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COARSE ACTING STRIKES BACK

Four More Coarse plays

by Michael Green

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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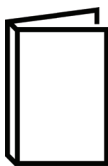
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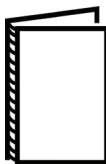


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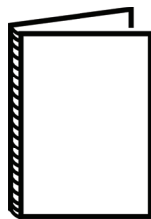
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Green was born in Leicester, England in 1927 and started writing as a reporter on the local newspaper. He has never been a lumberjack or sold hot dogs. Since publication in 1960 of his first book, *The Art of Coarse Rugby*, he has been a full-time author specialising in telling the grim truth about such pursuits as golf, sailing, drinking, moving and acting, and his books have sold over a million copies world-wide. In 1977 he took a company of amateurs to The Edinburgh Festival with a stage version of The Art of Coarse Acting called *The Coarse Acting Show*, and it was hailed as the comedy hit of the season. Two years later, *The Coarse Acting Show 2* was awarded a “Fringe First” at The Edinburgh Festival and then transferred to London’s West End for three months. But Michael remains modest. “I have a great deal to be modest about”, he says. He died in February 2018, aged 91.

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INTRODUCTION

This fourth volume of Coarse plays actually has more parts for women than men (loud cheers). Men had the best of things in the earlier plays, partly because some were pastiches of classic drama such as Shakespeare, and I am delighted the balance is restored. But if any of the pieces printed here are still not suitable, it would be possible to substitute a play from the earlier volumes and have a mixture. In that case a useful blanket title is *The Coarse Acting Show*, although strictly that is the sub-title of volume one (*Four Plays for Coarse Actors*).

Introducing a fourth volume of these plays is rather like inviting an actor to a party—you think everybody will know who they are, and then you find they don't. I hope most readers will know what Coarse Acting is, either from my book *The Art of Coarse Acting* or from the other three volumes of plays. However, one can't be sure, so once again, here's a brief explanation of what it's all about, with apologies to those who've read it all before.

In *The Art of Coarse Acting*, on which the plays are based, I give several definitions of a Coarse Actor (I use the word to include the female). The original was "one who could remember the lines but not the order in which they come", but as the years passed further definitions thrust themselves into my experience and sometimes into my face. For instance, a performance at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe suggested a Coarse Actor was one who limps on both legs simultaneously, while an unfortunate incident in another play indicated him as one who knows when to come on stage but not where. Then there was the woman I played with who knew the last play better than the one she was actually in.

So definitions can be extended indefinitely (I later acted with a chap who knew the next play better than the one he was actually in). But there is more to it than just incompetence. Coarse Acting covers every kind of misplaced performance from people who do imitations of Laurence Olivier to frightened players in their first part. Cliché performances are popular, in which all colonels have blood pressure and all cleaners Cockney accents. Frequently the character is based on something seen on film or TV. Some Coarse Actors are accident-prone while many have a compulsion to overdo it, so they play every part with a limp, something that is popular in crowd scenes, or

else have an outrageous accent. Age doesn't mean maturity, it means senility. But one feature common to all is that they think every performance was a success. "Believe me, old chap, the audience never noticed anything wrong," is the Coarse Actor's battle-cry. Over-confidence is their trademark.

Then there's Coarse stage management, brought to the audience's attention by a jammed door, a candle that won't light or a gun which won't fire. There's Coarse lighting, sound and wardrobe, and even directing, which may result in the whole cast finishing up huddled in one corner of the set. In fact, the acting can be fine but what goes on around the cast can still turn the show into Coarse Theatre.

This series of plays began as the result of a Coarse Acting competition at The Questors Theatre, Ealing, way back in 1972, in which various teams competed to see who could produce the funniest portrayal of stage disaster. People enjoyed the playlets so much other contests were held, competitors including teams from The Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre. Later, some of the best plays were put together in one show and after a successful run at the Edinburgh Fringe, the first volume was published. To be followed by the second, which transferred from the Edinburgh Fringe to the Shaftesbury Theatre, London...and the third...and now the fourth.

Basically, they are simply spoofs on bad amateur dramatics, or bad professional dramatics if you like. A send-up. And the plays themselves are pastiches of different types of drama. But like all send-ups, they rely on a basis of truth. The cast are trying to put on a successful show. They aren't all rotten actors and actresses. It's just that everything keeps going wrong...

The contrast between the earnest efforts of the cast and the disasters that befall them is an essential part of the humour. If all the cast are way over the top then the show won't be funny. Which is why the best actors and actresses do so well in the Coarse plays, because they can successfully parody types of actor and styles of drama. Genuine Coarse Actors are hopeless in a Coarse Acting play.

Directing requires an idea of the original which is being parodied, plus good comic instinct. Nothing is less amusing than a bad Coarse Acting play. I know. I've seen some. A few failed because the cast couldn't act; some because they'd ignored

the stage directions (not to mention the script); others because the director had approached from the wrong angle.

