

Nelson Mummers Play

As performed Dec. 19, 2009 in the Nelson Town Hall, New Hampshire

By Craig Brandon

Introduction:

The origins of the Mummers Play in England stretch back to the middle ages when it was performed in churches to commemorate the victory of St. George over the dragon, but it is probably much more ancient than that. It may have evolved from a pre-Christian ritual which involved human sacrifice on the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, to ensure the return of summer. It always worked before, the reasoning may have gone, and we're not sure if it's really necessary, but who wants to be responsible if we don't do it this year?

In modern times performers have deviated from the official text and added some heavy-handed contemporary social commentary to the basic plot in which St. George rescues a fair maiden by slaying the dragon only to be ritually killed and then brought back to life by a doctor. This death and rebirth has Christian overtones, of course, but it also symbolizes the pre-Christian idea of the new year being born out of the death of the old year.

The Nelson, New Hampshire, Mummers Play has been performed for decades. Each year a person is selected to write and direct the play using local performers, no set, minimal costumes and props. The challenge is to update the rhyming couplets each year to reflect current events while retaining enough of the plot and characters that it is still recognizable as an ancient tradition. My first experience in writing the play was in 1997 when I gender-bended the plot to make Princess Diana the hero and had a group of paparazzi as the dragons with flashbulbs for their fire.

For 2009, when I was once again honored as the author and director of the play, I selected Rush Limbaugh as the fire-breathing dragon and President Obama as the hero who slays him only to be cut down by the rapper dancers. His revival is complicated by a conflict between the false doctor of health insurance companies and the good doctor who wants to heal without pay. It's a lot of work to put this together and the actors did an excellent job of bringing my script to life. Rather than consign the script to the ages, however, I decided to post it here on my web site so others who could not make it to the performance can enjoy it.

Dramatis Personae:

The Room: Larry Ames

Father Christmas: Melanie Everard

The Dragon: C.J. Leake

The President: Dan Bowen

The false doctor: Jean Winter

The good doctor: Allison Aldrich

Rapper Dancers: Jay and Dawn Garrett-Larsen, Andy Chapman, Kris Arnold, Melanie Everard.

Room

(sweeping with his broom)

Room, I say room, give us room to rhyme!
There's a story to be told at this Christmas time.
It's a story that's old, but always seems new,
About a bold knight so brave and so true,
Who slew a huge dragon whose fire could burn.
To you who have ears to listen and learn,
The story seems simple, it's ancient and old,
But behind it's a secret, the truth be told,
In this, the dark time of frost and snow,
The ancient ways are important to know,
The old year must die for the new to be born,
And that's the true meaning of each Christmas morn.

Ah here comes Santa, he's busy it seems
With his new iPhone and Internet streams

Father Christmas

(adjusting his cellphone)

Naughty, naughty, and naughty again
Is no one still nice not Goldman nor Ben?
What's happened to all the nice girls and boys
Who behave all year long so I'll bring them some toys?
Everyone's been naughty, the whole year through,
It's enough to give Santa a case of swine flu!

Room

What have you there, clutched tight in your fist,
Certainly that's not your regular list? (she shows it to him)
A Blackberry iPhone is that what I see?
To separate the good from skullduggery? (he fiddles with it)

But this isn't the list of our children so sweet,
But a long list of bankers from Wall Street!

Father Christmas

Bankers? Aren't they the enemy,
Who trashed our national economy?

Room

The same! And they've been very bad,
They took taxpayer money and now we've been had.
On credit default swaps they made some bad bets,

And spent bailout money on big private jets!

Father Christmas

Then they'll get no Rolexes or Mercedes from me!
And into their stockings it's coal there'll be!

Room

Coal! That's not such a good solution.
They'll put it in factories to increase pollution!

Father Christmas

So what for the bankers would be a good gift,
Who foreclosed on houses and left families adrift?
They took the bailout those miserable skunkers,
Isn't that why it's called cash for clunkers?

Room

Coal is too good and sticks are too fine,
We need to find something that fits their crime.

Father Christmas

We should teach them a lesson the nasty hoods,
Like marriage counseling for Tiger Woods!

The Room

But wait what can be that terrible smell?
Like someone's left open the gates of hell!
It's evil and smells like a dragon's grandpa,
Bad breath and lies, it must be Rush Limbaugh!

The Dragon

(chomping a big cigar)

In comes I, the detestable Rush,
With fire and venom and lies I'll gush,
With sexism and racism, homophobia too!
It's fear that I'm peddling for me and for you.
The teachers are turning your children quite gay,
And immigrants sneak in to steal jobs away,
It's liberals who caused our depression, for sure,
Taxing and spending they think it's the cure,
But capitalism is a simpler solution,
Just give tycoons money, they'll give back pollution,
Just cut all the taxes for rich robber barons,
And palaces they'll build from Concord to Sharon!

