



GREENWICH STUDIO THEATRE

Erasmus Montanus

By Ludvig Holberg

30th January 1996 – 18th February 1996

Translated by Julian Forsyth

Directed by Julian & Margarete Forsyth

PROGRAMME



ERASMUS MONTANUS

The Greenwich Studio Theatre



Greenwich Studio Theatre was founded in 1990 at the Prince of Orange pub next to Greenwich BR station. The three actors who set it up, Neil Linden-Johnson, Nick Carpenter and Ian Embleton, ran the GST for two and a half years, mainly as a receiving venue for visiting fringe companies, while staging successful productions of their own, notably *Distant Point* by the 20th century Russian playwright Alexander Afinogenev, which was nominated for a London Fringe Award.

In 1993 the theatre's name and business was sold to husband and wife team Margarete and Julian Forsyth, who refurbished the premises and went on to stage eight productions of little known European plays by authors from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland, acquiring for the GST a reputation to rival that of the Gate Theatre at Notting Hill, and winning a Time Out Award and the London Fringe Best Director's Award in 1994 and a nomination for the 1995 Peter Brook Empty Space Award. In June 1995 the GST secured private sponsorship for a new season of plays from investment advisers GLC Ltd, matched under the pairing scheme by government funding from the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts.

However, as a result of an increasingly difficult relationship with the publican and lease-holder of the Prince of Orange, the Forsyths decided with regret to uproot Greenwich Studio Theatre from its original base and look for alternative premises where the long term prospects might be healthier.

The GST's "divorce" from the Prince of Orange culminated in the GST team being locked out of the premises and denied access to their equipment and seating, and in a High Court hearing on September 21st 1995, at which the Forsyths obtained an injunction which protects their right to the name and reputation of Greenwich Studio Theatre (pending a full trial), and a court order for the recovery of all GST property. The Forsyths then accepted an invitation from BAC's Artistic Director Tom Morris to take up temporary residence at BAC and in October 1995 revived their production of Wolfgang Borchert's *Out in the Cold* as part of the "I Wish I'd Seen That" season in Studio 1.

Greenwich Studio Theatre in Exile
at BAC, Lavender Hill, Battersea SW11 5TF
Tel & Fax: 0171 978 5688

Please ring our BAC office on 0171 978 5688 or write to us c/o BAC if you would like to go on our free mailing list or become a Friend of the GST.

The Greenwich Studio Theatre Company

presents

ERASMUS MONTANUS

by
Ludvig Holberg

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

30th January - 18th February 1996

sponsored by GLC
"Still working for London"



*GLC Ltd is an award winner under the 'Pairing Scheme',
(the National Heritage Arts Sponsorship Scheme) for its support of the
Greenwich Studio Theatre Company.*

*The scheme is managed by The Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts
(ABSA)*

THE COMPANY

James Allen

Lieutenant

Theatre includes: *Julius Casear* (Royal Exchange, Manchester), *King Lear* (Old Vic), *The Green Parakeet* (GST), *Erasmus Montanus* (GST), *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Glass Menagerie* (Pocket Theatre, Cumbria), *Relatively Speaking*, *Hard Times* (Century Theatre, Keswick), *Moll Flanders*, *The Three Musketeers*, *The Fifteen Streets* (Mercury Theatre, Colchester).

TV includes *Casualty*, *Between the Lines* (BBC), *The Knock* (ITV).

Short Films: *Identity*, *Appeal* (NFTS)

Jessica Bavinton

Stage Manager

Worked for the National Youth Music Theatre on productions of *Annie*, *The Threepenny Opera* and *Whistle Down the Wind* at the Edinburgh Festival. Jessica also recently worked for the comedian *Bob Doune* at the Bloomsbury Theatre.

Francis Crampsie

Corporal

Francis trained at Mountview Theatre School.

