An Illustration of Traveling Players in Franz Hartmann’s Early Modern Album amicorum

June Schlueter

The album amicorum flourished in German- (and Dutch-) speaking Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Begun in German universities, where students collected autographs of fellow students and professors, friendship albums, now in archives throughout Europe, stand as a Who’s Who of the early modern period. Typically, a contributor, at the album owner’s invitation, would inscribe a motto, a dedication, and a signature, along with date and place, and, often, have his coat of arms painted on the page. As the form evolved, watercolors of emblems, costumes, objects, and scenes, reflecting personal interests and travel, were commissioned by album owners and contributors. The album of Michael van Meer, for example, who was born in Antwerp, lived most of his life in Hamburg, and visited London for a year and a half in 1614–15, gives us the familiar painting of a cock fight, with King James and others waging bets; a skiff crossing the Thames at London Bridge; King James on horseback riding to Parliament; a St. George’s Day procession; and an American Indian on display in St. James’s Park.1 Often, album owners added to their albums for years—at least thirty-five in van Meer’s case—resulting in a compendium of continental and British autographs as well as a pictorial scrapbook of the times.

A number of alba amicorum hold special interest for theater historians. Johannes de Witt, whose ca. 1596 sketch of the Swan theater has proven to be valuable and vexing, signed his friend Aernout van Buchell’s album in 1585 with a dedication in Latin and a painting of a lily, symbolizing their lifelong friendship.2 An album owned by Francis Segar, an Englishman who spent much of his career in Kassel, Germany, and who accompanied the Hessian Landgrave Moritz’s son Otto to London in 1611 when the prince was a hopeful for the hand of James’ daughter, contains the signature of Ben Jonson on one page, with a dedication in Latin, and that of Inigo Jones on another, with a motto in Italian.3 A number of commedia dell’arte figures appear in friendship albums as well, and an album at the Staatsbibliothek Bamberg pictures
a late sixteenth-/early seventeenth-century outdoor stage with five actors/musicians.⁴

Such pages are not abundant: aside from the *commedia* figures, I have come across only a handful of theater-related entries in the fifteen hundred or so albums I have thus far examined. But there is one watercolor that is, to say the least, intriguing (see figure 1). It appears on f. 25 of the early modern album of Franz Hartmann of Frankfurt an der Oder, Germany.⁵ Painted with colors that remain bright, the illustration depicts six figures, in costume, on a cobblestone pavement, against a blue sky. Three—in pink, green, and blue robes, white ruffs, and helmets with plumes matching the colors of their robes—carry, respectively, a falcon, a model of a church, and a model of a boat; one—in red robe, white ruff, and golden crown atop long flowing hair—carries a flaming heart or ball. The four ride horses, while two—in doublets, ruffs, and bird masks, carrying torches—walk.

The painting, of course, could be allegorical, as at least two other paintings in the Hartmann album are. One, on f. 7, is of a young man straddling the ball of Fortune as he is pulled by contending forces: on one side, a man with bags of gold and silver; on the other, an attractive young woman. Another, on f. 137, shows the figure of a prince against a mountainous landscape, with
a vertically divided male figure on either side: one is half bishop, half man in loincloth with oil lamp; the other is half scholar, book in arm, half military man in armor with pike. Both illustrations represent common tropes in German albums. The subject painting, though unique among album paintings I have seen, also contains allegorical features: the objects the figures on horseback carry represent the four elements, with air designated by the falcon, earth by the church on a plot of land, water by the boat, and fire by the flaming heart or ball. Moreover, the two figures on foot, in rooster and owl masks, round out the conventional display as Night and Day. Indeed, the scene is much like that in a 1564 print after Maarten van Heemskerck (see figure 2), in which figures on a processional car are associated with similar representations of the sister elements, with Night and Day—cutouts of a moon and a sun atop winged horses’ heads—leading the way.

But the album painting and the van Heemskerck print show marked differences as well. Van Heemskerck’s depiction of the processional car, like those in the other album paintings, is unmistakably allegorical. Each of the four figures on the car, as well as a fifth, the coachman, representing Time, may have been performers in the 1561 Circumcision Procession in Antwerp on

The Triumph of Mundus, after a 1564 print by Maarten van Heemskerck. Permission of Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam.
which the illustration is based. But the inclusion of the four Winds, to complete the cosmic portrait, confirms the print’s allegorical nature, as does its place in the *Circulus vicissitudinis rerum humanarum*, a series of eight prints designed to present a moral lesson (pointed in Latin verses). The van Heemskerck print combines the historical moment of the ceremonial procession with the moral significance of the Triumph of Mundus, embellishing, stylizing, and idealizing what a spectator would have seen.

