and the nineteenth-century Dutch, German and Scandinavian peasant-dances, with which our folk-dance revival started, are slowly but surely being abandoned.²⁷

This picture of smooth co-operation provides, however, only a partial story. The couple's friend, Rolf Gardiner, had played a key role in The Netherlands dance revival and this had lasting consequences. Ten Benseel invariably acknowledged they had come to English dance via a meeting with Gardiner in Germany. And, as she explained in *De Volksdans Herleeft!*, it was Gardiner "who practically introduced English dances into our country from 1927".²⁸ Moreover, alongside visits by The Travelling Morrice to The Netherlands and Germany,²⁹ ten Benseel also mentions Gardiner teaching Playford contra dances in the two countries -

At the beginning of October of the same year, a group of students from Wageningen and Nijmegen, AJC'ers [Young Socialists], gymnastics teachers and other interested members started contra-dance classes in Arnhem under the leadership of Rolf Gardiner, who in the meantime had introduced these dances in 25 different groups in Germany. Thus, from 6 to 13 October 1927, the first weekly course in contra-dancing in the Netherlands was held in Arnhem, which proved to be a far-reaching influence on the revival of folk dance. The group continued to practise regularly after the week course, while Rolf Gardiner repeatedly came to lead for several consecutive evenings - often longer.³⁰

In the following October (1928), she also reports that Gardiner came to teach groups in Amsterdam, The Hague and at the *Academie van Lichamelijke Opvoeding* [Academy of Physical Education] in Amsterdam – a role ten Bensel herself took over in 1930. The course in contra-dancing at the Academy became a compulsory subject in 1932 – with sixty-five students taking “transitional exams” in 1933. The Netherlands had recently come through a moral panic about “modern” dance and one of its outcomes had been the formation of a range of groups associated with churches and political bodies who taught and encouraged the practice of “untainted” folk traditions.³¹ As a result of this, traditional dances – including those from England – began to enjoy wider popularity.

Teaching and examination to maintain adherence to the “traditional form” of English dances set down by Cecil Sharp was, however, a principal function of the EFDS. Classes, Vacation Schools, Teachers, Examinations, Subscriptions and Branch Affiliation fees also provided the major part of the Society’s income – representing £8,260.9.10d out of a total of £11,873.0.4d recorded in the annual report for 1930-31.³² Branches in the United States and examinations in Canada employed visiting and resident EFDS teachers and contributed to the Society’s coffers. But despite their wide range of English dance courses and promotion of English traditional dances, there is no record in the 1930-31 *Report* of a Branch, payment of Affiliation fees or use of Society teachers at De Meihof or elsewhere in The Netherlands. The arrival of Douglas Kennedy and the Society’s display team at Easter 1932 was perhaps intended to address this unsatisfactory state of affairs. Forestalling any organisational questions, however, in February 1932 ten Bensel started her own dance group, the *Nederlandsch Centraal Bureau voor Volksdansen* [NCBV]. Based at De Meihof and intended to be “a central institution for our country, which directs the practice and dissemination of folk dances”, it was backed by a *Commissie van Bijstand* [Commission of Assistance] made up of prominent academics and figures from the Arts world, many of whom were also colleagues of Van der Ven.³³

Balm for any bruised English feelings was immediately offered by the “first act” of the newly-formed NCBV. Whirling away the EFDS Team on a national tour, their displays at high profile venues like the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, ten Bensel assured her readers, promoted English dance and resulted in a situation where “interest in contra-, sword and morris dances has grown overall.” Such expansion was not without its drawbacks. As the “Introduction” to a “small collection” of Playford dances which ten Bensel published in 1931 revealed, she had been dissatisfied to find that rival dance organisations had begun to “invent” new dances under “unauthorised and musically inadequate guidance”.³⁴ Named as a “Foreign Corresponding Member” of the (now) EFDSS in 1932, ten Bensel offered a solution and further olive branch – the dance courses run under NCBV auspices in Dutch cities and the Summer, Christmas and Easter Vacation Courses at De Meihof would now involve “the best English teachers”. Her response to any awkwardness over who should provide the teaching of English traditional dances was then set out in the closing pages of *De Volksdans Herleeft!*

The 'English Folk Dance and Song Society', which I represent as an 'Honorary Corresponding Member' for the Netherlands, has rightly raised a serious protest because it is aware of the high cultural task that it performs with regard to folk dances.³⁵

Pausing only to issue “a word of warning” to those “youth associations that believe they have to create their 'own' dance meetings under their 'own' management without asking themselves,

whether that 'own' is at the same time the best or even sufficiently competent management", ³⁶ she revealed a new development in joint working:

In consultation with the 'English Folk Dance and Song Society', this year our Bureau has, for the first time, conducted teaching examinations in folk dances, the practical parts of which are equivalent to the corresponding English exams. In this way the N.C.B.V. has developed a corps of well-trained teachers, who in the future will assist me in spreading folk dances. As the many requests that reach our Office from all sides prove, interest in our country is growing strongly from the South to the North and from the East to the West.³⁷

With the promise of an Easter course with EFDSS teachers in 1934, all seemed set fair for a future of "consultation" and joint progress.

'Origins'

Just as it was Rolf Gardiner and the Van der Vens, rather than Cecil Sharp and The English Folk Dance and Song Society who provided the basis for the development of English dance in The Netherlands, Sharp's theories on folk dance were absent too. And unlike the questions of organisation and assessment, this omission proved rather less open to later fixes. Cultural Survivals Theory, which proposed that culture from 'primitive' and 'savage' stages of human development 'survived' into the present in the form of folklore, was accepted by many researchers until well into the twentieth century. Despite a method that comprehensively disregarded history and geography, for most writers, it was their origins as 'survivals' of hypothesised rituals from prehistoric religion that were the most important aspects of traditional dances – and particularly those associated with seasonal customs. In line with these conventions, Sharp's publications set out the origins for traditions like Sword Dance and Morris in clan feasts on a totemic animal.³⁸ From at least 1902, however, German nationalist historians, anthropologists and folklorists developed an elaborated version of Survivals Theory, which linked the view that "primitive" peoples "always had some form of male fellowships [*Männerbünde*]" with proposals that these groups also had "their own religious cults, where the members embodied the souls of dead warriors with weapon dances and masked or painted faces."³⁹ This formulation was then employed to conjure up an extended history through which customary performances – and particularly Sword Dances – became evidence of a biologically, linguistically and culturally united Germanic people whose uncontaminated existence could be traced from pre-history via the classical descriptions of youths in German tribes leaping among swords provided by Gaius Cornelius Tacitus, through seventeenth century paintings of St George's Day festivals in The Netherlands to village performances in the modern day.⁴⁰ These claims of ancestral unity extended beyond mainland Europe. Customs found in the north, midlands and south of England - Sword and Morris dances, even the Jack-in-the-Green, were very quickly integrated into this *germanische Kontinuität* [Germanic continuity]. In an appendix to his *Mysterium und Mimus im Rigveda* published in 1908, the Sanscrit scholar, Leopold Shroeder (1851-1920), provided a dazzlingly eclectic range of 'evidence' for this:

The mimetically presented weapon dances of the *Maruts*, the Germanic sword dances, the dances of the Roman *Salier*, of the *Curetes* and *Corybants* in Greece and Phrygia, when considered comparatively, lead us to the seemingly irrefutable assumption, that in Aryan prehistory the young manhood of the nation, at certain festival times, performed weapon dances in which the dancers ... represented the departed spirits of the tribe, especially the souls of dead warriors. The characteristic costume of the Germanic sword dancers were white shirts which were often decorated with coloured ribbons and were provided with bells, which we know to be so characteristic for the

dances of spirits and gods in Mexico. But the appearance of these [sword] dancers can also be black, as is evident from the Morris dancers in England, who have been so readily connected with Moors [*Morhren*] and *Moriscos*. The many soot-blackened figures taking part in the vegetation processions also belong to this, in the which the chimney sweeps and the smiths' guilds also often play a role.⁴¹

The fantasy that was *germanische Kontinuität* featured strongly in theorising by both Van der Ven-ten Bensels. Whilst preserving and reviving the national dances of their own country was mainly a matter for The Netherlands, ten Benseel wrote, it was impossible to consider the dances' folkloric origin and background without reference to their "cultural kinship" [*cultuurverwantschap*] - especially as far as The Netherlands was concerned - their Germanic tribal kinship [*Germaansche stamverwantschap*]."⁴² Germanic symbolism, in the form of "sun symbols",⁴³ a major branch of Nazi pseudo-folklore, were also included in ten Benseel's discussion of Sword Dances and plays. Taking in sword-wielding heroes from dragon killers like St George, Siegfried and Tristan, who rescued the golden-blond Isolde and King Arthur with his famous sword Excalibur, who represented "light, the sun and fertility" and rescued Guinevere from the clutches of Mordred, the personification of dark powers, her theory presents the "lock" of swords in the dance as a "star" - a "sun symbol" [*een symbolisch zonneteken*]. The dancers mimic the course of the sun, she proposes, using sympathetic magic to push the sun into place in the winter season.⁴⁴ As van Ginkel, in his book *Volkscultuur als Valkuil* [Folk Culture as a Trap] drily observes - "This concept made them [Van der Ven and ten Benseel] particularly susceptible to national-socialist ideas, in which Germanic symbolism played such an important role."⁴⁵

In his first book, *English Folk Dance Tradition* (1923), Gardiner reiterated Sharp's theories about the origin the Morris dance in clan feasts on totemic animals, but was already describing Morris and Sword dancers as a "*Blutsbrüderschaft*" [blood brotherhood], "specially trained performers, and always males."⁴⁶ By 1928, however, he had abandoned Sharp's views on origin and even "survivals" - the dances were not just quaint leftovers from irrational beliefs of the distant past, but had meaning and positive agency in the present:

...the Morris and Sword dance are not popular dances; they are essentially selective magic dances which only a peculiarly fitted and trained elite is capable of executing. It is ridiculous to suppose that *any* man is fit to dance the Morris; the old 'traditional' folk knew this well enough in making membership of the 'sides' something of a privilege, and their training of dancer an initiation. It is time that we should begin to restrict and discriminate and to reserve the Morris for a true function in the changing life of our people, and not allow it to be abused by a vogue.⁴⁷

Before and after Sharp's death, however, and even as he moved ever closer to Germanic concepts, Gardiner was always careful to avoid direct public confrontation with Sharp or open contradiction of Sharp's theories.⁴⁸

Others, though, did not finesse their objections. Citing the forms of a range of customs from The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Austria, in *De Volksdans Herleeft!* ten Benseel rejected Sharp's theory of the origin of Morris and Sword Dances. The two types of dances were totally distinct and had their source in two separate sets of beliefs: the Morris was a "ritual dance of the spring" in which the stamping and jumping of the dancers were sympathetic actions aimed at fostering new growth; whilst the Sword Dance was performed in winter and aimed to conquer the dark and restore light of the sun, symbolised by the lock of the swords. In summary, she declared, "On the basis of these common European customs and actions we cannot therefore accept Sharp's

theory, which provides the morris and the sword dance with the same origin and proposes the former developed from the latter.”⁴⁹ Offering a battery of specific details, she argued that a single origin for the two traditions was not realistic. And, she added, this brought forward an even more significant problem with Sharp and his research – it was insular and Anglo-centric:

Cecil Sharp, who relies on Chambers' 'The Mediaeval Stage' in addition to the material he collected in the field, has, like so many English researchers, not been sufficiently aware of non-English parallels. If Cecil Sharp had known more about related spring customs in Europe, where the same figures, in their kit and with rhythmic capers, appear with sticks and handkerchiefs, even though those customs are known under other and different names, he would undoubtedly not have come to an equivalence of sword and morris.⁵⁰

For many EFDSS members Sharp's pronouncements were sacrosanct - and certainly not open to criticism by upstart foreigners. It was probably only the fact that her book was written in Dutch that averted an immediate storm.

