



GREENWICH STUDIO THEATRE

Erasmus Montanus

By Ludvig Holberg

31st March 1994 – 30th April 1994

Translated by Julian Forsyth

Directed by Julian Forsyth

PROGRAMME



ERASMUS MONTANUS



The Greenwich Studio Theatre

presents

ERASMUS MONTANUS

by
Ludvig Holberg

adapted and directed by Julian Forsyth
designed and produced by Margarete Forsyth

31st March - 30th April 1994



The Greenwich Studio Theatre Company presents

the nun

adapted from the novel by Denis Diderot

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Pedants are 'the kind of people who treat bagatelles with respect and who immerse themselves so much in useless subtleties that they forget their chief duties and most urgent concerns ...'

Ludvig Holberg

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LECTURE SERVICES



THE COMPANY

Sonia Abercrombie

Lisbeth

Born in Belfast. Trained at Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama where she played Mary Warren in *The Crucible*, Yvonne in *Masterpieces* and Barbara in *Major Barbara*.

Theatre: Sonia played Debbie, the 15 year old delinquent leader of the girls in *Tokens of Affection* (Tara Arts Theatre), Julia in *Miss Julia* (Conway Hall), Sophie in *Just My Type* (Old Red Lion), Shura in *Chance Visitor* (Lilian Baylis), Cassandra in *The Trojan Women* and Irena in *The Three Sisters* (both at the Cochrane Theatre).

Sonia most recently played She in *And Women Must Weep* at the GST and played Lisbeth in the original production of *Erasmus Montanus*.

James Allen

Lieutenant

Theatre includes: *King Lear* (Old Vic), *The Broken Jug* (Edinburgh Festival), *The Rose and the Ring* (Latchmere), *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Factotum), *Relatively Speaking*, *Hard Times* (Century Theatre, Keswick), *The Glass Menagerie* (Pocket Theatre, Cumbria), *Wuthering Heights* (national tour), *The Three Musketeers*, *On the Piste*, *The Fifteen Streets*, *Moll Flanders* (Mercury Theatre, Colchester), *A Family Affair* (Tabard). Played the Lieutenant in the original production of *Erasmus Montanus* at the GST.

TV includes *Casualty*, *Between the Lines*.

Michael Burgess

Niels

Michael was born in London and trained at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art.

Theatre work includes: *The Life of Galileo* (Young Vic Studio), Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* (Clivedon Festival), Fred Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* and Bolshov in *A Family Affair* (both at the Tabard), Manassah in *Salome* (White Bear), Geronte in *The Illusion* (Duke's Head and Chelsea Centre), Macduff in *Macbeth* (Man in the Moon). Michael has also toured with his own show - *Magic Book of Verse* and played at the Edinburgh Festival.

Kate Crutchley

Magdelone

Kate began her career in Birmingham - in *The Archers*, the TV series *United* and the leading role of Louise in Tony Garnett's film *Prostitute*. She has worked in many regional theatres and directed at St Andrew's, Stoke and for Birmingham Arts Lab, Monstrous Regiment and the Women's Theatre Group. While programmer at Oval House she commissioned many new plays for her company Character Ladies including Joyce Holliday's adaptation of *Patience and Sarah* with the Split Bitches Co.

Fringe roles: Lady Eleanor in Sandra Freeman's *The Ladies of Llangollen*, Nancy in *Female Transport* (Half Moon), Princess in *The Lady or the Tiger* (Orange Tree/Fortune) and most recently Mrs Carter in Patrick Wilde's *What's Wrong With Angry* (Oval and BAC).

Recent TV: *The Bill*

Steven Dykes

Morten

Recent theatre includes: Colquhoun in the American Premiere of John Byrne's *Colquhoun and Macbryde* at the Theatre Exchange, Minneapolis, Phil in *Stand by* David Bown at the Symposium On New European Writing, Valencia, Spain, and Jerry in Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* for NXT (New Cross Theatre) on a tour of Mid-West America.