The album painting, by contrast, is unmistakably realistic: the scene we see is the scene a person standing at the roadside would have seen. The objects the figures carry do represent the four elements, but the allegory here is neither coherent nor sustained. Compare the headgear of the four elements on the car in the van Heemskerck print with the plumed helmets and crown of those on horseback in the album painting. In the print, each wears a further token of her allegorical status; in the album, neither the headgear nor the costumes contribute to or even complement the allegorical message. Indeed, in the album painting, it would appear that the significance of the objects is embodied not in the present moment but in an anticipated one. Clearly, there is a performance element to the painting, but the performance is not yet realized. Instead, there is a sense of anticipation, with a future event promising to actualize all the objects: falcon, church, boat, flame, helmets, crown, long flowing hair, and masks. In short, a person along the roadside and a current-day reader of the painting would see not an allegorical procession but a troupe of traveling players, with objects and gear that attract attention along the way and serve as stage properties at a future time.

Where, though, might Hartmann have seen a troupe of traveling players? And who might these players be?

Reconstructing the chronology of *alba amicorum* is a knotty task, for except for the early leaves of the album, which are conventionally reserved for princes of high estate (King James, Frederick V, the Landgraves of Germany, for example), signature pages were selected arbitrarily: even when two people were asked to sign on the same occasion, one might choose f. 120, the other f. 45v. Moreover, while many contributors inscribe both the date and place of signing, just as many do not, and watercolor illustrations are often undated and unidentified. Still, by mapping the chronology of an album, one can establish context and often infer where and when an illustration was done. In the case of the Hartmann album, entries span twenty years, from 1597 to 1617. Those that indicate place fall into two time frames: 1605–7, with numerous entries from Marburg (1605–6) and a few from Giessen, Tübingen, and Hamburg (1606–7), and 1614–17, with entries from Strasbourg (Argentoratum) (1614–15), Paris (Lutetia Parisiorum) (1615), Angers (1615–16), England (1616), and Paris again (1616–17). Dedications to Hartmann indicate that he was a degree candidate at Marburg, which means he kept his album while a university student there. In or before 1614, Hartmann traveled
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to France, then to England, album in hand. (Indeed, although there are only four entries identifying England as the place of inscription, Hartmann secured the earliest of these on a date of some import to Shakespeareans: April 23, 1616.)

Aside from coats of arms and a number of paintings on pages signed by contributors, the Hartmann album contains at least eight watercolors, including the traveling players, that appear to have been done by the same hand. One of these is dated Marburg 1605; another is sited Marburg but bears no date: the album’s chronology, however, implies that it, too, is from 1605–6. Indeed, stylistic and technical similarities among these paintings—particularly the positioning of four of them, including the traveling players, sideways on the page—suggest that most or all were from Hartmann’s university years.

But what of the figures in the Hartmann album? Other historical paintings in the album are of courtship and tavern scenes, perhaps particular to Marburg. What in 1605–6 Marburg might have prompted this more exotic illustration? The question, though almost certainly unanswerable, is nonetheless seductive, for what we know about traveling players in Germany suggests that a German could have seen such a troupe in 1605–6 Marburg. And—even more provocative—the actors could have been English.

Much of what follows, of course, is conjectural: we cannot know what prompted the illustration. But we do know a fair amount about traveling players in Germany. And we know that Marburg and the Academia Marpurgensis, where Hartmann studied, was in a line of theatrical activity associated with the Landgrave Moritz, who not only kept English actors at court in Kassel but regularly lent the actors to others, endorsed their appearance at the Frankfurt am Main fair, and, in 1604–6, built the English-style Ottoneum theater. As the halfway point between Kassel and Frankfurt am Main—a journey of ninety-odd miles—and as the site of the university begun by the Landgrave Moritz’s grandfather, Philipp der Großmuttige, in 1527, Marburg was likely to have seen English actors, in performance or on their way to and from the fair.

Records of the Frankfurt fair indicate that English actors from the Kassel court regularly performed there, both at Easter and in the fall, from 1600 to 1613. In an informative 1978 Heidelberg University master’s thesis, Peter Brand traces the travels of the best-known of the continental actor-managers, Robert Browne, whose association with the Landgrave Moritz dates back at least to 1595. In 1605–6, the Landgrave’s troupe of English actors, having returned from France and spent the winter in Kassel, were given a letter from their patron commending them to the Frankfurt officials. Twice in 1606, the troupe of fourteen to seventeen players traveled to the Frankfurt fair. They performed at the Easter fair in April, after which they returned to Kassel. In June, they were in Strasbourg, in early August in Ulm. In late August, fifteen
persons, including Robert Browne, John Green, Robert Ledbetter, and other players from Moritz’s court, were, once again, at the Frankfurt fair, after which they returned to Kassel. The journey (of six days?) would likely have taken them to—or at least through—Marburg.