Writing in English just a few months earlier, however, ten Bensel was equally disparaging of work that might have been expected to provide a better fit with her Germanic perspective. In December 1932, she provided a lengthy review of Kurt Meschke's book *Schwerttanz und Schwerttanzspiel im Germanischen Kulturkreis* [Sword Dances and Sword plays in Germanic Culture] for the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*. Although praising its “elaborate exposition and detailed comparison of several sword-dances and sword-dance-plays”, she considered it didn't “justify the author's claim to cover the Teutonic region”. And whilst it took in English dances, important recent sources from Belgium, The Netherlands and the Balkans, Italy, the Ukraine and Basque areas were omitted and the conclusions only referred to Germany. Overall, its arguments were limited and unconvincing. Citing Leopold von Schröder's *Musterium und Mimus im Rigveda*, she suggested that the author should “consider the sword-dance, a general, perhaps Indo-European rite, rather than the typical expression of Germanic spirit.” At the same time, she also took the opportunity “to add a few words” about *Robin Hood and Hobby Horse*, a recent pamphlet by the Austrian Folklorist and dance specialist, Prof. Richard Wolfram (1901-1995).⁵¹ Wolfram had visited De Meihof in 1928 to teach Austrian and Scandinavian dances and was a frequent presence at international conferences and folk dance festival. His paper “Ritual and Dramatic Associations of Sword and ‘Chain’ Dances” appeared in the same number of the *Journal* as ten Bensel's review and he was soon to join her as a Foreign Corresponding Member of the Society. From 1932 he was also a member of the Nazi Party.⁵² Whether ten Bensel knew of his Nazi membership at the time of writing the review is unclear, but his status as a prominent Folklorist applying Germanic theories already well-established. Despite this, she noted:

The quintessence of Wolfram's essay consists in an argument to consider the hobby-horse as an equivalent of Robin Hood. In spite of the extremely interesting material adduced, Dr. Wolfram does not quite succeed in convincing us of the identity of the two.⁵³

Developing the study of Folklore and Ethnology at University level in Germany and using aspects of folklore as a means of identifying potential sympathisers were major facets of Nazi political outreach. International conferences were sponsored, bringing foreign specialists into contact with

covert Nazis, who apparently shared their interests and fostered joint work. At the same time, members of the Nazi Party were sent out to take part in activities abroad, forging links with folklorists and folk dancers who might be useful politically in the future and whose “neutral” status was held to be more effective in persuading fellow-citizens than declared supporters.⁵⁴ Showpiece events like the 1936 Berlin Olympics saw Gardiner take the Sword team from North Skelton in Yorkshire to participate in the World Congress for Leisure-Time and Recreation which preceded the Games, whilst Van der Ven and ten Bensel led a group from De Meihof. But opportunities of all kinds, from international dance festivals to tours could be used as covers for less artistic purposes – as early as 1932 Gardiner’s expeditions, listed as “Activities of English and German Singers, Players and Dancers”, were drawing attention from the Foreign Office.⁵⁵

Implications of the EFDSS Summer School 1938

Which brings us to the English Folk Dance and Song Society Summer School at Stratford in 1938 and the “true specimen of Hitler Youth” who came to dance there. Although Kennedy never names him, we now know that he was Hans Ernst Schneider (1909-1999), who had studied in Vienna and Berlin and had a doctorate in Literature from the University of Königsberg in Prussia. Kennedy rightly identified his Nazi background, but greatly underestimated his status. Far from being a teenage member of the Nazi Party’s youth movement, he was 28 years old, a former Director of a department of the *Nationalsozialistischer Reichsbund für Leibesübungen* [National Socialist Reich Federation for Physical Education] in Berlin and already a member of both the SS and Heinrich Himmler’s power-base dealing with Ancestral Heritage and Folklore, the *Ahnenerbe*.⁵⁶ A highly ambitious Nazi careerist, Schneider had been trained by the SS as a specialist in traditional dances of Saxony. He was sent to Stratford by his SS superior, Richard Wolfram, “to observe and politically assess” the participants for possible collaborators and to report back to Berlin with any prospects.⁵⁷ Keen to pursue his contacts, Schneider then attended two courses at De Meihof in 1939 - the first, at Easter, was in English traditional dance taught by members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, led by Richard Callender. The dances, Schneider noted, “reflected general Nordic sensibility”, adding that he already knew the teachers themselves from the previous year’s School in Stratford. In early August, he met the EFDSS team again when they took part in the International Folk Dance Festival in Stockholm. Still under orders, he returned to De Meihof in late August 1939 for a course on Netherlands’ dance led by ten Bensel, closely observing the work of the Van der Vens and the NCBV. One outcome of his various meetings appears in a report he sent to the *Reichsgeschäftsführer* [Managing Director] of the *Ahnenerbe*, Wolfram Sievers (1905-1948) in Berlin on 16th June 1939. In this, the open question about further attendance at Stratford that Kennedy describes in his letter to Russell is transformed into career-bolstering information that “Douglas Kennedy, the Director of the English Folk Dance and Song Society” had “personally invited” him to the Society’s next Summer School at Stratford. “I am”, Schneider wrote, “the only German with such good, personal and institutional contacts with folk dance circles in The Netherlands and England and would like to follow them up.”⁵⁸

A further dimension to Kennedy and Schneider’s description of events at the Summer School is also provided in a letter from ten Bensel to Gardiner. Written on the 8th August immediately after her return home from Stratford, much of it deals with ten Bensel’s view of The Netherlands as a potential link between England and Germany – Dutch “racial connection” and geographically central position giving them sympathy and understanding for both countries. She and Van der Ven, she

explained, had visited Germany frequently over the last few years and felt there was an opportunity to create better relations in which dance could play an important part. As she saw it, in Germany, there was a dawning realisation that their own peasant dances were less suitable for revival than the common Germanic material found in English Country, Sword and Morris dances – which were the tradition to which “we Nordic peoples will all finally have to resort.” In England too, she declared, the superiority of Dutch performances of English dances – their greater “vitality, energy and life” were also recognised by English teachers. Both countries would benefit from technical assistance – “May not the Dutch help?”

Without naming him, she also told Gardiner about Schneider’s presence at the Summer School, explaining he was a member of the SS. Her associated discussion raises a number of issues. Ten Bensel was glad, she writes, that Gardiner had “come to a very good understanding with Douglas Kennedy”. She had just spent nearly two weeks at the same hotel in Stratford as him and his wife, Helen [née Karpeles] (1887-1976), both were extremely kind. However, she was certain that “apart from a family tragedy, you will never get any further with him than words”. Equally, “in Germany they will always be frightened off after their first contact with the E.F.D.S.” Whatever the subject of Kennedy and Gardiner’s understanding might have been, ten Bensel’s subsequent points are unpleasantly plain. Schneider was not simply a member of the SS, but worked in the *SS-Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt* [SS Race and Settlement Main Office] in Berlin. Beyond identifying possible collaborators via international meetings on dance, his role involved lecturing on race and researching the ‘racial purity’ of the families of women who were to be married to SS members. Schneider’s teacher at the Summer School was Helen Kennedy, who was Jewish. “You can,” ten Bensel told Gardiner, “fully imagine his impressions.”⁵⁹

At this point, Kennedy’s main conclusions about ten Bensel appear to have some justification. Supporting theories of *germanische Kontinuität*, she shared key aspects of Nazi ideology and worked with many pro-Nazi Dutch academics – prominent members of her N.C.B.V. *Commissie van Bijstand* had close relations before - and collaborated with - the Nazis during the war. Recently she and Van der Ven had also made frequent visits to Germany and although her own writings and working relationship display no overt signs of Antisemitism, whether she was aware of the detail of Schneider’s activities or not, she must already have seen at first hand the punitively aggressive racial policies of the Nazi regime. Despite this, she apparently saw no difficulty in accompanying Schneider through the week-long stages of the Summer School. Clashes of personality may have to be taken into account too. A background of occasionally inharmonious relationships between The Netherlands Revival and the EFDSS and ten Bensel’s penchant for trenchantly expressed views on Sharp or the superiority of The Netherlands’ dance techniques may not have been confined to her close circle or only aired in Dutch. Add in the general misogyny of the period and ten Bensel’s reputedly abrasive personality and the sources of the Director of Society’s later anger become comprehensible.

Kennedy’s comments on Van der Vens’ lives during and after the Second World War are, however, less reliably founded. As it had in the First War, The Netherlands pursued a policy of neutrality when war was declared in September 1939. Despite this, Germany attacked and invaded the country without warning in May 1940. Ill prepared and seeing bombardments deliberately targeted on civilian populations, after a few days, the Dutch surrendered. Notions of *germanische Kontinuität*

and *stamverwantschap* saw the Van der Vens already attuned to the idea of a *Grossgermanisches Reich der Deutschen Nation* [Greater Germanic Reich of the German Nation] subsuming most of Western Europe and Scandinavia. The invasion simply turned pan-Germanic theories into fact. The timing of the occupation was also opportune for them. Van der Ven had extensive experience as a fieldworker and writer on Folklife and had undertaken significant international research in preparation for the foundation of the Openluchtmuseum. However, his comparative youth, lack of a university education and allegations of populism contributed to his failure to be appointed as Director of the institution when it opened. Although he was Chairman of the Folklore Division of The Netherlands Bureau of Anthropology and had recently been made Commissioner of the Folklore Committee of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences, he remained merely a Board Member of the Museum's Association. Looking to the future, however, he had big plans for his own role and expensive proposals for the development of the Museum – including significant extension of the buildings, the addition of a hotel and youth hostel to the grounds and gardens planted with lots of Dutch bulbs.⁶⁰ Within weeks of the German invasion, he therefore invited the newly arrived SS-*Untersturmführer* and Folklore expert from the cultural and “scientific” department of the *Ahnenherbe* to tour the Openlucht Museum and De Meihof with him. Introductions would not have taken long, the SS expert sent to develop propaganda using Folklore to ensure that The Netherlands was firmly integrated into the Greater Germanic Reich was Dr Hans Ernst Schneider, former dance student of the EFDSS and NCBV. Reporting back on his “friendly reception”, Schneider told Berlin that Van der Ven was “fluent” in his command of Germanic theories and “completely adjusted to the new times. He'd become totally familiar with the terminology of nationalist thoughts and acts as though he's always been a National Socialist.” When Schneider invited him to contribute an article on “Baum und germanisches Brauchtum” [The Tree and Germanic Customs] to the magazine *Germanien* it must have seemed that Van der Ven's cultivation of German links would see his ambitions for the Directorship and expansion of the Openluchtmuseum come to fruition.

Schneider's reports, however, went beyond apparently approving comments on Van der Ven's ideological compliance. Although they were unaware of it, Van der Ven and ten Bensel's carefully nurtured relationship turned out to have been a disadvantage. In a Memo drawing on his “detailed” earlier experiences, Schneider noted Van der Ven “is one of the most dubious people dealing with Folklore in The Netherlands”. And tellingly, on the same day that he sent a letter to thank Van der Ven for his “friendly reception” at the Openluchtmuseum, Schneider also wrote to the German District Administrator for the Van der Vens' home province of Gelderland saying that their “earlier impression of Mr Van der Ven... had unfortunately been confirmed: the only thing in which Mr. v. Ven really has an interest in is money and business.” Van der Ven's plans for the Museum were dismissed too – they were “exactly what we do not want in museum matters, namely a commercial concentration of so-called nationality in one place, instead of caring for the entirety of folk growth in its country of origin.” Van der Ven, Schneider wrote, was only suitable “as a Consultant and external worker in the museum management” – he was not a “trustworthy person in the German sense” but was in fact “completely unsuitable and therefore must be rejected.”⁶¹

Reports show that ten Bensel's efforts for dance and song were equally disadvantageous. Immediately after the 1938 Summer School, her letter to Gardiner had presented a vision of English traditions of Sword and Morris replacing folk dances from other European nations to become the main form of Germanic dance – with the friendly “help” of The Netherlands (and thus the NCBV and

ten Bensel herself).⁶² Attendance at NCBV courses and concerts at De Meihof, however, only served to convince Schneider that the Van der Vens' interest in dance was commercial not nationalistic and their acceptance of Nazi ideas was entirely superficial – “within the ‘Nederlandsch Centraal Bureau voor Volksdansen’ specifically Dutch folk tradition is not cultivated” and “matters of folklore become a more interesting social affair, which is largely determined by the English model.” It was significant, Schneider wrote, that although De Meihof was reputedly the headquarters of Netherlands' folk dance, the dances taught were exclusively English – Country Dance, Sword and Morris. There was also a critical absence of German material. Schneider felt these matters represented the result of “skilful and energetic English propaganda” but assured his superiors that he had raised them with the Van der Vens:

I have not shied away from cautiously talking to Mr and Mrs van der Ven and also to numerous Dutch and Flemish participants about this phenomenon of the exclusive attention to English dance and expressing my amazement about it. The result of these conversations was a request from Mr. van der Ven to me, if possible in autumn and winter of this year, to conduct similar courses for German folk dance and folk songs - beginning in August with a weekend course, then in winter a German-English week is planned. Both with Flemish participation. In spite of the above reservations, I have accepted in principal. It seems to me to be an urgent necessity.⁶³

Schneider's pre-War role was to determine prospects for possible collaboration with the Nazis, but also to make a political assessment of their existing “ethnic awareness”. As ten Bensel had already told Gardiner, she saw that Schneider had reacted negatively to Helen Kennedy's presence at Stratford. In fact, he reported back to SS Headquarters in Berlin “that the Yiddish [*sic*] element also plays a certain role in the English Folk-Dance and Song Society”. What she apparently failed to notice, however, was his reaction to the concert she arranged when he came to De Meihof. Schneider's report dealt with both the songs and the singer:

The folk singing was led by a Mr. Harry van Cos, who also gave a public song evening. According to my information, there is the greatest probability that this Harry van Cos is a full Jew. It is again characteristic of the inner lack of instinct with which in many ways Mr. and Mrs. van der Ven practise their folklore and folklore work, even though they always know how to emphasise to Germans their full agreement with the National Socialist principles of folklore study. About half of the songs sung during the folk singing were English. The public song evening given by Mr. van Cos (folk songs of different nations) was informative. In addition to Scottish, Irish, English, Dutch, French and German songs, three Yiddish, two Creole and two Negro spirituals were sung, all of which were not only performed with the greatest pathos and compassion but were also received with the greatest applause. The Germans, by the way, were the only ones of the European song group to stand between the Yiddish and Negroid songs! **I thought this arrangement was a conscious gesture.** [My emphasis.]⁶⁴

As early as September 1939, therefore, neither ten Bensel nor Van der Ven was considered to be reliable by the Nazis. The most important Nazi dealing with Folklore in The Netherlands, SS-*Untersturmführer* Schneider, had already concluded that the Van der Vens' “involvement with theoretical and practical folklore is undoubtedly a clear business matter, which anyone who has ever

had any relationship with them can confirm.” Adding a warning that these “reservations have to be made when German services contact Dutch folklore through the person of Mr. or Mrs. van der Ven”.⁶⁵

Kennedy’s information about ten Bensel’s potential political future is also unfounded. Even if Schneider or others in the hierarchy had felt that she was indeed the “fanatical Nazi” that Kennedy describes, there could have been no question of her being “groomed” for the position of *Gauleiter* in Hilversum and Arnhem “after the Nazis handed over and returned to base”. Women were not allowed to join the German Nazi Party (NSDAP) and were excluded from political life and positions of responsibility in the public sphere. And although the Dutch Nazi Party, the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging in Nederland* (NSB) played a role in local government, on a national level and despite repeated requests, Anton Mussert (1894-1946), the Dutch Party leader was never made Prime Minister of The Netherlands given independence. The Germans never intended “to return to base” – The Netherlands was part of *Grossgermanisches Reich der Deutschen Nation*, once occupied, it would remain part of the Germanic realm and be ruled by German or Austrian Nazis. As a Dutch woman, there could have been no place for ten Bensel in the government of any part of the occupied Netherlands.