Theatre includes: Big John in *Calamity Jane* at BAC, *Pacific Overtures* (Bridewell Theatre), a workshop production of *Phobia* - written and directed by Ray Davies of *The Kinks*, Bagheera in *The Jungle Book* (St. Georges, Great Yarmouth) and the original production of *Erasmus Montanus* at the GST.

Films includes: *The Long Winter* (NFTS)

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: *Backup*

Steven Dykes

Morten

Steven has appeared in the GST's previous productions of *The Nun* and *The Green Parakeet*. Other recent theatre includes *Stand for NXT* at the Pearce Institute, Glasgow and as William Morris in *Clever as Paint* at the Hen and Chickens.

Television includes *Casualty*, *EastEnders* and *The Bill*

Steven will follow *Erasmus Montanus* with *Macbeth* for Actions and Words Theatre Company.



Vicky Emptage

Assistant Designer

Vicky studied at Middlesex University and is an established designer who has been part of the GST team since the beginning. Her work for the GST includes set painting and poster design for all their previous productions. Away from the theatre she has illustrated many books and produces a range of designer stationery and gift wrap.

Sarah Ford

Gudrun

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

Roles: Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, Bombour in *The Hobbit* at The Dukes, Lancaster, 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, 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*.

Other work: student films, photographic work & commercials.

Margarete Forsyth

Director & Designer

Margarete is the Artistic Director of the GST. 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.

Since then she has 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*, Büchner'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 she has directed *Minna Von Barnhelm*, *And Women Must Weep* (Nominated for Best Director - London Fringe Awards 1993/4) which she also translated, *The Nun*, *The Green Parakeet*, *A Spanner in the Works*, *The Will* and *Out in the Cold*. As a designer Margarete created the sets for the GST's *Erasmus Montanus*, *Minna Von Barnhelm*, *The Will* and *Out in the Cold*.

For Margarete's first season at the GST the theatre was awarded a Time Out Award for Outstanding Achievement.

Julian Forsyth

Adaptor and Director

Julian taught at Erlangen University in Germany before training as an actor at Webber Douglas Academy. As Associate Director of the GST he has adapted and co-directed *Erasmus Montanus* (Best Director at the 1994 London Fringe Awards) and *Out in the Cold*, adapted *The Nun*, translated *A Spanner in the Works* and *The Green Parakeet*, and appeared in *Minna Von Barnhelm*, *And Women Must Weep* and *The Will*.

His other recent theatre work includes Jacques in *The Miser* with Ian Richardson (Chichester Festival Theatre), Dr Manette in *Tale of Two Cities* (Greenwich Theatre), Poulengy in *St Joan* (Strand), Trevor Nunn's productions of *The Blue Angel* and *Measure for Measure* for the RSC,

Wedekind's *Lulu*, O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* and Howard Barker's *Scenes From An Execution* (Almeida), Barker's *The Europeans* (Greenwich Theatre and the Wrestling School), and Fagin in *Oliver* (Sadler's Wells and the Crucible, Sheffield).

Julian is currently playing Claudius in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* at the Royal National Theatre.

Catherine Harvey Lisbeth

Catherine trained at Central School of Speech & Drama, Oxford University, and studied for one year with Ian McKellen, The Cameron Macintosh Professor of Contemporary Theatre, who directed her as Sonja in *Uncle Vanya*.

Theatre: *Double Desire* (Edinburgh and New End Theatre), Evelyn in *Absent Friends* (Brockley Jack).

Radio: *Poetry Please* and *Short Stories* for Radio 4.

Bernard Kay Jeronimus

Early: Trained Old Vic, London

Cheeky: Age 24 - learned, rehearsed and played *Macbeth* in 20 hours.

Lucky: Haven't had to take a civilian job for over 40 years.

Reppy: Scores of parts in various reps - where have they all gone?

Telly: Who was the idiot who turned down *Z Cars*? Killed Ida Barlow in *The Street*. Known as the 'J.R.' of *Crossroads*.

Filmically: *Dr Zhivago*, *Darling Lili*, *The Hunting Party* (the English actor's dream - a Western), *Trog* - Joan Crawford's last film.

