

ECHARD LAWRENCE

PREFACES TO TERENCE'S
COMEDIES AND
PLAUTUS'S COMEDIES
(1694)

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no higher praise can be paid a translator than posterity's acceptance of his work. Laurence Echard's *Terence's Comedies*, first printed in 1694 in the dress and phraseology of Restoration comedy, has received this accolade through the mediation of no less a modern translator than Robert Graves. In 1963 Graves edited a translation of three of Terence's plays. His Foreword points to the extreme difficulty of translating Terence, and admits his own failure – "It is regrettable that the very terseness of his Latin makes an accurate English rendering read drily and flatly; as I have found to my disappointment." Graves's answer was typically idiosyncratic. "A revival of Terence in English, must, I believe, be based on the translation made.. with fascinating vigour, by a young Cambridge student Laurence Echard.." ¹

¹ *The Comedies of Terence: Echard's Translations Edited with a Foreword by Robert*

The Prefaces to Echard's *Terence's Comedies: Made English..* (1694) and to his *Plautus's Comedies, Amphitryon, Epidicus, and Rudens* (1694) are of interest for several reasons. Both of them outline the intentions and rationale which lie behind the translations. They also throw light upon the sense of literary rivalry with French achievements which existed in some quarters in late seventeenth-century England, make comments on the contemporary stage, and are valuable both as examples of seventeenth-century attitudes to two Classical dramatists, and as statements of neoclassical dramatic theory. Finally, they are, to some extent, polemical pieces, aiming at the instruction of contemporary dramatists.

Laurence Echard, or Eachard (1670? -1730), was a minor cleric, a prolific hack, and an historian, a typical enough confusion of functions for the time. It suggests that Echard had energy, ability, and political commitment, but lacked a generous patron or good fortune to take the place of private means. Within the Church his success was modest: he was installed prebendary of Louth in 1697, but had to wait until 1712 before becoming Archdeacon of Stow. Echard achieved the little fame by which he is remembered as an historical writer. Perhaps he is more accurately described as a compiler rather than as an historian. His major works were *The Roman History, from*

Graves (London, 1963), pp. viii-ix. Graves (p. ix) says that Echard's translation of Terence was made in 1689, when he was only nineteen. I have been unable to find any evidence in support of this statement.

the Building of the City, to the Perfect Settlement of the Empire by Augustus Caesar.. (1695-98), the equally comprehensive *A General Ecclesiastical History from the Nativity of Our Blessed Saviour to the First Establishment of Christianity..* (1702), his all-inclusive *The History of England from the first Entrance of Julius Caesar.. to the Conclusion of the Reign of King James the Second..* (1707-18), and the more detailed but equally long work, *The History of the Revolution, and the Establishment of England in.. 1688* (1725).

Echard's career as a publisher's jack-of-all-trades ran concurrently with his life's work on history, and showed a similar taste for the voluminously encyclopedic. In 1691 he graduated B.A. at Christ's College, Cambridge, and published four works under the imprint of Thomas Salusbury: *A Most Complete Compendium of Geography; General and Special; Describing all the Empires, Kingdoms, and Dominions in the Whole World, An Exact Description of Ireland., A Description of Flanders., and the Duke of Savoy's Dominions most accurately described.*² These were followed in 1692 by *The Gazetteer's or Newsman's Interpreter: being a Geographical Index..* Two years later the translations of Plautus and Terence were published.

All of this work was clearly irrelevant to his main interests: in 1695 he had been urged to undertake his *General Ecclesiastical*

² No copy of the *Duke of Savoy's Dominions* appears to be extant. It is not recorded in Wing, but appears in *The Term Catalogues, 1688-1709.*, ed. Edward Arber (1903-1906), II, 380. This must have been much smaller than Echard's other publications in this year: it cost only 3d. against the first two's 1s. 6d.

History, and by that time he was already at work upon his *Roman History* (1695-98).³ Into the bargain, he was in residence at Cambridge until 1695, for he did not gain his M.A. until that year. Despite the apparent success of his publisher's enterprises (*A Most Complete Compendium* was in its eighth edition by 1713, and *The Gazetteer's or Newsmen's Interpreter* reached a twelfth in 1724), little of the profit reached the penurious Echard. In 1717 Archbishop Wake wrote to Addison that "His circumstances are so much worse than I thought, that if we cannot get somewhat pretty considerable for Him, I doubt He will sink under the weight of his debts.." ⁴

The sheer quantity of work which Echard accomplished in these early years is astonishing: it is no wonder that in the Preface to the *Plautus* he explained that "business" had prevented him from translating more than three of the comedies, remarking, ".. I have taken somewhat less time than was necessary for the translating such an extraordinary difficult Author; for this requires more than double the time of an *Historian* or the like, which was as much as I cou'd allow my self" (sig. b3).