From the Nazi viewpoint, however, the Dutch were fellow Aryans. Initially - from 1940-41 - a relatively accommodating approach was employed to ensure that “Germanification” was achieved. And the approving voices of prominent Netherlands were regarded as a major mechanism for bringing this about. Despite his mistrust of their motivation, it was clear to Schneider that Van der Ven was the country’s best-known folklorist and was “totally familiar with the terminology of nationalist thoughts”. He also owned an unrivalled collection of Folklife photographs and films - a significant plus for the Ahnenerbe’s plan to produce accessible, attractive Germanic propaganda based on folkloristic subjects. Meanwhile, ten Bensel employed Germanic theories and was a leading figure in The Netherlands’ Folk Dance movement. “Both are the only ones in Holland who deal with these matters in a serious and broader way,” Schneider concluded. As a result, he offered Van der Ven and ten Bensel the chance to write articles and books on Folklore in the service of Nazi ideology, adding a heavy, private caveat that “they must nevertheless be observed by us.”⁶⁶ Over each of the next four years with books such as Van der Ven’s *De Heemliefde van het Nederlandsche volk*, the jointly written *De Volksdans in Nederland* and ten Bensel’s *15 Gemeenschaps- en Mannendansen*,⁶⁷ the pair provided works on aspects of Folklife and dance which featured Netherlands and Germanic content. Writing for the opening article for the first issue of *Hamer*, the profusely illustrated SS-sponsored monthly journal, Van der Ven’s portrayal of harvest customs celebrated the “spontaneous and deeply embedded customs whose rich diversity testifies again and again to the joy our Germanic nature takes in life itself and in our labour” and described Dutch harvest festivals as “reverberations of the olden customs of our forefathers, who bore within them the nobility of their blood and were called to Greater Germanic culture.”⁶⁸ In 1941 – with prominent members of other dance groups now held hostage or in hiding and with the support of the department of *Volksvoorlichting en Kunsten* [Public Information and Arts] – ten Bensel was given a national appointment as Leader of the *groep Volksdans van de Nederlandse Kultuurkamer* [Folkdance Group of the Dutch Culture Chamber]. She played her part with courses and articles for closely controlled Germanifying magazines such as the glossy, cultural bi-monthly *De Schouw* and even for the German folklore organisation *Volkstum und Heimat*. The year after she co-wrote *De Volksdans in Nederland*, ten Bensel also contributed an article on folksong and folk dance to the new

edition of Jan de Vries' (1890-1964) *Volk van Nederland* in which she hymned the emergence of the new songs of youth and political organisations associated with the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging [Dutch Nazi Party; NSB] such as the *Arbeidsdienst* [Work Service], *Nationale Jeugdstorm* (National Youth Storm; NJS) and the paramilitary *Weerbaarheidsafdeling* [Resilience Department; WA]. "The glow, seriousness and enthusiasm with which they are sung," she enthused, "suggest that the conditions for the creation of a new folksong in this day and age are present here."⁶⁹ But, as in the past, an apparently trouble-free set of reciprocal relationships was deceptive.

Promoted to Deputy Director of the Ahnenerbe in Berlin, Schneider left The Netherlands in July 1942. His relationship with the Van der Vens was always problematic. He might have sent polite "thank you" notes and the Van der Vens turned out material which could then be presented in attractive publications, but this collaboration with SS began poorly and deteriorated further over time. For Van der Ven, resentment seethed around the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap*, the "Working Community" which Schneider intended to make the dominant institution for Folklore, to which other institutions and individuals active in cultural policy in The Netherlands would be subordinate. Feeling his name and reputation as a popular author was being abused by inadequate payment for his work, Van der Ven stopped writing for *Hamer*, the journal of the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* in December 1940, after producing only three articles for the magazine. There was more general friction over the Museum too. Absence of support for his plans for the Openlucht Museum did not only relate to their expense but to its provincial site and his continuing aims to combine serious research with popular appeal – Nazi-orientated academic Folklorists based in Amsterdam shared Ahnenerbe views about the unsuitability of a more animated institution in rural Gelderland. Van der Ven's impression that the increasing circulation of *Hamer* was due to his accessible approach, whilst (with the connivance of Schneider and his supporters) he was consistently excluded from membership of the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* created a downward spiral of poor relations.

Ten Bonsel, meanwhile, was promoting her own plans for the future with a series of articles on "De herleving van de Noordschen gemeenschaps dans" [The Revival of Nordic Community Dance] in the Dutch Nazi Party (NSB) newspaper, *Het Nationale Dagblad*. She also brought together NSB organisations like *Arbeidsdienst* [Work Service], *Nationale Jeugdstorm* [National Youth Storm] in a Council on dance that the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* refused to join. Feeling his direction of the situation was in jeopardy, Schneider made attempts to establish greater control over ten Bonsel's work by inviting her to participate in a Folk Dance Weekend with another dance group. She refused the summons with a letter saying that many of her dancers felt they did not want to take part because of "*der augenblicklichen Umstände*" [the present circumstances].⁷⁰ Schneider replied that her attitude was "extremely regrettable" – it was her responsibility to make clear to dancers that they should co-operate in the task of raising national consciousness. He had believed that her activities were winding down, but now he had heard that her work was continuing and that she was combining organisations with support from the Dutch Nazi Party. Referring to this "drawing together" as "*Konzentrationen*" – a term with chilling implications – Schneider concluded his letter with the "You will understand if I have to follow up and act accordingly."⁷¹

In fact, the Van der Vens were never accepted as convinced National Socialists by either the German or Dutch Nazi Parties. The couple's only source of income was from films, writing and lecturing on Folklore and teaching courses on folk dance. As a result of this, the review of their joint work, *De Volksdans in Nederland*, which appeared in *Storm*, the magazine of The Netherlands' SS, described

the Van der Vens as "*parasieten op de volkskultuur*" [parasites on folk culture] motivated by "self-glorification in order to be able to earn as much money from the 'New Order' as from the old one". And dredging the deepest pits of Nazism's execrations, their book was termed a "Jewish product", its authors labelled as "Jewish-Masonic proselytes".⁷² The book received good reviews, however, in other NSB publications and the writers themselves were positively defended by the NSB affiliated weekly, *Volk en Vaderland* – though the journal added that they did so "out of fairness" as the writers "were not National Socialists."⁷³ Through 1942 and into 1944, the Van der Vens worked with NSB-affiliated organisations. Shifting, without feeling the need for tiresome explanations, from adherence to the ideas of the *Grossgermanisches Reich der Deutschen Nation* of the German Nazis to broad support for an independent *Groot Nederland* [Great Netherlands] envisaged by the NSB.⁷⁴ The couple obviously carried only minimal ideological baggage. And despite their close association – and the advantages they took - from both German and Dutch Nazis, they were never members of the Dutch NSB. Opportunism, rather than political allegiance, seems to have been their main motivation.

Arnhem and Aftermath

In late summer 1944, the Van der Ven-ten Bensel's took a holiday in Limburg in the south eastern Netherlands. Staying in the village of Beesel, where Van der Ven had made recordings for his first film on harvest customs, his diary records cosy evenings with the NSB Party Mayor, forgetting about the "misery of war facts" with Edam cheese and a good glass of red wine.⁷⁵ But "war facts" were finally intruding. In August 1944, the allies liberated parts of Belgium and France - and aiming to make a breakthrough into the industrial heart of Germany over the River Rhine - on 17th September, launched 'Operation Market Garden', an airborne invasion of the area around Arnhem. In the ensuing battles, Oosterbeek was fought over street by street and De Meihof – like most of the buildings in the village – was largely destroyed. Stranded in Limburg, Van der Ven passed the time dictating a new book on Netherlands costume and European folk art (which ten Bensel noted in shorthand and typed up), planning a prospective Department of Folk Culture (to be led by him) and drawing up a detailed programme for a profusely illustrated, free magazine with a '*zuiver volksopvoedkundig karakter*' [pure, folk education character] for families at home.⁷⁶ But although he confided concerns for the future of his sometime host, the NSB Mayor, to his diary, his extensive schemes for his own post-war career manifested no sense of guilt or perception that his and ten Bensel's activities involved extensive and egregious collaboration.

In April 1945 the whole of The Netherlands was finally liberated. On 12th July 1945, Van der Ven, who was at this time in Leeuwarden in the north of the country, was arrested and accused of being a member of the Dutch Nazi Party. The charge was not upheld – he could show that he was not a member of the NSB, so was released after a short time. But the detention had panicked him. Fearing that more investigations would follow, he wrote a detailed "defence", describing his lengthy and contentious relationship with the Museum management, including his plans for the development of the Openluchtmuseum under the occupation. His bid for the directorship and expansion was, he claimed, intended to keep the museum out of Nazi and *Volksche Werkgemeenschap* control.⁷⁷ Self-incriminating and containing wild accusations against colleagues, the defence was soon passed to the *Politieke Opsporingsdienst/ POD* [Political Investigations Service] in Oosterbeek.

In September 1945, Van der Ven was arrested by the POD, charged with collaboration and taken to a detention camp at Ede in Gelderland. In a hectic period of activity at the end of the occupation, The Netherlands had arrested around 150,000 people for collaboration – far more than they could easily hold within secure provision.⁷⁸ So when, after a few days, Van der Ven developed serious health problems, it was hardly surprising that he was allowed out of the camp and placed under house arrest instead. Initially, the POD had concentrated their enquiries on Van der Ven, but subsequently, an investigation was begun into ten Bensel, who was voluntarily sharing his detention. She too was then officially placed under house arrest. These actions prompted the pair to begin an intense campaign of letter-writing, asking friends and acquaintances for formal expressions of support for their integrity and patriotism. They had early success when Jacob van der Gaag (1905-1988), who had been active in the Dutch Resistance, wrote a letter to the effect that *“gedurende de oorlogsjaren door zijn werk belangrijk bijgedragen [heeft] tot de verspreiding van de belangstelling voor echt-Nederlandse cultuur en tot de liefde voor eigen land”* [“through his work during the war years [Van der Ven] contributed significantly to the spread of interest in real Dutch culture and to the love for his own country”].⁷⁹ The Van der Vens then copied van der Gaag’s letter and distributed it to other contacts suggesting they use it as a model for their own testimonial.

Their networking strategy provides the answer to what had previously been an inexplicable aspect of Kennedy’s involvement in the case of the Van der Vens. The Dutch authorities had multiple exculpatory statements from individuals who had been in The Netherlands during the occupation, as well as ten other witness statements – like the one in less complimentary terms from immediate contacts like Van Erven Dorens and Smit of the Openlucht Museum who said that “In our view, Van der Ven is a troublemaker, who doesn’t take morality very seriously”.⁸⁰ With such a range of first-hand information, why did they call Douglas Kennedy and Maud Karpeles, two foreigners who had not been in The Netherlands during the war, to the Embassy in London for interview about the activities of the Van der Vens in February 1946? In fact, among the letters supporting the couple, were three from members of the EFDSS – Rolf Gardiner, Maud Karpeles and Douglas Kennedy.⁸¹ Ten Bensel had written to Gardiner in November 1945 explaining her shock and bewilderment that she and Van der Ven – who, she claimed, had never been in the least political or in any way profited from the war – inexplicably found themselves under investigation by the POD. In a less than candid description of their current status, she wrote of that the couple were free, but had only escaped being interned thanks to the intervention of a friend, who had vouched for their integrity. She then added that they had, in fact, been freed ‘conditionally’ whilst the contents of their wartime publications were examined to ensure they were categorically pro-Dutch and anti-German. All she and Van der Ven had done during the war, she protested, was to continue their existing work in Folklore – she, in particular, had published a book of ‘Community Dances’ which was based on English Morris, Sword and Country Dances. It was only, she claimed, because their pre-war international contacts did not exclude Germany that they had become “suspect”. Popular feeling against collaborators was now making Dutch friends reluctant to say too much, ten Bensel declared, so she asked Gardiner if he and influential English people could send the couple letters expressing appreciation for their work and friendship with England – helpfully enclosing a copy of Van der Gaag’s testimonial as an example of suitable content.⁸²

Gardiner responded almost immediately (4th December 1945) and supportive letters were also sent in December from Douglas Kennedy and Maud Karpeles. As 22nd November 1945 had seen the POD asking Van der Gaag to confirm that he was retracting portions of his testimonial, these *loftuitingen*

[eulogies] from “leading members” of the EFDSS offered timely reinforcements of the Van der Vens’ cases for their exoneration.⁸³ But then and now, the English letters raise a number of questions. In Britain, some have taken Gardiner’s praise for ten Bensel’s continued use of English dances in her teaching and publishing at face value – as demonstrating what Gardiner described as her “inner sympathy with England which has always preserved the Dutch from overweight of German cultural influence and propaganda” – and “a shrewd blow for Dutch independence and for continued friendship with England”.⁸⁴ In the context of ten Bensel’s longstanding acceptance of the place of English traditions in Germanic continuity and her busy political networking and teaching with Dutch Nazi Party organisations at the time the book was written, this interpretation is not credible. What is perhaps even stranger, however, is her view that Gardiner, whose extensive links with Germany and openly expressed-Nazi sympathies meant he was under surveillance by the Foreign Office and British Security Services for most of the 1930’s and into the 1940’s, would be an appropriate advocate.⁸⁵ Also, we only have brief descriptions of Kennedy and Karpeles’ supportive letters – so although “praise” and “eulogies” are invariably mentioned, the precise terms of their backing for the couple are unknown.