The plays also require discipline. Strange how they bring out the worst in people. Usually the first rehearsal is like something out of an 18th century lunatic asylum, with everybody gibbering and foaming at each other. In directing I found it useful to have a rehearsal at which the play was performed straight. This proved effective in bringing the cast back to earth. The danger period is halfway through rehearsals when the lines have stopped being funny and the cast start trying to make everybody laugh again. There's a similar danger spot during the run, when over-confidence takes over.

Having issued these warnings, I'm pleased to say most shows were very amusing indeed. Some companies introduced ideas of their own and this is welcome, the sole criterion being that they work. A few innovations were so good I incorporated them in revised editions. Others were so bad I tried to forget them, especially the company who changed the ending of one piece because they didn't want to pay for a particular prop. I was impressed by the casts' different interpretations of parts, but tampering with the lines rarely worked.

If this sounds rather earnest, I can only say comedy is a serious business. It's the audience who need to laugh, not the actors. Notwithstanding that, have fun and good luck. I'd say "break a leg", but I really did once when I fell off the stage, and it wasn't very pleasant. Apart from anything else they carried me to hospital dressed as an 18th century pirate, complete with eye-patch and wooden leg. The doctor was not amused but the stage manager was in fits.

As regards the running order, it is recommended that *Trapped* should start because sometimes an audience needs introducing to Coarse Acting. Alas, they don't always realise the show is a send-up and have been heard to say, "It was awful. Things kept going wrong." Hopefully, *Trapped* should make the point and the rather extensive set can be put up before the show. Try to let people know what to expect through publicity and the programme. The gaps between plays can be a problem. One company actually served a three-course meal (a course between each play) and another introduced a Coarse pianist, who kept losing his music. In the revised version of the first volume (*Four Plays for Coarse Actors*) I wrote in a Vicar, who

made announcements between plays, such as a hospital bulletin on the lighting man, who was electrocuted during rehearsal. But experience has shown the audience are quite happy to chat and look at their programmes.

Michael Green,
2000

TRAPPED

TRAPPED

By Michael Green

First performed at The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London, on 11th April, 1996, as part of “Coarse Acting–The Revenge”, with the following cast:

HOUSE MANAGER

Ossie Peled

MAID

Janet Egan

MAJOR THOMPSON

Mark Redrup

MRS THOMPSON

Lesley White

COUSIN FRED A

Pam Gower

COUSIN SHEILA

Ann Harries

BRAITHWAITE

Keith Parry

COUSIN GEORGE

John Kearns

POLICEMAN (STAGE MANAGER)

Man King

Directed by **Michael Green**

PRODUCTION NOTES

Trapped is a pastiche of the country-house stage thriller. These all seem to be fixed in a vague period in the past, as if the clock stopped in 1949; so the show will need flats painted to represent a country house and plenty of tweeds, together with appropriate props (such as a silver tankard or a grandfather clock). Don't over-exaggerate the acting—the characters are ludicrous enough already and they must be believable.

It is important that the setting should be solid. After all, it is supposed to be a play about a group of people who can't get out of a room. However, if a full box set is really impossible, flats could be used for the doors and furniture placed in the gaps, thus partly sustaining the illusion at any rate. The french windows are never opened, so it's easy to make them come adrift when the Major attacks them. As regards the other two doors, one swings open; it's vital it doesn't do this before it has to. The other falls off under the Major's assault. In the original production this was achieved by replacing the hinge-pins by long nails with a nylon thread attached. These were pulled out from backstage at the appropriate time. But other methods may prove suitable. If necessary, it is possible to do the play with only one door besides the french windows, cutting out references to the second one. In that case, the door needn't collapse. But two is more fun.

Although the door of the built-in cupboard doesn't open it must be practical, so it can rattle and shake when George tries to enter. A door flat could be used instead of a cupboard. Make sure the audience has a good view of all the doors, since they are essential to the plot. Don't let furniture or the cast mask them when they come into the action. I have indicated in the script where the doors were in the original performance, but obviously a director will site them according to the needs of their own production.

Michael Green

NOTES ON THE CHARACTERS

MAJOR THOMPSON (who could well be in plus-fours) is the chief architect of disaster, which is unfortunate for him as he fancies himself in the leading role. Bought a moustache specially. Borrowed his accent from an old black-and-white war film. Alas, everything he touches goes wrong, often due to his over-enthusiasm. However, he ploughs gamely on, determined to see this ghastly business through. One suspects that offstage his biggest rival in the society is the man playing the villain,

BRAITHWAITE. Luckily for the major, Braithwaite is equally accident-prone.

MRS THOMPSON also fancies herself as one of the company's leading lights. Her performance is rather over-intense, and based on a visit to *The Mousetrap*. She speaks in what she thinks is the voice of a rural aristocrat.

THE STAGE MANAGER who comes on as the policeman at short notice, should be played by an actress. It's an important part, but not easy, and it's necessary the comedy doesn't sag at this point.

THE HOUSE MANAGER who announces the actor's non-arrival, is also an actress's part.

