Some early English playbills

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters

Citation


Citable link

http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42669843

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University’s DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA
Some Early English Playbills

The Harvard Theatre Collection contains a few early English playbills that are both interesting and unique. In a preceding issue of this Bulletin I reproduced one that I believe to be of the Commonwealth era. Hereafter are reproduced and discussed three more, two of them of the late seventeenth century, the third of the early eighteenth.

The first (Plate 1) is a striking poster announcing a performance of Robert Howard's popular Restoration comedy, the Committee, at the New Theatre, in Little Lincoln's Inn Fields, this present Wednesday the 27th of October. As was customary in the seventeenth century, Howard's name, the cast, and the year do not appear on the bill. The cast unfortunately cannot be reconstructed, although it is likely that Cave Underhill enacted his famous part of Obadiah, but the year is readily determined as 1697. The royal arms with the letters 'WR' at the top and the local flourish 'Vivat Rex' at the bottom indicate that the bill belongs to the period of 1695-1702, when William III ruled alone after the death of Mary, and 1697 was the only year during that time in which October 27 fell on a Wednesday.

The playbill refers to the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre as new. It was then in its third year, having opened under royal license on 30 April 1695. Somewhat damaged and obviously trimmed, the bill measures 15 5/16 by 11 7/16 inches and is similar in size and format to the insertion of over 450 illustrations, including many rare playbills and a superb series of theatrical manuscripts, sold as lot 726 in the daily sale in New York 20 March 1936 and was acquired by Harvard in 1936. In addition, two extra-illustrated copies of the large-paper edition of this work (also twenty-five copies) are at Harvard, one in the Theatre Collection (No. 3), in three volumes, lot 725, purchased by Robert Gould Shaw, the founder of the Collection, and the other in the Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Collection (No. 1, lot 725).
to one in the Folger Shakespeare Library advertising a performance of *Troilus and Cressida*; or, *Truth Found Too Late* at the same theatre on the following day, October 28. These two posters are the largest English playbills of the seventeenth century in existence.

The second playbill is a Bartholomew Fair bill (Plate II), 5 by 6 3/8 inches, advertising a *New Droll* called, Fryar Bacon: or, *The Country Justice,* to be acted at *Parker's and Dogget's Booth, Near Hoster-Lane End, in Smithfield.* Parker was probably the Robert Parker who had managed the Newmarketer Company, a troupe of strolling players, in the 1680's, and Doggett, announced at the bottom of the bill in the part of the miller's son Ralph, was certainly the celebrated Thomas Doggett, the best low comedian of his age and a man of such expressive countenance and clever make-up that he wore, according to Downes the prompter, "a Farce in his Face." 6

The droll, which was not published, was perhaps the work of Doggett, the author of a successful comedy, and was evidently based in part on Greene's old play, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay.* 7 George Daniel, the antiquarian, who once owned this bill, has written in the upper left corner, *'The gift of Fillingham. Kemble has many others,*" and has twice dated it 8

11 Or in the fifth chapter of *The Famous Historie of Fryar Bacon,* a popular chapbook often reprinted in the seventeenth century.
12 Fillingham would be William Fillingham, 1601, a year that cannot be correct. The letters *WR* in the coat of arms and the flourish after the text reveal that the playbill, like the Lincoln's Inn Fields bill previously described, was issued sometime in Willim's sole reign, at the opening of the two-weeks Fair in early September.

As Ned Ward paid a visit to Bartholomew Fair in September 1699 and saw there this very droll, with Doggett playing Ralph, the bill probably belongs to that time. Ward's account of the performance is so complete and so entertaining that I quote the greater part of it:

Having heard much of a comedian's [Doggett's] fame, who had manfully run the hazard of losing that reputation in the Fair which he had got in the playhouse, and having never seen him in his proper element, we thought the time might not be very ill-spent if we took a sight of another best show in the Fair (for so they all styled themselves) that we might judge of his performances.