They'll take all our money and leave only wasteland,
And stash all the dough on Grand Cayman Island!
Of the poor and the needy I spare not a care,
But I love the tea parties on Keene's Central Square.
What more can I say, for once I'll be brief,
It's gays and feminazis who cause all our grief!

Room

What a bunch of unmitigated bull!
You're dishing it out by the shovelful!
Do you eat with that mouth, so vile and evil?
The garbage you're spouting seems somewhat primeval.

Father Christmas

And saying such things in this season of joy!
When brotherhood we praise from Nelson to Troy.
Is there no one to take on this scaliwag?
Truth is the weapon to pierce this old windbag!

Room

Ah here comes a person who might do the trick,
He's got just the foot to give Rush a kick,
He might be the man to save our fair drama,
He's our knight and our hero, bold president Obama!

The President

In comes I, bold President Barack,
I'm finding an end for the war in Iraq,
On Monday I'll fix the economy so slow,
On Tuesday I'm closing Guantanamo,
On Wednesday I'll help find jobs for the poor,
On Thursday for swine flu I'll help find a cure,
On Friday there's time to fight climate change,
On Saturday those mortgage foreclosures, so strange,
On Sunday fix health care and still find the time,
For poverty and schools and Iran and crime,
For all of these projects, I've developed a plan,
And I've even found time for Afghanistan !

Room

Whew! That's quite an agenda for sure,
But how on earth will you ever endure?

The people are eager, but Congress pernicious,
You're only one person and the list is ambitious.

The Dragon
(pointing at the president)

He's a liar, a liberal, a quack and a spy,
Don't count on his help, he's not the right guy,
There's no place for *his* kind in our national warehouse,
Why do you think they call it the "*White*" House?

Father Christmas

Now you take that back, you miserable bigot!
Go wash out your mouth in yon village spigot!
Such language you use, it must be a crime,
And you seem to use it most of the time.

The President

It's best to ignore him and he'll go away,
The voters will figure who best knows the way,
It took Bush eight years, left our country undone,
And now they expect me to fix it in one!

The Dragon
(pointing his sword labeled LIES at the president)

You were born in Kenya and schooled in madrassah,
You hate our white country, call Bin Laden your massa,
We know, like the terrorists, you're known as Hussein,
Don't try to deny it, it's your middle name!

Room

Where on earth does he get all this stuff?
It's slanderous libel and we've had enough!

Father Christmas

He spews it all day on his radio show,
Why do listeners endure it, that I'd like to know.

The President
(pushing away Rush's sword)

Truth is the weapon to counter his lies.
He's an ignorant puppet of those right wing guys,
They want to protect the tax breaks Bush gave them,

While Wall Street exploited their deregulation.

The Dragon

You've done it all wrong, you lily-livered dort,
You put an Hispanic on our country's Supreme Court!

The President

Equal opportunity is what I believe in,
It says so much in our Constitution.

The Dragon

Taxing the rich is what you believe in,
It seems to me that's a terrible solution.

The President

The rich can afford it and what's so fitting is,
To quote Willie Sutton, that's where the money is!

The Dragon

(to the audience)

His death panels will kill all your grannies and babies,
Is that what you want, Nelson gents and ladies?

The President

There is no such thing, except in your head, son,
And you'll never convince the good people of Nelson!

The Dragon

(to the president)

You'll tax us and tax us till we're all in the poorhouse,
And then there's the love children you keep in the White House!

Father Christmas

Does he mean Sasha and Malia so pretty?
They're not love children, but his daughters you Ninny!

The President

Now you've gone and raised my temper!
You can slander me all day and not raise a whimper,
But when you attack my Malia and Sasha,
Now that makes me mad, and it's time for to bash ya!

(He draws his sword labeled TRUTH and they fight. After they fight for a while, the president thrusts his sword into the dragon's large belly. Rush drops his cigar and with a terrified look says:

The Dragon
(holding his chest)

Drat! I am slain! My innards are pushed in,
And here I am caught with no Oxycontin!

(he dies dramatically and the audience is urged by Room to cheer)

Room

Now it's safe for our children to listen
To radio shows without all that cussin'
The president has won and truth is abidin'
And we won't have to deal with "President" Joe Biden!

The President

I'd not be so quick to toot your kazoos,
The media's still evil, just look at Fox News!
With gate crashers avoiding the Secret Service,
There's lots of reasons for me to feel nervous!

Room

There's less to fear now that old Rush is dead,
Who else could there be to cut off your head?

(The music begins and the rapper dancers enter. They do their dance, kill the president and move off stage)

Room

(kneeling down and feeling president's pulse)

Alarm! Alarm! They've cut down our hero,
His blood has been drained and his pulse is near zero!
Is there not in this house a doctor of note,
Who can patch up his wounds with an antidote?
Is there not one, not sawbones nor wheeler,
A practioner, surgeon, dentist or healer?

