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Textual Analysis of English Quack Doctor Plays: Some New Discoveries¹

Peter Millington

Introduction

To quote Ronald Hutton:

“All told, the collapse of the theory of pagan origins has created more problems than it has solved in the quest for the origins of the Mummers’ Play.”
(*R.Hutton, 1996, p.79*)

The fundamental problem is that the demise of the survivalist theories has left a vacuum. No coherent replacement theory was waiting in the wings, so we were left with numerous questions and very few answers. Various proposals have been made regarding specific aspects of the folk play tradition, but they have not been assembled into a cohesive whole. There are five main points.

- a) It seems likely that the plays were added to pre-existing house-visiting customs, and that this took place sometime during the early to mid 18th century, as an extension of the entertainments that these customs already possessed.²
- b) Pettitt (1981 & 1994) and Fees (1994) have demonstrated that drama in the community was varied in the 18th and 19th centuries.³
- c) There is some evidence that the Quack Doctor plays indirectly took up the theatrical conventions of the *Commedia dell’ Arte*, in terms of verse scripts, dramaturgy and costume.⁴
- d) The overall similarity of the scripts suggests that there ought to be a single proto-text from which all the various versions developed. However, there has hitherto been no attempt to characterise or locate such a proto-text.
- e) Regardless of how the Quack Doctor plays originated, they seem to have spread very rapidly to most of Britain and diversified very early on in their history.⁵

Many problems remain. For instance, where geographically did the plays arise? How did contemporary popular theatre influence the plays, and what is the significance, if any of the numerous literary and ballad inclusions? And finally, the big question, what was the original source of the texts – literary or otherwise?

History of Textual Analysis

Given that texts comprise most of the evidence we have of the plays, it is odd that so little textual analysis has been done. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, many key scholars in the fields have asserted that the action of the plays is the most important thing, and that the texts are insignificant accretions, a view particularly formalised by Margaret Dean-Smith (1958)⁶. Consequently, textual analysis was regarded pointless.

Secondly, those that have considered textual analysis worthwhile have nonetheless blenched at the enormity of the task involved, and generally lacked suitable analytical tools - a situation nicely expressed by Cass and Roud:

“...the texts obviously contain vital clues – if we could just learn how to read them!”
(E.Cass & S.Roud, 2002, p.18)

Even so, despite these obstacles, there has been some textual analysis. Apart from the identification of literary and ballad inclusions by the likes of Baskervill (1924) and Tiddy (1923), E.K.Chambers (1933) identified most of the typical speeches and their variants in *The English Folk-Play* – a model that was followed for Plough Plays by Maurice Barley (1953). However, Chambers’ approach was primarily only descriptive.

With so many texts available, the advent of computers helped. Mike Preston was first off the mark in the late 1960s and early 1970s with a database of over 150 over texts, plus fragments, which he used to study variability and to investigate a number of specific texts (M.Preston, 1983, 1972, 1977a & 1977b).⁷

Preston also worked with the Smiths in their analysis of chapbook texts, and they used computerised cluster analysis to help determine the genealogy of the various editions (M.J.Preston et al, 1977, G.Boyes et al, 1999). Additionally, Paul Smith (1985) used cluster analysis to study sixteen Derby Tup texts, while Ian Russell published tables that marked Derby Tup speeches against the locations where they occur (I.Russell, 1979, pp.465-466). I have also used cluster analysis to examine the cast lists of Nottinghamshire plays (P.T.Millington, 1988), and I published detailed comparative analyses of the compiled *Peace Egg* text of Juliana Ewing relative to her declared sources and the derivative West Indian Mummies’ plays (P.T.Millington, 1996).

Aims of this Study

Previous work all related to specific texts or limited regions. No textual analyses have so far been published that covers the whole geographical range of the plays. The aim of this study has been to fill this gap. Largely exploratory with no firm predetermined outcome, I nonetheless anticipated being able to refine the classification of the plays through cluster analysis, and hoped to find clues to the evolution of the texts, perhaps even finding evidence for one or more proto-texts.

To define the textual scope of this study I have introduced the new term “Quack Doctor Play” to replace “Mummers’ Play” or “Mumming Play”. These are unsatisfactory because the actors were not all called Mummers, and not all Mummers performed plays. “Folk Play” is too general a term, and terms such as “Ritual Drama” and “Men’s Dramatic Ritual” are subjective and/or cumbersome. By contrast, “Quack Doctor play” is an objective term. The Doctor is the one ubiquitous character that both defines the *genre* and serves to distinguish it from other folk plays.

Text Database

The first thing I had to do was build a textual database. This had two parts – a collection of electronic play texts, and a derivative codified database of individual lines. The basic aim was to have as many different texts as possible, evenly across the whole of the British Isles, but focussing on the oldest available texts.⁸ The result was a database of about 180 full texts and fragments. This has been made generally available on the Traditional Drama Research Group’s website at www.folkplay.info.

The texts were laid out as lines, and a set of standard identifiers was assigned to each line type. This process raised the question of “what is a line?” For verse, this was

relatively straightforward. The only complication was that sometimes the same verse could be laid out as either a quatrain or as a couplet. In such cases, the couplet was adopted as the standard form, but building sub-types into the line-type codes also accommodated the quatrain format.

e.g. As a couplet;

1500 = “i am a valiant soldier and slasher is my name”

1510 = “with sword and buckler by my side i hope to win the game”

As a quatrain;

1500.1 = “i am a valiant soldier”

1500.6 = “and slasher is my name”

1510.1 = “with sword and buckler by my side”

1510.6 = “i hope to win the game”

Prose was somewhat more difficult. Most prose passages appear in the Doctor’s lists of travels and cures, or in the longer monologues of tangle talk, which are also list-like. In general, therefore the best approach was found to be to split prose in to discrete list items.

Variant wording of lines was an interesting problem. Many variations are trivial – e.g. substitution of “you” for “thou” or *vice versa*, addition of words such as “bold” for emphasis, etc. In general these can be regarded as spontaneously reversible and repeatable through normal language usage. On the other hand, some variations involve semantic shifts that are unlikely to occur more than once. Take for instance the line;

And send him to the cookshop to make mince pies

where a number of alternative destinations occur for the mince pies. “The cookshop”, “the bakehouse”, “the pastrycook”, etc., can easily be seen as interchangeable because the culinary theme relating to the mince pies is maintained. However, there is no obvious rationale for being sent to “Jamaica”, so that difference is clearly significant.

Such variants needed to be both kept together and kept distinct from each other. Again, this was done using the coding system. Identifiers were assigned in tens, and variants were numbered within the range, e.g.

420 = and send thee **to satan** to make mince pies

422 = and send him **to the cookshop** to make mince pies

424 = and send him **to jamaica** to make mince pies

426 = and send thee **over the seas** to make mince pies

This enabled computer programs to handle the variants either individually or as a group.

Observations on the Database

Before embarking on detailed analysis of the database, a number of immediate observations can be made, starting with statistics.

The full database of around 180 texts contains 5,700 to 5,800 different line types, depending whether variants are grouped together or treated separately. Of these, about 3,500 (61%) occur only once. About a further 1,050 (18%) only appear twice, and most of these arise either from duplicated texts or because original literary sources have been included alongside their folk play derivatives. In round terms, this leaves about 1,200

line types, or about 20%, that occur three or more times. This suggests that Quack Doctor Play texts are more variable than has previously been supposed. Most scripts have at least a few a lines that do not occur elsewhere.

Map 1 shows the distribution of the plays, marked according to the following broad date bands ⁹:

- Up to the 1820s – i.e. roughly up to and including W.Hone’s *Every-day Book* (1827)
- 1830s to the 1880s – i.e. pre-Ordish (1891)
- 1890s onwards – i.e. T.F.Ordish and E.K Chambers onwards.

The point to note about this map is that the earliest plays are distributed throughout the British Isles, and this would have even been the case if an earlier category for 18th-century plays had been used. Indeed the map suggests no obvious historical centre where the plays might have arisen, and from which they may have been dispersed. The inevitable conclusion is that the plays were dispersed rapidly very early in their recorded history.

The database contains about twenty identified literary and ballad sources, including one new discovery - the “Lady bright and gay” speech from Henry Carey’s *Honest Yorkshireman* (1736)¹⁰. Such sources mostly appear in one play only. Following my re-assignment of the late 19th-century play from “Mylor”, Cornwall to Truro in the late 1780s ¹¹, it becomes apparent that nearly all the plays with literary inclusions are earlier than 1850, and their source material is mostly 18th-century or earlier. This emphasises the increased variability of the earlier folk play texts.

Analytical Methodology

Analyses were run using both all the lines and just lines that occur three or more times in the database, These yielded similar results, but including the low frequency lines resulted in large unmanageable outputs and merely had a diluting effect. Therefore, for improved focus, the following discussion only reports analyses were done using line types occurring three or more times.

One method of analysing scripts in the past has been to use parallel texts. This is fine for two or three texts, but with larger numbers, transpositions and omissions make them unmanageable. An alternative approach is to abandon the narrative sequence of the texts and compile a table of play scripts versus line types, as in Figure 1.

***Mesa Graph* ¹² - Figure 1**

This chart lists about 180 texts and fragments across the top in chronological order, and about 1,200 lines down the side. Starting at the top left, all the lines from the first text are listed down the page. Any additional lines that appear in the second text, but not in the first, are then listed, followed by lines that appear in the third text but not the first two, and so on. Consequently, the lines are listed in roughly chronological as well as the plays. Notwithstanding any gaps, all lines are listed in the order they appear in their respective texts. Wherever a given play contains a particular line, the square at the intersection of the play column and the text row is shaded in colour.

