

The wives of the actor Robert Reynolds (fl. 1616 – early 1640s)

Historians of the Jacobean and Caroline stage are relatively well informed about the eventful career of the wandering actor Robert Reynolds, ranging from his earliest days as a Queen Anne's man in England in June 1616 and 1617 to his management of the Earl of Saxony's players in May-June 1628, his frequent visits to the city of Gdansk before and after 1635, and his appearance in Königsberg [present-day Kaliningrad] in May or June 1640.¹ For a short period of time, between late 1628 and the spring of 1631, Reynolds also appears to have resided in the Netherlands, where his wife Jane joined him in the course of the year 1629. Apart from (a) later performance(s) at Amsterdam in December 1636, few other traces of Reynolds' presence in the Netherlands have been recorded.² One document directly relevant to his Dutch connections has been occasionally cited by theatre historians, a notarial act dated at The Hague and drafted shortly after Reynolds' death. In so far as this document is concerned with Reynolds' widow, it has been the object of a strange case of misreading—and hence misidentification. A brief and partial examination of the act, signed before notary public Gerrit Syrcxszoon van Oldersom and preserved in the City Archives at The Hague, should serve to set the record straight.³

¹ G. E. Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage. Dramatic Companies and Players (Oxford, 1941), II, 543; Willem Schrickx, "'Pickleherring' and English Actors in Germany", *Shakespeare Survey*, 36 (1983), 135-47; Jerzy Limon, Gentlemen of a Company. English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660 (Cambridge, 1985), 22, 47, 51-54, 67, 80-81; Eva Griffith, A Jacobean Company and Its Playhouse. The Queen's Servants at the Red Bull Theatre (c. 1605-1619) (Cambridge, 2013), 183-86.

² J. G. Riewald, 'Some Later Elizabethan and early Stuart Actors and Musicians', *English Studies*, 40 (1959), no. 1, 33-41 (35); and 'New Light on the English Actors in the Netherlands, c. 1590 - c. 1660', *English Studies*, 41 (1960), nos. 1-6, 65-92 (84).

³ Haags Gemeentearchief [The Hague City Archives]. 0372.01: Notarieel Archief [Notarial Archives], inv. 203, folio 125, 30 October 1644. All further in-text references to the documents in this collection will be to GAH, followed by the inventory number and the folio(s).

On 30 October 1644 Nathaniel Speede, representing a company of English actors including Jeremy Kite, Thomas Loveday, William Cooke, Edward Shatterell, and others, signed an obligation acknowledging a debt of 118 guilders, which they owed to Robert Reynolds' widow for room and board and for hiring theatre costumes required for a performance to be given the next day at the court of Mary Stuart, Princess Royal (1631-1660). The obligation confirms that the actors, who had probably settled down at The Hague shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, were so destitute as to be thrown back on a set of costumes, which had in all probability belonged to Reynolds' company and had passed into the hands of his widow after his death, in or shortly before 1642. While shedding light on the whereabouts and vicissitudes of these mid-century wandering actors and the contacts they entertained on the continent, the notarial act of 30 October 1644 also raises the somewhat enigmatic issue of the identity of Reynolds' widow.

Although seriously damaged—the top right-hand corner of the first folio of the act is unfortunately missing—the text leaves little doubt that the contract was agreed between Speede and 'Jo^u Sijburch Jans, wed^e wijlen robbrecht reijnals' [the widow of the late Robert Reynolds]. Adducing this document in evidence of women's contributions to the contemporary theatre business, M. A. Katritzky has identified Reynolds' widow as 'Jane Sijburch Jones' and assumed without further ado that 'Sijburch Jones' was Reynolds' first wife Jane Browne (born around 1597?), the daughter of the Elizabethan actor-manager Robert Browne (1563 - ca. 1621), whom Reynolds had married before 1616.⁴ The identification is unfortunately an erroneous one. Even if, in accordance with the contemporary practice of Dutchifying English proper names, 'Jans' would have been

⁴ M. A. Katritzky, 'English Troupes in Early Modern Germany: The Women', in Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson, eds, *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (Aldershot, 2008), 42-43. On the family relationship between Browne and Reynolds, see Schrickx, "'Pickleherring' and English Actors", 136-37.

intended as the equivalent of 'Jones', it is difficult to see how Jane Browne Reynolds in this official document came to be called 'Jane Sijburch Jones'. In addition, the first name Jane assigned to her by the same scholar is based on a (convenient) misreading of the text: the contracted forms 'Jo^u' and 'Jo^w' in the act do not stand for Jane but for 'Juffrou' or 'Juffrouw', the Dutch form of address of an unmarried woman—as Sijburch Jans obviously was in October 1644.