COUSIN SHEILA is one of those delicate creatures who will never allow themselves to be anything but elegant on stage (even when poisoned). She has been playing all rôles in exactly the same way for thirty years and is not going to change now. Doesn't need to, as her husband runs the bank where the group have their account.

COUSIN FREDA gives what one might call a robust performance. She is more used to shouting at horses than acting.

THE MAID probably puts on a stock working-class accent, the one she used for the charlady in the last show. Unfortunately, traces of her own accent show through.

COUSIN GEORGE can't understand why he never gets large rôles. Something rotten always happens to him even in small parts. He is convinced he could have played the lead but for the prejudice of the director. Believes he saved the situation by coming through the french windows with a knife sticking out of him.

The interior of a country house.

There are french windows diagonally left; doors right and upstage leading to the interior of the house. Another door right leads to a built-in cupboard. Various country-house furnishings, including a small table laid for tea with sandwiches etc., and a table or desk with an old-fashioned phone. The walls have spears and shields on them, and hopefully a stuffed animal's head—it might be rather fun to paint it on the wall.

*Before the play begins, the **HOUSE MANAGER** comes on and makes the following announcement.*

HOUSE MANAGER Ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement. I am afraid that Charles Worthing, who should have played the part of the policeman, cannot appear tonight as he has been arrested for speeding while trying to get to the theatre. So the policeman will be read at short notice by Annabelle Brown, the Stage Manager. She has only had a few minutes warning of this and obviously has had no time to familiarise herself with the details, so we do ask your indulgence. We would also ask you, in view of the baffling nature of this murder mystery, not to reveal the name of the murderer when you leave the theatre, so others may enjoy the same suspense. Thank you.

Music (something dramatic and not quite right. Perhaps a few bars of Beethoven's Fifth?) Slow fade of lights to blackout, then lights up. The play begins with an empty stage. The phone rings. Nobody comes. Eventually it stops ringing.

As it does so, the MAID peers tentatively round the door right and then retreats. A short pause and she bursts on stage and picks up the silent phone.

MAID Hulloo... Major Thompson's rambling and isolated old country house in Surrey.

At this point the phone starts ringing loudly. The MAID is nonplussed. She looks offstage and, receiving no help, decides it's best to replace the receiver. The ringing promptly stops. She picks up the receiver and it starts again. This time it stops after a few rings.

Hullo, Major Thompson's rambling and isolated old country house in Surrey. No, I'm afraid the major is out for the minute. *(During the rest of this speech she wanders all over the stage still holding the receiver, the wire of which proves not to be connected)* As you probably know, since he retired from the army five years ago he has devoted his life to collecting old weapons and he has one of the finest collections in the country, which is valued at many thousand of pounds and it is lucky nobody has thought of stealing them. However, he will return soon, because the family have gathered to listen to the reading of his uncle's will by the solicitor. The old man left a fortune and it would be a pity if he left it to only one member of the family because then all the others would be jealous and something nasty might occur. You're welcome. *(She realises she is twelve feet from the phone and trying to pretend nothing is wrong, she sidles back to it and rings off)* Ah, Major Thompson, there you are, there was a call for you. *(She looks offstage)*

Unfortunately, MAJOR THOMPSON hasn't arrived yet. An alarming suspicion comes over her that she was facing the wrong door so she turns to face the upstage one and repeats the line.

Ah, Major Thompson, there you are, there was a—

The MAJOR bursts in frantically, with his wife MRS THOMPSON following, through the original door.

OEDOCLES, KING OF THEBES

OEDOCLES, KING OF THEBES

By Michael Green

First performed by Richmond Shakespeare Society at The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London, on 8th October, 1995, as part of The Fourth World Coarse Acting Championships, adjudicated by Timothy West, with the following cast:

OEDOCLES	John Kipps
OVARY	Yvette Walters
AMNESIA	Marian Jardella
HYSTERECTOMY	Sheila Camfield
SCROTUM	Michael Godley
PRIESTESS	Mo Stewart
CHORUS	Heather Godley, Margaret Thompson, Joan Good, Yvette Walters, Katie Abbott, Francis Abbott
SLAVES	Simon Bargate, John Crook

Directed by **Claudette Williamson**

Note: The slaves may be played by women, or are expendable (see Production Notes). These options were not open to the director of the premiere as the parts were played by two elderly actors who refused to be cut.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Classical Greek tragedy is an art form with strong characteristics of its own. The Coarse version sends up some of these, such as the unending misery, the mutilation and the way horror is piled upon horror; together with the inevitable Chorus reciting their woeful tidings. A visit to a Greek tragedy, or at least to the local library, is recommended for those not familiar with the genre. I somehow feel Oedocles is a production by an over-ambitious group with intellectual pretensions, following a theatre trip.

The Chorus of The Women of Thebes are vital. In a genuine amateur production, they would be cast from the dregs of the acting strength, like most minor roles. Hence they are all assorted shapes, sizes and ages and rather ill-disciplined. Their leader, Hysterectomy, who only got the part because she once saw Oedipus at Stratford-on-Avon, performs with desperate sincerity, but the effect is marred by her bad breath and habit of spitting copiously as she speaks, which make fellow actors shrink away. She might lisp.