Obviously because it has been squeezed to fit on one sheet, it is not possible to read the row and column captions – on paper. However, this chart was prepared using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and on a computer, the full-size text of the current cell can be viewed in the program’s formula bar (see Figure 2).¹³

The main features of this graph are as follows:

- The dominant feature is the staggered outline running from the top left to the bottom right. Any individual square in this line represents the oldest recorded occurrence of the line – perhaps the original or a close descendent.
- The texts with the longer segments in the outline have contributed more to the corpus. This does not necessarily mean that such plays provide the commonest lines. For instance, lines from the *Alexander* chapbook (on the first dividing line near the top left of the graph) are generally sparse in other plays.
- Common lines appear as horizontal rows of squares. These appear to be scattered across several source plays. No individual plays appear to be made up primarily of common lines.
- The vertical lines delimit intervals of approximately 25 years. This reveals that about a third of the corpus was in place by 1800 – including most of the common lines - rising to about two thirds by 1825. The larger additions thereafter come from chapbooks and embellishments to the Doctor's part in the Recruiting Sergeant plays.

From these observations it is clear that no specific text in the collection represents a proto-text, because if there was, there would be a play near the top left of the chart comprising most of the common lines. The chapbook texts emerge from this chart as derivative rather than ancestral.

Clustering Texts

In the mesa graph, several texts can be seen that have similar patterns of vertical lines. It is tempting therefore to abandon the chronological arrangement of the sources and bring these texts together. This could be done by eye in the spreadsheet, but a better way is to use cluster analysis to identify groups of texts. This is not the place to go into the technicalities of cluster analysis¹⁴, but suffice to say that typical output is a dendrogram that shows how the entities should be grouped – e.g. Figure 3.

If we combine a dendrogram with the previous chart, we end up with a clustered mesa graph – Figure 4. In this case, the texts are arranged in the order that they appear in the dendrogram, and the vertical lines delimit the main groups identified by the cluster analysis. Unsurprisingly, we start to see blocks of lines appearing for specific groups. However, we also see that for a few groups there are two or more blocks - e.g. the two groups on the extreme right, which represent the Plough Plays. Given that the lines are still in roughly chronological order, this indicates that the texts of such a group have developed in more than one phase.

As with the original mesa graphs, we can see horizontal rows showing that certain lines occur in similar sets of texts. As before, we can also abandon the chronological sequence of the lines and bring these rows together. Again, this has been done using cluster analysis, although this time the analysis is transposed so that lines are clustered on the basis of the texts in which they occur. Sorting the lines accordingly, the result is a chart called a trellis graph – Figure 5. The horizontal rulings in this case delimit the main clusters of text lines. The text and line labels have been removed and the main text and line clusters have been labelled with letters and numbers respectively to provide a way of referencing particular blocks.

The trellis graph is even blockier than the earlier clustered mesa graph. The presence of this structure proves the existence of discrete versions. If there was no structure to the collection, there would be no blocks and the dots would be spread randomly throughout

the chart. Also, if the texts formed some sort of continuum, overall diagonal or triangular features would be evident.

Evidence for a Proto-Text

A prominent feature of the trellis graph is a band stretching the full width of the chart in row 03. This represents a group of lines that are drawn on by all the plays in the database. I believe this to be evidence that all the plays ultimately derive from a single proto-text, with the lines in this band specifically representing some or all of the proto-text. Had there been two or more proto-texts, a single band would not have been present. Rather there would have been two or more offset bands. With other scenarios, no band would have been present at all.

Figure 6 lists the lines from this band in the order they would appear in a play. Each line is a random example of its type drawn from the database. Where the final digit of the Std.ID is an asterisk, this indicates that major variant wordings have been coded in the database. Only one arbitrary alternative is given here, but to highlight the variation, non-rhyming couplets have been chosen deliberately for lines 5 & 6 and 45 & 46.

It can be seen that Figure 6 almost forms a viable text. It can therefore be regarded as an approximate reconstruction of the proto-Quack Doctor play text. I say approximate firstly because it is likely to be incomplete, and secondly because there are a few instances of what appear to be alternative lines only one of which would have been in the original play. The alternatives are highlighted in Italics. They are:

- The opening speeches - Lines 1-4 and Lines 5 & 6
- Saint/King George's self-introduction – Lines 11-14 and Lines 15-18 – which I shall return to later.
- The second line of the Doctor's travels – Lines 37 and 38
- The line to rhyme with "The itch pox palsy and the gout" – Lines 42 and 43

Additionally some lines appear to be missing – e.g. rhyme lines after lines 25 and 54.

Thoughts on George and his Adversaries

Statistical analysis of the occurrence of the names King, Saint and Prince George confirms that the titles are interchangeable. However, when he is a King, he tends not to have the dragon legend lines – much as one would expect for a secular George. In the ensuing discussion I will just refer to him as George. George has three different introductory speeches, two of which have two sub-variants each. The distribution of these is shown in Map 2. The following observations can be made:

Saint George "from England have I sprung" or "who from old England sprung" is found in chapbooks and their derivatives - the *Christmas Rhime* in Ireland, and *The Peace Egg* – Act 1 in England respectively. In Ireland, this George fights the Turkey Champion, whereas in *The Peace Egg* he is coupled with Slasher.

The sub-variants of the "Bold" speech are found in fairly distinct northern and southern regions, separated by the Cotswolds.

"The champion bold" sub-variant is almost totally confined to northern England. It seems likely that the distribution of this variant has been highly influenced by the *Alexander* chapbook and *The Peace Egg* - Act 2, although this does not necessarily mean that the chapbooks were the ultimate source. In *The Peace Egg* – Act 2, this George fights both the Prince of Paradine and Hector. This second adversary is derived

from the earlier *Alexander* chapbook, where Prince George fights Alexander and Sambo (who has Hector's lines).

"The man of courage bold" sub-variant primarily occurs in southern England with a few outliers in the north. He is a King in 63% of cases, so it is possible that this is the original status associated with this line.

Outside of the chapbooks, bold George's adversary is primarily the Turkish Knight/Turkish Champion. To illustrate the point, he appears in the database with the Turk 17 times, 3 times with Slasher, and 8 times with both. In all the cases where the Turk and Slasher appear in the same play, the Turk is George's main opponent, and Slasher tends to be an extra.

The third introductory speech - "King George that valiant knight" - occurs throughout mainland Britain, but appears to be particularly concentrated (or at least less diluted) in the Cotswolds (Grid square SP). This George is primarily associated with Slasher, appearing with him 11 times in the database, whereas he only appears with the Turk 3 times, and with both 3 times (one of which is J.H.Ewing's composite text).

The linking of George's introductory speeches with particular combatants makes it possible to determine which came first. Map 3 shows the distribution of George's two principal adversaries, Slasher and the Turkish Knight/Turkish Champion. Slasher is found in most of mainland Britain. On the other hand, the Turk is mostly confined to southern England and to Ireland, perhaps overlying the Slasher distribution. This suggests that Slasher is the older adversary, and therefore by association, George the valiant knight must be older than George the bold. Furthermore, he was probably originally King George without any allusion to the dragon legend, and is likely to have arisen in the Cotswolds and/or North Midlands. How George the bold arose is discussed later.

New Classification

In addition to the proto-text, a more detailed classification emerges from these analyses, shown in Figure 7. This covers the nine main clusters that are marked in the dendrogram and the trellis graph, plus two "Other" classes for modern plays that were not analysed in this study, but which have been identified elsewhere. I have also added a catch-all class for composed and compiled plays, which are often so idiosyncratic that they cannot easily be assigned to any of the traditional classes, although they tend to have a Hero-Combat format.

The new classes confirm and refine classes that have already been established. Groups W and P together form the Plough plays (the Wooing or Bridal plays of E.C.Cawte et al, 1967, p.37) – the W group representing the Multiple Wooing plays and the P group the Recruiting Sergeant plays that I defined in 1995. All the other groups together represent varieties of Hero-Combat play. This has always been by far the largest class, and it was only to be expected that subdivisions would be found. Within this collection, group D represents the Sword Dance plays. Previously, Sword Dance plays have been treated as a significantly different major class, but in textual terms I believe this major distinction can no longer be justified. They therefore become a sub-class of the Hero-Combat plays, on a par with other variants. Lastly, the Robin Hood plays are grouped together as a sub-class in group C – see square C-07.

Three things show that the new classes are valid:

1. As just described, the classes are compatible with the established classification as defined in *English Ritual Drama* (E.C.Cawte et al, 1967, p.37) and more recently established refinements (M.J.Preston, 1976, and P.Millington, 1995).
2. The reality of the classes is confirmed by the discrete blocky structure of the trellis graph, as also already discussed. The band in row 03 defines the *genre* and the proto-text, while the other blocks represent the additional lines that distinguish the main clusters and sub-clusters.
3. The geographical distribution of the main classes is shown in Map 4. This shows that plays from the same class are generally speaking close to each other, which is what one might expect.

In my PhD thesis, I have defined the classes on the basis of the characteristic assemblages of lines. These lists are too large to be detailed here. However, as many of these lines belong to particular *dramatis personae*. I give these instead in Figure 7, and I will restrict my narrative to noteworthy features.

Plough Plays and their Evolution

The Recruiting Sergeant plays are represented by blocks in Trellis squares P14 and P15. The fact that there are two blocks suggests that further sub-classes are present, and indeed some additional internal structure is evident within the larger of the blocks – P14.

- The smaller block – P15 - holds lines that are found particularly in the two earliest Recruiting Sergeant plays published by Baskervill (1924) – *The Recruiting Sergeant* and Swinderby. These have a relatively basic recruiting scene.
- The bottom half of the larger block – P14 - spans all the plays in the group, including the earlier plays, and represents a fuller recruiting scene.
- The top half of P14 covers a smaller group of plays, of which the Cropwell play (Chaworth Musters, 1890) is the oldest. These lines include embellishments to the Doctor's part, Tom's wooing of the spurned Lady, and the somewhat supernumerary Farmer's Man and Threshing Blade.