These and other gestures of support, however, had some effect. Charged as a collaborator, Van der Ven had initially received a publication ban of two years, but this sentence was reversed and by 13 January 1947 he had received a ‘provisional certificate’ from the Press Purification Commission allowing him to begin publishing again. More was to follow. On 14th April 1947, the Tribunal decided against further criminal action, but ordered the Van der Vens be put on two year’s probation on condition that they behaved as good Dutch citizens, with a deposit of 1,000 guilders from Van der Ven and 500 guilders from ten Bensel to ensure this. The couple appealed against the decision and on 2nd January 1948 were unconditionally dismissed from prosecution because it was felt that their activities were not serious enough to justify the application of the “Extraordinary Criminal Law Decree”. When they applied to have their conviction of “minor guilt” changed to “proven innocence” in 1951, however, their appeal was not upheld because no reasons for the suspicion raised them against to be set aside had become known.⁸⁶

In contrast to Kennedy’s account of lifelong punishment, the Van der Ven’s sentence was neither long nor particularly severe. Their “house arrest” involved staying in a modern, if rather overcrowded, villa on Klinkenbergerweg in Ede. Here, ten Bensel told Gardiner, space for work was limited but they had their own room. They also had opportunity to make plans for their future. De Meihof was in ruins, but was apparently well insured and stood on a sizeable plot of land. The couple also had expectations of a Government grant in compensation for the damage sustained. As soon as it was possible for building to begin again in Oosterbeek, ten Bensel felt they would quickly be able to sell the land there and rebuild elsewhere. Coincidentally - or to reduce the chance of local recriminations - they chose to move to Lunteren, the little town in north-west Gelderland where the Dutch Nazi Party (NSB) had held its annual rallies in the 1930’s. Here, the local newspaper reported on 18th October 1948, they had a big opening party for the new Meihof with traditional housewarming customs, the planting of a may tree from “folk friends” in Wessex in De Meihof’s “beautiful garden” and in the evening, a ceremonial visit from the historic Lobith *Schuttersgilde* and a “gala ball” with lots of dances.⁸⁷ Friends from England also gave ten Bensel an early chance to return to writing about folk performance via a commission for a book in a series on European national dances. Edited by the prominent specialist on Continental dance and longstanding EFDSS member, Violet Alford (1881-1972), *Dances of the Netherlands* received a favourable review from

Douglas Kennedy, who commented that “the reader can rely on the texts, written so clearly by such authorities as ... Van der Ven-ten Bensel.”⁸⁸ Van der Ven, however, was rather less fortunate. In the post-war years, although regularly referred to as “the well-known folklorist”, he mainly earned his living from writing for trade and tourism publications. After his death in 1973, ten Bensel produced a biography and bibliography of his extensive writings and in the year before her own death, *Volksdansen vroeger en nu*, a partly sanitised revision their 1942 joint work, *De volksdans in Nederland*.⁸⁹ De Meihof continued its work for a short time after the war, but as Antony Heywood’s “Translator’s Note” explains, from 1946 the teaching of English folk dances in The Netherlands was organised by the *Nederlandse Volksdans Stichting* (NVS), now known as the *Volksdansvereniging NVS*.⁹⁰

Douglas Kennedy’s letter to Ewart Russell reveals markedly different attitudes to Van der Ven and ten Bensel. Van der Ven, “harmless”, “weak” and persuaded to abandon his patriotism by the Nazis – a “scholarly” man “who only feared for his academic position, was seduced by the facilities granted him to teach and publish his books”. Ten Bensel, a “fanatic supporter of Hitler and the Nazi” whose “forceful” dancing, “acid remarks”, “twisted and spiteful nature” led her to false conclusions about the nature of traditional dance and were far removed from accepted standards of behaviour for women. As contemporary evidence shows, this interpretation of the political positions of the couple and account of their actions are unsustainable. Today, researchers from The Netherlands offer a nuanced view of their politics – situating them in a broader time frame of idealistic work for national unity, as well as unprincipled opportunism and fractious relationships with colleagues before and during the occupation.⁹¹ Perhaps most surprising from Kennedy’s viewpoint would be the conclusion of a Dutch study of women active in Folklore between the wars which concludes that despite being “known for some works on folk dance that are still worth reading” [*bekend van enkele nog steeds lezenswaardige studies over volksdans*], ten Bensel was researching in a “niche”, feminine area of study. Across Europe at the time, women did write about dance but so did men – many of them with deeply malevolent political agendas. It was not necessarily a cosy little subject. It is also hard to justify the same author’s proposal that writing a biography and bibliography of her husband after his death should merely be counted as the dutiful service of a “faithful widow” rather than an attempt to justify and sustain the reputation of a professional partner ten Bensel had worked with over many years.⁹² For historians of Folklore Studies in The Netherlands, Van der Ven is a significant figure, working across a range of genres, raising awareness and developing many areas of Folklore. The example he set in collaborating so extensively with the Nazis and the Dutch Nazi Party therefore created untold damage. Ten Bensel’s work was largely focused on a single genre and she did not serve on same the level and number of bodies as Van der Ven, but her actions also had critical impact on Dutch society under occupation. Tellingly - and perhaps even more seriously - neither she nor her husband later accepted any responsibility for what they had chosen to do.

“It is not the argument but the particular mouthpiece....”

How should we read Douglas Kennedy’s letter now? Despite his comments to Russell, it seems unlikely that he had reached his damning conclusions about Van der Ven or ten Bensel immediately after the war. Aside from his supportive “eulogy” and review of *Dances of the Netherlands*, there was a “resumption” of EFDSS activities in early 1947, when dance teachers led by Richard Callander held an Easter Folk Dance Weekend at the Van der Vens’ home base in Lunteren and a further week devoted to training dance teachers was also held there in August 1947.⁹³ The Society had not given

any courses in Lunteren before the war and it seems unlikely that they would have chosen the town at random. The link with the Van der Ven-ten Bensels offers a plausible rationale for the location but Callender's report contains no mention of them. Is it from these visits to Lunteren that further information – amplified by inaccurate local gossip about the couple's wartime activities - began to be presented to Callender and via him to Kennedy? But why Kennedy chose to present ten Bensel as a fanatical Nazi, whilst her even more guilty husband was largely excused was – and is now likely to remain – an open question. In the 1930's, it seems to have been the combative ten Bensel rather than the "scholarly" Van der Ven who met Kennedy most often. She was also the person whom, Kennedy correctly recalled, spent time at the Stratford Summer School in close company with a representative of Nazi Germany. Having provided a letter of rescue immediately after the war, was Kennedy's wish to see "not the argument but the particular mouthpiece demolished" the product newer, sensationalised evidence and the emergence of retrospective scruples?

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Notes

1. "Volksdans als Traditie," *De Volksdansmare voor de vrienden van de Meihof*, Zevende Jaargang No. 1 (Herfst 1938), 2-7. For greater clarity, where appropriate in the remainder of the article, I will refer to each of the Van der Ven-ten Bensel's by their family names alone – i.e. Elise ten-Bensel and Dirk Jan Van der Ven.
2. "I was more interested in what Kimber had to say especially with reference to the 'cross backstep'. At the time of writing/translating, Helmond Morris Men were doing a lot of Headington Dances with the cross-backstep, a practice which was revived in the 1990s and is still an important part of our repertoire today.... For our part, we still hear sounds of wonderment when we do a dance with crisp and precise cross-backsteps!" Antony Heywood, personal communication, 10 November 2019.

3. Letter from Ewart Russell to Douglas Kennedy, 1 November 1984 – reprinted in *The Morris Dancer*, III:6 (February 1999), 190.
4. Letter from Douglas Kennedy to Ewart Russell, 7 November 1984, *Ibid.*, 190-91.
5. Letter from Ewart [Russell] to Antony [Heywood], 13 November 1984, *Ibid.*, 191.
6. Letter from Douglas Kennedy to Ewart Russell, 7 November 1984, *Ibid.*, 190.
7. For Van der Ven quotes and information on his career see Rob van Ginkel and Barbara Henkes, "On Peasants and 'Primitive Peoples': Movements of Rapprochement and Distance between Folklore Studies and Anthropology in the Netherlands," *Ethnos*, 68 (2003), 112-34; and the extensive detail in Barbara Henkes, *Uit liefde voor het volk: Volkskundigen op zoek naar de Nederlandse identiteit 1918-1948* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum - Polak & Van Gennep, 2005) and Rob van Ginkel, *Volkscultuur als valkuil: Over antropologie, volkskunde en cultuurpolitiek* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000). For report of Van der Ven's accident, see Mertens Instituut, archive van der Ven, scrapbook without inv. nr. with cuttings from the *Nieuwe Arnhemse Courant* of 20 March 1914 and the *Nieuwe Haarlemsche Courant* of 20 March 1914.
8. Theorem XIII of ten-Bensel's thesis quoted in Albert van der Zeijden, "Vrouwen in de volkskunde ten tijde van het interbellum: de factor *gender* in de wetenschapsbeoefening," *Volkskunde* 103 (2002) 97-123, fn. 31 http://www.albertvanderzeijden.nl/vrouwen_in_de_volkskunde.htm consulted 26 May 2019.
9. See Elise Francisca Wilhelmina Maria Van der Ven-ten Bensel, *The Character of King Arthur in English Literature* (Amsterdam: J H Paris, 1929). She also acknowledges that Van der Ven's assistance with the folklore of King Arthur had been invaluable.
10. Jaap Kunst, *Terschellinger volksleven: Gebruiken, feesten, liederen* (Uithuizen: H. H. Fongers, 1915) and *Noord-Nederlandsche volksliederen en -dansen uit den volksmond opgeteekend* (3 vols; Groningen; Den Haag: J. B. Wolters, 1916-18).
11. Dr. E. Van der Ven-ten Bensel, *De Volksdans Herleeft! [Folkdance Revived!]*, (Middelburg: G. W. den Boer, 1933), pp. 20-21.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22 and pp. 5-6.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
15. Elise Van der Ven's article is advertised as appearing in *Youth: An International Quarterly of Young Enterprise* Edited by Rolf Gardiner, II:11 (October 1923), whilst the article by D. J. Van is advertised to appear in II:13 (Summer 1924). See back cover of Rolf Gardiner, *The English Folk Dance Tradition: An Essay* (Hellerau bei Dresden: Neue Schule Hellerau, 1923).
16. Van der Ven-ten Bensel, *Volksdans Herleeft!*, p. 23.
17. The English Folk-Dance Society [EFDS] was founded by Cecil James Sharp (1859-1924) in 1911. In 1932, it amalgamated with The Folk-Song Society to become The English Folk Dance and Song Society [EFDSS].
18. Elise van der Ven-Ten Bensel, "Dutch Folk-Dances," *Journal of the English Folk Dance Society* No. 4 (1931), 1-8.
19. See *English Folk Dance Society Report September 1st, 1930, to August 31st, 1931* (London: English Folk Dance Society, 1931), pp. 11, 31 and 75; *English Folk Dance Society Report September 1st, 1931, to August 31st, 1932* (London: English Folk Dance Society, 1932), p. 2 and Dr. Elise Van der Ven-ten Bensel, "Met een twintigtal 'Vrienden van de Meihof' naar de EFDS-Vacationschool te Hereford," *De Volksdansmare* 2 (1933), 25-28.
20. See *Journal of the English Folk Dance Society*, II (1935) International Festival Number, 49-54 and *ibid.*, 17-24. Chairman's comments, *ibid.*, 23.
21. ten Bensel, "Volksdans als Traditie," p. 2.
22. Around a third of the 65 pages of illustrations in ten Bensel's, *De Volksdans Herleeft!* show English folk dancers or English subjects. "De populaire Engelsche volksdansleerares Miss C. Anderson" is probably the person shown in the Membership List of the *English Folk Dance*