In all of his work Echard sought and acknowledged the help of a whole series of unnamed encouragers and authorities. For the *Plautus* he "had the Advantage of another's doing their [i.e., "these" ?] Plays before me; from whose Translation I had very considerable Helps." (sig. b4). Apart from that aid, the *Plautus*,

³ *A General Ecclesiastical History..* (London, 1702), sig. b1.

⁴ *The Letters of Joseph Addison*, ed. Walter Graham (Oxford, 1941), p. 504.

on the evidence offered by the title-page and the Preface, was all Echard's own. This is not the case with the *Terence*, which was translated by a symposium, with the Preface being written by Echard on the group's behalf. As a result, its Preface uses "we" throughout where the *Plautus* uses "I." When the first edition of the *Terence* appeared it gave the authorship as "By Several Hands," but later editions are more detailed, and specify that the work was done "By Mr. Laurence Echard, and others. Revis'd and Corrected by Dr. Echard and Sir R. L'Estrange." The fourth edition also stated firmly in 1716, "The PREFACE, Written by Mr. *Laurence Echard*" (p. i).

The only discrepancy which might seem to deny Echard's authorship of the Preface to the *Terence* is the fact that the two Prefaces contradict one another over the way in which scenes should be marked. The Preface to the *Terence* simply says that exits and entrances within the acts are a sufficient indication that the scene has changed without numbering them, "for the *Ancients* never had any other [method] that we know of" (p. xxii). The *Plautus* on the other hand, numbers the scenes, and the Preface comments, "I have all the way divided the *Acts* and *Scenes* according to the true Rules of the Stage." (sig. b2v). Since this was an open question, however, in neoclassical dramatic theory, the simplest explanation is that Echard was free to do as he believed in the *Plautus*, which was all his own, but was, in the Preface to the *Terence*, expressing the views of the whole group of translators.

The two volumes are a testimony to Echard's remarkable industry and abilities. They were published the year before he took his M.A., when he was only twenty-four. In the years between coming up to Cambridge in 1687 and 1695, he found time not only to satisfy his university, and to do the very considerable amount of hack work which appeared in 1691 and 1692, as well as embarking upon his large historical works, but also translated two difficult Roman authors with great verve.

It would be interesting to know why, in the years between 1691 and 1694, Echard turned his attentions to the art of translation. The venture is a curious deviation from his otherwise single-minded devotion to history and to journalistic enterprises (the only other translation he is known to have done is the brief "Auction of the Philosophers" in *The Works of Lucian* [1710-11]). The connection of Dr. John Eachard and Sir Roger L'Estrange may offer a slight clue. Echard was closely related to Dr. Eachard (1636? -1697), Master of Catharine Hall, Cambridge, and author of the lively dialogue, *Mr. Hobbs's State of Nature Consider'd* (1672).⁵ With a family connection such as this, Echard might well have hoped for a successful career centered on his stay at Cambridge. The dedication of his *A Most Complete Compendium* in 1691 to the Master of his own college, Dr. John Covel, suggests that he was looking in this direction. L'Estrange is important not only for his intimate knowledge of

⁵ Recently republished with an introduction by Peter Ure as No. XIV (1958) in the University of Liverpool Reprints.

the publishing trade, but also because he was a translator in his own right. His *Æsop* appeared in 1692, and he had early put out translations of Quevedo (1673), Cicero (1680), and Erasmus (1680), and was to go on to translate Flavius Josephus (1702). Since L'Estrange had also been a student at Cambridge, there is some possibility that the translation of Terence was carried out at the instigation of a Cambridge based group. The translation might also be connected with the resurgence of interest in translation and in "correctness" which can be discerned in the 1690's.⁶

The two Prefaces differ somewhat in character. It seems clear from remarks made in the Preface to the *Plautus* that it was written after the *Terence* had already reached the public and after Echard's copy for the text of Plautus's three comedies was in the printer's hands. Not surprisingly the later Preface is hurried, and at times almost casual. The Preface to the *Terence* is more ambitious, more carefully written, and more wide-ranging, though giving fewer examples of the kinds of translations made by Echard. Both Prefaces lay claim to substantially the same audience. That to the *Terence* explains that the translation was undertaken in the first place because of the literary value of Terence's comedy. In consequence, its benefits would apply to "most sorts of People, but especially for the Service it may do our

⁶ "Dryden, Tonson, and Subscriptions for the 1697 *Virgil*," *PBSA*, LVII (1963), 147-48. Raymond Havens makes a rather different emphasis in his "Changing Taste in the Eighteenth Century," *PMLA*, XLIV (1929), 501-18.