The disposition of the blocks in the trellis graph, combined with the known dates of the plays suggests that Plough Plays underwent a three-stage development. The earliest plays were the Multiple Wooing plays, being a hybrid of what may have originally been an independent multiple wooing scene and a Hero-Combat play¹⁵. In the early to mid 19th century, the multiple wooing scene was dropped in favour of the recruiting scene. Finally, towards the end of the 19th century, substantial additions were made to the text, mostly of a comic nature.¹⁶

Comparing line distributions as before, it perhaps comes as no surprise that the Hero-Combat elements of the Plough Plays seem to belong to the adjacent Northern English group of plays. Map 5 gives one such distribution. While the link with the Northern English group seems quite strong, there are a couple of differences that appear to suggest an additional tenuous link with the Cotswold group of plays. For instance Map 6 shows the distribution of a subtle variation in the final line of Beelzebub's introductory quatrain. Perhaps therefore the Plough Plays derived their Saint George play from an older Northern English version that was found further south before the advent of Jack Finney in the Cotswolds.

North British Plays and their Interrelationships

The relationships between groups D, G and H are complex. The Sword Dance play group (D) is the most distinct because of the rounds of speeches relating to each dancer in the calling on, the lament and the denials of culpability (square D13). On the other hand there are lines in D01 that are shared with some of the plays in group G.

Groups G and H are mostly Scottish, but also spread into the English North East. Both groups have the distinctive character Galation¹⁷, although in a few cases his speeches are assigned to Slasher. Group G in fact shows evidence of two sub-groups. The plays covered by the block in G02 are the oldest Scottish plays. These feature overtly Scottish sentiments and dialect. The remaining plays in group G and in group H do not display this overt Scottishness.

The plays in groups D, G and H would benefit from re-analysis with a larger collection of texts. This might clarify the interrelationships. As it stands, the development of the Sword Dance and Galoshins plays seem intertwined, with initially separate strands coming together to develop a new identity. Consequently, there is scope for including these plays as sub-groups within a single large cluster, which for geographical reasons I have called the North British Group.

Taking the Sword Dance play first, sword dances have an independent existence, and they frequently feature a calling-on in which the individual dancers are introduced to the audience, often in song. This is not a dialogue. What appears to have happened is that a calling-on song has been merged with the text of a Quack Doctor play, with a few local embellishments. Because so much of the original Quack Doctor play has been excised to make way for the dancers' lines, it is not immediately obvious which variant was used. However there appear to be more similarities with the Northern English group than with the others.

In Scotland, the older group seems to have been rewritten to "make it Scottish". This appears partly to have been done by removing English elements, such as Saint George, and partly by ostentatiously using Scottish dialect. The key change was the metamorphosis of Slasher into Galation. Their introductory couplets are identical but for the name, and the names themselves have some similarity in pronunciation. This shows that this version was adapted from the proto-George and Slasher play.

The next oldest sub-group in Scotland has a combination of the calling-on and denial speeches from the Sword Dance play, and Galation from the earlier group, although there are some additional lines, a few of which are to be found in the *Alexander* chapbook. This chapbook may therefore also have been an influence, and can be seen as a source for the adversaries *Alexander* and the *King of Macedonia* in Scotland. The later Scottish plays probably evolved from the earlier versions mostly by losing material over time, but also by acquiring some new lines that drifted into the country from northern England.

Cotswold Plays and their Development

The play of group C are situated in the Cotswolds and are characterised by the presence of the Doctor's assistant Jack Finney, and a comical scene where giant tooth is drawn. These are represented by trellis square C08. There are however further lines in squares C09 and C07. C09 contains passages of tangle talk and *Land of Cockaigne* motifs, and seem to be enhancements of the basic type. C07 primarily holds the lines of the ballad *Robin Hood and the Tanner*, and therefore define the Robin Hood sub-group.

If one sets aside the defining features of this group, such as Jack Finney, this group has some similarities with both the Northern English and Southern English groups. This is perhaps not surprising bearing in mind its geographical position. The appearance of its distribution as a distinct local “island” suggests that is a relatively recent development. The question is, what did it develop from? My view is that this group is fundamentally closer to the Northern English group because of the presence of Slasher, Beelzebub and King George the valiant knight. The number of cases where typical Southern English features are included – Father Christmas, the Turkish Knight and the “hot and cold” vaunt – are relatively few, and I feel that these instances represent hybrids formed where the two groups meet.

I concur with Preston that the Robin Hood sub-type is a later development of this group (M.J.Preston, 1976). I also believe that the other sub-group – with the *Land of Cockaigne* and tangle talk motifs - is probably also a later development, because these lines are additional to the core Jack Finney and related lines. It is likely that the *Cockaigne*/tangle talk sub-type arose before the Robin Hood changes were made, because some of these mangled lines are also found in the Robin Hood version.

Irish and Related Plays

On the face of it, the Irish group of plays – square E06 – is one of the easiest groups to define, because the lines are nearly all to be found in the *Christmas Rhime* chapbooks. In addition to the truly Irish plays, there are a few plays on mainland Britain that have significant portions of the Irish text – Hulme (Manchester), Tenby, and Stanford-in-the-Vale, Berkshire.

The established view is that the plays were originally introduced to Ireland from Britain (A.Gailey, 1968, pp.15-16 and H.Glassie, 1975, p.135), although there has been no attempt to be more specific. By identifying lines that are shared by the two groups but which do not appear in the other groups, it appears that the Irish texts are linked with plays from the Cotswolds. Map 7 gives one example. While the shared lines establish a link, they do not reveal the direction of the derivation. I am inclined to concur with the established view that the English plays came first. However, the textual differences between the two groups are substantial, and therefore some major rewriting occurred in transit.

The Southern English Plays and their Genesis

Cluster S is found throughout southern England, roughly below a line drawn from London to Bristol. There are three couplets that particularly typify this group:

Here comes I old Father Christmas, welcome or welcome not
I hope old Father Christmas will never be forgot

Here comes I a Turkish Knight
Come from the Turkish land to fight

Saint George I pray thee be not so bold
If thy blood be hot I'll soon make it cold

Because of the ubiquity of the first two characters, I tend to sub-title this group *Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight*. Saint George is the hero of these plays, and is always the “man of courage bold” bold rather than “the champion bold”. The characters Beelzebub and Devil Doubt are generally absent from these plays, as is also to some extent Slasher.

An important clue to the origin of the Southern English group is the illustration in Figure 8, taken from W.Sandys (1852, p.152). This picture shows a group of juvenile performers that is clearly based on the description of costumes in both this and Sandys' earlier publications (in W.Hone, 1827 and in W.Sandys, 1830 and 1833, and "Uncle Jan Treenoodle", 1846). Presumably Sandys was happy with the accuracy of the depiction.

Without reading the accompanying description, most people would be under the impression that the character at the far left was Beelzebub. This is because of his large club, which is one of Beelzebub's expected accoutrements. It is therefore surprising to find that this character is meant to be Father Christmas¹⁸. Consequently, this raises the possibility that despite their differing rôles, Beelzebub could at some time have been transformed into Father Christmas while retaining features of his original costume. The geographical distribution of the two characters is shown in Map 8, which shows that they occupy different regions with very little overlap. This is consistent with the hypothesis. The possible confusion that this transformation could cause can be seen at three locations where Beelzebub is referred to as "Father Beelzebub" – Upper and Lower Howsell, Worcestershire, Ovingdean, Sussex, and Mid-Berkshire (B.Lowsley, 1888)¹⁹. The latter reference gives the following reassuring description for his costume – "Old Beelzebub: As Father Christmas".

Given that Father Christmas and the Turkish Knight are closely tied together in the Southern English group, and that the group also has King George the man of courage bold, with his dragon legend speech, a rational explanation for the creation of the new script becomes possible. This is that the play was rewritten to increase its Christian content. Three changes support this view.

- Firstly, all blasphemous or risqué material was removed – e.g.:
 - The replacement of Beelzebub by Father Christmas.
 - The replacement of the Devil by the cook shop in the line "and send him to the cook shop to make mince pies".
 - The replacement of "pox" by "pitch" or "stitch" in the line "I can cure the hitch the stitch the palsy and the gout".
 - The removal of Devil Doubt
- Secondly, the introduction of the Turkish Knight turned the plot into a play about the Crusades. Similarly, the inclusion of lines regarding the Saint George legend also reinforces the Crusading motif. However, it is strange that George remained a King and was not beatified at the same time.
- Lastly, the introduction of Father Christmas emphasises the Christmas and hence the Christian theme.

From the distribution, there can be no doubt that the new version was created in southern England. Although it is not possible to say precisely where, somewhere in the southern Cotswolds seems most likely since it has been demonstrated that the Irish plays derived from here, and the Irish Turkish Champion is clearly equivalent the Turkish Knight in southern England.

At some point the old and new texts would have come into contact with each other, and this probably explains why in Hampshire and neighbouring counties there are multiple combats with both the Turkish Knight and Slasher, and other mixed features.

Northern English Plays and the Chapbook Texts

Describing the cluster that occupies northern England, including the North Midlands is complicated by the chapbooks published and used in this area. Of the two types, *Alexander and the King of Egypt* seems to have had little recorded influence on performed plays. For a play of over 135 lines, the usage of this text is meagre to say the least. Only four plays in the database have 33 (i.e. 25%) or more of the *Alexander* chapbook lines. One of these is in fact a Whitehaven edition of the chapbook, and another is W.Walker's edition of *The Peace Egg* chapbook, which incorporates many *Alexander* passages *literatim*.

By contrast, *The Peace Egg* chapbooks are known to have had a big influence in the conurbations of the north (E.Cass, 2001, A.Helm, 1980, G.Smith, 1981, etc.). Map 9 shows the usage of *Peace Egg* lines in the play collection. The distribution is significant, in western Yorkshire, south eastern Lancashire, and the north Midlands.²⁰

The two English chapbook versions manifest themselves in trellis squares N10 and N12. The lines in square N10 are common to both chapbooks – mostly Act 2 in the case of *The Peace Egg*. Square N12 contains lines that come from *The Peace Egg* alone. However, only about a third of the plays in group N are chapbooks or show strong chapbook influences. If we look at the other plays in the group, they have little more than the basic lines in row 03, and therefore I suggest that they are closest to the proposed proto-text. Many of these plays have Slasher, however there are a few North Midlands texts, such as Selston, Notts., where he is replaced by Bull Guy in his variant spellings. It appears that Bull Guy is meant to represent an infidel antagonist, and as such he perhaps represents a step towards (or from) the Turkish Knight.

