DYING LAUGHING: ON THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE CLOWN IN
SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

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for Dad

“Lord, heap miseries upon us yet entwine our arts with laughters low.”

James Joyce.

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"Dying Laughing" opens by positing that Hamlet’s resistance to the distracting nature and vulgar appeal of the improvisatory stage clown reflects not Shakespeare’s view, as it may have been informed by the work of Sir Philip Sidney, but rather offers a critique of such aesthetic elitism potentially blind to its own clownish antics. Shakespeare’s practice, deeply rooted in the English performance tradition, not only acknowledged the clown’s particular vitality as central to early modern theatre, but used it as a source of often radical theatrical innovation, not least in his history plays and tragic dramas. Collectively the four chapters of this study articulate a reading of Shakespeare’s developing use of the clown figure that resists and complicates, in ever more innovative ways, the prevailing devaluation of the popular forms it may otherwise seem to have epitomized. Beyond merely innovating, I argue, it is the figure of the clown that enables Shakespeare to allow indecorousness to work—dramatically and theatrically, but also epistemologically and philosophically, to unsettle often dangerous or harmful fictions of decorum that structure social relations and social roles. Thus “clowning around” means serious business. Furthermore, I argue that a pattern of banished (or disappearing) and resurrected clowns in the Shakespearean canon demonstrates the irrepressible and metamorphic powers of comedy and clowing. The return of the repressed or the resurrection of the newly dead in the form of the afterlife of the clown, moreover, speaks to Shakespeare’s longstanding commitment to a politics of inclusion.

Chapter 1 demonstrates how the hugely popular stage clown Dick Tarlton, later indexed in the figure of Yorick in Hamlet, epitomized the theatre as a chaotic and productively disruptive form of popular entertainment. Specifically, I observe that Tarlton’s vitality and the connection between representation and reception that he facilitated was central to early modern performance: his presence and practice both the spark that animated performance and that drew people to it. I then argue that by bringing Tarlton’s successor, company clown Will Kemp, on stage with leading man Richard Burbage, Shakespeare invited and amplified the potentially disruptive, extra-textual elements of physical or verbal improvisation that were the habitual practice of the clown. While other critics have considered and explicated clown practice, my work builds on this as a point of departure to explicate the relationship between clown and lead-actor/hero, and how it was experienced in performance. What has not been fully considered previously is the peculiar tension and enormously generative, unstable and compelling relationship between the two actors - clown and hero - and how this expresses and echoes the page/stage dichotomy being contested at the time. Clowning in this context renders visible the class dynamics and the structures or hierarchies of authority at work. Moreover, in Shakespeare’s hands, the clown’s increasingly sophisticated deployment and absorption into his plays comments on and resists the transformation of the medium underway. The Kemp/Burbage exchanges and relationship, Chapter 2 argues, subvert the gravity of the tragic hero in Romeo and Juliet, and the political hero of 1 Henry IV. For Shakespeare, the dialectical tension between hero and clown, moreover, not only informed the genres of the tragic drama and the history play, but became constitutive of them. Hamlet takes the disruptive potential of the clown more seriously than scholars have fully contended. Chapter 3 argues that Burbage’s performance as the prince represents an absorption of the newly absent Kemp’s practice into his own. More than just exploring his performance of the ‘antic-disposition,’ I reconfigure the famous question of “delay” as a re-insertion of the disruptive and alternative temporality of the clown into the revenge mode. Here I argue, the clown’s famed capacity for direct addresses to the audience
resurfaces functionally even it differs thematically in Hamlet’s extraordinary soliloquies. Finally, I argue that the clown in King Lear is drained of his very vitality and function even as his exilic condition is revealed as endemic to the play’s vision of humanity. The theme of exile, as The Odyssey attests, always encompasses the longed-for possibility of return. I contend that the Fool’s premature exit from the play mirrors the historical arc of the clown’s expulsion from the theatre, and that the 1623 Folio, rife with alterations to the 1608 Quarto that were, I argue, the result of Shakespeare’s collaboration with Armin, facilitates a conscious paean to the clown as well as a more nuanced tragic vision. When Shakespeare’s plays consider what is lost in the excision of the clown, what surfaces is not simply a recognition that the nature of theater is changing in and through a renegotiation of the stage-audience relationship, but that more than a few voices, bodies, and perspectives are being left behind in the process.
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INTRODUCTION: THE CLOWN IS DEAD LONG LIVE THE CLOWN

And let those that play your clowns say no more than is set down for them, for there be of
them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too,
though in the meantime, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered.

Hamlet (3.2.38-43)\(^1\)

The gradual transformation of the clown in England from its carnivalesque roots in the
marketplace and social celebration to its absorption into, and fairly swift expulsion from, the
commercial theater of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries, is by now a familiar
narrative in cultural and dramatic history. As the story goes, as commercial theater developed
and incorporated increasingly “refined” political and aesthetic modes of decorum, the clown was
increasingly marginalized and ultimately exiled from the stage. In part the representative of the
base commoners (his very name developing from ‘clod’ of earth defined him as provincial), the
clown not only offended seemliness but also stood as a figure of the extraordinary inclusivity of
the nascent professional public theatre over which he briefly dominated. As critics have put it,
“By the time Hamlet’s instructions to the players first sounded in the theater, the traditional
clown with his right to improvise was well on his way to being a dead institution,”\(^2\) “by the close
of the Renaissance, the famed license associated with fooling—court fool or clown would no
longer be countenanced, politically or aesthetically.”\(^3\) This dissertation, however, examines both
the life and the many afterlives of the clown, focusing on the phenomenally productive structure
and function of clowning for aesthetic and dramatic innovation in the plays of Shakespeare.
Moreover, I attempt to set out a “logic of the clown” that opens up new ways of thinking about its operation and reception in performance. Collectively the four chapters of this study articulate a reading of Shakespeare’s developing use of the clown figure that resists and complicates, in ever more innovative ways, the prevailing devaluation of the popular forms it epitomized. Alert to the clown’s potential in his own developing dramaturgy, Shakespeare’s plays—particularly those discussed herein—mark an ironic ascent, a flamboyant valediction of the clown at the heart of the theatrical event, defiant in the face of its decline and dissolution.

Beyond merely offering the means for innovation, Shakespeare’s developing dramaturgy is infused with the recognition that the very vitality of the theatre he knew largely hinged on the capacity of the clown. A central argument of this dissertation is the extent to which the clown’s ability to manipulate or “play” a crowd becomes absorbed and intrinsic to Shakespearean practice, and to which he thereby preserved elements of earlier practice even as the medium was fundamentally changing. Shakespeare’s influence on the English language and culture has been seismic, yet while his dramatic or poetic legacy is ongoing cultural currency his remarkable treatment of the clown has been obscured by turns of history and taste. The late medieval theatre, the world of Shakespeare’s comic inheritance, was famously built around the rhythms of the community and the social or religious and agricultural calendar. It also, importantly, had the clown at its heart. Illuminating this history in Clowning and Authorship in Early-Modern Theatre, Richard Preiss tellingly admits that he did not set out to write about clowns, but found them to be the essence of his subject. Preiss suggests, as have others, that the period marks the English theatre’s gradual shift from a performer-based medium to a writer-lead one, even as his thesis parses that assumption. Further reconstituting crucial elements of this earlier performance-lead practice, and examples of its ongoing or residual use, is a central concern of
this study, as are the implications for performance and reception. Preiss further describes the theatre’s transformation as one in which audiences gradually morph from conditions of active “participation” to those of passive “consumption.” That participation was as unruly and indecorous as the clown’s involvement, “registering their pleasure and displeasure alike with violent disruptive intensity.” In taming and containing these energies the theatre becomes more similar to modern conceptions and experiences of it, but throughout the Elizabethan period it operated with quite different norms, difficult to imagine when simply reading the extant plays. In asserting control over their text and its means of production, emergent playwrights reconfigured the terms of engagement: they craved (if not always received) compliance from the actors, and attentive silence from their audience. Herein the clowns improvisatory voice and unpredictable roaming body had to be silenced and proscribed. And yet, it was precisely the inherently unsettling influence of the clown, figured in his inclusion of the audience as both its host and its representative, which Shakespeare embraced. The changing nature and form of theatre can appear inexorable in retrospect, logical or even necessary. Shakespeare stands apart in considering what is lost in the clown’s disappearance.

For a glimpse at the nature of the issue, let us raise a contemporary, albeit negative, voice. As late as 1597 Joseph Hall, the satirizing moralist and soon to be bishop, can describe (or lampoon) a performance being disrupted by a clown thus:

Now, lest such frightful shows of Fortune’s fall,
And bloody tyrant’s rage, should chance appal
The dead-struck audience, midst the silent rout,
Comes leaping in a selfe-misformed lout,
And laughs and grins, and frames his Mimick face,
And jostles straight into the prince’s place:
Then doth the theatre echo all aloud
With gladsome noise of that applauding crowd
A googly hodge-podge, where vile russettings
Are matched with monarchs and with mighty kings.
A goodly grace to sober Tragic Muse,
When each base clown his clumsy fist doth bruise,
And show his teeth in double rotten row,
For laughter at his self-resembled show.7

Hall captures the dynamism and physicality of the performer, and, as Robert Weimann observes:
“he takes aim at what seems to thrive beyond the control of writing: the strong, unfettered performative, the presence on stage of flesh and blood, with “fist” and “teeth,” and of course the textually unsanctioned rights of “laughter.”8 Significantly, the clown is introduced “lest” the more serious show should silence or displease its audience and interrupts the loftier tragic tyrant’s rage. It is this clashing of the two modes that so appalls the learned literary sensibility, and which is behind the period’s insistence on genre purity as writers such as Ben Jonson and John Marston self-consciously instill literary criticism into their work and attempt to wrest performance conditions from their demotic roots in artisanal stage-practice. Thus a conception of how theatre “should be” clashed with how theatre was in practice and drove developing conventions. Theory and aesthetics find a foothold in a popular medium and it is an uneasy arrangement.

The ensuing transformation in the theatre that Leah Marcus rightly insists we understand as the engagement of a culture of orality with a culture of literacy,9 is (also) intrinsically tied up with class and developing demands - or what I will call fictions of decorum - to which the clown is anathema and must be excised. The encounter (and discontinuity) between emergent ideals of learned writing and the realities of corporeal performance would long harp on precisely the actor’s privilege to say what he pleased, and seek to control it: a concern that soon fixates on the figure of the clown. While the critics, aforementioned and otherwise, have considered and explicated the clown’s practice and function, my work builds on this as a point of departure to explicate the relationship between clown and lead-actor/hero, and how it was experienced in
performance. What has not been fully considered previously is the peculiar tension and enormous generative, unstable and compelling relationship between the two actors—clown and hero—and how this expresses and echoes the page/stage dichotomy being contested at the time. Clowning in this context renders visible the class dynamics and the structures or hierarchies of authority at work. Moreover, in Shakespeare’s hands, the clown’s increasingly sophisticated deployment and absorption into his plays comments on and resists the transformation of the medium underway.

In 1599 a play called *A Warning For Fair Women* premiered in London, and its Induction presents the figures of Tragedy, History and Comedy who discuss matters of contemporary taste and quickly fall to arguing. Much could be said of this lively scene but I will restrict myself to one observation. Tragedy, who would banish the other two from the stage, is warned by Comedy that such a course would have dire implications. “But one a week if we do not appear / She shall find few that will attend her here” (Induction, 31-2). Comedy, and by extension clowning, is popular—it brings the paying audience in—but in the 1590’s popular was, in elite circles at least, almost literally a dirty word. Again, in context, genre purity (and appreciation of tragedy and the serious) is an expression of authorial decorum and successful or controlled reproduction of the written word on stage. Rejection of genre purity is at once aesthetic and political aberrance. Moreover, what Robert Weimann sees as the developing organic collaboration between author and actor over these years, can be seen by Richard Helgerson, as the breakdown of that collaboration. I posit that this interaction between author and actor is indeed constructive, but then also becomes destructive, precisely in step with the arc of the clown’s excision. In retrospect, the year 1600 emerges as the decisive hinge, the terminus qua, between inclusive collaboration and the subsequent increasing exclusivity, decadence and slow decline of the
theatre brought about once the playwrights gained the upper hand. The price of exclusivity and decorum would be the disintegration of the medium as a popular entertainment, as evidenced by the theatre’s move to the court under James.

The extraordinary disruptive capacity and vitality suggested in Hall’s scornful description of clowning are exemplified in the career and practice of “Dick,” or Richard, Tarlton, the subject of my first chapter. Tarlton’s practice embodies the potential of the clown to Shakespeare, and more immediately the theatre’s demotic origins in craft and practice. Tarlton’s vitality and the connection between representation and reception he facilitates, I contend, is central to early modern performance, his presence and practice both the spark that drew people to it, and that animated the performance. Tarlton’s great fame as a clown was unprecedented, his influence on his culture enduring and recursive, even from beyond the grave. The argument of this dissertation is threefold, each stemming from Tarlton’s influence and practice. I propose that clowning offers Shakespeare the central means for radical innovation, for challenging emergent aesthetic codes and literate authority that devalue the work of the performer, and for exploring ideas of repression indexed in the clown’s expulsion. These arguments are all linked and premised on the vitality and performative power of the clown onstage, as he implicitly renders the scene and its other characters’ subject to sudden disruption. After Tarlton’s example, this issue is worked out by Shakespeare as an ongoing dialectic between clown and lead actor, a structure further informed by the relationship between the two stars of Shakespeare’s company in the 1590’s, the clown Will Kemp and frequent hero Richard Burbage. This relationship informs and is found in Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Henry IV, and, in more subtle ways, Hamlet. The dynamics of this relationship, potentially rivalrous and competitive if long-standing, are again hard to glean from simply reading the plays, but would have been powerfully
experienced in performance. As such, virtuosity in performance, presupposed by Shakespeare, becomes itself a potent tool and tactic in the contested arena of the late Elizabethan theatre. Moreover, in these plays I suggest that the dialectical tension between hero and clown is not only integral to the genres of the tragic drama and the history play, but becomes constitutive of them.

As is well known, Shakespeare’s practice only occasionally observed the classical unities, and paid little attention to the neoclassical tenets of generic decorum advocated by the influential Sir Philip Sidney. Sidney, writing in the 1580s, famously abhorred the “mingling” of kings and clown as he tried to impose the constraints of genre and to discipline the clown. There is much to be said about the extent to which the stage clown in fact granted playwrights a powerful vehicle to challenge emergent forms of socio-cultural elitism and social stratification, and part of this dissertation will explore just that. However, I go further still, and argue that it is the figure of the clown that enables Shakespeare to allow indecorousness to work—dramatically, but also epistemologically and philosophically, to unsettle often dangerous or harmful fictions of decorum that structure social relations and social roles. Thus, I contend, clowning around means serious business and is, in fact, the key to the enormous cultural impact and ongoing legacy of Shakespeare’s drama. Again, part of the original argument of this thesis entails scrupulous attention to the potentially rivalrous and certainly dynamic relationship between Kemp and Burbage, between the clown and the leading man, as it worked out or was experienced on stage, that informs the “clown prince” Hamlet himself and also, in a different way, in King Lear. 14

In addition, emerging from Shakespeare’s developing interest in the social and historical role of the clown, and its compelling potency in performance, I contend that a pattern of banished or disappearing clowns emerges in the Shakespearean canon. Crucially, these banished
clowns each in their own way return or are powerfully resurrected. I trace the arc chronologically as it found in *Romeo and Juliet’s* Peter, in Falstaff, and as it dramatically reappears (albeit in a significantly modified form) in *King Lear*. Kemp’s exit from Shakespeare’s company some time in 1599 is another clown departure that acknowledges a new era but that which is powerfully reincorporated, memorialized and resurrected. While other critics see different ghosts stirring in *Hamlet*, I argue that Tarlton and Kemp’s clowning is resurrected in and throughout the play in Burbage’s performance as the prince, Hamlet himself becoming a clown replete with requisite banishment and return. Furthermore, Act 5 of *Hamlet* explicitly evokes and disinters Tarlton in the figure of Yorick, his laughter and influence recalled and resurrected to facilitate the prince’s acceptance of death. Where before the clown delayed a play’s conclusion, here it is necessary to achieve closure. Moreover, with Yorick’s skull in Hamlet’s hands, among the most famous and ubiquitous images in western literature, we find the association of death with laughter and clowning at the heart of the western canon. More than an index for the social change, specifically the theatre’s increasing exclusivity, the clown emerges as embodying an irrepressible force whose radical inclusiveness operates, like death itself, as a means of social levelling.

Encompassing and bringing all these aspects together in performance is the clown’s irrepressibility. The clown hates to leave the stage and relishes every return. He is endlessly resourceful and not easily drawn from seeking his desired oxygen (laughter), and this is a direct extension and application of clown logic that wants to be onstage and requires an audience. The clown’s irrepressibility manifests itself through delaying tactics and by connecting with audience—both forms of interruption or disruption of the plot that expose the theatrical conventions at work and involving the audience in employment (and enjoyment) of those fictions. As such, Hamlet’s complaint which opens this introduction encapsulates what is in essence the clown’s logic and *modus operandi*. Here, as elsewhere, by incorporating clowning, Shakespeare builds a central meta-dramatic and critical creative element into the heart of his work. The clown’s great political and philosophical strength is that he shows us, in an instant,
how things are put together or made, and thus deconstructs—but also, potentially, teaches us how to reconstruct—order. And, from any but Hamlet’s perspective, the clown is not villainous, rather he is doing precisely what he’s been put on stage to do. Equally, by the time he comments, Hamlet has assumed the clown’s privileged liminal relationship with the audience and has been constantly demonstrating his own clownish dilatory nature. Hamlet’s need to unpack his heart with words and connect with the audience is a manifestation of his own, albeit tortured, clown logic that renders him unwilling or unable to leave the stage, and/or to act.

THE ANCIENT/MEDIEVAL DICHOTOMY: ON CLASS AND THE LACK OF IT

Literary historians have long emphasized the enormous social upheavals and profound changes so characteristic of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England and Europe, not least involving the dynamic schism of the Reformation, the effects of which were still reverberating in Shakespeare’s England. In that time England, in the most general terms, began to shift from its medieval and feudal past into the early modern nation state. Richard Helgerson’s *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* charts this emerging sense of nationhood as an assertion of national pride, self-consciousness and ambition centered around the crown and its administrative arms, the Law, and the (now State-run) Church and influencing almost all of its cultural expressions. This ‘civilizing’ project was based in rejecting the supposed barbarism of the Middle Ages and aligning England anew with classical Greek and Roman ideals. As such, Helgerson argues, a dialectic of “Goth and Greek” was central to England’s developing self-understanding and self-representation, and the medieval versus ancient dichotomy was baked into the process of change.16 The terms of this dialectic, as they came to him through Sidney, John Lyly and others, inform and shape Shakespeare’s work, and his increasingly bold
mobilization and innovation with clown forms characteristic (particularly) of his Elizabethan output. This thesis argues for a productive and evocative juxtaposition of the comic with the serious in Shakespearean drama, which embraces while also newly dramatizing and thematizing the theatrical inheritance and the potential in the clown to corral his disruptive energy in the service of the serious—the serious business of history and tragedy, and, lest we forget, and throw the baby out with the bathwater, of entertainment.

Helgerson’s seminal book is constructed around the two central issues that he sees as underpinning the social transformation of the period: firstly, the monarch and monarchical power and, secondly the inclusion or exclusion of various social groups. Conflict, Helgerson says, was to develop along the lines of royal prerogative and subjects’ rights in the developing social or cultural system, a fair assessment most clearly of the Stuart period but equally of the Tudor era preceding it. Helgerson cites Ernest Gellner suggesting the lessening of social difference is a prerequisite of national state formation, but argues that “early modern national self-representation went the other way.”17 Claims to cultural legitimacy were based upon assertions of distance from popular culture and strong alignments with “standards of order and civility that transcended national boundaries but enforced boundaries of class.”18 Helgerson’s probing of “the narrative construction of national identity and particularly the relation of narrative to social hierarchy”19 provides the context for the transformation of the newly professionalized theatre that is the point of departure for this present study. As he crystallizes the logic of this process in his “Introduction”:

The social elevation of the London theatre depended on separation from the base commoners who originally made up a large part of its audience, so commoners were excluded.20

This “social elevation” process is at the heart of this thesis, the engine or catalyst behind the
change reshaping theatrical forms. Robert Weimann describes this same “social elevation” as a process of “differentiation,” integrally linked to class and the separation of theatre from its common roots.\(^{21}\) Shakespeare problematizes the simple dismissal of the clown and the class-based assumptions behind it, even as he was himself subject to those rigid class boundaries personally and professionally.

Weimann has powerfully argued for Tarlton’s influence on Shakespeare,\(^{22}\) and, building on his and others’ work, I assert that the vitality Tarlton embodied was precisely congruent with the emergent theatre’s inherent need and power to disrupt the working day of others and thereby draw an audience. Chapter 1, “Tarlton’s Playground: Shakespeare’s Comic Inheritance and the Man who could “Please-all,” while excavating the theatrical experience immediately prior to the more familiar Elizabethan and Jacobean iterations, begins by analyzing Tarlton’s role at the court of Queen Elizabeth in the late 1570’s. Tarlton’s relationship with the Queen increased his fame and indicates a tolerance and appreciation of his particular skills and persona across all levels of society. Furthermore, I suggest that at court in 1579, Tarlton’s role precisely mirrors that of the emergent stage clown with parallels in narrative romance and classical comedy, wherein the clown ironically comments on the situation of the hero. Appropriately, or predictably, Tarlton’s indecorousness went too far on (at least) one occasion, incurring the queen’s displeasure and seeing Tarlton banished from her presence.

Despite that incident, Tarlton would become in 1582 a founding member of The Queen’s Men. His career encompassed the years of that company’s dominant position throughout the 1580’s, and, as such, he was a crucial figure in shaping the experience and expectations of the London audience. Equally he was active at precisely the time Sidney was writing his *Apologie for Poetry*, the treatise that would prove so influential in reformulating laughter as inappropriate for comedy when it was eventually published, after his, and Tarlton’s, death. History attests to a personal relationship between the courtier-poet and the clown—Sidney stood godfather to one of
Tarlton’s children—and to a huge appreciative capacity for comedy in Sidney quite at odds with the language of the *Apologie*. I raise Sidney as a key representative of the literati, and as a creation of the State, an ultimately tragic figure, alongside the disruptive, indecorous, yet irresistible Tarlton. Their relationship indexes the limitations of Sidney’s vision, and the interaction of theory and practice in performance: I contend that the 1580’s saw an early pitched battle between Sidney and that which gave him pleasure, as he attempted to discipline his own enjoyment of theatre. Moreover, I suggest that Tarlton refuses to die, or at least to stay quiet from beyond the grave, and that his influence rivals Sidney’s in the next decade as, despite the maelstrom of social and cultural change that called for the disciplining of the clown, the clown refuses to be disciplined. If the conceit seems fanciful, the ensuing chapters will assert its peculiar and recursive currency.

Returning to Tarlton’s work onstage, I then consider his performance in *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, a vital pre-text to Shakespeare’s second tetralogy of history plays. Beyond the alternative senses of time (narrative, historical, theatrical) and representation (mimesis disrupted) that the clown brings onstage, I argue that Tarlton’s perambulations in that play, as Dericke, what the stage directions call his “roving,” represent an alternative occupation of theatrical space. The restless energy of the performance, its near-constant motion, foregrounds ideas of kinesis, embodiment, fictions of theatrical space, and the audience’s own engagement by turns restive and absorbed. I demonstrate how Tarlton’s practice offered a model of performance practice with clown and audience aligned together in the disruptive act of generating performance and carnivalesque inversion. This model, I argue, is in fact constitutive of early modern performance, its very vitality and popularity.

Chapter 2 “Seriously Vulgar: Will Kemp and the Apotheosis of the Clown,” reconsiders Shakespeare’s developing use of clown throughout the 1590’s, and his corralling of the energies that other writers and forces were increasingly attempting to suppress. If, as others have noticed, Sidney’s prescription for a cure were in response to the ills of the previous decade, his ideas were
nonetheless taken up with fervor after the delayed publication of the *Apologie* in 1595. That same year also saw the opening of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, two plays that both answer Sidney and arguably constitute Shakespeare’s own apology for poetry. The chapter describes how Shakespeare’s innovations with his roles for Kemp’s exploited the social inclusivity of the clown, and his virtuosity. Shakespeare, I contend, deliberately courts and attempts to contain disruption by placing his clown, Kemp (as Peter, Bottom, and Falstaff), opposite his lead actor, Richard Burbage (as Romeo, Theseus, and Hal), to devastating effect: their combined charisma adding the ineffable and the electric, thereby thematically and theatrically enriching the performance event. *Romeo and Juliet* offers examples of Shakespeare’s developing use of the clown to manipulate the audience’s perception of the hero. In these moments, I assert, Shakespeare invited and amplified the potentially disruptive, extra-textual elements of physical or verbal improvisation that were the skills and habitual practice of the clown. The Kemp/Burbage exchanges and relationship subverted the gravity of the tragic hero in *Romeo and Juliet* (and later the political hero of *1 Henry IV*). Again, it is important to observe that for Shakespeare, the dialectical tension between hero and clown for Shakespeare not only informed the genres of tragedy and history plays, but became constitutive of them. Equally, Shakespeare used comic forms and means to cultivate reflection upon the power of comedy in the serious domains of historical and tragic action. The clown’s disruption underscores and exposes the scaffolding of power, not to mention the power of surprise as an engine of drama, since the clown onstage raises the specter of the unexpected, keeping an audience in a form of engaged suspense.

*Henry IV* is premised on precisely the opposition of the serious with the comic that scholars might locate in a study as early as Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais in His World*, an
examination of the period’s dramatic forms of social change, particularly with regard to the fundamental refashioning and deracination of comedy he aligns with the influence of the Renaissance. For Bakhtin, laughter, in its broadest conception, encompassed a restorative, literally life-restoring quality that by extension made it a powerful tool or weapon against oppression. Bakhtin suggested that the social integration of laughter and its original power and breadth of function was gradually excised, reduced, and replaced by a social order that saw no place for the comical in “that which is important and essential.” The sphere of the comic, he wrote, narrowed to “the specific and the individual” so that the, “essential truth about the world and about man,” could not, “be told in the language of laughter.” For Bakhtin the clown is representative of the earlier form of laughter, rich in association, socially cohesive and fabulously restorative to the point of death defying. He is a folk figure, of community, of demotic endurance and spirited defiance. Bakhtin’s conception of the Rabelaisian grotesque is an unabashedly lurid and scatological construct that, I suggest, Shakespeare anglicized and transformed into a more recognizable vision of his own community that reflected the rhythms, social forms and traditions of both the rural pastoral calendar of his youth, and of bustling late Elizabethan London. As numerous scholars have recognized, the energy of the Bakhtinian clown, the associations and laughter he stands for, are the qualities Shakespeare employs in numerous clown-figures, most indubitably Falstaff. What concerns me at the end of this chapter, however, is the extent to which Falstaff represents an apotheosis of Kemp’s particular strengths in ways that challenge Burbage’s charisma “hold” on the audience as as Hal’s relationship to his subjects. Falstaff’s disruption is aesthetic, moral and political associated both with kingship and mastery over one’s desires. In Henry IV then we have a “Bakhtinian” clown who counterfeits death, laughs in the face of it, stubbornly and lubriciously celebrating a way of life and of being
that must end, that cannot be endured or accommodated, opposed as it is to all that is serious or responsible.

Hamlet, I suggest, is a second kind of “Bakhtinian” clown who confronts death and Shakespeare will disinter a third to foreground their significance to life and facilitate the prince’s acceptance of his role and destiny. Kemp left Shakespeare’s company, The Lord Chamberlain’s Men, in 1599 immediately before the company’s move to the Globe and the first performances of *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. Tarlton had lived on in the person of Kemp, and when both exit the scene permanently the spirit they represent is excised. When Shakespeare considers what is lost in the excision of the clown, it is a recognition that the nature of his medium is changing fundamentally and renegotiating the terms of its relationship with the audience. Shakespeare, moreover, refuses to silence the disruptive energies of the clown, or to present a world limited to clear generic boundaries.

Chapter 3, “Clown Prince Hamlet: ‘Antic Dispositions,’ and Fictions of Decorum,” contends that *Hamlet* takes this disruptive potential very seriously, and that Burbage’s performance as the prince represents the absorption of the absent Kemp’s practice into his own. More than just animating his performance of the ‘antic-disposition,’ I reconfigure the famous question of “delay” as a re-insertion of the disruptive and alternative temporality (or timing) of the clown into the revenge mode. Here I argue, the clown’s direct addresses to the audience resurface functionally even as they differ thematically in the soliloquies. *Hamlet*’s debt to theatrical tradition, and specifically clowning, was apparent if not universally praised at the time, yet has been obscured by subsequent developments and the play’s enormous amplitudes. In its encapsulating of this transformation *Hamlet* emerges as a crucial hinge or point of transition between the Tudor and the modern world, at once encompassing the theatre forms that made it
possible and anticipating its later forms and concerns that would efface those earlier ones so comprehensively.

Yorick’s appearance and Hamlet’s remembrance represents Tarlton’s second resurrection in the play, after Burbage’s prince has represented the return of the repressed in his own performance throughout. The clown’s powerful associations facilitate Hamlet’s acceptance of his role and fate. Tarlton/Yorick’s appearance is preceded by a display of clownish word play between the gravediggers, then between the gravedigger and Hamlet, a preparatory evocation of Tarlton’s craft ahead of his appearance. The whole scene is a deliberate mingling of prince and clown, and of course laughter and death. Herein as throughout the play, the vitality of the resurrected clown is imbued into the performance, and a crucial constitutive element in Shakespeare’s tragic universe.

Chapter 4, “The Worst Returns To Laughter,’ Transformation Through Collaboration and Textual Variation: Robert Armin as Lear’s Fool,” explicates the practice of Robert Armin, Kemp’s successor, as representing a new model of clowning even as it refashions long established clown traditions. The fool in King Lear is manifestly at once an archetype, and the last in a line. Armin was, among his many talents, a singer, and his clowning incorporated this melodious gift, as well as a self-conscious absorption of clown history and heritage. He was by inclination and education more refined in his outlook and aesthetic than either of his forebears, facilitating Shakespeare’s innovative employment of his sophisticated practice in a manner acceptable to the new Jacobean norms. I argue that the clown in King Lear is drained of his very vitality and function even as his exilic condition is revealed as endemic to the play’s vision of humanity. The theme of exile, as The Odyssey attests, always encompasses the longed for possibility of return. I contend that the Fool’s premature exit from the play mirrors the historical
arc of the clown’s expulsion, and that the 1623 Folio, rife with alterations to the 1608 Quarto that were, I argue, the result of Shakespeare’s collaboration with Armin, facilitate a conscious paean to the clown as well as a more nuanced tragic vision. In addition, the startling and sudden disappearance of Lear’s fool from the world of the play, whether or not the same actor played Cordelia, marks the last of disappearing clowns explored in this thesis. With his exit, it might be said, went an extraordinary dramatic tradition that enabled skepticism and truth telling while providing opportunities for release and relief through laughter.

None of the Elizabethan or Jacobean theatre venues survived the closing of the theatres by parliament in 1642, to open their doors at its restitution, after the civil war, in 1660. By the Restoration, new dramatic norms were operating if still evolving, and the theatre’s former social inclusivity and related non-mimetic elements were all but permanently eclipsed in the period’s riotous repertory, offering the impossibly captivating new diversion of actual women on stage. Most of Shakespeare’s plays survived—they had been collected and edited in the 1623 First Folio and were easily available for a hungry new audience—but they now reappeared in the symptomatically-revised forms of Dryden and others, with the clown parts much diminished or completely excised. But while no drunken Porter is there to belch, pun, and stagger the morning after Duncan’s murder in Davenant’s 1667 Macbeth, for example, and no Fool at all in Nahum Tate’s 1681 King Lear, the oppositional, bawdy, paradoxical, anti-rational, spirit of the clown still stalked the cellarage demanding, like the ghost of old Hamlet, to be heard, acknowledged, and remembered.
CORPSING: LAUGHING DESPITE ONESELF

Imagine, for a moment, an actress alone on the stage of a West End theatre, addressing a monologue to the assembled audience which repeatedly references a glass vase behind her on the set’s mantel-piece. In the midst of her speech, and while she is some feet from it, the vase shifts and falls to the floor, immediately shattering. The actress, startled, seeks to control her response, but realizes in the moment that not acknowledging the absurdity of the situation would be even more ridiculous than confronting it. As such, she turns to face front and smiles broadly at the audience who of course roar with appreciation, enjoyment, sympathy and not a little relief. Behind her a stage-manager emerges with a broom, sweeps the pieces off in a fluid crossing of the stage and then re-emerges with a replacement vase. After a reset moment, and with another smile, the actress resumes her monologue. Here, the actress has leveraged humor and irony to resurrect the scene and allow the play to go on. This is clowing incarnate.

Often a nightmare for the actor, this situation underscores the reality of the “live” event, occurring in real time, that either “lives” or “dies” in the moment. Embedded into the form, the live moment of performance carries with it the ever-present potential for this disruption, should the actor stumble, drop (in naturalistic conceptions of theatre) their all-important “character,” and draw awareness to the pretense at the heart of their endeavor. Meticulous casting, memorization and preparation, along with perfect control, and perfect decorum, is one way of attempting to resist the inherent danger. But inevitably, on occasion things go very wrong. Shakespearean practice embraces the discrepancy between planned performance and actual execution, celebrating the durability of the medium and the clown’s revivifying breath.

The clown’s irrepressible energy is not afraid of stage disruptions. Indeed, it can both cause stage death and be the means of the scene’s triumphant resurrection and continuation.
Quoting Hegel, Nora Johnson gestured toward the power of the actor or clown who thrives in the face of theatrical error or “dying,” of the “the blessed ease of a subjectivity which, as it is sure of itself, can bear the dissolution of its own ends.” While seventeenth century theatre turned toward naturalism and a commitment to mimesis, Shakespearean theatre celebrates the durability of the living moment that can encompass an unapologetic awareness of artifice even, or especially, in the face of death. Hamlet is right on the cusp of this, with his character asking for appropriate decorum in performance, even while Shakespeare subverts and embraces unpredictability. Specifically, in his holding forth about clowns, Hamlet complains “there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too” (3.2.39-40), criticizing a particular scene-stopping tactic that, along with the extemporizing, he wants stopped. The clown, he suggests, would at any moment deem their own performance and reception as more important than the ongoing scene and disrupt it just by laughing in order to prompt laughter from the audience. But Hamlet’s injunction indicates the limits of attempting to discipline the clown and control the medium more generally. As Weimann and Bruster note, “Here Shakespeare’s protagonist voices a demand for continuity between word and action - a demand held out against a situation marked by discontinuity between what the author wrote and what in fact these comedians were wont to do.” This is the core tension at the conjunction between writing and playing at work in the late Elizabethan theatre.

Hamlet has a point, but it is flawed. Shakespeare has given his hero a limited understanding of the mode in which he operated. The theatre may well attempt to banish clowns and their unruly ways, but an actor breaking character in the middle of the scene would remain an ever-potent possibility: it comes with the territory of performance, a by-product of the medium’s very nature. As we will see, Sir Philip Sidney’s vision, articulated by Hamlet, is restrictive in that it attempts to curb with authority forces that cannot be so contained, and when
repressed return with great power. I propose that when we hear inappropriate or unexpected or uncontrolled laughter on stage, then or now, whether self-interested or unintended, it is Hamlet being disobeyed, the scene’s progress halted, the humanist project challenged. In these moments, I contend, Tarlton’s comic spirit is returning to the stage, messing with the medium anarchically from the grave.

There is a truism whereby any convention only holds when all the participants adhere to it, or else by the application of distance or rejection from them it is revealed as ridiculous. In the theater, it hardly needs saying, an actor’s entire endeavor is rendered redundant and absurd if his fellow actor laughs in his face, which is precisely what Hamlet accuses the improvising players of doing. However, as anybody who works in the theater has seen, (and as the vase anecdote above suggests) it happens all the time, sometimes deliberately other times not, often in the privacy of the rehearsal room, but sometimes not. Sometimes, I suggest, these interruptions have their origin in a sudden unexpected change in the scene as rehearsed, an actor deliberately adding to his part to get a laugh. In other instances, an actor can unintentionally trip himself up in the execution of the scene by slipping physically or verbally in his accustomed delivery. Many actors have experienced the sudden forgetting of their next lines and the panic this affords. The laughter that often results from the actor at fault in these moments is both despite of and because of the professional injunction to the opposite.

In North America this dreaded moment when the actor fails, their character “dies” momentarily, and the comic fallibility of our nature triumphs in a burst of laughter, is simply called “breaking character.” In the English theater, the term is appropriately, if not necessarily in deference to Tarlton, “corpsing.” The term likely comes from the difficulty of staying still while playing a dead body on stage. Equally the term acknowledges how in these moment the character “dies,” and the audience sees the actor, not the character. This might be described as an “the
emperor has no clothes moment,” the moment, when, the actor is revealed as just an actor, and not a character. It is also the moment when, in “real life,” an authority figure is revealed to be just another human being. Hamlet’s wording suggests precisely this enduring form of inappropriate and irrepressible laughter, and this, I contend, is the same irrepressible force that Sidney struggled with when he laughed at Tarlton in spite of himself and his supposedly wiser nature. Later forms of theatre will again court the inherent magic in improvisation and unpredictability, but within naturalism it is anathema. For the sake of comparison, in his highly structured and prescribed *Waiting for Godot* (1948), Samuel Beckett has two tramps fall into the patter patterns of Vaudevillian clowns in an existential crisis: clowning is herein scripted and contained, but also thematized and suggested as reflecting human existence. The audience is played to, teased or tormented with extended pauses, but only acknowledged once and collectively as an indistinct bog.

Outtake or “blooper” reels from film and television provide startling examples of corssing, although they usually only surface after a film has had its cinematic release as they puncture everything the production has carefully spent time and money to create. Often these unplanned spontaneous moments are funnier than the material being attempted in a comedy, or outrageously at odds with the tenor of the serious scene. In the theatre such moments threaten to destroy a scene, but on occasion, can be magical and even transcendent—generating via their surprise moments of shared complicity (and unique experience) between actors and their audience. No one who witnessed the vase falling in the anecdote above is likely to forget it. Similarly memorable is the unpredictable practice of Tarlton/Kemp in the performance moment.

Readers familiar with the comedy partnership of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore may remember the latter’s deft ability to distract or otherwise disrupt Cook’s performance or train of thought and reduce him to helpless laughter. You can sometimes see in Cook’s eyes or facial flickers, the awareness of what his friend is doing, before he loses the ability to go on speaking.
In closing this introduction, I raise the specter of this transgressive laughter for its parallel with clown disruption. Cook and Moore, like Tarlton and Kemp, come freighted with the potential to make laughter out of anything at any moment. They only behave when they feel like it, they are frequently changed by what occurs and, therefore, the audience is always anticipating the unexpected. When Cook and Moore deliberately pull at the fabric of dramatic representation, potentially undermining their own material, they are performing comedy, their end is laughter, and the logic is that a switch to self-conscious recognition of the zaniness of their situation only adds to the hilarity. Theirs is an extreme example of comic energy shared between two performers, both highly literate observers and analysts of the comic forms they employed and exploded. Theirs is a satirical and transgressive agenda, and the anarchic freedom they generate belies the self-conscious preparation and construction. However, the energy and vitality that these two performers share, and the sense of instability they bring to the performance event, is congruent specifically with that which I suggest is exploited by Shakespeare when he puts Burbage and Kemp together. On stage there is professional rivalry and respect between the company’s two great actors, the handsome lead and the fabulous clown. Both men are invested in their own performance and alive in their interactions with the other, their performances fueled by the vocal approbation of the audience’s acclaim in the moment. Shakespeare’s tale unfolding, that audiences’ everyday lives are distant for a moment, their attention fully on the two stars, the sense of anything being possible is palpable and thrilling. Kemp’s debt to Tarlton is implicit but self-apparent, like his predecessor and Burbage after him, he walks the line between stage and audience, and between order and chaos. Shakespeare has pulled the clown here into the dramaturgical center where he retains his ability to disrupt, but he and Burbage are the necessary question of the play to then be considered.
CHAPTER 1. TARLTON’S PLAYGROUND: SHAKESPEARE’S COMIC INHERITANCE AND THE MAN WHO COULD “PLEASE ALL”

Tarlton when his head was onely seene,
The Tire-house dore and Tapistrie betweene,
Set all the multitude in such a laughter,
They could not hold for scarce an hour after.

Henry Peacham, Thalia’s Banquet (1620)²⁸

Dick, or Richard, Tarlton (sometimes spelled Tarleton) was the greatest clown of the Elizabethan era. John Stow, a contemporary commentator, extravagantly lauded Tarlton; “for a wondrous plentiful pleasant extemporal wit, he was the wonder of his time.”²⁹ Tarlton’s practice, indexed in these two opening quotations, was based in physical comedy, improvisatory wit, and extradiegetic disruption and digression experienced as pleasurable by the majority of those present. This man was wonderfully adept at prompting laughter, and scholars have increasingly understood his role in bringing a wealth of comic forms from social and cultural tradition on to the Elizabethan stage.³⁰ This chapter aims to set out a “logic of the clown,” instantiated by Tarlton, that opens up new ways of thinking about the clown him/herself.³¹ This logic in part informs how the physical comedy was experienced in performance and also how his practice, his class, and the figure’s still potent medieval associations, created a unifying popular drama.

Tarlton’s career spanned the early modern theatre’s years of great novelty and development that saw its professionalization in the 1570’s and the flourishing of the Queen’s Men through the 1580’s. As such, Tarlton’s was a defining influence in shaping the early form of
the medium and the audience’s developing expectations—in all its pre-decorum glory—before the arrival of Marlowe and the revolution and appropriation *Tamburlaine’s* mighty lines heralded. Richard Preiss, as we’ve seen in the Introduction, explicates how this earlier, nascent form of theatre was governed by the logic not of dramatic texts, but of social events, and how conceptions of theatre as text and as event are indeed often incompatible. Preiss describes the clown’s theatrical function as “vastly exceed[ing] his token role within the play—unsettling, in fact, the centrality of the play itself.” As such, we must reconfigure any preconceptions and recognize how “for many playgoers, indeed, the play was what interrupted them: it was an afterthought, and the clown, the ringmaster who transcended it, was the main attraction.” The distance from the content and language of surviving plays and contemporary references to this conception of a vibrant collective experience is indeed vast, but the chapter aims in part to reanimate the towering presence of Tarlton amidst this restless milieu.

That he was blunt, ugly, agile and very funny is clear, but it was Tarlton’s ability to entertain across class lines that elevated him to national fame, marked him as unique, and made him of particular interest to Shakespeare. Central to his practice is a confidence and irrepressibility that luxuriated in the vocal approval and adoration of his audience. In simpler terms, his oxygen was laughter: leaving the stage goes against this clown logic or imperative. From the clown’s perspective every moment or stimulus while on stage is a potential source of invention, an opportunity to give the audience more of what they want. Joseph Allen Bryant, cites the writer Gabriel Harvey coining the term “Tarltonizing” to describe the extemporizing and carnivalesque revelry of his performance practice. Bryant cites another contemporary describing Tarlton as one “That loved a maypole with all his heart /His humor was to please all them /That seem no Gods, but mortal men.” This suggests his appeal reached all but the
deranged or impossibly pious, a fitting tribute for a performer whose practice was enjoyed across all stratifications of class. The threat of cruelty or humiliation at being the butt of his humor is ever-present, but the dominant response is repeatedly both laughter, often raucous, and—a word oft used of him—delight. Crucially the laughter and inclusivity Tarlton exemplifies will come to inform and infuse Shakespeare’s dramaturgy most demonstrably in *Hamlet*: equally, I suggest, evoking his practice can radically inform our understanding of aspects of actor Richard Burbage’s performance as the Danish prince.

Tarlton’s practice complicated the important contemporary distinction and opposition of the refined comedy of delight and the low and vulgar comedy of laughter, as it encompassed both. That distinction was key in the period’s resurgence of classical ideals that sought to elevate and ennoble England’s unruly literature and language in the late-Elizabethan project of nationalist self-definition and aggrandizement. In this developing conception of the theatre, laughter—specifically uncontrolled and therefore indecorous behaviour—was deemed generically inappropriate to the aims of comedy. As such, as others have ably articulated, the London stage becomes a site of contention between the existing and emergent forms of theatre. Despite his obvious lack of decorum, Tarlton was funny enough to unify laughter and delight: he could not be written off as simply base, because his material was good enough to be appreciated by supposed gentlemen—laughing perhaps despite themselves, despite the injunction for courtly deportment and decorum. Various narratives emerge of the theatre’s “social elevation” in which the clown’s disruptive energy had increasingly no place in the developing professional theatre and the new plays written for it. Tarlton offers insight into the extent and manner of the struggle at the conjunction of writing and playing: as we will see, his practice would endure through the theatre’s transformation and cause Shakespeare, who still sought to create a unified
spectrum of comic laughter and delight, to dramatize forms of loss integral to the excision or exile of the clown.

A hugely influential figure in this aesthetic debate is of course, the poet courtier and soldier Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586). In his *An Apologie for Poetry*—circulated in manuscript in the 1580’s but only published posthumously in 1595—Sidney earnestly called for the “doltish” to be expunged from the theatre in the name of seriousness of purpose and appropriate decorum. The young aristocratic Sidney had witnessed this inchoate, demotic, and chaotic form of theater and saw in it danger and the need for containment and reform. Sidney’s early death (on the battlefield at Zutphen aged only 31) and the delay in publication of the *Apologie*, means that his criticism, achieving new currency on its publication right at the Shakespearean moment, attempts to settle questions raised by the excesses and crudeness of the 1580’s theatrical milieu that in fact fashions, market forces, and innovation had already begun to address. This much is well known. What’s less often considered are the implications of how Sidney’s literary and aesthetic sensitivities did not prevent him from having a friendship with the rudely charismatic social climbing clown. The friendship, which was close enough for the poet to stand godfather to Tarlton’s son, reveals the poet as having a huge appreciative capacity for comedy but, nonetheless, feeling compelled to restraint, and trying to discipline his own enjoyment. As such, the *Apologie* emerges as registering or recording an early pitched battle between the man and that which gives him pleasure. After his soldier’s death Sydney was lionized as a heroic embodiment of the ideal courtier—and may be at least partly invoked in Ophelia’s description of Hamlet embodying the ideal “Courtier’s, solider’s, scholar’s eye, tongue, sword” (*Hamlet* 3.1.151). Given his elite pedigree and early death, I want to raise Sidney as a tragic figure, aristocratic and a prince in all but name, then place him, as a product of the state, opposite the
comic figure of Tarlton. His life and principles bump alongside a friendship that makes him laugh in spite of himself, despite his supposedly better impulses and the restraint he advocated, a mingling supposedly anathema to the qualities he expounded. Here reality complicates assumptions and practice punctures theory. The following analysis, in focusing on reconstituting elements of Tarlton’s stage practice and his relationship with the audience, seeks to show the limitation of the application of theoretical certainty to stage practice. In fact, I suggest Shakespeare’s deployment of clown practice seeks to expose the fictions of decorum that Sidney expounds. This chapter and dissertation propose that Tarlton’s influence was both crucial and recursive. It was at its peak when clown and poet were both at court, as Sidney was struggling to discipline his own enjoyment. Then, in response to the stimulus of the publication of the Apologie in 1595, Shakespeare drew on Tarlton, who then also had a broader cultural revival at the end of the century. No one would argue against the cultural advancements and sophistication of the Renaissance in general, or the English theatre in particular, yet it is quite rational to speak of those advances coming at a cost, be it of social cohesion or other intangibles. The rough coincidence of Sidney and Tarlton’s deaths coming two years apart means their contention would continue in their absence, and both men would have a remarkable afterlife, profoundly influencing the theatre they left behind. The poet is invoked as an authority through the words he left behind, the clown, appropriately, through the irrepressible logic and physical inventiveness of humor that refuses to be silenced. In the decades after their deaths the nostalgia for both is potent.

Shakespeare will of course take the logic of the clown in ever more innovative directions throughout his career, a subject I approach in this chapter’s section on The Two Gentlemen of Verona. My emphasis here, however, is on how the vitality Tarlton embodied was experienced,
and was congruent with the emergent professional theatre’s inherent need and power to disrupt the working day of others to draw an audience in the afternoon. Without an audience present there is no performance. As Brian Walsh articulates it, the theatre’s “vitality rests in part on its ability to distract and disrupt the progress of other business, [and] to lure people away from their own professional commitments.” Tarlton himself is key to this disruptive allurement, and once the audience members are gathered, successfully lured away from their work day, his stage practice reflects this exact impulse and energy precisely. In performance, Tarlton refutes the diminished vision and vaunted verities that came to dominate and define the form for the seventeenth and subsequent centuries.

**DELIGHT AND BANISHMENT: THE QUEEN AND THE COMMON PLAYER**

Tarlton’s exact origins are obscure and contested, but from humble roots he made his way to, and reputation in, London. Surviving evidence places Tarlton as a founder member of The Queen’s Men in 1582, and their principal clown until his death in 1588. Touring with that company extended the reach of his popularity, but it is his prior and ongoing association with the queen herself that elevated Tarlton’s celebrity and notoriety. Their association also helpfully preserves otherwise ephemeral instances of his wit and practice. Moreover, the relationship indexes precisely the reach across class divides that the clown in performance embodies, and the anxiety around social mobility behind the call for genre purity and the clown’s expulsion. Fittingly, the association also offers its own near Falstaff-like end in banishment from the court—when his humor offends the sovereign—that parallels or presages the path of the clown in the theater and follows the same arc of banishment and return that I posit in this dissertation.
But it is strangely fitting, given the particular concerns of this dissertation with unstable genre, the mingling of kings and clowns, and the transference of skills from culture to the stage, that Tarlton’s earliest appearance in the historical record is as an adjunct to a real-life royal romance promoting the festive mood at Elizabeth’s court during her courtship by Francis, Duke of Alencon. At court in 1579, Tarlton’s role precisely mirrors that of the emergent stage clown with parallels in narrative romance and classical comedy, with the clown ironically commenting on the situation of the hero. (Alert readers will infer, again somewhat fittingly, that his was a role in a comedy without the customary consummation in marriage.) While common to the structure of comedy, such hierarchical disruption is transgressive and remarkable to find off of the stage. In this mode Tarlton is, of course, the consummate court fool or jester, a tradition at its peak in the reign of Elizabeth’s father but one that lingers into the seventeenth century. However, unlike those fools, or the Queen’s own dwarf Thomasina and the Fool we find in *King Lear*, Tarlton is not a kept household servant or companion, but an independent professional. In this he is the first, but his social mobility reflects broader social change.