Dramatick Poets.” Secondly, the work was undertaken for “the Honour of our own *Language*, into which all good Books ought to be Translated, since *'tis now become so Elegant, Sweet and Copious..*” Thirdly, it might rival the translations done in other countries, particularly those in France. The audience envisaged ranged from schoolboys, who would find the translation less Latinate and the notes more pointed than those of Bernard or Hoole, to “Men of Sense and Learning,” who ought to be pleased to see Terence in “modern Dress.” As for the dramatists, Terence might serve as an exemplar, especially since the translation could “be read with less Trouble than the Original.” (pp. xvii-xix). The *Plautus* Preface is far less detailed, but refers back to these reasons, while stressing the function of the translation for the schoolboy. Judging by the number of editions, the *Terence* found its market, for where the *Plautus* ran to only two editions, the first and that of 1716, the *Terence* appeared in a seventh edition in 1729. Nor was Echard’s audience merely made up of students. If one of his main targets was contemporary dramatists, he would have been elated to learn that William Congreve owned a copy of the first edition of both translations.⁷

The Prefaces are perhaps a little disingenuous in acknowledging Echard’s and his collaborators’ debt to the contemporary French classical scholar and translator, Anne Dacier. On both occasions Echard paid her some tribute. What

⁷ Items 450 and 595 in *The Library of William Congreve*, ed. John C. Hodges (New York, 1955). Project Gutenberg e-text 27606

he does not mention is that the two volumes seem to be modelled on her example. The *Terence* translates the plays which had appeared in her *Les comédies de Térence* (Paris, 1688), and it is significant that despite his claims that he wished to translate more than three of Plautus' comedies, he in fact translated only those three which Mme. Dacier had already done in her *Les comédies de Plaute* (Paris, 1683). Moreover, the notes and to some extent the Prefaces, are modelled on the French scholar's work: Echard's notes are often directly dependent upon Mme. Dacier's and are exactly described by her account of her own volume as being "avec de remarques et un examen de chaque comédie selon les règles du theatre."

The views on translation put forward by the Prefaces are an intelligent exposition of progressive contemporary notions of the art. The belief in literal translation which characterizes Jonson and Marvell in the earlier years of the century had been displaced by the more liberal concept of "imitation." Roscommon is a representative of this freer attitude, while Dryden's more severe theory of "paraphrase," whatever his practice may have been, stands somewhere between the two positions. Like Ozell and Gildon, and later Pope, Echard's aim, whether translating by himself or collectively, was to imitate the spirit of his author in English. "A meer *Verbal Translation* is not to be expected, that wou'd sound so horribly, and be more obscure than the Original.. We couldn't have kept closer.. without too much treading upon the Author's Heels, and destroying our Design

of giving it an easie, *Comick Style*, most agreeable to our present Times” (*Terence’s Comedies*, p. xx). To this end it was necessary to tone down the “familiarity and bluntness in [Terence’s] Discourse” which were “not so agreeable with the Manners and Gallantry of our Times.” This was intended to bring Terence up to the level of gentility for which he was credited by compensating for the barbarity of Roman social manners. But the translation was willing to go further than this: it added to the Roman comedy what Echard thought English comedy excelled in, “humour” – “In some places we have had somewhat more of *Humour* than the Original, to make it still more agreeable to our Age..” (*ibid.*, p. xxii). When speaking for himself alone in the Preface to the *Plautus*, Echard’s claims were less grandiose. Here the translation seems much more specifically aimed at schoolboys, and Echard made firm claims for his literalness (sig. b1-2v). On the other hand, he went out of his way to praise Dryden’s *Amphitryon* (1690) for the freedom it had taken with the original, which, said Echard, “may serve for one Instance of what Improvements our Modern Poets have made on the Ancients, when they built upon their Foundations” (sig. b3v-4).