Other Groups

Two other recognised groups, of known provenance, are not represented in the database. The first consists of the West Indian Mummies' plays. These are Hero-Combat plays that have been shown to derive from the text published by Juliana Horatia Ewing in 1884 (P.Millington, 1996). This script was compiled from five known texts that span several of the groups described above. It consequently does not really fit properly in any of them, and therefore the West Indian plays should be placed in a group of their own along with Mrs. Ewing's original.

The other group comprises the distinctive tradition of Mumming in Wexford, Ireland (J.Parle, 2001). Originally, the plays in Wexford were the same as the other Irish plays (see for instance the Ballybrennan play). However, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the plays were totally rewritten to represent patriotic Irish themes. The speeches consist of a series of relatively long monologues by patriotic Irish characters from all periods, but particularly from the Wexford uprising of 1798 (e.g. Wolfe Tone). However there is no real dialogue as such. Instead it is a series of self-presentations, interspersed with step dancing and the clashing of short "Mumming sticks". As they no longer have a quack doctor character, Wexford Mummies should perhaps fall outside the scope of this study. However there is clearly a historical relationship, and they warrant their own group.

Relationships between the Northern English and Southern English Versions

Although Map 5 demonstrates a strong link between the Plough Plays and the Northern English group, there is an additional sparse distribution for the "Iron and steel" speech in southern England, with a gap in between that corresponds to the

Cotswold plays. There are indeed other speeches that are shared by the Northern English and Southern English groups that are absent or rare in the Cotswold group. As it happens, all these lines appear in *The Peace Egg* chapbook. This being a compilation, the question arises as to whether these lines existed in the northern tradition before the publication of the chapbook, or if the chapbook was the ultimate source for the lines in the north. In fact, all the relevant lines do pre-date *The Peace Egg* in the north. For instance, Saint George's introductory lines appear in the *Alexander* chapbook – an 18th-century source used by *The Peace Egg* – and his dragon legend speech also appears in the Cheshire play recorded by Francis Douce sometime before 1788 (D.Broomhead, 1982). This shows that *The Peace Egg* derived lines from the oral tradition, rather than the other way round. The evidence regarding the shared lines therefore supports the view that the Northern and Southern English groups drew lines from the same proto-text.

A Family Tree for the Quack Doctor Plays

Having examined the possible and likely ancestral links between the various folk play groups, it is now possible to suggest a family tree, or rather a genealogical diagram for the Quack Doctor folk plays. This is given in Figure 9. A key element is of course the proposed proto-text, of which there is not as yet a specific real example, although the Northern English non-chapbook plays are perhaps closest to it. The degree of confidence in the various proposed links varies from case to case, as has hopefully been made clear. This diagram should therefore be regarded as a starting point for discussion and further research.

Conclusions

Three main results have emerged from this study. Firstly, evidence has been presented for a single proto-text from which later versions developed by addition and change. This contrasts with earlier views that the different versions had developed by attrition from a single all-encompassing *Ur*-text. The lines that the proto-text probably contained have been identified, and assembled into an initial tentative reconstruction. Secondly, the analyses have yielded a new classification for the plays that both confirms and extends the earlier schemes, but under two principal classes rather than three. The Hero-Combat Plays are divided into seven subclasses, of which one comprises the Sword Dance Plays that were previously regarded as distinct. The Plough Plays are divided into two subclasses – the Multiple Wooing Plays and the Recruiting Sergeant Plays. Lastly, the evolutionary relationships between the various classes have been investigated, leading to a proposed genealogy of the plays.

Future Work

There is plenty of scope for further research. The analyses should be re-run with a larger set of data. This should result in better characterisation of the proto-text, improve aspects of the classification - e.g. the definition of North British Group - and clarify the direction of the proposed evolutionary links. The main classes are likely to remain intact, but new subclasses may emerge – e.g. featuring the Royal Prussian King, Bulguy, etc. How the plays were so rapidly and so widely dispersed also merits further work, especially as it has been shown that the rôle of chapbooks was of regional significance only.

The search for literary and ballad parallels should continue - a task that is likely to become easier as more full-text databases become available online. Similarly, there is a

need to search archive and newspaper sources from the mid 17th to mid 18th century – the likely period of origin.

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-

Notes

¹ This paper is based on my PhD research at NATCECT, which was on “The origins and development of English folk plays” (2002). My thesis is well over 400 pages long, so in condensing the results down to a 30- minute paper, I have not been able to go into any great depth.

² H.Clarke in J.S.Udal, 1880, pp.115-116, M.J.Preston, 1971, P.Millington, 1989, T.Pettitt, 1995, pp.29-30,31. I have suggested that the non-play customs were probably the source for non-representational costumes (P.Millington, 1985), and Tom Pettitt (1995) has suggested they may also have been the source of some supernumerary characters. They certainly provided the dates of performance and the actors’ collective names.

³ Some of this may have been amateur drama – theatrical plays staged by amateur actors – but some plays were definitely performed in the folk idiom in association with calendar customs. Similarly, the earliest Quack Doctor play texts show more variety than the later plays, and there was a ready willingness to incorporate literary matter into the texts.

⁴ This influence was exerted indirectly via the Harlequinade in English pantomime and booth plays at fairs, aided by popular imagery in street literature. However, it seems likely that neither pantomime nor booth theatres are direct sources for the plays, unless a printed script can be located.

⁵ Most versions were in existence by 1825. Thereafter, in the 19th century, chapbooks were important for propagating the plays in certain areas, and from the mid-19th century, mainstream books were also important for disseminating texts.

⁶ “My first proposition is that the play and any significance it may have, resides in the action: the text is a local accretion alone, often both superfluous and irrelevant. The Play can exist in action alone, without a word spoken...” (M.Dean-Smith, 1958, p.244)

⁷ Preston also generated a KWIC concordance as a finding aid (M.J.Preston, 1975 & 1983), of which NATCECT has a copy.

⁸ I started with J.White’s *Alexander and the King of Egypt* chapbook - the oldest known full text - and added further texts in approximately chronological order. A special point was made of adding the earliest editions of all the known chapbook versions. Whenever identified literary or ballad parallels were encountered, the originals were added too, if necessary as extracts.

All the texts in Tiddy’s (1923) book were added and also other texts that were already available in electronic form, subject to proof reading against the original source. The chronological provenance of these texts was effectively random. Lastly, further texts were added to fill gaps in the geographical distribution, the aim being cover the country as evenly as possible, using the oldest available texts.

⁹ Record dates are the earlier of; date of performance, recording or publication.

¹⁰ This speech and some of the ensuing dialogue appears in the Swinderby Plough play (C.R.Baskerville, 1924, pp.263-268), with variants appearing in most Recruiting Sergeant plays of later date.

¹¹ During this work, I investigated the genealogy of the actors named in the play from “Mylor”, Cornwall, which contains significant literary inclusions. This showed that the play really belongs to Truro, and dates from the late 1780s. My results are due to be published in *Folklore* in Spring 2003.

¹² I call these graphs mesa graphs because early versions were originally plotted the other way up, and when viewed upside down they resemble the mesas of the Arizona Desert. In the absence of a succinct descriptive term, the name stuck.

¹³ Advantage was taken of this program feature, by not only shading relevant the cell but also putting the actual text line in the cell. Again this text was not normally visible, but it is possible, for instance, to move the cursor from cell to cell to see how the wording of a line changes from text to text.

¹⁴ Suitable descriptions of cluster analysis can be found in P.Smith (1985), P.Millington (1988), and B.S.Everitt et al (2001)

¹⁵ The speeches that came from the Hero-Combat play were effectively frozen at the time they were added, presumably around the start of the 19th century. These would therefore not have any features arising from subsequent developments in the Hero-Combat plays themselves. This could be helpful in trying to determine the chronology and genealogy of the different versions.

¹⁶ Mrs Chaworth Musters’ (1890) book *A Cavalier Stronghold* may have been instrumental in disseminating these additions.

¹⁷ In his book on the Scottish folk plays, Brian Hayward discusses the name at length, presenting a map to show that the singular form of the name Galation was used in the east of its region, and the plural Galoshins used in the west (B.Hayward, 1992, pp.72-84). He opted to use Galoshins as his standard for the name of the play and for the collective name for the actors. His practice is followed here, although on the basis of the quoted text, Galation is used here for the name of the character.

¹⁸ The relevant passage reads; “...Father Christmas is represented as a grotesque old man, with a large mask and comic wig, and a huge club in his hand...” - W.Sandys (1852), pp.154-155

¹⁹ The text with Veyther Beelzebub also reported at Glympton, Oxfordshire by E.Harpwood (1961) is in fact merely replicates Lowsley's text.

²⁰ For completeness, the influence of the Irish *Christmas Rhime* chapbook is minimal in mainland Britain. Exceptions are Hulme, Manchester, near where a one-off edition of the chapbook was published (R.Carr, 1836-1838), and in Tenby, Wales.