Mark Feakins

Rasmus

After gaining a degree in Librarianship, Mark trained at Mountview Theatre School. Since then his work has ranged from Puck at the Bridge Lane Theatre, Young Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* at the Chichester Festival Theatre, seasons at Sadler's Wells and the Mermaid Theatre, a national tour of Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* which included a performance to "lifers" in Wormwood Scrubs, and the Anglo-Japanese production of *Tango at the End of Winter* at the Picadilly Theatre.

More recently Mark has recorded a radio play, *For Lizzie*, for the Women's Radio group, an episode of the new TV series *Moving Story* and has just returned from a national tour of *Wind in the Willows*.

For the GST Mark has appeared in *Minna von Barnhelm* and the original production of *Erasmus Montanus*.

Sarah Ford

Gudrun

Training: BA Theatre Arts - California State University Hayward; Actors Institute London; New Actors Workshop, New York City.

Roles: LONDON: Gudrun in the original

production of *Erasmus Montanus*, Rachel and Mrs Cole in *Asking for It* - London New Plays Festival, Old Red Lion; Curtis and Biondello in *Taming of the Shrew*; New End Theatre, Hampstead; Liz in *Chicago*, Bloomsbury Theatre.

CALIFORNIA: Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*; Hope in *Dracula: a Musical Nightmare*; Mme Pernelle in *Tartuffe*; Gloria Rasputin in *Bye, Bye, Birdie*. Films in 1993 - *Secret Society* and *Valentino*.

Margarete Forsyth

Designer and Producer

Margarete is the new Artistic Director of the Greenwich Studio Theatre. She took an MA Degree in English and German at the University of Erlangen in Germany before teaching for four years at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

She then embarked on a career as a theatre and opera director, directing regularly for Carlos Opera and founding The Rude Mechanicals, for whom she directed Goethe's *Faust*, Buchner's *Danton's Death* and Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, all at the Young Vic Studio.

Margarete has also directed a wide range of European classics at some of London's leading drama schools. For the GST's opening season she directed *Minna von Barnhelm* and designed the sets for *Minna* and *Erasmus Montanus*. She has most recently directed and designed the GST's production of a cycle of Schnitzler plays under the title *And Women Must Weep*, which she also translated and adapted.



Julian Forsyth

Adaptor and Director

Julian taught at Erlangen University in Germany before training as an actor at Webber Douglas Academy. For the GST, in addition to adapting and directing *Erasmus Montanus*, he has played Major Tellheim in *Minna von Barnhelm* and Gilbert and Dr. Witte in *And Women Must Weep*.

His other recent work has been with the RSC in Trevor Nunn's productions of *The Blue Angel* and *Measure for Measure*, at the Almeida in Wedekind's *Lulu* and Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution*, with the Wrestling School in Barker's *The Europeans* (seen last April at the Greenwich Theatre), as Fagin in *Oliver* at Sadler's Wells and the Crucible, Sheffield, and in several West End musicals. He is now rehearsing the role of D'Estivet in *St. Joan*, scheduled for the West End in July.

His TV work includes *Poirot*, *Heroes* and *This is David Lander*.

Halcro Johnston

Jeronimus

Halcro comes from a farming family in Aberdeenshire and studied at Aberdeen University and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

He began his career at Scottish Opera, subsequently appearing with the Scottish Theatre Company in *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaites* and *The Life of Galileo*. He has played in national tours of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *My Fair Lady* and in the West End musicals *South Pacific*, *Les Misérables*, *Matador* and *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*. His latest role was Inspector Fix in *Around the World In Eighty Days*.

Tony Kirwood

Deacon

Tony trained at the London Theatre School.

Theatre work includes Trinculo in *The Tempest* at the Rose Theatre, the title role in *Scrooge*, and a solo performance of *The Diary of a Madman* at the Albany Empire. Television: *The Brittas Empire* (BBC), *The Bill* (Thames TV) and *Joint Account* (BBC). Films: *Son of Pink Panther* (to be released soon), *Fire, Ice and Dynamite* and several films for the National Film and Television School. Tony's comedy *Americans* was recently given a staged reading by the New Playwrights Trust. He recently filmed an episode of *Poirot*.