The number of kings, queens, heroes, harlots, buffoons, minstrels, priests, profiteers, and devils in the balcony, occasioned us to believe with the crowd, that there were no less varieties to be seen within than there were signs of without, for indeed we might reasonably have thought from their numerous appearance, that when they were all in the booth, there would be room for but a slender audience. So we put our pence into his worship's apron pocket, with a friend of Dillib, who had a sale at Sotheby's in April 1801. Kemble is John Philip Kemble, the famous actor, whose great collection of playbills is now in the Huntington Library. Daniel placed the Fillingham bill with other pieces relating to Bartholomew Fair— including the Commonwealth bill described in a previous Bulletin—in a volume that passed first to Henry Huth and then to Robert Gould Shaw; see H.L.B. 1, 182, for a more detailed account of the provenance.

Harvard Library Bulletin
I. the New THEATRE, in Little Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, this present Wednesday the 27th of October, will be presented,

A Comedy call'd,

The Committee, or The Faithful Irishman.

NO PERSON TO STAND ON THE STAGE.

Nor any Money to be after Return'd the Curtain is Drawn up.

by his Majesty's Servants: FIVAT REX.
AT Parker's and Doggett's Booth, Near Holber-Lane End, in Smithfield, during the Time of Bartholomew-Fair, will be presented a New Droll, called,

FRYAR BACON: OR, THE COUNTRY JUSTICE

With the Humours of TOLFREE the Miller, and his Son RALPH,

Acted by Mr. DOGGETT

With Variety of Scenes, Machines, Songs and Dances.

1691.

VIVAT REX.
which title the mob honoured the master of the booth, because they said he had been a Justice of the Peace, and then entered the pit where several of the top quality, of the female function, sat cracking nuts like so many squirrels, and looking round 'em for admirers...

The baskets of plums, walnuts, pears and peaches, began now to be handed about from the City fool to the jilt, and tiddle-tails of love were handed forwards and backwards, between the tongues and ears of those amorous frontiers of the impatient audience, who were forced to pacify themselves under their longing expectancies with nuts and damsons. Now and then, they broke out into Bear Garden acclamations of 'Show, show; show, show, show'; till at last, in answer to those loud-mouthed importunities, the curtain was drawn up, to reveal a trunk-braces king in a fool's cap, and a feather in it, attended by his cringing nobility, some Court jilt, and two or three flattering priests which I suppose the poet thought to be as true a representation of an old English Court as possibly he could think on. After these had entertained the licentious audience a little with their fusion combinations, they made their excuse, and the scene was shifted into a library where Friar Bacon, by his long study, had projected a brazen head, and was to wall the kingdom with the same metal, had not the devil caught him napping, and broke his most wonderful noodle into many pieces.

The priest grown drowsy with much reading, rubbed his eyes, arose from his elbow chair, and in my opinion, seemed both by his looks and actions much too ignorant as well as too young, for such a notable undertaking. When he had raved and strutted about a little, with his magician's wand, he began, like a true priest, to make large promises to the people of wonderful things which he very well knew would never come to pass, and after he had made a short occasion in praise of his brazen head, the scene changed, and shut him up in his study to consult the devil a little farther.

Then entered the miller and his son Ralph. The father seemed to be the same thing heimitated and as for his hopeful progeny, he was the only person we were desirous of seeing. I think he kept up so true a behaviour of an idiot, that it was enough to persuade the audience that he really was by Nature what he only artfully represented. I could not but conclude the part was particularly adapted to his genius; or he could never have expressed the humour with such agreeable simplicity. But, I fancy, if he was to play the part of a wise man, it would be quite out of his way. There was nothing in the part itself but what was purely owing to his own nature, for he was the comedian only, and not the poet, that rendered the character diverting. To be plain, they both acted and became their characters extremely well, for I cannot but acknowledge that I never saw anybody look more like a fool than the son, nor any miller look more like a cunning knave than the father.

The next part of the Droll that was diverting, was the country justice, whose weakness and impudence, I suppose, were designed to let the people know what ignorant magistrates have sometimes the administration of justice, and how common a thing it is for a wise man to bow a learned head to an empty noodle in authority. These were the chief of their characters, with a flying shoulder of mutton, dancing and singing devils, and such-like pieces of conjuration by the diabolical Friar Bacon, with whose magical pranks the mob were wonderfully pleased, as well as greatly astonished.