The scenario, though grounded in archival materials, is imaginary, for there is no known record of the English actors in Marburg in 1605–6. Nonetheless, it is not unlikely. Two letters from 1597 establish a connection between the Landgrave Moritz and theatrical activity in Marburg. The first indicates that Moritz lent Landgrave Ludwig of Marburg costumes and properties in order that the comedy of the Old Potentates might be performed; it was a performance that Moritz himself hoped to attend. The second records Ludwig’s return of the costumes and properties to Moritz following a performance that was seen by Grave Hans Ernest von Solms. Alternatively, Hartmann could have seen the actors in Kassel, at the Frankfurt fair, or elsewhere; sufficiently intrigued, he could have had the players painted in his album. Albums, after all, were not only records of one’s circle of acquaintances and one’s travels, prompted by motives similar to those of modern-day autograph seekers and vacation photographers; they were also acts of self-representation, designed to draw attention to the album owner as a man of experience and learning: perhaps the album owner here wished to show his knowledge of something his friends may not have seen. Or perhaps he was still excited over having seen the players perform. For despite Fynes Morison’s disdain for the English actors he saw at the Frankfurt fair in 1592, the English traveler did remark on the undiscriminating German audience, who “flocked wonderfully to see their gesture and Action.” And Balthasar Baumgartner the Younger, of Nuremberg, who also saw the players at the Frankfurt fair in 1592, reported in a letter to his wife that he was greatly impressed with the English comedians’ music and their talents at leaping and dancing. (He also mentioned that they were “köstlich herrlich geklayded”—wonderfully splendidly dressed.) Either way, Hartmann’s album amicorum offered him an opportunity to create a pictorial record of the traveling troupe.

But what of the painting itself? What can we learn from the figures on the horses and the two masked figures that lead them? Of immediate interest is the representation of gender: clearly the crowned player in red, with flowing hair, is intended to be a princess or queen. But what of the figure who brings up the rear? Is this a boy actor, dressed in a woman’s skirt? (Note that neither he/she nor the princess/queen is riding sidesaddle.) And what of the other two, in green and blue? Are they, too, in skirts, or are they in men’s robes? (The horses’ heads obscure the line of the fabric.) Three of the players on horseback wear plumed helmets: what should we make of their headgear? And what of the properties they carry? The falcon that sits on one player’s fist may or may not be alive, but it is clearly outfitted for hawking, with hood,
The August 13 entry in R. Chambers’s *Book of Days* observes that “the grade of the hawk-bearer was known also by the bird he bore”: a gerfalcon (for a king), a falcon-gentle (for a prince), a falcon of the rock (for a duke), a peregrine-falcon (for an earl), a merlin (for a lady), a goshawk (for a yeoman), a nobby (for a young man), a kestrel (for the ordinary servingman). Two other players carry a model church and a model boat: do these represent larger sets the troupe would have carted with them—or did traveling players use economical, “Brechtian” indicators in production? Morison, who saw the same performers as Baumgartner, observes that they had “nether a Complete number of Actours, nor any good Appareil, nor any ornament of the Stage.” But that was in 1592; once the actors were under the patronage of the Landgrave Moritz, did the circumstances of their performance change? Or did such properties, along with the falcon, church, boat, and flame, function allegorically in performance? And what of the two masked figures at the front? Are they part of a performance involving the four elements, or are they costumed for a masque or an *entre-act*? Is the rooster related to the cock of classical mime, the Chanticleer of medieval fabliaux, the Cucurucu of the *commedia*? And, finally, is the painting generic, or are these particular players costumed for a particular play?

Some months after the English actors returned to Kassel for the winter of 1606–7, Johann Eckel, an official at the Kassel court, informed the Landgrave Moritz of the actors’ dissatisfactions with their compensation; if it did not improve, their last performance at Kassel would be the *Comoedia vom Konig ausß England ud Schottland wie die beide gegen einand kreig führten, da der eine des Andern Sohn d Ander des Ander tochter gefangn hatte* [The Play of the King of England and Scotland, how the two waged war against each other, where the one takes the Other’s Son and the Other the Other’s daughter prisoner]. Might the players have performed this six-character play at the Frankfurt fair, just prior to their return to Kassel? If the Hartmann painting is of a particular troupe, could the player in red have been the captive princess, the player with the falcon the captive prince? Or could they have performed the *Tragedy of Julius and Hyppolita*, another six-character play in the repertory of the English actors? The characters in that play, involving the marriage of one brother and the departure of the other, are a prince, a princess, two Roman brothers, and two servants.