That Jane Reynolds, 'wife of Robert Reinolds', had travelled to the Netherlands many years earlier is a virtual certainty. Two successive 'licenses to pass beyond the seas' had been issued to her: on 2 July 1629 she had been given permission to join her husband at Utrecht, and on 17 October of the same year she had been allowed to travel to The Hague, at this point in time possibly Robert's operating base in the course of his European tours, in the course of which he occasionally performed under the clown-name 'Pickleherring'.⁵ Recording the visits of English comedians to Poland, the English traveller Peter Mundy in 1642 provided a memorable description of this dramatic character, adding that the actor who played it had died at Warsaw and that 'his wife now liveth here [i.e. in Gdansk]' with an allowance from the Polish King, '[f]or her Maynetenance'.⁶ If, as has been argued, this actor was Robert Reynolds, the widow would have been Sijburch Jans—or her alias, as I make clear below—instead of Jane Reynolds.⁷ Indeed no further incontrovertible evidence about the latter's whereabouts is available after October 1629. Unless the Robert and Jane Reynolds mentioned in the 1629 licenses were a different couple, it seems certain that

⁵ J. G. Riewald, 'Some Later Elizabethan and Early Stuart Actors and Musicians', 35.

⁶ R. C. Temple, ed., *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia 1608-1667*. Vol. IV: *Travels in Europe, 1639-1647* (London, 1925; repr. 1967), 181-82.

⁷ Willem Schrickx, *Foreign Envoys and Travelling Players in the Age of Shakespeare and Jonson* (Wetteren, 1986), 238-39. M. A. Katritzky has argued that the actor was George Vincent, not Robert Reynolds, whose 'widow lived in The Hague to at least 1649': see 'Pickelhering and Hamlet in Dutch Art: The English Comedians of Robert Browne, John Green, and Robert Reynolds', in *Shakespeare Yearbook*, 15 (2005), 113-40 (124).

Robert's first wife died between October of that year and sometime before 1642, and that he remarried a Dutch woman—the one named in the notarial act of October 1644 and in several later ones. But I have been unable to find a trace of Robert and Jane Reynolds' dates of decease or of Robert's marriage to his second wife in the Dutch records—perhaps confirmation that none of these events took place in the Netherlands. In addition, the name of Reynolds' second wife presents us with a another puzzle.

A number of notarial acts, preserved in the City Archives at The Hague and closely dated after October 1644, make further mention of the Dutch wife, who is repeatedly identified as 'the widow of Robert Greenhals' (as well as Reijnhalt, Reijnolts, or some other Dutch version of the name). Nowhere in these later documents is she called Sijburch Jans but always, strangely enough, Sijburch [Sijborch] van Sonsbeeck. Eliminating all possible doubts about the latter's ancestry and family name, a list of Sijburch's late mother's possessions, dated 22 January 1652, identifies her parents as Jan Willemsz. van Sonsbeeck and Trijntgen [i.e. Catharine] Balten vander Crocht (GAH, inv. 139, folio 32). One is therefore left to wonder why, in the agreement with the English players of 30 October 1644, she was called Sijburch Jans—the only occurrence of this name in the notarial records at The Hague before 1650. This could hardly have been an error on the part of the notary's clerk since it is in this form that the name occurs three times in the decipherable part of the act. As Jans' signature does not feature on the obligation, she may not have been present at its validation, even though it was executed at her house. The two witnesses were Matthew Sparrow, possibly a fellow-actor of Nathan Speede's, and 'Jan Jans', a local merchant of English descent, who signed his name as John Jones.⁸ Both had been expressly called in because they spoke and understood the 'English and Low-Dutch languages very well and had

⁸ See my note, "The Actor George Bentley at Rotterdam in 1646", forthcoming in *Notes and Queries*

translated and explained at some length the content of the obligation for the benefit of the first party [i.e. Speede]' (GAH, inv. 203, folio 125v; my translation). Whatever (or whoever) the source of the confusion, the question as to why Reynolds' widow, two months before being first registered under her 'true' name, was named Sijburch Jans must remain unsolved for the time being. But the available archival evidence does provide us with some new information about Robert Reynolds' heirs in the Netherlands. A number of notarial documents relevant to the van Sonsbeeck family allow us to establish some previously unrecognized facts.