- Society Report September 1st, 1930 to August 31st, 1931*, p. 47 as living at 10 Shelf Moor, Shelf, Halifax.
23. See Rolf Gardiner, *World Without End: British Politics and the Younger Generation* (London: Cobden-Sanderson Ltd, 1932), "Appendix: Calendar of British-German Activities 1922-1932", p. 53 for details of early Continental visits by Gardiner and English dancers and his less than flattering description of Dutch audiences at a dance display by Travelling Morrice a in Rolf Gardiner, "Summer Tour in Germany, 1928," *North Sea and Baltic* (High Summer 1938) New Series No. 4, p. 98. For further details of The Travelling Morrice, co-founded by Gardiner and Arthur Heffer, see "A Brief Account of the Travelling Morrice," *Ibid.*, pp. 75-81.
 24. Ivor Allsop in "The Squire Who Never Was!" *The American Morris Newsletter* V:28 No. 1, citing *E.F.D.S. News*, No. 30 Vol. iii Part 6, July 1932 at <http://www.americanmorrisnews.org/pastissues/may2008v28n1/ivorallsopv28n1thesquirewhoneverwas.html> consulted 20 June 2019. The 1924 team was probably the group ten Bensel rather obscurely described as "der [sic] beste dansers uit de Engelsche Volksdansvereniging" [the best dancers from the English Folk Dance Association] who gave exhibitions in Amsterdam, Haarlem, Hilversum and Nijmegen in Autumn 1924 at the invitation of Dr R. W. Zandvoort, but were not entirely successful because "was de tijd blijkbaar nog niet rijp" ["the time was apparently not yet ripe"], *De Volksdans Herleeft!*, p. 24.
 25. *Ibid.*, plates unpaginated.
 26. Allsop, "The Squire Who Never Was".
 27. See *Journal of the English Folk Dance Society*, II (1935) International Festival Number, 21-22.
 28. *Volksdans Herleeft!*, p. 23.
 29. Gardiner, *World Without End*, p. 53 and "Summer Tour in Germany, 1928," p. 98.
 30. *Volksdans Herleeft!*, pp. 23-25. Apparently basing their work on Playford, Georg Götsch and Rolf Gardiner also published *Alte Krontra-Tänze* (Wolfenbüttel: Mösseler Verlag, 1928) which was widely used and reprinted several times.
 31. For a detailed and informative overview, see Rob van Ginkel, "The Dangers of Dancing: Foreign vs Folk Dances and the Politics of Culture in the Netherlands, 1918-1955," *Ethnologia Europaea*, 38:2 (2008), 45-65 and the same author's, "Contra dancing, pro contradans Cultuurpolitiek en ideologie in Nederland, ca. 1918-1955," *Etnofoor*, 10: 1/2, Muziek & Dans (1997), 174-207 and *Volkscultuur als valkuil*, pp. 57-78. Of the wider range of bodies associated with English traditional dance in The Netherlands, a morris team founded in 1935 by Theo Driessen (1901-1977) and based on his choir at St Jozef's school in Helmond, were the origin of the Helmond Morris Men – who are still in existence today. See <http://www.helmondmorris.nl/> consulted 8 July 2019.
 32. See "Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ended 31st August, 1931," *English Folk Dance Society Report September 1st, 1930, to August 31st, 1931*, pp. 24-25.
 33. Members of the *Commissie* included: the theologian, Prof. Dr Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950) of Groningen University; the Germanist and folklorist Prof. Dr Jan de Vries (1890-1964) of Leiden University; Prof. Dr Karl Gaulhofer (1885-1941), the Rector of the Academy for Physical Education in Amsterdam who combined educational studies and eugenics; Sem Dresden (1881-1957), the composer and Director of the Royal Conservatoire at The Hague and the poet, translator and editor, Werumeus Buning (1891-1958). For a complete list and full aims of the NCBV see *Volksdans Herleeft!*, p. 30. For further discussion of aspects of the membership, see van Ginkel, *Volkscultuur als valkuil*, p. 70.
 34. *30 Contra-dances from "The English Dancing Master by John Playford. Chosen by Elise van der Ven-ten Bensel* (Amsterdam: De Spieghel, 1931). This publication was also helpfully timed to coincide with her teaching the Playford course at the Academy for Physical Education in Amsterdam.
 35. *Volksdans Herleeft!*, p. 31.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
38. See for example Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert C. Macilwaine, *The Morris Book with A Description of Dances as Performed by The Morris Men of England*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Novello & Co. Ltd, 1912), 1, p. 10.
39. Heinrich Schurtz, *Alterklassen und Männerbünde: Eine Darstellung der Grundformen der Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1902), p. iv quoted in Stefan Arvidson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*, Trans. Sonia Wichmann (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), p. 208.
40. See Georgina Boyes, "Potencies of the earth': Rolf Gardiner and the English Folk Dance Revival," in Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley, ed., *Rolf Gardiner: Folk, Nature and Culture in Interwar Britain* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2011), pp. 65-94 and Georgina Boyes, "Dancing Spies: Nazi attempts to infiltrate the English Folk Revival," in *Ballroom, Stage & Village Green: Contexts for Early Dance*. Edited by Barbara Segal & Bill Tuck (Cambridge: Early Dance Circle, 2015), pp. 87-88 for further discussion of this.
41. Leopold von Shroeder, *Mysterium und Mimus im Rigveda* (Leipzig: H. Haessel Verlag, 1908) quoted in Stephen Corrsin, "'Spectral, Dancing Hosts of War': German-language Research on Sword Dancing before World War 1," *Folklore*, 119 (2008), 288.
42. *Volksdans Herleeft!*, p. 6.
43. For further discussion of the range of Nazi symbols and their associated "scholarship", see Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, "The Weigel Symbol Archive and the Ideology of National Socialist Folklore," in James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld, ed. and trans, *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 97-111. Probably the best known 'sun symbol' is the swastika.
44. *Volksdans Herleeft!*, p. 11.
45. Van Ginkel, *Volkscultuur als valkuil*, p. 23.
46. Rolf Gardiner, *The English Folk Dance Tradition: An Essay* (Hellerau bei Dresden: Neue Schule Hellerau, 1923), p. 16.
47. Rolf Gardiner, "Summer Tour in Germany, 1928," *North Sea and Baltic* (High Summer 1938) New Series No. 4, p. 101. [Written in 1928, italics Gardiner's].
48. See for example, letter from Gardiner to Cecil Sharp, 10 July 1922, Rolf Gardiner Archive, Cambridge University Library, D2/1. "I was becoming very unhappy because of the cruel and calumnising rumours which were circulating among Folk Dancers & others about my attitude & the attitude of my friends towards yourself & the E.F.D.S."
49. *Volksdans Herleeft!* pp. 11-13.
50. *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.
51. Dr Elise van der Ven-ten Bensel, "Reviews," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* Vol. I:1 (December 1932), 65-67. Interestingly, Meschke's book received an uncritically glowing review from the Austrian Folklorist (and Nazi Party member) Lutz Mackensen in the *Journal of the Folklore Society of Ireland*, see *Béaloideas* 4: 1 (1933), 99-100.
52. The *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* [National Socialist German Workers' Party], "Nazis". Adolf Hitler, leader of the Party, became Chancellor of Germany in 1933.
53. *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, I:1 (December 1932), 67.
54. For a succinct overview of the development of these approaches and their context in Germany and Austria, see Hannjost Lixfeld, "The *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* and the Umbrella Organizations of German "Volkskunde" during the Third Reich," *Asian Folklore Studies*, 50:1 (1991), 95-116; for impact in The Netherlands see Ton Dekker, *De Nederlandse volkskunde: De verwetenschappelijking van een emotionele belangstelling* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2002) and Van Ginkel, *Volkscultuur als valkuil*; and discussion of forays into British academia in Boyes, "Dancing Spies," pp. 90-94.
55. See Gardiner's, "The Muses and the People in England," *Report: World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation Hamburg July 23 to July 1936* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanst.,

- 1937), pp. 150-51 and photo of de Meihof Dancers visiting the Museum of German Folk Culture during the 1936 Olympiad in Dekker, *De Nederlandse volkskunde*, p. 226. For report on Gardiner's tour, see *WO 371 FO Series: 1932 R. Gardiner: Activities of English and German Singers, Players and dancers – P1334/P2047/92/150*.
56. Specifically, Schneider was a member of the *SS-Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt* [SS Race and Settlement Main Office] in Berlin which, among other roles, checked the "racial purity" of potential marriage partners of members of the *Schutzstaffel* [SS] and also of the *Ahnenerbe* [Ancestral Heritage], which produced books, articles, exhibitions and conferences to provide "academic" evidence for Nazi ideas of Aryan biological and intellectual superiority. The hypothetical and fabricated geographical spread of Aryans (pretended Germanic ancestors) in pre-history were then cited in justification of German military expansion. These organisations were founded by *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945).
 57. For Schneider's background, reports and activities in the Nazi Party see Joachim Lerchenmüller, "Hans Ernst Schneider/Hans Schwertes Niederlande-Arbeit in den 1930er bis 1950er Jahre," in Burkhard Dietz, Helmut Gabel, Ulrich Tiedau, *Griff nach dem Westen: Die 'Westforschung' der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaften zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum (1919 - 1960)* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2003), II, pp. 1111-1140.
 58. *Ibid.*, p. 1120.
 59. See letter from "Elise" [Van der Ven-ten Bense] to "Rolf" [Gardiner] 8th August 1938 held in Papers of H. Rolf Gardiner, Holland Correspondence, D2/5/1-, Cambridge University Library.
 60. See Ginkel and Henkes, "On Peasants and 'Primitive Peoples,'" for valuable discussion of this and Dekker, p. 242 for details of Van der Ven's plans.
 61. See Dekker, pp. 207-8 and footnotes referring to *Aktenvermerk* 19-10-1940 van H. Schneider (NIOD: BDC H 817-5938); letter from H. Schneider to Van der Ven 4-11-1940 (NIOD: BDC H 920-6555); and letter H. Schneider to Landrat E. Schneider 4-11-1940 (NIOD: BDC H 916-6532-4).
 62. Letter from "Elise" [Van der Ven-ten Bense] to "Rolf" [Gardiner] 8th August 1938 held in Papers of H. Rolf Gardiner.
 63. Joachim Lerchenmüller, *Griff nach dem Westen*, p. 1122
 64. *Ibid.*
 65. *Ibid.*
 66. *Ibid.*
 67. D. J. Van der Ven, *De heemliefde van het Nederlandsche volk* (Naarden: Rutgers, 1941; 2nd ed. 1942); Dr. Elise Van der Ven-ten Bense en D. J. Van der Ven, *De volksdans in Nederland* (Naarden: Rutgers, 1942) and Dr. Elise Van der Ven-ten Bense, *15 Gemeenschaps- en Mannendansen* (Naarden: Rutgers, 1943). See Van Ginkel, *Volkscultuur als valkuil*, pp. 21-23 and 167-8 for further examples and detail.
 68. D. J. Van der Ven, "Bij de laatste schoof," *Hamer*, I:1 (1940), 4-7. *Hamer* was ostensibly published on the initiative of the *Volksche Werkgemeenschap*, an organisation that was a cover for the SS *Ahnenerbe*.
 69. E. van der Ven-ten Bense, "Volkszang en volksdans," in Jan de Vries, *Volk van Nederland*, 3rd rev. edn (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1943), pp. 332-357, specific quotes pp. 333 & 343. Jan de Vries was also a member of the Advisory Committee of the NCVB.
 70. See letter from E. van der Ven-ten Bense to H. E. Schneider 16-9-1941 (ARA, CABR PF-Arnhem 108101,6771: file E. van der Ven-ten Bense.)
 71. Letter from H.E. Schneider to E. van der Ven-ten Bense 8-10-41 (ARA, CABR PF-Arnhem 108101, 6771; dossier E. van der Ven-ten Bense.)
 72. Nico de Haas, "Parasieten," *Storm*, 11 June 1943 cited in Henkes, *Uit liefde voor het volk*, p. 102 and Dekker, *De Nederlandse volkskunde*, p. 264. For earlier criticism see also de Haas, "'Folklore' en volkskunde," *Hamer* 10:10 (1941), 2-3 and "Volks- en Germanenkunde in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw in Nederland," *idem*, 3:4 (1943), 2-7.
 73. *Volk en Vaderland*, 25 June 1943 see Henkes, *Uit liefde voor het volk*, p. 390, fn. 279.

74. In contrast to the *Grossgermanisches Reich*, the concept of *Groot Nederland* advanced by the NSB linked The Netherlands, Flanders, French Flanders and their extensive colonial empires in the Belgian Congo, the Dutch East Indies and even South Africa. This would have been an independent entity, separate from *Grossgermanisches Reich* but remaining a close Germanic ally.
75. See Henkes, *Uit Liefde voor het volk*, p. 391, fn. 285.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.
77. See Report 'D. J. van der Ven en het Nederlandsch prinnmuseum 1912-1941' (ARA, CABR PF-Arnhem 108101, 6772: dossier D. J. van der Ven) cited in Dekker, p. 261.
78. See Peter Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig. De afrekening met de 'foute' Nederlanders* (2nd edn; Amsterdam: Olympus, 2002).
79. See Henkes, *Uit liefde voor het volk*, p. 116 quoting Van der Ven Archive held in Mertens Instituut, inv. nr. 16-29-4: Extracts from two statements by J. van der Gaag about the patriotism of D. J. van der Ven of 19 July 1945 and 27 January 1947.
80. Dekker, p. 265 quoting NIOD: Doc. I 1756.
81. See Henkes, *Uit Liefde voor het volk*, p. 392, fn. 303 referring to Meertens Instituut, archief-Van der Ven, inv. Nr. 42-23-14; Dekker, p. 266, fn. 316 referring to Verklaring Rolf Gardiner 4-12-1945 (ARA, CABR PF-Arnhem 108101, 6772, dossier D. J. van der Ven; Meertens Instituut Collectie Van der Ven, **174:16.29** *Correspondentie, knipsels en uittreksels uit brieven uit brieven van o.a. R. Gardiner, D. Kennedy en Albert Marinus met loftuizingen aan het adres van de Van der Vens (1945 1946)* [Extracts from letters from R. Gardiner, D. Kennedy, Albert Marinus [Belgian Folklorist] and others with eulogies to the Van der Vens (1945 1946); and e-mail from Van der Ven Archive, Meertens Instituut, 7 October 2019 (private correspondence).
82. Letter from "Elise" [Van der Ven-ten Benschel] to "Rolf", undated [November 1945], held in papers of H. Rolf Gardiner held in Correspondence; Holland correspondence D2|6|1- , Cambridge University Library.
83. For negative responses to Van der Gaag's testimony from the POD, see Dekker, p. 268.
84. Decker, p. 266, fn. 316 quoting Verklaring Rolf Gardiner 4-12-1945 (ARA, CABR PF-Arnhem 108101, 6772: dossier D. J. van der Ven).
85. For detailed discussion of Gardiner's politics see Dan Stone, "Rolf Gardiner: An Honorary Nazi?," pp. 152-168 and Richard Griffiths, "The Dangers of Definition: Post-Facto Opinions on Rolf Gardiner's Attitudes towards Nazi Germany," pp. 137-149; for Gardiner and Kennedy's membership of Kinship in Husbandry, see Boyes, "'Potencies of the earth,'" pp. 65-94, all in Jefferies and Tyldesley, ed., *Rolf Gardiner*.
86. See Henkes, p. 113 and fn. 291 referring to documents in the Meertens Instituut, archief-Van der Ven, inv. Nr. 16-18-3 and associated documents; Dekker, p. 263 referring to Beschikking van de Procureur-Fiscaal bij het buitengewoon Gerechtshof te Arnhem d.d. 2.1.1948 (ARA, CABR PF-Arnhem 108101, 6772: dossier D. J. van der Ven and Bekrachtiging, beslissing door kantonrechter d.d. 24.4.1951 (ARA, CABR PF-Arnhem 108101, 6772: dossier D. J. van der Ven). For a useful background to the nature of these punishments see Luc Huyse, "Belgian and Dutch Purges after World War II Compared," *The Purge*, p. 165 at https://soc.kuleuven.be/centre-for-political-research/publicaties-luc-huyse/bestanden/pdf-hoofdstukken-in-boeken/2006_Belgian%20and%20Dutch%20Purges.pdf consulted 26.10.19.
87. See lengthy report, "'Meihof' herrezen te Lunteren: Schuttersgilde vierde feest," *Dagblad voor Amersfoort*, 18 October 1948, p. 4 - <https://archiefeemland.courant.nu/issue/DVA/1948-10-18/edition/0/page/4?query=> consulted 25.10.19. Gardiner's farm was at Springhead, Dorset in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex, but the paper does not record whether this was the source of the may tree or if Gardiner was among the "English folk friends" involved. There is also no mention in the reports of visitors from the EFDSS at the celebration.
88. D[ouglas].N[eil].K[ennedy]., "Review - *Handbooks of European National Dances* Edited by Violet Alford 4 vols *Czechoslovakia* by Mila Lubinová; *The Netherlands* by Elisa Van der Ven ten