Figure 1 - Mesa Graph - All Plays - Lines Occurring Three or More Times
(Vertical lines mark intervals of 25 years)

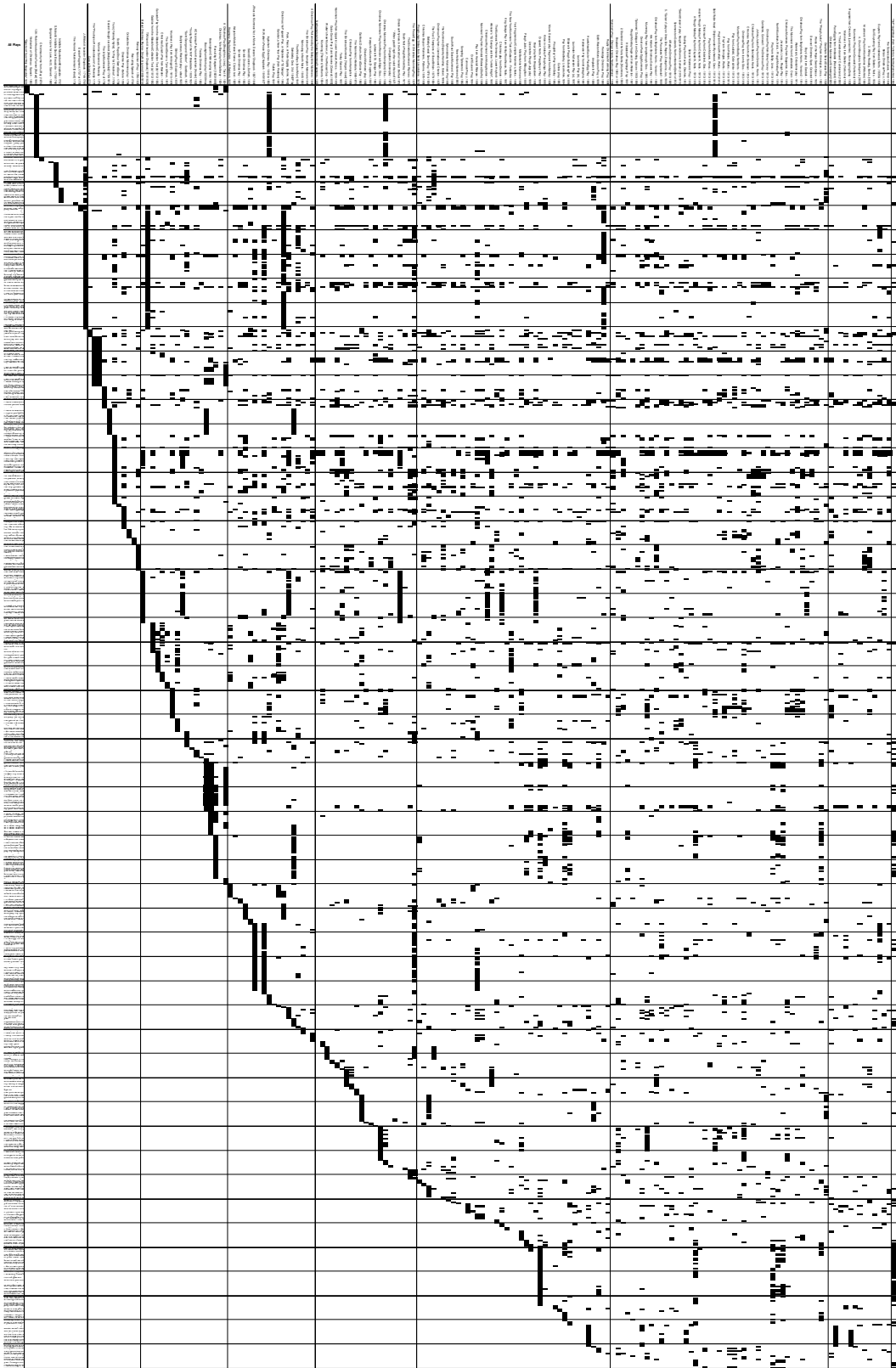


Figure 2 - Screen Dump of Mesa Graph

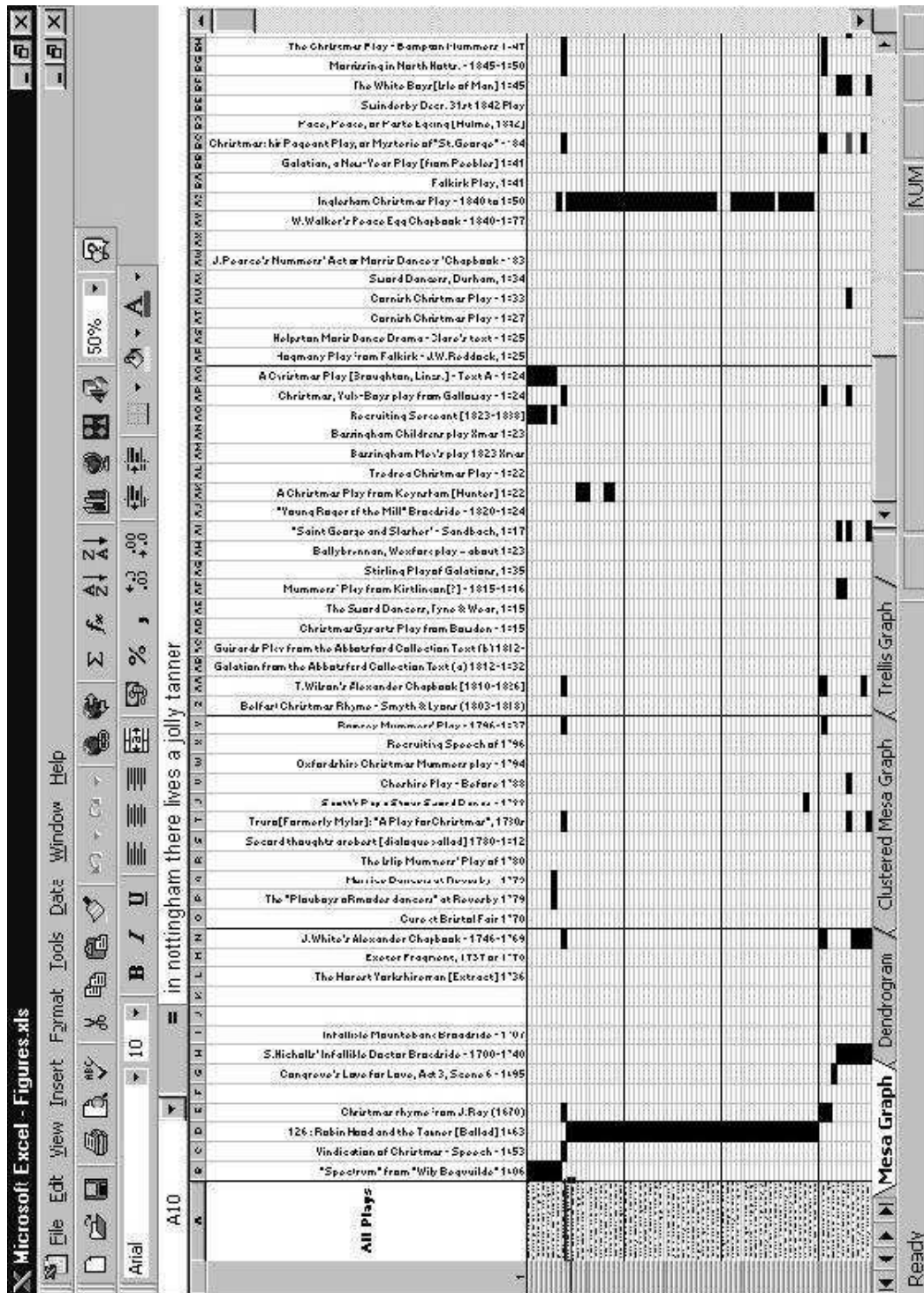


Figure 3 - Dendrogram Results of Cluster Analysis

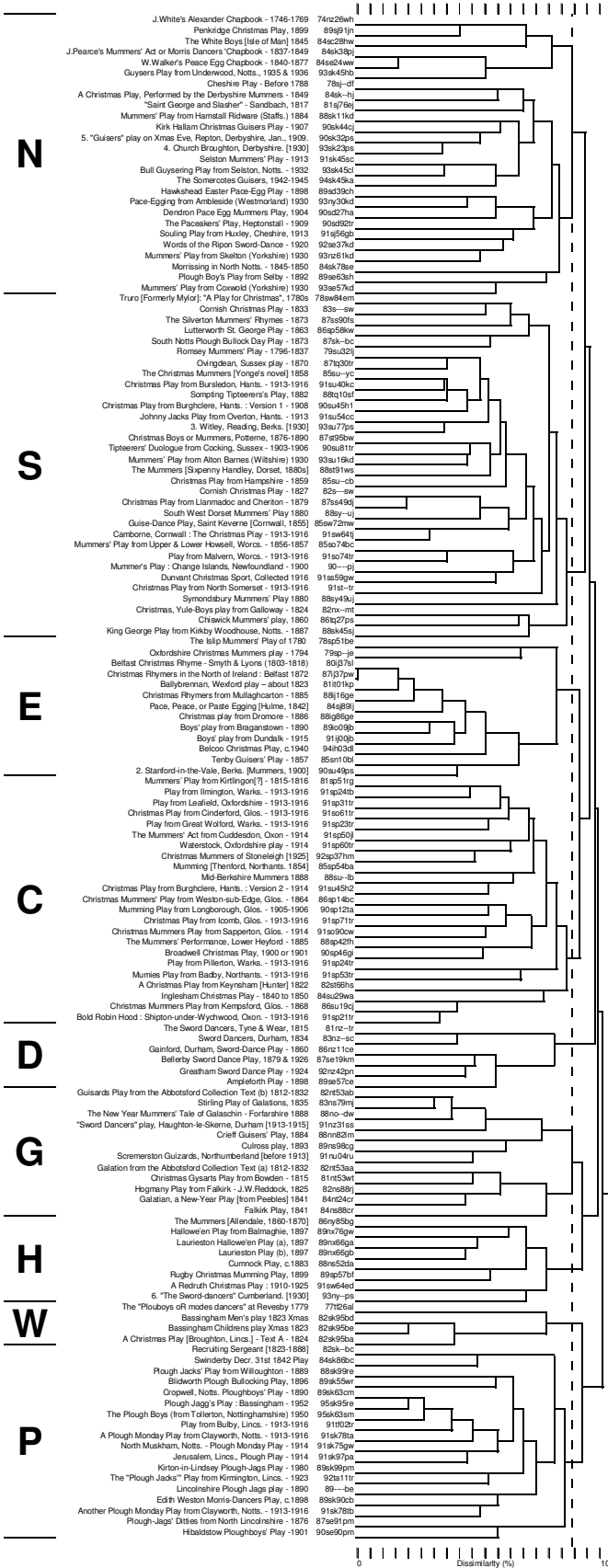


Figure 4 - Clustered Mesa Graph

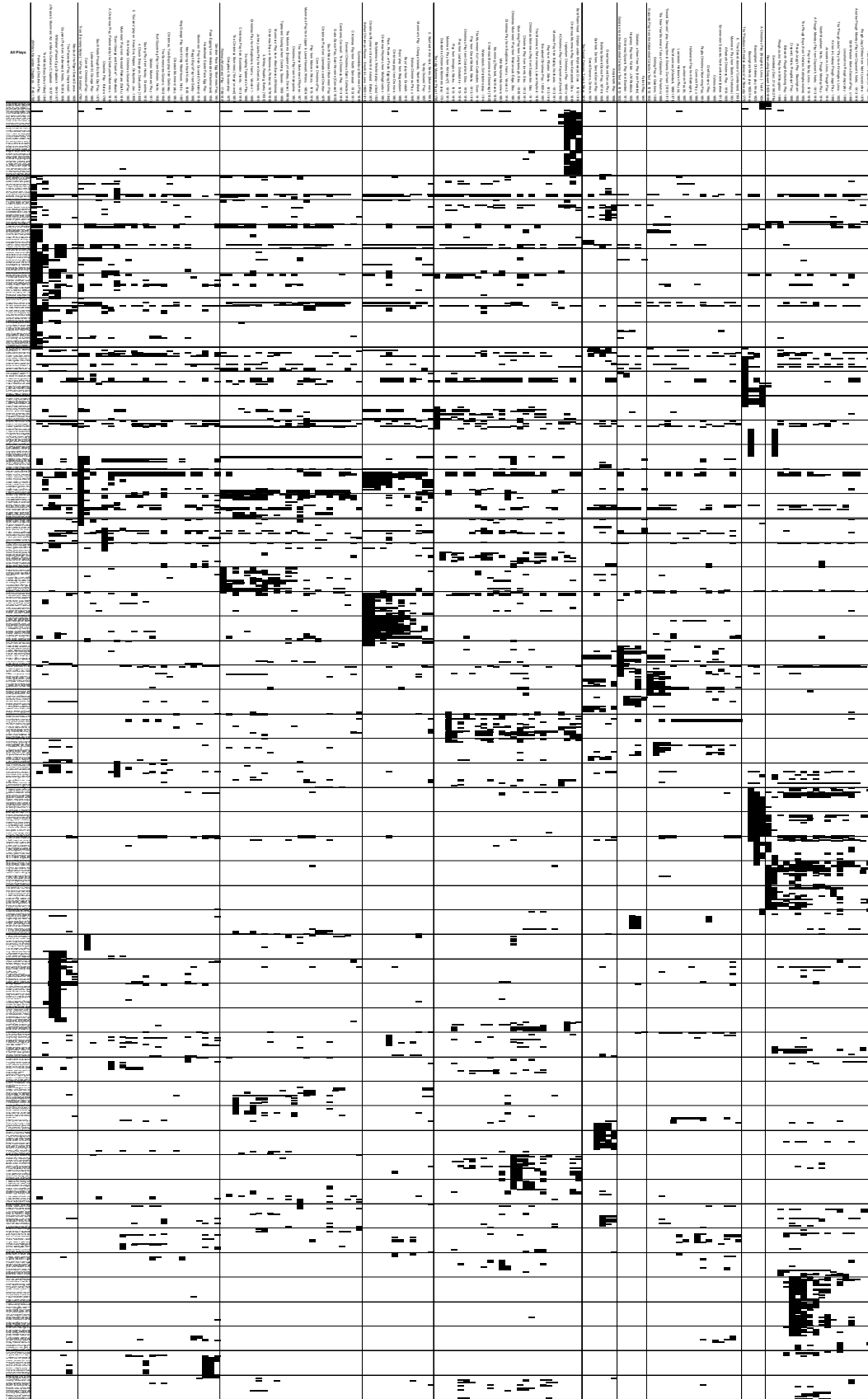
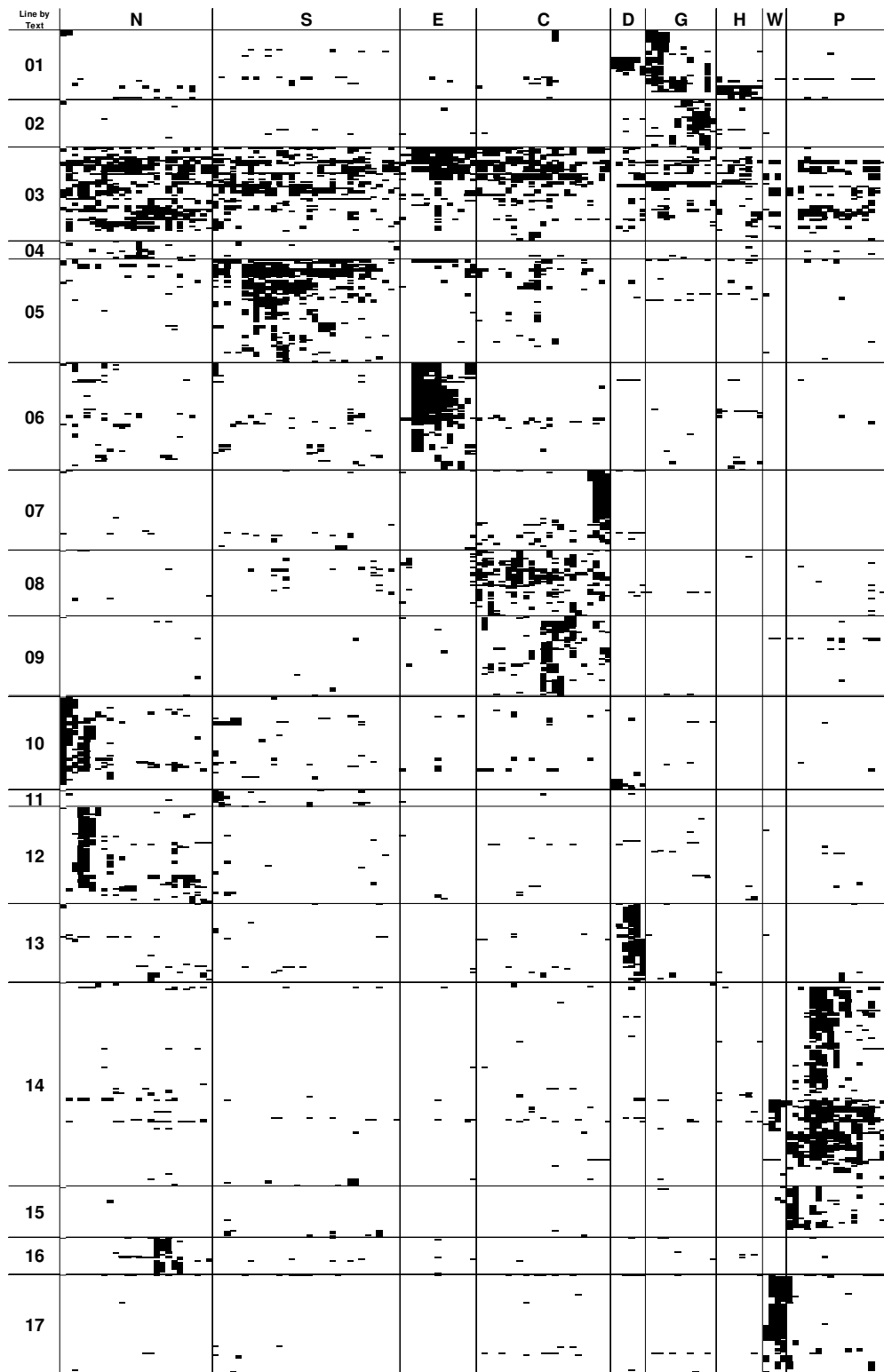


Figure 5 - Trellis Graph



Key to Text Cluster Codes

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| C = Cotswolds Versions | N = Northern English Versions |
| G = Galoshins Versions | P = Recruiting Sergeant Plays |
| H = Halloween Versions | S = Southern English Versions |
| E = Irish Versions | W = Multiple Wooing Plays |

Figure 6 – Reconstructed Proto-Text

Std.ID	Example Line	Line No.
1380	Open the door and let us come in	
1390	I hope your favour we shall win	
1400	Whether we stand or whether we fall	
1410	We'll do our endeavour to please you all	
13*	<i>Room, room brave gallants give us room to sport</i>	5
16*	<i>For remember good sirs this is Christmas time</i>	
1950	Activity of youth activity of age	
1960	The like was never acted on a stage	
145*	If you don't believe the words I say	
240	Step in Saint George and clear the way	10
1460	I am King George that valiant knight	
1470	Who lost his blood for England's right	
1480	England's right and England's reason	
1490	Makes me carry this bloody weapon	
29*	<i>I am Prince George a champion brave and bold</i>	15
30*	<i>With my sword and spear I won ten thousand crowns in gold</i>	
310	<i>I fought the fiery dragon and brought him to the slaughter</i>	