Edmund Bohun’s *The Character of Queen Elizabeth* (1693) provides a number of fascinating glimpses into Tarlton and his relationship with England’s sovereign. In 1579 Alencon was 24, the queen was 46 and she called him—presumably affectionately—the racist slur “her little frog.” Bohun records that

The coming of the duke of Alenzon into England, opened a way to a more free way of living, and relaxed very much the old severe form of discipline: the queen danced often then, and omitted no sort of recreation, pleasant conversation, or variety of delights for his (sic) satisfaction.41

In this “relaxed” atmosphere we hear that:

At supper she would divert herself with her friends and attendance; and if they made her no answer, she would put them upon mirth and pleasant discourse with great civility.
She would then also admit Tarlton, a famous comedian, and a Pleasant talker, and other such like men, to drive it up with stories of the town, and the common jests, or accidents; but so, that they kept within the bounds of modesty and chastity.\(^{42}\)

How Tarlton kept within or flaunted those “bounds” is both impossibly intriguing and congruent with the clown’s role in front of a larger audience, freighted and fraught with expectation and instability. The queen clearly gave him license, but we will soon see him overstep and be rebuked. Tarlton’s place at court situates him in the line of court fools and jesters dating back centuries into the country’s mythical past, but singly, as already noted, as a “famous comedian.” At the same time as crowning this court-fool tradition, Tarlton in large part inaugurated a new tradition synthesizing the clown’s social and performing functions in the newly professionalized theatre.\(^{43}\)

Whether onstage, at court, in a tavern or other social setting, Tarlton’s practice was a combination of physical, verbal and musical performance, extracting laughter from surprise, incongruity, extravagant movement, drumming, and song. Along with the jig, Tarlton is most associated with his “jests,” extemporized exchanges on themes thrown up by an auditor. The jesting was as combative as it was playful, ultimately resolving in a knock out put-down or similar resolution in laughter. Tarlton welcomed all comers, and he maintained he could not be bested in these displays of quick wit, wordplay and aphorism usually executed in verse.\(^{44}\) To win these exchanges so consistently won Tarlton admiration and renown. It also betokens confidence and the ability to control a crowd or group and keep things moving forward. He is winning while he is in control of the conversation: in modern parlance the man with the microphone controls the room. If his wit falters, he has other tactics he can draw on to expertly manipulate his interlocutors and the audience. Tarlton worked with disruptive and improvisatory aplomb, taking
an impulse, a suggestion, or an opportunity to quibble, to pratfall or otherwise surprise and
amuse. In considering his stage-practice we must try and imagine him as adept at extracting
laughter from next to nothing, a quixotic quality of performance rooted in the craft of
improvisation—the application of wit and imagination in real time, and a quality intrinsic to
Shakespeare’s conception of the theatrical event. Simultaneously, we must also see him striking
his social superiors as inherently comical in appearance, at once welcome and clearly “othered”
(and ultimately excluded) by virtue of his class. Capitalizing on nostalgia and his continued
renown after his death is a pamphlet, purportedly written by the dead clown, entitled *Tarlton’s
Jests, or News Out of Purgatory* (published 1600, but in circulation significantly earlier).45 A
compilation of his jests, in effect accounts of individual exchanges and events from across his
performance career, it proclaims itself, “full of delight wit and honest mirth.”46 The contents are
frequently difficult to comprehend. Sometimes it’s possible to see the situation but not the
comedy in it, but on occasion the comic force bursts forth, spectacularly untrammeled and
undimmed by the intervening years. The pamphlet is split into sections, namely, Tarlton’s “Court
Witty Jests,” his “Sound City Jests,” and his “Country Pretty Jests,” indicating the different
contexts and social groups his comedy served. As late as its 1611 reprint it still purports to be
seemly, promising on the title page “Onely such a jest as his jigge fit for Gentlemen to laugh at
an hour.”47

The woodcut image of Tarlton reproduced on the title page of *Tarlton’s Jests* shows him
as if striding, the weight of his forward foot on his heel with a drum strung in front of him. The
suggestion of both movement and music is telling. Tarlton was a master of comic song and is
closely associated with the stage jig, bawdy narrative entertainments sung at the end of
performances, which transformed under his influence and became a fixture of the demotic theatre
in the Elizabethan period. Tarlton sang and danced the jigs, in addition to accompanying them with his drum, and was central to their boisterous performance and increasing popularity. More generally, Tarlton’s movement was characteristically ebullient, manufacturing comedy in the manner and mode of his arrivals and departures; his physicality comically burlesquing the norms of walking. Timing is, of course, central to comedy. Clown logic feeds off of the elasticity of time created by speeding up and slowing down movement and responses. It takes joy in the journey as much as in the arrival, making full use of every moment on stage. Again, all scholarship in this field is indebted to Robert Weimann’s seminal work identifying the spatial and verbal modes by which the clowns of the era offered their alternative perspective on heroic action. While Weimann rightly has the clown occupying the fore-stage and working his peculiar magic from there, I want to foreground Tarlton’s movement, or the shifting place of his body in time as well as space. This traveling, what The Famous Victories of Henry V call his “roving”, operates as an alternative occupation of theatrical space. The stage we shall see can barely contain Tarlton, but first let us imagine him with his monarch and learn something of his “Court Witty Jests.”

A prerequisite of courtly manners was deportment, a badge of adherence to hierarchy, decorum, and containment expressed in how one carries oneself, quite at odds with the clown’s physical expansiveness. Tarlton, we are told, was reprimanded by the Queen for making her “laugh excessively” when pretending (or otherwise) to be drunk. A little drunk seems to have been Tarlton’s favored performance condition and of course we can only imagine the extent of his actual intoxication or of her displeasure. Drunk or otherwise the royal anecdotes speak to Tarlton’s knack for broad and infectious physical comedy and skilled mimicry of supposed inability to maintain composure and bodily comportment. In a modern parallel to Tarlton’s
comically outrageous behavior, the 2017 New York City’s Public Theatre production of *Hamlet* visually expressed Hamlet’s lack of decorum by having him refuse or forget to wear pants. The obvious literalization of Hamlet’s unmannerly *dishabille* that so scares Ophelia when he enters her closet “down-gartered” is still potently both funny and arresting. The choice interrogates the performative aspect of the antic disposition and is a still shocking joke or defiant gesture shared with the watching crowd. Employing Tarlton-esque tactics, Hamlet here deliberately offends decorum and generic order, and delighting and gaining complicity with audiences as he does so. The ludicrousness of the situation suggested by a prince with no pants on at Elsinore (even now) mirrors the comic inversion of a clown at court subverting norms of acceptable behavior. *Hamlet’s* indebtedness to Tarlton will receive a whole chapter. I offer this example here specifically for the disorder and comic undercutting that the choice of near nakedness indexed in the performance. Tarlton created waves of laughter by walking the line between the comic and the offensive and the logic of his performance demanded that he keep pushing boundaries. Prompting further laughter could equally compound or dissipate any offense. The fine line between the comic retort and the offensive remark may bring to mind the very risky late-Elizabethan move by Feste toward Olivia to “take away the fool” (*Twelfth Night*, 1.5. 38).

Much of the surviving material on Tarlton is gathered in Edwin Nungezer’s exhaustive 1929 *A Dictionary of Actors (and of Other Persons Associated with the Public Representation of Plays before 1642)*, including two anecdotes that illuminate Tarlton’s practice and the nature of his unlikely but intriguing relationship with the queen. The first is drawn from Thomas Fuller’s *Worthies of England* (1662), where we find that

Our Tarlton was master of his faculty. When Queen Elizabeth was serious [I dare not say sullen] and out of good humor, he could un-dumpish her at his pleasure. Her highest Favorites would, in some cases, go to Tarleton before they would go to the Queen, and he
was their Usher to prepare their advantagious (sic) access unto Her. In a word, he told the queen more of her faults than most of the chaplains, and cured her melancholy better than all of her physicians.\textsuperscript{50}

It is easier to amuse someone already in a good humor than to lift them out of a “dumpish” one, and it seems apparent that the queen, characteristically a master of self-control, found Tarlton’s ebullience hard to resist and his bluntness refreshing. Fuller is fulsome and specific in his praise, \textit{he} dare not call the dead monarch “sullen,” but Tarlton is lauded for his daring to speak truth to power.\textsuperscript{51} The third sentence is remarkable in suggesting Tarlton as a veritable intercessor, by implication a trusted confidant and advisor, a true intimate of the Queen and a key cog in the courts machinations. However, the last sentence (comparing him to her chaplains and physicians) is perhaps most revealing: it suggests a Bakhtinian capaciousness and power in their shared laughter. This in turn speaks to her relish of his presence, the way she values him for his honesty, moxie and willfulness, and the solace she takes in their mutual understanding. The situation is very humoral: the clown’s wit lightening the Queen’s melancholy. It is also a microcosm of laughter’s restorative power. Indeed, Tarlton’s ready-wit becomes all but invaluable to her as a woman laboring under the pressures of her own performative role as head of state. All these are precisely the elements, functions, and qualities that abound in Falstaff, but also inform the larger Shakespearean comic vision: his comic inheritance stubbornly underpinning his developing dramaturgy. For Shakespeare, the clown in its various guises brings with it these associations, bound up in the theatre’s origins in craft and practice. Equally this anecdote speaks to an insight by the contemporary philosopher of aesthetics and politics, Roger Scruton, about the power of fiction as a powerful form of consolation: “the consolation from imaginary things is not imaginary consolation.”\textsuperscript{52}
The second anecdote recorded by Nungezer describes

How Tarleton played the God Lutz with the fitch of bacon at his back, and how the queen bade them take away the knave for making her laugh so excessively, as he fooled against her little dog, Perrico de Faldas, with his sword and long staff, and bade the queen take off her mastie (mastiff): and what my Lord Sussex and Tarlton said to one another. The three things that make a woman lovely.53

Quite what the God Lutz business consisted of is hard to fully fathom. Charles Reed Baskervill in his study *The Elizabethan Jig and Related Song Drama* is similarly baffled, but I suggest that Tarlton either held the bacon behind him or else tucked it into his clothing at his neck or waist, teasing the dog to come his way while pretending to be attacked, fending off the “mastiff” with sword and staff. The full gag with the dog is yet more vivid. The language of the account places Tarlton on or close to the floor, fighting with feigned seriousness and alarm. He is armed most likely with the clown’s characteristic toy wooden sword (although he was a certified master of fencing,54 and could certainly handle a metal one) and a staff in all probability taller than he was. The dog we are told is “little” but Tarlton protests he is being attacked by a large fierce breed. The small dog was likely animated by the attention, running around and under him, maybe yapping, certainly tail wagging and comically un-threatening: later in the chapter I will discuss the dog-owning clown Launcle, from The *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, as a part Tarlton-informed and possibly even played. With the final comment here we are once again left intrigued but lacking, unlike Sussex we will not learn and laugh of the “three things that make a woman lovely.” The gag was likely self-mocking, designed to provoke laughter from a female sovereign who cultivated flattery at court. These bits of business equivalent to and drawn from his performance repertoire are clearly of the kind then still arbitrarily dropped into larger plays,
rather than fully integrated into the comic role or action. Although they are not intellectually sophisticated, they are compelling and contain a kernel of vitality and dramatic potential.

In each of these instances the queen is at once the primary auditor of his performance and the figure of authority. This is equivalent to the play or performance that Tarlton characteristically disrupts when on stage by improvising and stepping beyond the mimetic bounds the other actors observe. The remainder of the audience, the other courtiers present, would be expected to moderate their responses to the outrageous clown by way of observing the queen’s reactions moment by moment. When the queen laughed, she gave permission for others to follow and the inverse was true. Laughter however is not easy to suppress once it has taken hold. Readers familiar with Monty Python’s *Life of Brian* might think of the sequence where the Centurions standing guard to Michael Palin’s humorless Caesar (complete with a lisp) try not to laugh inappropriately at his extraordinary double entendres, bring punishment on themselves. Palin’s peculiar situation and virtuosity make him both queen and clown in the example, but the larger parallel stands. Clown humor and logic are predicated on drawing a rising sequence of responses from their audience, often quite literally despite or beside themselves. In the presence of the queen the lack of control induced by laughter is both a joyful release and a risk. Tarlton, while taking the biggest risks in prompting the laughter, thrives on the disorder. Toying with the bounds of moderation and chastity, here stipulated and enforced by the sovereign, is his *modus operandi* and the source of his appeal.

Bohun notes the queen’s influence on the increased interest in the theatre and once again, the theatre and the church emerge as in competition:

There were then acted Comedies and Tragedies with much cost and splendor; from whence proceeded in after times an unrestrainable desire of frequenting these divertisments; so that afterwards there was a greater concourse at the theatre, than at the
sermon. When these things had once been entertained, the courtiers were never more to be reclaimed from them; and they could not be satiated or wearied with them. But when Alencon was once dismissed, and gone, the queen herself left off these diversions, and betook herself, as before, to the care of a kingdom.55

The queen herself, by this account, initiated the popular theatre’s flourishing. Indeed it is hard not to align this fad for entertainment at court with the decision to invest in the erection of purpose-built theatres in the suburbs at precisely this time. Alencon left court in 1581, his suit unsuccessful, his romantic comedy with the Queen, of course, had no consummation in marriage. As such, having unleashed such “unrestrainable desire,” perhaps inevitably in the circumstances, the theatre, by this account, lost for the Queen its great appeal. That this was two years before the formation of The Queen’s Men suggests that the theatre would reassert its charms. Whatever her developing personal views on dramatic entertainments, the desire was still potent from audiences and the theatre would of course become one of the enduring splendors of her reign.

Presumably from Alencon’s period at court also comes Bohun’s account of Tarlton’s supposed fall from royal favor and banishment. Given the nature of Tarlton’s art, and the many other more refined and educated courtiers who faced the same displeasure, this is perhaps less surprising than inevitable.

Tarlton, who was then the best comedian in England, had made a pleasant play, and when it was acting before the queen, he pointed at Sir Walter Raleigh and said, see the knave commands the queen; for which he was corrected by a frown from the queen; yet he had the confidence to add, that he was of too much, and too intolerable a power; and going on with the same liberty, he reflected on the over-great Power and riches of the Earl of Leicester, which was so universally applauded by all the present, that she thought fit for the present too bear these reflections with a seeming unconcernedness. But yet she was so offended, but she forebade Tarlton, and all her jesters, from coming near her table, being inwardly displeased with this important and unreasonable Liberty.56
The scene painted is vivid: the queen frowns, which in normal circumstances would be enough to “correct.” “Yet” Bohun tells us, “he had the confidence to add” his slander of Leicester, no doubt because of his audience’s enthusiastic encouragement and voluble enjoyment, which the shocking further insult only extends and increases. Curiously, indeed remarkably, the clown’s addition means his comments audaciously mocked BOTH major court factions! The queen affects indifference, but subsequently coolly banishes “Tarlton, and all her jesters” from her table. The anecdote takes place after a performance of a play, rather than a solo entertainment like those implied in the earlier examples. As such, “all her jesters” may refer to the rest of the acting company, and “coming near her table” has both a temporal and a spatial inference: go away and do not come back. In the presence of Tarlton, how easy was it for the courtiers to show appropriate responses, take their cues from the queen, and not get caught up in the moment and incur her displeasure? Did some in their laughter miss the queen’s frown and forget to take their lead from their royal host? How completely did Tarlton hold the eye? One can imagine the transgressive excitement and intoxicating uproar of the scene. Calling one of the queen’s favorites a knave and suggesting he controlled her might have had another courtier imprisoned or seriously admonished. Raleigh himself languished in prison at her displeasure, and indeed died in one under her successor. The boldness of Tarlton’s provocation here, in ignoring the frown, suggests he was likely “drunk” here, his favored performance condition as we’ve seen, and a difficult one to maintain at the precise level for ongoing optimal functioning. I imagine him in full flow leading up to the Raleigh remark, the approval and the adrenalin of the table proving too much, and suggesting one jest too many, or too sharp for the occasion. Such transgression is thrilling if dangerous, not least given the sensitivities around these often-warring factions and their own patronage of nascent theatrical enterprises. Indeed, if Tarlton has become part of the
machinery he mocks, here overconfidence or complacency is his undoing. He is reduced to merely one among many who are subject to her royal pleasure and censure: the fool’s license summarily withdrawn. Importantly, the anecdote explicitly presents the clown as a threat to decorum—social, political and aesthetic—presaging the figure’s excision from the theatre in the years after Tarlton’s death on precisely these grounds. Moreover, the event closely prefigures Hal’s relationship with misrule, and the metatheatrical stakes behind his dismissal of Falstaff at the end of 2 Henry IV.

The playwright and pamphleteer Thomas Nashe recalls an incident in Pierce Penniless (1592) which places Tarlton performing with The Queen’s Men and speaks to a comic misunderstanding of performance and the place of laughter. Uncharacteristically, the clown’s is not the most disruptive presence! Echoing Peacham’s comment that opens this chapter, Nashe tells us that "The people began exceedingly to laugh, when Ta[r]lton first peept out his head."57 but this provokes an otherwise supposedly wise justice among the assembled throng to anger. Believing the audience is being disrespectful in laughing at servants or representatives of the queen, the justice “went with his staff and beat them round about unmercifully on the bare pates.”58 Like grandpa struggling with an iPad, the anecdote indexes cultural change leaving some in the dark. Theatre, in all its disruptive glory, was new, novel and exciting, if you were party to its emergent conventions. Although Tarlton’s “peeping” is an example of generic clown practice, it also suggests his powerful command of an audience and ability to evoke laughter before even entering the stage! “Peeping” is a potent tool of upstaging or “pulling-focus,” disrupting another actor in full flow. The wronged actor would hate it, but the audience would love it, not least if it burst pomposity or indulgence in their performance. This disruption of established norms, of course, has its political parallel in Tarlton’s puncturing of the studied
performances at court. “Peeping” grows naturally out of clown logic that seeks to maximize one’s part and the audience’s responses to it. We shall see the same impetus behind the expansive physicality of Tarlton’s tireless “ro[a]ming and “roving” around the stage in his role of Dericke.

It is fitting, if also conventional and hagiographic, for Bohun to credit the queen with initiating the era’s Golden Age of theatre begun in her reign (and ending with an equally remarkable falling off even before the theaters fell dark for close to half a century). It is also fitting that Tarlton should have been able to call himself a “groom of the queen’s counsel” and to make the highest authorities in the land laugh against their conditioning to restraint. Whether still banished from her court or not, Tarlton would return triumphantly on stage as the star of the company that bore the queen’s patronage and name. This will be but his first resurrection.

**DICK TARLTON AS DERICKE, THE ROVING CLOWN OF THE FAMOUS VICTORIES OF HENRY V**

The anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry V* was not published until 1598, but was originally performed in the 1580’s. The title page announces, “as it was acted by her Queen’s majesties players,” and an extant cast list establishes that Tarlton (who died in 1588) played the part of Dericke. The play covers events found in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* and *Henry V*: the riotous youth of Henry, his transformation at coronation, and the subsequent wars in France. The play’s relationship to Shakespeare’s second tetralogy is complex, rich, and at the heart of my thesis. As Janet Clare states, “Shakespeare’s trilogy does more than borrow narrative and scene from *The Famous Victories*; it builds on its popularity, responds imaginatively to its stagecraft, questions
its popular ethos, and complicates its heroics.” This current and subsequent chapters assert an arc of clown development that describes successive stages--from Tarlton/Dericke’s digressive and disruptive presence as exhibited in this play, a quality arguably essential to the role of the clown Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*, on to the interactive Hal/Falstaff relationship and beyond to a fully internalized dialectic of the clown and the prince in the figure of Hamlet. In all cases, the clown becomes not digressive from, but rather constitutive of, the plot, action, and significance of the play. While much of the text to follow anticipates or evokes Shakespeare’s treatment of Hal and Falstaff, my emphasis is specifically on the clown logic of the earlier play and on power that the Queen’s Men had in shaping the experience and expectations of the London audience.

The part of Dericke still reads as funny, gleefully so in places. That said, scholars have been correct to see beyond the page and suggest the part as one “in which what was done must generally have had greater impact on the audience than what was said,” particularly given “the parade of opportunities it offers Tarlton as Dericke to indulge his meta-theatrical talent as a maker of exits and entrances.” To fully understand Tarlton’s impact, not only on the audience but on Shakespeare’s imagination and developing practice, we need to think in these visual terms and of the character/clown’s distinctive use of the physical space. Brian Walsh, building on Weimann, articulates the manner in which the clowning in *The Famous Victories* “emphasizes the physical presence of performance and works to stimulate audience consciousness of the theatrical event in enacting history.” For Walsh, the clown foregrounds how history in performance is “bodied forth” in the present by actors and how drawing attention to performance as “laborious aesthetic event” is just one of many ways the clown “disrupts the historicizing work the plays otherwise do.” Clare deftly synthesizes Weimann and Walsh thus: “the clown contributes to the dialectic between historical and theatrical time, and this accords with the
complementary perspective offered on the nexus of power, authority, and heroic action.”

Again, beyond the alternative senses of time (narrative, historical, theatrical) and representation (mimesis disrupted) that the clown brings onstage, my analysis contends that Tarlton/Dericke’s perambulations, what the stage directions refer to as his “roving” or “ro[a]ming,” represent an alternative occupation of theatrical space in which the restless energy and near constant motion of the performance foregrounds ideas of kinesis, embodiment, fictions of theatrical space, and the audience’s own engagement as central and constant, by turns restive and absorbed.

It was an expectant and boisterous crowd surrounding the thrust stage intent on being entertained, engaged, impressed and amused. Andrew Gurr reminds us that references to "audience's hurling apples at the hangings in order to get the players to start the play are widespread" in the period. Importantly, the configuration of the theater made an unobtrusive entrance onto the open Elizabethan stage impossible, an actor was immediately visible when he stepped through any door of the tiring house at the back of the stage. All actors had to traverse this distance from the tiring house to their correct scene position (and off again), the stage as much as 27 feet from front to back and up to 43 feet across. Elizabethan plays have this rhythm built into their structure or fabric, successive, fluid, perhaps slightly overlapping scenes ending on decisions to depart and accommodating the architecture of the playing space. Such was this clown’s particular skill negotiating this distance from or to the tiring house that one biographer aptly termed it “Tarlton’s playground.” The use of entrances in this manner is physical improvisation akin to the verbal equivalent of speaking “more than is set down for them” that Hamlet criticizes but will be seen to inform, even animate, the behavior of Shakespeare’s elitist prince. Once established, and the scene underway, the same clown logic applies, the same
driving physical energy is at work, and we must remember to keep foremost in our minds how Tarlton’s actions and movements have as much impact on the audience as his words.

Dericke’s first entrance onto the stage in *The Famous Victories* suggests the comic potential of his “roving”. Dericke and his friend and sidekick John Cobler are among the conscripts who will accompany Henry to the war, but they are initially introduced in a domestic setting: Dericke has been robbed and is desperately searching for a constable; he enters and finds instead a tired shoe maker bent on sleep! If as customary Tarlton had a drum slung round his neck, I suggest he would be beating that too. Maximizing the potential for this physical romping and yelling, note how he comes in only to exit again and then immediately return, a deft touch of comic business and escalation:

JOHN COBLER. Neighbour, me thinkes you begin to sleepe,
If you will, we will sit down,
For I thinke it is about midnight.

LAWRENCE. Marry content neighbour, let vs sleepe. [*Enter Dericke roving.*]
DERICKE. Who, who there, who there? [*Exit Dericke. Enter Robin.*]
ROBIN. O neighbors, what meane you to sleepe,
And such ado in the streetes?

BOTH. How now, neighbor, whats the matter? [*Enter Dericke againe.*]
DERICKE. Who there, who there, who there?
J. COBLER. Why, what ailst thou? here is no horses.
DERICKE. O alas man, I am robd, who there, who there?
ROBIN. Hold him neighbor Cobler. ... (119-130)68

The stage picture of initial calm at its center is somewhat crudely established in order to contrast with Dericke’s noisy circling of the outer stage before he disappears as suddenly as he had arrived. Then Robin enters, presumably speaking as he arrives given the urgency of his message,
so he is upstage near the tiring house, his attention directed to his fellow actors at center when Dericke enters again, repeating his rampaging run past Robin. Initial attempts to quiet him fail so the actors move from the center to him (or Tarlton’s circles get smaller) and his run is halted in an attempt to contain the invading comic energy. In staging terms, this is proto-farce. The character is established with verve and economy as a loose cannon—unpredictability is a byword or by-product with theatrical clowns. Such unpredictability and propensity for comic disruption is emblematic of why they had to be banished, but here it is constitutive of the entertainment. Moreover, the comic effect would likely have been amplified by the audience’s anticipation of Tarlton’s (first) appearance, his extraordinary celebrity and reputation preceding the arrival of his boisterous energy and practiced shtick. Fame and charisma have a potency in the live event difficult to quantify or define, and Tarlton was a large part of what the audience had come and paid to see. To offer an analogy from more recent times, I will never forget experiencing John Malkovich on stage at the height of his fame in the London production of Lanford Wilson’s *Burn This*, exuding an effortless yet palpable (and distinctly sexual) energy, and prompting an extraordinary collective concentration and intoxication. For all their obvious differences, the exhilaration, the sense of their special status among the audience is similar in effect, as Tarlton and Malkovich exert a comparable magnetism and thrall. The audience is at once transfixed (at moments if not throughout) and self-aware. As Walsh so aptly puts it, the “physical force of Tarlton’s presence further keeps the audience grounded in awareness of the present moment of performance.”69 The grounding force Tarlton exerts alongside the the spell cast by his aura and energy, create an intense connection with the audience it creates.

At this entrance, Dericke is searching for an officer and explains to his fellows that he has been robbed, driving the comic exposition while surrounded and supported by the other three
actors. (This dynamic will be characteristic of Shakespeare’s writing for Will Kemp, corralling the solo-performer’s ability to run a scene, to lead by bossing his fellows, commanding both stage and audience. Kemp’s roles as Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are two obvious examples.) Dericke accepts the offered assistance, in terms that merit quoting for his logic and as an example of Tarlton’s idiosyncratic bluntness. While only a humble character, Dericke has pretensions, but his vanity is undercut by his squat and ugly physical appearance replete with squint and flat nose. In six lines the speech raises three laughs through abrupt changes in his manner and topic (no doubt reinforced with physical action), first at his own expense, then at his rudeness and then, returning to the plot, his fervor:

J. COBLER. Nay but heare ye sir, you seeme to be an honest Fellow, and we are poore men, and now tis night: And we would be loth to haue anything adoo, Therefore I pray thee put it vp.

DERICKE. First, thou saiest true, I am an honest fellow, And a proper hansome fellow too, And you seeme to be poore men, therfore I care not greatly Nay, I am quickly pacified: But and you chance to spie the theefe, I pray you laie hold on him.

ROBIN. Yes that we wil, I warrant you. (146-156)

No sooner is this accord achieved than the thief himself enters, starting Dericke up all over again.

The thief who stole from Dericke, it transpires, is a servant and friend to Prince Henry, and when faced with justice, both man and his royal master balk at the required restraint to their liberty. The whole situation directly if chaotically anticipates Shakespeare’s treatment of the same narrative in the first acts of *1 Henry IV*. In both plays Hal has an altercation with the Lord
Chief Justice over a rebuke to his behavior, but importantly, the blow simply referenced in Shakespeare’s play is shown onstage in *The Famous Victories*. Again, my emphasis here is on evoking Tarlton’s practice and his effect on the audience through examining the one part we can be certain he played. To that end, an anecdote from *Tarlton’s Jests* helpfully recalls in detail a moment from the play in performance where Tarlton’s improvisatory aplomb was magnificently on display. In *The Famous Victories*, the scene of the punch is immediately followed by Dericke and John Cobler discussing and re-enacting and burlesquing the encounter. On this occasion, however, Tarlton, waiting off-stage to come on for his scene, elected to step in and play the judge when his fellow player failed to arrive for his entrance. Tarlton’s immediate return on stage for his own scene, having received the blow as the judge, and his brilliant improvisation replaced the scripted exchange before continuing with the scene. The account reads:

At the Bull [Inn] at Bishops-gate was a play of Henry the fift, wherein the judge was to take a box on the eare; and because he was absent that should take the blow, Tarlton himselfe, ever forward to please, tooke upon him to play the same judge, besides his own part of the clown: and Knel, then playing Henry the fift[h], hit Tarlton a sound blow indeed, *which made the people laugh the more because it was he*. [Tarlton] But anon the judge goes in, and immediately Tarlton in his clownes cloathes comes out, and askes the actors, ‘What newes?’ ‘O,’ saith one, ‘hadst thou been here, thou shouldest have seene Prince Henry hit the judge a terrible box on the ear.’ ‘What, man!’ said Tarlton, 'strike a judge!' 'It is true, yfaith,' said the other. 'No other like,' said Tarlton; 'and it could not be but terrible to the judge, when the report so terrifies me that me thinkes the blow remains stil on my cheeke that it burnes againe!' The people laught at this mightily.

For a spellbinding moment, and with a cursory costume change, perhaps a cloak, the audience is asked to believe that Tarlton is someone else! They do not (of course) but rather experience and enjoy the unexpected in action, laughing *more* than they otherwise would. Tarlton’s presence in the scene doubtless affected his fellow actors, knocking them out of familiar rehearsed territory into the unknown ‘live’ moment of performance where anything might happen. This would have been particularly so for the leading man Knel that Tarlton was addressing, who he otherwise only
has a brief moment on stage with. In the surprise of the moment, the “box on the ear,” already a piece of comic subversion, is further enhanced, freighted with the unpredictability of the clown’s performance of the role, the audience’s increased involvement, and Knel’s response to the developing moment is to give him “a blow indeed.” Beyond reminding the audience that his peers were merely actors, Walsh sees here “Tarlton creat[ing] a metatheatrical effect through his performance in this play, by which he was able to connect directly with audiences even from within the potentially distancing frame of historical representation.”72 Importantly, this connection, while linked to these individual circumstances, is for Walsh more an indication or “an instance of what could have happened in every performance of The Famous Victories.”73 Indeed, as the compiler adds in closing his account, “I have heard it [the performance] commended for rare, but no marvele for he had many of these.”74 When Tarlton was onstage, anything might happen, and this was what the audience left their regular occupations for and paid hard cash to experience.

While it is highly probable that Shakespeare saw or even acted in The Famous Victories, I see Tarlton’s distinctive influence evident in Shakespeare’s conception of playmaking and performance. Shakespeare may well have read Nashe’s account of Tarlton’s substituting himself for the Lord Chief Justice (and thus playing both the role of authority and his own parody of the role of authority) as it brilliantly seeds the more hierarchically-structured role-playing mock throne scene in 1 Henry IV (2.4). The charged energy suffusing this recorded moment between Knel’s Henry and Tarlton’s judge, and the instability of the text as it becomes elastic, distorted or morphed in this and similar circumstances, is precisely what Shakespeare will court and contain (to devastating effect) in his own “mingling” when he places Kemp on stage alongside Richard Burbage as Romeo or Hal.
The play moves quickly on from the prince’s punch to matters of greater violence. As in Shakespeare’s play, *The Famous Victories* has men being rounded up for “cannon fodder” but here they are the characters we have already met, namely Dericke and his new friends, rather than the motley assortment Falstaff impresses. Since his earlier appearance, Dericke has briefly moved in with John Cobler, but the comedy of domestic dispute is displaced by the business of impending war. Dericke first unsuccessfully attempts to dodge the draft and then attempts to rally his fellows with talk of implied superiority over the French. The comic and the serious jostle somewhat uncomfortably here, the clear tenor or subject of the section being the avoidance of death:

**DERICKE.** Heare you maister Captaine?

**CAPTAIN.** What saist thou?

**DERICKE.** I pray you let me go home againe.

**CAPTAIN.** Why, what wouldst thou do at home?

**DERICKE.** Marry I haue brought two shirts with me,
And I would carry one of them home againe,
For I am sure heele steale it from me,
He is such a filching fellow.

**CAPTAIN.** I warrant thee he wil not steale it from thee, Come lets away.

**DERICKE.** Come maister Captaine lets away,Come follow me.

**J. COBLER.** Come wife, lets part louingly.

**WIFE.** Farewell good husband.

**DERICKE.** Fie what a kissing and crying is here?

**Sownes.** do ye thinke he wil neuer come againe?

**Why John come away, doest thinke that we are so base**

**Minded to die among French men?**

**Sownes.** we know not whether they will laie

**Us in their Church or no: Come M. Captain, lets away.**
CAPTAIN. I cannot staiie no longer, therefore come away. [Exeunt omnes.] (942-962)

His ruse to delay (or prevent) his departure by going home failing, Dericke instead resolves on action. His first line suggesting that they leave facilitates the brief comic business of the couple parting; “follow me” suggests he may have started off only to return and scoff with the kissing comment. At the scene’s close, Tarlton’s final and repeated cheer-leading exhortation, “Come M. Captain, let’s away,” is more emphatic than the Captain’s weak final line, facilitating or indexing the clown’s dominance of the scene and specifically of this closing exit and the implied movement off.

Once on the battlefield, we are treated to an example of comic valor, anticipatory of Falstaff at Shrewsbury:75

[Enter Dericke ro[a]ming, After him a Frenchman, and takes him prisoner.]

DERICKE. O good Mounser.
FRENCHMAN. Come, come you villeaco.
DERICKE. O I will sir, I will.
FRENCHMAN. Come quickly you pe[a]sant.
DERICKE. I will sir, what shall I giue you?
FRENCHMAN. Marry thou shalt giue me, One, to, tre, foure, hundred Crownes.
DERICKE. Nay sir, I will giue you more,
I will giue you as many crowns as wil lie on your sword.
FRENCHMAN. Wilt thou giue me as many crowns As lie on my sword?
DERICKE. I marrie will I, I but you must lay downe your Sword, or else they will not lie on your sword.

[Here the Frenchman laies downe his sword, and the clowne takes it vp, and hurles him downe.]
DERICKE. Thou villaine, darest thou looke vp?
FRENCHMAN. O good Mounsier compartue.
Monsieur pardon me.
DERICKE. O you villaine, now you lie at my mercie,
Doest thou remember since thou lambst me in thy short e?
O villaine, now I will strike off thy head.
[Here whiles he turnes his backe, the French man runnes his wayes.]
What is he gone, masse I am glad of it,
For if he had staid, I was afraid he wold haue sturd again,
And then I should haue been spilt,
But I will away, to kill more Frenchmen. (1290 -1313)

Picture for a moment the roving Tarlton, pacified before a word is spoken, his bravura rampaging checked by the sight of a sword. Then he successfully outwits and disarms his opponent, only to lose concentration in the act of bringing his sword down on his head.76 The Marx Brothers style of anarchic energy is apparent long before the Frenchman scampers off stage. Left alone on stage to comment and end the scene (a common practice in Elizabethan writing for the stage clown), his final line suggests a bravura exit, recalling his entrance before seeing his foe. In all this he is magnificently anticipates Falstaff, precisely prefiguring the fat-knight’s feigning of death and subsequent comic resurrection at the battle of Shrewsbury.

I now want to turn to Dericke’s final entrance and exit once the battle is won in order to further indicate extant stage practice and Shakespeare’s development of it. Here, Dericke reunites with his friend and they discuss their experiences, their pilfering, and their return home. Dericke has been collecting shoes from the dead French soldiers, while his shoe-maker friend has been gathering apparel for booty. As Walsh observes, “the image of Dericke scavenging the battlefield and stealing the shoes off corpses, the final battlefield image evoked in The Famous Victories of Henry V, parodies the English invasion of France as a brutal act of theft.”77
Shakespeare will likewise undercut Hal’s stated patriotism with similar representations of impressment and pillaging, while more fully embracing the clown’s skeptical stance into his dramaturgical design throughout. Post battle, Dericke’s roving has completely infected his friend John too, and physical comedy abounds in the arrivals, meeting and comic business afforded by the dialogue. In a play that moves along at an alarmingly fast pace the scene’s almost one hundred lines is the longest exchange of its sort, a comic respite brought (about) by serious victory elsewhere. Stories of comic or mock-valor and self-interest, again so redolent of Falstaff, tumble out in quick succession buoyed by their sense of victory, hope of homecoming, and the gain of their spoils. Both characters being weighed down with their spoils facilitates further physical comedy around their perambulations. Furthermore, both the parasitic and exilic nature of the comic character’s situation and behavior suggested here will be a significant element in Shakespeare’s late clowns, when Robert Armin is doing his own modified but indebted version of Dick Tarlton’s stage schtick.

[Enters Dericke, with his girdle full of shoes.]
DERICKE. How now? Sownes it did me good to see how I did triumph ouer the French men.