The earliest of these documents, dated 4 and 14 January 1645, relate to a sum of 306 guilders, which one Christian Hartman, assistant-equerry to Count (Johan) Maurice of Nassau (1604-1679), owed Sijburch for 'money borrowed' and for 'consumptions enjoyed at her house' (GAH, inv. 20, folio 205). A few days later Sijburch gave power of attorney to Andrew Courtman, a messenger in the service of the Princess Royal, to receive the debt on her behalf (GAH, inv.20, folios 188-89). Viewed in the context of Sijburch's lending of theatre costumes to the English company in October 1644, this evidence leads to two conclusions. First, Reynolds' widow was at this point in time in touch with at least the outer orbit of Princess Mary's play-loving court at The Hague.⁹ And, second, as the owner of a guesthouse, and even before she remarried a local innkeeper (see below), she had sufficient financial means of her own to be able to lend money to well-placed individuals.

The next handful of documents are of interest for what they tell us about Sijburch's remarriage. One of the witnesses to the power of attorney, dated 14 January 1645 and signed by 'Sijburch Renalls' herself, had been Jacob Stalpert [Stalpart], who was soon to

⁹ Marika Koblusek, "'A divertissement of little plays'. Theater aan de Haagse hoven van Elizabeth van Bohemen en Mary Stuart", in Jan de Jongste, Juliette Roding, and Boukje Thijs, eds., Vermaak van de elite in de vroegmoderne tijd (Hilversum, 1999), 190-202.

become her second husband. If he was the same Jacob Stalpert who was baptized at Delft on 13 November 1619, he would have been twenty-four, and in legal terms possibly considered underage, at the time of the marriage.¹⁰ With both partners being assisted by a guardian, the contract was drawn up on 12 April 1645; it stipulated that the future bride and groom would be contributing equal financial parts and enjoy community of property.¹¹ More interestingly, the contract reveals that the bride had two 'voorsoonen' (sons from a previous marriage, i.e. to Reynolds), either of whom was entitled to a sum of 300 guilders, in full settlement of their father's goods. The money was to be kept in trust by Sijburch and her new husband for the 'maintenance and education' of these underage children (GAH, inv. 191, folio 187). The identity of the Reynoldses' sons is revealed in the will of Anthony Croonenburch and Margaret van Sonsbeeck, Sijburch's sister, dated 8 February 1650 (GAH, inv. 137, folio 19). One of the provisions in this will is that if Margaret died first, her husband was to evenly divide their possessions between himself and Johannes and Jeronimus, his sister-in-law's children 'procreated by Robbert Reijnals, her first husband.' By now, the sons are no longer described as being underage; nor are they explicitly said to have reached their majority. But years of birth in the early to mid-1630s for either would square with the supposition that Jane Reynolds died not long after 1629 and that Robert married Sijburch van Sonsbeeck a few years later.

On 3 November 1654, while being bed-ridden, Sijburch made a will, the details of which must remain unknown as the records of notary public Pieter Bock, before whom the

¹⁰ Erfgoed Delft. Stadsarchief. 14: Doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken Delft, 1367-1811. Doopboeken Oude Kerk, folio 37v. His parents were Jeremias Stalpart and Geertgen Jacobs.

¹¹ In the marriage contract history, ironically enough, repeated itself: the bride's name was now mistakenly given as 'Suburch van Sonswijk.'

will was recorded, have not been preserved.¹² After having revised her testament twice in the next few months, Sijburch drew up what appears to have been a definitive version on 2 August 1658 (GAH, inv. 294, folio 131-32r). In it she left 100 guilders to either of her sons—whether this was in addition to the money already reserved for them in her marriage contract is not clear—as well as several silver and gilded decorative items. The eldest, Johannes, was to inherit ‘his late father’s golden ring.’ Sijburch also bequeathed no less than 1000 guilders, to be divided equally, to the four children (two daughters and two sons) she had had by her second husband. To each of them separately also went various items of jewellery and other valuables, all of which were to be handed over to the children once they reached their majority.

Although I have not located Robert Reynolds’ will, the size of his legacy—300 guilders could buy a small town-house around mid-century—suggests that his career as a travelling actor had been a lucrative one, and that he had benefited from his various appointments at European royal and ducal courts. Upon his death, his possessions would presumably have gone to his widow. In addition, the maintenance allowance which van Sonsbeeck herself (and not Jane Reynolds, as I have argued) had for a number of years collected from King Wladyslaw IV of Poland (1595-1648), no doubt in recognition of her husband’s services, may have helped her secure the guest accommodation business in the Netherlands. But even in after years, Sijburch, now signing her name as ‘Sijburch Stalpers’, remained active as a lender of rather considerable sums of money in her own right. On 21 March 1649, for instance, Jacob Stalpert, inn-keeper, ‘having married Sijburch van Sonsbeecke, the widow of Robbert reijnolts’, gave power of attorney to Cornelis Hofer, a tobacco salesman in

¹² The date of the original will is mentioned in the second revision, dated 12 February 1655: see GAH, inv. 293, folio 226. The first revision was dated 7 February 1655: see GAH, inv. 293, folios 216-217r.