320	<i>And by that means I gained the King of Egypt's daughter</i>	
2100	where is the man that dares bid me stand	
211*	I'll cut him down with my courageous hand	20
1500	I am a valiant soldier Slasher is my name	
1510	Sword and buckler by my side I hope to win the game	
410	I will hash thee and smash thee as small as flies	
42*	And send him to the cook shop to make mince pies	
3860	Stand off Slasher let no more be said	25
1860	My head is made of iron, my body's made of steel	
187*	My hands and feet of best knuckle bone I challenge thee to field	
490	O cruel Christian what hast thou done?	
500	Thou hast ruined me by killing my best son	
53830	To cure the man that here lies slain	30
157*	What is your fee?	
158*	Ten pounds is my fee but five I'll take of thee	
12540	How camest thou to be a doctor?	
12550	I have travelled for it	
12560	where have you travelled?	35
160*	I've travelled through Italy High Germany and Spain	
1610	And am now returned to old England again	
13250	Three times round the world and back again	
680	What diseases can you cure?	
1620	All diseases whatever you pleases	40
700	The itch pox palsy and the gout	
690	All diseases both within and without	
328*	<i>If the Devil's in I can fetch him out</i>	
323*	I've got a little bottle by my side called elecampane	
1650	Here Jack take a little of my nip nap	45
3590	Pour it down thy tip top	
1660	Rise up Slasher and fight again	
2460	Here comes I old Beelzebub	
2470	Upon my shoulder I carry my club	
2480	And in my hand a dripping pan	50
2490	Don't you think I'm a jolly old man?	
17620	Here comes I that never came yet	
3350	With my great head and little wit	
17630	Though my head is great and my wits be small	