[Enter John Cobler rouing, with a packe full of apparell.]
J. COBLER. Whoope Dericke, how doest thou?
DERICKE. What John, Comedeuales, aliue yet.
J. COBLER. I promise thee Dericke, I scapte hardly, For I was within halfe a mile when one was kild.
DERICKE. Were you so?
J. COBLER. I trust me, I had like bene slaine.
DERICKE. But once kild, why it is nothing, I was foure or fiue times slaine.
J. COBLER: Foure or fiue times slaine?
Why, how couldst thou haue beene aliue now?
DERICKE. O John, neuer say so,
For I was cald the bloodie souldier amongst them all.
J. COBLER. Why, what didst thou?
DERICKE. Why, I will tell thee, John,
Euery day when I went into the field,
I would take a straw and thrust it into my nose.
And make my nose bleed, and then I wold go into the field,
And when the Captaine saw me, he would say,
Peace! a bloodie souldier, and bid me stand aside,
Whereof I was glad:
But marke the chance, John.
I went and stood behinde a tree, but marke then John.
I thought I had beene safe, but on a sodaine,
There steps to me a lustie tall French man,
Now he drew, and I drew,
Now I lay here, and he lay there,
Now I set this leg before, and turned this backward,
And skipped quite ouer a hedge,
And he saw me no more there that day,
And was not this well done John?
J. COBLER. Masse Dericke, thou hast a wittie head.
DERICKE. I John, thou maist see, if thou hadst taken my counsel,
But what hast thou there?
I thinke thou hast bene robbing the French men.
J. COBLER. I' faith Dericke, I haue gotten some reparrell
To carry home to my wife.
DERICKE. And I haue got some shooes,
~~~ For Ile tel thee what I did, when they were dead,
I would go take off all their shooes. ... (1410 -1450)
Again evident in the piece of straw up the nose ruse is an explicit piece of Falstaffian pre-text, as in the later play Bardolph reveals to Hal Falstaff’s use of the same tactic among other “monstrous devices” to signal his own valor (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4). Of more immediate import, however, is Dericke’s performative behavior in recounting his encounter. Having established location and situation, Dericke plays out or pantomimes the exchange starting at “Now he drew, and I drew” (1136), demonstrating his supposed wit and dexterity in the encounter. Dericke indicates their relative positions (“Now I lay here, and he lay there,” 1137) and then some implied and demonstrated movement of his legs (“Now I set this leg before, and turned this backward, And skipped quite over a hedge,” 1138-9) as comic denouement. Whether the figures go from standing to the floor, as “lay” implies, is less important than the implied physical action and skirmish. The “this” he turns backward may be his head, his back, or his bottom, and is probably indicated as he executes a version of the skip with which he escaped. The story reenacted, Tarlton asks, “And was this not well done, John?”—clearly inviting his friend’s compliment or admiration but also potentially the audience to applaud his performance. Curiously the account given suggests the inverse of the scene the audience has already witnessed wherein the French soldier ran away. This suggests either that Dericke had multiple encounters or else, as we have seen elsewhere, that he has a Falstaff-like relationship to the truth and storytelling.

The two characters continue discussion of their experience and their getting home before the final six lines of the scene propel them off stage. Coming after Dericke’s bombast, John Cobler’s last line is fittingly comic bathos, delaying and dilatory, relentless in its extraction of one further moment of comic physical business:

J. COBLER. Why, what shall we do Dericke?
DERICKE. Why John, Ile go before and call my dame whore,
And thou shalt come after and set fire on the house,
We may do it John, for Ile proue it, [1480]
Because we be souldiers. [The Trumpets sound.]

J. COBLER. Dericke helpe me to carry my shooes and bootes. [Exeunt.] (1477-82)

Dericke’s plan is in language still startling today and it likewise hints at the extraordinary range of the clown’s misrule elsewhere in the theatre of the time. The suggested abuse and the arson plan, backed with the clown’s belief in his authority as a soldier, are immediately heralded as if in endorsement by the trumpets sounding. Equally the fanfare may have caused comic startling. Either way, the moment is further undercut and the exit, once again, extended by the team-work required in clearing the stage of the booty they carried in with them. All this physical business, along with the externals of performance, its exigencies and opportunities, informed the play and the audience’s response and involvement. These elements, lost in the extant record of the plays, like the dominating and organizing role of the clown suppressed by the rising authority of the printed and scripted word, are crucial to the evocation of clown practice. Only by evoking or imagining what the white space of the page replaces or effaces can Tarlton’s compelling presence and charisma, compacted into a pint size pot at little over five feet tall, be felt, not least his power to set the table or the theatre on a roar and all that he embodied, glimpsed and understood. To Walsh’s emphasis on the significance of the history being physically “bodied forth,” I want to add the exhilaration of the racing pulse, the clown’s roaming energy experienced in the audience’s own bodies.

Dericke’s shoe stealing, as Walsh rightly suggests, is a reminder that the performance of history of which it is part “is itself a kind of appropriation from the dead in and on ‘the terms of the living.’” The audience in this case are implicit in the appropriation, but their reception of
the ideology is tempered by the clown’s perspective. The commentary disrupts the flow while itself being part of the river, or rush, of both play and performance. The political implications of the clown’s place in historical representation might be argued depend upon whether one believes the comic energies are ultimately harnessed in the service of endorsing the absolutist forms the play’s present or whether they exist outside and beyond the form and thus are not contained.

Richard Helgerson’s reading of Hal’s banishment of Falstaff sees symmetry between the play’s structure and a conservative political ideology. But Walsh reminds us that David Scott Kastan has countered that the epilogue in 2 Henry IV might facilitate Falstaff’s all but immediate return at the play’s close and his having the last laugh. This moment, once the play has found its resolution and as the epilogue moves onto the jig, is the precise point at which the performance recedes into its non-mimetic practices that supersede allegiance to any one play and index the roots of theater in folk tradition and ritual celebration. The jig also looks back to (if also beyond) Tarlton himself, famed performer of the jig. In The Famous Victories there is no punishment meted out to Dericke. His only problem is his ongoing survival in adversity that he shares with the majority of the audience. In this sense, the play offers a most truthful mirror for all its lack of sophistication.

ONE MAN AND HIS DOG

Although no extant roles but for that of Dericke can be assigned to Tarlton with any certainty, I would like to present an argument for, and a reading of, his performance as Launce in Shakespeare’s The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Stylistically in his four appearances, the character is distinctly idiosyncratic (and) redolent of Tarlton’s practice and persona. Anne Barton, introducing Two Gentlemen for the Riverside Shakespeare, sees structural evidence that:
“Launce and his dog were fairly obviously an afterthought, imperfectly welded into a plot which originally employed only one comic servant.”81 Judith Cook perhaps overstates the case in proposing that those who care to look at such things have “thought that Shakespeare specifically wrote the clown’s role…to make use of Tarlton and his dog,”82 as critics stubbornly date the play in the early 1590’s.83 Rory Loughnane has outlined the many “obstructions to recovering the early part of Shakespeare’s career,” and surveyed the various narratives constructed by biographers to account for his path from Stratford to London.84 Among these are the theory first put forward by Samuel Schoenbaum that sees Shakespeare joining up with the touring Queens Men who are documented as performing in Stratford-upon-Avon at least once in 1586, and in years prior. On June 13 that year, one company member, John Towne, had killed another—William Knel, who had missed his cue to be punched as the Lord Chamberlain in the anecdote from Tarlton’s Jests above—and Schoenbaum surmised that Shakespeare joined the company when they were a man down. For all that Knel could have, as Loughnane observes, died after the Stratford performance, the theory is not only tenable given the immediate difficulty such a death would afford a traveling troupe, but also situates Shakespeare precisely in the sphere of influence necessary for his subsequent achievements, particularly his abiding fascination with native traditions and the essential vitality of specifically Tarlton’s clown. Schoenbaum’s theory, I contend, facilitates a persuasive argument for the earlier dating of Two Gentlemen that other evidence supports, before being revised under the influence and availability of the company star Tarlton.

Barton, in the course of an argument for the very early dating of Two Gentlemen, deftly outlines the heights that some of Two Gentlemen’s poetry reaches, but also the play’s many shortcomings. Importantly, she concludes that there is no reason to suppose that the play’s
mining of the English native tradition could not be written before Shakespeare’s experiments with classical and Italian models, specifically *The Comedy of Errors*—often considered Shakespeare’s first comedy—*The Taming of the Shrew*, and the early tragedy *Titus Andronicus*. Citing Stanley Wells, Barton points to the play’s near total reliance on monologue, duologues, and the comic aside, a limitation not found in the other early plays mentioned here, or even in his very early history plays. This is proto-drama, and two of these three dominant modes engage the audience directly. Beyond this notable stylistic indication of inexperience, other elements suggest the play is very early, not least its central theme and emblematic representation of the virtue and value of friendship exalted above romantic love. The otherwise grossly discomfiting gifting of Sylvia by Valentine to Proteus makes much more sense when seen in the medieval chivalric tradition of idealized friendship in which Shakespeare’s key sources are steeped. Shakespeare’s use of Thomas Elyot’s *The Book of the Governor* (1531) is broadly acknowledged as is his deep knowledge and intimation of Lyly’s *Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit* (1578), both of which offer models of unchallenged idealized friendship over love that run counter to all Shakespeare’s subsequent experiments in the genre. Kurt Schlueter intriguingly suggests a link between Shakespeare’s other key source, the Spanish *Seven Books of Diana* (1559) and a now lost anonymous play *The History of Felix and Philomena*, played by the Queen’s Men in 1585.85 This raises the possibility that the theme was suggested by a contemporary play that had pleased at court, or at least that the theme had continued currency. I would also hazard that the setting and use of the song *Who Is Sylvia* (4.2) indexes native folk traditions as well as Petrarchan conventions and suggests still emergent early practice. It is precisely these native traditions of comedy, indelibly bound up with the modes and practices of touring theatre, which inform and animate the Elizabethan Shakespeare.
Beyond merely questions of casting, Barton sees evidence of Shakespeare’s early interest and ability in writing comic prose in *Two Gentlemen*, and an uncommon perspective whereby, as in later plays:

> the commentary provided by pages or fools might modify admiration of the more dignified central characters. Lyly would never have the effrontery to hint that a comic servingman who volunteers to be whipped himself so that his dog will not have to pay for its social misdemeanors displays a generosity which puts a Proteus or a Valentine, for all their hyperbolic oaths, to shame.”86

Barton’s use of the word “generosity” here is incisive. Shakespeare’s clowns frequently invite laughter by their perspective, their manners, and their actions, but also reveal a rich humanity, a refinement of feeling in an unlikely vessel. We are invited to look down on them or feel superior to them and then recognize they possess something remarkable at their core. This use of fools and clowns to alter the audience’s impressions of their betters will, of course, be a defining characteristic of Shakespeare’s later work with Will Kemp in their time together in The Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Launce and later Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are obvious examples of this generosity of spirit, which contributes to the sense of shared community with the audience.

The clown’s first appearance in 2.2 is prefaced with the stage direction: “Enter Launce, leading a dog.” The speech that follows makes much of the dog’s impassivity and is framed by the character’s own sadness. Consider for a moment that the dog may be a rather lank mutt of advancing years:

> LAUNCE. Nay, ‘twill be this hour ere I have done weeping; all the kind of the Launces have this very fault. I have received my proportion, like the prodigious son, and am going with Sir Proteus to the Imperial’s court. I think Crab, my dog, be the sourest-natured dog that lives: my mother weeping, my father wailing, my sister crying, our maid howling, our cat wringing her hands, and all our house in a great perplexity, yet did not this cruel-hearted cur shed one tear: he is a stone, a very pebble stone, and has no more pity in him than a dog: a Jew would have wept to have seen our parting; why, my grandam, having
no eyes, look you, wept herself blind at my parting… Now the dog all this while sheds not a tear nor speaks a word; but see how I lay the dust with my tears. (2.3.1-13, & 30-2)

Despite the clown’s increasingly frenetic performance the dog must either sit or lie down during the whole speech, or in doing anything else, require correction and instruction occasioning further comic business as the clown incorporates it into his interrupted tale. Presuming the dog belonged to the clown, be it Tarlton or otherwise, they would be relatively familiar with its habits and likely able to anticipate disruption. The dog most likely traveled with the company and could have been chosen precisely because of his proclivity to sleep a lot. Whatever happened in performances of this play, Shakespeare will never again bring a dog on stage.

In describing the family’s tragic separation, Launce resorts to the ridiculous presentation of his much-worn shoes as his family members, his sad tale undercut by a delightful indecision and the comic confusion and misplaced diligence of its telling. The middle section of the monologue recounts the tearful departure employing brilliant clown logic:

Nay, I'll show you the manner of it. This shoe is my father: no, this left shoe is my father: no, no, this left shoe is my mother: nay, that cannot be so neither: yes, it is so, it is so, it hath the worser sole. This shoe, with the hole in it, is my mother, and this my father; a vengeance on't! there 'tis: now, sit, this staff is my sister, for, look you, she is as white as a lily and as small as a wand: this hat is Nan, our maid: I am the dog: no, the dog is himself, and I am the dog—Oh! the dog is me, and I am myself; ay, so, so. Now come I to my father; Father, your blessing: now should not the shoe speak a word for weeping: now should I kiss my father; well, he weeps on. Now come I to my mother: O that she could speak now like a wood woman! Well, I kiss her; why, there 'tis; here's my mother's breath up and down. Now come I to my sister; mark the moan she makes. (13-30)

Comic confusion is created with Launce employing as props only what is immediately to hand, and soon having more props than hands. Within his narrative Launce confuses the roles he and the dog are playing, but once he has settled on his allocation of a person with an object he does not confuse those. Even after the comic pay-off of the shoe smelling like his mother’s breath, Launce extracts a further laugh by remarking on a noise his sister made, or “makes.” When last
referenced his sister was his staff, which he must have had to hold or balance somehow so as to manipulate the other objects. Perhaps the staff made a noise by falling to the floor (more easily repeatable than snapping it) when he refers to her/it, topping the previous gag as he drops to the floor for it. This would place him at eye level (more or less) with the dog who he then brings back into the conversation in the past tense while referring to himself in the present and, by implication, prostrate on the floor: “but see how I lay the dust with my tears.” (31-2) Successful execution of such a comedic tour de force is entirely reliant on the clown’s physical skill and dexterity matching their verbal gymnastics and his skill in playing an audience. The length and complexity of Shakespeare’s monologues for Launce suggests they were written for an experienced player precisely of Tarlton’s ilk and stature. Indeed, the material may well have been recycled (and expanded) from earlier clown interludes that Shakespeare would have become familiar with if he indeed toured with the company. It hardly needs saying that we have already seen Tarlton wrestling with a dog and a staff.

The potential disruption a dog on stage might afford is comically evoked (rather than seen) in Launce’s last monologue where he describes taking a beating in punishment for his dog’s intestinal indiscretion. The speech establishes their close relation, and once again involves extensive demonstrative physical storytelling

LAUNCE. When a man's servant shall play the cur with him, look you, it goes hard: one that I brought up of a puppy; one that I saved from drowning, when three or four of his blind brothers and sisters went to it. I have taught him, even as one would say precisely, 'thus I would teach a dog.' I was sent to deliver him as a present to Mistress Silvia from my master; and I came no sooner into the dining-chamber but he steps me to her trencher and steals her capon's leg: O, 'tis a foul thing when a cur cannot keep himself in all companies! I would have, as one should say, one that takes upon him to be a dog indeed, to be, as it were, a dog at all things. If I had not had more wit than he, to take a fault upon me that he did, I think verily he had been hanged for't; sure as I live, he had suffered for't; you shall judge. He thrusts me himself into the company of three or four gentlemanlike dogs under the duke's table: he had not been there--bless the mark!--a pissing while, but
all the chamber smelt him. 'Out with the dog!' says one: 'What cur is that?' says another: 'Whip him out' says the third: 'Hang him up' says the duke. I, having been acquainted with the smell before, knew it was Crab, and goes me to the fellow that whips the dogs: 'Friend,' quoth I, 'you mean to whip the dog?' 'Ay, marry, do I,' quoth he. 'You do him the more wrong,' quoth I; 'twas I did the thing you wot of.' He makes me no more ado, but whips me out of the chamber. How many masters would do this for his servant? Nay, I'll be sworn, I have sat in the stocks for puddings he hath stolen, otherwise he had been executed; I have stood on the pillory for geese he hath killed, otherwise he had suffered for't. Thou think'st not of this now. Nay, I remember the trick you served me when I took my leave of Madam Silvia: did not I bid thee still mark me and do as I do? when didst thou see me heave up my leg and make water against a gentlewoman's farthingale? Didst thou ever see me do such a trick? (4.4.1-39)

Whether the dog is wearing a leash or not is only implied (in 2.4 Launce puns heavily on the word “tied,” see below), in either case the potential for unplanned disruption remains, a quality he shares with his master. In addition, it is worth stating explicitly the parallel between the dog’s low status, exclusion, and suffering, and that of the servants and the clown. Both are sent away from the warmth of the fire for their transgressions against civility. Launce is not typical in the care he takes of his beloved dog: more usually in Shakespeare treating someone like a dog implies quite the reverse.87

In picturing Tarlton or another capable clown in this role, it is worth noting the comedian’s affectation of sadness, of self-proclaimed melancholy. The Elizabethans considered melancholy a physical as well as an emotional state and thus one that could be imitated. Shakespeare’s later clowns are frequently given to displays of melancholy. Launce’s opening monologue, cited above, is a performative essay on weeping that continues after the entrance of Panthino with instructions for him to follow immediately or else delay his master. Even the relatively inexperienced Shakespeare can exploit this simple injunction for 23 lines of punning and inspired lunacy:

[Enter PANTHINO]
PANTHINO.  Launce, away, away, aboard! thy master is shipped and thou art to post after with oars. What's the matter? why weepest thou, man? Away, ass! You'll lose the tide, if you tarry any longer.

LAUNCE. It is no matter if the tied were lost; for it is the unkindest tied that ever any man tied.

PANTHINO. What's the unkindest tide?

LAUNCE. Why, he that's tied here, Crab, my dog.

PANTHINO. Tut, man, I mean thou'll lose the flood, and, in losing the flood, lose thy voyage, and, in losing thy voyage, lose thy master, and, in losing thy master, lose thy service, and, in losing thy service,—Why dost thou stop my mouth?

LAUNCE. For fear thou shouldst lose thy tongue.

PANTHINO. Where should I lose my tongue?

LAUNCE. In thy tale.

PANTHINO. In thy tail!

LAUNCE. Lose the tide, and the voyage, and the master, and the service, and the tied! Why, man, if the river were dry, I am able to fill it with my tears; if the wind were down, I could drive the boat with my sighs.

PANTHINO. Come, come away, man; I was sent to call thee.

LAUNCE. Sir, call me what thou darest.

PANTHINO. Wilt thou go?

LAUNCE. Well, I will go. [Exeunt] (2.3.33-56)

Launce’s situation here—he doesn’t want to leave his dog—mirrors the clown’s generic dislike for leaving the stage; there is comfort, or laughter, to be had in staying, but “the show must go on” as the last two lines recognize. Having been repeatedly bidden hence, resistance suddenly gives place to acceptance—and they are up and off. It is almost possible to picture the scene’s writer working through the permutations his half dozen puns allow him. It is easier still to imagine the slick interplay of two gifted comic actors bringing it alive in performance. The patterns of comic dialogue are now familiar to us but here represent a clear link between Tarlton’s practice, as preserved in The Famous Victories, and Shakespeare’s developing dramaturgy. Tarlton’s influence is evident whether or not he played the role of Launce.
A final example from the play places Launce/Tarlton in a larger scene central to the main plot and next to his master, Proteus, the play’s romantic lead. Act 3, scene 1 has Launce (sans dog) and Proteus enter seeking Valentine, who is already on stage. Proteus believes he must tell Valentine that he is banished, unaware that he already knows. The scene begins with great urgency, as man and master enter together from the tiring house, Proteus giving instructions that release the stationary and expectant (because awaiting instruction) Launce into a roving run around the stage, hollering, in the manner of Dericke in *The Famous Victories*. His run is halted by his seeing the sought-for friend, but the energy level does not drop as indicated by the quick-fire dialogue. I suggest that Valentine is somewhere along the front of the stage from where he has been talking to the audience and only gradually approaches Proteus. Launce runs and roves around the space between them, the clown’s comic urgency exploding between the two dolorous gentlemen. The situation—where both Proteus and Valentine are forlorn, with fate seemingly against them, both characters initially reluctant to speak—mirrors for a moment the impassivity on the dog’s part that, I suggest, contrasting to the clown’s freneticism contributed greatly to his scene’s hilarity.

[Enter PROTEUS and LAUNCE]

PROTEUS. Run, boy, run, run, and seek him out.

LAUNCE. Soho, soho!

PROTEUS. What seest thou?

LAUNCE. Him we go to find: there's not a hair on's head but 'tis a Valentine.

PROTEUS. Valentine?

VALENTINE. No.

PROTEUS. Who then? His spirit?

VALENTINE. Neither.

PROTEUS. What then?
VALENTINE. Nothing.
LAUNCE. Can nothing speak? Master, shall I strike?
PROTEUS. Who wouldst thou strike?
LAUNCE. Nothing.
PROTEUS. Villain, forbear.
LAUNCE. Why, sir, I'll strike nothing: I pray you,—
PROTEUS. Sirrah, I say, forbear. Friend Valentine, a word. (3.1.188-205)

Proteus prevaricates with his friend for a few lines before Launce cuts to the chase, complete with comic misuse of language, saying: “Sir, there is a proclamation that you are vanished” (225). Here again, the clown’s practice is the template for the scene, his energy and movement a dynamic third point in the fluid triangle of actors who make up the stage picture. As noted, it is rare for the play to have more than two characters on stage, but here perhaps confidence in his clown aided Shakespeare’s drafting of this relatively ambitious and successful comic scene. Launce is silent as the two friends reach their impasse over whether Valentine is indeed present (194-99) offering violence in place of the lack of words, a strange tactic perhaps, but straight from the clown’s repertory and flowing naturally from the clown’s logic and corporeal materiality. In all these examples, I suggest, the vitality of the clown is apparent and necessary to the scene’s success.

Again, whether the role of Launce was a late one for Tarlton, an early one for Kemp, or performed by an unknown other, it is indebted to the great clown’s performance genius and vitality. Launce demonstrates the extraordinary inclusivity of the late Elizabethan theatre over which the clown dominated, it is figured in his privileged relationship with the audience that like Tarlton—he be it in tavern, banqueting hall or on stage—engages them as active participants in the creation of the performance event. In considering The Famous Victories and Shakespeare’s history cycles, Walsh describes Helgerson as seeing in Shakespeare’s “aligning [of] the
unlicensed practices of the clown and other popular dramatic aspects of the theatre with the unruly, rebellious energy of the crowd, an impulse toward popular revolt that must be put down by proper authority.”88 While Shakespeare’s own ideological position is ultimately a matter of contention, I contend, Tarlton’s practice had already offered a model of performance practice with clown and audience aligned together in the disruptive act of generating performance and carnivalesque inversion. Tarlton, by virtue of his talents, his verve, and his being physically marked as different, embodied all the ancient traditions of clowning, demotic, transgressive, and resilient, and equally its latent potential for the stage. These elements that he embodied, the qualities expected of him and that made him popular, I have demonstrated, emerge in retrospect to parallel those of the larger medium (in its pre-decorum form), itself a chaotic disruptive popular entertainment. Tarlton’s vitality and the connection between representation and reception he facilitates is central to early modern performance, his presence and practice both the spark that animated performance and that drew people to it. When Shakespeare considers what is lost in the excision of the clown, it is a recognition that the nature of his medium is changing fundamentally and renegotiating the terms of its relationship with the audience.

TARLTON’S RESTLESS AFTERLIFE

Sidney’s legacy is as the ideal courtier and canonical poet, and his aesthetic precepts would be adopted and dominate subsequent centuries. But the dialectical relationship socially elevated theater (incarnated in between Sidney’s aesthetic theory) and traditions of clowning creates and constitutes much of early modern theater, and especially the drama of Shakespeare. Tarlton’s cultural and theatrical legacy underpins the following chapters in profound ways. His ghost is a recursive spirit that haunts the final years of the Elizabethan era and the dawn of the new
century. His spirit lingers perhaps longest as a frequent image or name on public house signs whereon he was found until at least the 18th century, a fittingly demotic, inclusive, and unruly legacy. Alcohol is social lubricant, akin to Tarlton’s clowning, the tavern the likeliest point of origin for the man and perpetual home of unrestrained laughter. Complicating theoretical certainty with practiced ease at eliciting laughter, Sidney and Tarlton’s close relationship, like Tarlton’s with the Queen, indexes and encapsulates precisely the reach across class divides that the clown in performance embodies, and equally the anxiety around social climbing behind the call for poetry’s restraint, genre purity and the clown’s expulsion. Around 1595, concurrent with the formal publication of *The Apology for Poetry*, the mature Shakespeare arguably emerges, challenging and violating Sidney’s precepts. The practical man of theatre thematizes indecorum and deliberately flouts genre purity. His plays of that year—*Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (as well as the later *Henry IV*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* all covered in subsequent chapters)—can indeed be read as their own *Apoloogy for Theater*, and it is one full of clowns. The theatre they reflect encompasses the glories of Marlowe, but equally the legacy of his theatrical heritage, Tarlton’s playground over which he roved freely. Shakespeare harnessed the clown’s essential vitality and popularity to endlessly innovate and to celebrate the theater’s inclusiveness. Moreover, my next chapter will demonstrate how beyond merely the extraordinary innovation Kemp facilitates, it is the figure of the clown that enables Shakespeare to allow indecorousness to work—dramatically, but also epistemologically and philosophically, to unsettle often dangerous or harmful fictions of decorum.

It is not necessary to repeat here, but rather simply recall Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of the deracination of comedy, and its representative the clown, discussed in my Introduction. Tarlton, and after him Falstaff and Hamlet, will still access and encompass the former more
expansive and inclusive form of laughter Bakhtin describes. Hamlet’s parroting of Sidney reflects not Shakespeare’s view but an ironic critique of it, although Sidney’s neoclassicism will dominate the literary scene for centuries. In retrospect, however, Sidney’s vision can be seen as foregrounding aesthetic formality over messy reality, and valuing privilege, difference and exclusion.  

Sidney’s aristocratic vision is tempered by or with artistic reality, even as the supposed verities of neoclassical form assert their authority and take hold. Tarlton’s practice indexes a theatre that was constituted and thrived on disruption and offered a model of and for the unified popular drama. This conception of theatre is a long way from its later forms in darkened rooms, even Jacobean city comedy and grisly tragedy, where the clown’s great threat to mimetic order has been largely excised and the audience (to an extent) tamed. In part in response to Sidney’s clarion call for generic purity, the improvisatory voice and unpredictable roaming body has been silenced and proscribed.

In the 1930’s W. J. Lawrence wrote a scholarly remembrance, quixotic and affectionate by turns, entitled: “On the Underrated Genius of Dick Tarlton.” In it, Lawrence opines that Tarlton’s “work as a pioneer has been wholly forgotten,” and also intriguingly suggests that his subject was potentially the “sweet Willie” mourned in Spenser’s *The Tears of the Muses* (1591). In Spenser’s poem, Willie is thus remembered:

> And he the man, whom Nature selfe had made  
> To mock her selfe, and Truth to imitate  
> With kindly counter under mimic shade,  
> Our pleasant Willy, ah! Is dead of late:  
> With whom all joy and jolly merriment  
> Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.  

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Various other names have been forwarded for the person whom Spenser meant to memorialize. In their eighteenth-century enthusiasm for him, some writers wanted it to be Shakespeare, even though the date of composition of the poem would make such praise premature or prophetic. This is in the same poem in which the aristocratic Spenser laments the inappropriateness of laughter to comedy, echoing Sidney’s call for refinement in the form. If Lawrence’s attribution is correct though, then it suggests, as does Sidney’s relationship with Tarlton, the man’s startling charisma was indeed capable of delighting the “grave as well as rude,” his actual practice more enduring than abstractions that strip the theatre of his vitality on the grounds of decorum. Tarlton’s influence on the drama in the years after his death is immense, not least to Shakespeare’s own equally influential developing conception of the medium. Tarlton’s privileged relationship with the audience will continue to disrupt proceedings from beyond the grave. His spirit is present whenever there is uncontrolled laughter, and perhaps most fully in the figures of Falstaff and Hamlet in the process of increased introjection I go on to explore. Figured by his physicality and logic, it is found as much in Fat Jack’s inveterate inversions of order as in Hamlet’s anguished perambulations when he cannot bring himself to leave Ophelia or the stage. Moreover, Tarlton will be specifically resurrected in the graveyard of Hamlet: it is he who is indexed by the skull of Yorick, and whose disinterment facilitates the prince’s acceptance of his role and destiny.
CHAPTER 2. SERIOUSLY VULGAR: WILL KEMP AND THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE CLOWN

INTRODUCTION

If Dick Tarlton was the man who shaped Shakespeare’s imaginative conception of the clown, and embodied its centrality to popular culture, Will Kemp, the gifted comic actor and dancer, and the playwright’s professional colleague, was the star player for whom Shakespeare conceived his early clown roles. A central tenet of the criticism regarding the theatre of the late sixteenth-century concerns the increasing tension between the written script and the improvised elements of performance, as the theatre’s new arbiters increasingly asserted the supremacy of the text in theatre’s developing function as conscious Art rather than communal revelry. This chapter contends that Shakespeare, in employing Kemp, embraces and takes advantage of precisely this tension, and mobilizes it for theatrical innovation. The clown was emblematic of the older tradition over which he had presided, his irrepressible vitality central to the performance event. Richard Preiss, while demonstrating the clown’s vitality and centrality, has argued that accounts of tension between playwright and player as driving theatrical reform are inadequate, ignoring the clown’s persistence in popularity even as they indeed traded places with the emergent author. Nonetheless, all caveats considered, the pressure on the clown in the 1590s was acute as epitomized in the person—and career path—of Kemp. This chapter considers Shakespeare’s developing use of clown forms, and follows his increasingly sophisticated employment of Kemp, with emphasis on three plays that span the years of their professional engagement: Romeo and Juliet (1595) and the two parts of Henry IV (c1597/8). By the premier of Henry V, despite promises to the contrary, Kemp had parted ways with the company.
Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in which Kemp played Peter and Bottom respectively, appeared in 1595, the same year as the publication of Sir Philip Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*, and are clearly in dialogue with it. Sidney’s project, as we have seen, was one of refinement—eager to purge comedy of doltish elements and to discourage the mixing of genres that mingled clowns with kings or tragic heroes. Under Sidney’s resurgent influence and authority, classical ideas of generic decorum became dominant and the clown’s innate indecorousness made him anathema to emergent theatre practice. But it is well known that Shakespeare felt no compunction to observe the classical unities or to be constrained by Sidney’s neoclassical precepts: against the prevailing aesthetic tide, he understood the extent to which the vitality of the theatrical event had formerly hinged on the capacity of the clown. I have already suggested that Sidney’s writing of the *Apologie* was in part his own struggle to discipline what delighted him, namely the rough and ready comic appeal of Dick Tarlton. Here I suggest Kemp’s practice, right up to his departure, exemplified the clown’s refusal to be disciplined. As already stressed, by bringing Kemp on stage with leading man Richard Burbage, Shakespeare brings hero or prince and clown together in ways that challenge or unsettle the audience’s perception of the former. As I have stated, in so doing, Shakespeare is inviting, even amplifying, the potentially disruptive, extra-textual elements of physical or verbal improvisation that were the skills and habitual practice of the clown. Moreover, Shakespeare’s practice refutes Sidney’s supposed theoretical certainties: beyond merely the extraordinary innovation Kemp facilitates, the figure of the clown enables Shakespeare to allow indecorousness to work—dramatically, but also epistemologically and philosophically, to unsettle often dangerous or harmful fictions of decorum that structure social relations.
Despite their limitations, the cultural values, aesthetic sensibilities, and class distinctions behind the devaluation of the stage clown continued throughout the seventeenth-century and beyond. Fortunately, extensive scholarship over recent generations has somewhat corrected the historical bias against the stage clown, illuminated certain aspects of developing performance practice, and made familiar ideas of the Elizabethan stage as a nascent and contested medium. From this point of departure, the current study sets forth and explores the functioning of clown practice as it was understood and experienced by audiences in performance. While emphasis on stagecraft and performance attempts to revivify aspects of clowning difficult to glean by reading texts alone, a central part of this argument entails attention to the potentially rivalrous and certainly dynamic relationship between Kemp’s clown and Burbage as the leading man. Kemp’s fame and popularity rivalled Burbage’s. Experienced in performance, their relationship would have been compelling by virtue of both actors’ status and charisma, and their combative and competitive egos, channeled into the material given them. At work here is the performative power of the clown onstage as he implicitly renders other characters’ subject to sudden disruption. Moment by moment, the inherent instability of the text’s reproduction in performance would be ratcheted up by the clown’s unpredictable presence. As I’ve stated, this issue is worked out as an ongoing dialectic between the clown: by design, and in execution, the Kemp/Burbage exchanges are potentially subverting the gravity of the tragic hero in Romeo and Juliet, and the political hero of Henry IV. Crucial to this dissertation, this tension between hero and clown is dialectically strengthening the genres of tragedy and history plays, indeed becoming constitutive of them. In this, the relationship, and the clown’s part within it, contributes thematically to the larger theatrical event and, to turn Hamlet’s famous criticism on its head, become elements of the “necessary question of the play”95
Kemp’s role as Peter in *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrates Shakespeare’s nascent innovation and fascination with comedy at the heart of the serious, and of the clown at the center of the theatrical event. From a traditional literary perspective, the role might be said to simply enliven the Capulet household, particularly given that the part in the play is quite small. And yet, Peter’s comic presence modifies audience perceptions of Romeo and of the tragedy more generally in ways that can help us see some strikingly subversive dimensions of Kemp as clown on stage. The role of Peter provides an important model of prevailing clown practices as they came to and were deployed by Shakespeare in the early 1590s, but, more importantly, the play offers key instances of clown-hero interaction where Kemp and Richard Burbage’s Romeo would have shared the stage. As I have demonstrated in the Introduction and previous chapter, historically the clown’s theatrical function was far greater than his role in a given play. In Richard Preiss’ phrase, the clown was an “organizing agency” whose presence was “capable of unsettling...the centrality of the play itself.” It was precisely this inherently unsettling influence, figured in his inclusion of the audience for whom he stands as a host and a representative, which Shakespeare embraced. All our consideration of Kemp in performance must place him within this his larger function and context, but specifically next to the tragic hero: unruly, diminutive and just plain funny-looking, and with the glimmer of potential disruption and upstaging in his eyes. Shakespeare’s innovation built directly on his theatrical inheritance. He wrote for an existing company, keenly alert to audience expectations: the clown, specifically Kemp, was fundamental to both.

The centrality of the clown and clowning to Shakespeare’s conception of the performance event informed his early tragedy and affected this effervescent potential in its performances. I contend that the success of this juxtaposition of Kemp and Burbage stayed with the playwright,
suggested its further potential, and, in turn, inspired and informed the physically embodied opposition of the comic and the serious in the *Henry IV* plays. In these plays, particularly *1 Henry IV*, the situation of a clown altering the audience’s perception of the hero is intensified and elaborated in the Hal/Burbage and Falstaff/Kemp relationship. Here the full range of the clown’s disruptive, dilatory fooling physical repertoire and his prime, liminal position between stage and audience, accessed just with a turn of the head or a step downstage, is employed in the service of Shakespeare’s grand vision of English history and transformation of his sources. Falstaff is the almost complete absorption of clown into scripted drama, a flamboyant and ironic ascent at the moment of the figure’s decline.

Exploring these plays from the perspective of performance and audience reception, I argue, reinforces the extent to which the dynamic between the two actors is a crucial element in the formation of meaning and interpretation, and, beyond (or prior to) that, in Shakespeare’s developing dramaturgical imagination. We will see the nature and potential of their relationship from their first moments together--and must attempt to reanimate that connection. Both performers were renowned precisely for their ability to hold or captivate an audience, be it Burbage’s matinee idol charisma and facility for incredible transformation, or Kemp’s athletic prowess and expert comic handling of an expectant crowd. Together they would have been impossibly compelling.
CLOWN LOGIC AND THE JIG.

Richard Preiss rightly asserts of the period that “texts were the medium by which theatre preserved itself, and [that] whenever we reconstruct [the theatre], we do so through their logic.”97 To appropriately frame our discussion, I would like to propose that, while not preserved in the extant texts, it was the clown’s role and logic that provided the perspective through which audiences experienced and understood the theatrical event in the 1580s and beyond, until their function was supplanted. Clown logic presupposes that performance time has been set aside for revelry, that laughter is communal, even restorative, and contingent more on merriment (and perhaps some splendid performance skills) than on any particular story or presented item. The clown knows the audience have come to share in a good time and expects them to do so: if there is a laugh to be had the clown will make it happen. This logic primes the audience to anticipate, enjoy, and share in laughter. Crucially, the clown’s sense of play was ludic and not dependent on its place within a larger narrative, rather, he personified the element of improvisation that the Elizabethan audience relished, expected, and even demanded.

By virtue of this improvisatory practice, Kemp’s clowns, like Tarlton’s, occupied the liminal position between the stage and the audience, seamlessly stepping in and out of the play’s world to connect directly with the throng. By extension, in the boisterous, participatory, and carnivalesque milieu of the period the clown dominates the proceedings, he is the audience’s favorite, their representative, and their guide. This relationship is expressed through the clown’s distinct use of the stage space, his direct address and characteristic dilatory, unpredictable mode, fueled by his logic that delights in laughter and would keep him onstage indefinitely given the opportunity. Within any given role, the clown, whose oxygen is laughter, has limited stage time and dialogue in which to manufacture his laughs, and, as such, physical comedy is a natural
answer, as is “padding”\textsuperscript{98}—part-building achieved by verbally or physically delaying his exit as long as feasible. This same logic, seen in the clown’s inversionary dilatory and extemporaneous relish, would have informed his larger function and actions in the medley of interstitial and interactive entertainments around the scenes of the play that made up the theatrical event. As we shall shortly see, each of Kemp/Peter’s appearances serve a particular and exemplary function in illustrating Shakespeare’s comic inheritance and his corolling and containing of the clown’s energy towards his larger dramatic design. Crucially, in employing Kemp, Shakespeare embraced and catered to precisely his clown ease, what Robert Weimann calls performing “not so much for an audience as with a community of spectators.”\textsuperscript{99} Peter’s very first speech illustrates this patterning as well as immediately establishing this shared community. It is precisely this “community of spectators,” or peers, and the linguistic markers we find of it in the text, that identify the roles we can attribute to Kemp—each offering him occasion to take over a scene, to luxuriate in audience attention and adoration—and which Shakespeare transforms alchemically for Falstaff.

If the significance of the clown in \textit{Romeo and Juliet} seems a stretch to some readers, it is important to consider his larger function as described, and also to recall that one element of that was the play concluding with a jig. Charles Reed Baskervill tells us that the stage jig—which “combined three arts in which the Elizabethans delighted and excelled—drama, music and dance”\textsuperscript{100}—was a flexible form, sometimes solo or else lead by its star dancer, and could incorporate extempore verbal sparring as well as rhyming dialogue and narrative. At the close of \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, of \textit{1 & 2 Henry IV}, and even after \textit{Julius Caesar}, Kemp would return from his striking final appearances and exits in order to lead a bawdy participatory dance.\textsuperscript{101} This fact must inform both our understanding of the event and of Shakespeare’s employment of the clown,
as it was the eagerly anticipated culmination of his contribution. In Wiles’ phrase, “the clown’s role within the scripted text needs to be viewed a progress towards the jig,” which he neatly defines as, “the instituted climax in which the spectators participate in the enactment of misrule”\textsuperscript{102} I argue it is in aligning this structural feature with Falstaff’s inversionary thematic function that Shakespeare created the apotheosis of the clown.

For a brief while in the 1580s, some version of the jig was also in aristocratic vogue. However, at the same time, the stage jig was being popularized by Kemp’s predecessor Tarlton, and becoming a staple of demotic performances. No doubt as a result of this association with coarseness and vulgarity, the term quickly became synonymous with clowning itself.\textsuperscript{103} Baskervill notes specifically that “in the extensive satire of the dramatists on popular taste, ‘jig’ is conspicuous as a term of contempt.”\textsuperscript{104} As such, for a decisive period, and for an influential few, the stage jig, and the clowns associated with it, came to epitomize all that was opposed to emergent ideas and ideals of serious art. The clown-dancer and the dance itself were vibrant cultural forms, emblematic of earlier participatory models of theatre, and elements of the unscripted improvisatory practice empowering audience involvement, anathema to decorum and authorial control. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Tarlton’s practice offered a model of performance practice with clown and audience aligned together in the disruptive act of generating performance and carnivalesque inversion. The inversion Tarlton embodied, the qualities expected of him and that made him popular, I have demonstrated, precisely parallel those of his larger medium. Tarlton’s vitality and the connection between representation and reception he facilitates is central to, and constitutive of, early modern performance. Shakespeare recognized how Tarlton’s vitality was the crucial constituent, his presence and practice both the spark that animated performance and that drew people to it. Kemp is heir to Tarlton’s vitality,
and his successor as master of the jig. Such was the pressure against the jig, and the extent of his association with it, that when Kemp left the Lord Chamberlain’s Men they ceased to offer the jig at the close of performances. As a result, the jig emerges as a class and generic marker, its increasing vulgarization a representative marker of social change, exemplifying the period’s social “differentiation”\(^{105}\) in action. Curiously, soon after Shakespeare’s retirement, the jig returned to the repertoire at The Globe,\(^{106}\) a concession to its continued popularity and suggestive of the slow pace of change and taste even amidst the radical transformation of the theatre over those years. The purging of the barbarous clown and his practices is only fully achieved in retrospect, after the seismic disruption of the interregnum. The forces arraigned against the clown were elitist and inexorable, but also gradual and only partly effective. The English theatre was literally re-formed twice in the Seventeenth Century, before and after the civil war, but the clown’s energies were stubbornly persistent and would return periodically and emphatically with the force of repressed hydraulic pressure.

Preiss draws a telling distinction between Kemp’s practice and that of his predecessor Tarlton, which further describes the jig, and precisely relates to his particular relationship with the audience:

Though [Kemp] apparently still provided crosstalk during the play and mobile set pieces [or] (what Nash call[s] “merriments,” which could be more or less part of the play’s fiction), we never hear of his practicing standard clown modes like peeping or “themes.” … he naturally gravitated towards the jig- brief courtship farces rife with song, noise, trials of physical prowess, misbehaving props, opportunities for improvisation between performers, exchange with the audience, smutty innuendo and the climactic release of dance. … [He] tellingly seems to have avoided interactions with the crowd that called for extreme isolation and humiliation. Buttressed by supporting comedians, and ensconced in a genre that put no direct pressure on his relation to the audience, he would have experienced only its adoration without the aggression that (as with Tarlton) always underlay it.\(^{107}\)
Kemp, this account suggests, lacked the specific antagonistic verbal agility of Tarlton and the competitive taste for blood or victory that went with the boisterous interchange of “themes,” exchanges of sometimes extended extempore wit often in rhyming verse. Tarlton had been indomitable. Kemp could hold his own with a heckler and dominate a stage but did not invite verbal sparring. I contend that in writing for Kemp, Shakespeare supplies him with his own variation of Tarlton’s wit and seemingly extempore banter. Rather than rapidly extemporized responses, Shakespeare’s prose for Kemp employs and builds on the cadences of the clown’s speech patterns, one idea developing from another as found in improvisatory practice, and calls for memorization in advance and then employment amid his usual comic business. As such, Shakespeare’s roles for Kemp exploit his repertoire of stagecraft, and the clown’s inherent liminal theatricality that positions him in his peculiar community of spectatorship with the audience.

Such writing, and exploitation of shared community are similarly found in abundance in the larger clown part written for Kemp the same year as Peter, namely Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. An example from this more familiar character serves to illustrate shared community generated by direct address and suggests how we might attend in more depth to the extra-textual dimensions of comedy that would have accompanied Kemp onstage. When Kemp/Bottom, alone on stage, wakes from his “dream” and calls to his now-absent fellows, he soon turns to the audience and takes them through his thought process: “God’s my life, stol’n hence, and left me asleep! I have had a most rare vision….” (4.1, 203-5). Whether the first sentence acknowledges the audience or not, the second, after the implied comic pause, certainly does. Bottom/Kemp’s speech continues in demotic prose even as it comically seeks to describe the ineffable, and concludes with a series of resolutions made in the moment: “I will get Peter
Quince to write a ballet [ballad] of this dream...and I will sing it ...before the Duke.

Peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her [Thisbe’s] death” (214-19). The audience thus becomes party to both Bottom’s confusion and his plan alike; his involvement of them follows naturally from what has gone before in the play, and further develops his community with them. Again, Peter’s very first speech illustrates this patterning and immediately establishes this shared community. The glorious comedy between Titania and Bottom surely reflects the relationship between Tarlton and Queen Elizabeth discussed in the previous chapter, their play a further contribution to the burgeoning Cult of Elizabeth like John Lyly’s *Endymion* (c1588) and Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590). Here, beyond the creative antagonistic relationship between Theseus/Burbage and Bottom/Kemp, Shakespeare makes central the memorial relationship between Bottom/Kemp/Tarlton and Titania the Fairie Queen/Queen Elizabeth, for it is Bottom’s charms and clownish ability to please the Faerie Queene—remembered by Bottom as his inspirational synaesthetic dream—that is the basis for her surrendering the changeling boy to Oberon, and thus effecting the romantic-comic conclusion of the play. This crucial plot point, of Titania’s willing handover of the child, is strangely buried or mute in the play’s concluding festivity (like Demetrius still being under the influence of Oberon’s charm); powerful magic is employed and the person it works on—and the audience—are redirected to think on other things. Equally Oberon’s act is political, almost as significant as Theseus’ wooing of Hippolyta in war in the mortal sphere. Oberon’s tactics and plan (as executed by Puck) are extremely effective, but they are indubitably underhand, deceptive and disingenuous; the working out of embedded patriarchal authority and hierarchical structures (here in a comedy) anticipating the clown-inflected machinations of Hal’s education in, and execution of, kingship.
Although extra-textual elements of performance characteristic of the clown are not preserved, and thus largely lost to theatre historians, it is possible to piece together something of the experience of performance from surviving evidence, often fragmentary, of theatrical traditions, stage practice and contemporary attitudes. In considering Tarlton, I sought to place him in visual, kinetic terms in order to emphasize his gestural comedy above and beyond the words that remain to us. In exploring Kemp’s practice, I again urge that we keep the visual elements foremost. The first critic to unapologetically make the case for his casting as Falstaff, Wiles suggests that Kemp’s trademarks were immediately apparent in the role: “his wooden stick [dagger], his cap [as opposed to a shaped hat], his tattered great belly doublet, his face illuminated by heat [were] for the audience ever present signs of the figure’s status as a clown.”\textsuperscript{110} Falstaff’s costume and props, the “externals”\textsuperscript{111} of his performance central to Wiles’ case, will be important to keep in mind as they add detail to my particular emphasis on the visual aspects of performance, the kinetic relationships between actors, and their non-scripted physical or vocal business. These externals worked powerfully on Elizabethan audiences used to emblem, pageantry, and allegory. Equally for 

*Romeo and Juliet*, let us try to see, as early audiences did, Burbage’s debonair Hal presented in stark contrast to the comical Kemp. In addition, Kemp’s charisma, bravura, swagger, and fame should be kept in mind as we imagine his presence on stage. Each appearance of Kemp would have been freighted with audience expectation that something unexpected might happen, embodying the inherent instability of text in performance, especially when onstage with another actor like Burbage with whom the tensions between two egos eager for audience approbation would become part of the dramatic moment. That is to say, laughter, and of many kinds, is present and potent in this tragic play, and not simply in the
figures of the Nurse or Mercutio, who both in many ways become tragic figures themselves. Let us now turn to and see this laughter, and this clown, in action.

**ENTER WILL KEMP, PETER IN** _ROMEO AND JULIET._

Atypically, or uncharacteristically for the period, the role of Peter can be confidently assigned to Kemp because of a stage direction for the clown’s entrance in Q2 that reads “Enter Will Kemp.” While this is known to scholars of the play, it suggests a clear conflation of actor and role registered and inscribed somewhere in the process prior to printing, most likely in the prompt-copy or else in the manuscript, foul pages, or even the type-setting, where somebody wrote the one name in place of the other without qualm or pause. Given the likelihood that Q2 originates from a theatre copy of the text, this conflation is not entirely surprising. Indeed, elsewhere a similar conflation occurs within the text itself when Old Capulet is instructing a servant in Peter’s absence. The standard reading, in both Q2 and F, is: “fetch drier logs! / Call Peter, he will show thee where they are” (4.4 15-6), however, Q1 gives Capulet’s line as “Call Peter / Will will show thee…” The repetition of the monosyllable makes sense only if Peter and Will are one and the same. While they may be a scribal error or an actor’s interpolation, the two conflations of actor and role suggest that this slippage would be ever-present to early audiences: Peter is always Kemp, just as Romeo is always Burbage—even given Burbage’s famed transformations into his characters.

Peter’s first appearance, in 1.2, sees him instructed by Capulet to “trudge about / Through fair Verona to find those persons out” named in his letter (1.2, 34-5). It is characteristic of early Elizabethan comic drama and its classical forebears for the clown to be sent on his master’s
business and Kemp is on well-tested ground when, left alone, he announces to the audience first his errand and then his complete inability to complete it. Peter’s monologue is at once brief and to the point, four of the five sentences are direct and seemingly simple exposition, and simultaneously dense in allusion and rich in characteristic clown practice.

Find them out whose names are written here! It is written that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil and the painter with his nets. But I am sent to find those persons whose names are here writ, and can never find what names the writing person hath here writ. I must to the learned. In good time! (38-44)

As Capulet and Paris leave the servant is left alone on stage, and I suggest moves forward to the front of the stage—Weimann’s plateau[113]—before or as he speaks, and directly addresses the audience. The first sentence simply states the task, its eight words almost complete an iambic line but fall lumberingly short, its operative word “written” foregrounded as the only one longer than a monosyllable. Audience members may guess at the clown’s dilemma before his illiteracy is stated first in passing to them and then to Romeo; his frustration may easily have been apparent in his delivery or physical actions. Immediately connecting with his audience by his first sentence, and his physical adjustment to include them, Kemp’s Peter then launches into the extraordinary 28-word sentence presumably tossed off with consummate clown ease. The sentence offers four examples of men defined by their trade supposedly capable of the task demanded of them but, with clown logic, the tools are misapplied; it should be the tailor’s yard (of cloth), the shoemaker’s last (a molded foot form), the fisherman’s net and the painter’s pencil. This sentence recalls the rhythm and structure of Bottom’s monologue in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, a comic treatment of the same material, where Bottom mangles St Paul’s letter to
the Corinthians: “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.”(Dream, 4.1.1 209-12) In both these instances Shakespeare is capturing the cadences and comic misconstructions of traditional convoluted clown speech that will be effortlessly passed off in performance. What’s funny here is Bottom’s lack of ability or of professionalism. What’s even funnier, and arguably transcendent in performance, is the comic synesthesia that suggest Bottom is experiencing an ass’s ignorant bliss.

The comic confusion of Peter’s shoemaker sentence, a prelude to that of the ensuing scene’s quibbling, includes not only bawdy phallic references in one if not more of the four nouns, but the whole thing is also a parody of John Lyly’s Euphuies, the Anatomy of Wit (1578). It is Lyly’s instruction to the shoemaker and other artisans that Peter refers to and then mangles for the hyper-literate in the audience, Shakespeare quibbling on Lyly’s call for “wit” by substituting the word “writ.” Lyly’s original reference is a call for respect of place and decorum which when not adhered to displeases him in like manner to “a fool [that] hath intruded himselfe to discourse of wit.” Kemp/Peter’s clown embodies the antithesis of decorum, an affront to Lyly or Sidney’s sense of deference and decency. As such, for those who catch it, Shakespeare has the clown parody the aesthete’s warning against precisely what is about to happen as his statement prefigures the illiterate clown intruding on the man of wit and words, adroitly tying up allusion and exposition in one.

Peter’s next sentence states his need for assistance and summons Romeo, or at least cues his entrance, while the next acknowledges Romeo’s timely arrival: “I must to the learned. In good time!” The physical comedian needs a man of letters and is sent a man of words, poetic in the extreme. (To Peter, Romeo is self apparently literate on first view, and a godsend.) Romeo
enters listening to, and then rebuffing, Benvolio’s advice to find a new love rather than to dwell in misery. Kemp, still in his downstage position, must presumably move back upstage into the path of Romeo and Benvolio, the hyphen in the text plainly indicating a break in thought.

Benvolio has asked Romeo if he is mad, to which, in his third utterance in the scene, he replies:

Not mad, but bound more than a madman is,
Shut up in prison, kept without my food,
Whipped and tormented, and—good e’en, good fellow.

SERVINGMAN [KEMP]. God gi’ good e’en. I pray, sir, can you read? (1.2, 53-57)

The comic servant is juxtaposed with the languishing lover, via a physical interruption that halts Romeo in his tracks and in his thinking. Having been in full flow the verse here falters, as Romeo’s greeting forces a feminine ending. The clown’s reply initially approximates verse, like Romeo’s line it is eleven syllables, but it falls comically short of rhythmic resolution, with the thudding three-word question ‘can you read?’ morphing the moment into comically direct prose. This moment dramatically informs the audience’s view of Romeo at this his second appearance, as his language of languishing love is framed by, and couched among, the physical action and ensuing laughter of broad low comedy. Matinee idol Burbage in full poetic flow, describing how his condition differs from madness, is literally and physically interrupted by the funny-looking and plebeian Kemp. At first the dissonance is such that Peter thinks Romeo means the opposite of what he says, the exchange (quoted above) continues from “can you read:”

ROMEO. Ay, mine own fortune in my misery.

SERVINGMAN. Perhaps you have learned it without book. But I pray, can you read anything you see?

ROMEO. Ay, if I know the letters and the language.

SERVINGMAN. You say honestly. Rest you merry.

ROMEO. Stay, fellow. I can read. [He reads the letter] (58-62)
Peter takes Romeo literally to mean that he doesn’t know either letters or language, in other words can’t read, and makes to leave, Romeo being of no use to him in his current situation. Realizing this, Romeo resorts to plainer speech and the next few lines, or in performance terms the next stage beat, lists the invitees, and establishes via comic quibbles the event and place they are invited to, and has Peter depart. The whole exchange is less than 30 lines, and the scene ends in another 20 with the suggestion they crash the party. While in reading the emphasis may appear to be on the expository content, in performance the clown’s presence, initially mute while Capulet and Paris talk, given his instructions and then left alone with the audience, would have been a significant element and an occasion for expectation in the crowd.

Observers such as Brian Gibbons have noted Shakespeare emphasizing the element of chance in the encounter that informs Romeo of the Capulet’s ball. Beyond that however, the scene hints at an alchemy in performance, two bravura virtuosos en face, each bringing out the best work in the other, a mingling of the serious and the comic, compelling and entertaining, advancing the plot, containing and enfolding Kemp’s genius into the writer’s design. The clown here and in subsequent scenes brings with him a splash of comic color, but more profoundly he directly influences the audience’s view of the hero, and how they receive his tragedy. Perhaps it is not simply Romeo's self-absorption and melodrama but the limits of his hyper-literacy that are on display in this encounter between clown and central tragic figure, or between Kemp and Burbage. For as critics well know, Romeo reads all too well, and his Petrarchan clichés disable him from being down to earth. The privilege of Romeo's social position is exposed even as the clown’s illiteracy occasions laughter, creating a dialectic between the serious and the comic that may well have informed Shakespeare's use of Burbage and Kemp, as we will soon see, in the form of Hal and Falstaff.