It will help if each member of the Chorus thinks up a particular character: one can be always late on stage, another moves left when the others go right, one is short-sighted, another is always two syllables behind; perhaps one is an old dear who doesn't know what's going on and another a giddy young girl. And so on.

The Chorus are largely written as speaking together, but the lines could be split among individuals.

Oedocles thinks he can act. Unfortunately, he's not as good as he thinks he is and his performance is based on something he saw on television. It consists mainly of waving his arms and clutching his head. There might be a touch of Bottom the Weaver about him. Perhaps he has a regional accent. That's one interpretation at any rate. His attendant Scrotum is an elderly actor who resents being reduced to small rôles.

Amnesia rather fancies her own glamour—her dress is cut so low her bosom is in danger of falling out. The Priestess has decided anyone mature must be an old crone so her performance is like something out of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

The set can be quite simple—curtains with just a pillar or something to suggest the classical period. Rostra at the back will be useful.

Costumes should be the classic period robes or tunics. They can be made out of old sheets. Any crones in the Chorus can have garments made of dyed sacking, which is appropriate as they are a miserable lot, like all Greek choruses. Footwear is sandals, although the Chorus could be in bare feet.

Two slaves are needed to carry off the body of Ovary. They can be male or female. They are not seen to carry on the body because of the difficulty of making a stretcher that will hold a body yet collapse when needed, as it does later. If this can be overcome, it might be rather effective to have the slaves carry in the body at the beginning, especially if they got tangled up with the curtains. However, the version as written is safer and more practical and means the stretcher need only be held together with Velcro, since it never carries any weight. If having slaves is too much for cast resources they can easily be cut and the Chorus can carry off the stretcher.

Most of the longer speeches are written in blank verse, iambic pentameters, which is the rhythm Shakespeare used, and a popular metre with translators from the Greek. Make sure the stresses come in the right place because, as with all Coarse plays, the more like the real thing this is, the more successful it will be.

Finally, my thanks to Claudette Williamson and her company from Richmond Shakespeare Society, who courageously undertook the first public performance of this epic, with hilarious results.

Michael Green

Scene One

Thebes, Greece, circa 370 BC...

A bare stage, except for rostra at the back and something suggesting Ancient Greece, such as a classic column.

The lighting should suggest heat. This is an attempt at something Greek, but about 2,350 years too modern. Taverna music.

*Lights up to reveal **OEDOCLES**, accompanied by **SCROTUM** and **AMNESIA**. They exhibit deep woe, perhaps rather deeper than is necessary. Beside them on the floor is a stretcher, carrying a body covered in a white sheet and attended by two slaves who presumably carried it in. They can be male or female. See production notes.*

OEDOCLES O leave this precious burden on the ground,

I would with grief communicate a while.

O woe, my lovely wife she is no more.

My tears shall shower water on her grave.

AMNESIA Woe! Woe!

SCROTUM My Lord, I grieve for thee.

OEDOCLES Thanks, good Amnesia and kindly Scrotum too.
Your sympathy has touched my heart.

CHORUS OF THE WOMEN OF THEBES enters, headed by their leader, **HYSTERECTOMY**. The **CHORUS** may be any number from three upwards. They are of assorted shapes and sizes. One could have a stick, which does dreadful execution on other people's sandalled feet. Another might

finish a syllable after everyone else. A third comes on stage ten seconds late and has to surreptitiously slip into position. Possibly one cannot see well because of her hood and gropes blindly.

HYSTERECTOMY *is one of those people who spits copiously and also has bad breath. She also shouts. Unfortunately, she has a habit of sticking her face close to people and bellows the following lines with her face right up to OEDOCLES, who gets the full blast.*

HYSTERECTOMY What means this, noble King Oedocles? Why do you weep by this sheet-shrouded figure on the bier?

OEDOCLES *(flinching and surreptitiously wiping his eye)* I am glad you asked that question, fair Hysterectomy. Alas—

He is interrupted by the late arrival of a member of the CHORUS.

—alas, I weep for my wife and your queen, the lovely Ovary.

The corpse sneezes.

HYSTERECTOMY Queen Ovary dead? How did this terrible event occur? Was she murdered by political rivals or struck down by the gods for some hideous sin?

OEDOCLES Neither, noble Hysterectomy. She ate some bad fish. A piece of hake, to be precise.

HYSTERECTOMY Oh fatal hake, oh wretched fish so vile, foul poisoner of our most beloved queen!

During the following, the CHORUS become more and more violent. Eventually, they fling themselves down by OVARY's body and start wailing and pummeling it with their fists in distress.

CHORUS Oh woe, thrice treble woe! Now let the seas

Boil over, and the sun conceal its face,

Let storms rage over every place on earth

May rivers flood until all life is drowned,
 And hideous fires burn everything to ash.
 If Ovary be dead, let all the earth
 Be devastated to the very core.