- Bensel; *Sweden* by Erik Salvén; *Switzerland* by Louise Witzig. London: [Max Parrish & Co.], 1949," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 2 (1950), 76-77.
89. Elise Van der Ven-ten Bensel, *Dirk Jan van der Ven 1891-1973: Biografie en Bibliografie* (Lunteren: NP, 1978) and *Volksdansen vroeger en nu* (Arnhem: Gysbers en van Loon, 1981).
 90. See Antony Heywood, "Translator's note on the current situation in the Netherlands," *The Morris Dancer*, III:6 (February 1999), 189 and <https://www.nvs-dance.nl/> consulted 27.10.2019.
 91. See for examples works by Henkes, van Ginkel and Dekker cited above.
 92. Van der Zeijden, "Vrouwen in de volkskunde ten tijde van het interbellum: de factor gender in de wetenschapsbeoefening," 103 (2002) 97-123 at http://www.albertvanderzeijden.nl/vrouwen_in_de_volkskunde.htm consulted 31.10.2019.
 93. Richard Callender, "The Year's Work in Folk Song and Dance" *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 5:2 (Dec. 1947), 96. Callender wrote that "participants camped on the Dutch Nazi Party's former meeting site – turning the huge walled-in headquarters of the Dutch Fuhrer-to-be to a more pleasant, and we hope more sensible use."

TWO EARLY REPRESENTATIONS OF MUMMERS

Julian Whybra

About the Author

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Two Early Representations of Mummers

Either side of the cart-way on the eastern side of the National Trust property Paycocke's in Coggeshall, Essex are two carved wooden statues of a fool and a knight standing atop plinths. They are the oldest-known, positively-identifiable representations of mummers in England.

A Mummers' Play, what we might call the original street theatre of England, is a dramatic form of the Morris and was often accompanied by a Morris or Sword Dance. There are numerous traditional

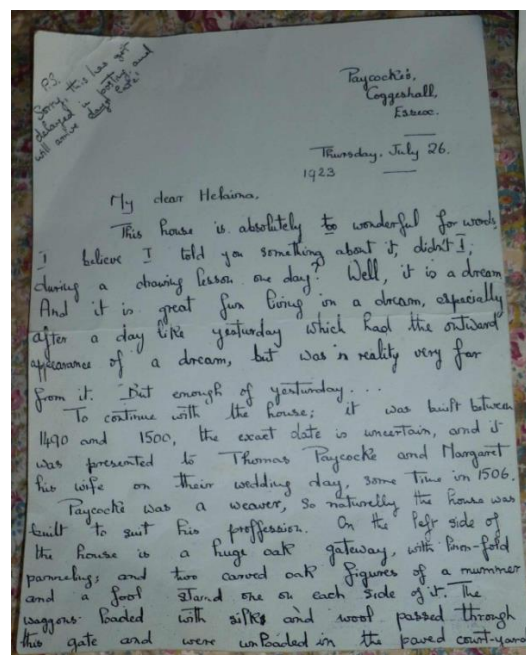
Mummers' Plays, each one different and associated with a particular place and date for performance. A particularly representative one is St. George and the Dragon.



The cart-way at Paycocke's: the fool on the left and knight on the right; the dragon can be seen top left.

The front of the house was built between 1509 and 1510 for the weaver Thomas Paycocke.¹ It was subjected to much refurbishment and restoration in the early twentieth century but the cart-way and its statues remained untouched and are thus pristine survivals.

In 1923 Imogen Holst, the 16-year old daughter of the composer Gustav Holst, was a guest at Paycocke's and wrote to a friend, "[o]n the left side of the house is a huge oak gateway, with linen-fold pannelings [sic] and two carved oak figures of a mummer and a fool stand one on each side of it." Her letter is on display on the first floor at Paycocke's.²



Imogen Holst's letter dated 26th July 1923 to Helen Asquith

Unsurprisingly both statues are slightly damaged and both are naïve in carving. They date to the part of the house built in 1510 and correspond to the dress, etc., portrayed in art from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

The right-hand figure of the knight is probably St. George (the part played by the mummer-knight) and is broken off at the left wrist and he is left-handed – a left-handed knight is in itself unusual. According to the Oxford English Dictionary left-handedness symbolized that which was:

1. feigned, shammed, masked (as in a left-handed marriage);
2. defective, awkward, clumsy (*gauche* in French and English);
3. characterized by underhand dealings (left-handed ends);
4. ambiguous, doubtful, questionable, spurious (a left-handed compliment).

All these usages, current in the late Middle Ages, cast doubt on the character's right-mindedness and merit and emphasize his mutability and triviality. Because of lack of vertical space it is unlikely that the missing hand held a lance; a sword is more probable. In contrast to the symbolism surrounding left-handedness, the mediæval symbolism of the sword represented power, strength, courage, intellect and chivalry. If the sword were short, – a toy sword – as the Paycocke's knight may well have had - it would tend to show that his prowess was not all it was cracked up to be.



The right-hand mummer's figure: the Knight or St. George.

The knight's face presents a grotesque gaping maw such as might be found on a mask – a mockery of a true Christian knight – and the face (with tongue stuck out) is echoed on the surface of the heater shield held in the mummer-knight's right hand. A heater shield was popular in late mediaeval times and was mainly used by swordsmen in tournaments and by mummers because it was small in size, lightweight and easy to handle.

One indicator that the knight represents St. George is the presence of the carving of a wingèd Dragon above the Fool on the opposite side of the Cart-way flying towards him. It appears on the left-hand side of the decorative facing of the lintel above the entrance supporting the first-floor Cart-way Room and can also be dated to 1510.



Facing the knight, a wingèd Dragon, twisting his neck in St. George's direction.

The left-hand figure of the Fool, as with other contemporary depictions of Fools, also has a gaping maw. He wears a typical Fool's one-piece hooded motley. Its cowl has ears like an ass and bells are visible at the elbows. Typically of Fools from this period both hands grip a club, 'bauble', or marotte carved at the end with the Fool's head. Unfortunately the tip of the Paycocke's Fool's marotte is broken off.

Images of fools from this period abound and a comparison of clothing, stance and depiction, is easily possible. Visitors to the first floor of Paycocke's will find the *Nous sommes trois* detail of fools in the *Allegory of Folly* (French, c. 1600). *Nous sommes trois* ('We be three') is a traditional joke at the viewer's expense who, by his puzzled enquiry, makes himself the third fool.

The fool represents man's naivety. "*The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.*"³ Like all archetypes, the Fool is universal, easily recognizable and beyond the usual yoke of custom and convention. He is ostracized but he can see, say and do things others cannot. He is often coupled with a 'King' figure or Lord & Master such as St. George as a contrasting foil; they balance each other out and the Fool is used to highlight particular qualities of the other character. Furthermore St. George must be dignified and proper while the 'Fool's Privilege' allows him to say what no-one else dares. Shakespeare's Fool in *King Lear* is a prime example. Like all archetypes, society needs the Fool: "*A little nonsense now and then is cherished by the wisest men.*"⁴



The left-hand mummer's figure: the Fool.

As regards the origins of mumming, early British and European scholars were influenced by the works of James Frazer, who viewed these folk dramas as survivals – albeit debased versions – of a pre-Christian fertility ritual.⁵

In the twentieth century social anthropologists split in their views between 'survivalism' and 'revisionism' – although latterly the former position is again gaining ground.

'Revisionist' folklore writers suggest a late mediæval, non-'survivalist' origin for mumming for which there is no evidence. In fact the earliest recorded play was by the "*munners of the court*" at the 1296 Christmas festivities and marriage of King Edward I's daughter.⁶

The St. George and the Dragon Mummers' play was usually performed at Midwinter (the time of the winter solstice) and the traditional 'survivalist' view is that it evolved from and superseded an earlier traditional male, ritual Yuletide Play or festival dating perhaps from the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in England.

Thereafter these plays were gradually adapted and 'cannibalized' into popular quasi-religious dramas, what E. K. Chambers called, "*the detritus of heathen mythology and heathen worship, enduring with but little external change in the shadow of an hostile creed.*"⁷ Thus, say the 'survivalists', heathen folk-plays gave rise to a purely secular drama: the ritual evolving into a Christmas ceremony.

During the Christian Middle Ages the events of the Crusades and the legend of St. George infiltrated the ancient form: depictions of combat between Crusader and Saracen replaced those of killing the Old Year and all the dead knights were resurrected by a comic doctor.

In the sixteenth century when printing became cheap enough to reach the rural poor, who had maintained the mummers' play long after it had lost fashion at court, mumming became influenced first by popularizations of Christian legends such as 'The Seven Champions of Christendom' and later by historical events such that characters like Oliver Cromwell (in Irish versions), Napoleon Bonaparte, and King George were introduced, along with an increasing amount of slapstick humour.

Although usually broadly comic, mumming has two underlying themes:

1. duality (a belief in the complement or conflict between the benevolent and the malevolent, good and evil, light and darkness, summer or winter) and
2. resurrection (generally stemming from a battle between two or more characters, representing the duality, and the ultimate triumph of the light over darkness. Good overcomes Evil. What better message!).

There is no written evidence for the 'survivalist' theory although there is a multitude of persuasive social anthropological, historical, literary and linguistic paradigms from across northern Europe where there are precedents in, and parallels with, secular north European folk-dramatic customs dating from the early mediæval period and containing themes and influences from Germanic folk traditions of the pre-Christian era.

The abundance of similar early examples would certainly appear to undermine 'revisionist' writers' theories. Social anthropologist Thomas Pettit suggests that the 'survivalist' view of Mummers' Plays *"as the 'detritus' of primitive ritual reflects folklore's most decisive inheritance from nineteenth-century anthropology, the notion of cultural evolution."*⁸

As to why these carved wooden statues should be in Coggeshall, a clue might be found in the account books of the Howards of Stoke-by-Nayland, Essex which record rewards to mummers as follows:⁹

26 Dec. 1481. Item, the xxvj day of December, my Lord toke the Plaiers of Kokesale, iij^s iiij^d.

25 Dec. 1482. Item, Crystemas day, my Lord gaff to iiij pleyers of my lord of Gloucestres, iij^s iiij^d.

Item, the same day, my lord gaff to iiij pleyers of Coksale, iij^s iiij^d.

It would appear that in the late 1400s Cogs'all or if you prefer Coggeshall¹⁰ had its own established company of mummers of such repute that it was being hired by the nobility for performances. Since Paycocke's was built between 1509 and 1510 it might not be surprising if reference was made to well-known, popular mummers from the local community in its architecture. It might even have been the case that the Paycockes were the mummers' patrons.

Mumming returned to Coggeshall on 22nd July 2018 when the Mayflower Morris Men of Billericay performed their mummers' play, St. George and the Dragon, at Paycocke's. They were there in 2019 and they will be again in July 2020.



Mummers old and new.

References:

¹ Alston, Leigh, *Paycocke's – Coggeshall, Essex: Historical Analysis of Structure*, (unpublished Report for the National Trust, 2005), documented the research and analysis of the house's construction: "...a fifth bay that formed a gateway to the left of the street frontage was added the following year with timber felled in the winter of 1509-10...The fine carved figures flanking the gate are original." Dendrochronological testing established that the first-floor room above the cart-way was also constructed in 1510. The carpenters' marks in the Cart-way Room are significantly different from those in the rest of the house (as well as being quite unusual) which indicates the employment of a different group of craftsmen.

² Imogen Holst's letter dated 26th July 1923 was written to her friend Helen Asquith, daughter of the late brilliant Raymond Asquith, killed on the Somme in 1916, eldest son of the former prime minister, Herbert Asquith.

³ Touchstone in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Act V, Scene 1.

⁴ Dahl, Roald, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, (New York, 1972), ch. 4.

⁵ Frazer, James, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, (1st ed. London, 2 vols., 1890; 2nd ed. 3 vols., 1900; 3rd ed., 12 vols., 1916-15; abridgement 1 vol., 1922)

⁶ *British Library*, The Royal Wardrobe Books, 25 Edward I, f.6.b. Princess Elizabeth (of Rhuddlan) Plantagenet (7th August 1282-5th May 1316) married Jan I, Count of Holland at the priory church of Ipswich on Monday, 8th January 1297 (Rymer, Thomas, *Fædera...*, [1704-13], vol. i [of xvi], p. 850.