Having thus entertained us for about three-quarters of an hour, at last, with a most splendid appearance of all their lords and ladies, they concluded their
Droll. Then, from the glittering assembly, one of the best-mouthed orators steps to the front of the stage and with a cringing piece of formality, promises the audience to begin again in half an hour, as if they believed people to be such fools to fling away their money so unprofitably twice in one day, when the seeing of them once is enough to tire any man of reasonable patience.8

Ward's description of Doggett's acting, in the part of the half-witted Ralph, is one of the best that has come down to us. In commenting on the droll after he had left Parker and Doggett's booth, Ward remarks to his companion: 'What a blockhead may be a Justice of the Peace; how a rich cunning knave may have a fool for his son; ... and what jack-puddings men will make of themselves to get a little money.' The role of the Justice of the Peace was probably played by Parker, who as 'the master of the booth' had collected the price of admission at the entrance, dressed in his stage costume.

The third playbill from the Harvard Theatre Collection (Plate Ill), of undetermined provenance, is an attractively printed handbill, measuring 6 by 8 15/16 inches and advertising a performance of 'The True and Ancient History of King Lear, and His Three Daughters' at 'The Theatre Royal in Lincoln-Inn-Fields' on 'Saturday the 28th of March' for the benefit of 'Mr. Boheme.' It bears the arms of George I and, at the bottom,


8 That this bill is not a poster but a handbill, printed for distribution in the theatre and other public places, is revealed by the announcement that the program of the Nivelon, French dancers, will be Exposed in the Great Bill.
manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields, could have stuttered. It contains the three leading Shakespearean actors of the company—James Quin, the best known tragedian of his day; Lacy Ryan, who had starred as Hamlet; and Anthony Boheme, the Lear of the company, for whose benefit the play was given. Doran says of Boheme's Lear that it "was full of antique grandeur and pathos; it was, perhaps, the only character in which the former young sailor's quarter-deck walk was not discernible." 18 James Spiller, the Gentleman Usher of this revival, was one of the two most popular comedians of that day, the other being William Pinkethman, who usually played the same role at Drury Lane. It is surprising that the names of the actresses who played the parts of Goneril and Regan are not given.

To these notes of Harvard playbills I should like to append a description and reproduction of a Jacobean broadside (Fig. 1), discovered by Mr William A. Jackson in the British Museum. 19 Mr Jackson informs me that it is the work of William Jaggard, the printer of the first folio of Shakespeare. 20 Sometime in the winter of 1606-07 Jaggard purchased the shop and business of James Roberts, acquiring from him at the same time the sole right to print playbills and other theatrical announcements, a right that Jaggard held until his death in November 1623. 21 The broadside belongs

19 In a volume of miscellaneous broadsides of various dates (C.1885.74). 20 So identified by Mr P. S. Ferguson, who on typographical evidence would place it about 1617.
21 Information supplied by Mr Jackson therefore to the years 1606-23. Measuring 5 13/16 by 7 1/2 inches, it cannot properly be classified as a playbill—though its interest is clearly theatrical—because it advertises a performance of dancing by a strolling troupe of child acrobats, concluding with a dance called "The merry conceits of Jacke Pudding." 22

At the beginning of the announcement, after the words "At the," the printer has left a blank space on which has been written in ink, presumably by the manager of the troupe, "Rose in in winestreet." In the margin at the top of the broadside the same person has added the time of performance: "at 9 a [10?] Cloke," which I take to be in the morning. Since there was no Wine Street in London, the announcement is for a performance of rope dancing and other acrobatic feats—feats of activity they were called—in one of the provincial towns of England or Scotland, perhaps Bristol. There is, and was then, in the center of Bristol a Wine Street, where stood from 1616 to 1619 the town's first theatre, but I have been unable to find among its seventeenth-century taverns a Rose Inc. 23

The troupe that gave its feats of activity at the Rose advertised itself as "his Majesty's servants"—evidence that and based in part on the unpublished Court Book of the Stationers' Company, which he is engaged in editing. 24