Eddie Marsan

Jacob

Eddie has been a professional actor for the last three years, graduating from Mountview Theatre School, and is now a regular student of the Science of Acting. His theatre work includes Just in *Minna von Barnhelm* (GST), Caligula in Albert Camus' *Caligula*, Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* in the open air (Oxford), the Ghost, First Player and Fortinbras in *Hamlet* (Guildford) and St Pior in *Noonday Demons* by Peter Barnes (GST).

TV Credits include *The Bill*, *Piglet Files*, *Crime Monthly*, and *Dame Edna's Neighbourhood Watch*.



Stuart Mullen

Corporal

Stuart has just finished John Byrne's *Cuttin' a Rug* at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Previously, he was at the Bridge Lane Theatre performing in Noel Grieg's new play *He is Ours Again*.

Stuart is due to finish at Rose Bruford Drama College in July, where his final show will be *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker at the Lillian Baylis Theatre.

David Plater

Lighting Designer

Before moving to London, David lit many semi and professional productions. He then trained in Stage Electric and Lighting Design at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art where he lit productions of *The Shelter* for Alby James, *The Bright and Bold Design* for Caroline Eves and *Camille* for Claire Venables.

He has lit regularly at the Greenwich Studio theatre, productions include *Minna von Barnhelm*, *Erasmus Montanus* and most recently *And Women Must Weep*.

Plays lit for the touring company Gold are *Beirut* and *Single Spies*.

David's most recent lighting design has been for the new musical *The Relationship* at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith. He is pleased to be relighting *Erasmus* and looks forward to the forthcoming production of *The Nun*.

Beeke Ropers

Costume Design/Wardrobe

Beeke first started making and designing costumes during her three years at Goldsmiths College (University of London).

Since her graduation in 1991 she has worked on several fringe productions including *Galileo* directed by Margarete Forsyth at the Young Vic Studio and *Vitus Bering* at the ICA. She has also worked with the National Youth Music Theatre on *Aesop*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Billy* and *Poppy*. Most recently she designed the costumes for the GST's productions of *Minna von Barnhelm*, *Erasmus Montanus* and *And Women Must Weep*.

Sarah Stephenson

Nille

Trained at Royal Ballet School, East 15 Acting School.

Theatre includes: Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* (Lincoln), Miss Julie in tour of *Miss Julie*, Vivie in *Mrs Warrens Profession* and Miranda in *The Tempest* (Exeter), Desdemona in *Othello* (Mermaid), Mike Leigh's improvised play *No 10* (Open Space), Mrs Markham in *Move over Mrs Markham* (Torquay). She also started the Orchard Theatre Company in Devon.

Films include: Mike Leigh's *Bleak Moments*. TV: *Strangers and Brothers*, *The Waiting War*.

After years out bringing up her family Sarah is back and has just been seen in an episode of *Anna Lee*.



ERASMUS MONTANUS

by Ludvig Holberg

translated and adapted by Julian Forsyth

THE CAST

Rasmus Berg, also known as Erasmus Montanus
Nille Berg, his mother
Jacob Berg, his brother
Lisbeth, his betrothed
Jeronimus, her father
Magdelone, her mother
The Deacon
Niels, a farmer
Gudrun, a farmer's wife
Morten, a farm hand
Lars, a farmer
A Lieutenant
A Corporal



Mark Feakins
Sarah Stephenson
Eddie Marsan
Sonia Abercrombie
Halcro Johnson
Kate Crutchley
Tony Kirwood
Michael Burgess
Sarah Ford
Steven Dykes
Renato Nadal
James Allen
Stuart Mullen

The action takes place in a Danish village
early in the 18th century

There will be no interval

Music: Grieg's 'Holberg Suite'



THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Director
Set Design
Lighting Design
Costume Design

Julian Forsyth
Margarete Forsyth
David Plater
Margarete Forsyth
Beeke Ropers

Company Manager
Stage Manager
Lighting Operator

Julia Crampsie
Renato Nadal
Giorgio Frare

Set Construction

Costumes made by

Giorgio Frare
Renato Nadal
Vicky Emptage
Beeke Ropers
Anja Siemens
Helga Bertazzo