OVARY *gives a cry of pain and half sits up.*

OEDOCLES Take up the body and bear my precious Queen
 Ovary to the burial place.

AMNESIA Come good King Oedocles, I will comfort thee in
 my sister's death.

HYSTERECTOMY Who is this grief-stricken female, who clutches
 your arm so fiercely?

OEDOCLES (*flinching*) The sister of my wife, Amnesia.

CHORUS Oh hapless sister! Was thou born for this?

Most miserable of women! Oh, most vile
 And wretched in the earth! Oh woe to thee
 Unhappiest of women! Surely thou
 Art most accursed of all thy sex in Thebes.

The CHORUS get violent again, weeping and tearing their clothes, and flinging themselves on AMNESIA, clutching her round the knees and beating at her. She emerges a wreck.

OEDOCLES Thank you, fair women of Thebes, I'll let you know
 (*slight pause*) how much I am beholden for your sympathy.
 Take up the bier.

The two slaves do so. Unfortunately, the base of the stretcher gives way with a rending noise, and they are left holding two poles with the body still on the ground.

After a short pause, OVARY, the body, realises what has happened and decides to save the situation. She therefore stands up in a crouching position, carefully

PRIDE AT SOUTHANGER PARK

PRIDE AT SOUTHANGER PARK

Adapted for the stage from
Jane Austen's long-lost work

by Rupert Bean

First performed by the Old Carthusian Dramatic Society at
The Redgrave Theatre, Farnham, on 8th March, 1998, as part
of the Tenth Coarse Acting Festival, with the following cast:

CECILY CHICHESTER , an orphan	Claire Mistry
LADY FANNY BOTTOMLEY , Cecily's aunt	Suzy Winter
REVEREND GILES HENRY , a vicar	Ashley Pannell
GLADYS , the maid	Clare Croome
SIR THOMAS BOTTOMLEY , Cecily's uncle	Murray Pannell
WILLIAM SQUIRES , a suitor	Rupert Bean
MRS SQUIRES , William's mother	Tom Chisman
MARCUS D'ANGELO , another suitor	Jake McQuitty
FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER	Damien De Roche
DRUNKEN HUSBAND	Mike Aldridge

Directed by **Rupert Bean**

Lighting and Sound by **Nick Townsend**

Note: The drunken husband does not appear in the published version. Mrs Squires and the front of house manager may both be played by females.

PRODUCTION NOTES

For nearly twenty years The Redgrave Theatre, Farnham, put on a Coarse Acting Competition every other year to raise money, and this play was an entry in the last competition in 1998. Soon afterwards, the theatre sadly went dark, though one hopes not for ever. As usual, I was adjudicating the competition and I was much impressed by this piece. However, I somehow got the idea that the author, Rupert Bean, and his team from the Old Carthusian Dramatic Society, had won the competition two years previously, so I did not award it first prize. That turned out to be a typical piece of Coarse adjudication, because they hadn't won two years previously; somebody else had come first and author Rupert Bean had then got the award for best director.

I was therefore very happy to make amends by including it in this book, especially because it was greeted with uproarious laughter at The Redgrave. Since then, one or two alterations have been made. In the original, Mrs Squires was played by a man (the Carthusians are one of the few drama groups to have a surplus of men). As this volume aims to give more opportunities for women, that restriction has been removed. However, this doesn't mean Mrs Squires needn't be played by a man—if you have one to spare (see notes on the characters).

As regards the rest of the production, Rupert Bean recommends there should be a great sense of BBC Jane Austen about the whole thing. Costumes and set should be as circa 1820 as possible (except the outrageous reverend). However, they haven't quite got things right, as witness the music. This is a production by someone who's seen the TV series but hasn't read the book (or any books probably). The cast make a great effort at the period style, bowing, fluttering fans, etc., but they haven't much of a clue.

The interruptions by the house manager will be much funnier if the cast react by stopping, freezing and staring bleakly at her. If they play through regardless, the business won't be funny because the audience's attention will be split. We want to feel that there will be a row afterwards ("I don't care about the audience, you spoilt my big moment..."). The house manager herself, like all front of house staff, is unaware of the effect of the interruption. Incidentally, she must be at the front of the audience or she won't be seen. And you must have a stooge planted for the person whose ticket she challenges, otherwise

a real argument may develop. The whole business must go quickly and smoothly or the atmosphere will be wrecked. The same applies to her second entrance with ice creams.

As for the easy chair, the breaking of which causes so much trouble towards the end of the piece, use an old chair from a rubbish tip or charity shop so the leg can be sawn off. The length cut off will depend on the thickness of the Bible which replaces it. Balance the chair with the cut-off piece and cover the whole thing with ornate wraps and so on. Then it will collapse when Cecily walks into it; this is essential, as much of the plot depends on it. If it doesn't work for Cecily, somebody else must find an excuse for making it collapse. Rehearse it frequently. Don't leave it to the dress rehearsal.

Michael Green

NOTES ON THE CHARACTERS

CECILY CHICHESTER, an 18-year-old orphan: Very attractive actress. Keen, new acquisition to the group. Anxious to shine.