Lately: *Galileo* at the Young Vic, Glendower at the RSC, French King in *Fruit 'n' Fibre*. *Minna von Barnhelm* and *The Green*

Parakeet at GST.
Futuristically: ????

Tony Kirwood Deacon

Tony trained at the London Theatre School.

Theatre: Trinculo in *The Tempest* (Buttonhole Theatre Co), a solo performance of *The Diary of a Madman* (Albany Empire) and two runs of *Erasmus Montanus* at the GST.

Television: Soon to be seen in a new series of *Cadfael*. Also *The Brittas Empire* (BBC), *The Bill* (Thames TV), *Joint Account* (BBC) and *Poirot* (ITV).

Films: *Son of Pink Panther* and *Fire, Ice and Dynamite*.

Tony's comedy *Guatemala* has been performed by the New Playwrights Trust.

Ben May Assistant Director

Trained at Lancaster University, reading Theatre Studies and English.

Ben directed *Richard III*, *The War Plays* and *In The Penal Colony* (Duke's Theatre Studio); worked on *Libration* (Woman's Theatre Workshop); designer and director's researcher for *Story of an African Farm* (National Theatre Studio) and most recently worked on *Macbeth* (Company Adrift).

Andrew Muir Erasmus

Theatre includes: *The Love of a Good Man* (Arts Threshold), *Journey's End* (Village Theatre), *Wife Begins at Forty* (Tour), *Six*

Degrees of Separation (Royal Court & West End), *Shadowlands* (Tour), *Paulou: The Dog & the Bell* (Teatro San Martin de Caracas, Venezuela). For the GST: *The Green Parakeet* and *Out in the Cold*

TV includes: *Casualty*

Renato Nadal

Lars

In addition to appearing as Lars in *Erasmus Montanus* Renato has worked on every GST production as lighting or sound operator, stage manager or set builder. He has also operated the lighting for visiting companies at the GST.

David Peacock

Niels

David trained at Arts Educational School. Recently he toured with Barrie Rutter's Northern Broadsides in the critically acclaimed award-winning productions of *Midsummers Nights Dream* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Other theatre includes *Two* by Jim Cartwright, *Two Way Mirror*, *Dead Dad Dog* by John Mackay, *Leonardo's Last Supper* at the Actors Centre.

David Plater

Lighting Designer

Trained in lighting design at RADA where he has lit *The Shelter*, *The Bright & Bold Design* and *Camille*.

For the Greenwich Studio Theatre Company: *Minna von Barnhelm*, *Erasmus Montanus*, *And Women Must Weep*, *The Storytellers*, *Cock-a-doodle-doo*, *The Nun*, *The Green Parakeet*, *A Spanner in the Works*, *The Will* and *Out in the Cold* (also at the BAC).

Other lighting designs include the musical

The Relationship (Riverside Studios, Hammersmith), *Entertaining Strangers* and *Dark of the Moon*, (Lyric Studio, Hammersmith), *Oliver* for the NYMT (George Square Theatre Edinburgh/Adam Smith Theatre Kircaldy), *The Fox and Dead Fish* (Man in the Moon), *The Rivals* (Southwark Playhouse), *The Cherry Orchard* (Capitol Theatre, Horsham), *Girls Were Made to Love and Kiss* (Old Fire Station, Oxford), & Rossini's opera *Count Ory* (New Sussex Opera, Gardener Theatre, Brighton & Tour), Workshop '95 (London Royal Academy of Dance), *Liar, Liar* (The Red Room).

Future designs include: *It Took More Than One Man* (Southwark Playhouse) *Gaslight* (RADA) and *Workshop '96* (Royal Academy of Dance).

David is currently Deputy Chief Electrician at the Donmar Warehouse (Covent Garden).

Mary Ellen Ray

Nille

Mary Ellen Ray was a member of leading theatre companies in America, and in England helped found Paines Plough, touring extensively with that company, Foco Novo, and The Kosh.

