

Note

AN EARLY MODERN CUE-SCRIPT OF *MUCEDORUS*

A small manuscript document kept in the post-1500 western post-medieval manuscripts collection at St John's College, Oxford, is described in the catalogue as including on one side a '[f]ragment of *Mucedorus* ... with some variation from printed editions' (Figure 1).¹ On the verso side of the document are brief instructions in a different hand for how to use a larger document to which the smaller was attached, headed 'Berkshire described' and listing the hundreds and parishes of Berkshire along with a selective run through the region's claims to fame, including the origins of the Order of the Garter, Alfred the Great's birthplace, and a twelfth-century murder (f.2r). Attending to the 'variations' to the text of the play *Mucedorus* that are highlighted in the catalogue description, reveals that this may be a fragment of a longer cue-script produced for amateur performance.² As Tiffany Stern and Simon Palfrey have demonstrated, there are only six extant cue scripts produced in English from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries prior to the Revolution.³ Four of these are for university plays—two of which are in Latin—one for a miracle play, and one for Edward Alleyn's role as Orlando in the Rose playhouse's production of *Orlando Furioso*.⁴

This is therefore an important document in its own right, but also because *Mucedorus* has a claim to being the most popular play of the period. It received around seventeen editions between

1598 and 1663.⁵ Its inclusion of a doubling chart, common in pre-1580s playbooks but almost unique after 1581, offers an invitation for amateur performance that was widely taken up, often by artisan-class and seasonal-commercial performers both in and beyond London, famously in a disastrous performance at an inn in Witney in 1652, as recorded in disapproving but invaluable detail in the antitheatrical Puritan John Rowe's *Tragicomoedia* (Oxford, 1653).⁶ The extract's appearance on the recto of a document relating to Berkshire introduces the possibility of regional performance, one of the central contexts in which *Mucedorus* appears in archival records.⁷ It was also, famously, performed by the King's Men before James VI & I in 1610, and possibly prior to that, and Charles I owned a copy.⁸ *Mucedorus* is an important text that provided a unique appeal and utility for early modern audiences, readers, and amateur practitioners. The fragment therefore connects to a far wider national culture of amateur and regional performance for which *Mucedorus* seems to have been both an emblem and a dramaturgical template. Below, I make some initial, cautious suggestions regarding what this document might be able to tell us.

⁵ Recent scholarship on the play's popularity includes Peter Kirwan, 'Mucedorus', *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England*, Andy Kesson and Emma Smith (eds), (Farnham, 2013); Will Sharpe, 'Authorship and Attribution', in William Shakespeare and Others: *Collaborative Plays*, Jonathan Bate, Eric Rasmussen *et al* (eds), (Basingstoke, 2013), 643–747; Kim Gilchrist, 'Mucedorus: The Last Ludic Playbook, the First Stage *Arcadia*', *Shakespeare*, xv.i, 1–20 (2017).

⁶ *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* refers to the play having been acted by the Grocer's apprentice Rafe 'before the wardens of our company' (sig. B2r); in Abraham Cowley's *The Guardian* (perf. 1642; pub. 1650), a servant speaks of having 'plai'd the bear' that rumpages through the play's opening scene (London, 1650; sig. E4v); and Gerald Langbaine refers to the play being performed by 'Country people' in his 1691 *Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (f. 541–42). There is also a record of a performance of 'musedors' at Rydal Hall on 26 December by the Applethwaite Players 1666: See David Bond, 'On Playing Musedors', *N&Q* xxxiii.iv (1986), 469–71.

⁷ Works of regional chorography, such as Richard Carew's *Survey of Cornwall* (1603), were often products of provincial historiography and self-representation. The motivation to produce a somewhat self-aggrandizing survey and history of Berkshire is, I suggest, more likely to have struck a resident or native of the county than someone from elsewhere.

⁸ For more on Charles I's copy, see Peter Kirwan, 'The First Collected Shakespeare Apocrypha', *Shakespeare Quarterly* lxii.iv (2011), 594–601.

¹ MS 298: *Berkshire described*. Fragment of *Mucedorus*, England, 17th c.; ca. 1600. Manuscripts of St John's College, Oxford. St John's College Library, University of Oxford. GB 473 MS298. The document description can be found at <http://archive.shub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb473-ms/ms298>.

² In writing this piece, my thanks are due to the *Notes & Queries* reviewer and Callan Davies for their insightful comments and encouragement.

³ There is an additional cue script from the Restoration, and a number produced in the sixteenth century in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy.

⁴ Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford, 2007), 15, 19. For further work on the meaning and use of early modern cue scripts, see Jakub Boguszak, *The Self-Centred Art: Ben Jonson's Parts in Performance* (Routledge, 2021).