22 With margins. Without margins it measures 4 5/16 by 6 3/16 inches, including the ornamental border.
23 Probably a jig. Jack Pudding was a celebrated clown in faires, jigs, and morris dances. The role is synonymous with the Merry Andrew of the late Restoration. See Charles R. Barber, The Elizabethan Jig and Related Song Drama (Chicago, 1929), pp. 244, 355, 378 n.
At 9 o'Clock this present day shall be showne rare dancing on the Ropes, Age by his Maiesties servants.Wherein an Irish Boy of eight yeares old both vault on the high rope, the like was never see: And one Mayd of fifteen yeares of age, and another Girle of foure yeares of age, doe dance on the lowe Rope. And the said Girle of foure yeares of agedoth turne on the Stage, and put in fourescore threads into the eye of an Needle. And other rare Activities of body, as vaulting and tumbling on the Stage, and Egges dancing upon a Staffe, with other rare varieties of Dancing, the like hath not beene see in the realme of England. And the merry concurites of Jacke Pudding.

If God permit.

Vivat Rex.
it held a warrant or commission from the king. In his voluminous records of English provincial companies, Mr. J. Tucker Murray lists two troupes that were showing feats of activity in the period 1616-23. One of these was headed by William Vincent, who was performing by authority of the king as early as June 1622 at Leicester; the other was headed by William Peadle and included members of his family. Of the two companies, Peadle's troupe appears more likely to have advertised in this broadside. Under a royal warrant dated 14 May 1616, he presented his company of dancers at Norwich in June 1616, was refused permission to appear there again in June 1620, and performed at Coventry in November of that year. As late as December 1639 either he or his son of the same name was touring with a company of dancers and acrobats that included four children.

---

William Van Lennep

---

Keats's Misdated Letters: Additional Notes

In a recent number of this Bulletin I discussed various dates that should be changed in any new edition of The Letters of John Keats. The additional notes that follow may be of some use to students. Numbers followed by an asterisk (as No. 65*) refer to letters by other writers that the editor has interpolated among those of Keats.

No. 4

No. 4 is a brief, undated note in which Keats informs Charles Cowden Clarke that Haydon cannot 'see us on this day Evening' because he is going to a performance of Timon of Athens. There were only seven performances of this play at Drury Lane in 1816—October 28, 30, November 1, 4, 8, 11, 18. Earlier I gave reasons for thinking that No. 4 was written on November 1, though I suggested that November 4, 8, or 11 were equally plausible. Meanwhile Professor Madison C. Bates has discovered and printed (Keats-Shelley Journal, III, 1954, 72-88) a new letter of Keats, written to Joseph Severn on November 1, that changes the situation entirely. In it Keats says, "I know you will congratulate me when I tell you that I shall Breakfast with Haydon on Sunday, that is, November 3. Evidently in No. 3 of October 31, wherein Keats expresses to Clarke his great delight 'at the thoughts of seeing so soon this glorious Haydon and all his Creation,' he refers to this Sunday, November 3.
List of Contributors

RICHARD C. HARRIER, Instructor in English, Colby College
HENRY W. HOLMES, Professor of Education and Dean of the Graduate School of Education, Emeritus, Harvard University
WALTER J. ONG, S. J., Instructor in English, Saint Louis University
ELEANOR N. LITTLE, in charge of the Treasure Room, Harvard Law School Library
KEYES D. METCALF, Professor of Bibliography, Director of the Harvard University Library, and Librarian of Harvard College
GEORGE PEIRCE CLARK, Associate Professor of English, Northern Illinois State Teachers College
WILLIAM KELILAWAY, Library Assistant, Guildhall Library, London
PHILIP J. MCMUFF, Assistant Librarian of the Harvard College Library in charge of the Lamont Library
WILLIAM H. BOND, Curator of Manuscripts in the Houghton Library
WILLIAM VAN LEENED, Curator of the Theatre Collection in the Harvard College Library
HYDER E. ROLLINS, Guincy Professor of English Literature, Harvard University
LOUIE L. NEVET, Assistant Director of the Office of Student Placement, Harvard University

CORRIGENDUM

Vol. VIII, No. 1 (Winter 1954)

In the article entitled ‘The Harvard Collection of Hugo von Hofmannsthal,’ p. 61, the year of accession of the collection of printed works of Hofmannsthal presented by Mr Gilbert H. Montague, ’01, should read ‘1949,’ and not ‘1947’ as printed.