The praise of Dryden is to some extent double-edged since it is an implicit assertion of the point made in both Prefaces, that English writers had much to learn from the Roman dramatists. Echard uses the Prefaces to assess and compare Plautus and Terence, but he also uses them as a springboard for a critique of the state of English comedy. Like much neoclassical criticism it

is, of course, derivative. The stock comparison of Plautus and Terence comes from Anne Dacier,⁸ and Echard's footprints can be tracked in the snows of Cicero, Scaliger, Rapin, André Dacier, the Abbé D'Aubignac, and Dryden. Having set the Ancients against the Moderns, Echard is able to attack the looseness of English double plots by pointing to Terence's success within a similar structure. He is also able to praise Terence's genteel style. Against this, Echard admits, along with his precursors, Plautus' superiority in point of *vis comica*, which he defines, interestingly, as "*Liveliness of Intreague*" (sig. a8). Echard is thus able to claim, with considerable conviction, the superiority of English comedy in several areas, especially in its variety, its humour, "in some Delicacies of *Conversation*," and "above all in *Repartée*" (*Terence's Comedies*, p. xi).

What the English had to learn, in Echard's view, was "regularity," that is, the discipline imposed upon a dramatist by observing the Unities, and obeying the other "rules of the drama" (such as the *liaisons*), in pursuit of verisimilitude and tautness of structure. Echard's main hope was that his translation and notes would correct his contemporaries' habit of ignoring the Roman dramatists' "*essential Beauties*," and "contenting themselves with considering the *superficial* ones, such as the *Stile, Language, Expression*, and the like, without taking much notice of the *Contrivance and Management*, of the *Plots, Characters*,

⁸ *Les comédies de Plaute*, ed. and trans. Anne Dacier (Paris, 1683). For a further statement of her views, see *Les comédies de Térence* (Paris, 1688).

etc.” (*Plautus*, sig. a1). The remarkable fact about Echard’s discussion of these matters, despite his dependence at times upon that arch-pedant, the Abbé D’Aubignac,⁹ is the critical intelligence with which he puts forward his argument. Unlike many neoclassical critics, Echard keeps his eyes fixed firmly on the strengths and weaknesses of Restoration comedy within the context of previous English comedy and the Restoration stage itself. A sign of this is his attention to practical details, which take the form of one or two valuable notes on the theatre of his day. We learn, for instance, that actors were in the “custom of looking.. full upon the Spectators,” and that some members of the Restoration audience took printed copies into the playhouse in order to be able to follow the play on the stage.¹⁰ It is a real loss to the historian of drama and to the critic that these two volumes were Laurence Echard’s solitary adventure into the criticism and translation of drama.

⁹ In particular, see his discussion of the *liaisons* which is derived from François Hédelin, Abbé D’Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre..* (Paris, 1669), pp. 117-19, 315-20. D’Aubignac’s work was translated into English as *The Whole Art of the Stage..* (1684).

¹⁰ *Plautus’s Comedies*, sig. a8v; *Terence’s Comedies*, p. xiii.

PREFACE

Since long Prefaces are lately much in Fashion upon this and the like Occasions, why may not we be allow'd some tolerable Liberty in this kind; provided we keep close to our Author, and our own Translation of him. As for our Author, wherever Learning, Wit or Judgment have flourish'd, this Poet has always had an extraordinary Reputation. To mention all his Excellencies and Perfections were a Task too difficult for us, and perhaps for the greatest Criticks alive; so very few there are that perfectly understand all of 'em; yet we shall venture at some of the most Remarkable.

To begin with him in general. He was certainly the most Exact, the most Elaborate, and withal the most Natural of all Dramatick Poets; His Stile so neat and pure, his Characters so true and perfect, his Plots so regular and probable, and almost every thing so absolutely just and agreeable, that he may well seem to merit that Praise which several have given him, That he was the most correct Author in the World. To compare him with Plautus, the other great Latin Comedian, we may observe that Plautus had more Wit and Spirit, but Terence more Sense and Judgment; the former's Stile was rich and glaring, the latter's more close and even: Plautus had the most dazelling out-side, and the most lively Colours, but Terence drew the finest Figures and Postures, and had the best Design; the one pleas'd the Vulgar, but

our Author the Better sort of people; the former wou'd usually set his Spectators into a loud Laughter, but the latter steal 'em into a sweet Smile that shou'd continue from the beginning to the end of the Representation: in short, Plautus was more lively and vigorous, and so fitter for Action; and Terence more grave and serious, and so fitter for Reading. Tho' Plautus's Beauties were very extraordinary, yet he had his Faults and Indecorums very frequent; but Terence's Excellencies (tho' possibly inferior to some of the others) were more general, better dispers'd, and closer continu'd; and his Faults so inconsiderable, and so very few, that Scaliger said, There were not three to be found throughout the Six Plays. So that our Author seems to want nothing to make him absolutely compleat, but only that same *Vis Comica* that Cæsar wishes he had, and which Plautus was Master of in such a high degree. We shall determine nothing between 'em, but leave 'em good Friends as we found 'em.

