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Citation

Langhans, Edward A. 1975. A restoration actor's part. Harvard Library Bulletin XXIII (2), April 1975: 180-185.

Permanent link

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A Restoration Actor's Part

Edward A. Langhans

THE JANUARY 1971 ISSUE of the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN contains an admirable analysis by Edward F. J. Tucker of the manuscripts at Harvard of Ferdinando Parkhurst's translation of George Ruggle's Latin play *Ignoramus*. As Professor Tucker notes, the play has come down to us in three versions, which Harvard acquired from the Duke of Westminster in 1967. Also included in the purchase was a unique document of great theatrical interest, Matthew Medbourne's part or "sides" for the role of Trico in the play. Professor Tucker seems to have been the first to study these manuscripts closely, though the HMC reported on them in 1872 and theatre historians have frequently cited that report ever since.¹ I would like to augment Professor Tucker's textual and bibliographical analysis with a study of the sides, for they are, I believe, the only extant example of an actor's part from the Restoration period.

Ruggle's play was first acted on 8 March 1615 at Cambridge and proved popular enough to warrant printed editions in 1630, 1658, 1659, and 1670. In 1662 Robert Codrington's translation of the work was published; it may have stimulated the Duke's Company's interest in the play, or their production of it that year may have inspired Codrington's publication. But for their production at Whitehall on 1

¹ *Third Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London: 1872), Appendix, p. 215. The report gave a transcription of the title page and cast page of MS C and noted that "There are two copies of close and one copy of the paraphrastic translation." No mention was made of the sides. Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1928), pp. 214-215; Bernard M. Wagner, "John Rhodes and *Ignoramus*," *Review of English Studies*, V (January 1929), 43-48; Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: 1961), I, 302, 423; and William Van Lennep, ed., *The London Stage 1660-1800* (Carbondale, Illinois: 1965), Part 1: 1660-1700, p. 58, cite and draw information from the HMC report but do not show evidence of having studied the manuscripts. Edward F. J. Tucker, "The Harvard Manuscript of Parkhurst's *Ignoramus*," HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, XIX (January 1971), 5-24, is the article I have cited here. Professor Tucker's Harvard dissertation was a critical edition of Parkhurst's *Ignoramus*, and he also published "*Ignoramus* and Seventeenth-Century Satire of the Law," HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, XIX (July 1971), 314-330.

November 1662 the actors used (perhaps even commissioned) Ferdinando Parkhurst's translation. Parkhurst's work was never published. As Professor Tucker demonstrates, one of the versions of the play at Harvard, which he designates MS C, is a conflation of "three manuscripts, or at least of three separate stages of composition" in Parkhurst's hand.² The sides, he notes, were also written by Parkhurst, and though they are closely related to MS C, they were probably transcribed from an early draft of the play and not the version staged in 1662.³ This would account for the survival of the sides over the centuries; had they actually been used by the actor Medbourne, they might have been lost to us. Such documents, like promptbooks, were jealously guarded by the players and, it would seem, were usually destroyed after they served their purpose. They are today of great rarity.

The sides reflect the emendations in the play proper but in cleaner form, though this is not always the case. In III, iii, for example, MS C has the following stage direction for the character Trico: "(pockets y^e sugar)." The sides contain only "(sugar)" — a clue to the business but not a full explanation of it. More often than not, however, the sides are more complete, as, perhaps, was the early draft of the play on which the sides seem to have been based. In III, v, the line "he has swallow'd the hook" should have been marked as an aside in the full text, as it is in the sides. In IV, x, the sides tell us that Trico is supposed to hide after he says "to your work with celerity," but the full text omits this direction. In V, vii, the sides direct Trico to make an exit and later re-enter, whereas the full text leaves Trico's exit unclear. In general, the sides appear to have been written out in less haste than MS C.

Trico is not in all the scenes in the play and, according to the full text, makes his final exit before the concluding entertainment. We cannot be certain how the play ended in actual performance, for there is a discrepancy between the two manuscripts. The full text ends with an entertainment consisting of an exchange between Ignoramus and Torcol, an Epithalamium, an Epilogue (possibly omitted, for it is lined through), another exchange between Ignoramus and Torcol, a dance, and a concluding speech by Theodorus. All of these come after Trico's final exit. In the sides, however, is a brief "Ante-Epilogue"

² Tucker, p. 14.

³ Tucker, p. 23.

involving Trico and Ignoramus which is not in MS C or the other Harvard *Ignoramus* manuscripts. The Ante-Épilogue may have derived from an earlier version of the play, as Professor Tucker suggests, or perhaps it was an afterthought by Parkhurst.

The chief interest of the manuscript sides is theatrical. The role of Trico, the clever servant to Theodorus, runs to 499 lines out of an approximate total of 2900 in the whole play as found in MS C. Trico makes his first entrance in the fifth scene of Act I, which begins in the play proper (MS C) as follows:

Scen: < 6 > 5

Enter Antonius & Trico

Ant: Now Trico all my hopes depend on thee,
my time's almost expir'd, my life runs minuts.

Tric: ffear nothing Sir, both time & tide's preseru'd,
giue me leaue to cleere your eyes,
behold yon starr —

Ant: hah, my Rosabella, heaūes bless th' appearance.

Tric: approach not neere her sir, take my advice,
see you not that old woman?

Ant: what of her?

The same sequence in the sides reads:

Trico,
his part.

Actus primus, Scen: 5.

Mr Medburne

1.

— — — — — life runs minutes

ffear nothing Sir, both time & tide's preseru'd.
giue me leaue to cleere your eyes —
behold yon starr —

————— appearance

approach not near her Sir, take my advice,
see you not that old woman?

————— what of her?