Figure 7 – New Classification of Quack Doctor Plays

<i>Class</i>	<i>Defining Characters</i>	<i>Trellis Block</i>
Quack Doctor plays	Doctor	All
Plough Plays	Dame Jane	W & P
Multiple Wooing plays	Noble Anthony, Father's Eldest Son, Farming Man, Lawyer, Ancient Man	W
Recruiting Sergeant plays	Bold Tom, Recruiting Sergeant, Ribboner, Lady Bright and Gay, Farmer's Man	P
Hero-Combat plays		N to H
North British plays		D to H
Sword Dance plays	No individual combatants – Dancers include the Squire's or Farmer's Son	D
Galoshins plays	Galation	G & H
Irish plays	Saint Patrick, Oliver Cromwell	E
Southern English plays	Father Christmas, Turkish Knight	S
Cotswold plays	Jack Finney	C
Robin Hood plays	Robin Hood, Arthur Abland	C07
Northern English plays	Slasher?, [Bull Guy]	N
Others		-
West Indian Mummies	Saint George, Saint Andrew, Saint Patrick and Saint David	-
Composed and compiled plays	None - Highly variable	-
Wexford Mummies	No Doctor – Father Murphy, Wolfe Tone, etc.	-

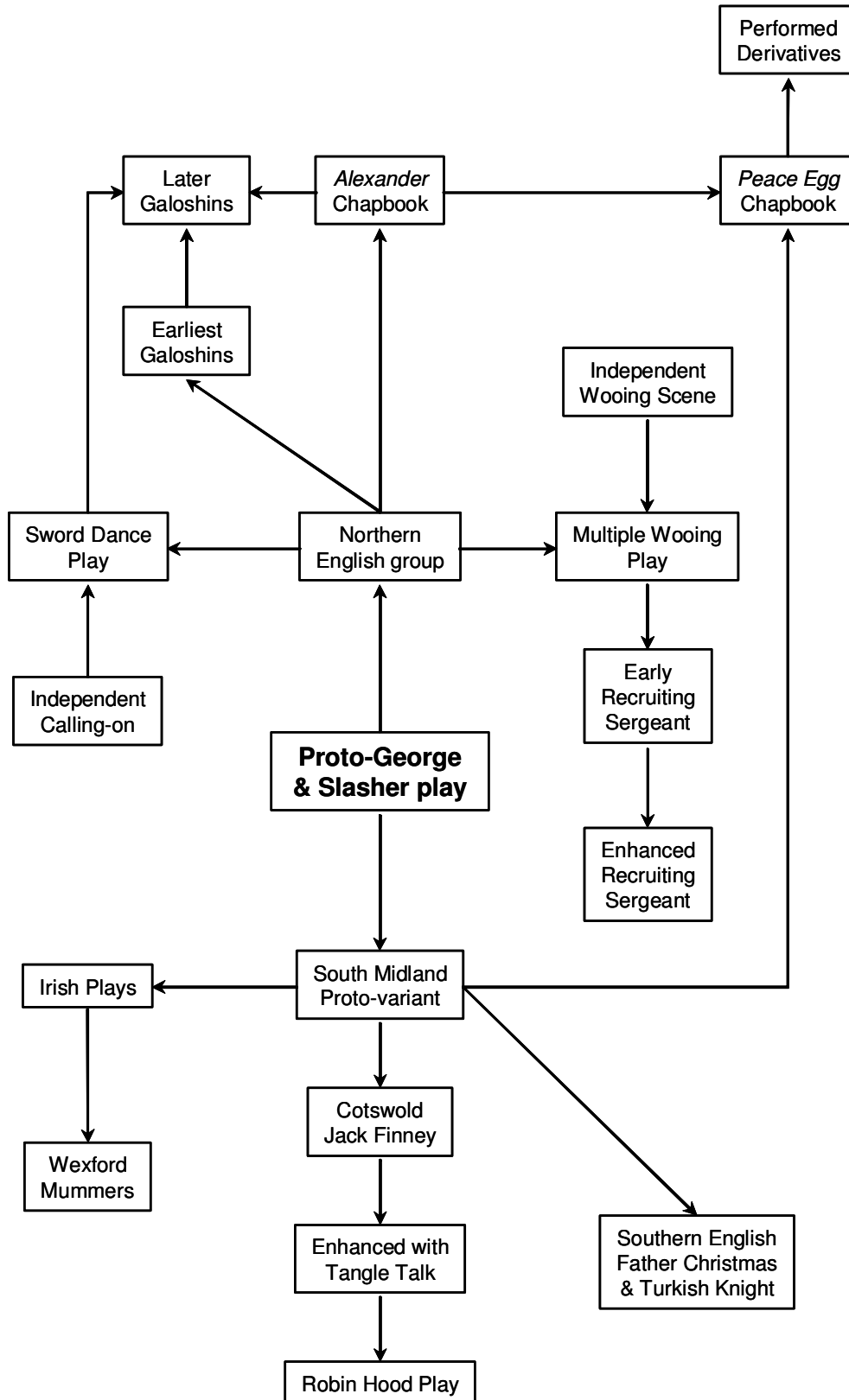
Figure 8 - Illustration from W.Sandys (1852, p.152)



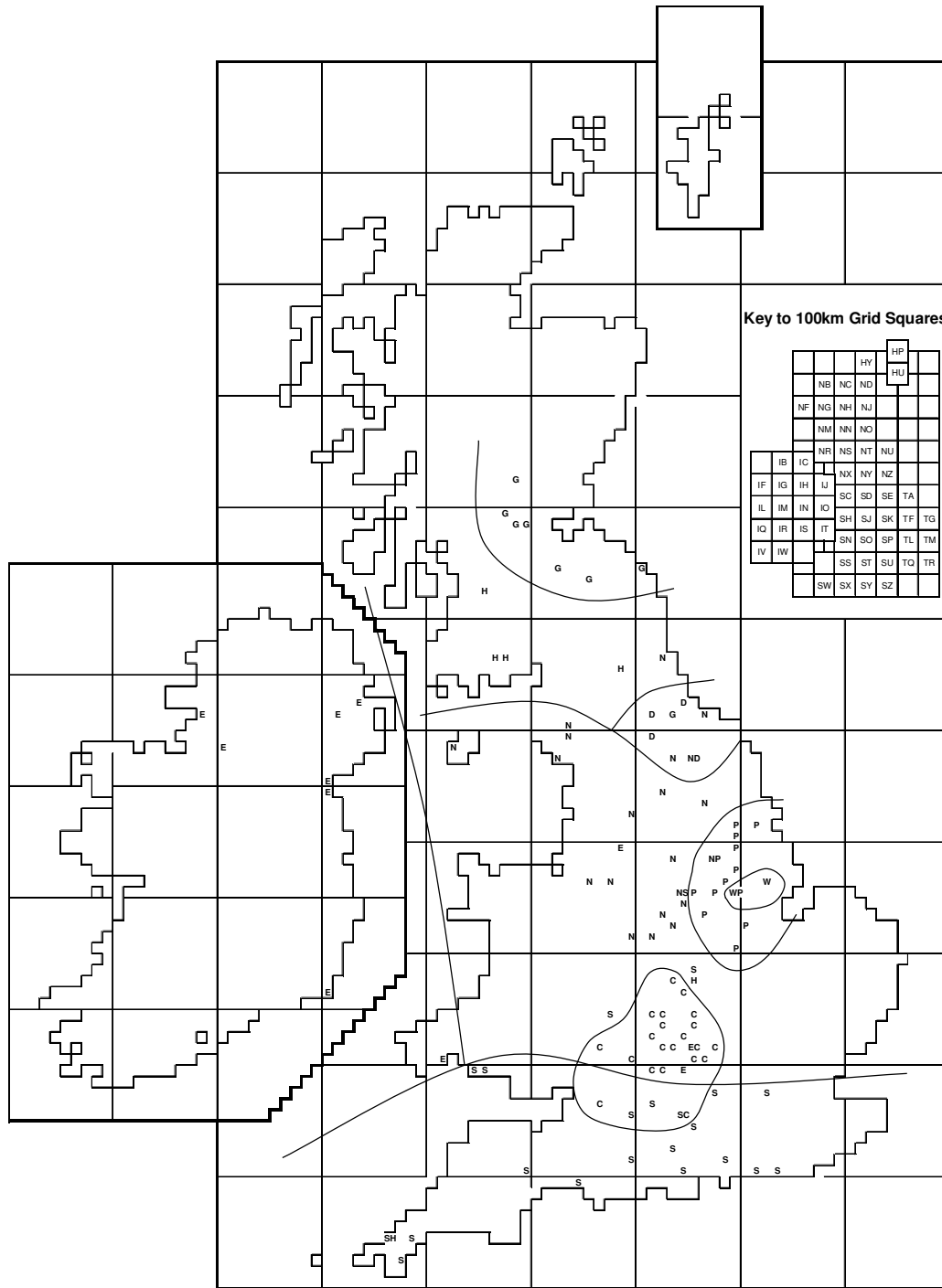
"The performers, who are usually young persons in humble life, are attired, including St. George and the Dragon, much in the same manner, having white trousers and waistcoats, showing their shirtsleeves, and decorated with ribbons and handkerchiefs; each carrying a drawn sword or cudgel in his hand : as one of the Somersetshire mummers says, 'Here comes I liddle man Jan wi' my sword in my han!' They wear high caps of pasteboard, covered with fancy paper, and ornamented with beads, small pieces of looking-glass, bugles, &c., and generally have long strips of pith hanging down from the top, with shreds of different coloured cloth strung on them, the whole having a fanciful and smart effect. The Turk sometimes has a turban; Father Christmas is represented as a grotesque old man, with a large mask and comic wig, and a huge club in his hand; the Doctor has a three-cornered hat, and painted face, with some ludicrous dress, being the comic character of the piece; the lady is generally in the dress of the last century, when it can be got up; and the hobby-horse, when introduced, which is rarely, has a representation of a horse's hide. Wellington and Wolfe, when they appear, are dressed in any sort of uniform that can be procured for the nonce, and no doubt will now be found as militia men of the county where the play is represented."