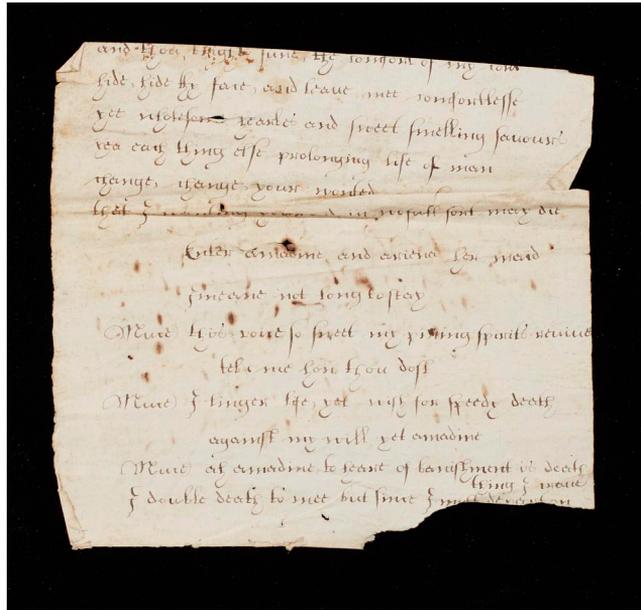


Figure 1. MS 298, f.1v. By permission of the President and Fellows of St John's College Oxford.

The fragment is dated by the Oxford transcriber as '16th/17th c.'. Comparing the extract with published editions of the play, which were regularly updated and amended, helps to narrow this a little.⁹ The wording of Mucedorus's phrase 'the comfort of my cold' did not appear until the play's eighth extant edition of 1618, meaning that the transcript must have been made after this edition was published. The phrase in the Oxford transcription available online that appears as 'my pining spirit reuiues' is in fact written in the fragment as 'spirits revives', a phrase that was only amended to 'spirit' from the 1639 edition onwards. Other variants of spelling and punctuation in the fragment are inconsistent with any single edition of the play and seem to reflect the preferences and style of whoever originally adapted the playbook text for the cue-script. For example, the word 'voice' is spelled as such in all possible editions

except that of 1619, which uses 'voyce'. This would seem to exclude the 1619 edition as the fragment's source. However, the fragment's spelling of 'hearbes' for 'herbs' *only* matches the spelling used in the 1619 edition, which without 'voyce' would suggest 1619 as the source. In other words, each example cancels the other as securely indicating a source. Therefore, I suggest, whenever the cue-script was prepared, the transcriber was working from any one of the 1618, 1619, 1621, 1626, 1631, or 1634 editions of *Mucedorus*.¹⁰

The document itself is small (147 x 160 mm) and the writing is large and legible.¹¹ The top of the first line of dialogue is missing, suggesting that the fragment may have been cut neatly from a

⁹ For analysis of the various editions' amendments, and possible evidence of a lost edition of 1615–17, see Richard Proudfoot, "Modernising" the Printed Play-Text in Jacobean London', *A Certain Text: Close Readings and Textual Studies on Shakespeare*, Linda Anderson, Janis Lull, and Thomas Clayton (eds), (Newark, 2002), 18–28.

¹⁰ For this section I have worked from facsimiles of each edition available via *EEBO*. The 1621 edition which, as I have shown elsewhere, is now held at the Polska Akademia Nauk Biblioteka Gdańska, is not available digitally.

¹¹ Callan Davies notes the 'neatness of the hand and writing on the extract' as being 'sharper and more careful handwriting than in the other known extant cue scripts' and that this may speak to the manuscript's possible amateur and regional context, suggesting 'a different sense of time pressure in producing parts than the commercial playhouse' (private correspondence).

The Comedy of Mucedorus.

Yet goodly Groves partakers of my songs,
 In time before when fortune did not frowne,
 Powre forth your plaints and waile a while with me:
 And thou bright Sunne the comfort of my cold,
 Hide, hide thy face, and leaue me comfortable:
 Yee wholesome herbs and sweet smelling fauours,
 Yea each thing else prolonging life of man,
 Change, change your wonted course,
 That I wanting your aide, in wofull fort may die.

Enter Amadine and Ariena her maid.

Ama. Ariena, if any body aske for me,
 Make some excuse till I returne.

Ari. What and *Segasto* call?

Ama. Doe you the like to him, I meane not to stay long. *Exit.*

Muc. This voice so sweet my pining spirits reuiues.

Ama. Shepherd well met, tell me how thou dost?