SIR THOMAS BOTTOMLEY, Cecily's uncle: Played by a young actor who thinks his character should be grandiose and pompous. His real-life wife is about to give birth, so he is armed with a (concealed) mobile phone. Very highly strung and can't take crises, especially now.

LADY FANNY BOTTOMLEY, Thomas's wife. Actually quite a decent actress, though let down by the incompetents around her.

REVEREND GILES HENRY, the vicar: Thinks that as a churchman he should carry a Bible and crucifix; tends to cross the air for no reason whatsoever; he is also wearing some sort of papal outfit, preferably bright red, since this was the only costume remotely religious that the wardrobe had.

WILLIAM SQUIRES, Cecily's tutor: Can't act for toffee and only given the role because his dad gave £500 to the Society. Suffers bad stage fright.

MRS SQUIRES, William's mother: If played by a woman, she should have a "common" accent but try to talk posh. A bad piece of casting, but there was no one else. However, the part can be played by a man, in which case he should do his Widow Twanky performance from last year's *Aladdin*.

MARCUS D'ANGELO, loveable rogue and suitor: Modelled on the sexy Mr Darcy of Colin Firth in the 1998 TV production of *Pride and Prejudice*, complete with sideburns and tight trousers. Very full of himself. Tends to address all his lines to the audience.

GLADYS, the maid: Coarse actress from the Midlands, complete with chip on her shoulder. Keen to develop the role.

FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER: This part should be played by an actress, not the real person. Armed with a powerful voice and torch to match. Has no idea of the destruction she is causing with her ill-judged interventions.

The action at the play takes place in the living room of Southanger Park, the ancestral seat of Sir Thomas and Lady Fanny Bottomley in Hampshire.

Scene One

Lights down. The soundtrack from “GONE WITH THE WIND (TARA’S THEME)” is played—a fuzzy recording. According to the director, this gives the piece the “epic quality” it needs to be up there with National Theatre productions. How wrong can one man be.

Lights up on the living-room of Southanger Park. Chaise-longue, an armchair (see production notes), and a table with flowers set; plus anything else one feels would look at home in a Jane Austen epic. The entrance to the room is right; the exit to the dining room is left.

CECILY CHICHESTER, just turned 18, is standing looking out at the audience as if through a window. She has forgotten to take her watch off. She is constantly using her fan.

LADY FANNY BOTTOMLEY is sitting on the chaise longue, stroking an obviously fake toy dog.

The music continues, since the sound engineer is having an argument with the lighting man about football.

There is an awkward pause while the two actresses exchange worried glances.

CECILY decides to start anyway, shouting loudly to be heard over the music.

CECILY Dear aunt, now that I have turned eighteen, can I be allowed to marry whom I choose?

LADY FANNY Cecily my child, you know how strict your uncle, Sir Thomas, is—he will need to approve of the match.

CECILY But what about love? Does that not count for anything?

LADY FANNY What of that virtue?

CECILY turns and runs to LADY FANNY, as the music cuts out with a screech. They look plainly relieved.

CECILY Surely I must be allowed to marry someone whom I truly love?

LADY FANNY But you will learn to love in time. Love must be initially forsaken in favour of family, status and security.

CECILY So this is why my uncle has invited the odious Mrs Squires and her son to my birthday dinner here tonight. He wishes me to consider Mr Squires as a suitable posster...

There is a pause.

...possible suitor.

By now the FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER has strolled in, armed with her loud voice and powerful torch. (One of the laws of Coarse Acting is that the FOH staff are always more audible than the cast).

She bounds up to a person on the aisle, sweeps the torch around and settles on their face. (See production notes.) During this interruption, LADY FANNY and CECILY glare pointedly at the FOH MANAGER, angry at the hiatus.

FOH MANAGER (*booming*) Excuse me, sir, can I see your ticket please?

There is some protesting.

Well, I'm sorry, sir, but this ticket is for next week's matinée performance of Mother Courage. Because of you, we have had to turn people away. Please see me in the interval.

FOH MANAGER *retreats, though not before sweeping the audience once more with the torch.*

The play continues. LADY FANNY gets up very quickly, forgetting the dog on her lap which just falls on the floor. She replaces the dog on the sofa.

LADY FANNY I do not believe that there is any consideration to do, child. Ever since your parents died, Sir Thomas has felt it his duty to marry you off to someone of high social standing.

WILLIAM Squires is such a man, and you could do far worse.

CECILY But aunt...

Pause. The doorbell rings, as electric sounding as possible, preferably with a silly tune.

LADY FANNY Hush, child, for Gladys will shortly enter with the first of our guests.

Huge pause. GLADYS does no such thing.

(ad-libbing) Surely I hear Gladys in the hall with the first of our guests?

The doorbell sounds again. REVEREND GILES HENRY can be heard off.

REVEREND *(offstage)* If she's not here, I'll just go on, shall I?