Peter’s next appearance occupies the closing lines of the play’s very next scene, (1.3), which famously introduces Juliet, her mother, and the nurse. Lady Capulet has been eager to talk to her daughter about a suitor but has had to listen at length to the Nurse’s bawdy recollection of Juliet as a child. In performance the end of the scene can seem abrupt, especially if the Nurse’s sense of unhurried laughter has spread to the audience, and dominated the scene in tension with Lady Capulet’s sense of required haste. The Nurse, of course, serves a comic function in the play akin to the clown’s, but the relationship with the audience is contingent on actor choice in performance. I follow Wiles in suggesting that the comic business in this scene is derived, in large part, from Peter delivering his long message in one breath. Peter enters, I suggest, speaking as he travels, pained perhaps by how much is to be done, and how central is his excessive labor to the house’s smooth running and its owners’ pleasures: “Madam, the guests are come, supper served up, you called, my young lady asked for, the Nurse cursed in the pantry, and everything in extremity. I must hence to wait, I beseech you follow straight” (100-5). Note the rhythm, internal rhyme, and cadences of natural flowing speech. This entrance of Peter contrasts markedly with his prior and more characteristic ones, as he comically inverts the expectation of his delaying or interrupting the scene by the speed of his delivery and brevity of appearance.

Peter’s presence in 2.4., where the Nurse visits Romeo, again dramatically informs the scene. His verbal contributions are only at the beginning and end of the section, during his arrival and departure with the Nurse, but he is also a silent presence throughout and a dynamic element in the stage picture created. The scene begins with Mercutio and Romeo sparring together, their jests an overtly competitive battle of wits that both demonstrates the play’s characteristic heightened linguistic tone and foreshadows the plays more violent confrontations, specifically their very next scene where Romeo’s words of love to Tybalt are immediately and fatally
countered by Mercutio’s action in drawing his sword. The duel that follows marks the play’s tragic turn and brings down the Prince’s judgement threatened at the outset. The previous appearance of Mercutio and Romeo, mere minutes of stage time before the former’s death, rehearses the scene in a comic form. As they spar Mercutio feigns exhaustion, “come between us good Benvolio, my wits faints” (2.4.69), and Romeo’s response demands that he rally or concede defeat “Switch and spurs, switch and spurs, or I’ll cry a match” (70-1). Then, moments later, as Peter and the Nurse enter, Romeo is saying “Here’s goodly gear / A sail! A sail!” (100-1). The first phrase is ambiguous and could either refer to the quality of the word play underway, ending one topic, or to the sight of the new arrivals and heralding a new topic. His following phrase, a variant of “Ship Ahoy” or the earlier “Sail ho,” is clearly acknowledging the new arrivals. Mercutio adds “Two. Two. A shirt and a smock” (102), meaning a man and a woman, before the Nurse speaks demanding her fan from Peter. Wiles adeptly envisions the entrance suggesting that:

The bulky Kemp—the shirt—must enter “afore and apace,” half concealing the nurse. I presume the two comedians are mistaken for a boat because they enter with cloaks held up to cover their faces. Their errand is a secret one, and a Capulet servant cannot ever be seen to communicate with a Montague. The nurse calls for her fan to keep her face concealed while she talks. Since she masks her face in this way she is naturally taken to be a prostitute.¹¹⁷

This evokes quite the comic entrance as well as speaking to Shakespeare’s visualizing of stage business in writing dialogue. Wiles adds that of course, “Peter is not allowed to listen to the conversation, but keeps watch,” and that his “one interjection calls attention to his prop, the dagger.”¹¹⁸ The moment bristles with comic bravura and Peter/Kemp’s characteristic physical comedy informing his bustling entrance and exit, and his bawdy interchange with the nurse while supposedly just standing watch. In the scene that immediately follows, Peter re-enters with the Nurse only this time to be immediately sent away again without speaking (2.5). Here again is
contrived another opportunity for Tarlton-inspired “roving,” making business out of simple arrivals and departures, and facilitating ready coverage of the whole stage area and environs. These moments in Act 2 of *Romeo and Juliet* suggest that Kemp was as adept as his predecessor in this roaming or “roving” mode that will later constitute, and become characteristic of, Falstaff’s comic lumbering perambulations in *Henry IV*.

Act 4 of *Romeo and Juliet* begins with Juliet’s despair being met by the Friar’s desperate enterprise of his “thing like death,” and ends with her discovery supposedly dead, and Peter’s scene dismissing the musicians heralded by Capulet’s demand that “All things we ordained festival / Turn from their office to black funeral” (4.5.84-5). In between these two events there is much excited preparation for another feast in the Capulet household, initially to announce Juliet’s engagement, and then conceived as the wedding party itself, couched either side of her apprehensive drinking of the potion. The opening of 4.2 recalls Peter’s first scene discussed above: here Capulet sends one servant to invite guests and then instructs a second to hire cooks. In 4.4 Peter is noted as absent, another servant is instructed by Capulet to “fetch drier logs! / Call Peter, he will show thee where they are” (4.4 15-6) (the “Will will” of Q2 ). This brief comic exchange drawing attention to Peter’s absence has the effect on the audience of reinforcing how different this servant’s interaction is to Kemp’s presence on the stage. When Peter does arrive, it is for the last 45 lines of the scene and act and this is the entrance the second quarto has as “Enter Will Kemp.” Wiles suggests the writer or compositor could not separate the actor from the role and saw this as “his scene” where he “no longer has to play a subordinate part.” Here, following the discovery of Juliet’s supposedly dead body, is Peter’s largest and last scene.

This brief interlude, where the musicians realize they will not get to perform or be properly paid but hope for something to eat, is characteristic of Kemp’s leading of a scene in
which he instructs or guides subordinates, controlling the dialogue and the forward momentum. In turning the musicians from their “office” and the play towards its climax and atmosphere of “black funeral,” as demanded by Capulet, the episode is brash and argumentative and prefigures the jig when the same musicians will return. Rather than a later addition or interpolation from another writer suggested by critics appalled at its mocking tone in a tragedy, I suggest the scene is central to Shakespeare’s design that here as so often is exploring the clash of genres, tones and modes of performance. The scene injects the comically mundane into the mood of intense (and premature) mourning, before Peter departs from the stage, and the disruptive embodiment of comedy leaves the play. In his sudden unexplained (if logical) disappearance, Peter is first in a line that I draw from him to Falstaff through Hamlet to Lear’s Fool that I suggest echoes the sudden expulsion of the clown from the theatre tradition, leaving only the traces and memories of the clown tradition as embodied in the careers of Kemp and Tarlton. But for Shakespeare, traces of the clown re-emerge in ways that variously thematize the irrepressible spirit of comedy, and access the wisdom, inclusivity, and social status of the clown, resulting in powerful forms of theatrical innovation.

Peter might have had quite a different final scene. The Second Quarto and the Folio texts of the play both feature a curious and confusing stage direction in 5.3 that says “Enter Romeo and Peter” even as Romeo’s companion immediately before and afterwards is Balthasar. Wiles offers a compelling hypothesis in which he suggests this is evidence of authorial revision. At their entrance the stage direction obliges Peter “to carry, simultaneously, a mattock, a wrenching iron, a letter and a light—a comically difficult task”¹²⁰ (and one that mirror’s Flute’s task as Moon in Act 5 of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) before he is confused with contradictory orders about going and staying. Wiles correctly points out that this is clearly clown business and
suggests that in Kemp, Shakespeare “had a clown whose presence would never allow Romeo to dominate the stage, [and] whose presence would preclude any even short-lived idealizing of Romeo’s emotions.”

Peter’s presence, moreover, would “oblige the audience to reject Romeo’s own account of himself, temporarily, and to accept an alternative perspective.”

Faced with this situation Shakespeare “rejected the obvious ploy of developing a master-servant relationship, and relocated his clown within a set of inter-servant relationships,” and the part was “with minimal cuts or changes assigned to Balthazar.” Wiles is astute in his analysis but while his emphasis is on Kemp’s practice in the roles that can be assigned to him and particularly Shakespeare’s developing use of him, my emphasis concerns Shakespeare’s placement of Peter at the play’s climax, squarely beside Burbage’s grief-stricken Petrarchan pontificator, and secondly the combination in performance of those two actors together.

Although Shakespeare takes Kemp/Peter out of the tomb, his initial design reveals a powerful impulse to imagine and embrace the clown’s vitality, popularity and inherent instability in the service of tragic complexity. While Shakespeare cuts Kemp in this particular instance, we are left with a reminder of his potential to enhance the theatrical moment. Shakespeare’s sensitivity to the power of comic forms in tragic drama becomes a preoccupation in *Hamlet*, but even in this much earlier play he is endlessly crafting, calibrating, and thematizing the uses of the comic throughout the play. Juliet is given her Nurse, whose coarseness is there to better off set her fellow cross-dressed charge’s innocence and delicacy, but Romeo is isolated, at this late stage, from the too funny or distracting clown. As such, Peter is withdrawn from the world of the play, as we’ve seen, with his dismissal of the musicians, but Shakespeare will remain preoccupied with the clown as a paradoxically central figure in both history and tragedy, not least because of
the extraordinary and compelling theatrical energy generated by Kemp and Burbage on stage together.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare contrives for the clown Bottom to actually become Romeo when he has Bottom play the tragic lead in the “Pyramus and Thisbe” interlude. Bottom, while performing as the temporary lead actor in his company, has much to say to the play’s actual lead-role and actor: Burbage’s Theseus. The play, written simultaneously with *Romeo and Juliet*, rehearses in a comic vein many of Shakespeare’s concerns in his tragedy, and the parallels are illuminating. As such, before moving on to *Henry IV*, I want to return to Kemp as Bottom once more, to examine his one scene on stage with Burbage. Bottom’s Pyramus I suggest, represents a fuller expression of the clown’s potential as a central figure in tragedy, an example of the inherent instability the clown brings on stage, and a vibrant evocation of the ordered comic chaos Burbage and Kemp’s shared presence could muster. Simultaneously with his Peter, Kemp’s weaver made an indelible impression on Shakespeare’s own imagination. Bottom, an inveterate improver, despite being cast as the romantic lead, initially wants to play all the parts. In this absorbing of all the characters: “Let me play the lion, too!” (1.2.66) he is the inverse of the isolated Romeo. In his guileless lack of understanding of theatre Bottom as Pyramus cannot keep its two worlds apart; as the play’s hero he is too concerned with the real world’s reception and understanding of the performance and is woefully patronizing and inappropriate in his explanation of theatre to Theseus. It should be noted that here Shakespeare has written a part for his clown that travesties the clown’s natural traversing of the line between the play’s world and that of its audience. At the same time, Bottom’s ignorance is accompanied by an openness to experience, a susceptibility to the imagination which is the opposite of Theseus’s condescending scorn as expressed in his monologue that opens Act 5. In a play about
the two worlds of Athens and the overlapping fairy-realm, imagination becomes the hinge, the prerequisite for comprehension. Bottom’s enduring popularity with audiences is contingent on his cheerful lack of comprehension, and his irrepressible enthusiasm: it is a masterly construction burlesquing the form as it successfully employs it.

This situation inverts the historical choric function of the clown relating and commenting on the action to the audience, the clown here offering ignorance rather than insight, effortlessly generating their enjoyment of an assumed superiority. Despite his apparent ignorance Bottom is the only “mortal” character to meet with the fairies when he is transformed by the ass’s head. Similarly, as Pyramus, despite his ignorance of theatrical norms, his play transforms or touches its stage audience, however fleetingly, and arguably, like the play in which it sits, offering its larger audience delight and wonder. After his play’s climax in his extended suicide (a bravado burlesque of Romeo’s), rather than staying dead to receive his applause, Bottom leaps up to ask Theseus if he would like to see more. Theseus, in a subtly threatening exercise of state power, declines the Epilogue, insisting that the players should stay dead, “for when the players are all dead, there need none to be blamed” (5.1.355-59). Kemp will leap up from feigned death again as Falstaff, but here it serves, in addition to all his other aesthetic crimes, as an example both of clownish pulling focus away from its proper place, and of the clown’s reluctance to leave the stage. The play has finished, the other play, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, should be allowed to resume, the stage audience are all more or less eager to retire for their wedding night, but Bottom and his fellows make them sit through a rustic bergomask dance. The bergomask is as incongruous and gauche at court as the clown’s jig will become at the refined theatre, but Shakespeare is allowing his clown, and his audience, their rustic dance, before his redesigned finale of the fairy blessing. With deft irony, the mechanicals are allowed their dance as part of
Theseus’ performance of magnanimity, the jig is indexed and indulged, demos intrudes on the Athenian capitol, holding in abeyance its resolution. At its end the dancers are shepherded off without further ceremony.

Apparent throughout this scene is a tension between the forms of knowledge employed by the “rude mechanicals” and their bookish betters, exactly as we saw in Peter’s first encounter with Romeo. Romeo’s literacy there is the catalyst for meeting Juliet, and his destiny. Andrew Stott identifies the two types of comedy at work in Midsummer—the native tradition, embodied in Bottom’s “mortal grossness,” and the resurgent Roman New Comedy tradition, written in verse and expressed by Titania’s “aery-spirit.” Stott suggests that the most intense moment of the play’s crossing of authoritative centers is the meeting of Bottom, with his ass head on, and “Titania’s misplaced, misrecognizing desire representing acute distillations of base-bodily and aristocratic visual that organize the comedy, amplified to the point of absurdum.”

This juxtaposition is repeated in the theatricals of Act 5, where it mirrors and complicates the larger social situation presented, and the process of theatrical “differentiation” underway. It maps onto the rigidly reinforced ascending social scale from lowly clown to nobility, the latter ennobled by their birth, their learning, their decorum and the virtues these express. Such superiority relies, as we have seen, on defining itself as in opposition to the base unmediated instincts of the low-born, epitomized in the loutish clown. Bottom’s name indicated his social status, but also locates him as of the flesh and in Stott’s phrase, a “fouling vehicle.” Shakespeare suggests that Theseus, the height of the play’s nobility, fundamentally lacks imagination, his understanding flawed and his experience impoverished as a result. He has Bottom attempt to explain the mechanics of theatre to Theseus who, unlike the more sensitive Hippolyta, is untouched by the performance. Here again Shakespeare is considering what is lost in the abjective view of comedy and the all-
too corporeal, figured in the excision of the clown. In the play’s comic universe, Kemp’s Bottom can guilelessly challenge Burbage as Theseus’ authority, breeching decorum repeatedly, and, as with Romeo, radically inform the audience’s perception of the character. Shakespeare’s dramaturgy increasingly relies on offering multiple perspectives, and 1595 taught him, if he didn’t know already, that bringing his clown and his star together facilitated a ready and compelling way to achieve this, their virtuosity further realizing his.

“FAT JACK FALSTAFF:” GLUTTON AND FOLK SPIRIT.

Far more so than Peter has opportunity to do in Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare has Falstaff call into question the verities underlying tragedy, history and the larger, social, moral order. Falstaff’s perspective is built into the generation of meaning and of history. While the role of Falstaff has prompted a massive body of criticism, much of it has been blind to the specifically clown-based material and performance conditions out of and for which he was created. Indeed Shakespeare’s inclusivity of vision in using the clown, rather than meriting praise, sees him upbraided and misunderstood. Falstaff’s whole existence, as I have already observed, is in fact premised on his opposition to the serious, and critics who judge him for his lubricious irresponsibility, or question why he is present or given such free reign in the play, impose, retroactively, a querulous moral sensitivity rendering their vision more pious and squeamish than any Elizabethan with Tyburn blood on their shoes and beer in their belly would recognize. From a perspective, (hopefully) free of class or classicist bias, it is apparent and exciting that the Kemp/Burbage relationship is one that Shakespeare mobilizes in ways that have escaped many critics.
In framing further discussion of the dynamics of the *Henry IV* plays in performance, I want to return to one of Shakespeare’s sources to show how he in fact borrowed extensively from the clown in his source play, and the clown in his company, in order to generate Falstaff, historically aligned with Oldcastle. Shakespeare’s debt to the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (c.1587), is transparent despite his alchemical transformation of its material, language, situations, and characters that make Falstaff’s emergence from the clown tradition readily apparent. Reinvigorating the historical story of young Henry already part mythologized, Shakespeare’s plays also preserve and illustrate elements of his theatrical inheritance from it. Published in 1598 but performed over a decade earlier, *The Famous Victories* falls into three parts corresponding to the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*. Likely a memorial reconstruction of a presumably longer play, Arden editor A. R. Humphreys deftly describes it as like reading *Henry IV* “in a bad dream, so close to Shakespeare is it in fragments, so world removed in skill.” The Hal/Henry character entirely lacks the self-possession and sophistication that define him in Shakespeare, where his rough edges—like his crude prose—will be replaced with wit, and his excesses will be channeled into and figured in “that trunk of humors, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts,” Falstaff."(1 Henry IV, 2.4.433-6) I stop short of quoting Hal’s full description but trust the point is made, and Shakespeare’s amplification apparent.

One of the prince’s madcap coterie is nicknamed Jockey, and identified as Sir John Oldcastle, the original name of Shakespeare’s Falstaff before it was changed to avoid offense to living relatives. The part is small but otherwise clearly congruent with Falstaff in Shakespeare’s play. As in Shakespeare’s version, Hal rejects his former life on his way to coronation, but the expulsion of his former friends doesn’t even address Jockey/Oldcastle
directly, and all three disappear from the play without speaking further. Shakespeare’s amplification of this moment, discussed below, is a towering achievement and advance in the sophistication of the drama. The part of Jockey/Oldcastle is underdeveloped but clearly a model for Shakespeare’s Falstaff, and I propose that the part’s transformation involved combining Oldcastle’s roguish knight role and function with that of the play’s clown Dericke (discussed in the last chapter). Originally played by Tarlton, Dericke is one of the prince’s lowlife acquaintances bound up in the robbery, and who later accompanies him to war. The character exhibits characteristic flashes of the clown’s quibbling wit or word-play: defending one of his men caught in the theft they undertook. Hal says “he did it but in jest” to which the injured party Dericke rejoins: “Heare you sir, is it your man’s qualitie to rob folk in jest? In faith, he shall be hanged in earnest” (4.330-1). The quibble is hardly novel but it echoes, in miniature, the nature (and the language) of the Shakespearean Hal-Falstaff relationship which vastly amplifies this one brief moment of stage dialogue the two characters share in the earlier play. In the analysis that follows, numerous structural and conceptual similarities between the two roles and the latter ‘great’ one emerge to establish the link between Falstaff and these his theatrical forebears. In this process of amplification the Falstaff role acquires the rich symbolic significance and associations of the clown, discussed herein, including representing, in Wiles’ terms “a Lord of Misrule, a personification of Shrovetide or summer,” a carnivalesque folk-spirit with the “power temporarily to halt the normal progress of time.” Falstaff’s relationship with, or separateness from, time is explicitly evoked at his first entrance, and alluded to throughout in his demeanor and language. In real time of course, temporal progress resumes and the figure must be sacrificed.
Falstaff’s first appearance immediately establishes him as fat, slovenly, and given to drink, ends harping on his age, and in between establishes the combative but close relationship of prince and clown, partners in crime and conviviality against the serious. The previous scene, the play’s first, ends with the exit of the King and Warwick after weighty talk of civil strife and repressed anger: Henry would like to go on an expiative crusade to the Holy Land but is stopped by threats on his western and northern frontiers, and he has just compared his prodigal son unfavorably to the Northumberland’s son, the honorable Hotspur. Now we will get to judge that comparison for ourselves. Hal and Falstaff’s entrance would likely have been from a door in the tiring house wall, but it is also possible that they were revealed in the retiring space in the same wall (where Polonius will meet his end), or even emerged from the stages’ trap door or hell-mouth which would have been both unexpected and richly associative. In any eventuality, the entrance would have immediately followed the king’s exit, and have registered as an abrupt change of tone, as Kemp and Burbage arrive and establish themselves in clear opposition to the socio-political gravity of the King:

FALSTAFF. How now what time is it?

PRINCE HENRY. Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil has thou to do with the time of day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds. … I see no reason why though should be so superfluous as to demand the time of day. (1.2.1-6)

Framed in terms of verity and knowledge, the language here of course shifts into prose, its tone markedly different from the politic iambic—comic rather than serious—extravagant, indicative of excess, of the nature of their relationship, and diametrically opposed in form and content to the previous scenes evocation of pressing needs and heavy responsibility. Having met the
troubled King the audience meets his son unhurriedly plotting merriments, specifically highway robbery, with his beloved “Fat Jack.”

In the 1930’s Joseph Bryant’s essay, “Falstaff and the Mantle of Dick Tarlton,” proposed that “whether by accident or design [Shakespeare had, in Falstaff] assimilated and perpetuated the living memory of the greatest clown of them all,” creating “an immortalized Tarlton...brought back from the dead.” Beyond being among the first to consider Falstaff’s debt and the clown’s reincarnation, Bryant’s most perceptive insight is regarding Falstaff’s overt theatricalism, rightly noting how: “Falstaff carries with him a full supply of those stock devices which belong to the world of the theatre itself not to the world of those plays in which he appears” In reconstructing Kemp’s performance visually the fat suit, likely stuffed with straw, is only the most obvious of these clownish ‘externals,’ accoutrements, and affectations. To assist in picturing the Fat Knight of Part 1 I want to jump ahead briefly to Falstaff’s first appearances in 2 Henry IV. Act 1, scene 2 of the latter play establishes Falstaff in opposition with the Lord Chief Justice (his combatant throughout Part 2 in place of Hal in Part 1). Throughout the play he shows scant regard for the law, confidently contending that his relationship with the Prince protects him. Here, once the Justice has left, Falstaff is instructing his page to deliver messages, brusquely shaking off the warning to moderate his behavior when a stab of pain literally arrests him—pun intended. For all his protestations and protection he is subject to physical frailty and decay. He turns to the audience to share his pain:

A pox of this gout! Or a gout of this pox! For the one or the other plays the rogue with my great toe. “Tis no matter if I do halt; I have the wars for my colour [pretext], and my pension shall seem the more reasonable. A good wit will make use of anything, I will turn diseases to commodity [advantage]. [Exit.] (244-50)
In the Tudor tradition of morality plays and other forms of religious instruction the figure of Gluttony, whose Falstaff’s fatness and behavior emblematically suggest, was associated with disease. Here, Falstaff does not know which disease is ravaging his foot, a fact that furthers his gluttonous credentials with the audience. His comment on a “good wit [making] use of anything” applies as much to the art of clowning, and his resolve—to pass off disease for heroism—is morally appalling, characteristically Vice-like, thereby invoking the specter of another precursor to the Elizabethan stage clown. In starting Part 2 Shakespeare reasserts Falstaff’s clown identity, his essential opposition to the serious and the responsible, and gives him further license to limp, a generous gift to a physical comedian. Moreover, whether we countenance it or not, there is evidence later in Part 2 for some timeless physical comedy of discomfort: Wiles reads the stage direction, found only in the Quarto, “Enter Will” at the top Act 2, Scene 4 as describing the clown’s urgent and harried journey across the stage in search of the chamber-pot that he reappears holding and full on his formal entrance.134

The casting of the clown as Falstaff, I contend, was not merely expedient and logical but also innovative and inspired, allowing Shakespeare to draw on the carnival and Saturnalian folk traditions at the heart of Elizabethan constructions of identity in the process of developing the history play. Kemp, the master of ceremonies, the audience’s representative and host of the extra-dramatic activities, is bought center stage into the heart of the narrative plot next to its hero. Here Shakespeare, serious and ambitious in his purpose to dramatize English history, embraces the permeability of genre, and the particular value of virtuoso performers, more than his more bookish and fashionable fellows, and presents for his audience to relish, the company’s famed stage-prince and clown, on stage together moment by thrilling moment. Their performances and interaction throughout, as I’ve proposed, would have been shot through with
extra-theatrical tension, at once amplifying, channeling, and containing the inherent instability of their scripted interaction. In this, Shakespeare’s vision of History was grounded in the practical magic of the theatre, and was avowedly popular and radically inclusive. The clown is the organizing agency (in Preiss’ phrase) of Shakespeare’s inheritance, and he has folded the charismatic Kemp into the fabric of his design. The clown and Falstaff both preside over the play-making, expose its illusions and index that the time is for revelry. theirs is a potent life force, indeed indestructible, for whatever the plot brings them they will return triumphant for the jig. This in turn informs Hal’s pseudo-direct relationship with the audience and his performance of kingship. Hal is unabashedly contriving, consciously presenting his own dramatic conversion story, his subjects will see only godlike transformation, but his paying audience are party to the intoxicating artifice.

ALL PLAY AND NO WORK. “WHAT SHALL WE BE MERRY, SHALL WE HAVE A PLAY EXTEMPORE?”

Falstaff’s inversionary valuing of play in opposition to work and the serious is built into the fabric and structure of 1 Henry IV. Indeed, the majority of his contribution is structured around Shakespeare’s employment of him within a series of jests, diversionary entertainments, or pseudo-improvisatory “tavern play(s)” that facilitate this dichotomy. The modern meaning of the term “play” as a theatrical entity, the earlier association of theatre with improvisation, and the sense of ludic or child-like past-time all align in the name for this popular Elizabethan form of improvised playing around while drinking, that predates karaoke and the trivia quiz. When Falstaff pronounces “What, shall we be merry, shall we have a play extempore?” (1 Henry IV 2.4.275-6) he is specifically referencing this particular impromptu feature of tavern life of the
period, called upon (like theatre) to pass the time convivially. *1 Henry IV* repeatedly references the form and incorporates the popular and improvisatory performance tradition into scripted drama that arguably captures, apes or creates written dialogue that suggests in its performance that it is extempore. Falstaff is an inveterate avoider of work, by default a man at play: as Hal says, introducing him, “Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-colored taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of day” (1.2.7.12). His position, the inverse of that expected of the responsible prince, is consistently disruptive of order, and framed in terms of these diversionary activities. As with the Porter in *Macbeth*, the intrusion of reality will be repeatedly figured in the sound of an off-stage knocking, auguring the insistent arrival of matters of import, and ending the revelry.

The improvisatory nature of tavern-play makes it evidently an extension of clowning on stage or off. Indeed, the efficacy of the device may have been suggested to Shakespeare by its brilliant deployment by the proto-Falstaff clown Dericke in *The Famous Victories*. The episode occurs moments after young Henry, refusing to be censured or restrained, punches the Lord Chief Justice. When the prince and judge exit, Dericke and his friend John [the] Cobbler are left alone on stage, they marvel at the prince being arrested before Dericke proposes that they reenact what they saw:

Faith John, Ile tell thee what, thou shalt be my
Lord Chiefe Justice, and thou shall sit in the chaire,
And ile be the young prince, and hit thee a boxe on the ear,
And then thou shalt say, to teach you what prerogatives
Meane, I commit you to the Fleet [prison] (5. 386-90)
Cobbler concurs, on the proviso that he be not hit too hard, and their following exchange
hilariously parallels and parodies the one the audience has just witnessed. The passage echoes
and suggests Shakespeare’s extended episode of Falstaff and Hal pretending to be Hal and
Bolingbroke by turns, and his more wholesale and structural employment of the device.

Whether suggested by *The Famous Victories* or otherwise, the Eastcheap scenes, or all of
Hal’s interaction with Falstaff up to the departure for Salisbury in Act 3 Scene.3, are
Shakespeare’s own tavern plays: collectively they represent Hal’s idling, his contrivances and
entertainments to pass the time in appropriately merry fashion while away from his political
responsibilities. They are conducted at the Boar’s Head tavern, historically a noted site of early
London theatrical activity, and in Orson Welles’s wonderful film enactment, the 1967 *Chimes at
Midnight*, are designed so as to suggest both tavern great room and the purpose-built theater
itself. Notably, they are explicitly contrived for entertainment, or ‘sport’ rather than profit.

Falstaff’s call for a “play extempore” (2.4.276) is actually him trying to end the piece of tavern
play in which he is laboring uncomfortably as both the object and subject of the jesting. Later in
that scene of successive tavern plays, Hal structures the playing to anticipate his imminent
conversation with his father, and the facing of responsibility that represents. Falstaff first plays
the king: his “dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown” (379). We can imagine Kemp’s
comic aplomb in the situation, and the onstage Hostess repeatedly praises his performance.
When the roles are reversed, Hal as the King admonishes Falstaff’s Hal. Falstaff’s defense of
himself is cut short, as so often the incursion of external reality comes with a knocking from off
stage. When Bardolph enters running to announce that it is the sheriff at the door, Falstaff wants
to continue extemporizing in holiday terms but cannot, for the play has already ended: “Out ye
rogue, play out the play, I have much to say on behalf of that Falstaff” (478-9). The scene moves
on to conclude with a game of hide-and-seek: Hal tells the sheriff that Falstaff is not there while the fat clown falls noisily asleep behind the arras.

In reimagining or revivifying the old play Shakespeare has made tavern play a thematic device, figuring the sharp opposition to the serious tone and character of the court, where of course verse is spoken. Whereas Act 1 sets up the robbery, specifically as a merriment, anticipating the laughter it will generate, Act 2, Scene 4 exploits Falstaff’s comic discomfort after it. Hal is proved correct in his prediction of Falstaff’s courage melting into comically ludicrous cowardice, and Shakespeare maximizes the enjoyment Hal and the audience extract from it. Jeff Doty shrewdly parses Hal’s presence in the tavern and Shakespeare’s design behind it:

Contrary to popular belief, Hal does not percolate bottom-up enthusiasm for his accession in a tavern. True, like the tavern goers with whom he interacts audiences generally enjoy seeing him there. But critics generally confuse the effects of Hal’s presence in Eastcheap on these particular loggerheads, carters, and drawers with his purpose in being there. Hal goes there not to win popularity but to give “offense,” to cultivate “rotten opinion” in everyone (2 Henry IV, 5.2. 128).135

Such an either/or reading risks missing the crucial point that Hal’s time in the tavern not only creates and heightens the effect of his reformation, but also teaches him how to play many roles, including that, finally of the King. Hal introjects play as a crucial technique of governance. Crucially, Hal’s desire to give offense is carefully calibrated. It also facilitates the sense of festive past-time and holiday jollity in the play that is further enabled by successive instances of boisterous and extempore tavern play, and the scandal to his name that his plan requires. Falstaff is chosen precisely for his vulgarity, off-setting Hal’s quick wit in the present and facilitating his miraculous transformation in the minds of others.
The robbery, a carnivalesque inversion of order with Falstaff at its comic heart, is the centerpiece of 1 Henry IV’s riotous tavern play, albeit the one act that requires leaving the tavern. The scene’s disorder is carefully contextualized, performed and deconstructed entirely as entertainment for Hal, and by extension his offstage audience, at Falstaff’s expense. Whereas The Famous Victories depicts the prince as impulsive and brutish, eager to rob in sport and for gain, in 1 Henry IV Hal’s participation is considered not casual, and is conditional precisely on Poins’ contrivance of turning it to sport against Falstaff. The topic is broached by Hal, so Falstaff can eagerly respond, occasioning wit in himself and others, and then Poins enters with details of an actual plan. In reading the passage picture Hal and Poins roughly center, Falstaff nearer the lip of the stage. Falstaff’s ebullience and Hal’s seeming resistance generate rhythms, a seesawing sense of possibilities, and the spaces for physical reactions:

POINS. I have bespoke supper tomorrow night in Eastcheap: we may do it as secure as sleep. If you will go, I will stuff your purses full of crowns; if you will not, tarry at home and be hanged.

FALSTAFF. Hear ye, Yedward; if I tarry at home and go not, I'll hang you for going.

POINS. You will, chops?

FALSTAFF. Hal, wilt thou make one?


FALSTAFF. There's neither honesty, manhood, nor good fellowship in thee, nor thou camest not of the blood royal, if thou darest not stand for ten shillings.

PRINCE HENRY. Well then, once in my days I'll be a madcap.

FALSTAFF. Why, that's well said.

PRINCE HENRY. Well, come what will, I'll tarry at home.

FALSTAFF. By the Lord, I'll be a traitor then, when thou art king.

PRINCE HENRY. I care not.

POINS. Sir John, I prithee, leave the prince and me alone: I will lay him down such reasons for this adventure that he shall go.
FALSTAFF. Well, God give thee the spirit of persuasion and him the ears of profiting, that what thou speakest may move and what he hears may be believed, that the true prince may, for recreation sake, prove a false thief; for the poor abuses of the time want countenance. Farewell: you shall find me in Eastcheap.

PRINCE HENRY. Farewell, thou latter spring! farewell, All-hallowen summer!

Exit Falstaff (1.2. 125-55)

Again, what Poins will suggest is the turning of the joke against Falstaff, an invention Hal cannot resist, and in which the audience shares his delight. Despite having raised the subject Hal initially says he will not be part of it. Falstaff challenges or dares him and Hal concurs, only to change his mind immediately once Falstaff is delighted. The princes’ deliberate baiting creates combative pseudo-conflict for great comic effect, sets up the ensuing comic drama in which they all play parts, and binds the audience in to Hal and Shakespeare’s design. Note also how Falstaff is given an extended verbal flourish, in which he wishes Poins success “for recreations sake” no less, prior to his lumbering exit. Here is play within a play! The scene ends with Hal’s monologue that reveals his own larger design. His transformation, he suggests, “Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes / Than that which hath no foil to set it off” (208-10). Hal’s own play or performance will work magic and inspire wonder in all who see it, precisely because of his wild company, specifically his opposite or “foil,” the scurrilous fat knight. Here Hal’s construction of identity is generated by his performance in response to Falstaff’s inversionary clown antics. Hal will in fact ingest (the pun on ‘jest’ is apparent but not intended) Falstaff into his view of kingship. Having shielded him for as long as he can as a prince, on ascension to the throne he must be seen to reject Falstaff. Once king, Hal employs pragmatism by turns ruthless and holy or surprisingly humane, a capaciousness he learnt of his foil. He has learnt younger than Prospero that “the rarer action is in virtue not in vengeance (The Tempest 5.1, 27-8), and how, in the exercise of power, there is need for dynamism and creativity as well.
The robbery itself is a comic tour-de-force, in part as beyond his cowardice it is Falstaff’s physical discomfort that is foregrounded as cause for laughter. We must picture Kemp pseudo-breathless and wretched almost throughout—at the robbery he “sweats to death and lards the lean earth as he walks along” (2.2.109)—adept at extracting the physical comedy of the situation. The scene’s opening line deftly frames this discomfort and sets up Falstaff’s entrance, as Poins tells Hal, “I have removed Falstaff’s horse and he frets like a gummed velvet” (2.2.1-2). The two withdraw as indeed Falstaff enters bawling. Hal steps forward only to exit supposedly to look for Poins. Left alone, Falstaff turns to the audience and opines his fate:

I am accursed to rob in that thief’s company [Poins]; the rascal hath removed my horse and tied him I know not where. If I travel but four feet by the squier further afoot, I shall break my wind. Well I doubt not but to die a fair death for all of this; if I scape hanging for killing that rogue. … I’ll starve ere I rob a foot further…. Eight yards of uneven ground is threescore and ten miles with me, and the stony-hearted villains know it well enough. (2.2.10-27)

This is the comedy of discomfort, specifically Falstaff’s limited physical capacity, and it draws attention to his physical state contributing to his frustration. When Gadshill enters later in the scene with the line “Stand,” Falstaff replies, “So do I, against my will” (47-8): as he says, “Have you any levers to lift me up again, being down?” (34-5). The trick on Falstaff that follows, where having robbed the travelers he is robbed in turn by the disguised Hal and Poins, facilitates more comic comings and goings, including the glorious stage direction: “They all run away, and Falstaff after a blow or two, runs away too, leaving the booty behind them” (stage direction, 98). He wants the money but cannot endure the beating; the scene is halfway to Italian farce, the audience, his confidants, cannot help but be charmed by his language and rendered helpless by his running around. The scene ends with Hal and Poins’ enjoyment of the same comedy that the audience saw, Hal saying “Falstaff sweats to death,” and Poins adding, “How the fat rogue roared” (2.2.103-6), as the two make their own merry exit. The language and the physical
comedy it facilitates, I suggest, are clearly adaptations of Tarlton’s roving entrances and exits, and we should try and imagine the dilatory delight with which Kemp’s fat-suited Falstaff would have been coming and going. Moreover, the enjoyment of Falstaff’s wit, his outrageous bravura lying, and his comic suffering will be exploited by Hal—shared with audiences on stage and off—in their next scene back at the tavern.

Beginning with Hal asking Poins to “lend me thy hand to laugh a little” (2.4, 2), 2.4 is entirely constructed around different employments of extemporaneous tavern play, largely at Falstaff’s expense, which, on the other hand, are skillfully structured by Shakespeare so as to take us from the “very bass-string of humility” (2.4.6) to Hal’s confident imagining of himself as future King. Drinking with the workers, Hal has been given a packet of sugar by Francis the Drawer, a useful gift to sweeten sack, but Hal is contemptuous of it which, in turn, gives him an idea. The comic torturing of Francis that follows, the serving man torn between deference to the prince that would insist he stay and the repeated calling of him hence by Poins, placed offstage by the prince, is a perfect example of extempore tavern play, here at Francis’ expense. Moreover, Hal hatches the idea explicitly saying that it will “drive away the time til Falstaff come” (28-9). Falstaff will provide entertainment on a different scale but of a similar kind, and he soon arrives.

As anticipated, Falstaff’s arrival is occasion for increased comic mischief. Calling for him, Hal anticipates more revelry saying: “I’ll play Percy, and that damned brawn shall play Dame Mortimer his wife” (107-8). Hal’s proposed tavern play is supplanted by the teasing of Falstaff, his account of fighting off an increasing number of foes comically undercut by the wooden toy sword he brandishes, and the disconnect between his supposed feats and his cumbersome frame. Hal makes him squirm and falsify for some 130 lines before revealing the truth that he saw him run away, roaring for mercy like a “bull calf” (247). Then follows
Falstaff’s request for a “play extempore,” clearly an attempt to initiate an activity in which he can take charge again of the fun, following his extended teasing by Hal, in which he has been the butt of the joke—excluded from the laughter. Hal concurs to the request but with a deft twists assures him the final word and laugh: “Content, and the argument shall be thy running away” (279).

What follows, the famous play-acting of royal father and son, is a further extended piece of tavern play only curtailed by the incursion of seriousness. Initially Falstaff assumes the role of king, but he soon switches to representing Hal to rebuff his characterization as “that old white bearded Satan” (457). Then, Shakespeare has the fat clown cast a charismatic spell defending himself in the person of the young prince, by virtue of the repetition of his name, variations of his central phrase, and the repeated incantation of the speech’s terrible (unthinkable but inevitable) operative word:

No my good lord, banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins—but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being that he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry’s company, banish not him thy Harry’s company, banish plump Jack, and banish all the world. (468-474)

Hal’s reply is at once declamatory and ambiguous: “I do, I will” (475), and is immediately followed by the off-stage knocking announcing the sheriff and the watch. As we’ve seen, the realm of the serious, of responsibility, impinges on and forecloses their play world. Falstaff’s attempt to ignore reality: “Out, ye rogue! Play out the play! I have much to say in behalf of that Falstaff” (478-9), is in vain.

Falstaff’s next entrance, with Bardolph, in 3.3, brings him on with the comically enchanting idea that he has lost weight. This conceit serves to set up a colorful argument between them about Falstaff’s girth and Bardolph’s red face. The stage direction at Hal’s arrival
reads: “Enter the Prince, marching, and Falstaff meets him playing upon his truncheon like a fife,” (stage direction, 85) notable for another piece of physical comic business, and also for the detail of Falstaff’s appearance carrying a clown prop. Again, the scene offers ample opportunity in performance for the verbal sparring to spill into extra-textual comic business. There is much comic business over a lost ring before the scene turns to the darker subject of war, while still retaining its lively tone. When Hal tells Falstaff “I have procured thee Jack, a charge of foot,” he replies, in comic keeping with what we know of him, “I would it had been of horse” (185-6). The next time we see Falstaff, having just told the audience that he has sold off his soldiers, he tells Hal that he is ready for war and “as vigilant as a cat to steal cream.” Hal replies “I think to steal cream indeed for thy theft hath already made thee butter” (4.2, 60-1), presciently implying he can see Falstaff has indeed served himself, evidenced by his increased girth. Herein, Falstaff’s larger sin, in selling the soldiers, is figured in the manifestation of a second sin, the gluttony that results from his profiting. Contrary to Falstaff’s expressed belief in the previous scene, he has put on weight.

At the scene’s close, once again, Falstaff is left alone onstage to deliver a parting judgement before taking his lumbering exit: Westmoreland’s haste prompts his intention to be late to the battle and early to the feast. Having proved a cowardly thief, Falstaff is to be tested as a soldier, but few in the crowd were likely surprised by Hal’s discovery on the battlefield that his pistol case contains a bottle of sack. Significantly, the prince’s rebuke is that to a clown joking and wasting time: “What, is it a time to jest and dally now?” (5.3.55). Here the serious and the comic are brought face to face, and memorably in physical opposition. But this opposition is potentially complicated by physical action: the stage direction instructs Hal to throw the bottle at him, an action serious in intent but still comical in execution. Left alone onstage to end the scene
again, dallying and sardonically jesting, Falstaff speaks for all soldiers, and all his audience, saying “Give me life,” before (ruefully in the context of battle) adding “which if I can save so: if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there’s an end” (59-61). In the battle that follows he of course plays a comic part, enacting his belief that the “better part of valor is discretion” (5.4.119).

Falstaff’s debunking of valor takes place amidst a sequence of great spectacle, his comic cowardice framed by genuine heroism and death. The battle at Shrewsbury (5.4) shifts effortlessly between stage combat and moments of great pathos or hilarity: no one voice is dominant but Falstaff’s presence, actions and charisma serve as a challenging critique of orthodoxy. The scene finally brings Hal and his great rival Hotspur together on stage, and it is just as they leave talking and start clashing swords that Falstaff comes in. The sequence this initiates is a consummate example of genre fluidity, the foil of comedy shining wonderfully against the facts of death, dynastic and political history, and seriousness. Falstaff is immediately engaged by the entrance of the rebel Scot Douglas. The stage direction reads: “Re-enter Douglas, he fighteth with Falstaff, who falls down as if he were dead. Exit Douglas. The Prince mortally wounds Hotspur” (75). Falstaff’s counterfeit of death is juxtaposed with Hotspur’s actual stage death, the rebel’s stirring dying words and Hal’s paying his respects. Only after this does Hal see Falstaff’s body, and the moment is deliberately contained and carefully calibrated. First comes a simple if moving epitaph:

What, old acquaintance, could not all this flesh

Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!

I could have better spar’d a better man (101-3).

This is followed by some tender quibbling on fatness and dearness before Hal promises he shall see the body embalmed and departs. Falstaff’s death anticipates the pathos of his final
banishment—not least because his apparent death is not overly sentimentalized by Hal—the better to effect his comic resurrection here and the pain of his more final exits to banishment and death. Once Hal has left the stage direction reads: “Falstaff riseth up.” His first word: “embalmed?” would have elicited a marvelous response in consort with his rising. But, this being Falstaff, the delight in his comic resurrection is but occasion for still more outrage, clown logic here demanding more than one show-stopping laugh. Not content with feigning death to avoid the real thing, and with subverting the codes of battle, Falstaff stabs the corpse of Hotspur and lifts him on his back to take credit for the kill. This sight is freighted with both great pathos as well as comic potential, death and life combined, slain honor and resilient humor, Hotspur’s stillness and Kemp/Falstaff’s likely lurching. But, the comic mode is in the ascendant as Falstaff’s departure is delayed by the entrance of Hal, and Prince John, incredulous to see him alive and of his impossible story. Yet, once again, Hal has the measure and the back of his friend, and will credit what “seem’st” (136). Left alone, Falstaff shares his fortune with the audience: if he’s made duke or earl he suggests, implausibly, that he’ll reform, “leave sack, and live cleanly as a nobleman should do” (163-4). With this he exits “bearing off the body,” an incalculably incongruous image, his limited mobility further constrained by the encumbrance of the heavy corpse, as the trumpets sound for the scene’s next and final entrance of the king. Here Shakespeare has alchemized Tarlton-esque roving into near sublime bathos, the association of laughter with death is again made manifest, the scene’s whole design expressed in its final image.

Beyond being Hal’s foil in play, Falstaff is his foil in real-politics, war and death. Hal rejects him, but this is in part an Abrahamic sacrifice of part of himself that Kemp’s Falstaff never allows the audience to forget. Shakespeare’s deployment of Kemp at the heart of his
design, more than being innovative and hugely popular, challenges emergent aesthetic discourse that imposes class-based behavioral norms and limits on the range and import of laughter. Falstaff’s capaciousness and wit expose the fictions of decorum that would contain and delimit him (and his auditors). His play, *Henry IV*, writes skepticism into the fabric of English history, it rejects the increasing exclusion and differentiation on which national identity is being built, and it does so through the irrepressible figure of the clown. Crucially, through Falstaff Hal learns to introject creative play—as opposed to uncritical ritual—into his own political practice.

In *2 Henry IV* Falstaff is not afforded much stage time with Hal, but rather the Lord Chief Justice, representing the weight and authority of the law, is his foil throughout. The exception, other than the moment of banishment, is the long comic scene at Eastcheap (2. 4) which represents a final piece of tavern play wherein the prince and Poins disguise themselves and serve Falstaff at supper. The scene opens with the “drawers,” the inn’s waiters, on stage, and with the business around the chamber-pot. The tone is bawdy and fun, but the interaction between prince and clown begins only late in the scene, after Hal and Poins have stepped forward and been recognized. The potential for unexpected extra-textual business between them is still present, but the language moves faster and lacks the easy languor and implicit good will between them that fanned the possibilities for play in the earlier play. Falstaff, caught in defaming the prince, is defensive and Hal is less than charmed by his idiosyncratic equivocation. Even so, the argument is charged with high stakes, primed by their past closeness. Throughout *2 Henry IV* the drum of death is beating, Hal’s accession is close and with it Falstaff’s still sterner treatment by Hal at his banishment. As with 2.4 in the previous play, the long comic scene closes with the incursion of the serious into the world of play, this time the news from court is a call to arms for both of them. Hal, suddenly feeling “much to blame so idly to profane the precious
time” parts with the most direct of pleasantries: “Falstaff, good night” (358-9, 63). The next time they meet, Hal will not recognize him.

“BANISH FAT JACK, BANISH ALL THE WORLD”

Falstaff’s rejection by Hal at the end of 2 Henry IV echoes and expresses the expulsion of the clown from the world of the serious at the heart of this dissertation. Kemp’s trajectory mirrors that of the fat knight, from the bosom of the prince and in the lap of loud laughter to exile and historical obscurity. And yet, the fact that Falstaff would endure and be rightly celebrated as a literary and theatrical giant (for all that he is censured), while Kemp and his influence would languish largely forgotten until the twentieth century, speaks to Shakespeare’s extraordinary capacity to restore, adapt, and breathe life into the figure of the clown even at the historical moment of its theatrical devaluation. Indeed, it is important to distinguish that there were and are two separate and distinct processes at work here, both within and beyond the world of the play that are reflected in Falstaff’s rejection. Both processes are only visible in retrospect: there is the career path of one particular player, Kemp, and there is the larger social elevation of theatre underway, embracing new norms and expelling the clown wholesale from the realm of the supposedly serious.

The precise reasons behind Kemp’s departure are unclear: he was listed among the principal players and sharers in the new Globe theatre in February 1599, but by the autumn of that year had left the company. Richard Helgerson sees a development in Shakespeare’s output that “made comic license seditious [in order] to punish it accordingly—most memorably with Falstaff, whose banishment inaugurates Hal’s Lenten civil policy…[and which] culminated
in the actual defection of Will Kemp from the Lord Chamberlain’s Men.” Here as so often, the fates and functions of Kemp and Falstaff overlap, even as the critic is at pains to keep them apart. Helgerson evokes Falstaff in contrast to Lenten abnegation, the play indeed constantly associates him with eating, drinking, fatness, sweating and explicitly suggests his role as a Shrovetide, or Saturnalian, Lord of Misrule. Helgerson aligns Falstaff’s moral crimes (seditious comic license) with Kemp’s aesthetic ones suggesting:

There is no reason to think that the banishment of Falstaff caused this separation. But the fictional event does have a proleptic relation to the factual one. The banishment of carnival from the proximity of politic rule foreshadows the departure of Will Kemp from the Shakespearean theatre. And when neither returns, the likeness is confirmed. Helgerson suggests Kemp likely played the part, but fails to fully acknowledge how the player himself embodies the same Saturnalian spirit, the enjoyment of excess that requires their banishment and the likelihood that the two issues—the one requiring the skills of the other to communicate—were entwined in the one man. There is no strong rival candidate for casting as Falstaff, and it starts to look willful to look for one given the strength of the thematic and stylistic evidence, especially when considered in the light of performance. From what can be reconstructed of the facts two things clearly emerge: firstly, that the jig did not survive into the repertoire performed at the Globe, and secondly that the gap left by Kemp was speedily filled by another clown.

I now want to approach Falstaff’s banishment by way of comparison to its treatment in *The Famous Victories* in part to demonstrate how here, as elsewhere, Shakespeare’s history explicitly shows how Hal’s transformation is achieved where the earlier play doesn’t. Moreover, in the amplification of the earlier play’s Jockey into Shakespeare’s Falstaff, the affable fat knight is established as a constitutive part of the redemption of the monarchy, and a necessary foil to
effect the miraculous transformation. Without Falstaff there is no struggle, no contention. Shakespeare’s project in the Henriad, his second History tetralogy, presents with more dramaturgical and imaginative skill than his first, an argument about the successful reconstruction, and necessary stage-management of the monarchy. The vision of monarchical rule that he presents embraces an openly sceptical take on the greatness than great men do. The theatricality of Hal’s journey to kingship is only a prologue to the political plays of his reign, the self-conscious presentations of self-masking cynical manipulations of popular opinion. The nation’s new found peace and stability under Henry is built on these Machiavellian foundations, and his continued management of news and opinion, or of “optics” in the current parlance. Moreover, there is ample evidence of Hal continuing to incorporate Falstaff into his kingship: he fools around, sometimes in deadly earnest, be it with tennis balls or in playing Tamburlaine at the gates of Harfleur. Henry’s heir will have no Falstaff, and will lose all the spoils of his father’s foreign wars. As such, in considering his banishment as it was experienced on stage, we must keep foremost in our minds that a direct cause and correlative to Falstaff’s shaming is Hal’s glory, effected in the moment. Burbage’s young prince shines with a new authority and maturity, he is now a king, transformed from his transgressive past as a private citizen onto the world stage of divinely-appointed monarchs. Hal as Henry will find many of the assumptions that accompanied his rise are false: there are cracks in the political verities that he stands for and upholds, but in this moment, fresh from his coronation, he is ascendant, his pseudo-Christ-like transformation on view to the public for whom it was contrived. The banishment is the final necessary and sacrificial act, required after his anointment, it will cement or make manifest the magnificence of his new status to the surrounding throng, onstage and off.
As in the later play, prior to the new king’s entrance, *The Famous Victories* presents Jockey, in expectation of plenty, announcing: “Oh how it did me good, to see the king / When he was crowned; / methought his seat was like a figure of heaven / And his person like unto a God” (9. 716-9). Jockey is building up expectations and framing the new king in terms of transcending the mortal secular. On entering, Hal is greeted by Jockey, and then by Tom, claiming his promised promotion. Hal immediately responds:

    I prithee Ned, mend thy manners,
    and be more modester in thy tearms [terms]
    For my unfeigned grief is not to be ruled by thy flattering
    And dissembling talke, thou saist I am changed,
    So I am indeed, and so must thou be, and that quickly,
    Or else I must cause thee to be changed. (740-5)

First Jockey, then Tom, splutter in surprise before the new king continues:

    Ah Tom, your former life greeves me,
    And makes me to abandon and abolish your company forever
    And therefore not upon pain of death to approach my presence
    By ten miles space; then if I heare wel of you,
    It may be I will somewhat for you,
    Otherwise look for no more favour at my hands,
    Then any other mans: And therefore be gone,
    We have other matters to talke on.  *[Exeunt Knights.]* (749-56)

Although the speech is not addressed to Jockey directly, it prefigures Hal’s banishment of Falstaff in both essence and detail. Present is the change or conversion, the ten-mile banishment, and the ambiguous hope of future comfort retained by Shakespeare. For all the similarities, however, the latter version is devastating in a way the source play is not, due to the superior
quality and directness of the language, the dramatic positioning of the banishment, and, no doubt, the near-unparalleled skill and vitality of the two actors playing the scene. Shakespeare dispenses with named address in favor of the monosyllabic clarity of disowning, a rough rejection by means of a feigned but symbolic lack of recognition. Falstaff salutes the new king first reverentially but then familiarly; “My king! My Jove! I speak to thee my heart,” but is told in the starkest of Pauline language:

    I know thee not old man. Fall to thy prayers
    How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester! (2 Henry IV, 5.5. 47-8)

Falstaff is named as a jester even as he is banished from the court at which he should serve. Then, soberly intoning his judgement, and with a final dry pun on his girth, the prince commands in earnest that he ready himself for death:

    Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace;
    Leave gormandizing; know the grave doth gape
    For thee thrice wider than for other men. (51-3)

The success of this moment in performance is contingent on the contrast with their previous meetings, as, having mingled so merrily before, the kneeling comic is summarily expelled from the realm of the serious. The moment may likely have been taken more symbolically than personally by Elizabethan audiences, the foreknowledge of Hal’s fate along with the constant reminder of Kemp’s presence within the fat-suit, perhaps limiting the pathos. Arguing against such emotional distance is Falstaff’s physical movement: instructed to “fall to [his] prayers,” he likely shifted from his attempt to approach the King as an equal to a position of importunity, kneeling, and abjection, which would be wonderfully forceful in performance. We can only guess what was made of that moment, on stage and by its auditors, as the former chemistry between the two performers suddenly stifled, no place or occasion for a smile or one-upmanship.
The clown’s oxygen supply—laughter—is pointedly denied, his métier scorned, the shock enough to stifle any immediate response in his throat. Suddenly serious, here the calculated risk in employing Kemp’s transgressive energy pays off if, as expected of him, he behaves and commits to his character’s defining moment of suffering in silence. Once the king has moved on, Falstaff is only able to bluster a denial, ending with the evocative but ambiguous “I shall be sent for soon at night,” before being arrested and hustled off as part of a group exit, protesting “My lord, my lord,—” (89-90, 93). However, as noted, his short walk of shame done, Kemp would soon have returned in his pomp, after some fine words had wrapped up the play, to wildly whip up some of the audience with his jig. To see this triumphant return would likely have retrospectively recast somewhat the audience’s assessment of the banishment, not the least given the language of the epilogue which promises Falstaff will be in Henry V. Luxuriating in applause at the first performances, Kemp’s apologetic dancer is surely unlikely to have anticipated the jig he was starting would be among his last with the company.

Despite the stated promise to the contrary, Falstaff’s disappearance from Henry V is absolute. But for his residual internalized influence on the king, he exists only as he is recalled, infantilized and helpless in the comic confusion of the Hostess’ account of his death (Henry V 2.3.9-26). Her affecting story is inflected with an appropriate touch of bawdy as his spirit is emphatically declared departed. The hope evinced from Hal’s ambiguous language at his expulsion is extinguished. The tone is nostalgic and the audience are informed at once that the great fat knight is now no more, and by inference that his promised return at the end of Part 2 will not be delivered. The part of Pistol, for all its explosive charge, is a scripted humor, and he is a cipher not a clown. The change in personnel, while circumstantial, is here still persuasive of the link between beloved character and beloved performer.
Kemp’s departure was quickly followed by the clown’s famed dance from London to Norwich (approximately 120 miles). Still today in Norwich a plaque commemorates one of the events on his triumphant arrival there, his victory in a shoe-throwing competition: no one it seems could throw their shoes higher than the athletic dancer. The dance became the subject of Kemp’s s *Nine Daises Wonder*, a pamphlet he announces was written as much “to reprove the slanders spre[a]d of him” pertaining to his dance as to record the journey itself.¹⁴¹ The pamphlet’s dedication situates the jig and the jest at the core of Kemp’s journey, not simply to Norwich but on earth itself, for he tells us he: “spent his life in mad jiggs and merry jests.”¹⁴² Richard Braithwait writes a verse that strangely collates Kemp’s completion of his dance with his death. Entitled “Upon Kempe and his morice [morris], with his Epitaph,”¹⁴³ I quote its opening and concluding lines:

Welcome from Norwich, Kempe! All joy to see
Thy safe return moriscoed lustily.
But out alas, how soone’s thy morice done
When Pipe and Taber, all thy friends be gone.

... Then all thy triumphs fraught with strains of mirth
Shall be cag’d up within a chest of earth:
Shall be? They are: th’ast danc’d thee out of breath,
And now must make thy parting dance with death.