Amsterdam, to requisition and collect the sum of 158 guilders, which one Cornelis Hauwen owed Stalpert's wife—not Stalpert himself (GAH, inv. 213, folio 37). Several depositions and contracts of the 1650s, relating to the rent and sale of property and the collection of unpaid debts, in their turn indicate that the couple, usually described as mere innkeepers, over the years had built up a thriving business in The Hague.¹³

In later years, Jacob and Sijburch established themselves at Delft, as an entry in the register of the local Orphans' Chamber indicates. On 1 July 1671, Sijburch, 'the widow of Jacob Stalpert, inn-keeper in this city', informed the authorities that she and her husband, in their will dated 3 November 1654 (see above), had excluded the Chamber from the guardianship of their children. As this type of notification was as a rule made upon the death of one of the parents, it is safe to assume that Jacob had died shortly before 1 July 1671, aged about 52.¹⁴ Sijburch survived her husband for more than 16 years. On 12 January 1688, 'Siburgh van Sonsbeeck, widow of Jacob Stalpert, [living at] Langendijk', was buried in Delft; the entry duly noted that she left (an undefined number of) adult children.¹⁵

There can be little doubt that Sijburch van Sonsbeeck (though not Jane Reynolds) was, within her own sphere of action, no less enterprising than those women who as performers, co-managers, or even financiers vitally contributed to the operation of their husband's company of travelling actors.¹⁶ But none of the documents briefly touched on here nor any other that I know of warrant the conclusion that Reynolds' widow 'maintained

¹³ See, for instance, GAH, inv. 193, folio 96 (22 January 1652); inv. 410, folio 377 (21 August 1658); and inv. 220, folio 54 (5 February 1659) and folio 282 (27 November 1659).

¹⁴ Erfgoed Delft. Stadsarchief. 72 Weeskamer Delft, 1536-1863, inv. 72.467, folio 307.

¹⁵ Erfgoed Delft. Stadsarchief. 14: Doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken Delft, 1367-1811. Oude en Nieuwe Kerk, inv. 14.44, folio 242.

¹⁶ For some examples, see: M. A. Katritzky, 'English Troupes in Early Modern Germany'; J. P. Vander Motten, 'Jacob Hall and other Rope Dancers at The Hague, 1679-1681', *English Studies*, 103 (2022), no. 6, 853-70; id., 'More on the Rope-Dancing Couple Jacob Hall (fl. 1670-1681/82) and Susanna Roy', forthcoming in *Notes and Queries*,

her links with British players, and economic dependency on the theatrical profession, for many years after the death of her husband.¹⁷ Nor do they prove, as one scholar has boldly claimed, that Sijburch 'deckte...mit dem Aufbau eines Kostümverleihs eine Marktlücke im Bühnenbetrieb' ['supplied a gap in the theatre market by setting up a costume rental business'].¹⁸ However attractive, the hypothesis that the theatrical activities engaged in by the Elizabethan actor Robert Browne and his son-in-law Robert Reynolds, both in England and on the Continent, were continued by the latter's *English* widow in the Netherlands is solely based on a misreading in, and an extrapolation of, one document—the October 1644 obligation mentioned at the beginning of this note. Sijburch van Sonsbeeck's lending of the theatre costumes appears to have been a one-off (and not gratuitous) act of helpfulness benefiting a troupe of actors who would have been no strangers to her late husband's continental career. If, as has been asserted, Reynolds' widow made a living in the theatre business in the 1640s and afterwards, the evidence substantiating this notion has not yet emerged.

J.P. VANDER MOTTEN

Ghent University
Belgium

¹⁷ M. A. Katritzky, 'English Troupes in Early Modern German', 43; Peg Katritzky, 'Pickelhering and Hamlet in Dutch Art: The English Comedians of Robert Browne, John Green, and Robert Reynolds,' in Ton Hoenselaars and Holger Klein, eds, *Shakespeare Yearbook, Volume 15: Shakespeare and the Low Countries* (2005), 119-20.

¹⁸ Peter Brand and Bärbel Rudin, 'Der Englische Komödiant Robert Browne (1563 - ca. 1621). Zur Etablierung des Berufstheaters auf dem Kontinent', *Daphnis. Journal of German Literature and Culture of the Early Modern Period (1400-1750)*, 39 (2010), 118.