Publicity
Photography
Publicity Design



Louisa Gummer
Camilla Watson
Vicky Emptage

For The Greenwich Studio Theatre

Artistic Director
Associate Director
Administrator
Company Manager
Front of House Manager
Stage Manager
Wardrobe Mistress
Publicity



Margarete Forsyth
Julian Forsyth
Mark Feakins
Julia Crampsie
Giorgio Frare
Renato Nadal
Beeke Ropers
Louisa Gummer

The Greenwich Studio Theatre is allowed to operate by kind permission of Bill Bridges, the Landlord and Leaseholder of The Prince of Orange Public House. The room in which the theatre is situated is dedicated to the memory of Dean Bridges.

The Greenwich Studio Theatre would like to thank the following people and companies for their support in realising this production.

Bill Bridges, Sarah Bridges, Vicky Emptage, Neil Fraser,
Susan Jenkinson, Oscar at Benefactors.

Davy's Wine Bar, Greenwich Parks Department,
Pippins Suppliers to Hotels and Catering Traders, RADA,
Greenwich Council, Goldsmiths' College Drama Department,
Scott, Jonathan and David.

The Royal Danish Embassy for organising and sponsoring a gala performance

And all those people who gave their time and talents for free, to make the costumes and set and to refurbish the theatre.

Chair Sponsors

Mrs C Johnstone, Karl Pfeiffer, Teo Maler, Gisela Ropers, Marianne Eggers, Nigel Forsyth, Joan & Mark Forsyth, Nicola Fawssett, Cornelia Graffam-Lewis, Dietrich L Graffam, Christopher and Elke Graffam, Professor Dr. Wolfgang Lottes, Schlaepfer, Theaterkreis Bortfeld, Transtelex Plc, Dudley Dods, John Humphries and Nicole Canuet, Jane Wynn Owen, Deira Cooper, Peter and Suz Buckhurst, Professor Dr. Höltgen, Sigrid and Herbert Bohn, Frank Hübner, Jörg Stegert, Ray Jones (Centre Stage), Rudolf and Martina Beck, Peter-Paul Schnierer, Ted and Margaret Batley.

If you would like to sponsor a chair at the GST, please ring 081 858 2862 or pick up a form in the foyer.

Ludvig Holberg

Two contrasting tendencies are characteristic of Danish literature in the 18th century. One is critical, based on reason, mainly influenced by French and English literature and philosophy; the other is emotional, introspective, often with a tinge of religious mysticism, and in its origin essentially a German movement. Ludvig Holberg is the embodiment of the first tendency. As far as Danes and Norwegians are concerned, all that the 18th century represents in the shape of wit and common sense, of awakening cultural life, of widening intellectual horizons, is concentrated in this one man.

In 1722 the first Danish theatre was founded in Copenhagen. Its directors, two Frenchmen, urgently needed someone to write original plays in Danish to supplement the diet of translations of Moliere. They turned to a university academic who had recently published a mock-heroic poem called *Peder Paars* under the pseudonym Hans Mikkelsen. In this work, a parody of Virgil's *Aeneid*, a Danish tailor's apprentice makes the short trip across the water from Zealand to Jutland to visit his sweetheart. The Olympian Gods interfere for and against him, and in the end this unlikely hero never gets to his destination because the author lost interest in finishing the work. *Peder Paars* was an oblique satire of social conditions prevalent in Denmark, and only just escaped being publicly burned for poking fun at Danish institutions. This literary debut turned its author into Denmark's foremost writer - there was, as yet, no competition - and it was common knowledge in Copenhagen that behind the pseudonym "Hans Mikkelsen" was hiding the current Professor of Eloquence at the University, the Norwegian Ludvig Holberg.

The author of *Erasmus Montanus* and 31 other comedies that are regularly performed in Denmark and Norway but studiously ignored in Britain, was born on December 3rd 1684 in the bustling Hanseatic port of Bergen, the youngest of twelve children. His father, a farm lad who had worked his way up through the army from a private's rank to that of Lieutenant Colonel, died when Ludvig was only a year old, and his mother, who came from a distinguished family of merchants and government officials, died when he was 11, leaving him in the care of her cousin, a pastor. Ludvig was originally intended for the army, but, perhaps because he was small and delicately built, the plan was soon dropped and he was sent to the Latin school in his native city.