The poem associates his dance—and laughter—with his death in a striking manner that resonates with the historical death of the clown at the turn of the century. Earlier, in the dedication to *Nine Daises Wonder*, he declares that: “Some sweare in a Trenchmore I have trod a good way to winne the world; others that guesse righter, affirme, I have without good help daunst [danced] my self out of the world.”¹⁴⁴ The phrase “without good help” sounds a note of defiant independence—he
is after all a solo entertainer at heart—but might also be read as a hint of abandonment. The self-penned epitaph is apt, given how complete his disappearance is, and might suggest, however subtly, that he knew his career was past its height. In the epilogue to *Nine Daies Wonder*, written in a waspish tone “to the impudent generation of Ballad makers and their coherents,” Kemp outlines some plans thus: “Am shortly, God willing, to set forward as merrily as I may; whether [wither] I my selfe know not.”145 Whatever Kemp had in mind no trace of any journey exists. In 1602 Kemp appears fleetingly in records of the Earl of Worcester’s Men, which would place him performing next door to The Globe, for a still-hungry popular audience at The Hope, with, of all things a Falstaff play! After this his history is a blank.

Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humor*, a follow-up to *Every Man In His Humor* in which Kemp had appeared as Cobb, premiered in the Winter 1599/1600 season, the first after the clown’s departure from the company. Jonson’s revisions to *Every Man In* for publication in 1616 preserve an example of the clown’s role being excised in the act of rewriting146. In short, moments of theatrical exultation and potential connection with the audience are removed in favor of material that doesn’t challenge the mimetic boundaries of the play presented. The result is that the audience are not invited in, or included in the same way as before. This is Jonson, ever the enthusiastic classicist (and neurotic about actors corrupting his great works), responding to the practical casting reality of Kemp’s departure in a way that reflects, and reinforces the emergent aesthetic agenda. As such, the revisions themselves constitute further examples of socio-cultural differentiation in real-time action, the excision by quill (and then printer) of the clown’s particular vitality from the historical record. Writers in the seventeenth century theatre and beyond had their own battles with containing audience energies in the absence of the clown, but the larger arc towards a passive audience for a mimetic whole was in motion. However, perhaps
in deference to the man, if not his mischief, Jonson’s sequel finds an apt moment to recall Kemp in a fitting recollection that deftly evokes, with Jonson’s own characteristic comic genius, something of his spirit in his absence. Frustrated by a companion, the clownish Buffone (played by Kemp’s very different successor Robert Armin) bristles as they depart: “would I had one of Kemp’s shoes to throw after you!” Kemp’s spirit is evoked by way of the shoes that wrapped his dancing feet and won him renown in competitive flinging: the shoes stand for the man, at once his irrepressibility and his stage-craft, as well as indexing his absence. The Jonson of the years after Shakespeare’s retirement will be nostalgic for the charms of the clown, the meat that he had loathed in his youth. By this time the theatre had for a few years been peculiarly and intensely aware of its own history: the clown’s irrepressibility again recursively resurgent, suddenly betokening former times and glories. Shakespeare stands alone in anticipating the implications of the clown’s loss, and from as early as 1598, his prescience grounded in practical knowledge of both theatre and aspirant human nature. After Kemp’s departure, Shakespeare will take Falstaffian jesting still further as he infuses Burbage’s Hamlet with clown practice: essential to the antic disposition in performance, the departed clown Yorick (indexing Tarlton and the whole clowning tradition) is also a crucial element in the prince’s re-grounding and renewal. The clown’s irrepressibility is figured in the absence Kemp’s practice possessing Burbage’s body, and in the disinterring of Tarlton’s spirit. In Hamlet, the threat to decorum will luxuriate in clown-like delay for several acts and then literalize itself in regicide.

As I discuss in the introduction, Mikhail Bakhtin’s social reconstruction of the early modern period in Rabelais and His World is premised on precisely the opposition of the official
and the serious that Henry IV dramatizes. Andrew Stott describes Bakhtin’s marketplace as, “a vision of a culture at ease with, and making fun of, graphic descriptions of sexual activity and bodily functions, ridiculing officials and officialdom, and violating officially designated rules of etiquette and decorum.” I contend that these same words might serve as a description of Falstaff, and for what we must see him representing; an attitude and a way of life that are both under increasing pressure. The description, moreover, is equally true of the actor performing the role, Kemp himself, embodying that tradition, its conventions, and its expression through laughter. I follow Stott and others in suggesting that Falstaff is a modification of the Rabelaisian grotesque, and a representative of carnival. Stott writes that for Bakhtin, “Rabelaisian grotesque was the purest possible manifestation of the folk-spirit,” and that the, “grotesque is a vivid celebration of inter-connectedness, growth beyond death and the continuity of existence where the body is triply significant as a representation of ideal community, the embodiment of festivity and interpenetration and connection with the universe.” Discussing Falstaff in this context also recalls Anthony Burgess’ Shakespeare (1970), which acknowledges the clown’s scope and range of influence in the culture. Burgess’ prose is arguably sentimental, redolent of its own past era, but its central point holds:

That Falstaff should be one of the great lovable characters of all literature is—to those who equate lovability with moral excellence—an eternal mystery. But to those that see no virtue in war, government, propaganda, sour puritanism…and who cherish fallen humanity when it reveals itself in roguery and wit, then there is no mystery. The Falstaffian spirit is a great sustainer of civilization. It disappears when the State is too powerful and when people worry too much about their soul. When we talk of the Shakespearean spirit we sometimes mean chiefly the Falstaffian. When in Orwell’s 1984, Winston Smith wakes up with the name of Shakespeare on his lips, his unconscious has not been invoking the patriotic order or the pleader for order in the state; it has been dipping down to Shakespeare- Falstaff the folk spirit, the witty, irreverent scoffer at political slogans, the old raspberrying Silenus.
The Shakespearean “folk-spirit” is consummately figured in the role of Falstaff, his laughter redolent of a disappearing but still potent past. He is the embodiment of the carnival spirit, and of debauched defiance and clownish celebration. His lengthy creed on the virtues of sack (*2 Henry IV*, 4.3.84-123)—which he argues has warmed Hal’s blood—alone marks him as this figure, as does his constant association with eating in excess, and his mode of existence in general. His carnivalesque resurrection at the end of *1 Henry IV* and banishment at the end of *2 Henry IV* confirms it. In this, I contend that Shakespeare thematized his interest in the repression of the spirit of comedy underway at the end of the sixteenth century. Falstaff’s banishment is congruent with laughter’s deracination. Here, I suggest that Shakespeare has rehearsed this opposition of the comic and the serious, embraced and innovated with comic and clown forms, and the forces and traditions they evoke, in the vibrant Falstaffian spirit at the heart of the *Henry IV* plays. The laughter which Falstaff epitomizes is of the old order now manifestly passing, the forms and traditions of clowning he accesses and evokes equally clearly those of Tarlton and Kemp. The play’s vision of monarchy and history, and their appeal to audiences both rely on the avowedly populist, increasingly anathema, comic vitality of the clown. Moreover, it is precisely the play’s popularity, its inclusivity and playfulness as figured in Falstaff’s ceaseless ebullience, which flouts and exposes the restrictive fictions of decorum that were seeking to control and repress the function of laughter, and changing the medium indelibly.

Hal’s plan, openly shared in his monologue in Act 1, Scene 2, is similarly a transparent and marvelously executed exercise in popularity, for it employs the theatre and elements of the unabashedly theatrical. Jeffrey Doty’s recent *Shakespeare Popularity and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge UP, 2016) argues that the term “popularity” came into use by the regime in the late 1590’s, at precisely the time of these plays. Specifically, Doty sees the word’s use developing
around the colorful career of the Earl of Essex in these years, to “condemn the pursuit of [courting] popular favor.” Doty suggests that Shakespeare made the tactics of popularity—and the wider audience they addressed—vital aspects of politics. His reading of the Henry IV plays sees political strategy and theatrical manipulation at the heart of Hal’s design and the genius of the risky plan being that “no one interprets it as political strategy.” No one that is except, of course, the audience, and Doty, having charted the creation of Hal’s religious aura, considers his situation as a “problem of theatrical popularity,” linking his realm and concerns with Shakespeare’s representation of the monarchy and society. The popular is associated with eating, and by extension Falstaff. Doty’s emphasis is on popularity and theatrical effect in Hal’s building of a political identity, specifically manufacturing an aura of majesty that confers authority and restores the damage of his father’s usurpation. While Doty doesn’t consider the popularity of the clown, his argument is congruent with my reading that Shakespeare employs the clown precisely for its popular appeal, and, moreover, casts in the role someone able to conjure effects every bit as dazzling as Hal’s in community with his audience. Falstaff is so great a presence in performance that he threatens to exceed his function within the play, but this is permissible if his banishment is complete—albeit, as we’ve seen, tempered by Kemp’s return to dance the jig. Doty argues that Hal’s miraculous conversion is not painless, “the wonder he produced depended on his total rejection of his past life, symbolized by Falstaff.” That Hal does not reject Falstaff at the battle of Shrewsbury suggests to Doty that Hal is not ready for this at the end of Part 1, and that his relationship with the fat knight is “not merely tactical.” The pleasures of the flesh are real, but must be repudiated if you want to be seen as a god (or at least moderated if you want to pass in Elizabethan society). For Doty Falstaff is lumped in with all the negative associations of popularity and of theatre from which the mature Shakespeare would
seemingly attempt to distance himself. In 1598/9 however, Shakespeare was still very much subject to his audience and aspiring to ‘please all.’

Doty explains how theatres and playwrights specifically, were subject to what Ben Jonson calls “popular censure,” where their plays were judged volubly by audiences, and how this subjection had social consequences and class implications. Jonson himself railed against ‘players, despite being one in his youth and his life-long professional association with them, in an attempt to distance his art of writing from their base craft of acting. By contrast Shakespeare was firmly one of them. Following Jeffrey Knapp and others, Doty places Shakespeare on a course of social elevation that sees his association with the theatre as tarnishing his new identity and reputation as poet and courtier. Sonnet 110 talks of performing as “donning motley to the view of the world” (2) and having “sold cheap what is most dear” (3). The next sonnet even more explicitly states how “my name receives a brand” at the “dyer’s hand” and the inference is reinforced and clear, such is Shakespeare’s view of himself at some time in the Jacobean period if, as Doty correctly qualifies, “his sonnets are to be trusted.” Whatever Shakespeare’s true feelings on his and the theatre’s social elevation, Doty draws attention to Knapp’s “ingenious” reading of Sonnets 133-5 which pun so inventively on the name and word “Will.” I would assert that the sonnet’s terms and punning also encompass Shakespeare’s employment of the clown, specifically Will Kemp, engaging and representing the audience, through to Falstaff and Hamlet. “Knapp argues that in Sonnets 133 and 134… Shakespeare drops his pretensions to elite status and instead “present[s] himself as the embodiment of the audience’s commonness, the one of their many: ‘Think all but one, and me in that one Will.’” The Shakespeare of 1598 as yet had no elite status, but in writing and innovating he could, and chose to, contrive opportunities for his clown Kemp (then later Burbage, as the next chapter explores) to stand for his audience offering
a recognizable and inclusive community through his representative and irrepressible example. Whichever “Will” is meant in the sonnet (and the word is repeatedly and deliberately employed for its multiple resonances elsewhere in the sequence), the clown of Shakespeare’s theatrical inheritance had presided and embodied that commonness, and in doing so, been a prominent constitutive element in the theatrical event. Such commonness was, viewed with increasing contempt in the decades either side of 1600 that cover Shakespeare’s career, and risked marking him as provincial. The success of Henry IV, and Hamlet’s ability to “please all,” transcended such reductivism, even as his medium was being appropriated by the cultural gatekeepers with their less inclusive vision.

The Shakespeare of the 1590’s is abidingly concerned with modes of engaging his audience, and his innovative employment of clown forms, reflects perhaps an acknowledgement of a new era dawning but at the cost or price of something all but tangible being lost. In Hamlet the mobilization of comic forms in deliberate defiance of orderly respect for genre boundaries expresses the particular nature of the prince’s relationship to modes of performance, and facilitates his particular/unique relationship with the audience. Robert Weimann sees in Hamlet, “the culture of Renaissance humanism and the practice of antic performance engag[ing] each other,” concluding that: Shakespeare’s theatre can [thus] celebrate the pinnacle of its inclusiveness at the very moment when the impact of socio-cultural differentiation began to seriously challenge the integration of the Globe’s components.”

I contend that Shakespeare in Henry IV achieves a similar height of inclusiveness and by similar means, in the seasons prior to Hamlet opening and the move to The Globe. With and in Hamlet, and Burbage’s performance as him, Shakespeare combines the hero and the clown in a single character who absorbs the capacities of the clown even as he, like Hal does but in different ways, disavows them. Hal
redirects those capacities towards his “serious” project of transformation, Hamlet towards survival in court, sharing his interim with his audience, and finding the strength to accept his given fate and leave the stage. As such, the most famous of Shakespeare’s dramas staged in the wake of Kemp, *Hamlet*, would internalize and memorialize the figure of the clown in a tribute that would be increasingly hidden in plain sight.

In the process of the clown’s devaluation, constructions of the binary master-servant view of the world were no longer sustainable at the end of the 16th century, as carnival was displaced from the realm of the politic and the serious. Kemp’s Falstaff and Burbage’s *Hamlet* are modified manifestations of an early modern phenomena that served a socially cohesive function by virtue of their difference; the clown as central to society’s conception of itself as much as to performance. More technically they are the last and greatest manifestations of the clowns who share Kemp and Shakespeare’s adaptation of Tarlton’s ‘shared community’ with the audience. The death of the clown herein described is of that spirit, the energy that Shakespeare experienced in performance and embraced, employed and exploited, the great leveler. If Greek tragedy marked the devolution of myth in society by its shift to increasingly human-centered drama, then Shakespeare’s adaptation of the clown can be seen as the devolution of divine comedy in Renaissance drama, particularly tragedy, where the grand design concordant with the structure breaks down. Prior to the towering sophistication of his Jacobean plays, which he wrote as a different person and for a changed audience, Shakespeare’s popular touch and theatrical flair co-opted the energy that infused the theatre he inherited even as its banishment was imminent. Falstaff and *Hamlet*, landmarks in the history of representation, still startle and compel, laughing or wheezing at us, leaning on the limen of modernity, jesting at scars they can well imagine for which there is no heavenly solace.
APPENDIX 1. CASTING

In the absence of playbills or cast lists, casting information from the period comes down to us mostly in the form of commendatory verses or correspondence recollecting performance. The surviving references are mostly to the famous Shakespearean and other lead roles first played by Richard Burbage, and to his great counterpart as leading man at The Admiral’s Men Edward Alleyn. Also extant, no doubt because of their popularity and cultural impact, are a smattering of references to other players, notably the clowns. Supplementing these references is internal evidence from the plays, and surviving theatrical and legal documents from which scholars and historians, have established some basic outlines of the known facts. As such, the arguments of this dissertation regarding the developing relationship and dialectic between Burbage and Will Kemp, then later Burbage and Robert Armin, are for the most part on solid factual footing. The parts that I discuss as written for Armin (Touchstone, Feste, and Lear’s Fool) are self-evidently so stylistically, except for that of the gravedigger in Hamlet. However, the role is a part no doubt written for a clown, Armin’s position, and also includes, in its reporting of how he “poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once” (5.1.173-4), a reference to Armin’s own association with Tarlton, making it most unlikely that it was written for anyone else. (See page 193 below).

Similarly, David Wiles makes a powerful case for the roles obviously written for Kemp in his years with Shakespeare’s company. Of these, as I discuss in the chapter, Wiles and others have shown that Kemp’s name makes it into Romeo and Juliet in a character heading for the clown Peter (see page 81 above). While there is no equivalent textual support in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, it is clearly a companion piece and written for the same theatrical season as the tragedy. Bottom is clearly the principle clown role, and in context, Kemp’s.
Until recently, critical discussion of Falstaff was either romanticized or opprobrious, and in either case, there was rarely sustained interest in the conditions of playing or the casting (in part because of the larger denigration of the clown and actors generally). More recent and contemporary criticism (as cited in this dissertation, and beyond) has created a greater understanding of performance conditions, and has recognized, if not redressed entirely, the influence of centuries of devaluing of the comic forms at the heart of Elizabethan theatrical practice.

There are no extant references to Burbage as Hal, but I propose the role is the play’s lead, and his by default, by virtue of his place in the company. Shakespeare conceived the Henry IV plays as part of his larger tetralogy, and the logic of Burbage playing Henry V, the same character after his succession, is self-apparent. Furthermore, Bolingbroke was not the lead in the earlier play Richard II, the titular king clearly the glamor part was designed for the company’s leading actor. A senior actor in the company, perhaps Hemmings, would have played the ascendant Bolingbroke as a foil to Burbage’s tragic passion. I suggest it was always conceived that Burbage would exult as the prodigal Hal, in Henry IV: once crowned, Bolingbroke’s only function is to register dissent and guilt resulting from his usurpation, and to misjudge then forgive Hal before dying. John Gielgud’s lean, steely-eyed and still, almost embalmed, portrayal of Henry IV, in Orson Welles’ 1967 film Chimes at Midnight, nicely emphasized how Shakespeare made the dying king somewhat dull and unsympathetic. In the dichotomy Shakespeare establishes between the comic and the serious, the carnivalesque “holiday,” to use Hal’s term, and the world of somber political and legal responsibility, the Father figure embodies the latter and is effectively pressed to death by it, in contrast to Hal’s ebullient foil—Kemp’s Falstaff!
Henry IV’s early performance history, Parts 1 and 2 along with Shakespeare’s The Merry Wives of Windsor written in between them, and related plays that either influenced these plays or looked to profit off of their popularity in the years immediately following, suggest a tantalizing picture of a vibrant theatrical milieu where aesthetic innovation and artistic concerns were only one element of a nascent economically-driven enterprise. They also suggest a likely chronology that further supports the case for Kemp as the fat knight. The departure of Kemp, after Henry IV Part 2 (performed 1598/9) at the curtain and before Henry V (1599/1600?) and Hamlet (1600/1), coincides both with the move in venue and the disappearance of Falstaff. Analysis of the play, and its progenitor The Famous Victories of Henry V, in the context of what we can reconstruct of Shakespeare’s company and their playing conditions, reveals structural and conceptual similarities with roles we can assign to Kemp. Two or three years after his role as Peter, his eminence and popularity close to their zenith, Kemp is ideally placed to relish the opportunities afforded by the role of Falstaff—in fact he will feed off its success in leaner times. In this analysis Falstaff emerges as a direct link with folk traditions and constructions of community, steeped in the traditions of carnival and jesting, and dependent on the particular performance skills only evident in Kemp. With the clarity that an emphasis on performance conditions brings, Kemp emerges as the only qualified candidate for the originator of the role of Falstaff. In this I am indebted to Wiles’ unambiguous reclaiming of the role as he rightly suggests “only the role of Falstaff is congruent with other roles written for the clown of the company in 1595-8, [and] that Shakespeare plainly relied on Kemp’s performance skills in order to create Falstaff.” Wiles himself seems to have anticipated skepticism in some of his readers, a residual result of centuries of dismissal for the clown’s art, craft, and consummate ability (like theatre) to make something out of nothing.
The role of Falstaff luxuriates in the possibilities of physical comedy be it interplay with his fellow actors or alone, but for the ever-present onlookers, he is frequently in pain, at a loss, inconvenienced, affronted, bemused, sweaty and the like. The part is at once supremely visual and physical while also enormous in terms of lines and stage time. Long an audience favorite, Kemp had proved himself capable of memorization and more than worthy of trust by this point in his professional career, and the part is written in precisely the cadences he operates and delights in. It is hard to imagine the role was not the pinnacle of the actor’s career, certainly Kemp’s biggest and most glorious part to date. Shakespeare has bought the organizing principle of the clown into the heart of the narrative, from where it can still easily turn to the audience or move to the plateau. In return for ceding a certain amount of freedom, in fact just buying into the importance or quality of the script presented, Kemp has embraced scripted dialogue that apes the highest level of extempore verbal wit and sophistication, encourages his virtuosic comic abilities and allows him to luxuriate in the adoration of the “community of his spectators.”

The chronology around Kemp’s departure in relation to the fate of Falstaff is also complicated by an assertion at the very end of *Henry IV Part 2* that we should consider. The final paragraph of the Epilogue reads:

One word more, I beseech you. If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it and make you merry with fair Katherine of France; where for anything I know, Falstaff may die of a sweat, unless already [he] be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died martyr and this is not the man. My tongue is weary; when my legs are too, I will bid you goodnight.” (26-34)

This announcement, which serves as advance publicity for a further sequel, *Henry V*, explicitly says that Falstaff will be in it. When *Henry V* opened, most likely at The Globe, in 1599/1600, Falstaff was absent, recalled only in a moving if appropriately comic account of his death. Falstaff’s popularity with audiences had been proven both by *Part I*’s success, now—the speaker
of the epilogue hopes and trusts—here with Part 2, the speaker promises to continue in a third play. Whatever the writing, casting and performance conditions were, it seems apparent that as Shakespeare wrote the end of Henry IV Part 2 he was not yet anticipating the character’s absence from the final part of the sequence. This epilogue, I suggest, was spoken by Kemp returning to the stage after playing Falstaff, the logic of this suggested in part by the manner and language in which the jig is anticipated and introduced. The language of weary tongues preceding legs about to be still wearier after a dance echoes phrases in Kemp’s Nine Daises Wonder where his stamina is to be marveled as much as his dancing. However, the conceit is not sophisticated, it could occur to any dancer or a modest poet. The line’s survival is important more as evidence of the jig in Shakespeare’s company surviving to this date, and tellingly as the very last piece of such evidence. Kemp’s jig after Part 2 was seemingly his, and the company’s last.
CHAPTER 3. CLOWN PRINCE HAMLET: “ANTIC DISPOSITIONS” AND FICTIONS OF DECORUM

And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too; though, in the meantime, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered: that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it (Hamlet, 3.2.39-46).  

TARLTON, KEMP, BURBAGE AND HAMLET

The image of Hamlet contemplating the skull famously encapsulates the hero’s mortality and his earthly engagement with matters on both sides of the grave: he is “on the frontier of two worlds.” Too frequently, though, Hamlet’s “graveyard thoughts” become merely “part of the same contemptus mundi which has made its intermittent appearance since the beginning of the play.” The skull, however, is crucially also that of a clown, a particular clown known to the prince in his youth, but equally one that evokes Hamlet’s earlier criticism of clowns in the theater, as cited in the epigraph to this chapter. As such, I argue that this enduring image stands at the apex of the play’s sustained engagement with the spirit and function of comedy, and also establishes the death and resurrection of the clown as central to its design and concerns. In the historical framework of the play, the spirits of two departed clowns, Richard/Dick Tarlton and William Kemp, and the disruptive power of comedy they represent, inform the overall drama of Hamlet more than generations of critics have fully recognized, and in fact haunt the play as much old Hamlet. The bodies behind these two clowns, the actors and their professional skill, or what Hamlet calls their “quality” (2.2.428), are in fact reconstituted in the play’s early performances through Richard Burbage in the role of the prince. Shakespeare, through Burbage, mobilizes
what would have been well-known clown forms within the traditional revenge structure (and over the skeleton of a now lost play), in the process transforming both the revenge drama and the functions of the clown.

Many critics have linked Shakespeare’s Yorick with earlier historical clowns. Richard Hornback speaks for the broad consensus, arguing that Yorick is “Shakespeare’s tribute to the first and most famous professional stage clown of the English Renaissance, Richard ‘Dick’ Tarlton.”168 Each of the play’s three extant versions take care to identify the skull as that of “Yorick, the King’s jester” (5.1.175), prompting Hamlet’s recollection beginning, “Alas, poor Yorick…” (177-189). The 1603 First Quarto has Hamlet repeat Yorick’s name three times in total, not solely in the first line, and has the gravedigger speak of him being in the ground “this dozen year” (Q1.16.86). For the early performances of Hamlet c.1600/01, this would place the fictional Yorick as dying at the same time as Tarlton himself.169 The historical math compliments and synthesizes with the fictional evocation. Crucially, the whole graveyard scene is vastly summative of the Prince’s entire life and is set against the background of the mingling of kings and clowns. One biographer calls Tarlton, “a legend in his lifetime…constantly reinvented for two decades after his death,”170 alluding to his continued popularity and influence. This influence, I have demonstrated, is recursive throughout the period, and at a highpoint in and around 1600: Shakespeare was not the first to bring Tarlton back from the grave. Cumulatively the evidence suggests powerfully that he would have been recognized; his presence was still missed, his absence mourned. As such, the ghost of Old Hamlet is the play’s catalyst while Tarlton’s resurrection is consciously contrived to facilitate its resolution.

Accepting Yorick as a representation of Tarlton opens issues about the play’s debt to the clowning tradition, particularly as his disinterment comes in a scene of extended clowning that
both shapes and informs the final Act. Crucially, I suggest, the skull may not only represent Tarlton (or the place of the clown more generally in a newly tragic context), but Hamlet himself may represent—may remember and incorporate—him as well. Tarlton, I propose, is emblematic, an active incarnation of disruptive energy, and a richly Falstaffian spirit of comedy. As a synthesis of earlier clown forms and popular traditions, Tarlton (and his practice as passed on through his successor Kemp) offers Shakespeare, and Burbage, a model for a distracted and disruptive tragic hero. The resultant figure incorporates the revenger’s tragic inheritance along with the energies and repertoire of court fool and stage clown traditions in a play that is manifestly concerned with hybrid genres. Hamlet, that is, plays the clown: he occupies the clown’s position between stage and audience, standing at one remove from the corrupt and dangerous Elsinore, where there is as much acting off stage as on, at once sharing and interrogating its fictions. In Shakespeare’s developing pursuit of political theory the second tetralogy of history plays had explored the fall of anointed kingship and the “rise” of Hal’s “good” re-creative Machiavellianism: now, at the turn of the century, the succession crisis loomed large in the wake of the Essex crisis, the unspoken elephant in the room stretching political fictions at court and prompting the disintegrative, Lucretian/Montagnian Hamlet. The Earl of Essex’s supposed melancholy or madness, and his dramatic attempt at insurrection, further marks Hamlet’s disorder as political, a threat of potential disruption to the state. The introjection of the king and clowns dichotomy in Burbage’s playing, after Kemp’s very recent exit or dismissal from the company, parallels or takes us to the same place: the political philosophy amply captured in many of the play’s speeches is equally indexed through the interaction, improvisation and playing in the performance. Delay becomes the play.
As recent critics have rightly made clear there are more comic strains in Hamlet than have been fully acknowledged, given the longstanding critical investment in the play as fundamentally tragic and as marking the rise of interiority in a newly modern regime. Indeed, as Margreta De Grazia elucidates in Hamlet Without Hamlet: “in the early decades of its performance, Hamlet’s signature action may have been not paralyzing thought but frenzied motion.” For early audiences, she continues, “like his dancing a jig and playing a pipe after the success of the Mousetrap, [Hamlet’s] hyperactivity would have linked him more with the roustabout clown of medieval folk tradition than with the introspective consciousness acclaimed by the modern period.” Also, as Hornback observes, Hamlet (despite his assertions of seriousness) is “frequently shown prompting ‘spectators to laugh’ through improvisatory, quick-wit repartees.” That Hornback needs to point out the obvious disparity between Hamlet’s actions and his stated view on clowning explicitly demonstrates how, by not fully recognizing the manner of Hamlet’s “antic disposition” in early performances, the critical orthodoxy has underestimated the extent to which Burbage’s performance drew on Tarlton’s and Kemp’s repertoire of popular clowning techniques. For De Grazia, Burbage’s performance employs the “signature stunts and riffs of the Clown, madman, Vice, and devil: all stock figures of privation and therefore suitable role models for the dispossessed prince.” In humoral terms Hamlet is “antic,” or fevered, oscillating madly between melancholy dumpishness and moments of heated activity which he cannot sustain as clearly productive plot. De Grazia and Hornback, among others, establish that clowning and the antic were at the heart of the audience’s experience of the play through the performance of Burbage, and, as such, the symbolic presence of Tarlton in the play should also compel us to consider why he is present, and the extent to which his practice informed Burbage’s performance in the role of Hamlet. The following attempts to revivify
specific performance interactions, revealing both how certain aspects of clowning would or might have been experienced, and the play’s debt to the theatre’s origins in craft and practice.

What Richard Helgerson calls the “social elevation” of the theatre[^177] during the English Renaissance resulted in a gradual refashioning of the theatrical event, a refinement of content, and most decisively a change in the makeup of its audience, increasingly excluding the demotic contingent that had formerly made up the majority of the crowd. Robert Weimann describes this “social elevation” as a process of “differentiation”[^178] integrally linked to class and the separation of theatre from its common roots. Kemp’s departure from Shakespeare’s company might be seen as this “differentiation” in action, and Hamlet’s genre-fluidity and self-reflexivity are, I contend, retrospective and rebellious paeans to the inclusivity and vitality of the English tradition, epitomized in the clown. Kemp’s departure, I suggest, represented a literal exit of the spirit of comedy from the building and potentially the repertoire: the “vice-regent”[^179] to Tarlton had gone, as well as Tarlton himself. Shakespeare’s response was to assign the role to Burbage’s Hamlet, the two clowns encoded not only by the skull but in and within the performance of Hamlet himself. Shakespeare, having found the feigned madness in his sources, developed the “antic disposition,” and the unpredictable indecorous behavior it allows, to facilitate Hamlet becoming the clown in the space left by Kemp’s departure. The juxtaposition of Burbage’s Hal and Kemp’s Falstaff, and their humoral antithesis of king and clown found in 1 Henry IV, are here combined in the at once royal and critical person of the Danish prince. Alert to the social implications and practical ramifications of Kemp’s departure, Shakespeare infuses his tragedy with the clown spirit and makes Tarlton’s return from Purgatory as significant as old Hamlet’s. If Burbage as Hamlet is relishing the disruptive Kemp’s absence, then Shakespeare in Hamlet is
probing what that loss of stage clown, and the change his excision signifies in the larger culture, might mean.

As seen in this chapter’s opening quotation, it is the disruptive quality of clowns to delay or detract from the plot that Hamlet strives so categorically, but also so unsuccessfully, to reject: the clown’s infernal procrastination, its opposition to the serious matters of the plot, with, of all things, laughter. The clown figure is animated by the audience responses it provokes with its peculiar form of direct address, combining extra-textual and non-verbal business, commentary, containment, and badinage. The prince’s own clowning likewise encompasses his slick word-play, improvisatory asides and mocking critique of Claudius’ court, his bustling physicality, unpredictability, and shocking lack of decorum. I contend that *Hamlet* takes this disruptive potential very seriously, and in excavating the ‘antic-disposition,’ I reconfigure the famous question of “delay” as a re-insertion of the disruptive and alternative temporality of the clown into the revenge mode. Here I argue, the clown’s direct addresses to the audience resurface functionally even as they differ thematically in the soliloquies. Specifically, the clown’s privileged relationship with the audience and natural inclination to linger for more approbation is transmuted into Hamlet’s tortured sharing with the audience at the expense of action, reflecting his existential dread of what awaits him ‘off stage,’” and his refusal to accept the dramatic convention of his given circumstances.

The chapter’s analysis builds from Shakespeare’s conception of the “antic” as expressed in his earlier play *Richard II* (c.1598). Here the ‘antic’ is simultaneously a discrete entity and an internalized state; it is also, crucially, one that both staves off death and allows for a performance. Where Richard is shocked to discover that he is a subject within the court of the antic (death), Hamlet both introjects and deploys that melancholy position, the response of a
Hamlet describes himself with a title normally reserved for the dancing Tarlton or Kemp: “O God your only jig-maker. What should a man do but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks and my father died within two hours” (3.2. 123-5). In the circumstances adopting the clown’s attitude is Hamlet and Shakespeare’s only option.

“WORDS, WORDS, WORDS,” THEORIZING KINGS AND CLOWNS

Hamlet survives in three versions. The First Quarto of 1603 is short and often considered a memorial reconstruction.180 A Second Quarto, more substantial, followed in 1604, purporting to be corrected, and similar to the Folio text of 1623 but with many textual variances. The existence of these multiple texts is symptomatic of the labile, performative, nature of the early modern theatre, and the fitful, still nascent process of plays being printed. In the process of being performed the text is subject to the inherent instability of theatrical performance where no two performances are ever quite the same. Moreover, such instability, and the chances of variation, are magnified whenever the clown is present. The clown’s de-stabilizing influence, figured in his dilatory, improvisatory, and inclusive instincts, are diametrically opposed to the emergent Humanistic ideals, both aesthetic and political, of the day that Hamlet espouses. These forces were dominant, loudly extolled in the competitive London theatre scene c.1599, and demanded the disciplining or excision of the clown and the supposed refinement of theatre practice. But Shakespeare’s developing use of the clown figure resists and complicates, in ever more innovative ways, the prevailing devaluation of the popular forms it epitomized. In Hamlet, we can see Shakespeare using the indecorous clown in part to critique and expose the shortcomings of these new ideals: its clown forms pick at the fabric of certainty and authority, stage-practice
puncturing lofty theory. Deeply rooted in the English performance tradition, this is radical theatrical innovation, and clowning at its most daringly political. The pattern of banished or disappearing clowns that emerges in the Shakespearean canon, climaxes here in *Hamlet* (before powerfully resurfacing in *King Lear*). Crucially, these banished clowns are irrepressible, and each in their own way return or are powerfully resurrected.

Critics have long seen in the structure of Shakespeare’s adopted form the need to fill out the time between the ghost’s command for revenge and its final execution, as the cause of Hamlet’s perceived delay, even as De Grazia shows this delay was not an initial critical concern. David Scott Kastan describes this time span as Shakespeare’s stressing Hamlet’s refusal to revenge which, “creates the imaginative space for tragedy.” More specifically though, Hamlet’s deferral initiates an interrogation of the conventions of genre and theatre until he reaches the moment at which he’s willing to accept that there is a generic convention in which he operates. From his seeing the Ghost until Hamlet can say “the readiness is all” (5.2.218), we might say, “the interim is clown.” Through his orchestration of the play’s events Hamlet is exploring how different textures or generic modes apply in different emotional and psychological situations. In the First Quarto Hamlet’s advice to the players [discussed below] is extended and here Burbage, who would have known Kemp’s repertoire intimately from their years of sharing a stage, even more consciously than elsewhere would have been impersonating and embodying the despised and supposedly excised clown. In his advice to the players, Weimann observes Hamlet as collapsing “two different orders of authority” in one speech, one “humanistically sanctioned mimetic precepts associated with Donatus and Cicero, the other — in the teeth of their rejection — the contemporary practice of Tarlton and company.” Where Weimann argues for moments
of ‘collusion’ between prince and clown, I go further to suggest, from the perspective of early audiences, the inseparability of prince and clown.

The very forms of theatre anticipated by *Hamlet*—the subsequent dominance of neoclassical and later naturalistic norms—along with the play’s ubiquitous place in Western culture and thought, further obscure *Hamlet’s* debt to clowning and earlier theatrical forms.\(^{183}\) For an influential elite the hero’s lack of decorum was considered a deplorable lack of taste and judgment, a regrettable byproduct rather than a constituent part of his and the play’s genius. Voltaire expressed this strain of criticism, going as far as to call the play “barbaric.”\(^ {184}\) Scholars of this enduring ilk were unable to see or countenance, in Hamlet’s need to unpack his heart with words, an adaptation of the clown’s liminal relationship with the audience; a twisted application of their disruptive energy and characteristically defiant and dilatory refusal to leave the stage so that the play can continue. The present study insists that the association of Hamlet with elitism and tragedy, class and genre, is at the heart of critical dismissals of the comic elements within the play. For the conflation of the serious with the vulgar is indeed the engine at the heart of the play’s power. Hamlet is at once a distant representative of royalty, and a clown, in the fullest Falstaffian form or sense, the indecorous, unvarnished and hilarious representative of his whole audience and society, crawling about their business between heaven and earth.

But it was the critics, not the audiences, who rejected *Hamlet’s* comic elements. The play’s commercial popularity is attested to by contemporary reports. One of these accounts, precisely echoing language used to describe Tarlton’s class-crossing appeal, describes Hamlet as able to “please all.”\(^ {185}\) Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* offers a construction of social change in the period in which he sees a conception of carnival and of “grotesque” comedy existing in opposition to the arduous, the enforced and the serious. This parallels Richard Helgerson’s
proposed dichotomy of the Greek and Gothic, with the serious and the new Greek in ascendance at the turn of the new century. Again, Bakhtin suggests that the social integration of laughter and its earlier breadth of function and power was gradually excised, reduced, and replaced by a social order that saw no place for the comical in, “that which is important and essential.”186 The sphere of the comic, he continues, narrowed to “the specific and the individual” so that the, “essential truth about the world and about man,” could not “be told in the language of laughter.”187 This is the broader social context for Hamlet’s defiant mobilization of clown forms, and the play’s evocation of Tarlton. The play, I suggest, comprehensively disproves the emergent elitist view that comedy impedes tragedy’s path to profundity. Hamlet’s professed thoughts on theatre, an aspect of him singularly contingent and limiting, I contend, are precisely those of Sir Philip Sidney, an influential voice in the splenetic “battle of the theatres”188 still underway, but his play comprehensively counters Sidney and the “university-wits” noisily authoring in his wake.

After situating the soliloquy in terms of Elizabethan stage practice, the following analysis continues in four further sections corresponding to the beats of the play within its arc. 1) the melancholy beginning, the advent of the Ghost, and the assumption and initial exercises of the antic disposition, 2) the announcement that “the players are come to Elsinore” and the many-layered reflections of dramatic practice and purpose that it provokes, including, ultimately, the performance of “The Mousetrap” and its relative effectiveness and effect, 3) the aftermath of “The Mousetrap,” and Hamlet’s exile, and 4) the gravediggers and Tarlton’s disinterment. In context, the forced departure and return of the prince can be seen as a death and resurrection of Hamlet as clown similar to the play’s resurrection of Kemp and Tarlton, part of a pattern of disappearing clowns in Shakespeare that I explicate. The last of these sections, “Tarlton’s Resurrection,” proposes that among Shakespeare’s animating concerns is an engagement with
the restless spirit of comedy and laughter, and its compensatory and cohesive nature and function in the face of death and human suffering. The association of death with laughter and clowning is manifest. Shakespeare’s avowedly elitist prince, who pitches good theater against the base and common “groundings” (3.2.11), will not only come to hold the death of the clown in his own hands, nor simply to feel his own “gorge rise” (5.1.181) at it, but to represent the return of the repressed clown in his own performance throughout. This mobilization of comic forms in deliberate defiance of orderly respect for genre boundaries expresses the particular nature of the prince’s relationship to modes of performance, and his relationship with the audience. I show that this is an expression or manifestation of the comic Falstaffian spirit in opposition to the serious. Tarlton’s resurrection also facilitates Hamlet’s acquiescence, the skull evoking associations of the earlier, more expansive form of laughter, of community, festivity and of the interconnectedness with the universe.

“BY INDIREDION FIND DIRECTION OUT,” SOLILOQUY AS CLOWN

ADAPTATION

Margaret De Grazia situates soliloquy within Elizabethan theater practice, establishing how the modes of performance were shaped by its conditions, and stating explicitly that “the Globe’s open-stage would have allowed Hamlet no illusion of exclusionary self-absorption” and that what Lamb and Hazlitt called his ‘solitary musings,’ “may have been consummately performative.”189 In layman’s terms “Now, I am alone” (2.2.543) means to the audience ‘it’s just us’, or more comprehensively “the exiting of the other characters clears a space not for pure solipsistic thought but for direct contact with the audience.”190 To this crucial revelatory principle, that he is not really alone when playing his soliloquies, I want to add that from the
clown/ authorial perspective he is playing them to a considerable extent for the audience. Here once again, the terms and modes of Shakespeare’s new play are not yet as detached from their medieval and Tudor roots in the old play, as contemporary and later critics would have liked. Hamlet’s speeches are addressed to an assembled mass, raised on stage-devils and striking theatrical devices, moving and immediate religious allegories, festival entertainments and interludes, all eager for novelty and diversion. All these forms are consciously bought on stage for them in Hamlet, even as the audience are there for something new and exciting, not least a taste of Burbage’s acting “quality”. The immediacy of Hamlet’s role, the sense of sharing in the hero’s journey, is based on shared frames of reference as well as of identification. Tarlton and Kemp as performers both epitomized this immediacy and shared identification, and the delicious ability to shock—as does Hamlet. The audience’s identification with the tragic hero is greater because it commingles the clown qualities with that of the tragic hero, crossing genre lines with the same ease as that from plateau to locus. Class and genre are collapsed in the person of the prince, who in turn stands as clown for all the audience. Only when these different clown forms are synthesized, and the connection achieved can the play’s protagonist access and encompass the amplitudes he does.

While the soliloquies are not strictly funny, they are distinctly performative and compelling: it is the masterstroke of Shakespeare’s innovation that rather than distracting from the “necessary questions of the plot” as his models do, he has Hamlet assume the position to take us deeper into the man, the plot, the universal, and the unknowable, thereby challenging the plot’s primacy while reinforcing its power. This synthesis is afforded, beyond merely the text as received, by Burbage’s capacious acting talents that could easily jump through a quick succession of wildly different demands, and effortlessly assume mimicry or assimilation of
Kemp’s equally bravura repertoire of tricks. Early audiences looked not for psychological consistency from their tragic heroes but for flashes of excitement, pathos and humor that kept them engaged, and reflected back a recognizable human reality. Shakespeare knew this and gave Burbage a role which afforded him ample opportunity to copy Kemp’s vitality and practice, promote laughter, and beyond that infuse it with awe and wonder.

Hamlet talks to the audience more than any other character in world drama—his full part is some 1400 lines, 300 lines longer than the next biggest role in Shakespeare, Falstaff191. He has as many as seven soliloquies, and it is fair to say that the whole time Hamlet is talking to the audience his play has stopped moving forward in terms of plot. By extension “some necessary question of the play”—one might say, and by his own definition, the crucial question of the plot—is being lost or not attended to, and, as such, Hamlet in his musing is doing precisely what he admonishes the clown for. Hamlet’s dramatic situation, his problem or dilemma, is in part an inability to act, in the doing not performing sense. The impossibility of action Hamlet feels or suffers is in part a reluctance to accept his allotted role as revenger. In sharing with the audience he is simultaneously attempting to comprehend and holding at length his dread of what he must do when he’s done talking. Hamlet’s stage presence moves effortlessly between what Robert Weimann calls the “plateau” and “locus” areas of the open stage,192 his asides, like the soliloquies, if not always able to be delivered from the fore-stage (plateau), are expressions of the same direct address and achieve the same connection. Moreover, Hamlet is traversing and operating in the same physical space and theatrical function occupied by the clowns in their liminal role between stage and audience. Shakespeare has fused his hero’s dilemma with clown forms and in doing so he makes him the audience’s representative as Tarlton, Kemp, and other clowns were: the hierarchical structure between prince and commoner is collapsed, Hamlet’s
mortality and fate are also the audience’s. Transforming the nature of the revenge, subject and theme combine with forms and structure to facilitate Hamlet’s halting journey and his ultimate acquiescence. In Act 5, discussing Alexander and Caesar’s remains stopping a bung-hole immediately after the lines to Yorick, death and a return to the earth are figured as an ultimate leveler. Comedy in the play operates, in and throughout, as just such a leveler.

Hamlet, in his soliloquies, confides in his audience as Richard III, Aaron in Titus Andronicus or Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing do, all characters with a debt to the clown and vice traditions. Here in Hamlet though, there is a further synthesis of form and subject, and the space created for a discussion of generic forms informed by clown practice facilitates the play’s greatest innovation, namely its “interiority.” This quality of interiority is rehearsed by Shakespeare in Brutus’ monologue in Julius Caesar (Act 2 Scene 1). Brutus’ anguishing having resolved on acting, anticipates Hamlet’s comparable dilemma, but Caesar is duly dispatched in the following Act. A year later, Shakespeare complicates and extends the terrible interim of Brutus’ “horrible dream” out over the length of an entire play. And, while Julius Caesar nods towards a tight classical structure, Shakespeare eschews this in Hamlet, adapting the lost original play’s structure into a dilatory interrogation of the form and of genre application and texture. This, it transpires is both an aesthetic and political development, and part of an extraordinarily capacious expansion. As Peter Ackroyd observes, “He [Hamlet] is master of every mood and subject to none.” Hamlet’s vitality, its amplitudes and enduring power, are facilitated by Shakespeare’s self-reflexivity and mobilization of clown forms, the durable doubleness of the imaginary and material world in which play and prince luxuriate. In short, the clown forms imbue the tragic structure and position Hamlet such that, when he comes to soliloquize, he is connected to his audience far more intimately than Brutus.
The nature of soliloquy in *Hamlet* then, is a development from earlier Shakespeare plays, working in part as a co-option of direct address and clowning in the face of the expulsion of the clown. The play’s knowing theatricality is a nod to the larger social functions of theater, as well as epitomizing in the old fashioned ghost story and more, that the prime directive or first order of theatrical presentation (in any period) is the active engagement of the audience’s imagination. The clown’s vitality was central to this engagement, even as it challenges the plot’s hold on the audience: what may seem counterintuitive is rather a reminder of what I just called the durable doubleness of the imaginary and material world that was Shakespeare’s theatre and the clown’s terrain. Shakespeare had written reflective monologues before, particularly those of Hal and Brutus but equally those of *Richard II* and the early *Richard III*. Certainly Hamlet’s soliloquies share characteristics with those of earlier revengers, like them his are each assessments of his current situation, but (unlike those of his predecessors) their peculiar interiority is, I contend, achieved only after they have been situated via clown forms. The clown’s oxygen is laughter, their purgatory the want of an audience. The audience is aware that Hamlet’s adoption of the antic disposition is an assumed role in part because of the candor and comedy of his asides. Hamlet brings the same candor to the monologues, but his oxygen is not laughter but rather connection, he needs an audience for inaction, while he unpacks his heart with words. This connection is motivated by the playwright’s desire to directly engage the audience with material beyond the traditional scope of the clown’s, but the practical means employed are those of the clown. In this process of speaking to put off action the soliloquies are each imbued with Hamlet’s paralyzing indecision: structurally and thematically they serve to eke out the time between his command and “the acting of a dreadful thing” (*Julius Caesar* 2.2.63). This is procrastination, the drama—or lack of it—in inaction, talking not doing, and as such, of a kind.
with the clown’s distinctive delaying tendencies that extends his time on stage without forwarding the plot. As late as Hamlet’s final soliloquy he is still resolving to forthwith have “bloody thoughts” (4.4.66). But, even here, actual action is still some way off, instigated by external events, and, as Claudius’ prisoner he is in no position to carry out his threats. Indeed, the whole final speech might be seen as an absurdist trailing off, or parodying, of an ending, that further highlights the clown-based action of the final Act. (To this muddying indeterminacy we shall return.) Throughout the tragedy that bears his name, by virtue of his dilatory melancholy, Hamlet’s seemingly endless amplitudes include his being the first sad clown.195

BURBAGE AS HAMLET: THE FIRST RETURN FROM DEATH

Hamlet’s first soliloquy (Act 1 Scene 2) has him explain his wish for death, the circumstances of his situation and his melancholy. Later I describe how instead of resolving “into a dew” (l.2.130), Yorick helps Hamlet to an acceptance of a more earthbound fate. Here I want to suggest that, even before the onset of his antic disposition, Hamlet may be closer to clown forms than we might otherwise think, in that this his first appearance is dominated by his professed melancholy. Traditionally on a theatre stage a tragedy was indicated by a black banner being unfurled at the back of the playing area, and Hamlet, as the text makes clear, is in one of his “customary suits of solemn black” (78), to express his grieving. On top of this of course, Hamlet is displaying signs of melancholy, for physically he is downcast, heavy, and morose. Gertrude makes it clear that his head is bowed, when she says: “Do not forever with thy vailed lids / Seek for thy noble father in the dust” (70-1). This performance of melancholy is of particular interest, as a similar affectation of melancholy, albeit in a comic mode, was part of Will Kemp’s repertory of stage business and likely of Tarlton’s as well.196 I have stressed elsewhere the influence of
Kemp’s clown practice on Burbage’s performance, but here it is revealing that Hamlet’s initial appeal to the audience’s sympathies comes in direct address and via this known clown affectation. There is only a matter of degree and context between Burbage’s performance of melancholy and Kemp’s or, to risk a modern analogy, between watching Jim Carrey in emotional crisis versus watching Dustin Hoffman. Moreover, the monologue is in part expository, and commenting on the action to date, both choric functions of the clown. Even the speech’s position at the end of a larger scene after the other characters depart is characteristic of clown practice exhibited in Shakespeare’s writing for Kemp. As with those characters, Hamlet, as he will so often, steps from his position in the “locus” area on stage down towards the “plateau” and the audience. While in the context of a tragedy this opening soliloquy, after Hamlet’s long silence and brief exchange with Gertrude and Claudius forbidding him to leave, both builds off natural human empathy for human suffering, and mobilizes clown forms that will become still more apparent subsequently.

The First Quarto of Hamlet is an extraordinary document, for it presents a vibrant if truncated version of the more familiar texts, its variants fascinating: in it “To be or not to be” continues; “Ay there’s the point” (Q1. 6.120). The relative brevity and comparatively frenzied pace of Q1 brings Hamlet’s debt to clowning into sharp relief, while the longer versions demonstrate the play’s clown-informed dilatory indirectness in which “performance, in defiance of Hamlet’s precept, is devoid of any one fixed purpose.”197 Compared to the more familiar Second Quarto and Folio versions, all the events and architecture of Act 1 are present in Q1. The same brooding atmosphere and outline of Revenge Tragedy are established, but the Act reads as if one is traveling over familiar terrain at breakneck speed. The ghost arrives within thirty lines of the play’s opening and the whole opening scene is fifty lines shorter than in Q2. The following
first court scene is similarly swift: it omits Claudius’ monologue and Hamlet is left alone in less stage time than he spends standing mute in the longer versions. The act continues to rollick along to its end with Hamlet’s “wild and whirling words” (1.5.139), where he is begged for information and offers only further mystery and an insistence on secrecy in return. Here, in 1.5, the ghost has impressed upon Hamlet Claudius’s guilt and deep duplicity in stealing the Queen and crown, “meet it is I set it down / That one may smile and smile and be a villain,” (107-8). The “falling off” (47) that took place between old and new king represents an epochal change and a descent into a world of falsity.

Given the atmosphere of duplicity and danger, Hamlet decides he will need the antic disposition to survive, and his introduction of it is coupled with his equally revealing request that Horatio and Marcellus not reveal why he’s acting strangely. Q1 reads

HAMLET. But come here, as before you never shall
How strange or odd so’er I bear my selfe,
As I perchance hereafter shall thinke meet,
To put an Antick disposition on,
That you at such times seeing me, never shall
With Armes, incombred thus, or this head shake,
Or by pronouncing some undoubtfull phrase,
As well well, we know, or wee could and if we would,
Or there be, and if they might, or such ambiguous:
Giving out to note, that you know aught of mee,
This not to doe, so grace, and mercie
At your mo st need helpe you, sweare.

GHOST. Sweare. (Q1. 5.133-149)

Hamlet specifically asks, and acts out in elaborate details, to make his point indubitably clear, how they should not act if they see him acting oddly: not to insinuate with their body language
that they know anything as to why, in assuming the antic disposition, he is acting strangely. It is one long sentence that drives forward emphatically through to its final, operative, word: “Swears.” Imagine the insistent urgency behind his words: picture him folding his arms, shaking his head conspiratorially, and lingering over the monosyllables of the “undoubtfull phrase” drawing out the ‘w’s, ‘l’s and vowels. The point left unsounded but inferred is that any such suggestive behavior or physical action would be observed and acted upon as intelligence, leading to their questioning and pressuring for information. Hamlet is readying himself for the need of duplicity in his outward action as he knows that his and everybody’s actions are being watched, and he now has a hidden purpose. Structurally, in the play’s complex fabric of metatheatricality, these are also metadramatic performance cues. They alert the audience to the performativity of Elsinore, and the type of performed behaviors to expect and mistrust. Confident of his own acting abilities, Hamlet draws attention to everybody else’s.

The helter-skelter pace of Q1 continues into Act 2, and Hamlet’s insistence on his friends not “ambiguous[ly] giving out” (5.145-6), and the particular manner of his asking, quickly takes on a retroactive force and significance to frame his next appearance. Given Q1’s brevity, and its earlier placing of the “To be or not to be” speech, this reappearance is quick, barely five minutes later. In that brief interim we see Corambis (Q1’s name for Polonius) instructing Montano to gather, by “indirection,” information about his son (in effect to spy on him), hear that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been sent for to “wring from [Hamlet] the very cause and ground of his distemperance” (Q1.7.6-7), and learn of the plan to have Claudius and Corambis spy on Hamlet directly. Hamlet’s caution is thus immediately vindicated. His extended recent mournful bearing has laid the ground for Hamlet’s successful mobilization of the antic disposition. His appearance “down-gartered” to Ophelia escalates the diagnosis of his condition
to "madness," implied by the King’s, "our dear cousin Hamlet/ Hath lost the very heart of all his sense" (Q1.7.1-2). Dropping even the pretense of decorum is enough to mark him as touched and, for Claudius, suspicious. While it is tempting to agree with De Grazia, who suggests that Hamlet might have aroused less suspicion if he had chosen to feign rapid recovery rather than further sickness, Hamlet—albeit reluctantly—has settled on a course of action to meet duplicity with feigning and like cunning.

The play's most famous supposed soliloquy is, of course, in fact performed in the presence of Ophelia, its audience potentially fractured, and leads directly into their punishing scene together. In the speech’s meditation on death Hamlet’s particular circumstance, his impossibility of action, is universalized into the human condition:

> Who would fardels bear,  
> To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
> But that the dread of something after death,  
> … puzzles the will  
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have,  
> Than fly to others that we know not of? (3.1.76-82)

The issue, and the parallel, is made explicit in the use of the word "puzzle," the meaning of which was much more emphatic in 1600, closer to stunned than confused. Jenkins gloss "bewilders so as to make incapable of proceeding," captures the words’ power and its double application here. Hamlet’s condition, as we’ve seen, embodies this incapacity for action, transmuting the clown’s playful desire to not leave the stage into the trapped state of wordy procrastination that are his soliloquies. The same inability to leave the stage informs the painful cruelty of his scene with Ophelia, as time and again Hamlet dismisses her or says "Farewell," but
is unable to bring himself to leave. We have touched on the clown and Hamlet’s cruelty, but here, with tragic irony, Hamlet (in a position that anticipates the irony of his professed love for her in the graveyard only confirming his madness) cannot reach Ophelia with the import of his injunctions to her endangered purity, but neither can he bring himself to stop attempting to do so. In a painful irony, he is perceived as cruel in attempting to be kind. Hamlet’s manner here with Ophelia, while brutal, is also in part consciously a performance of his madness, while his inability to reach her figures his larger failure to act or move forward. It is also worth noting that Hamlet’s assumed madness—half freneticism, half ruminative, very male melancholia—is distinct from Ophelia’s very female hysteria. Ophelia is overwhelmed by hers, literally dragged down by it to an unremittingly tragic death. Hamlet’s condition holds him in the horns of an impossible dilemma which is both a dramaturgical device and an assumed coping mechanism.

The question of whether Hamlet knows his conference with Ophelia is being spied on by her father cannot be decisively answered. More pertinent is the comprehensive atmosphere of deceit that has been established to foreground Hamlet’s merited suspicion, an element present but diluted in the longer versions. One of Hamlet’s first questions to Ophelia (Ofelia in Q1), concerns her honesty “Are you honest” (Q1.7.144). Similarly, in the subsequent exchange, Corambis’ response to Hamlet’s opening remark saying he’s not a fishmonger is met with “then sir, I wish you were so honest a man” (Q1.7.209). Hamlet, craving honesty, finds nothing but dissimulation all around. Into this miasma of death and deceit, Shakespeare will introduce a troupe of players. Their special “quality,” (“true feigning”) will shine a quite brilliant light. Hamlet’s dilemma is expressed in the impossibility of action he is faced with, his antic condition mirrors and the clown’s delight in sharing the banal and playful with the audience is transmuted into Hamlet’s meditations: his acting out his inability to act. The pun on acting as profession and