German records identify a number of plays that were performed by English actors on the continent, some carried there by Robert Browne. Those known to have been presented by the Kassel actors include (by title or description) *Comedy of Abraham and Lot and of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; Of a King of England who fell in love with a goldsmith’s wife and abducted her; Comedy of the prodigal son; Of a pious woman of Antwerp; Of a duke of Florence who fell in love with a nobleman’s daughter; Of Nobody and...*
Somebody: Of the two brothers King Ludwig and King Frederick of Hungary. King Frederick had all stabbed and murdered; Of a King of Khipern, of a Duke of Venice; Of a rich man and of Lazarus; Comedy of Amadis; and three that may be versions of Marlowe plays: Fortunatus, Von dem Doctor Faustus, and Vom dem Jude.

Clearly, the painting of the traveling players poses more questions than it answers. The album context has yielded a time and a place, but as yet we know of no archival documents that can, with authority, fill in the narrative. Yet like the de Witt sketch of the Swan theater—extant through the copy made by van Buchell—and the Peacham drawing of Titus Andronicus—or a German version of the play—the Hartmann illustration claims a unique place in the early modern theatrical record.

Notes

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the theater history seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America conference in Philadelphia, April 13–15, 2006.


2. Kunstbibliothek Berlin, Lipp 0Z3.


5. British Library, Eg 1222.

6. I am grateful to David Landman for pointing out the allegorical features of the painting.

7. I am grateful to John Astington for drawing my attention to the van Heemskerck print.

8. The text for the lead car, The Triumph of the World, identifies the figures and ends with this comment: “How swiftly do immutable laws on earth engender the rotary motion which reveals everything in its turn.” Ilja M. Veldman, Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism in the Sixteenth Century (Maarssen: Gary Schwartz, 1977), 137. Although these “after Heemskerck” prints have been attributed to Dirck Coornhert, Veldman suggests they were done by Cornelis Cort. See Veldman, 133–41, for a discussion of the print series.

9. One of four 1597 entries is sited Frankfurt an der Oder. These entries are the oldest in the album, which does not start in earnest until 1605.


12. John Green’s name appears frequently in continental records. Those that place him with Browne include June 1606 Strasbourg and the 1606 fall Frankfurt fair. Robert Ledbetter is on record with Browne in 1599 and 1601, as well as 1606. The “Johan Le Peter” in a 1606 letter regarding the Frankfurt Easter fair from “Robert Browne, Johan Le Peter, and other Hessische commediens” may be an elision of John Green (Johan Grün) and Robert Ledbetter.

13. An October 1606 record indicates they played in Nuremberg: they may have stopped there after Frankfurt or made the trip after returning to Kassel.


21. Of a King of Khipern, a Duke of Venice may be related to Othello, with “Khipern” a German version of Kypros (Greek) or Kibris (Turkish) for Cyprus.

22. The records also provide titles or descriptions of plays that were “probably” or “perhaps” in the Kassel actors’ repertory. Identified as such by Christiane Engelbrecht, Wilfried Brennecke, Franz Uhlebendorf, and Hans Joachim Schaefer, Theater in Kassel: Aus der Geschichte des Staatstheaters Kassel von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1959), 7–8, these include Comœdia Otto Schutz.
[Comedy Otto Schutz (written by the Landgrave Moritz)]; Die Belohnung der Gottesfurcht [The Reward of the Godfearing]; Ariodante und Ginevra; Komedia von Tarquinius und Lukretia; Speculum aistheticum (“probably”); Vincentius Ladislaus, Satrap von Mantua (written by Heinrich Julius of Braunschweig); Romeo und Julia; Viel Lärm um Nichts [Much Ado About Nothing]; Komödie der Irrungen [Comedy of Errors]; Spanish Tragedy; Sidonia und Theagenes; Julius und Hypolita; and Titus Andronicus (“perhaps”).

German titles or descriptions of the plays that were surely performed by the Kassel actors are Comoedia von Abraham und Loth und vom Untergang von Sodom und Gomorra; Fortunatus; Von einem König aus England, der sich in eines Goldschmidt's Weib verliebte und sie enführte; Comoedie vom verlorenen Sohn; Von einer frommen Frauen von Antworf; Von dem doctor Faustus; Von ein Herzog von Florenz, der sich in eines Edelmanns Tochter verliebt hat; Von Niemandts und Jemand; Von dem Jude; Von den zwei Brüder König Ludwig und König Friedrich von Ungarn. Hats der König Friedrich als errstocher und ermordet; Von ein König Friedrich von ein Herzog von Venedig; Von dem reichen Mann und von dem Lazarus; and Comoedi aus dem Amadi.