She has appeared in the Royal National Theatre; the Royal Court; Manchester Royal Exchange; Traverse, Edinburgh; Liverpool Playhouse; Newcastle Playhouse; Nuffield, Southampton; Leicester Haymarket; Birmingham Stage Co, and the Duke's, Lancaster.

Roles include: Big Mama in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Chorus in *Medea*, Mother-in-Law in *Blood Wedding*, Kate in *All My Sons*, Ma (an ape) in *Animall*, Miriam in *Habeas Corpus*, and Gratiana in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Premieres have included *Hunting*

Scenes From Lower Bavaria, House Of Yes, The Stickwife, Sleeping Policemen, Quantrill in Laurence, Music To Murder By, Dorothy And The Bitch, The Hot Hello, Mr. Hyde, The Edge, and the one woman play, *Later*, written especially for her by David Pownall.

Recent television includes: *The Bill, Selling Hitler* and *Unnatural Pursuits*.

Beeke Ropers

Costume Design/Wardrobe

Beeke first started making and designing costumes during three years at Goldsmiths' College.

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* (ICA).

Beeke has also worked with the National Youth Music Theatre on *Aesop, Guys and Dolls, Billy, Poppy* and *Threepenny Opera*.

She designed the costumes for the GST productions of *Minna von Barnhelm, Erasmus Montanus, And Women Must Weep, The Nun, The Green Parakeet, Spanner in the Works* and *The Will*.

Benedict Sandiford

Jacob

Ben trained at Webber Douglas.

Theatre: *Falling Over England, Tale of Two Cities* (Greenwich Theatre), *The Schoolmistress* (Chichester Festival Theatre).

Television: *Men of the World* (BBC), *Touch of Frost, Cuts* (ITV), *Eskimo Dances* (BBC), *Only You* (ITV).

Latin Glossary

or - The Deacon's Guide to Latin

alea iacta est

the die is cast (Julius Caesar)

ave imperator, morituri te saluant

hail Emperor, we who are about to die salute you
(the cry of the gladiators before commencing battle)

cogito ergo sum

I think therefore I am (Descartes)

dulce et decorum est pro patria mori

it is sweet and good to die for one's country
(the poet Horace, c. 65 BC)

Gallia divisa est in partes tres

Gaul is divided into three parts (Julius Caesar)

Nemo repente fuit turpissimus

No one ever reached the depths of depravity all at once
(the satirist Juvenal c. 100 AD)

from **The Vermin-killer: being a complete and necessary family book, Anon 1755**

Lice: get the juice of a broom and mix it with oil of radish or mustard and anoint the head with it

That rats or mice may not eat books: let the printer put an infusion of wormwood into their printing ink and they will never eat the letters

Bats and rare mice to drive away: the smoke of ivy burnt does it



from **Cabbage Husbandry Anon 1774**

There are many garden cabbages which come to large size, and are much admired by cattle, but they rot and fall off long before the farmers pinch comes: what they want is sort that will resist frosts and putrefaction: the turnip-cabbages resist putrefaction of itself, but not with frosts; the garden cabbages resist frosts but rot without them: if these evils are not prevented, the cabbage husbandry cannot be of use, except in particular circumstances. The cabbage now offered to the public, is common to Sweden, Lapland, and Norway. It is hard solid and firm and never flocky; the root much exceeds a turnip; and there is no cattle but what will prefer good in feeding and fattening beasts, sheep and even horses and hogs.



from **Cheape and good husbandry Anon 1606**

Now for the preservation of these cattle in good and perfect health, it shall be meet that the young and lusty, and indeed generally for all sorts, except calves, to let them blood twice in the year, namely the spring and the fall, the moon being in any of the lower signs, and also to give them a drink of the pickle of olives mixed with a head of garlic brushed therein. And for your calves be onely careful that they do not go too soon to grass, and small danger is to be feared.