(W.Sandys, 1852, pp.154-155)

Figure 9 - Suggested Genealogy of the Quack Doctor Plays



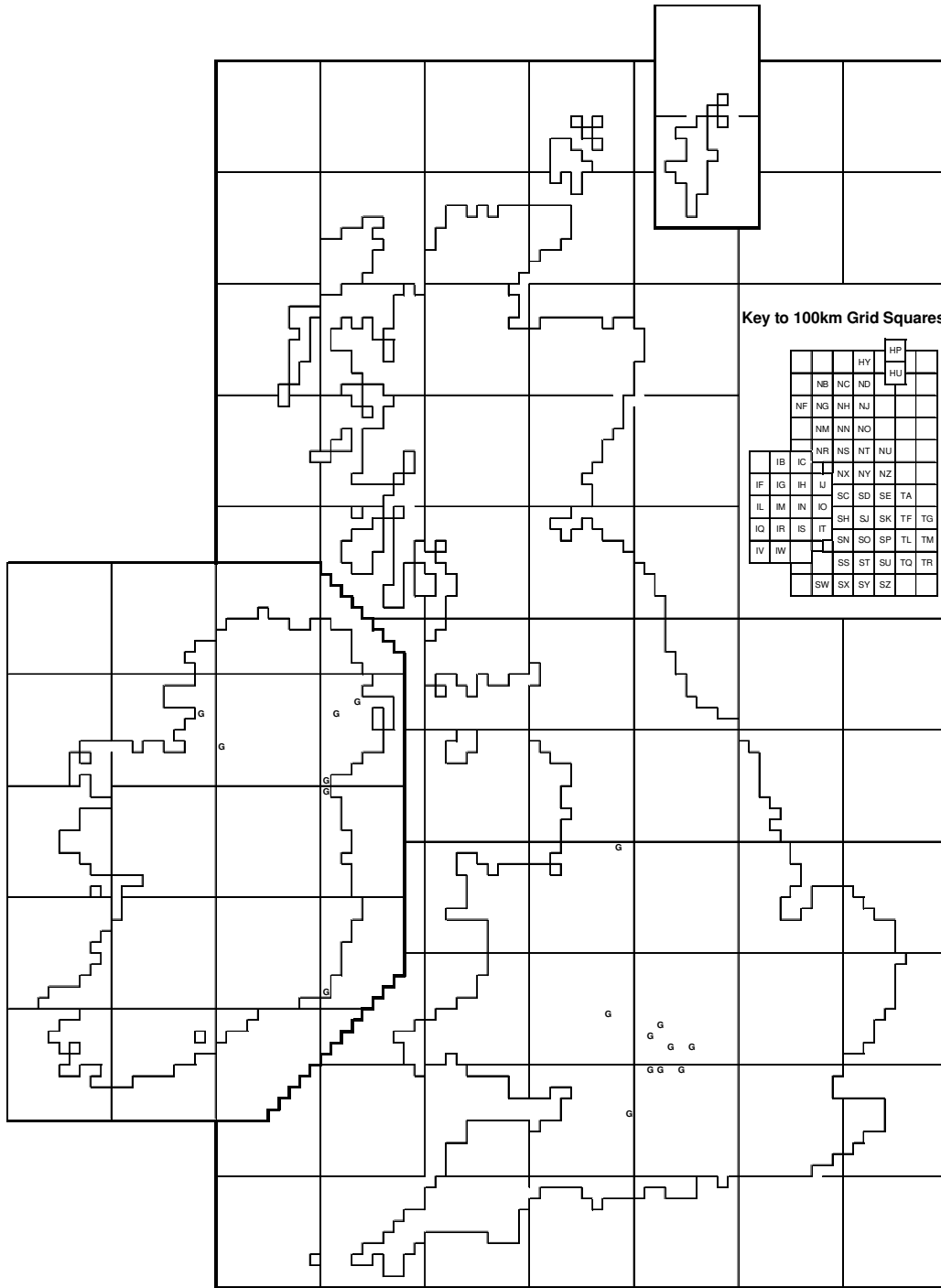
Map 4 - Distribution of Clusters



Key

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| C = Cotswolds Versions | G = Galoshins Versions | P = Recruiting Sergeant Plays |
| D = Sword Dance Versions | H = Halloween Versions | S = Southern English Versions |
| E = Irish Versions | N = Northern English Versions | W = Multiple Wooing Plays |

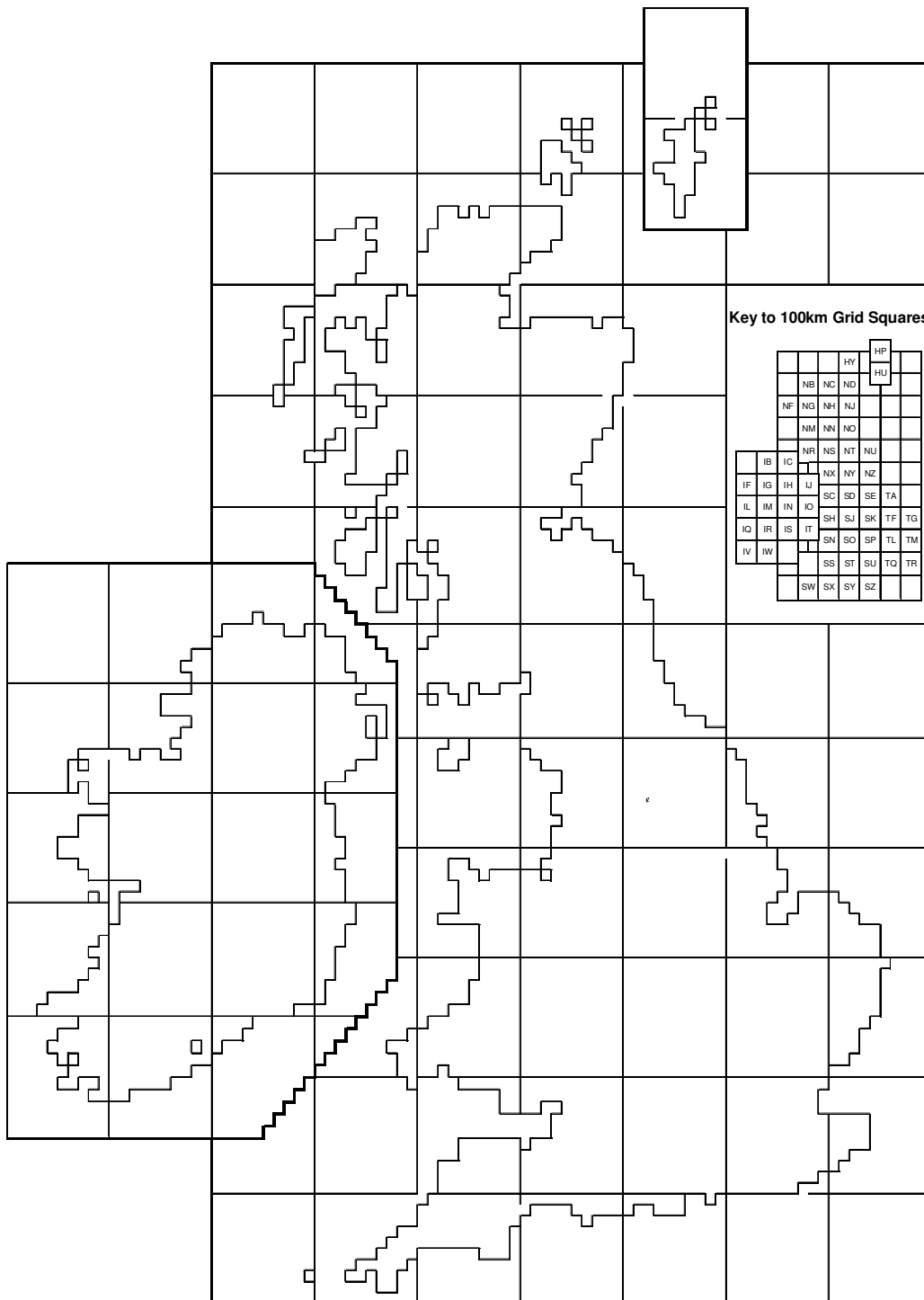
Map 7 - I am a doctor pure and good / And with my skill I can staunch his blood



Key

G = Std.ID 2210/2220 - I am a doctor pure and good / And with my skill I can staunch his blood

Map 9 - Use of W.Walker's "Peace Egg" Chapbook in Folk Plays



Key

- = 1 to 16 lines
- ▤ = 17 to 32 lines
- ▬ = 33 or more lines
- e = W.Walker's "Peace Egg" Chapbook