Muc. I linger life, yet wish for speedy death.

Ama. Shepherd although thy banishment already be decreed, and all against my will, yet *Amadine*.

Muc. Ah *Amadine* to heare of banishment is death:
 I double death to me: but since I must depart, one thing I craue.

Ama. Say on with all my heart.

Muc. That in abience eather farre or neere,
 You honour me as seruant to your name.

Ama. Not so.

Muc. And why?

Ama. I honour thee as Soueraigne of my heart.

Muc. A Shepherd and a Soueraigne nothing like.

Ama. Yet like enough, where there is no dislike.

Muc. Yet great dislike, or else no banishment.

Ama. Shepherd, it is onely *Segasto* that procures thy banish-

Muc. Vnworthy wights are more in ielousie. (menc.

Ama. Would God they would free thee from banishment,
 Or likewite banish me.

Muc. Amen I say to haue your company.

Ama. Well Shepherd. sith thou sufferest thus for my sake,
 With thee in exile also let me liue,

On this condition Shepherd thou canst loue.

Muc. No longer loue, no longer let me liue.

Ama.

larger sheet, a possibility also suggested by the fact that where the fragment begins the text is already several lines into a longer speech. Conversely, the final line on the page appears several millimetres above the bottom. The writer appears to have mis-judged the space needed for the final line and has squeezed the last words into the space between this line and the penultimate line. One possible reason for the care taken in retaining this blank space at the bottom of the sheet is suggested by two small pinholes, which may indicate that the sheet was stitched or otherwise attached to another, creating the kind of roll/role used in the professional theatre, although for the *Orlando Furioso* cue-script the pages were pasted together.¹² I speculate that the extract was cut from a larger document at the top edge in order to be reused for the instructions to ‘Berkshire discribed’.

The extract itself is from a scene featuring three speaking characters, the hero Mucedorus, the princess Amadine, and her maid Ariena. However, while Mucedorus’s lines are transcribed in full, only the final few words of Amadine’s speeches are included, indented in each case. Mucedorus’s lines are given the prefix ‘Muce’. This is in line with the practice of preparing cue-scripts for individual performers who, to save paper, were only given the cue lines of other characters that preceded their own lines. To illustrate, Ariena has a single line in the playbook but this is not included in the fragment as it falls between two of Amadine’s lines and is therefore not a cue line for the person playing Mucedorus. While the transcription shows significant fidelity to the source playbook, one aspect of the fragment perhaps offers some indication of the writer subtly adapting the published text for performance. Amadine’s words, included as a cue line in the fragment as ‘I meane not long to stay’ are different from the same phrase in all editions of the play I have checked, where the full line is ‘I mean not to stay long’. To take the 1618 edition as an example (Figure 2), the full line the cue is taken from is ‘[d]oe you the like to him, I mean not to stay long’ (sig. C4r). The prosody of this short sequence—if indeed it has coherence—shifts uncertainly between pentameter, trimeter, and a possible fourteener, but nonetheless ‘I mean not

long to stay’ is more rhythmically coherent—and arguably far easier to speak aloud—than the printed version.

The fragment’s later reuse for the instructions for using ‘Berkshire discribed’, if that is the sequence of the texts, do not necessarily connect the text’s original performance with Berkshire itself, whether or not the performance was executed or only intended, or reveal what the nature and social context of the performance might have been. However, the *Records of Early English Drama* for Berkshire do include evidence of a thriving theatrical culture that included regular performances by touring London-based and regional companies as well as complaints of unlicensed amateur playing.¹³ Also, it should be noted that Berkshire adjoins Oxfordshire, site of the disastrous 1652 performance by the Stanton Harcourt players at Witney, adding to the evidence inadvertently provided by John Rowe that *Mucedorus* was an important part of the region’s performance cultures.

The *Mucedorus* fragment is rare evidence of an early modern cue-script prepared sometime after 1618 and demonstrating both careful attention and fidelity to the text and a degree of stylistic intervention in terms of adaptation. That it is a text for amateur or seasonal-commercial performance is suggested both by the wider evidence of *Mucedorus*’s cultural contexts, the fragment’s apparent association with Berkshire, and the fact that it has been transcribed from a printed playbook. This is a valuable addition to the corpus of evidence relating to early modern performance culture, which I hope will provide a springboard for future discussion and analysis.

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¹² R. A. Foakes, ‘Dulwich MSS 1, Article 138, folio 8r (MSS-1/Article-138/08r)’, henslowe-alley.n.org.

¹³ Alexandra Johnson (ed.), *Record of Early English Drama: Berkshire* (available at: <https://erecd.org/collections/berks/>).

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