This may be sufficient for our Author's Excellencies in general; for his particular ones, we shall begin with his *Stile*, a thing he has been admir'd for in all Ages, and truly he deserves it; for certainly no one was ever more accurate, natural, and clear in his Expressions than he. But to be a little more particular in this Matter, we shall give you some few of our Author's Excellencies in this kind under three or four different Heads.

And first, We may observe of his Words, that they are generally nicely chosen, extremely proper and significant; and many of 'em carry so much Life and Force in 'em, that they

can hardly be express'd in any other Language without great disadvantage to the Original. To instance in these following. Qui cum ingeniis conflictatur ejusmodi. Ut animus in spe atque in timore usque ante hac attentus fuit. Nisi me lactasses amantem, & falsa spe produceres. Pam. Mi Pater. Si. Quid mi Pater? Quasi tu hujus indigeas Patris. Tandem ego non illâ caream, si sit opus, vel totum triduum. Par. Hui? Universum triduum. Quam elegans formarum spectator siem. Hunc comedendum & deridendum vobis propino.

We shall next take notice of one or two Instances of the Shortness and Clearness of his Narrations; as that which Tully mentions. Funus interim procedit sequimur, ad Sepulchrum venimus, in ignem posita est, Fletur. Another may be that in Phormio. Persuasum est homini, factum est, ventum est, vincimur, duxit.

Another remarkable Beauty of his Stile appears in his Climaxes; where every Word is Emphatical, heightens the Sense, and adds considerably to what went before. As, Hæc verba Mehercule una falsa Lachrymula, quam oculos terendo miserè vix vi expresserit, restinguet. Quod ille unciatim vix de demenso suo, sum defraudans genium, comparsit miser.

The last thing we shall give any instance of, is the Softness and Delicacy of his Turns; of which many might be produced; but we think these few may be sufficient for our purpose. Eheu me miseram! Cur non aut isthæc mihi ætas & forma est, aut tibi hæc sententia. Nam si ego digna hac contumelia sum maxime, at tu

indignus qui faceres tamen. Nam dum abs te absum, omnes mihi labores fuere, quos cepi, leves, præterquam tui carendum quod erat. Palam beatus, ni unum desit, animus qui modeste isthæc ferat. Aliis, quia deficit quod amant, ægre est, tibi, quod super est, dolet. And as for the Purity of his Language in general; we find it very much commended even by Tully himself. And One of the Moderns is not at all out of the way when he tells us: That the Latin Tongue will never be lost, as long as Terence may be had.

Our Author's Excellent Latin is now the greatest Cause of his Esteem, and makes him so much read in the World; but for certain, he that reads him purely for his Latin sake, does but a quarter read him; for 'tis his Characters and Plots have so far rais'd him up above the rest of the Poets, and have gain'd him so much Honour among the Criticks in all Ages. His Stile, tho' so very extraordinary, in a great measure may be learnt by Industry, long Custom, and continual Usage, and has been imitated to a high degree by several; and indeed this was but as rich Attire, and outward Ornaments to set off a more beautiful Body. But in his Characters and Manners there it is that he triumphs without a Rival; and not only Dramatick, but all other Poets must yield to him in that Point. For these are drawn exactly to the Life, perfectly just, truly proportionably, and fully kept up to the last; and as for their being natural, Rapin says, That no Man living had a greater insight into Nature than he. The more a Man looks into 'em, the more he must admire 'em; he'll find there not only such Beauty in his Images, but also such excellent Precepts of

Morality, such solid Sense in each Line, such depth of Reasoning in each Period, and such close arguing between each Party, that he must needs perceive him to be a Person of strong Sense and Judgment. His Deliberations are most compleat, where all the several Accidents, Events, Dangers, Casualties, good and bad Consequences are fully summed up and clearly urg'd; so are the Answers of each Person as perfect, where every thing is so well fitted, so home, and so natural, that if one shou'd study upon 'em never so long, he cou'd scarce find any thing more to the purpose. He had a peculiar Happiness at pleasing and amusing an Audience, perpetually keeping 'em in a most even, pleasant, smiling Temper; and this is the most distinguishing part of his Character from the rest of the World; his Pleasantries were somewhat Manly, and such as reach'd beyond the Fancy and Imagination, even to the Heart and Soul of the Audience; and what is more remarkable yet, one single Scene shall please a whole day together; a Secret which few or no other Poet ever found out.

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