As the transcribed portion shows, an actor was given extremely brief cues. The shortest in the manuscript is "yea" in II, v, but there are several other cues of only one syllable, such as "horne," "Play," "sweat," and "Court." Only three times in the part do the cues run to four words, the longest being in III, iv: "contracted now to Ignoramo."

One might expect to find longer cues at the ends of lengthy speeches, or after Trico has had no lines for some time, but such is not the case, and there appears to be no logic behind the selection of cue length. At the beginning of II, v, Parkhurst inadvertently wrote out the whole speech of Antonius as a cue: "Trico I like this plott" — but then he went back and crossed out the first three words to make it a shorter cue. In the excerpt transcribed above it will be noted that the last cue happens to be Antonius' entire speech, but the sides make it appear to be a fragment.

Not only are the cues very short, but rarely do the sides indicate who speaks the cue line. The excerpt quoted is typical: the part gives no hint as to the identity of the character to whom Trico is speaking. Elsewhere in the sides speech ascriptions are occasionally supplied, as at the beginning of I, vii, where a marginal "Theod:" indicates that Theodorus speaks the cue "cudgel'd now." But Trico appears in 23 scenes in the play, and only in five scene openings and in the Ante-Epilogue did Parkhurst provide the names of the speakers — and there seems to be no special reason why he did so in those cases.

The sides are similarly lacking in information concerning entrances. If the actor playing Trico wanted to know whether he enters in the scene quoted or is discovered onstage, or if he comes on alone or with another character, the sides would not help him. In only two instances in the play — at the beginnings of II, ii, and III, i — entrance stage directions for Trico in MS C appear in the sides, and again there seems to be no special reason for these two cases. Even then, the sides contain no helpful entrance cue line. When Trico and Antonius enter at the opening of II, ii, the sides give no indication of the last words of the previous scene, who was involved in it, or if an exit concluded it. The sides are even less helpful at the beginning of IV, iii, where there is no cue for Trico even though he has been out of the action of the play since III, v — a matter of nine pages and probably 15 to 20 minutes of playing time. But we know from information found in extant Restoration promptbooks that the prompter or his assistant normally warned and cued entrances, so that actors did not have to depend on their memories.⁴ Indeed, since the players worked in a

⁴ For examples, see Frederick S. Boas's edition of the manuscript promptbook of Edward Howard's *The Change of Crownes* (London: 1949), though Boas unfortunately omitted most of the actor warnings and cue marks; and Edward A. Langhans, "The Restoration Promptbook of Shirley's *The Sisters*," *The Theatre Annual*, XIV (1956), 51-65.

repertory system and had to carry in their heads the parts for perhaps two dozen plays, they were heavily dependent on the prompter and his book.

The *Ignoramus* sides contain only one marginal note that is not in Parkhurst's hand: the "M^r Medburne" that is written at the top right corner of the first page. The same hand entered the names of the actors on the east page of MS C at some point after the manuscript was written, as Professor Tucker demonstrates.⁵ Had the sides been annotated by Medbourne they might reveal much more to us of Restoration stage practices, but it is clear from the clean condition of the document that it did not see use in the theatre. If that is true, can we trust Parkhurst's manuscript as evidence of what a Restoration actor's part actually looked like?

Evidence from both earlier and later times would suggest that we can. The only extant sides from the Elizabethan period, those for Edward Alleyn's role in *Orlando Furioso*, are remarkably similar in form to the *Ignoramus* sides of 70 years later.⁶ Extremely brief cues are common to both manuscripts, and both are similar in their lack of helpful information about speakers of cues and the location of speeches within scenes. Alleyn's own notes on his part assure us that the *Orlando Furioso* manuscript was used in the theatre. Manuscript actors' parts from the eighteenth century, such as Macklin's part for Lovegold in *The Miser* at Harvard or Quin's part for Falstaff at the Folger, are remarkably like the *Ignoramus* and *Orlando Furioso* sides.⁷ And similar sides are still used by some professional actors today, though the practice is frowned upon by many. The actor-teacher John Dolman, Jr., explained the use of sides:

Because plays are usually produced before they are published, professional actors, from the earliest times, have been accustomed to learning their parts, not from printed books, but from what are often called "sides." These are simply pages of manuscript containing the lines of one part, with a short cue for each

⁵ Tucker, pp. 10, 15, 22.

⁶ W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses* (Oxford: 1931), Commentary, pp. 176-181.

⁷ The Harvard manuscript is discussed in Bernard Barrow, "Macklin's Costume & Property Notes for the Character of Lovegold," *Theatre Notebook*, XIII (Winter 1958/9), 66-67. The Folger Shakespeare Library has, in addition to James Quin's sides for Falstaff, Macklin's sides for Touchstone, and the part for Gomez in *The Spanish Fryar*. All of these eighteenth-century sides have marginal notes, some concerning stage business, some indicating from which side of the stage the actor should enter, and (in the Harvard MS) costume and property notes.

speech consisting of the last two or three words of the preceding line — usually with no indication of which character speaks it. Only the prompt copy contains the whole play, and the actor does not know what it is all about until he has attended enough rehearsals to enable him to remember the continuity.⁶

Over the centuries the nature of actors' parts seems hardly to have changed, and we are safe in taking the *Ignoramus* sides as fair evidence of what such manuscripts looked like in Restoration times.

The sides actually used by Medbourne in rehearsal may have been copied from Parkhurst's manuscript, but it is more likely that they were made up from the promptbook, which might have been prepared from MS C. The promptbook probably contained cuts, additions, or changes, necessitating the preparation of new parts for the players. But the sides written out by Parkhurst are all we have, and we must be grateful for the survival of so unique a document and what it tells us of Restoration theatrical practices.

⁶ *The Art of Acting* (New York: 1949), p. 78.

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