as volition becomes structural as the play brings in some actors playing actors, and Hamlet demonstrably plays the clown chorus in their play.

**THE PLAYERS ARE ANNOUNCED...**

The difficulty, or impossibility, of action, and the two complementary meanings of “to act” (to do and to consciously perform) that Shakespeare foregrounds is further paralleled with the play’s rehearsal of the familiar but paradoxical notion that actors (and poets), with their “true feigning,” might act and speak more truthfully than real people with reason to dissemble. And this, of course, in the context of duplicitous and dangerous Elsinore. Before the entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and then again before the entrance of the players, Hamlet riddles with Polonius. Here Hamlet’s antic disposition is a natural extension of his wary stance in front of the king’s chief officer. In the atmosphere of duplicity the play has established, Polonius’ linguistic shortcoming is established as indirectness. Experienced by the audience as comic verbiage, Polonius is shown to know the rules of rhetoric but flagrantly not to observe them (a trait Shakespeare may have observed in Thomas Wilson’s *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560) the lengthy call for clarity expressed in its bungling opposite which served as an authority on such matters at the time). Polonius extols brevity as the “soul of wit” (2.2.90) but cannot resist, or help, luxuriating in, and even losing himself in, witless word play (2.2.85-95). Its effect on the audience, the laughter it produces, is of a totally different quality than the prince’s deft extemporizing. The audience laughs at Polonius for his idiosyncratic pedantry and his misguided view of himself. Hamlet’s sparring wit and wordplay is executed far more swiftly and directly, and experienced as a sharp, rather than a blunt instrument, that repeatedly leaves Polonius dumbfounded. Hamlet’s assumption of the clown role, we shall see, is just getting started here; in theatre parlance he’s “warming-up,” if you will. For the Elizabethan who cared about such matters, there was a
distinction between the rustic or natural clown, or “clod,” ignorant and witless, and the professional, witty clown, like Tarlton or Kemp, who wore the same garb in order to earn a living. Clown as clod will return to concern us in Act 5, but here Hamlet’s verbal interactions with Polonius constantly threaten to expose the old man as a natural fool, rather than the witty courtier he imagines himself to be—or indeed the witty fool that Hamlet epitomizes through his Tarlton-esque verbal toying. In one sense Polonius is the play’s more orthodox clown, the foolish foil to Hamlet’s wit. The comic structures at work in their dialogue, and the accompanying stage business, are perennially popular, the mechanics of its comedy clear. As such we can begin to imagine Hamlet’s baiting and switching, duping and stupefying. Moreover, a poem of 1604 alluding to Burbage in the role, describes him sucking on a pen as if it were a tobacco pipe, and drinking from an inkhorn as though it were a beer bottle, a tantalizing evocation of Burbage in his pomp! On another level Polonius operates as a satire of the University-trained courtier, affording Shakespeare and Burbage metadramatic opportunities to scorn pseudo-learned pomposity. Skepticism of court authority is indexed by exposure of ignorance, deceit or folly. Once again Shakespeare burlesques self-importance and critiques fictions of learning as well as of decorum, as he does more broadly in the dichotomy between what Hamlet says about theatre and what he does. Also, let us note, Hamlet’s put-downs of Ophelia in the following act are of the same nature and origin as those with her father, but represent an escalation of violence integral to comedy. Ophelia appears less deserving of the put-downs and less able to defend herself, as such they are doubly devastating and, as with so much else in the play the comic bleeds into the tragic.

In Q1’s shortened exchange at their first meeting with Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are welcomed as “kind school friends’ (Q1.7.237), as opposed to the Folio’s less
conditional “My excellent good friends” (2.2.224), and immediately asked, “But is this visitation
free of yourselves—or were you not sent for? Tell me true,” (Q1.7.240-1). Hamlet is asking for
their words to correspond to the truth, as friends to “deal justly” (Q2.1.276) with him to be “even
and direct” (Q2.1.287). Similar language appears in the Q2 and F variants of the scene, but after
45 lines not three, it’s, “were you not sent for” (Q2 2.2.274), repeats the rhetorical assumption of
knowledge of the true facts and would have similar directness in return. As observed, Q1 in its
brevity harps on this theme more insistently than its more loquacious variants. The longer
versions of the scene see Hamlet probing his suffering, and a further heart-felt and explicit
request for (moral) probity as Hamlet meets their evasion with entreaty, “If you love me hold not
off” (290,1). They relent and admit, “My lord we were sent for” (292), but are neither even nor
direct. Hamlet senses that, as elsewhere, there has been a “falling off;” the purity of the
friendship is now fatally stained by their lack of directness that indicates they are complicit
stooges in Claudius’ “rotten” Denmark. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are told to anticipate the
prince touched with madness, but find him courteous, warm, and in the contemporary tongue
“decorous,” holding himself with natural decorum. The antic disposition here is held in abeyance
by Hamlet until his supposed friends’ complicity is apparent to him and its employment
necessary. The effect of its sudden mobilization (in Q2 and F) is to baffle them as Hamlet
dismisses them with lines that promise disclosure and clarity, yet offer none, and are perceived
as evidence of his sickness even as they express his true acuity:

HAMLET. You are welcome. But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.
GUILDERNSTEM. In what, my dear lord?
HAMLET. I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly I know a hawk
from a handsaw. (F.2.2.372-5)
Imagine Hamlet, polite, then faux-earnest, inviting the questioning response. Then, confounding both, he addresses the unspoken issue of his sanity with monosyllabic clarity: he is only partly mad. Then the second sentence promises proof but in muddled, confusing terms. Perhaps to confound them further he leads their eyes upward pointing to an imagined bird with one hand, beforestartling them by proffering an imagined saw in the other. Hamlet is returning their indirectness. Beyond the characters’ reunion being marked by indirectness, the scene has a second major function in terms of plot, namely to introduce first the players and then the topic of contemporary theatre into the play. To do so, Shakespeare will have the prince’s potentially revealing self-reflection interrupted and curtailed by a moment of unbidden laughter; a startling intrusion or incursion of irrepressible comedy into the tragic realm. To fully understand this moment’s power, its relationship to Burbage’s performance, and thereby, its potential significance for a section of the audience, we must (re)introduce a contemporary voice outlining the terms of reference for matters of poetry, play-making and aesthetics.

As we have seen, Sir Philip Sidney was unequivocal about clowns and equally the strict observance of genre: his critique of the former is couched in terms of the latter. For Sidney, writing in the 1580’s, poetry should convey truths artistically, and employ all the pleasurable devices of art to make its instruction palatable. Delight is the result of such poetry. It is rarefied, and sharply contrasted with laughter, which is an instantaneous rather than reflective quality of the body rather than of the mind, of the common and base rather than the exalted and refined. In Bakhtinian terms, Sidney stands in the vanguard of the dominant “serious” political and social hegemony. Furthermore, as asserted, it is hard not to see the aristocratic and tragic courtier-soldier-poet-scholar reflected in the aesthete Prince, at least when he mouths his influential yet restricted or outdated pronouncements on theatre. Taking authority from classical precedent(s),
both men are sure of their arguments for a decorum which their own aesthetic creations then fail
to observe! Both men have a touch of arrogance in this respect, Sidney proclaiming that, “the
dullest wit may conceive it,” with “it” being the veracity of his observations on the subject of
theatre. Again, Hamlet scorns clown forms, but his play and its audience relish in them. In
approaching the arrival of the players in Hamlet I quote the widely referenced passage from
Sidney’s Apologie in part for the echo the reader will find in Hamlet’s remarks on the subject,
but also for what it tells us of the perceived danger of disregarding his precepts. Again, I assert
that Shakespeare manufactures a curious moment of theatrical laughter, deliberately invoking the
terms of Sidney’s debate at the moment the players are mentioned, in order then to expose their
limitations and fictions and puncture theory with skilled practice.

Discussing the misguided tendency of the popular theatre not to observe strict genre
distinctions, Sidney opines:

So falleth it out that, having indeed no right comedy, in that comical part of our tragedy
we have nothing but scurrility, unworthy of any chaste ears, or some extreme show of
doltish- ness, indeed fit to lift up a loud laughter, and nothing else: where the whole tract
of a comedy should be full of delight, as the tragedy should be still maintained in a well-
raised admiration. But our comedians think there is no delight without laughter; which is
very wrong, for though laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight, as
though delight should be the cause of laughter; but well may one thing breed both
together. Nay, rather in themselves they have, as it were, a kind of contrariety: for delight
we scarcely do but in things that have a conveniency to ourselves or to the general nature:
laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature.
Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present. Laughter hath only a scornful
tickling. The implication is clear: for poetry, specifically play-making, and tragedy, to serve its true
purpose it must deal in delight and resist laughter’s tickling, it must observe discretion, decorum
and the unities. Such was the dominant aesthetic voice of the time, larded with classical
precedent and defining its purity in opposition to baser matter. Shakespeare, as Stephen
Greenblatt points out, “routinely violated” these precepts, adding that Sidney’s mocking
description of theatre that is “meant to make people groan” turns out to anticipate precisely what Shakespeare would do brilliantly throughout his career.”202 And, while Hamlet holds forth on the proper use of comedy, his play, his tragedy, if that’s not too restrictive a term, celebrates and explores genre permeability, and Shakespeare’s self-reflexivity displays consummate knowledge of his craft and of his audience.

Returning to the play, Shakespeare, I contend, references Sidney in an otherwise unexplained or inexplicable moment of stage time, in a pun on “delight” that plays on both its most profound and basest sexual meanings and that is framed by its supposed opposite scornful laughter. The tonal shift that the play makes from familiar tragic exposition into one of discursive procrastination, interrogating acting as it relates to action, and further mobilizing of comic forms, is heralded by a snort of laughter perhaps as startling in context as the cock crow that draws a veil over night and prompts the ghost’s departure in the opening scene:

HAMLET. What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me, no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

ROSENCRANTZ. My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.
HAMLET. Why did you laugh, then, when I said “man delights not me”? ROSENCRANTZ. To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what Lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you. We coted them on the way, and hither are they coming to offer you service.
HAMLET. He that plays the king shall be welcome. (2.2.303-318, italics added)

A curious moment of confusion, of misperceived mirth, built around confusion between laughter and delight is thus the moment that connects Hamlet’s contemplation with the matter of the player’s imminent arrival and the discussion of theatre. The language and rhetoric seesaw extravagantly, famously paraphrasing Pico della Mirandola’s celebrated “Oration on the Dignity of Man,” and then descending to the matter/mater of the dust and the female. Despite their being
“the paragon of animals” (306), in his current condition, Hamlet can no longer “delight” in man. Nor woman—Rosencrantz has laughed and then immediately stopped, or tries to, seeming to Hamlet to mock the seriousness of his purpose. The bathos of his interruption is clear, philosophical inquiry is met with apparent derision and reduced to bawdy connotations of sexual desire. But Hamlet is mistaken. Rosencrantz’s assumption that Hamlet will be pleased to hear about the players is correct. Hopelessness, even as it is being articulated, is offset against the thing known to delight Hamlet, here arriving and announced. The reflexive snort of laughter, far from derision, is an ironic expression of well-intentioned perceived delight at hand to relieve the sufferer. But in the debased situation Hamlet presumes his laughter as scornful, hears only frat-boy derision, and as such is himself responsible for the corruption of perceived delight into bawdry. Act 5’s graveyard will give him a new perspective on dirt. In transitioning between topics, Shakespeare makes the allusion to Sidney emphatic and pertinent to both by having Rosencrantz repeat “delight” for its fourth use in barely a minute. Asking, “What players are they” (l.324-5), Hamlet is told the “Even those you were want to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city” (l.326-7). What does it say that Shakespeare offers theatre as a tonic? The now-experienced playwright is confident in his art and his company’s abilities; it is not just any troupe of actors that he introduces for Hamlet’s delight, it is Shakespeare’s own troupe—which is in fact struggling so amid the corrupt tastes of 1599.

The city alluded to will soon be established as London. Polonius’ comical encomium, wherein he calls the troupe “the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history pastoral, pastoral-comical” (392-3) and then, with multiple further variations of genre hybrids, attests to the company’s excellence and robust popularity across a broad repertoire, surely confirms that the lavish praise is meant for the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. In the cut-and-thrust
world of late Elizabethan theatre, Shakespeare would hardly laud another company with that title. This is of particular import given the various wars of the theatres still ongoing that the scene goes on to explore and engage with. In that context (with the influence of Sidney’s criticism underpinning the contention), Polonius’ extended list of genre-busting play types is itself a dilatory clown show and a celebration of genre flexibility—implicitly suggesting that the company’s success is because of, rather than despite, it. With regard to the clown specifically, the Folio has Hamlet say, “the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickled a th’sere” (322-3), a dense dismissive reference to a gun going off easily. Q1 has the simpler: “the clown shall make those laugh who are tickled in the lungs” (Q1.7.281). In both variants the assumption is once again that clowns are associated with easy, base and thoughtless laughter rather than the more refined “delight” that Hamlet, Sidney, and modish London, prefer. There is no suggestion that the clown has been excised, but equally there is no indication one arrives: the prince has so thoroughly, if not consciously, absorbed the role.

In response to Hamlet’s, “How chances it they travel? Their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways” (327), establishing himself as informed, Rosencrantz answers, “I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation” (I.328-31). By this he means, and Hamlet understands, that there is a ban on playing in the city. The “late innovation” is a teasing phrase as it could refer to the competition with the Children of the Blackfriars that they go on to discuss, but that in itself would not be sufficient cause for a playing ban whereas riots, like the recent Essex rebellion, would be. If in context the phrase comically inflates the former with the latter it suggests the play, and the clowning within it, are again operating on another subversive political level that it mines elsewhere, indeed throughout.
The discussion of the theatre that ensues reflects in its language and tone the sense of excitement and gossip at play in the competitive contemporary London scene. Q2 and F both have a poetic flourish as they speak of, ‘the poet and player [going] to cuffs’ (354) and, “much throwing about of brains” (356). Q1, by contrast, has Guildenstern explain somewhat prosaically:

Y’faith my Lord, novelitie carries it away,
For the principall publike audience that
Came to them, are turned to private playes
And to the humor of children (Q1.7.271-3)

The essence of the situation was the rise in popularity of first one and then a second Children’s company, adding to the highly competitive theatre scene and happy to throw out criticism of the public theatres. The ensuing “Poets War,” or in Thomas Dekker’s contemporary coinage Poetomachia, and its satirical one-upmanship between playwrights, is the background for what James Bednarz calls the “theatrical politics” in Hamlet. The Children of Paul’s at the cathedral had only a small space, but, from 1600, the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars started performing in a space that seated up to 800. Greenblatt imagines Shakespeare writing the play as if, “looking over his shoulder at the children’s companies and pretending to worry—not altogether comically—that they would put his troupe out of business.” Q2 and F have the following description:

an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on top of the question, and are most tyrannically clapped for’t. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills and dare scarce come thither. (2.2.337-42)

Crying out “on top of the question” pointedly means “with the maximum of contention:” they are noisy and the bird reference may suggest the boys’ still unbroken voices. In Jonson’s
contemporaneous play *Cynthia’s Revels*, the children are, “so many wrens,”208 for Rosencrantz’s they are “little eyases”—young hawks whose predatory instincts have been nurtured by their keeper. To great applause, the children criticize the “common stages.” Here Shakespeare takes Jonson’s exact term for the popular stage, again from *Cynthia’s Revels*, plainly drawing attention to it: for those in the know, “so they” here clearly means, “so he—*Jonson*—calls them.” With maximum efficiency Shakespeare then repeats Jonson’s rebuke about the theatre being not fashionable enough to attend before having his Jonsonian hero respond incredulously. Hamlet’s response questions not only the children’s ability for the task but who cares for them, and what awaits them once their voices inevitably break. Without waiting for a reply, he sees their likely natural progression to work as adult actors, and finishing his own thought, reasons, “their writers do them wrong to make them exclaim against their own succession” (349). Shakespeare pointedly notes the responsibility of the writers in the skirmish. Rosencrantz replies that, “there has been much ado on both sides,” and that the country stood and watched when for a time there was, “no money bid for argument unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question” (353-4). No company, this suggests, would bid on a playwright’s new piece unless it included this unruly matter and behavior. The Folio has Hamlet ask if the boys are successful, using the image of “carrying” the audience away. This carrying is clearly meant in the sense of actor’s power to imaginatively entrance their audience but also in the sense of their pillaging of audiences. Rosencrantz’s reply contains an explicit reference to the very theatre he and the audience are standing in: “Ay that they do, my lord, Hercules and his load too” (358) refers to the flag flying above The Globe showing the world held by Atlas (equally Hercules) and bearing the slogan “All the World’s a Stage,” (*totus e mundem* in the Latin) another reference the audience are far from likely to miss. For Hamlet, this fact is most strange,—but the point is
made, the reported situation in the London theatre demonstrates the same “falling off” that Hamlet has witnessed in Elsinore.

All this discussion is done before the players even enter. Before they do there is still time for some teasing of Polonius—guessing the purpose of his arrival, Hamlet mentions the famous actor Roscius, confounding the old man by anticipating the topic of actors. Polonius attempts to plough on with his news already known, Hamlet hindering and mocking the old man, his court-clown function rendered superfluous. Seeing the players enter, Hamlet figures them as his relief from having to tolerate the foolish Polonius; “look where my abridgement comes” (416).

The entrance of the players brings about a marked tonal shift. The troupe traffic in the ‘true feigning’ of acting, aspiring to art’s glory in contrast to employing seeming in the service of subterfuge or advancement that Hamlet sees all around. Hamlet need not be antic with them: rather he can relish their craft and employ them for his own truth-seeking ends. He warmly welcomes the group collectively, and then his warmth turns to eagerness for some of their “quality.”

The speech Hamlet requests is by his own admission obscure; he remembers it never or perhaps once being acted as it “pleased not the million” though others, “whose judgement in such matters cried in the top of [in agreement with] mine—an excellent play…set down with as much modesty as cunning” (2.2.433-5). The speech is manifestly classical, its subject the Trojan War, and allows Hamlet a dig at Polonius that decries the old man’s enjoyment of popular rather than refined forms. When Polonius complains, after initially claiming to like the speech, “This is too long”, Hamlet’s response derides him as one, “for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps” (494-6). David Scott Kastan rightly states that: “Hamlet values literature for its mimetic and didactic functions, its abilities to generate moral exempla that will, ‘show virtue her feature,
scorn her own image' (3.2. 22-23), and, guided by his idealist mimetic principles, he recalls Pyrrhus, a son who readily avenges his father, as an example that might animate his own revenge."209 Unfortunately, Kastan continues, "Pyrrhus serves only to confirm the disturbing resemblances Hamlet needs to deny,"210 in that he represents both a figure of Hamlet revenging his father but simultaneously of Claudius killing his. If Hamlet looks to the scene for example he sees rather only an expression of the impossibility of moral action. However, the player’s mode of performance, if not the content of the First Player’s speech, inspires Hamlet’s next stratagem: “the play’s the thing” (600).

Hamlet’s soliloquy beginning “Now I am alone” (2.2.543-601) echoes the language, situation, and theatricality of the Pyrrhus speech that inspires it. In context, the two speeches comment on the rapidly changing fashions in theatre over the past decade: the former's studied old-fashionedness threatens at times to make it comic, while Hamlet's rehearses and exhibits the same Senecan gore and excess. Of course, the Pyrrhus speech includes him frozen in inaction, doing "nothing" (478) at the crucial moment, and Hamlet, pinched by it to further self-loathing, is at his most heated, impotent, and demonstrative. As De Grazia helps us see, Hamlet’s opening line at once acknowledges that the other characters have left, and his awareness of the audience.211 The expert on acting opines his comparative lack of ability to act, blending the two meanings in his reflections: “What would he do / Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have? He would drown the stage with tears” (2.2. 554-6). And, yet, the revenger—like Pyrrhus—does nothing. The speech has three shortened lines which, like the earlier "Did nothing" (478), at once serve as rhetorical and physical flourishes, and indicate a pause. The first "For Hecuba" (552), and the second, "Yet I" (561) each invite a different dramatic stance and declamatory verve. The third is the scene's second sounding of laughter in response to the idea of
being called a villain. Seeing the speech as in direct recognition of the audience suggests that in his questions "Am I a coward? Who calls me villain?" (566-7), Hamlet may be imagining a response from the audience, which the invective that follows building in intensity over three lines forecloses, and culminating instead in his “Ha!” (571). This “Ha” can be played in any number of ways, but the fact that it has a whole line of verse allocated to its one syllable, suggests it was deliberate, unrushed and followed by delaying physical action, if only a defeated pause. Here Hamlet definitely protests too much, and, having pseudo-braved the audience to call him on his inaction, he recognizes that himself. The speech presents a serio-comic Burbage/Hamlet attempting to come to grips with the elevated passions of Troy given his own debased surroundings, and the anodyne Polonius his court's master of the revels. The long speech is at once a critique of theatre’s artifice, an auguring of its practical potential, and an extended invitation for virtuoso playing. Hamlet feels trapped in inaction, once again, articulated in theatrical terms, until the same theatre offers itself as answer and catalyst.212 Spurred on by the player’s arrival and their mobilization, Hamlet warms up into his allotted role: he will give his clown skills full rein as he orchestrates his trap. As we shall see, for his performance, Hamlet will claim to have earned a place in the company of players.

Hamlet’s advice to the players opens 3.2 and immediately precedes the royal command performance. The speech begins in implied continuation of off-stage dialogue, “Speak the speech I pray as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue,” the manner of the entrance suggests urgency, the content hinting at it too, even as it heralds diversion. Further irony operates in the relationship between the prince and the first player, facilitated by their vast difference in status. Players, of course, could only legally perform under noble patronage, without it, troupes could be
treated as vagrants, beaten and banished from the district. Here, Hamlet is operating in a comparably beneficent role and magnanimous manner: the player by implication, is honored by the attention for the social elevation it affords him and his company, even as he endures being told how to do his job. Q1 has the variant, “as I taught thee” (9.2) instead of “pronounced,” suggesting that the player has already endured a didactic masterclass on acting, not just a rendition of Hamlet’s lines to be inserted.

In another sense, there is a necessary irony in that Burbage as Hamlet is performing—orating—on the art of acting. If, as I suggest, the player’s company is the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, then the first player is in some sense a representation of its own great first player: Burbage. Burbage’s oratory is in one way addressed to himself, an expression of exquisite taste and judgment, a bravura apology for poetry of its own in its call for seriousness; its inclusion, at once premised on the star actor’s ability to make it thrillingly engaging, also ennobles Burbage, the company, their art and endeavor. More prosaically, it affords Burbage the chance to sound forth on his own genius; presenting a treatise on the art of great acting with his own great acting. In this, the speech is a gift to the actor, a nudge to a colleague, a nod to his pre-eminence. In the disconnect between his stated views and his behavior it also provides the key to accessing the play’s sustained engagement with comedy, its forms, its spirit and its absence, and expressed interest in contemporary theatrical and aesthetic taste. In context, as I’ve previously stated, Hamlet’s parroting of the aesthetic ideas of Sidney clearly reflects not Shakespeare’s view, but rather his subtle critique of that model of elitism as restrictive, exclusive, and potentially blind to its own clownish antics. If the extra language of Q1 is an example of exactly the thing complained of, as I follow Jenkins in suggesting, then the speech in total is a celebration of acting and the theatre’s potential for greatness, profundity and seriousness. It is also very funny
in performance, as the anxious amateur patron lectures the accomplished and poised professional. Here also is rehearsed the duality and ironic difference between the theatre as planned (written and rehearsed) and as it is experienced. Going forward, the play presented to Claudius, complete with Hamlet's interpolated lines, as it is carefully prepared, meets the reality of what actually happens under the conditions of performance.

The more famous language of Q2 and F (quoted at the opening of this chapter), continues in Q1:

And then you have some again that keeps one suit of jests—as a man is known by one suit of apparel—and gentlemen quotes his jests down in their tables before they come to the play, as thus: ‘Cannot you stay till I eat my porridge?’ and ‘You owe me a quarter’s wages!’ and ‘My coat wants a cullison!’ and ‘Your beer is sour!’ and, blabbering with his lips and thus keeping his cinquepace of jests when, God knows, the warm Clown cannot make a jest unless by chance – as the blind man catcheth a hare – masters, tell him of it (9.29-38).

The Q1 editors gloss the passage by offering some advice of their own:

An example of the kind of extemporizing that Hamlet is deploring; in performance Hamlet can imitate the accents or even substitute the catchphrases of modern comedians who the audience will recognize. Their advice makes the point explicitly, Hamlet is mimicking popular contemporary clowns:

Kemp and Tarlton’s practice specifically are embodied and brought forth in Burbage’s parodying of Kemp’s repertoire and physical inhabiting of the clown. Beyond this though, the take-down implies that Kemp has only one “suit of jests,” however, Kemp and Hamlet, as incarnated by Burbage, share a substantially larger wardrobe. The extra language also encompasses and indexes the popularity of the clown across classes, albeit expressed through its snobbish critique of the gentlemen writing down and repeating their jests. In both word and action, Hamlet’s parroting of Sidney is undermined: the inclusiveness the prince mocks actually constitutive of the play that bears his name.
The cinque-pace, pronounced “sink-a pace”, is a dance in five sections as Hamlet’s impression of it is. It is also a wordplay on inappropriate urination, “apace” both a crude homonym and suggesting a lack of time or control to master the need. The clown, in Hamlet’s criticism, is incontinently pissing away valuable time. Nonetheless, gentlemen write down his witticisms. Ponder for a moment Burbage’s own parodic dance: the writing implies a cumulative physical caper fluidly encompassing concern for porridge, indignation in various forms, and the lip blubbering effect of sour beer. The final image of the hare suggests that the clown is inept unless aided by others, through their assistance, or their laughter. This, of course is only what he says, and ironically he is an inept revenger and clown until he is himself aided by a clown. As the next pages demonstrate, Hamlet is here readying himself for the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago* and his clown role within it. As mentioned, in actors’ parlance this process is called “warming up,” a process that this extra language both suggests, in its reference to the “warm clown” as meaning one in full flow, and practically serves as for Burbage. Retrospectively Hamlet calls his performance a successful audition, so now let us now approach it in those terms.

In a repeat of the irony at the outset, Hamlet finishes his delaying advice with a call for haste. Q1 has, “go make you ready” said twice (Q1, 9.40), while in Q2 Polonius is asked to bid the players, “make haste” (l.49) and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to “help to hasten them.” (l.50) The Folio text has all three injunctions. The calls for haste remind us of Hamlet’s burning desire to get quickly to his inserted speech, which he sees as the entire point of staging *The Murder of Gonzago*: this urgency is in tension with readiness and preparedness, as Hamlet is thoroughly warmed up, and wants everyone else as ready. “I must be idle” (3.2.90) he says, the usual gloss on this line is “so as not to be seen conspiring,” but it also carries the sense of foolish and acting the madman. Hamlet, so invested in the performance that he lacks the peace and
presence of mind to be idle in the sense of sitting still, will rather idle in the choric clown sense, will twitch, intervene, and interlocute. Hamlet will employ all his wit and guile in orchestrating The Mousetrap, but he is not ultimately in control of its execution or even his function within it. In his deadly earnestness of purpose he will be seriously vulgar, and in this acting-out, Burbage’s absorption and synthesis of Kemp and Tarlton’s forms is complete.

As the royal party arrives Hamlet immediately riddles with Claudius about the air being “promise crammed” (3.2.94), expressing his sense of anticipation but making no sense to the King. This moment though is just the first, brazen yet veiled, example of Hamlet’s dizzyingly Tarlton-esque display in this scene, and the broad specifics of his borrowings are worth restating. The presumed license to speak scurrility (even to hint at regicide), as Hamlet does, is unique to the clown tradition. Similarly, the role of chorus that Hamlet assumes in the scene, the explanatory figure between audience and stage, belonged in the preceding centuries to the clown. Ophelia may prompt Hamlet, but the audience is the beneficiaries of his commentary, the only ones able to appreciate its ironies.

Leaving Claudius perhaps bemused but confirmed in his belief of Hamlet’s frailty of mind, the prince turns to ask Polonius about his acting experience and the foolish lord sets himself up as victim for a withering put-down. Explaining that he played Julius Caesar and adding “I was killed I’th Capitol. Brutus killed me,” Hamlet replies “It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. Be the players ready?” (3.2.104-5). Here Hamlet’s punning works on multiple levels simultaneously. On the linguistic level, the place of execution, the Capitol, is turned to an adjective modifying “calf,” at once a butchered animal but carrying also the sense of “fool.” Simultaneously, it is likely that the actor playing Polonius had previously played Caesar to Burbage’s Brutus just months earlier in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. If so, Burbage as Hamlet
is now reveling in his higher status as the lead actor in the company, while also prefiguring his imminent killing, or butchering, of Polonius. Moreover, here again the political, the aesthetic and the clownish commingle in the reverberations of a sharp and ominous inside joke. In Polonius again being mocked, in part as a representative of the University, and here specifically its drama, Shakespeare is marking a distance between himself and its writers or “wits.” Concomitantly, the remark operates as a metadramatic deepening of the socio-political movement from Julius Caesar the previous year to the current play: the terms around assassination occupying a decidedly different place in the aftermath of the Essex crisis. Shakespeare has become increasingly open to the problems of succession crises and assassination, such disruption of order in many ways the most dangerous implications of clowning. Lastly, note how the pun is summarily delivered and immediately followed by the prince’s next question, returning the redundant Polonius to functionary rather than foil.

As Hamlet turns his attention to Ophelia, via the rejection of his mother, Shakespeare also draws the audience immediately into the world of sexual suggestion and inappropriate behavior relished by the clown. In another affront to social propriety, Hamlet openly puns on words for copulation and genitalia, provoking Ophelia despite her obvious discomfort with the subject matter. As we’ve seen, when she calls him “merry” (120), a characteristic of the clown, he replies sardonically “O God, your only jig-maker” (3.2.123), evoking the departed Kemp even as he is assuming his place, function and repertoire of stage business. Shakespeare invites us repeatedly to see Hamlet as a clown even before his clown-commentary on the play begins. Ophelia explicitly refers to Hamlet as a chorus, to which he rudely suggests that, like a puppet master, if he observed Ophelia and a lover, he would be able to proffer dialogue to go along with it: “I could interpret between you and your love if I could see the puppets dallying” (241-42).
Her response points to his bitterness, twice calling him “keen.” Replying, Hamlet puns on the double meaning of “keen”—both the sharpness of a blade and of sexual desire: “It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge” (244). Given their relationship the comment is cruel, bordering on sadistic, but as part of Hamlet’s performance it is entirely consistent with the clown’s flagrant use of bawdry and love of prompting shock or embarrassment.

*The Murder of Gonzago,* for all Hamlet’s holding forth, is neither in its dumb-show nor in its main action a neoclassical representation. Rather, dumb-shows, like Ghosts, were considered old devices and seen to pander to the popular taste for spectacle. This dumb-show is unusual in that it exactly prefigures the action of the full play. Jenkins argues persuasively though that it would “not have seemed strange to an Elizabethan audience already accustomed by the emblematic shows to see a theme given preliminary treatment in a different mode.”215 The dumb-show foregrounds Hamlet’s stratagem and also asks for elucidation, which he duly provides. The question remains as to why there is this repetition of the dramatic action—particularly given the similarity why the first representation of the murder (and subsequent wooing of the widowed queen) was not (except in the 1948 Olivier film adaptation) enough to elicit a guilty start from Claudius. That it doesn't might be Hamlet's own fault and is perhaps the greatest of the scene's complex ironies.

The play itself starts by establishing the Player King and Queen in a dialogue of some seventy lines between them before the king is left alone to sleep. Hamlet interjects twice during this, and then, as the Player Queen exits, talks again. Then, when Lucianus (the figure for Claudius) enters, he neither speaks nor goes to the sleeping king straightaway. Rather he must wait for ten lines of Hamlet talking to Ophelia, before being rudely told to hurry up: “Begin, murderer. Leave thy damnable faces and begin. Come the croaking raven doth bellow for
revenge” (246-8 italics added), the second sentence of which hits a Senecan pitch that has not been heard in the play for some time but which will be resounded by Lucianus. Intriguingly though, Hamlet’s comment suggests that the actor/murderer is prevaricating, not merely waiting for his courtly audience’s attention, but mugging in the manner made famous by Tarlton and then Kemp. We have seen how the journey into the playing space can itself be dilatory, Tarlton would not start his scene until he had fully milked the laughter and applause on his arrival, just such face-pulling may be recalled in the line to Yorick “quite chop-fallen” (5.1.186), and here, “if Lucianus were playing the scene for laughs, by pulling faces, at once fiendishly grotesque and ludicrously comical, we have another instance of the dilatational clowning censured by Hamlet.”216 Moreover, we have another instance of delaying before murder, and two clowns on stage at once.

In a scene replete with ironies, David Scott Kastan also sees the deftest of unforced errors from the prince: “In unnecessarily identifying Lucianus as ‘nephew to the king,’ Hamlet allows his play to imitate both Claudius’ guilty secret and his own.”217 As with Pyrrhus, the imitation presented exposes the guilt in all parties, the nephew line is in all three texts and with it the playwright “holds aloof from…sequential action to bring into focus at the center of the drama a perfect image of the crime which is the foundation of the plot”218 and the impossibility of action reflected back at the hero. Once again, the problem of revenge is rehearsed and expressed, mobilizing a non-elite form and through a dilatory deviation from the plot. Crucially, Hamlet’s continued commentary, his repeated clown-like interruptions of the action, risks distancing and distracting both Claudius and Gertrude and also the larger courtly audience from the main event, namely the unambiguous revelation of Claudius’s guilt. And, of course, Hamlet has cautioned the players against letting their clowns behave in precisely this way. Furthermore, his
commentary implicates him in seditious intent and action every bit as much as Claudius, whose angry exit confirms nothing objectively other than his having taken offence at Hamlet’s baiting. As both hero and clown, Hamlet has created a generically complex, muddled, and unclear action. The result is that his play (and his performance in it) ends up as an imperfect rehearsal for, rather than an end, to the action of the play. Here again, is the disjunction between performance in theory and in practice, the duality between theatre as planned and its execution under the conditions of performance. Eschewing neoclassical neatness, a fuller, if indeterminate picture emerges: each of Hamlet’s subsequent scenes up to and including his departure for England will end in this muddled manner.

Once the King has called for lights, Hamlet sees none of this ambiguity. Rather he bursts into song and luxuriates in the success of his Mousetrap enterprise: “Would not this sir, and a forest of feathers, if the rest of my fortune turn Turk with me, with Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players” (269-71). He is about to state explicitly that he’ll now believe the ghost, but in the process he reaches three significant conclusions. First, he reasons that his success, aided by some flamboyant clothing for his costume, equips him for a role in the theatre: if life continues to play false with him he could play false professionally as an actor. This sentiment, supported by his use of the derogatory term “cry” as his collective noun for actors, presumes (or encompasses at least) a disparaging view of actors peddling lies in wicked disguises. This prince’s dismissive attitude to the players is true to his class, but paradoxically, if not surprisingly, it comes as he is exulting in the power of theatre, specifically to have a profound effect on its audience. Here again, as with the arrival of the players, so at their exit, Hamlet makes a meta-joke about his role within a company in which he is both leading man and patron. Lastly, Hamlet expects that his success should be rewarded with a ‘fellowship’
or ‘share’ in the company, a model of collective actor-ownership used by The Lord Chamberlain’s Men at the time. Horatio suggests Hamlet has only earned “half a share”, but Hamlet insists “A whole one, I” (273-4), and sings a snatch of song in further clown-informed celebration. In practice, sharers were only replaced after a previous one died or left the company. In Hamlet’s opinion, he has just successfully auditioned the part of chorus and clown for a professional troupe. As we’ve seen, at the time of performance there was one vacancy in the company, and the missing shareholder was Kemp.

**AFTERMATH: IMPASSE AND BANISHMENT**

Before summoning the spirit of Tarlton, it is pertinent to briefly re-introduce (as the play does) its catalyst for Hamlet’s non-action, the Ghost, whose reappearance 3.4 ironically confirms to Gertrude her son’s madness. As well as its two protagonists, the scene features two fathers and, through their fates and employment, mixes modes and forms, and contrasts words and action. Where in Act 1 Horatio and the others could see the Ghost, Gertrude clearly can’t and the applying of this simple theatrical convention, a further fiction within the fiction, makes for a moment as powerful as the stabbing of Polonius immediately prior to it: the dramaturgical impulse behind both moments being to manufacture a powerful effect on the audience, individually and cumulatively. In the stabbing, the audience knows Hamlet is mistaken in believing that it is Claudius behind the arras, but thus informed they are powerless (of course) to change anything. A minute later the audience knows Gertrude is wrong to think Hamlet mad and addressing “vacancy” (3.4.117) and are equally powerless. Here, Hamlet’s dread at the Ghost’s appearance or his reactions as perceived by Gertrude (his hair stands on end, a tough call for an actor) confirms to her the insanity of his previous excessive mourning and antic disposition.
(With dramatic irony of course, this comes just as Hamlet has started to reach his mother, and it prompts his powerful, and deadly serious, denial of madness and plea to her for sexual restraint.)

As such, the final appearance of the Ghost fuses the comic strains that have been unleashed since his first appearance with the tragic mode, and prepares for the play’s shift in intensity, out of the interim space created by the arrival of the players and towards its bloody conclusion. This shift will bring on stage Ophelia’s real madness and tragic end, and in reintroducing Laertes, returns the revenge mode to the dominant. For all its foretelling or foreshadowing, the harrowing scene is experienced as repeatedly shocking, in real time, and the escalation it anticipates is equally busily happening in the scene.

Just as Hamlet explores different modes and tonalities throughout, Shakespeare makes very different use of the Ghost here than in his first appearances. In Act One the Ghost is expansive in his movements and speech, appearing and reappearing on different areas of the stage (above, within, even from the trap—his own Tarlton-esque roving?), and declamatory. Here in Act 3 he is stealthy, if not all but entirely still, quiet and brief. In part because of the scene’s varying locations—the battlements and the bedroom calling for different staging and sensibility—the ghost’s comparative immobility and tone, I suggest, is deliberately used to suit and enhance the dramatic tone of the scene. While far from a new departure in criticism, I raise it to suggest that Shakespeare (who as legend has it played the ghost) is deliberately limiting the figure’s potential for disruption. Contemporary allusions to the play refer to the ghost’s theatrical crying out of “Revenge,” from which De Grazia correctly infers that declamatory ghosts have become representatively and decidedly old-fashioned theatrical devices.219 Was Shakespeare risking ridicule at the outset of his great tragedy? It is but a hair’s breadth from ludicrous to
laughable. Or might he, with the same probing enquiry of textures displayed elsewhere in the play, have deliberately flirted with laughter on Elsinore’s battlements?

With so much going on it is possible to miss the ease with which Shakespeare manages the transition, and the acting tour de force it requires. I suggest that the Ghost’s slow silent exit encapsulates the play up to this point: it is another delay in the plot’s progression which acts as a stage-traversing tableau of unresolved action, and with each step the tragic suffuses the comic mode through its multiplication of fictions and flamboyant theatricality. As Hamlet says “On him, on him. Look you how pale he glares” (3.4.125), Gertrude looks on in incomprehension, part of Polonius’ corpse is visible, and the previously stentorious ghost steals away. Burbage’s frantic injunction must have thrilled his audience, the kinetic relationship between him, Gertrude and the Ghost capturing the essence of his impossible situation, raising the stakes and inspiring awe and wonder.

The closet scene ends with the dragging off of Polonius, immediately after Hamlet has shown knowledge of his trip to England (202), and here the tenor of the scene changes, its tension abated and the comic restraint somewhat eased. This shift is effected by Hamlet’s breezy confidence in the face of his banishment (arguably preparing the audience for the ease of his return) and the enforced comic business of getting a body off-stage. There is nothing to be gained in false solemnity, and much to be enjoyed in its opposite. Shakespeare embraces the likely comic difficulty of removing a supposedly dead actor, twice comically indexing it, first in the monosyllabic bathos of Hamlet’s “I’ll lug the guts into the neighbour room,” (214) and again with the punning insouciance of his short exit line while so doing: “Come sir, to draw toward an end with you. / Good night mother” (218/9).
Hamlet’s final soliloquy, “How all occasions do inform against me” (4.4.32-66), ends with him resolving on action, albeit action that is not action, but rather figured only in forthcoming “bloody thoughts” (66). This is paradoxical both because he is Claudius’ prisoner, already on his way on his faux diplomatic mission to England, and as he has just considered the futility of Fortinbras’ endeavors. Here again, though, Shakespeare has blended thought, word and action, injunction and promise in Hamlet’s retroactively over-confident “Now to my word” (1.5.110): he might more accurately have said “words” or “now to my clown.” Between that point in Act 1 and here in Act 4, Shakespeare, through Burbage, innovated with clown forms and filled and absorbed the space left by Kemp’s departure. Now Burbage, like Kemp before him, must leave the scene. The clown-prince’s return will ultimately be transcendent. But, as I touched on earlier, this whole final speech, and ignominious exit to exile, might be seen as an absurdist trailing off, or parodying, of an ending, one that not only further highlights the clown-based action of the final Act, but also represents the action of the play having reached an impasse. Like the end of The Mousetrap, the close of the closet scene, and indeed after Hamlet’s own Pyrrhus-parodying over the praying Claudius, this moment of promised resolution and clarity is fractured into muddled indeterminacy.

It is doubtless in part in acknowledgment of his influence that Shakespeare disinters Tarlton for a decisive cameo. That Tarlton was supposed to stalk the same nether-world as old Hamlet allowed the play to offer an alternative perspective on death and transform its (base) model and structure. This the play repeatedly does in its reveling in the theatrical, the comic and the supposedly vulgar in its groundbreaking, thrillingly entertaining, pursuit of the serious. Moreover, this innovation is further encoded and expressed in the actual on-stage breaking of
ground, during Act 5’s clowning around in the graveyard, from which the spirit of comedy in Yorick is resurrected.

TARLTON’S RESURRECTION

The reintroduction of the comic element at the opening of Act 5 marks a further and pronounced tonal shift in the play even as the scene is inextricably situated around, and focused on, death and the decay of the material body. One possible staging would have had the Ghost of Hamlet itself initially rising ominously, back to the audience, from the trap-door in the stage floor. Now the same trap-door is a grave from which two clowns pop up, and into which Ophelia will be placed: the scene is an extended clownish interpolation of the type Hamlet disparages, and a space consciously opened up amid the impending carnage to dig into questions of mortality. In plot terms, the lengthy scene (295 lines in the Folio, including the funeral and fight with Laertes) tells us only that Hamlet is returned and Laertes is angry but largely compliant to Claudius. However, prior to the entry of the funeral party (at line 211), we see the mobilization of comic forms in an extended investigation of human mortality, physical decomposition and regeneration. Time and again the play has used displays of verbal wit to foreground and alert its auditors to the malleability of language: its double meanings, its capacity for directness, and equally for opacity and deceit. Here, in three extraordinary interactions, laughter and death jostle alongside each other, and the language of material reality is mined for what it can tell us of central human concerns. Human life is shown as an arc emerging and returning to the earth, a shape that the scene’s structure apes, its contents describe, and from which the prince draws solace and more.
The scene in fact digs into the language of dust and dirt, like the clown itself lowly and worthless by some measures, but constitutive of human existence. In Act 2, Hamlet quibbled with Polonius’ question about what he was reading—“What’s the matter my lord?”—replying, “Between who” (2.2.193-4) rather than with the topic of which he reads. Here in the graveyard, Shakespeare has the words interrogate the matter of matter at an almost granular level. Here dirt is not its usual thing of naught, it is made up of dust and of earth, “humus” (to use De Grazia’s term), organic if not quite alive, and throwing up examples “gross as earth” of human potential and destiny. This scene, as I suggested earlier, dissolves the genre and thematic boundaries within the play as its discussion of genre finds common cause with the play’s primary concern with enduring in the face of debilitating loss. The Bakhtinian sense of laughter is replete with those regenerative associations, as it literally laughs in the face of death, rubs itself with funeral ashes, and is evoked here as throughout the play by its representative, the clown. The cumulative effect, reinforced by the timely eruption of Tarlton’s skull and spirit out of the ground, allows the endlessly ruminating Hamlet to cease talking and find the peace to say “The rest is silence” (5.2.363). The master maker of entrances facilitates the great prevaricator in making his final exit.

The broad movements of the scene are the three interactions alluded to above—that between the two clowns, then Hamlet and the gravedigger, then Hamlet with Yorick and Horatio—each a conscious mobilization of comic forms not to obscure but to elucidate the play’s heart, followed by the arrival of the funeral party. Prior to the funeral procession, little is advanced in terms of plot, yet the ground is being prepared for Ophelia’s burial, the resting place for her physical being as her soul transitions from this realm to the next. It hardly needs stating that Hamlet perceives himself as on that same trajectory, the human condition intensified by his
theatrical situation that defines but somehow doesn’t limit him. Out of that long sequence of playing and digging in the dirt comes Hamlet’s extraordinary reckoning:

Imperious Caesar, dead and turn’d to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.
Oh that the earth which kept the world in awe
Should patch a wall t’expel the winter’s flaw (206-9).

Man here, and not just any man but the exemplary man, is reduced to his constituent organic elements, once again the doggerel rhyme evoking Tarlton’s themes. Here then, the graveyard sequence has profoundly modified Hamlet’s thinking in his earlier “What a piece of work is a man!” (2.2), speech where he settles on “the quintessence of dust” in answer. Facilitated by the scene’s festival or carnival of clowning, around the resurrected Tarlton, the play achieves its incredible shift in perspective. James Calderwood, without crediting the clown, sees Hamlet at the end of the play reversing the direction of his earlier speech and:

Seeing man not merely as a god that descends to dust but as dust that ascends towards god. [Wherein the] final ascent cannot be made, it seems, until one has experienced in person the preparatory descent. Then death becomes a part of one’s life, and spiritual paralysis is transformed into readiness.  

This alchemical shift, the former Pico della Mirandola “levelled” to become the site of a bottom-up providential rise, takes the play from revenge into restorative territory for prince and audience. It is the culmination of Shakespeare’s transformation of clown banter into extraordinary word play, that, with homonyms, double meanings and rich associations, build up cumulatively into an extended philosophical meditation. This rich and nuanced process mirrors the way that Shakespeare layers his innovative play over the bones of his now lost source, similarly transforming base matter. In prefacing the play’s climax in a flurry of action and death, Shakespeare takes two hundred lines to attend to his own plot, in the gardening sense: he tills
with base matter, earth and clown, opposes the serious with its resolute opposite, and offers a perspective where the grave is less final. Much as this now-active materiality nods to Lucretian atomism, and anticipates twentieth century physics (no matter is destroyed or created), the material disinterment of Yorick’s skull and all it represents makes explicit that the scene is also an evocation of rich Bakhtinian laughter, one last exploration of genre before Hamlet accepts his allotted role as a revenge hero. In pulling Tarlton out of Purgatory, the line between life and death is, as with old Hamlet, suggested as permeable, and unspeakable loss is met with acceptance and almost tangible, restorative hope.

As I invoked earlier, in Richard II, Shakespeare has already associated royalty and responsibility (and death) with the clown and the “antic.” In telling “sad stories of the death of kings”, Richard opines:

For within the hollow of the crown
   That rounds the mortal temples of a king /
   Keeps death his court, and there the antic sits,
   Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp
   Allowing him a breath, a little scene. (3.2.160-64, italics added)

The image is of a mocking court jester, at one and the same time creating and filling a space that staves off inevitable death and allows for a short performance. The “antic” is at once a discrete entity and internalized into the king by his donning of the crown, literal or otherwise—he doesn’t need to be wearing it to suffer its weight. The first 200 lines of Act 5 in Hamlet is just such a “little scene,” one that aligns laughter inextricably with death, where Hamlet’s princely status is leveled, in part, by sharing the stage with other clowns, both living and dead.

Greenblatt describes the Senecan revenge plot in Hamlet as seeming, “to rise up from the twisted ruins of the purgatorial system,” when, after the Reformation, Catholic burial
practices, not least the selling of indulgences for the relief of souls suffering in purgatory, were proscribed. Hamlet’s trapped state between compulsion and action, order and execution, is in part created by the tension between the Senecan injunction for revenge being incompatible with modern moral and Christian attitudes. Contemporary Protestant teaching extolled looking within one’s self and one’s soul rather than to external rituals, fripperies, or indulgences for consolation and understanding. As De Grazia adroitly phrases it, “‘Hamlet’s ‘inwardness’ is the dramatic counterpart to the historical Luther’s, ‘introversion of the soul upon itself.’” While many twentieth-century critics see Shakespeare as anticipating their psychology, seventeenth century audiences saw their material, mortal and spiritual concerns reflected back at them in Burbage’s frantic but sincere clown play. Having been instructed not to “seek for thy noble father in the dust” (1.2.71), Hamlet can only find peace once he has realized the perspective on mortality that accepts that “the dust” is the destination for all. This acceptance of the fate of man’s mortal remains is accompanied by a renewed belief in providence or his place in a greater design, a consolation facilitated by and found in the figure of Tarlton. This evokes, in a not so “little scene” before the onslaught of inevitable death, the sound of laughter in its richest Bakhtinian sense, and the irrepressible spirit of comedy.

The cause of Ophelia’s death is the occasion for traditional clown fooling as established by the Gravedigger’s opening line: “Is she to be buried in Christian burial, when she willfully seeks her own salvation?” (5.1.1). As we have seen demonstrated by Hamlet, the clowns’ jesting allows them to speak things otherwise unutterable, here demonstrated in the Second Clown’s comment, “Will you ha the truth an’t? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o’ Christian burial” (23-5). As Greenblatt argues: “[t]his dispute over Ophelia’s funeral ceremony is an instance of an overarching phenomenon in Hamlet: the disruption or
poisoning of virtually all rituals for managing grief, allaying personal and collective anxiety, and restoring order.” At the same time, though, the scene addresses that anxiety head on, the multiple clown figures through their word-play, their presence and evocations, expound on and defiantly celebrate, ideas of human life as essentially one with the earth on which the actors stand (scattered across the stage by the initial tossing up of skulls). The gravedigger’s reply first acknowledges the class injustice of Ophelia’s sanctified grave—that he is standing in—and then sets up a discussion of the biblical Adam that collapses the difference between gentle and common man: “Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers - they hold up Adam's profession” (29-31). The line is followed by the stage direction, “He digs,” before second clown seeks clarification asking, “was he a gentleman?” to be told, “[He] was the first to ever bear arms” (33). Curiously, the Folio is the only version that lets the Clown unpack his pun: “What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the scriptures? The scripture says Adam digged. Could he dig without arms” (35). The pun, perhaps groan-inducing then as now, plays on the idea of a gentleman having a coat of arms, and wittily inverts the proverbial idea of there being no gentlemen before the Fall by implying rather that there were none but gentlemen. The answer to the clown’s follow-up question “[who] builds stronger than either the mason the shipwright, or the carpenter?” (l.41-2) is, of course, the “grave-maker [for the] houses he makes last til doomsday” (l.58-9). Before Hamlet has even entered, the dug earth has leveled the supposed distinction of class and shown man’s mortal life as a brief span on a larger arc. Not to miss an opportunity for delay, comic business and laughter and doing if not saying more than is set down for him, Halliwell suggests a “stage tradition perhaps dating back Shakespeare’s players [which] had Clown 1 strip off a dozen waistcoats before beginning to dig.” If he did (and what a way for Robert Armin to announce his arrival) Burbage had little
ground to criticize him for it. In the ensuing lines, man’s association with the earth is manifest repeatedly, and, like Richard II’s antic, death is held at bay for a little scene that restates and re-situates the play’s concern with the line between life and death, in what C.S. Lewis calls “surely the strangest comic relief ever written.”

When Hamlet and Horatio enter the First Gravedigger is singing: his song follows his life cycle from amorous youth to his now-aged condition for which a grave is ‘meet’ or appropriate. Q1 has again intriguing variants from the longer texts. The first of these is found in Hamlet’s first line: “Has this fellow any feeling of himselfe, (“of his business” in Q2 and F) / That is thus merry in making of a grave” (Q1.16. 36-7 italics added) rather than “that he sings at Grave-making” (F.1.65-6). Hamlet’s “merry” echoes its use by Ophelia, and the gravedigger’s song—and his throwing up of skulls—frames Hamlet and Horatio as they quibble over the bones they see, beginning with; “That skull had a tongue in it once,” (174), which prepares for the extraordinary discussion that follows. Pertinent to questions of degree and class being collapsed by death, as seen in the gravedigger’s invocation of Adam, is Hamlet’s comment that the skull being, “knocked about the mazard with a sexton’s spade” (88) might have been that of a lord or a lady. He continues: “Here’s fine revolution and we had the trick to see’t. Did these bones cost no more a breeding but to play loggets with them” (89-91). The wheel of fortune is evoked, and the superiority of breeding bathetically collapsed by the comparison of the gravediggers throwing of the bones to “loggets”, a variant of bowls, involving throwing wooden pieces as close to a stake in the ground as possible. The thought prompts a further speech of some fifteen prose lines wherein Hamlet turns over its implications. Here, as so often, Hamlet is being thorough, rehearsing ideas that will be developed and animate the scene once he decides to “speak to this fellow” (115) and engage the clown. As he does so, Hamlet steps into the role left by the second
gravedigger-clown, and he and the remaining gravedigger tussle over which of them is the
dominant partner. Hamlet’s disinherintance, his land-plot, makes him a prince and not a king here,
but the scene remains a defiant celebration of the supposedly “mongrel” mingling of class and
genre distinction.

Hamlet’s interaction with the gravedigger draws its comic power initially from great
bathetic literalism that frustrates the prince but delights the audience. In a rude clash of status
and genre forms the tragic hero asks the common clown, “Whose grave’s this sirrah?” to be told
“Mine, sir,” (115-7) before the clown returns to his song and his work. In what follows Hamlet
tells him he ‘liest’ and they quibble on the two senses of ‘lie’ (a deceit and the present tense of
lay). Immediately we are in the same world of slippery meanings and desire for directness and
truth found in the court of the previous acts. The gravedigger is far from duplicitous or
malevolent. Rather he is blithely unconcerned as to who Hamlet might be, and the comedy arises
from his literalness in the face of expected clarity and deference. In dilatory dialogue that,
characteristically, manages to arrest any sense of progression or dramatic development, the
clown’s vitality comes perversely from his directness:

HAMLET. What man dost thou dig for?
GRAVEDIGGER. For no man, sir.
HAMLET. What woman then?
GRAVEDIGGER. For none neither.
HAMLET. Who is to be buried in’t?
GRAVEDIGGER. One that was a woman, sir; but rest her soul she’s dead
HAMLET. How absolute the knave is. We must speak by the card or equivocation will
undo us. (126- 134).

“By the card” here, means strictly or accurately, and “equivocation” carries both the plain sense
of ambiguous use of words, and also “the sinister sense, with intent to deceive.”227 Hamlet