If you perceive your goat to droop or look sullen with bad countenance, it is an assured sign of sickness; but if they foam or lather at the mouth, then it is a sign of pestilence. The cure is first to separate them from the found, then to let them blood, and give them the buds and leaves of Celodine, with rushes and reeds to eat, and it is a perfect remedy.

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

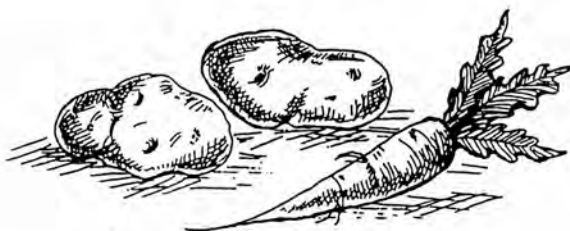


Andrew Muir
Mary Ellen Ray
Benedict Sandiford
Catherine Harvey
Bernard Kay
Kate Crutchley
Tony Kirwood
David Peacock
Sarah Ford
Steven Dykes
Renato Nadal
James Allen
Francis Crampsie

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

Directors
 Assistant Director
 Set Design
 Assisted by
 Lighting Design
 Costume Design
 Company Manager
 Production Manager
 Stage Manager/Lighting Operator
 Set Construction

Julian and Margarete Forsyth

Ben May

Margarete Forsyth

Vicky Emptage

David Plater

Beeke Ropers

Julia Crampsie

Renato Nadal

Jessica Bavinton

Richard Arduş

Andrew Charles

Richard Clayton

Giorgio Frare

Renato Nadal

Keith Radley

Benedict Sandiford

Beeke Ropers

Astrid Schulz

Louisa Gummer

Camilla Watson

Vicky Emptage

Costumes made by
 Assisted by
 PR and Programme Design
 Photography
 Publicity Design



For The Greenwich Studio Theatre

Artistic Director
Associate Director
Resident Costume Designer
Casting Associate
Administration
Publicity Consultant

Margarete Forsyth
Julian Forsyth
Beeke Ropers
Julia Crampsie
Dirk Schneider
Louisa Gummer

The Greenwich Studio Theatre would like to thank the following for their support

Laurence and Rosie Staden,
Nigel Forsyth, Clive Freedman and Laurence Winston,
Steve and all at the Devas Club,
Davy's Wine Bar, Greenwich,
Evelyn Costello, Joan Forsyth,
Matthew Francis at Greenwich Theatre,
Bradley Hemmings and David Brownlee at Greenwich Festival,
Alan, Gerry and Kevin at West Greenwich House,
Neil Linden-Johnson, Jonathan Banatvala, Don Thake,
Richard Clayton, Illona Linthwaite, Flick Blair, Turtle,
Cathy Bell, Delphine Lettau, Siobhan O'Kane,
Margaret and Martin Aston, Helga Bertazzo, Goldsmiths' College
and Tom Morris and all at BAC

The auditorium seats used in this production are from the GST's original base at the Prince of Orange pub in Greenwich. They have been individually sponsored by members of the public and supporters of the GST. The company's work has also been supported by donations from Friends of the GST.

Chair Sponsors

Mrs C Johnstone, Karl Pfeiffer, Teo Maler, Gisela Ropers, Marianne Eggers, Nigel Forsyth, Joan & Mark Forsyth, Nicola Fawcett, 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, Dera Cooper, Peter and Suz Buckhurst, Professor Dr. Hölting, Sigrid and Herbert Bohn, Frank Hübner, Jörg Stegert, Ray Jones (Centre Stage), Rudolf and Martina Beck, Peter-Paul Schnierer, Ted and Margaret Batley, Wyn Moyes, Axel Treu, Trudy Lawrence, Christin & Philip Brady, Dagmar Brunow & Bernd Hirichs, Nigel Andrew, Anna and Lorenz Lorenz-Meyer.

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T. Moriarty, James Morgan, T.P. Cowhig, Delphine Lettau, Olwen Anne Pearson, Rosemarie Morgan, Madeleine Craiggs, Jeanette Culver, Won-Yoe TYang, Mr & Mrs N Riley, Alison Ripley, Harald Marchant, Claire Marchant.