⁷ Chambers, E. K., *The Mediæval Stage*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1903, reprinted 1967), vol. I, p. 94.

⁸ Pettitt, Thomas, 'When the Golden Bough Breaks: Folk Drama and the Theatre Historian', *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2005), p. 2.

⁹ From the accounts of John, Lord Howard, afterwards Duke of Norfolk (1483-1485), in Collier, John Payne (ed.), *Household Books of John, Duke of Norfolk, and Thomas, Earl of Surrey; temp. 1481-1490*, (Roxburghe Club, London, 1844), 145 and 336.

¹⁰ Coggeshall is referred to in two Anglo-Saxon charters (S.1646 dateable to 1042 x 1066 and S.1519 dateable to 1052x1066), its name having derived from Old English *Cocceshealh* ('Cocc's nook'). After the Norman invasion and in an age before standardized spelling the name was spelt as it was mispronounced in Norman-French, with 'g' replacing 'c(k)' (e.g. Cogheshala 1086, Coggeshal 1181, Goggeshale 1221, Coggishal 1260, Koggeshal 1273, Cogsall 1487) and also as it was pronounced in English (Cokgesal' 1248, Cokkeshale 1304, Coksale 1412, Kocsall 1540, Cocksall 1570, Coxall 1601). In spoken English in the early 1600s a sound-change from 's' and 't' in certain letter-combinations to 'sh' (which gave rise to action ['ak-shun'], mansion ['man-shun'], pension ['pen-shun'], etc.) coincided with the ready availability and widespread use of atlases in the 1620s and the standardization of spelling 1630s-1670s. This combination resulted in the spelling 'Coggeshall' and the transference of the 's' from 'Cogges' to the 'h' of 'hall' to form the sound 'sh'. By the mid- to late-twentieth century the name was still being pronounced as 'Cocks'll' (/ˈkɔːksəl/) but, with the huge population influx from the 1970s on, more usually as 'Cogger-sh'll' (/ˈkɔːgɪʃəl/). See Sawyer, P. H., *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and Bibliography*, (London, 1968), pp. 426 and 452 and *The Place-Names of Essex*, (English Place-Name Society Vol. XII, Cambridge, 1935), p. 365-366.

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Wrapped in Plastic: How folk custom became kitsch.

Anna FC Smith

About the Author

This essay accompanied the collaborative exhibition 'Hear My Voice and Answer Me' by Anna FC Smith and Rachael Finney curated by Nathalie Boobis. The Swiss Church, London, 5th - 21st March 2015.

Anna FC Smith is a Wigan (UK) based multimedia artist. She studied Critical Fine Art Practice at the University of Brighton, graduating in 2007 and has exhibited internationally. Smith has an obsession with folk culture and communal tradition. Her works develop through historical and anthropological research, emerging as multi-dimensional symbolic collages spanning eras, and forms of material culture. Touching on politics and performative space, she examines low culture, bawdiness, irreverence and ambivalence. She explores the role history plays in our interpretation of the present, seeking links contemporary society has to its predecessors to find an understanding of humanity.

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Wrapped in Plastic: How folk custom became kitsch



Floragarten Swiss Folklore Music. Picture supplied by the author

Introduction:

Yodeling is a disquieting and visceral art form of primitive ancestry. It crosses cultural and national boundaries; employed in Switzerland as a pagan call to the gods, a demon dispeller, a tool to communicate with animals and people across vast distances and as a celebration song. As Bart Plantenga states “[Yodeling is a] genuine expression of the drama inherent in the mountain scope; frightening, dangerous, glorious, boundless.”¹ But despite its complexity, beauty and awesomeness it has long been seen as a kitsch joke, featured on game shows and ‘cheesy’ records, a comical symbol of Switzerland. Yodeling has become an embarrassment to a nation, which now feels reduced by it. As Plantenga states it has become “alien to...Swiss culture...and most normal Swiss people avoid at all costs.”²

Kitsch is defined in the Collins dictionary as “tawdry, vulgarized, or pretentious art, literature, etc, usually with popular or sentimental appeal”.³ It is synonymous with bad taste. The story of yodel’s

descent into kitsch may be in part due to the very nature of yodeling's preservation and an accident born of the methods used to rescue it from a perceived oblivion. The collectors and promoters who valued this art form enough to save it have inadvertently laid the foundations for kitsch to arise. This is not to lay blame at their door, as 'kitschification' may be inevitable due to the impossibility of capturing a live tradition and in part a fault of additional historical and social factors, which were not under the control of the collectors and preservationists.

Many traditional folk expressions seem to be cursed by the aura of kitsch. Morris Dancing particularly suffers this same condemnation in the UK. The history of it, and English folk song's recording and dissemination is a mirror of Switzerland's through the founding of both the Eidgenössischer Jodler Verband (EJV) and the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) and their (loosely) associated collectors. These movements were initiated at similar times, with similar founding principles, by similar people. It is to them we must be forever grateful for a tireless dedication to tradition but where this story of 'kitschification' may begin. I will use examples from both nations to espouse my theory.

Kitsch is typically used as a pejorative term but you only need to take one look around my house to see that I personally do not hold any antipathy towards it, and in my love for all things folk I can see a place for antiquated customs, but I aim to discover how it is that something as amorphous as folk heritage has found it's way into the canon of kitsch.

The history and context of the collectors

A concerted interest in folk traditions began simultaneously in England and Switzerland in the 1800s and became more formalised in the late 1800s / early 1900s. This was a time of burgeoning industry and rapid urban expansion, with a consequent decline in rural life as Gammon observed; England was suffering from the issues of "...urban degeneration, and rural depopulation, the worrying prophecy of the eugenicists foretelling the decay of the race, ...and the general feeling of the *laissez faire* was not an adequate way to run society".⁴ These issues may have been similarly felt in Switzerland.

In Switzerland the yodel had become a popular entertainment but it was the 'more urbane, frothier Austrian and Bavarian yodels', that had gained favour overriding the indigenous Swiss styles. In Victorian England a similar problem was felt, in that foreign, particularly German, music was gaining more status over homegrown song.

The Eidgenössischer Jodler Verband (EJV) was established in 1910 by composers along with other enthusiasts to save what it perceived to be the vanishing Swiss styles. It aimed to clarify "regional yodel distinctions...[and] clear distinctions between yodeling and yodel song." and it also "coordinated a shift from collecting to producing folk music."⁷

The EJV continues to be committed to preserving and promoting yodeling and other Swiss national pastimes and holds a triennial festival 'Eidgenössischer Jodlerfest' with yodeling competitions, alphorn playing, traditional dress and beer drinking in the Alps.

In England in the early 1800s, there was urgency amongst middle class song collectors to rescue traditional English folk music from extinction. In 1898 the Folk Song Society was founded by

researchers. In 1911 the English Folk Dance Society (EFDS) was founded by Cecil Sharp with collections of Morris, sword and country dances.⁸ Many of the collectors from these organisations were also composers including Ralph Vaughn Williams. They merged in the 1930s to become the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) and opened a headquarters in London named after Cecil Sharp. They ran a festival celebrating folk music and from 1936 they published the 'folk music journal' four times a year, which was titled 'journal of English folk dance and song society' until 1963.⁹ They continue incredible work promoting, interpreting and providing resources for folk heritage today.

The term Kitsch was coined in Munich art markets in the mid 19th Century to describe the sentimental and populist art it sold.¹⁰ It had gained theoretical momentum in the early to mid-twentieth century.¹¹ The back end of this folk revival. It was used to describe both objects and a way of life brought on by the mass production and urbanisation of the industrial revolution. Though these two loose national movements grew out of a perhaps unconscious reaction against mass production and urbanisation, through their concerted efforts they began to run the elusive folk meme through a factory of interpretation and repackaging that gave it the same aesthetic and political implications that kitsch possessed. Through the methods, personalities and agendas of individual collectors and promoters, a certain idealized form could not help but arise. This form emerges from what is collected, what is left out and what is modified. As kitsch informed debates about mass culture and growing commercialisation so folk became entwined with these concepts.



New Glarus Swiss Yodelers. Picture supplied by the author

Man and Nature as idols

Potentially as part of a reaction against industrialisation, collectors in both England and Switzerland focused on the rural element of their heritage. It is true these traditions were born of a closeness to nature but in their resurrection there is revealed a feeling of loss towards this way of life. They

attempted to capture an imagined past, one of clarity of purpose, simplicity and connection to nature.

This idealisation of the rural life may have begun in Switzerland as early as 1729 with the poem *Die Alpena* by Haller and a subsequent movement, which helped "idealise the herdsman life for the urban dweller."¹² The yodel clubs of the late 19th century set up by the EJV were mainly based in cities but it was mandatory that they maintained rural themes in their yodels and this is still true today. Ecological subjects are the only contemporary issues that slip into the repertoire with Frank Stadelmann singing yodels which stress protection of the environment.¹³ As Bart Plantenga says "Yodeling is no longer just for herders and farmers...[their] lyrics are no longer about those who sing them but an idealised Swiss past."¹⁴ The EJV believes the yodel to be an "idyllic expression of mankind's relation to nature"¹⁵.

This obsession with an idolised nature, and a lack of acceptance of its loss is in its conception kitsch. It revels in the beautiful and denies its ugly counterpart. It disallows the functional or the dark aesthetics of the urban to taint it. Like a fake flower, nature is prevented from withering in the city apartment. As Whitney Rugg states it is this falsified nature which Gillo Dorfles disparaged kitsch for.¹⁶

This trend is true also in England where Carl Engel in *Literature of National Music* 1878 began the idea that folk music was the sole domain of country residents. As Christopher Bearman states "the intellectual opinion of the time that the deep countryside was a place whose customs and values remained relatively untouched by the mores and values of the city."¹⁷

This rural Eden was also situated in the time of yore, the 'past', when things were 'better' and more communal than the now (either now, or the collector's nows). This era has no firm dates, but at the time of the collectors it is in the process of being lost. The people who lived there were thought of as pure, almost Taoist, as Bearman says Sharp thought they were people who had "escaped the infection of modern ideas by their remoteness."¹⁸

This time and the 'common people' who lived in it were considered by the collectors to be more 'real'. Their idealized lives were that of happy communal spirit and oneness with their environment. Sharp believed folk music must have originated from individuals, "but that the means of transmission through an oral culture meant it transformed the individual composition so that it became a communal product".¹⁹ He thought of folk song as the creation of "those whose mental development has been due not to any formal system of training or education, but solely to environment, communal association, and direct contact with the ups and downs of life."²⁰ They share in a collectivism, and understand the true turmoil of life (associated with nature, farming, 'real' life and death). Lloyd condemned Sharp's view of the native singers as 'primitive romanticism'.²¹ To consider this imagined reality as more real than the actual reality of the time is to create a fantasy that is in complete denial. It is valuing the imagined over the hard truth, presenting a state of delusion, and as Rosenberg states "kitsch's antagonist is reality".²² The folklorists have framed the folk world of the past (which they are trying to save or recreate) as the hyper-real and as the antagonist of dull present reality.

Fernando Vallejo quotes Adorno claim that aesthetic ideal is a world in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist.²³ The performers and festival goes to The EJVs triennial

jollities play out this fantasy of 'real' convivial life by "sitting shoulder to shoulder, toast to toast, making merriment, punctuated by impromptu bursts of inspired yodeling and juutzing",²⁴ ignoring the car horns of a traffic jam in the background. Plantenga notes that his hosts Guet and Bachmann-Geiser both commented that this is where Plantenga would "find the "real" thing".²⁵ But this 'real' thing is actually what Whitney Rugg describes as "assembling a pretense of reality, the straightforwardness of kitsch belies it's inherent contradiction as a 'real forgery'".²⁶

The EJV and the EFDSS have both been accused of denying present concerns or cultural cross overs, editing and bowdlerization of their material. In 1920 EJV founder and composer Oskar Schmalz "incorporated solo yodels into yodel refrains and helped prune the untidy natuurjodels, making them more presentable and formal, "authentic" expressions of the past".²⁷ It has been claimed that the English collectors skipped the more bawdy songs or 'tidied up songs for schools and for middle class consumption. They are said to have frowned upon Music Hall songs because they thought them crude.²⁸ Milan Kundera identified kitsch as the "absolute denial of shit, both in the literal and figurative sense, kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence."²⁹ And so with the folk movement's filtration of their material to present cleaner and more palatable versions, they actively embodied Kundera's assertion.

Fernando Vallejo states that "kitsch is pretense [and so] ...kitsch art is pretending to express something and in accepting it [we] are pretending to feel."³⁰ To express these 'times' the costume of folk custom was simultaneously preserved. In Switzerland it is a fanciful pastiche of traditional eighteenth-century-style, Bart Plantenga describes yodel club finery as "felt caps festooned with medals and pins from other festivals, breeches, hand-embroidered *tracht* blouses, uncomfortable-looking buckled shoes, salt-and-pepper beards, and handlebar moustaches. The women, meanwhile, dress in their elaborate and ornate traditional dirndls."³¹ Meanwhile in England, Morris Dancers in particular, dress in historically dubious outfits, combining elements from the 1600s through to the Victorian era. They are decked with sashes, ribbons, badges, flowers and bells. They often wear three quarter length pantaloons with tall white socks or stockings, and hats (of all types) embellished with emblems, plumes and badges. This garb is theatre (not a condemnation, as they are performers) but it is sentimental and camp. It is laden with an unspecified nostalgia, and physically affecting this nostalgia with (often) cheap imitations of the historic to imbue their activities with all the weight and kudos of tradition and the past. This is what Whitney Rugg would have called the "theatrical emotionalism and affectation of kitsch."³² What has been created is a virtual, consumable and idealised historical parody, where modern dyes vibrantly announce the wearer's dedication to their traditions and they affect the walk of their ancestors in clomping shoes.