suggests that he and Horatio must match the gravedigger’s “absolute” directness, as his posing of the questions with insufficient stricture had left room for linguistic uncertainty within the knave’s supposed directness. This exchange quickly establishes their status and comic relationship while priming the audience’s ear for renewed nuanced wordplay. Integral to the power of the scene is the parsing of meanings, words used for their ability to strike two or more meanings simultaneously in the attentive ear. Without addressing them directly, Hamlet is still the audience’s guide, and Burbage’s performance would have encompassed and fed off them. Once on stage, Hamlet is the dominant character, and everything is perceived by how it relates to him. In probing the gravedigger about his trade, Hamlet’s own name comes up, “he that is mad and sent into England” (144). Enjoying his anonymity, Hamlet asks why he was sent there. The irony of his not being recognized is replaced by a joke at the audience’s expense that also speaks to Hamlet’s representative function: if he, “recover his wits there. Or if [he] do not, ‘tis no great matter there. … Twill not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he” (146-51). Hamlet’s condition is the English condition.

Prior to Act 5 Hamlet sought sanctuary in words, mobilizing clown procrastination and licensed by his role to talk as much as he liked in order to escape the violent demands of action and hold off death’s uncertainty. Here in the graveyard, most of the words uttered are intently focused on the material condition of man and his relationship to the earth and to land. It is as if death goes from something discussed as abstract, distant, and to be feared to being revealed as everywhere, in the dirt on the hands and under the feet of the characters, a tangible and an ongoing presence in life. De Grazia argues persuasively that the “language of the play itself upholds the attachment of persons to land, human to humus,” going on to say that Hamlet’s, “disengagement from the land-driven plot is the very precondition of modernity ascribed to him
The land plot traps Hamlet: it places him in the position of the exilic fool belonging everywhere but nowhere, and is the catalyst for Hamlet’s adoption of the antic disposition, a physical representation of his clown status and a manifestation of the impossibility of moving forward with his injunction to action. His disengagement with the land plot historically would facilitate Hamlet epitomizing the skeptical human mind rather than just his own local situation. However, through Shakespeare’s mobilization of clown forms, specifically and cumulatively employed in service of the “necessary question(s) of the play,” Clown Prince Hamlet already serves as the audience’s representative. Like Falstaff before him, Hamlet’s skeptical attitude is built into his clown aspect. Hamlet’s mode of enquiry, his supposed interiority, and the play’s “inexhaustible verbal energies,” will become central to the developing cultural and intellectual landscape of the next centuries. In that process the play’s sophisticated engagement with earlier popular forms, epitomized in Yorick and the prince himself, like the land-plot will be obscured, in the march of progress and, dare we say, the “serious?”

De Grazia’s attention to the complexity of word play throughout the play would not be beyond an intelligent early attendee at the play, aware that they are seeing a new twist to an old model. In prefacing Yorick’s disinterment, I want to draw attention to De Grazia’s etymological comments about Hamlet’s very name and the language of the land, as these, I argue facilitate the play’s synthesis of the mobilization of comic forms with its larger design, the appropriated and transformed Revenge Tragedy and the inevitability of death. Throughout her reclamation of the play De Grazia considers three different derivations of the prince’s name, firstly saying:

Amidst so many instances of the close kinship between human and humus, man and manor, land and entitlement, dominus and domus, even the protagonist’s name begins to
Hamme … derives from the Germanic word for home. A hamlet is a cluster of homes: a kingdom in miniature.\textsuperscript{231}

In Bakhtin’s terms the clown, as embodiment of medieval laughter, is a figure of the community and here consciously or otherwise, Shakespeare has literalized that association.

The extent to which Shakespeare knew the Norse legend that constitutes the earliest known version of the Hamlet story cannot be reliably ascertained, and may only have been indirect through the Ur-Hamlet.\textsuperscript{232} Speculation aside, there is no ghost in Saxo: it was likely an innovation of the Ur-Hamlet given the contemporary allusions to the figure crying “Revenge,” and Saxo’s prince has to wait years before avenging his father. In the interim, he assumes what De Grazia calls, “the idiocy implied by his name in Old Norse: Amlodi, “a fool, ninny, an idiot, trickster feigning simplicity.”\textsuperscript{233} The clown here is etymologically at the very heart of Hamlet’s identity, his name. Moreover, the definition encompasses both Elizabethan senses of clown, as rustic idiot and as professional ‘feigner’ of folly. For the English, Tarlton was the figure who combined these two senses or identities in one person, and he is the physical and human link between Hamlet as merely subtle Vice figure and fully realized clown prince. Regardless of whether Shakespeare knew the obscure Norse etymology or not, Tarlton made Hamlet possible.

In superimposing a new play over an old one, which suggested the antic disposition but not a solution for the hero’s dilemma, Shakespeare built on his confidence and belief in clowning’s power and popularity. In the absence of Kemp, Tarlton’s successor, Shakespeare would have Burbage incorporate his practice, his energy and his associations, possible by virtue of Burbage’s skill and the two actors’ years of close professional association. In addition, in transforming his revenger’s perspective from retribution to restoration, Shakespeare calls on the spirit of Tarlton to facilitate the transition. Kemp as Falstaff, in the earlier Henry IV plays, had rehearsed many of the necessary clown tropes in the service of dramatic sophistication, and doubtless brought the
house down during his many glorious scenes with Burbage as Hal. In Hamlet the two figures, the
king-in-waiting and his attendant clown, are absorbed into one.

The last of De Grazia’s etymological un-earthings concerns man’s mythical origins in
relation to the gravedigger’s evoking of Eden, and Adam specifically, from the Bible’s Book of
Genesis. In the First Clown’s construction, not only does Adam dig—and thereby figure as both
common and gentle—he is also constituted from the earth, his wife from his hip. De Grazia
makes the connection emphatic, reminding us that “Adameh” is the “Hebrew word for clay,” and
that Hamlet, “plays on the primal cognomen when he refers to that clayey piece of work [man] as
a ‘quintessence of dust’”234 (2.2.308). Quite separate but inextricable from the physical
manifestation of Burbage’s performance then, and before Yorick is exhumed and his spirit
evoked, Hamlet’s very name encodes a sense of community, as well as the idea of the fool, idiot
or clown, that effectively describes the community of spectatorship in which his application of
clown forms have situated him dramatically, or theatrically. Hamlet’s representative position
also encompasses man’s fallen and earthbound state, from ashes to ashes, and to bring De
Grazia’s etymological dig full circle, as it were, I restate that the word “clown” is itself a
development of ‘clod’, as in a farm worker—a boor in the crude unmannered sense. William
Willeford explains the linguistic connection by way of the rustic’s effect on others “boors being
funny to townsman—[hence] a funny fellow.”235 At the same time “clod” is a word for soil or
earth, usually in a clump or mass. As such, in addition to all of the above, the clown is a
constituent part of the earth, the humus of humanity. With that said, let us turn to the play’s
second bursting of cerements, and the insight and acquiescence Yorick’s mortal remains afford.
All three texts of the play have Hamlet ask “Whose was it?”, while Q1 has “Whose scull was this?” and is the only text to intriguingly suggest that Hamlet should know the answer rather than guess:

CLOWNE. This, a plague on him, a madde rogue it was. He powred once a whole flagon of Rhenish on my head. Why do you not know him? This was one Yoricke’s scull (Q1.16, 104-7, italics added).

In all three extant versions the gravedigger assumes that everyone knows Yorick, even as he doesn’t follow up his name here, as he does in Q2 and F, with the explanatory “the king’s jester.” The gravedigger’s description of Yorick as a “rogue” suggests the clown’s and player’s outsider status, while the Rhenish spilling suggests Tarlton’s possible origins in, and professional familiarity with, tavern and court culture. The wine anecdote is also a vibrant image of disruption enacted, and the indecorous sorry dampness of the victim implied, worthy of the great improviser. Beyond even that, the story speaks to a reality in the London theatre personnel, here being evoked, that is in itself a rebirth. If, as seems likely, Robert Armin, the clown who replaced Kemp, played the gravedigger role, then the image also serves as a literal and figurative secular baptism: the older clown, Tarlton, passes on his disruptive spirit in an act of upsetting wine over the younger (and newly arrived) comic’s head. A more literal passing of the torch moment features in Tarlton’s Jests under the title How Tarlton made Armin his adopted sonne to succeed him.236 The Rhenish anecdote then is pseudo-biographical, and further serves the play’s themes of regeneration, renewal and the resilience and resurrection of the clown spirit. In the context of this chapter, and of Kemp’s departure from the company, this line’s inclusion, funny in itself with no further context, is an astonishingly nuanced and densely working display of a “passing of the torch” moment, contrived with great economy (in a scene and a play with clowning at its very heart) to welcome and introduce the new clown. That it features at all further suggests a
strong affinity between the playwright and the dead clown. If Shakespeare and Tarlton were in the Queen’s Men together, however briefly, in the early 1580’s, then, as Anthony Burgess suggests, “the old clown may metaphorically have carried the young playwright on his back.”

We then arrive at Hamlet’s recognition of the clown, and the mixed feelings it evokes. Q2 adds the inquisitive “Let me see” before the customary “Alas, poor Yorick” (5.1.177). But the “fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy” (178-9) is transformed, and now abhors the very faculty it previously delighted, Hamlet’s imagination. He is held between feelings of pleasing nostalgia and nauseous revulsion, as he says, “my gorge rises at it” (181). Capturing more than his personal feelings this passage encompasses both cultural energies in the one moment: those who would banish the clown and those who miss his presence. *Hamlet* encodes Shakespeare’s awareness of what is being lost in the new less capacious forms of theatre, and exposes the fictions of decorum on stage, and by clear implication socially and politically.

It is in the discussion of Alexander as dust that follows immediately after the contemplation of Yorick where Peter Sacks sees Hamlet’s, “reflections on mortality assume something of a providential cast.” Hamlet is still holding the skull, he refers to it as ‘this’ and then smells it, prompting Q2’s, “pah” and the Folio’s, “Puh.” It is in this moment, not of intellectual contemplation of, but in sensual connection with the skull, that the clown’s resurrection is connected with the hero’s conception of ongoing renewal or rallying of faith, and in which the play’s classical and Christian stances, previously at paradoxical odds, linguistically morph into the language of providence, readiness and silence. Greenblatt describes the moment thus:

This is the primal and elementary nausea provoked by the vulnerability of matter, a nausea that reduces language to a gagging sound … “Pah”. This revulsion is not an end in itself; it is the spiritual precondition of a liberated spirit that finds a special providence in
the fall of a sparrow, sacrificially fulfills the father’s design, and declares that the readiness is all.239

Hamlet’s attitude in Act 5 is far distant from that of the tortured avenger who like Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* might fatalistically rage: “O no, there is no end. The end / Is death and madness” (3.2.165-6). Shakespeare’s transformation of his sources requires a different fate, in spirit if not in kind, for its hero. Sacks sees Hamlet’s sense of “a divinity that shapes our ends,” (5.2. 215-6) as the second aspect of the change underway in the scene. The first he outlines as Hamlet learning to integrate or reconcile, “what had earlier been his opposed perspective on individual and general mortality,” continuing:

His intimate confrontation with individual death in the form of Yorick’s skull prompts not so much a self-centered complaint as a generalizing philosophical view of human mortality, precisely the view of Nature’s “common theme” that he had so fiercely rejected at the beginning of the play.240

The result of these two aspects combined is that “Hamlet acquiesces finally to a received design.” Yorick and Alexander between them reconcile the impossibility of action that has hitherto held up resolution of the plot. This understanding is bound up with a recognition of temporal perspective and inescapable destiny: the clown and emperor reflect equally constitutive elements of the person of the prince, and their figured remains the common fate of humanity.

Immediately prior to the rhymed verse about “Caesar dead and turned to clay [stopping] a hole to keep the wind away” (212-3), Hamlet explains his logic in tracing, “the noble dust of Alexander til he find it stopping a bunghole” (204):

Alexander died: Alexander was buried: Alexander returneth into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make Lome, and why of that lome (whereto he was converted) might they not stop a Beere-barrel? (209-12)

Hamlet’s first soliloquy cries off his wish for his body to “thaw, and dissolve itself into a dew” (1.2.130); Sacks describes this as Hamlet yearning for “actual deliquescence to become…a
purified or distilled force that involves individual death but also has the power to survive extinction,” adding that, “dew may connote spiritual purity, but it retains its earlier relation to the immortal seminal potency on which almost all images for the spirit subsequently have been based.” Hamlet’s desire in this is thwarted by divine injunction and material reality. Instead, of impossible essence he is faced with ubiquitous dust and dirt, and in this realization of the “base uses” to which we all “return” (200), Hamlet finds providential ordering and accepts his place and role. Here Shakespeare’s mobilization of clown forms throughout, and in disinterring Yorick, has made possible such consummate, all-but-tangible, theatrical transubstantiation.

Theme and form fuse in resolution: Adam, evoked early in the scene through the clown’s digging and marked by his fallen state, is both primogenitor and of the same stuff as all of us that his Hebrew name invokes: clay.

Hamlet’s droll versifying on his new theme ends abruptly when he sees the funeral procession, recognizing the king and registering that it is Ophelia they follow. With the entrance of the funeral party, the tone shifts equally abruptly back into grand tragic mode. The gravedigger may have exited, or remained head bowed; absent or mute and contained. In the words/action paradigm established in the play, Laertes is all action, in Sacks’ phrase, “frantically ready to prove his grief in deeds not words,” and, in revenge lore, to quote from The Spanish Tragedy, “Where words prevail not, violence prevails” (2.1.110). Before the play’s violent denouement, however, there is still time for the struggle over Ophelia’s grave. Q1 and F both have the stage direction that Laertes “leaps in [to] the grave,” only Q1 indicates that Hamlet follows him, but this action is supported both by the common sense exigencies of staging (he either leaps in or Laertes leaps out, there is no time in the dialogue for any third alternative), and, by an anonymous Funeral Elegy for Burbage that enthuses:
Oft have I seen him leap into the grave
Suiting the person, which he seem'd to have,
Of a mad lover, with so true an eye,
That there I would have sworn he meant to die.²⁴³

One of only two extant references to Burbage’s performance as Hamlet, the elegy helps elucidate how the fight in the grave, what Sacks calls a “grotesque funeral game,”²⁴⁴ figures the transition from comic to tragic in that moment and on the same physical site as witnessed the delightful fooling and the clown’s resurrection. For the anonymous poet who saw the scene more than once, Burbage’s leap was informed with the intensity of his love for Ophelia. Oft considered one of Hamlet’s chief crimes against decorum, the moment is actually full of pathos, drama and heroism. With tragic irony, despite the depth of his feelings apparent to the audience, the leap merely confirms to Laertes and the royal party that Hamlet continues in his madness and concomitantly deprives his protestations about Ophelia of their sincerity. A mad man is incapable of seriousness. Hamlet’s actions cannot, of course, bring Ophelia back, rather they only further seal his fate and hasten the return of action and death.

The tussle in the grave serves one further purpose in that it adds to the sense of what Sacks describes as Laertes’ “irreligious depravity,”²⁴⁵ against which Hamlet’s role in the duel, and his finally killing of Claudius, becomes, if not blameless then justified, destiny and tragedy rather than moral monstrosity. Fortinbras, the other prince against whom Hamlet compares himself, while always seen on a war footing, respects the command not to attack Denmark and, as such, in this moral schema, inherits the kingdom, worthy of the prince’s “dying voice.” Hamlet’s dying words express the desire to be remembered by violent words, where his father demanded remembrance through violent action, and with this the transformation of the revenge hero is complete.
There is one more opportunity for the restless spirit of comedy to defy its expulsion and for the clown in Hamlet that would always be speaking to come out. As De Grazia notes, in the Folio there is an utterance not found in other texts:

between the “silence” (363) that is his last word and the cardiac “crack” (364) that sounds his final passing, he is given his last chance to exceed the script. “O, o, o, o” reserves for the player-playing-Hamlet a final opportunity to indulge that “most pitiful ambition” of holding on to the stage.246

Burbage—indeed any player-playing Hamlet—is no doubt exhausted by this point, but the whole performance has lead up to this, his final moment, the hero’s death. Aware in his death pangs of those that stand “but mutes or audience” to him, he has one more moment to work his effect on them all, for his death must exhibit “quality.”

Disinterring Yorick facilitates the play’s detailed meditation on, and analysis of, the language of decomposition, loss and futility. In evoking the power of medieval laughter and its class barrier-crossing representative Tarlton, the play links the language of decomposition with the restorative power of laughter and Bakhtinian regeneration. As much as the first spirit to “walk in death” (1.1.141) inspires awe, dread and wonder, the second spirit, Yorick, the spirit of comedy, invigorates and fortifies the audience with his own sense of common humanity. A further commendatory verse in News Out Of Purgatorie calls Tarlton “lord of mirth,” exalting his and his subject’s status, then suggesting “who in his grave, still laughing, gapes.”247

Tarlton’s laughter might be heard from beyond death. Yorick facilitates Hamlet’s final phase, his casting off the role he assumed and acceptance of the one he was created for. He has found, amidst the din of deceit, the debilitating pain of what Nietzsche called his “insight into truth,”248 and his dread of what happens to the soul, the “readiness” for and “providence” of his inevitable passing (5.5.215-18). In this, Hamlet stands for each of his audience, as they are and as they hope to be, reconciled with the natural fear of death by a force as strong and as enduring. Their
mingling the atomic reaction that powers it, prompting interest with its mid-afternoon invocation of night and the crude theatricality of a ghost, the play sustains the interest—in a plot about inaction—by turns probing mortality and generating laughter. On this great stage of fools astride a grave, the spirit of comedy, even if hydraulically repressed, will erupt like one of Tarlton’s “flashes of merriment” or one of Kemp’s exuberant pratfalls, with visceral shock and tension releasing power: a rhetorical fart at a family funeral. The sublime enhanced by the stain of the ridiculous.
CHAPTER 4. “THE WORST RETURNS TO LAUGHTER,” TRANSFORMATION THROUGH COLLABORATION AND TEXTUAL VARIATION, ROBERT ARMIN AS LEAR’S FOOL

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep,
And go the fools among.

*King Lear* (1.4.171-4)

*King Lear*, like *Hamlet*, thwarted emerging neoclassical ideals of dramatic production by entwining the tragic figure at the center of the play with that of the clown/fool, not simply “mingling” but utterly enmeshing kings and clowns. And yet, in the middle of the play, the Fool in *King Lear* suddenly vanishes—exiled from the drama of which he has been such an essential part. As many have noted, the exit of the Fool from the stage of the play, however we might make sense of it in terms of doubled parts or thematic trajectories, uncannily anticipates the historical trajectory of the role itself. It is worth recalling that when Nahum Tate famously re-wrote *King Lear* in 1681 in order to please rather than upset an audience by inserting a happy ending, he also omitted, importantly, the Fool from the play completely. We can certainly understand the need for a happy ending in a play that stretched tragedy to its limits, but what problem might Lear’s Fool have posed such that he was exiled from the stage for over 150 years, until William Charles Macready’s production of 1838. Such a question must lead us back beyond the long conflated editions of *King Lear*, which, of course, failed to clearly distinguish between the 1608 Quarto and the 1623 Folio (hereafter Q and F) to consider the significance of
variants for our understanding of the potential of the figure the fool for a radical rethinking of tragedy and tragic drama.251

Central to the play’s design and first reception is not simply the character of the fool itself, but the person for whom the role was written, actor Robert Armin. A small man, a student of the earlier clown tradition but also an innovator, Armin’s skill set was based in his wit and verbal sophistication, along with his musical and singing prowess, a persona that distinguished his clowning from that of the recently departed Will Kemp. However, to adopt an analogy from an early biographer, while his witty persona was not of the breed despised by Hamlet (and the real-life arbiters of taste for whom he stood), it was, importantly, of the same genus.252 Through ongoing practical collaboration with Armin, Shakespeare would continue to harness and innovate with the clown/fool’s vitality, popularity, and radically destabilizing power. Crucially, Armin, like Kemp, could hold the stage next to the charismatic leading actor Richard Burbage, and Shakespeare would continue to court the inherent theatricality and instability of juxtaposing their complementary crowd-pleasing skills. I contend that for Shakespeare, placing Armin’s Fool alongside Burbage’s Lear in act 3 of King Lear facilitates the culmination of the process of introjection of clown by king and of comic forms into tragic modes that we have seen throughout this dissertation. Whereas Burbage’s Hamlet absorbed and internalized Kemp’s practice in the clown’s absence, Armin’s folly is at once absorbed by the king and his condition presented as endemic to the political and social worlds of the entire play. As such, the Fool in Lear emerges as the culmination of Shakespeare’s project of clown/prince inter-animation examined in this dissertation, an expression of his ongoing engagement and commitment to inclusive modes of storytelling, and a rejection of emergent, and exclusive, ideals. Armin at Burbage’s side, troubling the King’s epic myopia, like Falstaff with Hal the previous decade, challenges
assumptions of decorum and genre-purity; an act of aesthetic, moral, and political subversion in the service of an expansive and inclusive world vision.

Even since Gary Taylor and Michael Warren made the important and persuasive case that the 1608 and 1623 versions of *King Lear* were two separate and distinct texts, the Fool’s role has become all the more complicated to parse. Attempting to counter a revisionist critical consensus that the Folio was essentially a more “perfect” (corrected and amended) version of the Quarto, Robert Hornback argued for the virtues of the earlier text in itself. Specifically, Hornback asserts that the Quarto Fool is exemplary of the “artificial” fool roles characteristic of Armin’s wit and persona, and exploited the vogue for these roles onstage in the early 1600s. This wit and persona, Armin’s particular contribution, facilitated Shakespeare’s ongoing investigation of comic forms in a reimagined and revivified guise, once the earlier tradition of stage-clowning had been excised as intolerably base and indecorous, (like the hacks who wrote for them) in the eyes of the emergent university-educated playwrights and their aristocratic patrons in thrall to classical precedent. Without doubt the roles of Touchstone in *As You Like It* (c.1599) and Feste in *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601-02) explicitly illustrate the passing of the comic mantle from Kemp to Armin and are thus important antecedents for the Fool in *King Lear*. Both characters are indeed (ostensibly) “artificial fools,” whose distinctive license to speak openly to their superiors is consciously explained to the audience by Jacques and Viola/Cesario respectively. Pointing out the pun inherent in the pronunciation of Jacques’ name, Anthony Burgess deftly captures this transition stating, “if the groundlings wanted lavatory mirth, then they should have it in a very refined form,” as the scatological clown becomes the acerbic Fool. Of course, the idea of the Fool’s license or privilege to speak, in the tradition of royal jester, had cultural currency in England dating back to Henry VIII and beyond back into mythic
Merlin at Arthur’s court, but the character still needed (re)introducing, and careful distinguishing from his unfashionable predecessor. 257

Biographer Charles’ Felver describes Touchstone in terms that precisely capture the character’s verbal dexterity and ebullience, and that apply equally to Feste and Lear’s Fool:

...comfortable at court, [full of] pithy [sayings, and] proverbial lore, [Touchstone] glances at different meanings of words and situations at every turn. He can never be fully understood if taken literally. Moreover, Touchstone is so conscious of the ambiguities of words and situations that he cannot resist verbal effects even when they are lost on the listener. 258

Each of these phrases resonates afresh when transferred beyond the comic realm and into Lear. There the ambiguities of words and situations are stretched to breaking point, there is no court nor comfort to be had, and the language of Lear’s Fool—taken literally or otherwise—is lost on the king and hotly disputed by those who would explicate it.

Hornback, then, alerted us to the important contemporary distinction between “natural” and “artificial” fools in the period: the former marked by physical and intellectual limits, the latter by cleverness and embodied by Armin. While the turn to performance was laudable, Hornback only further solidified the idea of Armin as a new kind of clown that was dramatically different from the unsophisticated earlier breed. Certainly there was a profound shift in emphasis and practice. However, as I will show, by overemphasizing the distinction between the ‘bitter” artificial fool and the “sweet” natural, he underplayed the complexity of Armin’s craft. In addition, Hornback’s reading of the two extant versions of King Lear misses how the latter amplifies the former, precisely by depending upon complicating the distinction between natural and artificial. While Shakespeare characteristically wrote with particular actors in mind, I want to assert that his relationship with Armin was peculiarly collaborative, and that the changes between the two versions of Lear reflect this creative rapport. Hornback is correct to praise the
Quarto Fool as a model of Armin’s artificial fool persona, but he does not see in the Folio Shakespeare following the implications of Armin’s mutability through to one version of their logical ends and application. Resistant to the idea that the Folio offers an improved text, Hornback doesn’t credit Armin’s likely involvement in what he sees as the generally “more sweetly pathetic” fool of the later version. I want to emphasize here that idiot and sophisticate, sweet and bitter, natural or artificial, are fluid not fixed qualities: they rather operate as notes sounded powerfully and selectively for dramatic effect, distinct voices in the complex developing chords of the scene that generate powerful overt or ambiguous poetic resonances, moment by moment.

The following analysis asserts that Shakespeare’s amplification of the Fool’s role, more than just illustrative of their continued collaborative practice, is at once a landmark in the developing history of stage representation, and a paean to an earlier inclusive model of theatre. This model relies on the audience’s active presence, the convention of the clown’s direct address drawing attention to their importance in continually accepting the medium’s other conventions. Emergent naturalist theatre resisted this mixing of modes, and the mirror of life it presented invited a detachment (as well as encouraging quiet) in the audience, asking to be observed not experienced, separating them and the stage, and proscribing the liminal zone between them in which the clown had traditionally played. A three-dimensional medium thus becomes a two dimensional one, the clown excised or else neutered by receding into the representative plane of the stage mirror. In Lear’s Fool, as with Kemp’s Falstaff alongside Burbage’s Hal, Shakespeare brings out the full range of his experienced clown/actor’s repertoire in the service of his grand vision.
Again, Shakespeare’s use of revivified clown forms serving his inclusive vision was a provocative act, a critique more or less hidden in plain sight. Characteristically less constrained by genre classification than intent on troubling it, Shakespeare found grounds for continued innovation whereby the clown/fool figure or principle complicates and destabilizes generic forms—figuratively and often literally talking back to genre—in a play consciously upsetting generic expectations throughout. The Fool facilitates the play’s thematic substance, at Lear’s side (or absent but evoked) he is a wounded victim of his master’s folly laboring to out-jest that master’s suffering: he epitomizes human need and (inter)dependency, but also the peculiar durability of early modern and Shakespearean theatre to court the liminal space and include the audience without diminishment, rather than to hold it at arm’s length. One effect of troubling genre is precisely to draw attention to the artificiality of, or artifice inherent in, theatrical forms, another is to index the author’s confidence in the audience’s constitutive presence. Lear’s Fool repeatedly does just this, or references the comic forms of direct address and choric commentary that do, just as he forces an unwelcome if true perspective on the King. More immediately, to the audience, if not always to Lear, the fool offers increased imaginative and emotional involvement, albeit a peculiar and tragic solace in diminished circumstances, at the intersection between the creative and receiving imaginations, the more powerful because self-conscious. In the Folio this function is further mined and exploited, and the Fool pays a heavy price for it. Shakespeare is alert to the zeitgeist: he walks the halls of palace and court as well as the space of his playhouse, and is aware that the days of Tarlton and Kemp are behind him. Perhaps he marveled at how profoundly the nature of the medium was changing, even as he was one of the great engines of that literary and theatrical change, the ultimate and enduring heir to Marlowe’s mighty line.
FROM CLOWN TO FOOL. “WOULD HE NOT BE A COMFORT TO OUR TRAVEL?”

The marked differences between Kemp and Armin, their proclivities and their practices, have lead many critics to surmise a shift from the carnivalesque inversion of Kemp’s clowns to what Hornback calls the more “normative” style of the artificial fool mocking diversions from the norm. However, to retroactively assign Kemp’s roles as those of “natural fools,” distinct from Armin’s sophisticated artifice would be an oversimplification. Rather it is important to recognize the extent to which there was an overlap in performance practice between the two, and to which Armin facilitates Shakespeare’s continued innovation and probing of comic forms in a not entirely new direction. As such, I assert that in Shakespeare’s writing for Armin, the distinction between clown forms was more malleable than many critics have acknowledged. We have already seen the supposed simple dichotomy between old and new comic forms problematized, and it is equally necessary to do the same with the distinction between natural and artificial fools. Complicating the distinction further is a material reality: Armin came to clowning as the only performance option open to him. At approximately five feet tall his diminutive size marked him as different, at once facilitating his casting as the clown and decisively informing the perception of everything he said. Wiles speaks eloquently to the semiotic implications, “Armin was obsessed with natural fools because he himself, physically though not mentally, was a natural fool….” Furthermore:

Armin’s physique determines the particular character of his clowning. The pompous or parodic utterances of a man with total control are counterpointed by a deformed body… [all his] lines are written on the assumption that body and voice are set in opposition, and speak, as it were, different languages.

Armin then, for all his sophistication, is always in some sense a natural: his profession is comic actor, famous for playing an artificial fool but physically a natural one. And, when the repertory calls for a clown, he brings his artistry and sophistication, however paradoxically, to the display
of buffoonery. Going forward, then, we must see that for all the difference between Kemp’s clowns and Armin’s fools, even when the latter was at his most artful the distinction between natural and artificial fools does not hold over the length of a play or even a scene—particularly not in *King Lear*. And, rather than limiting possibilities, Shakespeare finds in the situation the means to further innovate and access amplitudes. Specifically, into his play of and about epic scale and grandeur, he inserts a tiny man and adds a comedy of disproportion. As we shall see, Armin’s physical size is important, not least to his relationship to Cordelia, and to the need for Edgar.

Wiles describes Armin in terms that adroitly express his potential to Shakespeare and company. He was:

> [A] pioneer of realism in his study of how fools actually behaved. His stage fools were based on observation rather than on the recreation of an emblematic stage type. At the same time, and paradoxically, Armin’s interest in fool allowed Shakespeare to tap one of the richest veins in the medieval dramatic tradition: the idea that the Vice reveals vice to be folly. At the same time again, Armin was attuned to the intellectual tradition of the Renaissance which declared with Erasmus and the Fool Societies of France that the fool had his own species of wisdom, and could be used as a double-edged tool in order to satirize human manners.

Again we see how Armin’s skill-set, intellect and creative malleability made possible Shakespeare’s adaptation of the clown’s vitality into the introduction of a particular archetype on the stage—the licensed court jester becoming the stage fool. In so doing, Shakespeare is tapping into a potent, if manifestly dying, tradition of folly with deep roots in national mythology in a form that simultaneously encompassed many of the clown’s associations and practices.

So far we have considered the qualities that Armin bought with him for the creation of the role, and to these must be added two distinctly Shakespearean elements or characteristics. The first of these is the concept of the cynical philosopher-clown, and related to but distinct
from this is perhaps Shakespeare’s most subtle yet far-reaching contribution, namely the fool’s essentially displaced and dispossessed character, his estrangement from the world. In *Shakespeare’s Drama of Exile* (2003), Jane Kingsley Smith comprehensively elucidates Shakespeare’s enduring fascination with ideas of exile, and how it was part of the discourse of religious persecution, and equally of poetry and its poor relation the theatre. Exile, and its corollary banishment, were punishments associated specifically as alternatives to death, as they implied a full renunciation of place, status, and identity. Such total renunciation was the price of the court-fool’s license to speak freely. As such, in developing the fool’s self-conscious rootlessness, Shakespeare integrated Armin’s clown into his larger discourse of exile and banishment. In addition to recognizing the implications of this, we must again see the extent to which this process was reciprocal or symbiotic, developed mutually by and between player and playwright, both prior to *King Lear* and through that play’s metamorphosis from Quarto *History* to Folio *Tragedy*.

Thematically, the associations of exile will reverberate in *Lear* where Smith sees them act as “a microcosm for national dissolution,” and “a fate no man escapes.” In addition, and of direct relevance, Smith notes the literary elite similarly embracing the potential for self-reinvention and the transformation of shame into glory that the trope of exile offered. These same poets, in defending poetry from its exiling or exclusion by Plato and ongoing criticism of its worth, successfully reconfigured the debate into a question of differentiating between, in Smith’s terms, “the true and the false artist,” and in Sir Philip Sidney’s words, “banishing the abuse, not the thing.” As we have seen, this need to banish art’s abuses played itself out most directly on the late Elizabethan and Jacobean stage in the theatrical upheaval that pitted the “university wits” and their plays against the improvisatory disruption of the clown and the lowly
hacks who wrote for them. The curtailing of popular playwrights who, informed by the demotic tradition, “load the stage with stuffe, / Rak’t [raked] from the rotten [e]mbers of stale jests,” was thus part of the same process that excised the clown. The uneducated playwright is despised as much as the clown, indeed lumped in with their lowly state, himself a clown in the broader derogatory sense of not being a gentleman. (A similar leveling is found in the Prologue to Tamburlaine, where Marlowe famously promises “high astounding terms” in place of “jigging veins of rhyming mother wits, /And such conceits as clownage has in play.”) Here the demotic, be it playwright or player, is despised. The discerning auditor should exalt the “true poet,” and denigrate his popular rival, and herein, “banishment has become a fantasy through which the ‘true’ playwright gains control of the popular stage.” As such, in exiling clown/fools Shakespeare consciously has them assume the same disempowered stance as is built into poetic performance, and achieves a remarkable parallelism as the theme of exile reverberates through the play. Both Shakespeare’s deployment of the Fool and the character’s conspicuous early departure, index the writer’s ongoing engagement in this discourse of the theatre’s appropriation and transformation.

Ideas of exile are rehearsed by Shakespeare in his earlier plays with Armin. The heroines of As You Like It, Rosalind and Celia, delight in Touchstone, and determine that he will accompany them in their exile and adversity. Rosalind suggests stealing “The clownish fool out of your father’s court / Would he not be a comfort to our travel?” to which Celia tellingly responds, “He’ll go along o’er the wide world with me” (1.5.130-2). By such means, both the function of the fool and an implied intimacy is established. In Twelfth Night, Feste’s exilic status is more developed: his introduction establishes him as wanderer, he is both cursed and blessed in his position. Feste is immediately chastened for his absence by the maid Maria, “My lady will
hang thee for thy absence” (1.5.3-4), its elevated mock-seriousness intimating the scale of the offense. By such and subsequent touches, we learn that Feste shares a closeness with Olivia comparable to that which Lear’s Fool shares with Cordelia (and Lear himself) in the later play. It is precisely in presenting Touchstone and Feste as models for beloved servants, the outsider embraced, earning or given a place in the warmth of the family hearth, that Shakespeare prepares his audience for the figures’ devastating use in the tragic context of King Lear. There the exile is staged as real, exposing the characters to the elements and forcing them to feel as wretches feel. Removed from the warmth of the hearth into the cruelly inverted pastoral norms of the heath, the Fool’s pathetic babbling and his canny philosophy resonate alike for the audience, even if ineffectual in the play’s universe of tragic suffering. As widely noted, the repeated phrase of Feste’s song that ends his play “for the rain it raineth every day” is reprised on the heath by the Fool shortly before his disappearance, the comic platitude consciously and poetically bleeding into the tragic vision.

In previous chapters I discuss how Kemp’s practice established common grounds with the audience, I propose Armin—in Shakespeare’s hands—offered a quite different but equally compelling stand-in for the audience. In place of Kemp’s demotic “community of spectators,” Shakespeare accommodates Armin’s innovative persona and has him stand as a more oblique representative, his appetites universal, his wisdom hard-won, and only indexing selectively the older clown functions and forms that his Fool figures encompassed and reconstituted. I thus challenge Wiles’ assertion that Armin “does not serve as an intermediary between play and audience.” For the play texts show Armin’s clowns did employ direct address and occupy the liminal space between stage and audience, whether physically moving into the plateau space or simply turning out—Hamlet-like—with an aside. Wiles correctly identifies Armin’s social and
literary aspirations as distinct from Kemp’s overt appeal to the common man—and correctly states how these “personal aspirations are inseparable from the clown persona which each presented.”278 However, his analysis of the actor does not encompass how in Shakespeare’s hands the exile, fool or otherwise, is almost always, as Jane Kingsley Smith makes clear, a symbolically inclusive figure. Citing the example of *Sir Thomas More* as typical, Smith suggests that More’s famous speech both redefines the foreigner and insists upon the inhumanity of the banisher, thereby implying greater civility in the banished and encouraging empathy with them.279 In this manner, particularly as Feste and Lear’s Fool, Shakespeare accesses and reasserts the clown’s demotic representative function, albeit obliquely in circumstances increasingly hostile to clowning. *King Lear* is, of course, widely recognized as employing comic forms, not the least in setting up and then frustrating audience expectations.280 Lear’s Fool is the largest clown role outside of a comedy since Falstaff, a role with which it shares a similarly central and destabilizing function. More than representing the pinnacle of Shakespeare’s project of introjection or of inter-animation, his absorption of the comic into the tragic by means of the clown’s influence on the hero, in unleashing the exiled fool into the world of Lear his own state of being is revealed as universal: exile endemic and folly rampant. Armin allowed Shakespeare to continue his experimentation with popular comic modes over the course of years and to reach, in the 1623 Folio Fool, a culmination of his interest in the vitality and inclusivity of the clown figure at once worthy of its play, and announcing its departure from both ancient Britain and the contemporary London theatre scene simultaneously.
FROM QUARTO TO FOLIO: SHAKESPEARE AND ARMIN, COLLABORATION IN TRANSFORMATION

Nahum Tate likely recognized the Fool’s profound destabilizing influence and, by removing him, attempted to let the play’s embedded pastoral structures resolve themselves—from his perspective—more appropriately and naturally. His crude method, of simply excising the Fool’s lines unleashes a particular and non-Shakespearean madness, as it leaves Lear talking to himself in a near-nonsensical one-sided conversation. In so doing, Tate ironically disrupted the play’s fabric and demonstrates (retrospectively) how the clown’s disruptive role was constitutive of early modern theatre even as it was excised in the process of its birth. In place of tragic grandeur, Tate’s adaptation, ending with the union of Edgar and Cordelia, offers at every opportunity the comforts of sentimentality. Shakespeare’s revisions, specifically the changes to the Fool’s function in the Folio, offer no such simple consolation. Rather they index the play’s further generic intensification of tragedy, as reflected on their title pages from the 1608 “History of King Lear” to the 1623 “Tragedy of King Lear,” refashioning the poetic landscape leading up to the profound disruptive shock of Cordelia’s death, the tragic invocation of the Fool as her double, and (in F) Lear’s dying moment of hope.

The Folio’s changes to the Fool reflect responses to the play in performance that are at once alert to changing theatrical taste and illustrative of Shakespeare’s developing stage-practice and dramaturgical scope. In revisiting Lear, that is, Shakespeare made the Fool both more dramatically effective and less direct, and the changes signal a writer shaping a particular actor’s performance and vice versa. The additions and cuts allow Shakespeare to refine the nature and effectiveness of the role in performance, while also making a further potent if enigmatic statement about the diminishment of comedy and the exile of the clown. Moreover, the
characteristic inversion and the “license” associated with Armin’s brand of fooling arguably inspire the play’s inception, and they certainly inform the earlier versions’ structure and generic malleability: the Fool is intimately bound up with the play’s design and power, his emblematic alienation becomes a constituent of Lear, the other characters, and beyond them, all suffering humanity. Valerie Traub articulates how *King Lear* “bequeaths to us the terms of abstract universal humanity—a discourse of normality infused with and bolstered by appeals to our common nature—by which we still judge the play, and each other,” that must however, still be historicized. As the play “gestures fitfully toward the future”:

> The concept of an abstract, universal, representative human—what we now tend to think of as a normal human—is the product of specific styles of reasoning grounded in, and made possible by, contingent material practices: art as well as science... *King Lear* is implicated in, helps give rise to, and provides support for nascent understandings of an alternative universal, the terminology and appeal of which would become dominant only much later in time. \(283\)

For Traub, the relation between the medieval concept of nature and the modern concept of norms is accessed through a new style of horizontal and comparative reasoning that results in the proffering of Edgar as Poor Tom “to constitute a universal corporeal standard.”\(284\) Equally however, the Fool’s very disproportion, his physical size—for Lear but not for the audience—will bar him from this representative function. In this he is rendered irrelevant or superfluous, twice and fatally exiled. Moreover, the language of the Folio’s increased naturalism and interiority, anticipates and gives rise to profound changes in theatrical norms that would likewise “become dominant only much later in time.” The increased pathos (not sentimentality) and dramatic application of the Folio Fool is at once the supreme development and articulation of popular clown practice and the inclusive impulse behind it, and also a truly prophetic figure who reads the writing on the wall and has agency in his own excision. In this he functions,
retrospectively at least, as a microcosm for the larger historical theatrical and cultural transformation of the sixteenth and subsequent centuries, and a figure in whom theoretical discourse and developing theatre practice collide. For the early scholar of clown, Enid Welsford, “Lear’s tragedy is the investing of the king with motley: it is also the crowning and apotheosis of the Fool.” To this assessment, one that recognizes the characters’ interdependency, I assert that in combining the Quarto’s contagion of his disruptive inversionary practice and exiled condition into the play’s cosmos with his ironic crowning and death (at once a forced and willing excision), the Folio Lear can be read as the Tragedy of the clown.

Critics have long understood *King Lear* in terms of large cultural transitions or opposing views of the universe. Kenneth Muir, for example, echoing John Danby, writes that:

> Shakespeare presents two contrasting views of nature—the traditional view of Hooker and Bacon, which assumes that nature is benignant, rational, and divinely ordered; and the view of the rationalists that man is governed by appetite and self-interest.

Equally, Muir tells us that the play contrasts the rights of the poor with the doctrine of survival of the fittest, and alludes to Danby’s well-known suggestion that “Shakespeare is dramatizing the conflict between medieval society and nascent capitalism.” Traub necessarily rejects the simplification of “Danby’s bifurcation of Shakespeare’s treatment of nature into two opposing intellectual ‘camps,’—the orthodox party of Hooker, represented by Lear and Cordelia, and the empirical party of Hobbes, articulated by Edmund, Goneril, and Regan”— but continues that “Danby is correct that historically specific, contrasting ideas of nature impart a complexity and capaciousness to the impact of this word in the play.” These oppositional values can be given different names that resonate more or less persuasively, but they all in some sense index the clash between forms of human competition and forms of human compassion, co-operation, and fellow-feeling.
However we name them, the clash of opposing forces animates the plot, even as the play then sets about comprehensively collapsing and inverting previously stable norms and interrelations. Arraying these oppositions in terms of good and evil accesses the homiletic qualities that Maynard Mack and others note abounding in the play, and resonates with the structures of religious faith (whether Protestant or Catholic) common to the majority of the play’s early audience. Shakespeare, setting his play in pre-history partly in response to restrictive blasphemy laws,\textsuperscript{289} writes what J.C. Maxwell calls “a Christian play about a pagan world,”\textsuperscript{290} which I would refine to a pagan play for a Christian audience and society. Muir nicely captures this important facet, observing that: “Shakespeare remains in the background but he shows us his pagan characters groping their way towards a recognition of the values traditional in his society.”\textsuperscript{291} In considering the Jacobean audience’s response to the Fool and the play more generally, this biblical underpinning is of great import. Mack emphasizes the coexistence of parable and realism in the play, and makes a related comment on the relation of the play to its sources:

Perhaps the clearest route to [seeing \textit{Lear} as a] parable is by way of its sources. In general, I think discussions of Shakespeare’s sources...have erred by defining the term too narrowly, paying almost exclusive attentions to the books - Arcadia, The Chronicle of King Leir, plus a couple of others that may have contributed some details - while virtually ignoring larger, admittedly vaguer, but equally cogent influences, which frequently determine the way in which the specific source is used. It is difficult, for instance, to account for what Shakespeare made of the old play apart from the influence of some such governing archetypal theme as that embodied in folk and medieval renderings of the Abasement of the Proud King.\textsuperscript{292}

These “vaguer…influences” determine equally how the source is used and its application as understood by the audience. Mack’s general point holds, as does his specific example: \textit{Lear’s} story would have bought to mind the widely known story of the proud king, stripped of his identity to learn that God humbles the proud and exalts the humble. The crucial thematic link
between parable and play, beyond even this, is that the abased king is not recognized by those who should recognize him, and any assertions of authority are met with derision and his being treated as a mad man. In none of the known sources is Lear mad, nor as old as he is in Shakespeare’s version, and both refinements bring Lear closer to parable and biblical echo. Moreover, the trial scene of 3.6, excised in F, has as its governing conception precisely the abased king’s moral, from Luke Chapter 1, Verse 52: He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek [or them of low degree].

If, as Mack argues, “Man’s tragic fate, as King Lear presents it, comes into being with his entry into relatedness, which is his entry into humanity,” then the Fool occupies a representational place in that relatedness. His presence in the heart of the family, indexed by his unusual closeness with Cordelia and Lear, is a demonstration of that common humanity so often aligned with Lear’s revelations on the heath, and simultaneously, that he is a helpless creature who, having known such comfort, is deprived of it and pelted by the pitiless storm. As Muir suggests: reduced to only essential needs, humans need not money nor status but rather “patience, stoical fortitude, and love... perhaps above all, mutual forgiveness, the exchange of charity....” The Fool, Cordelia, and Kent embody these values in their service and love to a master tragically slow to recognize it. Susan Snyder makes a compelling argument for early audience’s perception of King Lear as an adaptation of the still more pervasive parable of the Prodigal Son. “In both parable and play,” she says, “reconciliation is rebirth.” I emphasize the array of critical perspectives here in order to suggest that the parable form and the pre-Christian setting, along with the Fool’s license, contributed to Shakespeare’s complex mixing of genres throughout, and the devastating effect of thwarted expectations at the end. Moreover, the pagan vision presented is clearly perceived by its audience through a Christian lens. Grounds for hope
and optimism—the promise of the resurrection and salvation—that also operate at a structural level through its homiletic infusion of parable and pastoral forms, coexist throughout its painful path and conclusion with the play’s stoical call for endurance in the face of suffering.297

Lear’s Fool appears in six scenes of both the 1608 Quarto and the 1623 Folio, three of which are substantially revised in the play’s transformation from History to Tragedy that their respective title pages announce. Crucially, the Fool is also referenced pointedly in his absence three times. The first two occasions, in 1.4 and again in 3.1 where his whereabouts are questioned, are the same in both texts and serve to establish his place and function, practically and symbolically. Prior to his first appearance, Lear twice calls for his Fool and “knave,” only to be told “Since my young Lady’s going to France, Sir, the Fool hath much pined away” (1.4.71-2). Lear will not hear of the cause, or entertain his suffering—“No more of that” (73)—but rather demands his immediate attendance. This clearly indicates Lear’s prior closeness or dependence on the Fool, as other references reinforce, and his initial lack of empathy and understanding of the implications of his banishing Cordelia. In the later scene, Kent asks who is with the king out in the storm and is told: “None but the Fool who labours to outjest / His heart-struck injuries” (3.1.16-17). The Fool is practically and symbolically Lear’s last and closest adherent, even as the disguised Kent and the soon-to-be-blinded Gloucester still attempt to serve and aid him. The Fool’s familial place and dedication to his master are first established and then reinforced with great economy. In addition, the first reference also connects him indissolubly with the wronged Cordelia with whom he is painfully and poetically conflated (in the third and final reference to him) in Lear’s anguished cry when he cradles Cordelia, “And my poor Fool is hanged” (5.1.304). All questions of doubling the roles aside, the two figures represent the same virtues: both remain loyal and are fatal victims of Lear’s rash action in banishing Cordelia and dividing the kingdom.
I contend that the changes between the Quarto and Folio represent a refining of the Fool’s function and the representation of virtue within the play: in effect a further humanizing of a sympathetic, but initially more formulaic role. Where in the Quarto, as Hornback says, the Fool’s role is manifestly that of an artificial fool, the Folio revisions arguably represent playwright and comic actor in consultation responding to the play’s earliest performances, and developing the figure into its fuller potential. Critics who see either a bitter fool or a sweet one miss the fact that he is tragically conflicted and simultaneously both: Lear’s action in banishing Cordelia strikes a blow at the character’s capacity to function as both human and Court Fool, as the king’s folly has fatally stricken both clown and youngest daughter. As such, even before the gates are physically closed on him and Lear, the Fool is twice exiled, in that he has returned to his former and endemic state of rootlessness prior to his entry into human relatedness and experience of familial love. The comedy of the Quarto, “often twisted to serve, and intensify, the immediate tragic effect,” is arguably revised, honed, and amplified in new directions with the playwright and comedian in concord. Armin, himself a pioneer of realism for all that he is overshadowed by Burbage, brings an experienced actor’s sensibilities and range to a formerly emblematic role, makes limited but very effective use of his direct access to the audience and conversely pulling them into his, and the larger, tragedy. Again, appropriately for the world of paradox and opposites that the play world evokes, Shakespeare simultaneously facilitates Armin’s own pioneering work and applies his existing training and vitality to a statement of what is being lost in the theatre’s gentrification and rejection of earlier comic forms.

In his opening scene (1. 4) the Fool’s dialogue has a number of significant revisions in the Folio text, including a cut of some fifteen lines and two significant re-attributions of lines (the first at his arrival, the second later in the same exchange). The substantial cut reshapes the
Fool’s opening exchange with Lear and Kent, which James Kerrigan suggests creates a superior streamlined reading of the section that, alongside other cuts, shows a conscious distancing of the Fool from Lear compared to the earlier version. Kerrigan and Hornback both make valid observations as they engage with elements of character, staging, and audience reception at variance, but neither fully credit or empower the creative and collaborative process likely at work. To restate that assertion in more specific terms, Armin’s physical appearance complicates Hornback’s distinguishing of the natural and artificial fool, and his ongoing collaboration with Shakespeare exploits his talents and this ambiguity to the full. The following analysis assumes (with both Taylor and Kerrigan) an earlier date for the revision than Hornback entertains, as playwright and clown plan a revival or respond to the censor, sharing a restless practical enquiry and passion where audience reaction (like Cordelia’s virtue) is its own special reward.

The scene originally reads as follows (the lines later excised in F are grey scaled):

FOOLE. Dost know the difference my boy, between a bitter fool and a sweet fool.
LEAR. No lad, teach mee.
FOOLE. That Lord that counselled thee to give away thy land,
   Come place him here by mee, doe thou for him stand,
   The sweet and bitter fool will presently appear,
   The one in motley here, the other found out there.
LEAR. Dost thou call me fool, boy?
FOOLE. All thy other Titles thou hast given away, that thou wast born with.
KENT. This is not altogether fool my Lord.
FOOLE. No faith, Lords and great men will not let me, if I had a monopolie out, they would haue part an't, and Ladies too, they will not let me have all the fool to my selfe, they'll be snatching; give me an egg Nuncle, and I’ll give thee two crowns. (Q1.1, 4, 112-129)
The Folio reading jumps directly from “No lad, teach mee,” (l.114) to the slightly reordered “Nuncle, give me an egg, and Ile give thee two Crownes” (l.152). Gary Taylor points out that “to those acquainted with the full Quarto text, the Folio’s train of thought appears nonsensical,” producing a jump from sweet and bitter folly to egg custards, crowns and kingdoms. Kerrigan argues this is the first of “several increasingly violent dislocations working to distance and finally divorce the revised or adapted Fool from the Folio King.” Hornback reads the changes differently, suggesting that, here as elsewhere, “while the part of the Fool in the Quarto was tailor-made for Armin’s artificial fools, the Folio revision was clearly not,” with Q offering “the typical pairing of Armin’s artificial fool with a foil (e.g., Touchstone with Corin and Will, Feste with Sir Andrew or Malvolio, Lavatch with Parolles, Thersites with Ajax, Carlo Buffone with Sogliardo… etc.) whose folly becomes increasingly obvious.” Furthermore, Hornback insists that only in Q is the king’s request to be informed of the difference between bitter and sweet fool answered. Hornback suggests that in the leap caused by the cut there is a change of subject, a logical disjunction, and a descent into incomprehension. Gary Taylor similarly notes the supposed non sequitur even as he acknowledges it is typical of the Fool to raise the expectation of clarity and instead offer obfuscation. Understood in this manner, as it would have been by early audiences, despite lacking the overt closure of the longer version, the Fool’s empty egg shell metaphor, punning on Lear’s bald, uncrowned head, still effectively serves as the answer to the difference between bitter and sweet fool question. For Hornback, citing Theodore Leinwand, the Q Fool “is not mad,” and:

whereas the Q Fool self-consciously harps on carnivalesque, topsy-turvy imagery in order to continue an attack on Lear’s transgressive folly begun lines earlier in 1.4, the F Fool’s verbal inversions-lacking the lines in the Quarto that present an actual attack on Lear’s abdication-are unmotivated and seem to be nonsensical, the standard inversionary humor characteristic of a natural who turns the world upside down, not out of any satirically motivated logic, but merely “by nature.”
But the attack is only unmotivated or seemingly nonsensical if we assume no foreknowledge of the subject by the Fool, whereas the opposite is quite apparently the case, or similarly if we assume that a direct question requires a direct answer. For those looking for a logical connection between folly, eggs and crowns, Shakespeare’s capaciousness has embedded one: as Taylor notes an additional usage of “fool” at the time was as a name for the popular dessert custard. If, as Taylor implies, this usage was widespread, then even the least educated among the audience could follow the Fool’s characteristically mangled logic and Shakespeare need not have viewed the change as problematic. Again, “crowne” simultaneously conveys the sense of a king’s symbol of power and a bare human head, and the Fool offers the proof in his pudding, which he cannot make without breaking eggs. Lear’s actions broke up a family and a nation, and in the process, his formerly witty Fool has had his world turned upside down for him, and by his master: the proffered “crownes” poignantly index this reality and its tragic implications. In terms of character, before his arrival the Fool has been asked for and described as pining in the absence of Cordelia: although merely hinted at, the implication is clear and the character enters suffering, the first indirect casualty of his master’s wrath and folly. As I’ve suggested, the Fool’s position as a dependent at (and soon out of) the court is diminished, even exploded, by the profound smart of Cordelia’s banishment and the upsetting of familial ties of which he was a beneficiary. His prescience of the new reality (which he painfully transfers to Lear) renders him emotionally blighted, at once more bitter—not being blind to the grim implications as his master still is—and a pathos-filled, “sweet” helpless innocent. Armin as an actor is both capable of and inclined to play or display the character’s sense of bereavement and diminishment, even before the further dislocation of accompanying Lear away from the comforts of hearth and kin. These given circumstances are the same in both versions, motivate the fool
equally in both, and would have been as apparent to the audience in both versions every bit as much as the actor’s diminutive stature.

In F’s truncated form then, as opposed to a massive leap of subject, the Fool’s response simply (and characteristically) adopts a different tactic in answering the question: a reaches for the egg example, the contents of which and the remaining hollow shell stand plainly for the abdication and his giving away all he has. In place of the more literal idea of having the ill-serving counselor (Lear himself) come and stand by him for the difference to be revealed, the Fool offers the metaphor which does not call the king a fool directly but arrives at the same point: “All thy other titles though has given away” (1.4.146). In the Q language, even as the two characters stand next to each other, it is not clear in the language who would be the bitter and who the sweet fool, and even stage business such as Armin’s Fool pointing could not decisively answer who is being called which. Furthermore, in both versions the exchange begins with the Fool calling Lear “boy” (l.112 in Q, l.134 in Muir), an inversionary use of one of Lear’s terms of affection for him in the Q language and elsewhere. As such, no increased sensitivity to the king is suggested in or by excising the harsh language, since he has already deflated his position—in recognition of the king’s new altered circumstances as a former father now at the mercy of his children that the fool insists on repeatedly in both versions. Furthermore (and conclusively), amidst the supposedly nonsensical commentary on the egg, the Fool links “giving away both parts” directly with “thou boar’st thine Asse on thy back o’er the dirt” (1.4.157-9), referencing Aesop’s fable “The Miller, His Son, and Their Ass” whose motto is simply “You can’t please everyone.”312 Within the fable, the Miller, in trying to please others, ends up pleasing nobody—and losing his ass, the necessary and unsuccessful sale of which had motivated the whole journey. The inference is clear, and harps insistently once again on Lear’s folly and rashness in