The REVEREND struts on stage right. He is equipped with a Bible, a crucifix around his neck, and is wearing full bishop regalia, complete with mitre. As soon as he enters, he crosses the air, as he feels all holy men do this every waking moment. Indeed, he has spent the last three Sundays before performance in church studying the vicar.

(to non-existent GLADYS) Thank you, my good woman; may your soul have eternal salvation.

CINDERELLA

CINDERELLA

By Michael Green

CINDERELLA, a young girl

SAMMY, a cat

CYSTITIS, Cinderella's ugly sister

HERNIA, another ugly sister

BUTTONS, a cheerful young man, friend to Cinderella

A YOUNG LADY TRUMPETER

PRINCE CHARMING, a young prince

GOOD FAIRY

PROMPTER

And a hand coming round the scenery

PRODUCTION NOTES

Pantomime is a traditional English type of entertainment and if anyone outside of the country should find this piece incomprehensible, I'd understand and advise them to replace it with a play from one of the other volumes.

However, as English readers know only too well, pantomime is all about tradition and this needs to be mirrored in the production. We need all the traditional clichés, such as Cinders leaning on her broom, Buttons leaping around, the life and soul of the party, the principal boy all fishnet tights and thighs. There's an air of desperate jollity about the whole thing, which contrasts with the ineptitude of the production. A pity because they'd always wanted to put on a panto. However, they were sure nobody noticed what went wrong and their friends all said how good it was. It might help the cast to keep this imaginary company in mind as it will aid their own performances. Perhaps they might think of a defective village hall production. Below I sketch out some suggestions on performances, but obviously the cast may adapt these to suit themselves.

The prompt is one of the most important characters and should be played by an actress rather than a prompter. She is totally oblivious to the havoc she has created. The reactions of the cast to her are important. They try to struggle on but exasperation shows.

Buttons is convinced he is the funniest thing on earth. It might be an idea if he tried to do it in Yorkshire but keeps wobbling and going into Irish or Welsh (as one does). He has obviously added dialect lines to the script such as "Ee bah gum" and "deed to goodness". The rest of the cast hate him. Cinderella tries rather too hard to be sweet and finishes up being sugary. Perhaps she puts on a squeaky voice. However, her real nature sometimes breaks out.

Prince Charming (who is, of course, traditionally played by a woman) is about twenty years too old for the part and rather too plump. Her fishnet tights have holes in them. Occasionally she gets her fingernails caught when she slaps her thigh. She tries for a strident principal boy voice but merely deafens everybody. Her local accent might well show through (Welsh?).

The ugly sisters may be played by women or men as preferred. Traditionally, they are usually played by men, but I see no reason why two women shouldn't be cast. They need to be

loud-mouthed and distinctly unfeminine. Perhaps posh ladies trying to sound common.

The good fairy is quite wrong for the part. Anyone less graceful couldn't be imagined. I've described her in the text as squat but the main thing is to be awkward and un-fairy-like. She could be huge. Further, she might have a strong regional accent, something completely out of key such as Birmingham, West Country, or Australian.

The flying (or rather non-flying) of the Fairy is vitally important. If the fairy can be flown properly she should descend and ascend jerkily on a ridiculously thick rope. Imagination will suggest what disasters may happen. Alternatively (and more practically) she is meant to be flown but something has gone wrong. ("I told them not to leave it until the dress rehearsal.") So she has to walk on and off with a thick rope attached to her back, trying to give the impression she is floating and waving her wand. The rope can run through a pulley over the stage and another offstage to give the impression they meant to fly her. It might jerk sometimes, as if they were trying to lift her, or it might stop her suddenly. If this results in a rope hanging diagonally from above the stage to the fairy in the wings, have the pulley close to the side where the fairy enters. However, strange ropes dangling about are nothing new in Coarse Theatre.

Sammy the cat rather resents having to be an animal after she read for Cinderella. She thinks it's an easy part so she keeps dropping out of character and behaving like a human, sitting in a chair with crossed legs etc. as indicated in the script. Then she suddenly remembers and goes back into cat mode. Ideally, she should have a proper cat's costume, but it might be possible to improvise or use a mask. The part can also be played by a man.

The herald doesn't often get parts and she is really trying. Perhaps her first show. She's very nervous. It's not her fault the sound operator had one too many in the bar. She realises he is destroying her big chance.

Michael Green

Scene One

CINDERELLA's home. The kitchen.

If necessary, the scene can be set in drapes, with just one flat containing every pantomime cliché—strings of onions hanging down, pots and pans plus a besom broom all painted on the flat. There is a fire in front of the flat, with a genuine flicker effect, and an old-fashioned table and some chairs. If facilities permit, the more flats the better.

When the curtain opens, CINDERELLA is dusting. She is dressed in the traditional rags.

Her cat, SAMMY, sits by the fire. This part can be played by either a man or a woman, but whichever it is, they regret volunteering, because now the cat costume has actually arrived, it is very uncomfortable and keeping up a cat-like stance is tough on the knees. So sometimes SAMMY lapses into human poses, scratches the armpits or stands upright.