The headmaster was a great lover of Latin disputations (the ancestor of our modern school debating societies), and was so proud of the work of his pupils that he had some of the best disputations printed in learned journals. Holberg was a diligent enough pupil, but was more interested in the life of the city around him. The citizens of Bergen, who even today display a brusqueness and independence which sets them apart from other Norwegians, were solid practical merchants with a dislike of vain ostentation and a readiness to "muck in" together when necessary without regard to class differences. Hardworking, economical and orderly - that is how Holberg wrote of them later with admiration, and in return his statue looks out today with measured gaze over the tourists milling round the Bergen docks and in and out of the Old Wharf.

After leaving school, Holberg spent a year or so in the nearby district of Voss as a tutor in the house of the local pastor, occasionally deputising in the pulpit. The country people loved his sermons, he records, but the pastor was less pleased, for they lasted only a quarter of an hour.

It was not long before the Wanderlust he had inherited from his father got the better of him and, ignoring all the dire warnings of his mother's relatives, and with only 60 taler in his pocket from the sale of a few possessions, he set out for one of the European centres of classical learning at that time, Amsterdam. The young man was optimistic that, once his meagre funds had run out, he could put his learning to practical use and earn his keep through teaching.

This first foreign trip of Holberg's was a disaster. His age, health and finances were all inadequate for the trip. After an ignominious scuffle over the border in Germany where he had tried to escape from a tavern without paying the bill, he returned to Norway, too ashamed to go home to Bergen and the *Schadenfreude* of his mother's relatives, hiding instead in the quiet town of Kristiansand on the south coast, where he eked out a precarious living by giving lessons in French.

Some of his activities here crop up in modified form in *Erasmus Montanus*. Ludvig shocked the good citizens of Kristiansand by staging a public disputation, one of which his old headmaster might not have been proud, in which he first maintained and then refuted a thesis he had read in a Dutch book, to the effect that "women are not human beings". His efforts to earn his keep were hampered by the presence in Kristiansand of a professional rival, a Dutchman who likewise professed to teach French. The two men agreed to hold a public debate to show whose knowledge of French was the greater: "I

fenced with him in Norwegian French, and he parried with his French-Dutch, and I do not believe the French language has ever been worse mistreated. We each spoke incomprehensibly enough when we were by ourselves, but it must have been much worse in the state of anger which then possessed us." Eventually, the two rivals agreed to divide the business.

As soon as he had acquired sufficient funds to travel again, Holberg, undaunted by his first discouraging experience, undertook further trips abroad: first to England, where he appears to have spent two years in the Bodleian Library in Oxford engaged in researches of various kinds, supplementing his meagre income from private tuition with his expertise on the flute. Further studies at the University of Copenhagen were interrupted by a third foreign tour, this time to Germany as travelling companion to a young nobleman.

His fourth European expedition (1714-1716), comprising 18 months in Paris and six in Rome, during which he shared lodgings with an Italian acting troupe, seems finally to have satisfied his irrepressible hunger for travel, and on his return to Copenhagen he settled at last into a poorly paid post at the University as Professor of Metaphysics, a subject he despised. Obligated to begin his tenure with the customary formal oration in praise of his subject, Holberg left his hearers in little doubt as to his true feelings by spicing his address with irony and referring to it afterwards as a funeral oration.

Much to his relief, he was made Professor of Eloquence a few years later in 1720, enabling him to refresh his knowledge of classical literature, and in 1730 he took over the post to which he had always aspired, Professor of his favourite subject History, writing several readable and accessible historical works which were just as highly regarded in his day as the comedies.

Holberg remained a bachelor until his death in 1754. On account of his parsimonious way of life, the money he earned by his writing made him a wealthy man. His acquisition of the title of baron by the bequest of his fortune for the re-establishment of a college is a little out of keeping with the democratic spirit of his writings.