Ludvig Holberg

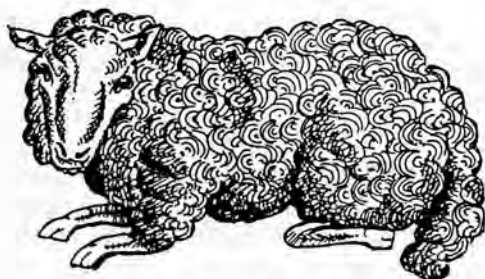
In 1722 the success with educated Danish audiences of the comedies of Moliere encouraged two French theatre directors to found a Danish theatre in Copenhagen. Urgently needing original plays in Danish to supplement their repertoire of Moliere translations, they turned for help to a university academic who had recently published, under the pseudonym Hans Mikkelsen, a mock-heroic poem called *Peder Paars*. The poem was a parody of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which Mikkelsen as a schoolboy had reluctantly learned by heart, and it described how 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 he never reaches his destination because the author lost interest in finishing the work. This literary debut narrowly escaped being publicly burned for poking fun at Danish institutions, but turned its author overnight into Denmark's leading writer. (There was, as yet, no competition.) It was common knowledge in educated circles that behind the pseudonym "Hans Mikkelsen" was hiding the Professor of Latin Literature at Copenhagen University, the Norwegian Ludvig Holberg.

The growth of literature in the 18th century in what was then the Twin Kingdom of Denmark-Norway is characterised by two contrasting tendencies. One is critical, sceptical, rational, heavily 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. 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.

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 was a farm lad who worked his way up through the army from a private's rank to that of Lieutenant Colonel, travelled extensively in Italy, served the Venetian state and enrolled at the University of Siena. He died when Ludvig was only a year old. His mother came from a wealthy family of merchants and government officials. She died when Ludvig was 11, leaving him in the care of her cousin, a pastor. The boy was originally intended for the army like his father, but being small and delicately built was sent instead to the Latin school in his native city of Bergen.

The headmaster had a passion for Latin disputations (the ancestor of our modern school debating societies), and took such pride in his pupils' skill that he had some of their best debates printed in academic journals. Though young Holberg enjoyed these battles of wits and generally worked hard at school, he was more interested in the bustling 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 who disliked vanity and ostentation of any kind and were ready whenever necessary to "muck in" without regard to class differences. Holberg praised them regularly in his writings as economical, down to earth, hard-working people, open to new ideas and influences (especially from abroad). In return, a statue of Holberg today looks out with measured gaze over the tourists milling round the Bergen docks and in and out of the Old Wharf.

Upon leaving school Holberg spent a year in the nearby district of Voss as a tutor in the house of the local pastor, occasionally deputising in the pulpit. The country people apparently loved his sermons, but the pastor was less impressed, for the simple reason that they lasted only a quarter of an hour.



It was not long before the spirit of 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 money 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. Amsterdam was a cosmopolitan centre of 200,000 inhabitants compared with Bergen's 15,000, and nobody paid much respect to a slight, 20-year-old Danish academic. Trying his luck over the border in Germany, he suffered a humiliating beating in Aachen where he tried to leave a tavern without paying the bill, and eventually borrowed enough money to return to Norway. Too ashamed to go home to Bergen and face the scorn of his mother's relatives, he hid instead in the quiet town of Kristiansand on the south coast, where he eked out a 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 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". The struggle to earn a living was hampered by the arrival in Kristiansand of a Dutchman offering rival French lessons at cheaper rates. The two men decided to resolve the problem by holding a public debate in French to show which of them had the greater command of the language. "I fenced with him in Norwegian French, and he parried with his French-Dutch, and the French language has never been so massacred," Holberg wrote. "We each spoke incomprehensibly enough when we were by ourselves, and only made matters worse by provoking each other into a state of anger." Chastened, Holberg and the Dutchman decided to share out the business between them.