Boiling in sugar; Wrapping in Plastic; Holding in stasis

The folk collectors obsession with a 'forever countryside' and a 'forever present past' renders them as death deniers. Though they have recognized a near demise in folk heritage they are actively preventing this natural cycle from taking place. The folklorists occupation is technically opposed to what Adorno states as the process which art is supposed to go through, as he says "Important artworks constantly divulge new layers; they age, grow cold, and die".³³ And so rather than promoting the art of folk the collector becomes an embalmer, layering chemical and potion onto their subject to prevent it from appearing dead.

From the moment the folk collectors began their work, the death knell for the Swiss yodel and the English folk custom had already begun to sound. And so the material they gathered was already dated, and at odds with the era in which they worked. As this material was held in a constant stasis since its collection it has become more incongruous with the time in which it is being viewed, and so more out of touch, more seemingly ideal, and more comical.

The act of preservation is unnatural. It holds a live and fluid amorphous entity in perfect stagnation. Pinned like a butterfly or boiled in sugar like a strawberry in jam. They are instantly removed from their natural context. Unlike an object these living traditions are supposed to react to the people and lives of their performers, but when they are kept in a state of purity they can no longer belong to the people and instead become caricatures of what they once were, or as Dorfles would describe of kitsch “facsimiles which are out-and-out approximations”.³⁴

Collectors and promoters need rules and regulations to ensure the clarity, purity and authenticity of their collections and future productions, but paradoxically this leads to an abstraction of their material. The EJV has a mandate of “standardised song structures and male orientated vocalisations [and this] has produced what Baumann and others refer to as folklorist music.”³⁵ As Plantenga states “as yodels began to be documented they grew more standardised. Using stereotypes that transformed folk into folklorist music.”³⁶ Plantenga worries that this produces conformity and ‘threatens improvisation and the very existence of the nature yodel’³⁷.

EJV standards and competition guidelines define “how the hands of the yodelers must be kept in the pockets of their uniforms, gender composition, permissible notes, tonal range, behaviour, posture, accuracy of traditional costume down to pants length, “the parameters of interpretation of a yodel,” precisely when a yodel begins and for how long it continues within a song. It’s all set down precisely in blood and pixels.”³⁸ The yodel clubs conform to the many regulations and so “convert unquantifiable, folk utterances into something measurable and enforceable.”³⁹ These societies are so keen to hold on to a ‘true’ form that they cannot allow for improvisation and adaptation to be too severe, imbuing living performers with a lifelessness, as though plastinated, “at once unique and yet standard/interchangeable”.⁴⁰ Rugg speaks of how “kitsch does not analyse culture but repackages and stylises it.”⁴¹ And here we see this happening directly. The form of the yodel is standardised and stylised. It has been given one form, one sound; easy, specific and safe. It has become easy listening and easy watching, and does not challenge expectation.

Plantenga speaks of the good-natured competitions where each performance is followed by polite applause. This demonstrates safe emotion, it is not passion filled with its ecstasy and dark drama, but fondness and comfort. Again Rosenberg asserts that “by providing comfort kitsch performs a denial. It glosses over harsh truths and anesthetises pain.”⁴²

The methods of preservation have made folk custom into a plasticised, reproducible, singular product which bares no relation to the motion of time. It has become familial and comfortingly stagnant. A recognisable item of mass appeal, or at least of mass comprehension.

Fascism and fake-ism; the symbol of a nation

Folk is representative of the land from which it arose and therefore it is positively and negatively intertwined with Nationalism. The more folk is reduced to simplistic and definable elements the

better it becomes a national symbol, and shorthand for its nation or area. As nations are themselves arguable concepts then symbols of these invented states are affected by the falsehoods they represent. Plantenga posits "Switzerland like other nations, does not really exist except in the minds of those who need it most; tourists and nationalists and those who sell the production of its image."⁴³

Folklorists have been in the business of producing emotive images, which incorporate the positive and heart swelling elements that could summarise a nation. EJY-approved yodel lyrics described their "idealized pastoral past—nature, the mountains, farmers, and freedom".⁴⁴ This is the production of kitsch as it "mimic[s] the effects produced by real sensory experiences...highly charged imagery, language and music that triggers automatic, and therefore unreflective, emotional reactions. Kitsch lies in its formula, its familiarity and its validation of shared sensibilities".⁴⁵ Folk collectors and promoters use formulas and terms with which to preserve and view their material, they have created simplistic and idealised imagery and sound that they themselves perceive as charged symbols meant for a nation to share and rejoice in collective ownership, as Plantenga states; "The EJY...serve[s] to unify cultural identification on a mass scale, creating a clear template to rail against or rally behind."⁴⁶

In England folk song was originally termed National Song until it was renamed, but under its new guise it still held the representation of it's peoples nationhood as an integral part of its definition. Sharp's thesis on folk song described his idea that folk music is generically distinct from ordinary music; "[the ordinary is] limited in its outlook and appeal, but [folk is] a communal and racial product, the expression in musical terms, of aims and ideas that are primarily national in character."⁴⁷ In Switzerland folklorists such as GS Studer interwove folk music with the emotional relationship people had with the landscape and an emerging 'national folk identity' and the Ranz des Vaches' was a natural nominee as 'real' Swiss music.⁴⁸

It would seem folklorists were responding to insecurity in the identity of their subsequent nations at a time of such immense social change and rapid industrialization. In Switzerland Plantenga observed "national folk aficionados believed Switzerland was suffering from identity theft of their *Stimme des Volkes*". And so folk culture entered a process to become assimilated into the official national culture. "This process allowed them to re-appropriate their own traditions and folk activities – via governmental mediation and glorify themselves."⁴⁹

In England, Bearman talks of how Gammon claimed that "Folk music collectors mediated by misrepresenting their material and idealising their sources, so that their work amounted to an imposition of meaning 'on certain aspects of the musical activities of the rural working class...which...fostered a spurious myth of 'Englishness' divorced from class experience and culture."⁵⁰ Again myth divorced from reality. "Further, he asserted, this was done ultimately in the collectors own interests and that of the upper and middle classes generally."⁵¹ Arthur Somerville the inspector of the Board of Education promoted folk song as National songs within schools. Though this clashed with Sharps ideas somewhat, Sharp is still accused of promoting the concept of 'Merry England' and he was guilty of assuming a localized folk custom was linked to an idealized English character when he spoke of the Morris Dance as; "A formula based upon and arising out of the life of man, as it is lived by men who hold much speculation upon the mystery of our whence and whither to become unprofitable; by men of meager fancy, but of great kindness to the weak; by men who

fight their quarrels on the spot with naked hands, drink together when the fight is done, and forget it, or if they remember then the memory is a friendly one. It is the dance of folk who are slow to anger, but of great obstinacy - forthright of act and speech...The Morris dance, in short, is a perfect expression of the English character."⁵²

Roger Scruton pronounced that "kitsch relies on codes and clichés that convert the higher emotions into pre-digested and trouble free form - the form that can be most easily pretended. Like processed food kitsch avoids moral energy."⁵³ Folk culture has been digested by the folklorists into a symbolic phenomenon, song and dance are the codes and clichés from which we can read national character and national pride. Once again, in this self-congratulatory spirit, the negative is denied and we find an idealism which becomes a deception. The intense emotions associated with National identity are related to that of home and family, but they are appealed to, and manufactured by the representatives of Nationalism. "The element of falseness appears everywhere in such cases of hyper-kitsch: love, grief, birth and death are transformed into superficial emotions..⁵⁴ Nationalism, like kitsch is pretention. Though these codes are representative of what would be seen as trouble free, positive attributes one of the elements they deny is the other, in their insular glory and view of self perfection there is the threat of xenophobia.

The EJV charter states its political and religious neutrality, but Hanspeter Gautschin's 2009 article in the *Tages Anzeiger* "revealed that tensions surrounding change may sometimes translate into racism."⁵⁵ Yodeling in it's romanticised form as an expression of national identity has been associated with right wing politics and the Nazis. Think of the Nazi propaganda poster of the happy Arian. The Wandervogels was an innocent, yodeling, back to nature movement but it was politicized in the 1930s by the Nazis as a healthy alternative to their dreaded jazz. This was mainly in Austria and Germany though and in Switzerland yodeling was commonly presented as symbolic resistance to Nazi influence.⁵⁶ Though some far right groups in England have attempted to latch onto the national identity of folk custom, they have been rejected by the movement. The folk music scene at least has either been seen as the folly of the bourgeoisie or else been associated with workers movements and the left. British folk custom is tainted with some anti-Catholicism, anti-authority/anti-state sentiments from both the left and the right, and has been accused by outsiders of racism, but I can find no evidence of any organized groups that have been affiliated with far right political ideology.

Tourism and consumerism

As a direct consequence of folk's use as a national symbol, folk custom is a major part of the saleable representation of a nation to its tourists. The audience for folk performances are all tourists, they may be from outside the country, from other areas of that country or the very people who take part in the spectacle. A live performance taking part in a lenticular 3D postcard. This is true of the Morris Dancing events I have attended across England, and in Switzerland as Plantenga describes how yodel performers "dodge and parry with the manufactured notions of culture as remembered and reassembled to create a sense of imperfect (national) identity based on a wobbly makeshift dioramic re-creation of their culture. Swiss yodelers perform for outsiders/ tourists but also for themselves so that they become tourists in their own dioramas."⁵⁷

Dorfles speaks about how the monument, in this case an entire nation becomes a kitsch icon: "[copies of touristic monuments become kitsch because they exploit their features] and made it a

source of curiosity and attraction”.⁵⁸ The features are the folk heritage and the landscape to which they have been entwined. Repackaged as unusual quirks, particular to each nation. Dorfles continues that “the very word ‘curiosity’ is steeped in kitsch; what else are those ‘curios’ much sought after by American tourists during their package tours abroad but the purest kitsch?”⁵⁹

Yodeling has been adopted by ‘corporation Switzerland’, it “is both enhanced and encumbered by the honed myths that consumers consume.”⁶⁰ Switzerland is reproduced in the form of “hundreds... of touristic, easy listening, sentimental, fake-folk collections of Swiss yodeling, with titles like *Yodeling Songs of the Alps*, that comfortably and profitably reinforce consumer (mis)conceptions about Swiss yodeling. They play up every cliché to sell their packaged Swissness so listeners can go home and serenade themselves with their Swiss cultural fare...The EJV... has its own trademarks within and without this “market,” with every CD containing the interchangeable, standardized iconography repertoire.⁶¹ This is the Cultural Industrialization of which Dorfles speaks where “[great works] become the symbols of kitsch by being vulgarly reproduced and known not for their real value but for a sentimental or technical substitute of these values.”⁶²

These disks render the folk heritage worthless with their pretentiousness.⁶³ As Plantenga complains they provide no information such as names, locations, or composers “probably to spare tourists from having their listening pleasure overwhelmed by extensive ethno musicological details.”⁶⁴ This yodeling has been separated entirely from its living roots, and the clumsy details have been forgone to allow the song to speak for something more, for the cheap facsimile of trash sentimentality. Talking about copies of fine art Dorfles states “These copies only apparently encourage culture and taste; what they really do is to incite the public to put the authentic masterpiece on the same level as the mediocre or even obscene copy”,⁶⁵ and this is exactly what has happened to the elusive folk traditions that have been captured and resold.

Global kitsch resides in souvenir replicas...from around the world.⁶⁶ Each of the additional commodities sold alongside the folk performances go even further in reducing the dramatic to the sentimental. As kitsch may have come from the German word ‘verkitschen’: to make cheap:⁶⁷ so these affordable and pocket-able memories are the ultimate in kitsch. The yodel CDs are “all packaged with a shot of mountain and church on a hillside.”⁶⁸ The Morris tea-towels and badges have flowers, quaint architecture or villages, bells and beaded Morris men. They are little pieces of the simplified experience that you are able to take home and enjoy.

So here folk culture completes its kitsch journey, it becomes the hyper-reality that stands for the Swissness of Switzerland or the Englishness of England, and is presented as a live spectacle for the pilgrim to attend to reconnect with some lost past, or it is sold as a commodity to a consumer under this pretense. Folk customs have been churned through a machine of collection and re-representation; sterilized, purified and then mass produced.

Conclusion

Swiss Yodeling and English folk customs like the Morris have been on an odyssey, from near eradication, to salvation, and then in that salvation transmogrified into nostalgic symbols, re-represented and sold back as commodity. It is the folk collectors and organisations who promote folk heritage who have escorted the traditions along on this journey. When they began their task of rescue they would not have foreseen the consequence of their altruistic, if perhaps slightly naïve,

actions and attitudes. Plantenga proclaims “fanatical traditionalist preservationists endanger the very tradition they wish to preserve choking them off as a sad photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy, each copy further degenerating the in-flux original.”⁶⁹

It is impossible to wish to preserve something without projecting any form of attitude (likely positive) on to it. And it is impossible to preserve every nuance of something as vast and unquantifiable as folk music and customs. There we have the challenge to which the EJV, the EFDSS and their associates were faced with and to which they responded, on the whole, very well. Plantenga admits “I share some fatal flaws with those preservationists of confabulated traditions. Sometimes I want to preserve yodeling's vitality by mummifying, quantifying, and documenting it”.⁷⁰

Without their efforts we could well have lost much of our folk heritage and so the kitschification of the mass output of folk is something to be accepted as a by product. Despite it's famous status as kitsch, yodeling has survived in its ‘truer’ form as Plantenga says “the real natuurjodelers, the outsider-outdoor juutzers, still exist in the more remote corners and inside the hearts of yodelers who regularly seek communion with nature, their robust yodels resounding through the valleys and chambers of the heart.”⁷¹ But had it not been for the kitsch Swiss stereotype of yodel we would probably have never heard of it and would not be embarking on this artistic endeavor to understand it.

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