He is claimed by both Denmark and Norway, and in both countries he is affectionately referred to as "Father Holberg". His statue stands by the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen as it does by the National Theatre of Oslo. The epitaph he wished for himself, echoing the words of wisdom expressed by the enlightened Lieutenant at the close of *Erasmus Montanus*, was to be remembered as "a useful citizen".



The Comedies

For the Danish theatre, which opened on September 23, 1722, Holberg wrote 32 comedies, the first 15 of which (including *Erasmus Montanus*) flowed from his pen in a little over a year.

Like other playwrights from the days before the invention of literary copyright, Holberg did not hesitate to take the framework of his plays from a variety of different sources; he borrowed freely from Aristophanes, from Plautus and Terence, from the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*, and from Moliere, to whom he is most often compared, with the important difference that Moliere was a court dramatist, whereas Holberg wrote his plays for and about the ordinary people of his day: officers, artisans, peasants and respectable small town citizens.

The plots in his plays are often conventional, and many of his characters are based on stock comic types, but he always transplants them to native soil and builds on his own experience. He kept his eyes open wherever he went for the "ridiculous in mankind". Most of his plays are centred, like Moliere's, on a central character who personifies some human folly, though in contrast to the driving obsessions of Moliere's *Miser* or *Misanthrope*, the foibles are easily corrigible. *The Political Tinker* ridicules an ignorant know-all who regards himself as a potential political statesman; *The Restless Man* satirises the sort of person who appears to be continuously busy but achieves nothing at all; *Jean de France* exposes the foolish snobbery of educated Danes in the use of the French language and French customs; *Erasmus Montanus* pokes fun at academic pedantry.

Holberg's chief targets - Pedantry and Superstition

There was no type of personality Hulberg abhorred more than the pedant. He was compelled to associate with obvious pedants in the University of Copenhagen, particularly during his tenure of the Professorship of Metaphysics. But his campaign against pedantry extended beyond the confines of the university into all walks of life.

He once wrote in an essay that pedants are "the kind of people who treat bagatelles with respect and who immerse themselves so much in useless subtleties that they forget their chief duties and most urgent concerns, who busy themselves with the husk and neglect the kernel, and fall in love with their own follies."

Only in one social class did he find very little pedantry, namely among the peasants: "One can say that of all classes no one is freer of pedantry than the peasant class." But they were in turn badly ridden by superstition, which Hulberg ridiculed with almost equal vehemence.

His critique of pedantry on the one hand and superstition on the other is an expression of the rationalistic philosophy which led him to take the "middle course" in all things. He poked fun at extremities of all kinds, whether of orthodoxy or radicalism.

There was occasion enough for this in his own country. Toward the end of the 17th century Denmark-Norway had lost contact with the great currents of intellectual life in Europe. The passion for humanity which had been the criterion of the true humanists and awakened their interest in historical and philological study had turned into pure formalism. Orthodox religion and Latin grammar had combined to change a love of learning into a method without content, a subtle sophistry of knowledge.

This was particularly true of metaphysics, the teachings concerning the supernatural, which had largely been inherited from medieval scholasticism. Even before the Reformation this sublime gothic structure had been hollowed out by the newer scientific views, but many of the Protestant men of learning at Copenhagen were still wrapped up in it and unable to raise their sights beyond it. Metaphysics was to them the supreme test of formalistic learning, and its greatest joy was the *philosophia instrumentalis*, a method of disputing and freely speculating on any subjects (of which the disputants might have no personal knowledge whatsoever) without reference to experience or observable reality. The skills acquired in mastering this method might be useful in the legal profession, but of little benefit to society at large.

The superstitions of the common people flourished in part precisely because of the indifference to their problems shown by the learned. Every unusual event was popularly interpreted as an omen of something else. If a peculiar herring was caught in the Kattegat, it was a sign of impending catastrophes. If a little girl was born with some odd-looking deformations on the top of her head, it was thought to be a warning of the Lord's displeasure with the new fashions in women's hats. Books were published around 1700 in which such ideas were advanced in all seriousness, making even the Lord into a kind of super-pedant.