CINDERELLA Oh dear. I shall never finish all this work. My two sisters are out enjoying themselves and I have to do all the housework, the sweeping, the dusting, the cooking. It's a shame, isn't it, Sammy?

SAMMY *gives a highly unconvincing miaow.*

And now the fire is going out.

She picks up a log and rather hurriedly thrusts it on top of the fake fire, which promptly explodes. SAMMY stops being a cat and leaps four feet in the air.

But you never desert me, do you, Sammy?

The cat shakes its head and miaows again. As CINDERELLA dusts, it tries to follow her, but has difficulty in walking like a cat. ("I couldn't remember whether the left leg at the back goes with the right leg at the front, or if it's left leg and left leg.") CINDERELLA strokes the cat and it leans against her leg rather unsteadily, as it hasn't got used to balancing when crouching. When she moves away, it falls over.

The door bursts open and the two ugly sisters, CYSTITIS and HERNIA, enter. They are dressed traditionally, like washerwomen with striped woollen stockings.

CYSTITIS Oh, me legs is killing me. Take these parcels, Cinderella.

HERNIA And hold these dresses, Cinderella. Go away, cat!

The cat is pestering her. Unfortunately it can't go away as she is standing on its tail. It makes frantic efforts to move without success.

CYSTITIS You lazy thing, Cinderella, you haven't cleaned the floor.

CINDERELLA Yes, Hernia. Yes, Cystitis.

HERNIA Isn't this underwear lovely? *(She holds up a pair of red Directoire knickers from a parcel)*

CINDERELLA Yes, Hernia.

The cat, now desperate, has slipped out of character and is tapping HERNIA's leg and pointing to its tail. She merely tries to brush it away.

CYSTITIS And isn't this bra divine? *(She holds up something like a couple of potato sacks)*

CINDERELLA Yes, Cystitis.

HERNIA And where's dinner, Cinderella? Why isn't it ready for us?

CINDERELLA I've been too busy cleaning, Hernia.

At last HERNIA moves a little and releases the cat, which gives an audible sigh of relief.

HERNIA Then get it ready at once, you naughty, worthless baggage. Where's that broom? I'm going to spank you.

CINDERELLA By the fireplace, Hernia.

HERNIA storms across to find the besom broom is painted on the flat. ("Well, you never told me you wanted a real broom, mate.") A pause. She returns empty-handed.

HERNIA Ah...well...yes...bend over and take that, you naughty girl, and that and that. *(She mimes spanking)*

CINDERELLA Ow, ow. You're hurting.

CYSTITIS I should think she is, you lazy little thing.

A stage management hand comes round the scenery and offers HERNIA a modern broom (the one they use to sweep the stage). She doesn't see it, although the broom is waved vigorously. Eventually, the hand gets fed up and withdraws. It returns immediately and makes a rude sign ("After all the trouble I went to, the silly cow just stood there.").

HERNIA And now I'm going upstairs to rest. I'm fair worn out.

CYSTITIS Yes, we haven't time to mope around the kitchen all day like our young sister.

The UGLY SISTERS exit.

CINDERELLA *heaves a sigh.*

CINDERELLA I'd better get on with getting the dinner and start the sweeping or I'll never finish.

CINDERELLA goes over to the fireplace, only to find the broom is painted on the flat, as did her sister. She stands puzzled.

A hand again appears round the fireplace flat and offers her a modern broom. She doesn't notice at first, so the broom is banged on the floor twice. Seeing it, she automatically accepts. Then she starts to sweep. After a few strokes, she leaves the broom propped against the fireplace flat and sits on a stool, with a sigh. A hand comes out and snatches the broom back ("Well, we needed it urgently backstage.")

BUTTONS *enters. He is dressed in a traditional pageboy uniform. He obviously fancies himself as the chief comic, although in fact he is totally unfunny. Furthermore, his trousers are dramatically undone, with a strip of shirt sticking out obscenely, a fact of which he is oblivious. He also does not realise that he has a coat hanger dangling from his jacket collar, with a piece of paper on it saying "BUTTONS" or "Take in waist". He has decided to play the part in a Northern accent but this keeps slipping into Irish, Welsh, Scots or anything, sometimes in mid-speech.*

BUTTONS *(with ghastly cheeriness)* 'Ullo, 'ullo, 'ullo. How are we today, then? How's me luvly Cinderella, ha, ha, ha, ee bah gum.

CINDERELLA *(not very impressed)* Oh Buttons, how lovely to see you. Your merry voice gladdens my heart. *(She goes to give him a hug and realises his trousers are undone and contents herself with a peck on the cheek)* Oh Buttons, I do like you so very much. *(She points delicately at his crotch)* And I think you like me. *(She points again)*

BUTTONS *(oblivious)* I like you too, Cinders, better than anybody else I know.

CINDERELLA You're the only friend I have in the world. *(She points at his loins, less delicately this time)*

BUTTONS And you're the only friend I have in the world, too, Cinders, except for Sammy the cat. *(He goes over and strokes SAMMY)*

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