Ah here comes someone who might be of help,
But seems somewhat awkward, a bit of a whelp!

False Doctor

Matthew Thornton's my name, though some call me Aetna,
Or Harvard Pilgrim or Blue Cross etcetera.
Insurance's my game, my premiums cost billions,
But if you get sick, I'll not act civilian.
I've hundreds of thousands of clerks and pen clickers,
Who've only one thing to say to the sickers.
No, sorry, no, your ailment's not covered,
It seems clear to me that the loophole's discovered,
The escape clause is here and your I's are not dotted,
You forgot to sign there, where the T is not cross-ed.
So sick you may be and sick you will stay,
For there is no treatment for you today!
(She looks down at the president)

So what have we here, an obvious slacker,
What is his illness, pray what is the matter?

Room

It's our hero, our president, the brave Obama,
Who met a sad end and is now in a comma.

False Doctor

Comma, you say, how was this discovered?
Here is his policy, let's see what is covered.
(He rolls out a very long scroll across the floor and searches through it line by line)

Ah here is the paragraph that I long was seeking,
It says we won't pay for someone who's sleeping!

Room

Sleeping? That's not what is wrong with the man,
It's those danged rapper dancers who struck him and ran!

False Doctor

Ah dancers..they're covered in paragraph twenty,
Sharp objects and tappers, we've excuses a plenty!
If ever he was cut with razor while shaving,
The condition's preexisting, and we won't be paying!
I'm sorry there's nothing I can do for your friend,
Unless you pay millions on the front end.

Room

Then what shall we do with the injured Barack,
Are we at the mercy of this sawbones and quack?
Health reform is needed for Congressional adoption,

Is there no hope, have we no public option?

False Doctor

Your reform is a joke, our lobbyists oppose it,
Public option is dead and everyone knows it.
The reformers have lost, let them file a suit,
So leave me alone to enjoy all the loot.

Room

Is there none who can help, our predicament is dire!
We must save Barack, call this bozo a liar!
There must be someone, please come out of hidin'
To help save us all from President Joe Biden!

Good Doctor

In comes I, the good single payer!
My aim is to cure, now better than later.
By spreading the cost among millions of users,
Each person can afford me without those abusers,
Just show me the hero so brave and so fine,
And I'll have him up fighting for us in no time.

False Doctor

The hell you say, what kind of doctor can be
Who will not perform a wallet-ectomy?
Our fees are the prizes we win in this nation,
For airplanes and yachts and tropical vacations.

Good Doctor

Your solution is weak and your heart is much tougher,
The rich should pay more, so the poor will not suffer.
So bring me the sick, the unhealthy and dying,
And I'll patch 'em up free, without hardly trying!

False Doctor

Give it away free? Have you lost your senses?
We need that money for Mercedes Benzes!
Sending out the bill, that's always the best part,
We offer full menus or else a la carte!

Good Doctor

Healing comes first and not health insurance,
And this poor man here's reached his limit of endurance,
I know how to cure him and I'll not be amiss,
Come on, Obama, I'll heal you with a kiss!

False Doctor

(comes at her with the sword labeled LIES)

Oh no you don't, you miserable do gooder,
I've tired of your voice, as saccharine as sugar,
I'll not stand by why you give it away free,
What if *that* caught on, then where would we be?

(The good doctor finds Barack's sword labeled TRUTH and they fight for a while.
Eventually the good doctor stabs the false doctor and she begins to fall down)

False Doctor

Drat! I am slain, I'm as dead as a cactus,
And my policy rules out doctor malpractice.
(she dies and lies down next to Rush)

Good Doctor

(kneels down and kisses the president)

Arise dear sir for our country needs saving,
There's trouble amiss and the Right's misbehaving,
We need you to save us from greed and from evil,
From talk radio's lies and Wall Street's upheaval!

The president

(rubbing his eyes)

That's the longest rest I've had in a year,
Since I went out with that Harvard professor for beer.
There's work to be done but I need your assistance,
Just give me a chance, and we'll conquer resistance!

Room

And now comes the time to end our fair drama,
Of the evil man Rush and president Obama.
It's an important story, for kids of any age,
But there's no more room for bodies on our stage!
So rise again, actors, rise like the new year,
For you too are good and should be of good cheer!
Our hero's reborn from dark into brightness,
And we pray the new year brings joy and kindness,
Social justice and peace we plead for our nation,
Not misinformation or hallucination.
May all of us find peace and enjoy prosperity,
And spare us from sickness, injustice and poverty.
The time of darkness will soon be behind us,
As the days grow longer and warmer months greet us,

We thank all here present, you were all so polite!

All
Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!

(curtain call, all bow, exit all)
The End