Far from being disheartened by his first experiences of foreign travel, Holberg took off again as soon as he had saved enough money. He embarked this time for England, where he lived for two years, spending much of his time in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, socialising with English students and managing to supplement his income from teaching with his musical skill 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) was a Grand Tour comprising 18 months in Paris and six in Rome, during which he shared lodgings with a troupe of *commedia dell'arte* actors. Having finally satisfied his irrepressible hunger for travel, he settled at last on his return to Copenhagen into a poorly paid post at the University as Professor of Metaphysics, a subject he despised. New professors were obliged to begin their tenure with a highly formal oration in praise of their subject. Holberg spiced his address with irony and referred to it in conclusion as a funeral oration, leaving his audience in little doubt as to what he really thought of his subject.

Much to his relief, he was made Professor of Latin Literature a few years later, and in 1730 he at last succeeded to the post of which he had always dreamed, Professor of his favourite subject History. He wrote several readable and accessible historical works which were just as highly regarded in his day as his writings for the stage.

Holberg, who remained a bachelor until his death in 1754, is claimed by both Denmark and Norway, and in both countries he is affectionately referred to as "Father Holberg". Statues of him stand in front of the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen and the National Theatre of Oslo. The epitaph he wished for himself, echoing the words of 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 in 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, 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: merchants, army officers, artisans, academics and peasants.

The plots in his plays are often conventional, and many of his characters are based on stock comic types, but he always transplanted them to native soil and drew on his own experiences. 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, but 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 boasts of being a potential political statesman; *The Restless Man* satirises the sort of person who rushes around being busy but never actually achieves anything; *Jean de France* mocks the 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 Holberg abhorred more than the pedant. He had to associate with obvious pedants in the University of Copenhagen, particularly in his time as Professor of Metaphysics. But his campaign against pedantry extended beyond the confines of the university, and he wrote in an essay that pedants are to be found in all walks of life, being "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. They busy themselves with the husk and neglect the kernel, and finally fall in love with their own follies."

In one segment of Danish society he found a refreshing absence of pedantry, and that was among the rural population: "Of all classes no one is freer of pedantry than the peasant class." But they were in turn badly ridden by superstition, which Holberg ridiculed with almost equal vehemence, in *Erasmus Montanus* and elsewhere.

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 undermined 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. As the Lieutenant points out to Erasmus, 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 waters of the Kattegat, it was seen as a sign of impending catastrophes. If a girl was born with a deformed head, it was taken as a warning of the Lord's displeasure with the new fashions in women's hats. Books were published around 1700 in which these and similar notions were advanced in all seriousness, making even the Almighty 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. He demanded 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 passes through countries that are caricatures of European states. There is a land ruled by monkeys where Niels wins renown by introducing wigs. This monkey society is obsessed with ceremony and ritual, hair-splitting legal decisions, and learned disputations on the most ludicrously abstract subjects.

Erasmus Montanus

Erasmus Montanus seems 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, Christian VI, who frowned on popular amusements. The lapse of time between the play's writing and its publication suggests Holberg was anxious 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. I preferred to make the action continuous, allowing me to trim the play considerably and cut out any 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" Rasmus' father and the bailiff and redistribute their lines among the other characters. 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 with the original cast at Greenwich have found their way into the finished text.

The brief prologue was also added in rehearsal to help clarify the plot and reinforce the farmers' amazement at the extent to which Rasmus has been changed by a university education.

We can no longer assume, as Holberg could, that a significant proportion of a theatre audience will understand Latin. Holberg's village deacon pretends to dispute with Rasmus in Latin by spouting a string of grammatical rules and maxims, which are all the poor man can remember from his student days. We decided in rehearsal to make the deacon's limitations more obvious to a modern audience by using well-known Latin quotations instead.

I doubt if these changes have added much to Holberg's original intentions. I hope above all that they do not dilute the warmth and humanity that are the essence of Holberg's writing.

Julian Forsyth

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Ludvig Holberg



LISBETH