

## A Response to Pauline Greenhill

Daniel Stone

Pauline Greenhill's reflections "On the Whiteness of Morris: An Illumination of Canadian Folklore" concern themselves more with Canadian folkloristics than with Morris dance activities. Her aim is to "suggest that Canadian folklorists who are white, English-speaking, and middle-class must recognise that we live in a society of white supremacy and white privilege." Since Morris dance is mostly done by white dancers in white costumes, she finds it an easy take-off point for social commentary. Despite her criticism, Greenhill, a former Morris dancer, likes the informality of Morris performance which undercuts social rigidities.

I have two problems with Greenhill's interpretation.

First, Morris dance is so little known and enjoys so little prestige that I find it hard to connect it with supremacy and privilege of any sort. As far as I know, no one makes a living out of Morris dancing; at best, teaching an occasional workshop supplements the modest income of a very few professional folk musicians. In addition, North American Morris owes its popularity to the counter-culture folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s rather than to its English origins. Like other participants in the folk revival, most

Morris dancers seem politically left-of-centre and unsympathetic to the present social system. Efforts to appear English, like efforts of other city folk to appear Appalachian or Western, represent romantic reactions to commercial mass culture. Early attempts to implant Morris dance in establishment culture during Canada's imperial period proved unsuccessful, as in the Winnipeg school system from about 1930 to 1960.

Second, Greenhill's symbolic interpretation of white seems dubious. Morris whites come from 19<sup>th</sup> century English village dress and are essentially the same as the white uniforms worn to play cricket, another English village activity. As Greenhill correctly points out, Morris dance has attracted few "dancers of colour," but, in contrast, cricket is enormously popular in the West Indies and throughout the Indian subcontinent. Dark-skinned cricketers dominate international competition, and, among Winnipeg's amateurs, only West Indians seem to use the Assiniboine Park cricket pitch. If white clothing has not alienated cricketers of colour, white clothing is probably not responsible for the Caucasian domination of Morris dancing.

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About 1915, a theatre was built. It was in business for a while and closed. The building was then used as a dance hall where big "moochigans" (Cree for "dance") were held. A two piece orchestra consisting of a fiddle and someone chording on the piano furnished the music. The Indian elders sat on benches along the walls and did a shuffle in time to the music.

Siddon Key, Pioneers Who Blazed the Trail (High River, Alberta)



When night came, the town was full of dances. One could have a choice, and most of us managed to spend some time at each before daylight.

Unattributed, Pioneers Who Blazed the Trail (High River, Alberta)