Holberg's self-appointed task became that of clearing the air in Denmark-Norway of the trend towards pedantry. This was one of the contributions of 18th century thinking in general, and Holberg here brought the Twin Kingdoms of Denmark and Norway into harmony with the best thought of his times. He asked that orthodoxy give way to common sense, that Latin be replaced by the native tongue, and that purely learned studies yield to practical inquiries into the nature of man and his world. These were ideas he advanced in all his writings, seriously in his essays and histories, more lightheartedly and effectively in his comedies, poems and satires, notably in a work he wrote in 1741 which reminds one of *Gulliver's Travels*. In *Niels Klim's Journey Through the Underworld* the hero, in the act of exploring a cave near Bergen, falls through the earth's crust into another world and enters a series of countries that are caricatures of European states. There is a country where monkeys are in charge, and he wins great renown by introducing wigs. Everyone is concerned with ceremony, useless learning, hairsplitting legal decisions, disputations on abstract and impossible themes.



Erasmus Montanus

Erasmus Montanus appears to have been written in 1723, but was not published until 1731, and not performed until 1747, when the Danish Theatre re-opened after a long enforced closure during the reign of a pietist King who frowned on popular amusements. The lapse of time between the play's writing and its publication suggests Holberg may have wanted to avoid antagonising too many people at the university until his status was more secure.



This adaptation

Holberg's plays, while preserving the conventional unities of time, place and action, follow his models Plautus and Moliere in adopting a five act structure. For the purposes of this production of *Erasmus Montanus* it was thought preferable to make the action continuous, enabling me to trim the play a little and cut out some of the repetitions of arguments.

With an insufficient command of either Danish or Norwegian I had to work from an early 19th century German translation which, I was assured by Norwegian friends, is very faithful to the original.

The play deals with the return of a young student after three years' absence to the farming village in which he grew up. The biggest change from the original has been in the creation of a recognisable community of farmers to interact with this central character. Holberg has two sets of parents, a deacon and a bailiff, and the shortage of stage and dressing room space at the GST induced me to "kill off" Erasmus' father and the bailiff and redistribute their lines among the other characters. In order to try to bring the farming community to life, we spent a few days improvising with the characters in given situations and some of the lines that grew out of those improvisations have found their way into the finished text.

The brief prologue was added during rehearsal as an aid to appreciating the puzzlement that farmers experience at the change that has come over Erasmus as a result of his university education.

One can no longer assume, as Holberg could, that a significant proportion of a theatre audience understands Latin, and so it was decided in rehearsal to make the deacon's limitations in the use of the language, in his confrontation with Erasmus, more obvious to a modern audience by using well-known quotations rather than the string of grammatical rules and maxims which are all the deacon can remember from his student days.

The changes will not have added much to Holberg's original intentions. I can only hope they do not obscure the didactic value of the piece and the spirit of Holberg's writing.

Julian Forsyth

(Gleaned from A History of Norwegian Literature by Harald Beyer; An Introduction to Scandinavian Literature by Elias Bredsdorff, Brita Mortensen and Ronald Popperwell; Spielplan by Georg Hensel.)



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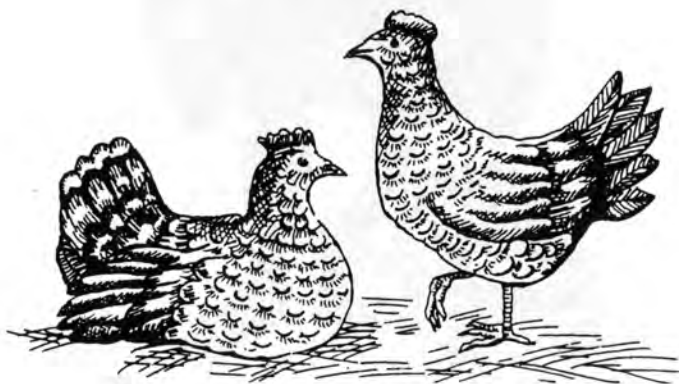
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