dividing his kingdom. The obliqueness of the Fool that has so troubled critics would, I contest, have been straightforward fare for its initial audience, a disjunction but not a derailing one. In this Kerrigan is nearer the truth in seeing the cut as a streamlining of dialogue, tightening its pacing, and establishing an unbroken “King-jester duologue” at the first appearance of the character. The moment, I suggest, is still more a painful nudge toward self-knowledge than it is a bitter announcement of dislocation, except in the sense that Lear has dislocated the natural order. Goneril’s behavior on arrival confirms the Fool’s analysis in terms Lear cannot ignore and prompts his first stirrings of regret and self-knowledge in the line “Woe, that too late repents” (255), which aptly, if dimly, anticipates his remaining days. Already Lear is futile in his claims to authority and resolutely pathetic, like the eels flailing in the pan that the Fool will evoke in a later scene (2. 4.119-122).

Let us now return to Hornback’s argument, which articulates in detail the practical distinction between the “artificial” and “natural” fools, as they were widely understood at the time:

The natural fool was an “innocent” who was generally laughed at for mental deficiencies, the artificial fool distinguished himself and his fooling with his clever, bitter wit, as he provoked laughter at others. Whereas the natural fool was dependent, and consequently often depicted as sweet and pathetic even when unintentionally insulting, the artificial fool was characterized by his consistent and intentional bitterness. Similarly, while the natural was demonstrably irrational and so was often painstakingly characterized by disjointed logic, the artificial fool was just as clearly distinguished as rational by his ordered, and occasionally even artfully formal, or syllogistic, logic.

The distinction is key for Hornback, “especially since artificial fools stood essentially in opposition to the thing itself, the ‘very fool’ or ‘natural,’ whose folly was real in that it came ‘by nature,’ not by pretended artifice or art.” Again, in correctly raising and elucidating the distinction, Hornback’s analysis at once expertly adduces its relevance to King Lear yet misses
how Armin’s performance contains and veers between elements of both. As we saw Wiles point out, while the quintessential artificial fool, Armin was simultaneously marked as a natural. As such, the natural Fool is always present when Armin is on stage, indexed or accessed by a simple change in affect. In fact, I suggest this reality was precisely what became apparent from the first performances of Lear and suggested changes when revival or censorship necessitated the play's revisiting. This on-stage reality necessitates another: in the context of Lear, Armin/the Fool’s reduced circumstances combined with his physical otherness (his diminutive stature marking him as different) makes him simultaneously a figure of “unaccommodated man” at once “the thing itself” but unrecognizable to Lear as such. Rather Edgar must artfully assume the shape of the “bare forked animal,” becoming a transitional mirror for the king as he fumbles toward self-knowledge, his rambling replacing the Fool’s words and love in the king’s mad mind.

Hornback, as we’ve seen, establishes the popular trend for roles with Armin playing an artificial fool when Lear was written, and sees the revisions, which he places post-Armin’s retirement in 1613, as reflecting a subsequent new trend, this time for pathos:

The Quarto Fool variants published in 1608 make most sense if situated within the context of the specific theatrical trend of “spin-offs” favoring the artificial fools played by Armin, while the subsequent Folio Fool is a more pitiable or pathetic natural Fool in keeping with another trend, the increasing taste for pathos already evident in Shakespeare’s latest plays and in the works of Beaumont and Fletcher. The Lear Quarto and Folio not only encode the distinguishing characteristics of the two Renaissance fool types but, in so doing, they also reflect two distinct theatrical trends.

Hornback is correct to suggest that the supposed bitterness and “biting irony” of the excised language are characteristic of the artificial fool, casting Lear painfully and ironically as the sweet natural, and to detect the Folio’s increased use of pathos and locating it in that precise trend for the same. However, in seeing the revisions in these cut-and-thrust terms, at a later date and for a
replacement actor, I suggest Hornback figures the revision as post Shakespeare’s supposed “Romances” rather than anticipating them.

The last comment of the Fool in the 14-line cut refers to monopolies, frequently a politically sensitive topic in the years between the Quarto (1608) and the Folio (1623) version, and suggesting censorship as a possible likely cause for revision. Whether or not censorship is the cause for its removal, the line’s moral resonates equally in Lear’s world and Jacobean London. The Fool opines that “if I had a monopolie out, [of folly] they [great men] would have part on’t; and ladies too” (Q.1.4.1.126-7), suggesting the pervasiveness of human folly in the Erasmian tradition, but equally of the absorption of the Fool himself into the near-ruined king. The content of the cut lines being so politically sensitive, specifically the monopolies reference, and the one time the king is directly, if by implication, called a fool (and for once hears it), suggests to Taylor that they would have been unlikely to have got past the censor, and to posit from that that the Q text (or the relevant lines of it) were never performed. The implication for Taylor is necessarily an earlier date for the revisions than either Kerrigan or Hornback entertain. Kerrigan posits 1609/10 shortly after the publication of the Quarto, while Hornback, as we’ve seen, suggests 1613. Only this last date is incompatible with my argument for creative collaboration as being decisive in the transformation of the texts, as it is after Armin’s likely retirement. And, while Taylor’s argument problematizes the Quarto’s survival and the title page’s assertion that it was “plaied before his majestie,” the crisis of speedy revision augments my case for Armin and Shakespeare’s opportunistic refashioning of the play and role. Taylor is right to imagine the dangerous provocation of the lines to a sensitive James: he had recently imprisoned other playwrights for similar infractions. Separate from the insoluble argument over dating, the cut marks a particular diminishment, a neutering even, of the court fool’s
emblematic explicit license to speak truth: the very freedom that comes from the renunciation of
everything else. The assertion of folly remains implicit in much of the Fool’s remaining dialogue
course, but this one occasion of successfully landing his point home is denied him. In response
to that slight, I propose, Shakespeare enhances his Fool’s role and symbolic function to more
fully inhabit the existing but hitherto untapped possibilities of pathos within the role. The
expansion reinforces the thematic centrality of Armin’s employment to the play’s dramatic
effectiveness and encompasses a tragic end that also comments on the hostility of authority (and
authorship) to the clown/fool’s animating and disruptive presence. At risk of having my cake and
eating it, I propose that what was implied in the language that is cut from 1.4 remains implicit in
the surviving revised text: Lear and his Fool are both, and simultaneously, sweet and bitter fools,
pathetic, helpless yet painfully aware of their impotence, and the difference between the types is
less one of rank or personage than of situation in the post-Cordelia landscape.

Together with the longer cut, three other minor but significant variations in this sequence
of 1. 4 illustrate a refinement in the scene’s purpose and effectiveness that I suggest reflect actor
and author collaboration, congruent with the other textual variants, less towards a perfected than
a reconsidered version, further pushing the envelope of the play’s innovation with comic forms
and defying genre and audience expectations. In F, after the Fool has entered, he twice offers
Kent his coxcomb: Kent’s reply in Q, “Why Foole?” (Q1.i.78) becomes Lear’s “Why my boy”
(98). Thirty lines later, the line “This is nothing, Fool,” in response to the Fool’s quibbling, is
reassigned from the King to Kent (128). The former adjustment results in including Lear earlier
rather than having the Fool seemingly ignore him, establishing a king-jester dialogue
immediately on the character’s first entrance, as we saw Kerrigan point out, and I would add, it
makes Lear more of the Fool’s foil in the Folio rather than less.322 Kent’s line coming later
breaks up the rhythm of the exchange between king and jester, and should remind us that the section is throughout a vibrant triangle of three people, and is not merely a dialogue. The Fool is subsequently often employed in this fashion, standing between Lear and another character, critiquing his choice or offering an alternative perspective. This F revision is a minute but effective tightening of dramatic control and focus, suggesting the diligent attention to detail of authorial revision without impugning or reducing Q to a mere draft. The final change is more thematic than technical as the chilling answer to Lear’s searching question, “Who is it can tell me who I am?” Where before Lear had answered himself, here the line “Lear’s shadow” is given to the Fool. Kerrigan notes that Q likely follows the True Tragedy of King Leir to which it is “strikingly close,” and also suggests that the reattribution poignantly “opens up a gap between Lear’s shadow and [the king’s subsequent line,] ‘Your name, fair gentlewoman,’ which is both painful and unignorable. The poetic space can scarcely be played across.” Lear must hear the reply before addressing his daughter and pretending not to know or recognize her. Having the Fool say the line makes him a more active participant in the moment, and overtly central to Lear’s identity. Here again Shakespeare’s stagecraft deftly creates a poignant and pregnant triangle, this time featuring the Fool, the king and Goneril.

Goneril has entered wearing a frown, on which Lear immediately comments. The Fool returns to his theme about Lear’s folly in giving his kingdom away, quibbling on how he formerly didn’t have to concern himself with his daughters’ whims or moods. The speech is the same in both versions and I want to suggest that the language suggests Armin may have been creating a zero with his lips and then emphatically closing his mouth. Such a proposition only makes sense when we allow that such physical inventiveness comes naturally to the clown and
see how his use of the word “O,” in the sense of a cipher (a nothing), preceded his conspicuous use of the term “nothing,” once before seeing Goneril (and offering to be silent) and once after.

Now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now. I am a fool, thou art nothing. [To Goneril] Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue; so your face bids me, though you say nothing.

Mum, Mum:

He that keeps nor crust nor crumb,
Weary of all, shall want some.
That’s a shelled peascod (1.4.189-96).

Having had to open his lips to form an “O” to pronounce the letter, the twice repeated “Mum” (meaning I will say nothing) that immediately follows his second use of “nothing” as he promises to be quiet, again requires a closed mouth to open fully to an O shape before snapping shut again. As such, there is the potential, or implied game play, of pretending to stop repeatedly before actually stopping. The subsequent rhyming words of his ditty all require the emphatic closing of lips in the repeated the ‘m” sounds, so that something of the game might continue until the final line abruptly alters the rhythm and the mouth shapes required. The directness and insolence of the rhyme is diffused in the peculiar summation. Later the Fool proffers, “for there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths in a glass” (3.2.35-6), meaning as they apply lipstick, and referencing the trope of women’s falsity linked with makeup which we find so prominently in Hamlet. Given that context, the Fool’s own facial contortions, or making of “mouths,” here either mockingly directed at Goneril or shared with the audience, may well have been indexing the tragic association of the word “nothing.” Either way, the Fool at once acknowledges Goneril’s new authority and undercuts it, and again, immediately after her speech, he pipes up with the proverbial image of the cuckoo biting off the head of the sparrow who had
weaned it (lines 213-4). “That’s a shelled peascod” is declamatory, a pea out of its casing or shell, and although uttered while the stage direction reads “Pointing to Lear,” could refer to his rhyme, Goneril’s behavior, or Lear’s. It hardly needs adding that when the doors are shut on the king, he and the Fool are both unaccommodated, or “shelled” to continue the metaphor. Lear’s “O” will rent the ears of the auditors in act 3 as he experiences the reality of the “nothing” he invoked in banishing Cordelia and received at Goneril’s hands. Moreover, the clown/fool is a performer characteristically given to not needing language to generate action; their physical or other non-verbal improvisation was famously frowned upon for disrupting the text. Lear’s Fool, bidden to silence first by Goneril and then by the heath, need not be speaking or even present on stage to have a profound effect, and in him Shakespeare mines philosophically the figure’s mercurial capacity for creating something out of nothing.

Act 1, scene 5, all but identical in the Quarto and Folio, features a second king and jester dialogue in which the Fool, very much Hornback's witty artificial Fool, enacts his role as accouterment to royal power. Whereas in the previous scene the Fool chastised his master for giving everything to his daughters, here his focus is insistently on Lear's folly in expecting Regan to treat him any differently than Goneril. The Fool puns on Regan treating Lear “kindly” (l.14) both in the sense of affection and after her nature—she is of a kind with her sister. The Fool's function here is clear, still nudging his master towards self-knowledge, specifically now that the king has relinquished his authority and inverted the natural order of things. Again, the Fool's reference to monopolies in Quarto 1.4 suggests that his folly is keenly sought by "great men" (Q.1.4.126)—and here, step by step, he establishes Lear's folly before stating, when Lear answers him correctly, that the king would make “a good fool" (29). If Lear cannot see his folly, he should be able to smell it, and a snail does not have a shell in order to give it away (to his
daughters). Implied but not yet invoked is the sense that the inversion that renders Lear a fool renders the once-cherished Fool irrelevant, not a king in his master’s place but an obsolete, and for a time forgotten, functionary. The whole scene anticipates Regan’s rejection of her father, if not the scale, speed and severity with which the ensuing action escalates towards the doors being shut on the old king, when he and Lear appear again just three scenes later in 2.4. The Fool ends 1.5 with his rhyming couplet to the audience, one of three times he does so (the third is the longer prophecy in act 3, F only, discussed below), and a device characteristic of Kemp’s clown roles up to and including Falstaff. Here the Fool, using a clown form, insists on generic understanding or distinction: the woman who thinks his presence indicates a comedy or, in Muir’s phrasing “the maid who sees only the funny side of the Fool’s gibes, and does not realize Lear is going on a tragic journey is such a simpleton that she won’t know how to preserve her virginity.” In an oblique manner then, Act 1 ends with a warning to the audience not to expect anything but a tragic outcome, whatever forms or expectations are invoked and raised going forward.

The next step in Lear's journey to increased self-awareness requires his identification with Edgar's "Poor Tom" as "the thing itself,” and the Folio makes clearer and cleaner the transferring of symbolic function from the Fool’s character to Poor Tom. The Fool can reference “unaccommodated man” more or less obliquely—the snail giving his shell to his daughters is characteristically not a difficult metaphor—but Lear cannot fully see the reality or the implications of his actions and situation until he projects his condition onto the Bedlam beggar. Here I want to suggest that Armin's physical appearance and short stature create naturally a distancing or "othering" that the actor playing Edgar (in all likelihood a more conventionally commanding figure) assumes by artifice. In status terms, both Fool and beggar are symbolically
polar opposites of royal power but, like Gloucester's eyes, the Fool can only take Lear so far on his journey. Ironically, real gibberish from a pretend natural is needed to awake the fellow feeling to which Lear has been blind, even as this same value is epitomized in both the Fool and Cordelia. The Fool’s very humanity is obscured by his being marked as different, his stature paradoxically prevents his being taken as an example of unaccommodated man, “the thing itself,” that Edgar becomes by imitation, if also necessity. On the heath, Edgar’s pseudo-deranged Poor Tom will briefly and unwittingly assume the Fool’s function as the mad Lear looks to him for wisdom. Poor Tom is precisely the figure of a “natural,” idiotic babbling fool, even as Edgar’s imitation is consummate, and even excessive artifice. The Fool’s neglect and death are then a further (final) loss caused by Lear’s lack of understanding, ironically as his search for it has begun, albeit misplaced and addled: like Albany says of Cordelia a “great thing(s) of us forgot” (5.3.235). His loyalty forgot, his wit and wisdom absorbed or lost in the wind, the exilic Fool is broken by the elements and announces with characteristic opacity his final departure. Edgar’s journey is only just beginning, a night with the king is followed by the discovery of his father from whom he must both teach and learn. Only an element on the way to the king’s self-knowledge, Edgar's own banishment and dark night(s) of the soul are also necessary preparation for his own assumption of leadership in Lear's place. The Folio makes this element clearer, not least in the redistribution of the final four lines of the play from Albany to Edgar that reinforce his assumption of authority. The increased pathos that Hornback and others see in the Folio Fool is partly a result of further humanizing Lear, and the Fool stands as a victim, a necessarily caustic and helpless companion to Lear's blindness, whose value, like Cordelia's, is only fully comprehended too late. Here, again, in his increased suffering and implied death, indicative of Armin’s range as an actor, the revised Fool at once supersedes the
traditional artificial fool that Armin had long perfected, and comments on the excision of the fool/clown's comic disruptive energy and vitality from the Jacobean theatre more generally. Armin allowed Shakespeare to first create and then surpass the greatest stage expression of the artificial fool and court jester, and in a tragedy.

As I mentioned earlier, critics such as Susan Snyder and Maynard Mack have long noted that *King Lear* is infused with comic forms, and repeatedly invites the audience to expect a more hopeful resolution (associated with those forms) only to then dash those expectations: Edgar learns that "the worst is not, so long as we can say ‘this is the worst’” (4.1.27-8), only one of many necessary reevaluations he is forced to make, and a powerful part of the play serving only to thwart generic expectation. Just as in *Hamlet*, *Lear* invokes and favors still vibrant popular theatrical traditions and practice over increasing insistence on developing emergent norms that, in the name of banishing art’s abuses, insist on artistic decorum, and that life on stage should be presented as it should be (with virtue rewarded and vice resulting in ignominy). Perhaps in subversive reaction, I have suggested that the Fool's license to expose superficiality, cant, and folly is responsible for, or at least reflected in, the play's attitude towards upsetting generic expectation and ultimately insisting on Cordelia’s death. Indeed, I further suggest that the play's great power in fact stems from following the Fool's disruptive potential, tied to its alienated state, to its logical conclusion. Without adding humor per se, the Fool’s presence indexes and activates clown forms subverting decorous observation of form, and, like the proverbial bad apple, his influence spreads into the play’s fabric and vision of atomized order. Present in Q, this unflinching vision of society is subtly enhanced in F, partly by allowing the Fool a fuller range of feeling, and also by a refinement of emphasis that makes the representation of virtue increasingly allegorical and asking to be read as parable. In this, the play not only makes, in Kerrigan's
phrase, "no concessions to what we would like life to be," it also accesses amplitude. Exploiting the ambiguity and inversions of which the play is constituted, its ultimate vision of humanity holds in seemingly perpetual counter-balance, redemptive readings transmuted from its stoic calls for endurance amidst nihilistic indifference to suffering. It may be that Armin’s performance and evocation in the revised text decisively tipped that balance for some present.

Edgar, whose journey might be read as epitomizing the play's message of endurance, is introduced to the audience by Edmund in terms that invite contempt, as the “catastrophe from the old comedy” (1.2.131-2). While referencing the concept of disaster, the predominant sense of “catastrophe” here is the earlier technical one synonymous with denouement. Edmund is perhaps suggesting that his successful duping of his brother will initiate and bring about his own happy or comic resolution, namely his usurpation of his father, which in the short term it does. At the same time Edmund's reference mocks Edgar's gullible if virtuous nature, ahead of duly capitalizing on it and confirming it to the audience. Edmund, in act 2, uses a consciously self-inflicted wound to substantiate his (false) story to his father, ironically inverting the wound that Lear has witlessly inflicted on himself. Edmund's pragmatic selfishness is bearing tangible results and is thus contrasted with ineffectual or misguided virtue. His bravura, moreover, was likely recognizable to early audiences as a Vice character from the morality tradition or more recently as from the school of Marlovian over-reachers, both of which invoke chaos ultimately tamed or controlled. Here, as elsewhere, generic associations are raised to misdirect and complicate expectations—good will ultimately triumphs, but only after being pushed to new extremes, drained of consolation, and seemingly stripped of any restorative power or poetic justice.
Immediately prior to the Fool's third appearance in 2.4, we see Edgar, having escaped pursuit, beginning the transformation into Poor Tom. His speech begins, famously, “I heard myself proclaimed,” (2.3.1) announcing his outlawed state, thrust upon him by a betrayal of a magnitude with Cordelia’s and the Fool’s. The rest of the speech declares his intent to assume the “basest and most poorest shape /That ever penury in contempt of man/ Brought near to beast,” (7-9) and to throw himself on the enforced charity of others. This renunciation of his place in society gives him a status comparable to the Fool’s (at least within the play, if not prior to it), and like him, his suffering renders him at times a natural, albeit as we have seen by an imitation comprehensive enough to pass as such to a maddened king. Edgar's suffering and exile is foregrounded ahead of Lear's own banishment, so his character's position is established ready to shiver alongside the king and his increasingly helpless and impoverished Fool.

As Edgar exits, the king and the Fool re-enter the play (in the scene that ends with Regan shutting the doors on them), to discover Kent in the stocks. The king’s reluctance to accept this smaller indignity cum reality indexes the larger folly of his blindness to the truth of his situation. The situation is established in undeniably comic form, and escalates in intensity in the same way the subsequent action of the larger scene that contains it will in the tragic mode:

FOOL. Ha, ha! look! he wears cruel garters. Horses are tied by the head, dogs and bears by th' neck, monkeys by th' loins, and men by th' legs. When a man's over-lusty at legs, then he wears wooden nether-stocks.

LEAR. What's he that hath so much thy place mistook To set thee here?

KENT. It is both he and she-

Your son and daughter.

LEAR. No.
KENT. Yes
LEAR. No, I say.
KENT. I say yea.
LEAR. No, no, they would not!
KENT. Yes, they have.
LEAR. By Jupiter, I swear no!
KENT. By Juno, I swear ay!
LEAR. They durst not do't;
They would not, could not do't. 'Tis worse than murther…. (2.4.7-22)

Another triangle like the earlier scene (1.4) but this time the Fool is a silent obsolete observer as “hysterica passio” is preceded by comedy absurdum. The Fool’s silence does not prevent him acknowledging or including the audience in his reactions, either with a direct look or some other physical business that draws the eye briefly—perhaps his attention darts back and forth between the speakers, like following a furiously fast tennis ball, and he shares his amazement at the end of the “point.” Collectively such moments from his performance are what the audience will recall when the Fool is referenced by Lear in his final moments, and where the pathos is increased while he is alive so that moment will have greater emotional resonance.

This section with Kent in the stocks exhibits what Maynard Mack calls a particularly distinctive feature of King Lear, namely “its combination of parable and parable situation with acute realism.” Shakespeare again is preparing the audience for the stormy times ahead and for the unlikeliest sense of restoration the play will offer. Inverting generic expectations with grotesque comedy that the comic character merely witnesses is part of the unsettling process that gives the final deaths such force. I will soon suggest that the Fool and Cordelia’s deaths together evoke their own potent parables that may have resonated powerfully with early audiences.

Returning to the cited text above, however, Kent goes on to explain the circumstances where
such impossibilities became not just possible but reality, and then, in the Folio, when the Fool finally speaks again, it is with the first of his new additions. “Winter’s not gone yet if the wild-geese fly that way” (45), which prefaces his new jingle about fathers and daughters that reflects on themes already well-rehearsed in the play, followed by a pun:

Fathers that wear rags  
Do make their children blind,  
But fathers that bear bags  
Shall see their children kind.  
Fortune, that arrant whore,  
Ne’er turns the key to th’poor.  
But for all this you shall have as many dolours for thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year (46-53).

Kerrigan suggests that this added song may be a direct replacement for the material cut in 1.4, and that Lear’s response to it describing his “climbing sorrow” (54) becomes the “spontaneous cry of a soul in agony” rather than an anguished, yet reasoned response to Kent’s speech. More broadly, Kerrigan sees the Fool’s contributions in this scene as “distressingly irrelevant,” the Fool “disengaged from the king” and “drift[ing] apart, something that never happens in Q.” Hornback, insisting that F is merely different rather than superior to Q, counters that the “disjointed logic” of the Fool that Kerrigan reads as detachment is “characteristic of the psychology not of a rational artificial fool but of an irrational natural fool.” In fact, the additional lines can more easily be read as a continuation, and perhaps repetition, of the Fool’s prescience and idiosyncratic quibbling on the reality of Lear’s situation. In performance we see the Fool excluded and merely observing the comic escalation between Lear and Kent, and the latter’s account of the actions leading to his placing in the stocks that follows it, before, in typical fashion, then contributing his commentary. The additional dialogue can be played for pathos, but
does not thereby become irrational, and there is no reason Lear cannot be absorbing the implications of Kent’s speech, while the Fool essays on them more or less directly. Lear’s response acknowledges the magnitude of the situation (more forcefully than without the new language) and can be played as including the Fool’s contribution or not. In essence, Kent and the Fool together are bringing Lear closer to a forced awareness, and only in this sense is the Fool becoming irrelevant: Kerrigan anticipates the estrangement that comes when the doors are locked against them that the Folio scene certainly intimates if not inaugurates. Hornback, I suggest, misreads the poignancy of the song in context as separating its effect from the language in which it is expressed that would otherwise be quite typical of a Feste or a Touchstone’s artificial wordplay. Structured and placed as it is, I contend that the scene, in both versions, prepares the audience for the transfer of Lear’s focus from the Fool, from whom (apparently) he has learnt all he can, to Edgar. Equally it makes manifest the king’s absorption of the Fool into himself as clearly as the Q-only language in Act 1 about the sweet and bitter fools and monopolies. A characteristic of Armin’s artificial fools is that they are rarely if ever disconcerted or confused. Touchstone weathers the discomfiture of Arden with wit, Feste only hints at hard times, and both are equal to any situation or character they encounter. By contrast, Lear’s Fool is stricken with grief before we meet him and then with little warning thrust out into the cold. The increased pathos of the Folio fool is concomitant with the stage reality that Armin’s Fool in Lear (even more than usual as and where he is in extreme distress) was simultaneously or by turns both an artificial and a natural fool, a breathing incarnation of suffering folly. For all the finesse of Hornback and Kerrigan’s readings, neither fully account for Armin’s plasticity in performance and Shakespeare’s capitalizing on it moment by moment for any number of individual and cumulative dramatic effects. In the universe of Lear there is no immediate succor or reward for
wit, song, or indeed for any service. The song receives no direct comment of recognition or other payment, and, as such, the Fool’s lack of succor here is literal, adding to his emotional anguish, growing confusion, and helplessness. Armin, even silent as he is for the Lear and Kent exchange, is primed to connect with the audience and, once again, pull them further in to his, and the larger, tragedy.

The three scenes on the “heath” (to use Nicholas Rowe's term) in F’s Act 3 feature the most pronounced changes in role of the Fool: 3.2 introduces his prophecy, 3.4 gives Lear more language addressed to the Fool, and 3.6 excises Q's mock trial, reconfiguring the scene's shape and the Fool's final appearance—and disappearance. In the storm of 3.2, moreover, the Fool counsels Lear to ask his daughters’ forgiveness if that is the price to be dry again (11) and further opines on his, or their, exposure to the elements. It might be argued that, far from showing the Fool as increasingly remote from Lear, this amended scene shows them at their closest—with the King finally heeding his (and Kent’s repeated) counsel to take cover. Such is the ambiguity in the Fool’s position that the King, finally listening, hearing and heeding his warnings might be read as either success or as making himself redundant. Further supporting the closeness of their relationship, despite his suffering, Lear can still find compassion for the Fool and display a touch of humanity before his descent into confusion. In 3.4 the King will begin his transfer of interest to the even more bedraggled Poor Tom. Here, in response to Lear’s concern (68-73), the Fool sings, as mentioned above, a reworking of Feste’s song in a tragic (or at least ultimately tragic) setting:

He that has and a little tiny wit-
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain-
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
For the rain it raineth every day. (3.2.74-77)
The king comments, “True, boy. Come bring us to this hovel” (78), listening to, acknowledging, and validating the Fool’s contribution before then departing with Kent. Whether Armin in character looked to the audience as he sang or not, the song must have resonated in particular ways with those present who recognized the song from its original placing. The King recognizes the lyric’s truth, in effect an expression of the play’s message of endurance that Gloucester has to learn: “Men must endure/ Our going hence even as our coming hither” (5.2.9-10), achieved through a mocking, if only slight, exaggeration of the English weather. While the audience also hear and recognize this, they also see Armin’s Feste suddenly transplanted from Illyria to the cold, indifferent, and blasted heath. The link between Feste and the Fool here, however subtle, demonstrates Shakespeare’s transformation of a song linked with comic revelry and excess at the close of *Twelfth Night* into a vehicle for tragic expression. Moreover, the song marks the surprise reprise of Armin’s beloved virtuoso counter-tenor amidst the stage evocation of bleak tempest, perhaps now quivering exquisitely. Shakespeare thus mobilizes the Fool here to alert the audience to the distance achieved from comedy, and to heighten their involvement through the increased direct application of pathos, even before the Fool steps forward with his prophecy.

The prophecy is part of Shakespeare’s refashioning of the Fool’s exit from the play and is as quixotic as anything he ever wrote for Armin. It has troubled critics in large part precisely because of its strategic misdirection and inversion which we shouldn’t by this stage be surprised to find, especially given the vogue for spoof prophecy at the time. It reads in full:

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This is a brave night to cool a courtesan. I'll speak a prophecy ere I go:
When priests are more in word than matter;
When brewers mar their malt with water;
When nobles are their tailors' tutors,
No heretics burn'd, but wenches' suitors;
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When every case in law is right,  
No squire in debt nor no poor knight;  
When slanders do not live in tongues,  
Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;  
When usurers tell their gold i’ th’ field,  
And bawds and whores do churches build:  
Then shall the realm of Albion  
Come to great confusion.  
Then comes the time, who lives to see’t,  
That going shall be us’d with feet.  
This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time. [Exit.] (3.2.79-96)

The first four lines suggest contemporary London or England, but the next six are supposed impossibilities, before the prophecy arrives at an anticlimactically familiar time of “great confusion” where people walk with feet, and ends with a curious timestamp. On one level, the speech is careful to say or predict nothing (and it would be a strange world indeed if he’d successfully predicted anything out of his play’s immediate scope) but it does serve to satirize as we would expect. Perhaps there is an implied link between the two sets of eventualities, the chances of brewers not diluting their product and slanders no longer living in tongues, both being a part of human nature: certainly religious institutions (with priests often impugned for more talk than matter) were in turmoil, only adding to Albion’s confusion rather than offering any moral clarity. Characteristically, the satire is diffused through the prophecy, collapsing in on itself, and the immediate distancing of displacing it onto Merlin. This last line serves as a disclaimer, “I know nothing,” mocking gently those audience members who expected more from him. It retroactively frames the prophecy as meaningless and reminds the audience of the context: he is an impoverished fool alone on stage in its pagan world and pitiless storm. In referencing Merlin
and alluding to the Christian era, the Fool’s final line obliquely raises revealed religion as an essential difference between his supposed time and his audiences, further inviting the audience to read the play homiletically. Whether or not the audience make any religious link with his own later departure, the Christian principle is evoked again when Cordelia returns and is described as “redeem[ing] nature from the general curse” (4.6.206-7), and again in the iconography of her death and Lear’s desperate pieta. The allusion to the quasi-mythical time of King Arthur conjures a confident, idealized and militarized revealed religion, balanced by (or held in tension with) the skeptical jab at priests in the first line: there are no easy answers in the equally murky moral Englands of King Lear and King James I.

Stepping back from the specific content of the prophecy, I now want to consider its placement and effect more generally as the longest of the character’s interactions with the audience. Kerrigan suggests that the speech dramatizes “the F Fool’s growing sense of irrelevance [and that] the reviser or adaptor has turned a stilted convention, according to which the stage fool can move easily between engagement with a play and engagement with its audience, to profound dramatic effect.”333 The mature Shakespeare, as I discussed in the last chapter on Hamlet, is carefully selective in employing direct address and nuancing the relationship between character and audience. In the case of the prophecy, less is more. The “stilted convention” that Kerrigan evokes was still very pliant in Shakespeare and Armin’s hands: Othello, written shortly before Lear, sees a new adaptation of its application in Iago, a role that combines Armin’s ease at direct address with his capacity to handle the increasingly sophisticated realism asked of him to devastating effect. In approximately the same time frame, the role of Lear’s Fool grows from the generic artificial fool that Hornback identifies in Q into the more rounded and dramatically-varied F version. This enhancement simultaneously exploits
Armin’s development as an actor and Shakespeare’s ongoing investment in the vitality of the clown. Importantly, the prophecy, in addition to serving the narrative functions outlined above, connects the Fool directly with the audience prior to his unspoken end, and deepens their collective bond with his and the larger tragedy. Simultaneously, giving Armin the stage alone at this moment carves out a brief diversion from the consuming thrust of the plot, in a manner characteristic of Elizabethan clowns whose dilatory practice was in marked contrast to the emerging emphasis on authorial and narrative control. For a moment the stage is empty but for the little clown, and herein Shakespeare momentarily revivifies the vitality of the clown and the (stage) tradition and cultural associations that he evokes, albeit in a diminished state and a tragic context: wherever Armin was placed on the stage he is at once within the mimetic framework of the play and an iconic reminder of the conventions that govern theatre and which require continual recreation by the active presence of its audience. The prophecy is a final inclusive act, against the dominant tide, acknowledging the audience (as well the political, cultural, and aesthetic climate), and quixotically saying goodbye: in this it truly augurs the future. Recalling (for those who remembered) Tarlton or Kemp alone on stage, the prophesying Fool indexes the passing of the Elizabethan theatre tradition that assumed its audience (and its clown) constituted a central and necessary role in the creation of the event. (In this light, Tate’s excision of the Fool is just helpfully hastening an old man off the stage and into retirement.) In F, the arc of the Fool’s diminishment within the play’s world, and the clown’s excision from the world of the theatre, overlap for the length of act 3’s great storm. Wiles argues that Armin’s short stature meant that he could not command the stage alone in the manner of Kemp’s Falstaff. However, Shakespeare is not afraid to have Iago on stage alone, and, again, from earlier in his career there is a stage tradition cum legend that Armin, as the gravedigger in Hamlet, preceded his digging by
removing successively (with mounting comic hilarity) a dozen or more waistcoats. While the anecdote cannot be verified, it suggests a vibrant unapologetic comic confidence, and is in keeping with his and Shakespeare’s destabilizing of genre, and poignant association of death with laughter. It is true that Armin is less often alone on stage than Kemp, and Shakespeare’s selective use of such audience time with the prophecy is all the more powerful for its rarity. As with the scene-ending couplets earlier, a comic form employed by a comic actor subverts comic expectations to intensify the tragedy, draw the audience further in, and offer only quixotic cold comfort. Equally powerfully at work is the simple but potent stage image of desperate human frailty presented during and after the speech. Here the comedy of disproportion is at its most grotesque; the short shivering man alone, thrown into relief and further dwarfed by the empty echoing architecture.

The following appearance of Lear, Kent and the Fool, after the brief scene between Edmund and Gloucester (3.3), sees them enter in front of a hovel, the shelter Kent/Caius has found for them. Lear, having been persuaded to take shelter, is now more concerned that his fellows do, because the storm is keeping him from “things would hurt me more” (3.4.25). As he did in act 2, Shakespeare again here structurally prepares for the transition of focus from the Fool to Edgar. Moreover, the transition of focus is contrived around the Fool’s stage-business, hinging on his exit and re-entrance in between which comes Lear’s move to pray before he sleeps. To the extraordinary wealth of criticism already written on Lear’s journey through madness to renewed sanity (and death), I wish to add a single observation about the displacement of dramatic function from the Fool onto Edgar—with particular attention to the precision with which it is wrought and to the process of rendering latent material powerfully explicit through the addition of two lines in the Folio. The Folio reads, “Lear. In boy, go first. You houseless poverty. / Nay, get thee in. I’ll
pray and then I’ll sleep” (F only, 3.4.26-27) at which point the Fool duly exits into the hovel. Lear then continues: “Poor naked wretches, whereso’er you are / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm …” (28-9), and so on. Muir cites D.G. James’s comment on how Lear’s language fuses ideas of “the body as the house of the soul and the house as the protection for the body.”337 The nine-line speech, or prayer, that precedes Edgar’s first line from the hovel and the Fool’s re-entry, seems to almost invoke Edgar’s arrival, but the description of “houseless heads” in the long speech echoes precisely that of the “houseless poverty” in the additional dialogue. Even as Lear lurches painfully towards self-knowledge, the Fool’s wretchedness, though acknowledged by Lear, is not quite human enough to bring the realizations that come with Edgar’s beggarly appearance and oblique babble. Armin’s shortness of height, the physical attribute that marks him as a clown, equally marks him (for Lear at least) as other than fully human. Armin’s clowns appeared beastly, disproportioned, and by intimation not “natural” in the emerging comparative and idealized sense. Pertinent here is Wiles’ observation that Armin “clearly had a physical affinity with dogs,” apparent in how both Jonson and Shakespeare employ a cluster of related canine terms in and describing the roles they wrote for him.338 It is intriguing to imagine how Armin might have physicalized this affinity, but also not difficult to picture a dog as at once, or by turns, engaged, playful and intelligent (read artificial), and also when bedraggled, as helpless, and pathetic (natural). This explains (if not justifies) how the Fool might appear to Lear as not primarily a representative of suffering humanity. As I say above, the Fool’s reduced circumstances combined with his physical otherness (his diminutive stature marking him as different) makes him simultaneously a figure of “unaccommodated man” at once “the thing itself” but unrecognizable to Lear as such. His diminutive size and appearance, the very trait that would have allowed him to play a woman (and there is a compelling case that he doubled as
Cordelia), requires his symbolic substitution here, and creates the need for Edgar to assume the representative function of “bare-forked man.” Instead of the Fool’s impoverished (and natural) reality it takes Edgar’s compelled but performative (“artificial”) display of madness to reflect back on Lear his own suffering mortality, with a shock of recognition sufficient to finally unhinge his frail sanity. This, the Fool’s penultimate scene, provides him only five lines, the first two of which express his surprise and suspicion at Poor Tom’s sudden and frightening appearance, while the third is a bravura piece of clown-wit par excellence, wherein again he can potently quibble again on the idea of “nothing.” Lear, imagining Poor Tom’s suffering to be the result of his also having given all to his daughters, asks “What, have his daughters brought him to this pass? / Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give ’em all?” (62-3). In reply, the Fool says: “Nay, he reserv’d a blanket, else we had been all sham’d” (64-5). The reply is at once bawdy and tragic, in context the call for decorum borderline absurd. His fourth line makes the poetic truth of the scene an induced reality: “This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen” (77). His next lines attempts to halt Lear’s desperate disrobing before announcing Gloucester’s arrival with a torch in terms of a “walking fire” (108-11), after which he remains on stage but silent for the scene’s remaining seventy lines.

Hornback takes issue with Kerrigan’s reading, arguing that “far from making the Fool more acerbic, the Folio revisions tend to make the Fool there a sweetly pathetic figure,” suggesting that Lear’s

added expression of concern for the Fool’s condition in F, [quoted above] combined with Lear’s prior concern for the Fool’s exposure to the cold in both texts (“How dost my boy? Art cold? . . . Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That’s sorry yet for thee” [Q 3.2.65-70; F 3.2.68-73]), creates a distinct impression that the Fool’s health is waning in F. The Folio’s additional lines also make the Fool there seem sweet and loyal since he possibly resists going in out of the cold ahead of Lear. Alternatively, the Folio lines may
suggest that its natural Fool does not always have the proverbial “sense to come in out of the rain” and depends on Lear for care, as was typical of the natural fool.340

The idea of failing health could easily have been present in Q performances, but Hornback is right to see its increased likelihood and relevance in F. His broader readings of the Fool’s delay on exiting (another staple of clown practice here transposed to tragic circumstances) are insightful, but are also not mutually incompatible. Equally, while a performance of failing health is an attractive option for an actor aiming to signal the Fool’s increasingly abject state and continued diminishment, to suggest instead a suicide accesses a markedly different yet rich vein of symbolism. The Fool’s suffering is accentuated in the Folio—how exactly Armin expressed that is beyond our knowledge, but we must accept that he was capable of sounding any emotional note Shakespeare asked of him. The Folio changes collectively ask for a broader palette of emotion and effect, increase his connection with the audience, and augment his symbolic function. Once again, the Fool is *in extremis*, and the question of proving him artificial or natural not the central concern. While Hornback sees the revisions designed for a successor to Armin, I hold that the F changes mark a clear trajectory for the Fool’s enhanced symbolic exit and exhibit the playwright’s further nuancing of a brilliantly executed role in performance for his trusted and popular colleague. Importantly, the refashioning of the Fool’s death invites it to be read as parable, especially and forcefully in retrospect: its silent passing amidst the maelstrom of the heath is hauntingly evoked by Lear in the final scene. Cradling Cordelia in his arms Lear conflates and confuses their deaths with his cry of “And my poor Fool is hanged” (5.3.304), a wrenching reminder that the Fool’s death must be added to the play’s tally of suffering, amidst the bodies strewn across the stage in its final moments.
The mock trial, with its painful juxtapositions, may indeed have been a step too far in Shakespeare’s mixing of genres, the Fool’s misrecognition of Lear’s supposed eldest daughter, anticipating a classic Abbott and Costello set-up, is perhaps, in context, too funny: “Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool” (3.6.51). Snyder suggests that the cutting of the trial in the 1623 Folio may indicate that actors and audience may have had “difficulty coping with pathos that trembles constantly on the edge of farce.” Moreover, she suggests that “the trial scene appears suspended between genres: comic in its anticipation of the restitution of society, and tragic in its failure to achieve that ordering and in its foreshadowing of the catastrophe at Dover.” The inversion that Lear has unleashed, and that the Fool is characteristically master of, is here out of all control: taken to its extreme, reality has subsumed the parody. This further suggests a tactical withdrawal by Shakespeare in excising material that encompasses such radical destabilization. If so, what remains skirts very closely the same void.

Stripped of the trial, and barely half its original length, the Fool’s shrunken final scene has none of his language from Q, and in their place just three new lines. Two of these concern the Yeoman joke that Lear does not fully engage with, and the third is his final line, “And I’ll go to bed at noon” (l.83). This last equivocal line is in response to Lear’s inversionary “We’ll go to supper in the morning” (present in both versions), as the king lies down in the hovel too tired to eat. Hornback parses the Fool’s final seven words thus:

\[\text{Not only does the Fool acquiesce to Lear’s inversion of custom, but he also identifies pathetically with a flower that shuts itself away after the passing of the noon-day sun. The “Go to bedde at noone” was a flower “which shutteth it selfe at twelve of the clocke and sheweth not his face open vntill the next daies sunrie do make it flower anew, whereupon it was called Go to bed at noone.”}\]

However, being Shakespeare, there is a further cluster of associations around the Fool’s final words. Kerrigan quotes Hilda Hulme claiming that early audiences would have understood the
phrase proverbially “in the sense ‘be gullled, naively anticipate the impossible,’” and he identifies the simple surface meaning of resolving to leave the king and his play only halfway through its course. The change from the king’s “We’ll” to the Fool’s “I’ll” clearly indexes separation, and I suggest the whole phrase implies individualized agency, and thus suicide. A physically ailing Fool could make the line read as an acceptance of reality and impending, death. In context though, a conscious decision to withdraw, not to endure, and to embrace a premature end is more idiosyncratic and compelling. Such an act, especially recalled as it is, could be read as selfless and redemptive; suicide transmuted into renunciation and sacrifice. Equally the line (and the moments after it) could be played and read as fatalistic, flirting with the play’s vision of nihilism. Perhaps most likely this climactic performance moment was masterfully executed with characteristic (and tantalizing) ambiguity. Lastly, and here I cannot compete with Kerrigan’s economy of phrase: “What makes the Fool’s line particularly serious is its witty accomplishment.” Here, at the moment heralding his death, the worst returns to laughter; the wit that in another context would yield praise or succor, still flows but is deracinated, stripped of comic force, purpose and reaction as it announces his own willing embrace of death. And, of course, beyond his own death, going to “bed at noon” also figures the necessary if premature withdrawal of the comic from the world of the serious.

In the play’s inexorable accumulation of intensity, the Fool’s death goes initially unremarked upon, an unsounded tragic note in the wrenching music of the play’s discord. Marcello Magni, playing the Fool to Kathryn Hunter’s Lear in 1997, remained motionless on stage amidst the straw of the hovel, out of sight and mind, as Lear was lead off. The lights held on his body throughout their slow exit, before snapping to black. The clear inference was that the sleep that Lear had attempted in this scene, only to then be bustled off to greater comfort, took
instead a steely hold of his equally frail Fool. Something akin to this effect was likely integral to the Jacobean staging, though without the expediency of the blackout available. In Q, Kent calls to the Fool to accompany them as the other characters exit, in F this line is pointedly missing, and the implication of abandonment or death is deliberate and manifest. His implied death on the heath is only the most brutal example of the costs and consequences of the old man’s folly, and of “the mad injustices of sane men’s choices” that abound in the play, scarring the kingdom and the psyche.

With the sudden arrival of Poor Tom in 3.4, the Fool has seen his function being usurped as the mad king looks for wisdom from the mad beggar. Edgar’s nonsensical retort to Lear’s allusion to his “pelican daughters” — “Pilicock sat on Pilicock Hill” (l.74-5)—for Snyder is evidence that “sound has taken over from sense to produce comic irrelevance.” Developing further on the density of Lear’s allusion, however, Snyder observes that

Pelican [is] used negatively by Lear with stress on the rapacious young rather than on selfless parent, it nevertheless can call up a whole familiar pattern of creative suffering, abasement as part of a movement toward greater good. Its archetype is the divine comedy of redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, whom Dante called “nostro pelicano.” That divine comedy is the ultimate frame of reference for many of the conventions of comedy… It blots out death with love, and directs human beings from bondage to freedom not through a causal chain of works and rewards but through humiliation, self-dislocation, and the transforming faith that makes a new reality. Once again the play invokes familiar “comic” conventions (and I am aware of the two senses of comic at play here), only to confound them, and for Snyder, Cordelia’s death breaks a rule and “is the last and greatest example of pelican displaced to pilicock, moral significance dissolving in absurdity.” Snyder echoes complaints dating back to at least Samuel Johnson that Cordelia’s death is “senseless” and “monstrously unfair.” However, as Muir points out, in all the play’s likely sources Cordelia commits suicide. In the change from suicide to sacrifice, doubled in the loss and sacrifice of the Fool, and by further refinement of both roles in F, Shakespeare both
encapsulates a world drained of comfort, and, without overt sentimentalism, suggests the patterns, structure and consolation of revealed religion.

As already noted, the disappearance and implied death of the Fool, Lear’s closest adherent in Cordelia’s absence, is retroactively insolubly linked with her own banishment and death in Lear’s confused and conflating cry of “And my poor Fool is hanged” (5.3.304). Until now, I have held off any conjecture regarding the doubling of Cordelia and the Fool as separate from my larger argument regarding the collaborative and symbiotic working relationship of player and playwright. But the connection is irresistible as the conflation of Lear’s cry is made flesh if the parts were so doubled: the ambiguity of the language deliciously deliberate, the parable evoked doubly devastating. Such an occurrence has a decidedly Shakespearean ring: Again, Armin’s size and voice would suit him for playing Cordelia and allow Shakespeare to tacitly bolster the themes of regeneration, sacrifice, fidelity and the other Christian virtues. At the same time, both characters index the play’s unflinching view of nihilistic emptiness, as each lock horns with the king on the value of nothing. In 1961, Thomas B. Stroup surveyed the observed affinities between the two roles, and decided the balance of probability suggested they were written for the same boy or male actor.353 Stroup shows how Lear “made [Cordelia] houseless poverty, and the Fool is her image before him, her alter ego.”354 Even when reunited, Stroup adds “she is as houseless as ever the Fool was, and as utterly devoted as he—without his bitterness,” continuing: “Like him she leaves the stage, without taking leave, not to return alive.”355 The doubling, Stroup notes, would also explain Q’s careful preparation for the first entrance of both characters, one that emphasizes their closeness, and the quite remarkable detail whereby the same number of lines (356) separate Cordelia’s exit in the first scene from the Fool’s first entrance as separate his final exit to her reappearance.356 While we can place Armin
in the role of the Quarto Fool without misgivings, we must also recognize little else can be established with certainty, though no one has seriously challenged Shakespeare’s hand in the revisions. What does exist in the Folio is a conscious foregrounding of the Fool’s departure, and, as a result the curious displacement of Cordelia’s suicide ONTO the Fool, as the text implies by his going “to bed at noon.” The desperate solution sought by Cordelia is reconfigured into his conscious withdrawal, his suicide, like his life, an act of selfless sacrifice and devotion. At the same time, the Folio Cordelia, carefully shorn of the dangerous associations of foreign invasion, is more purely a sacrificial figure, and the Fool is folded into that portrait of selflessness. Their suffering, that has run parallel throughout the play, intersects at the moment of Lear’s cry. The Fool’s departure is equally, as we’ve seen, in conscious dialogue with the contemporary aesthetic discourse about the role, place and suitability of comedy in the presentation of tragedy. Shakespeare is both canny and provocative in making the role so central: only in retrospect is his expansive and inclusive vision revealed as more modern than his critics.

For all that editors and critics contest the possible readings of “And my poor Fool is hanged,” Stroup considers reasonably that the Fool and Cordelia are united in death, at the very least in Lear’s mind. Cordelia’s loss and sacrifice, even before being compounded with that of the Fool, comes as a brutal, sickening shock. It is this shock that has drawn so much criticism to the play, and even the suggestion that it cannot, or shouldn’t, be performed. The conflation of moral and aesthetic certainty is what most undermined early critics of the play: the Fool should not be there at all, and Cordelia should not die. Such critics are responding (perhaps naturally) to the embedded comic and pastoral structures we’ve seen operating, the pattern of hope raised only to be thwarted, repeated in the shock of her death. Indeed, the full power of Cordelia’s death is achieved through the close alignment of her with the comic modes accessed by the Fool.
Whether or not the parts doubled (but perhaps overwhelmingly if they did), the Fool’s association with Cordelia in death and throughout not only facilitates or tacitly reinforces a redemptive reading of Shakespeare’s unvarnished vision, it reveals Armin’s clown as the structural device that generates and makes possible such an unflinching but potentially transcendent or cathartic outcome. The Fool’s influence both radiates outward, his idiosyncratic alienation and atomizing of meaning endemic in the upsetting of order Lear unleashed, and stands as central to the play’s evocation of selflessness, fellowship and belonging. He contains fatal poison and its antidote. His death, when coupled with Cordelia’s, invokes and collapses another stage triangle recalling and reinforcing their symbolic Christ-like function, inviting a stubborn residue of redemptive hope to persist. That hope is raised even, as before, specifically to be thwarted in the present, and to presage Lear’s passing.

A further variant between the texts is illustrative here. The Q reading of the moment prior to Lear’s death is identical to Hamlet’s breathy expiration found only in the Folio of that play. Both lines read: “O, O, O, O”, although in Hamlet only the first O is capitalized (Q1. 5.3.306, Hamlet, 5.2.363). In the Folio Lear is given instead a vision of resurrection: “Do you see this? Look on her, look her lips, /Look there look there!” (5.3.307-8) and dies mid-line. His dying words in the Quarto, “Break heart, I prithee break” (Q.1.1.307, F, 1.310) are reassigned to Kent. The increased pathos is marked as Lear, rather than sputtering out in agony, has a moment of transcendence and, albeit imaginary, hope.

After Lear’s death, there still remains a crucial variant between the Quarto and the Folio texts, namely the redistribution of the play’s final four lines from Albany to Edgar. This displacement symbolically completes the process of generic transformation from History to Tragedy. Speaking the last lines affords status on the speaker, not least given the vacuum of a
royal death. When Albany speaks the final lines, he is the last surviving noble of the old order. Moreover, he is immediate family and, as Goneril’s surviving husband, the direct heir. His name and position stand for the land, and for history. As such, the Quarto ends in stasis. By contrast, Edgar is of the next generation and in a sense elected by Lear. Edgar’s voice closing the play implies continuation, but also holds within it both tragic and redemptive resonances, and offers the prospect, however dim, and the hope however muted, of a new society.

Tate’s removal of the Fool and having Cordelia survive to marry Edgar is clearly a response to the inexorable tug of the tragi-comic structures embedded in the play. Revision allowed Tate to iron out generic upheaval so that the play could comfortably fit or conform to a generic label, finding closure in a solution Shakespeare had purposefully eschewed. Shakespeare preferred to encompass the consolations of comedy within a tragic vision. The Fool is problematic for countering the exclusive drift of the Jacobean theatre, troubling supposed verities of taste, artistic form, and decency, his employment supposedly an appalling aesthetic choice as distasteful as the crime of Cordelia’s unnecessary death. As Bakhtin and others note, the social function and uses of comedy were being radically reordered in the period, a deracination of its medieval breadth and scope. Equally profound were the comprehensive changes in the makeup of the audience, for by the time of Tate the dominant theatre forms were a middle-class and aristocratic pursuit. As such, it is ironic that Tate excised the inclusive and populist Fool to make the play more popular, commercially speaking. The clown will re-emerge in elite forms of theatre, on the continent in short shrift and ultimately in all forms of theatre that are not consigned behind a fourth wall unable to speak directly to or to acknowledge its audience. In the ruins of the well-made play and the experimental or immersive theatre milieus the resurrected and transmuted
clown presides as king, eternally passing time, jesting at scars, sitting out the *Endgame, Waiting for Godot*.

It is needless to argue that the changes to the Fool alone, or even the revisions in total, entirely transform *Lear* from History to Tragedy. To do so implies a rigidity in form and meaning that ignores the tragic elements of Q’s *History*, and the thrust of this chapter regarding the Fool’s essential destabilizing of genre. The play (in both iterations) radically and deliberately stages the breakdown of order as the king plays Bo-peep. However, only in the refinements and adjustments of the Folio (up to and including Edgar being given the last couplet) does the play offer the increased pathos, and access, via the Fool and Cordelia’s conflated death, the fuller tragic catharsis that could have decisively swung the audience’s perceptions from the play’s otherwise unresolved tension toward the redemptive reading. In this the play offers a further moment of identification for the audience, becoming potentially a richer experience for them, and indubitably, among its amplitudes, *The Tragedy of the Clown*.

Separate from how one may subjectively categorize the play, I suggest Armin’s influence and likely collaboration in the revision is extensive. If, as Taylor suggests, the Quarto was “set from a manuscript which contained material the censor had ordered to be removed,” then Armin likely rehearsed (and possibly performed) some version of the earlier text and then absorbed the changes into performances. While we cannot know the extent of the collaboration, Taylor’s assessment of the evidence means that the Folio would have been in the repertoire long before Armin or Shakespeare’s retired. Moreover, as we’ve seen, the changes reflect the fashion for pathos and show an increased demand on the player’s range in ways further developed in other roles for Armin such as Iago, Thersites, and Caliban. In the revision Shakespeare is further
developing the idea and potential of Armin’s vitality (his characteristic comic inversion and disruption) echoing Lear’s fatal misjudgment in dividing the Kingdom) to its logical tragic extent. Through its collaborative reconfiguring the Folio Fool encapsulates the ways in which the clown is constitutive of the modern theatre even as it was excised in the process of its birth. We might suggest too that what is excised is often what is most central, and how Caliban is properly acknowledged by a wiser sage than Lear. To the Quarto’s vision of entropy, the Folio has the developed symbolism and embedded structures that assert new growth. It is a more mature work and represents a more fully human fool, as well as a more human and foolish king. Valerie Traub cites John Danby, from his *The Doctrine of Nature in King Lear*, famously encapsulating how: “At the beginning of the play we are watching an old man and his awkward family. At the end all we can see is stricken Humanity holding murdered Nature in its arms.”363 To this we must add that, in F, the Fool is present in neither moment, but invoked in both. It might be a bold theatre historian who suggests a supporting actor’s performance decisively swayed in performance (for some if not all) a longstanding critical impasse, especially one who such much of his impact is either silence or conjured in his absence. And yet, arguably, this is precisely what performance history bequeaths us; generations of audiences drawn under the spell of charismatic and occasionally transcendent experiences of which the texts are just a dull echo. Dominant culture narratives inform responses to a given text, as conflicted but pervasive religious constructs would have framed Jacobean experiences of the play. Moreover, Burbage, Armin, et. al would, of course, have risen from the final scene’s carpet of corpses for the play’s final mixing of modes, the bows. Shakespeare’s poetic vision and practical magic was for all, and Armin was a consummate performer, capable, as all good clowns are, of alchemizing something from
nothing. This is true even as their medium was transforming, ephemeral, and beyond the extant words “left not a rack behind” (Prospero, *The Tempest*, 4.1.146)

It is Shakespeare’s great paean to the clown that he harnesses exile to inclusive ends, to bring about such an unflinching and uncompromising vision, more powerful and enduring (if not always popular) for its rejection of the verisimilitude by which Cordelia’s virtue would see her survive. The Folio Fool does not shirk from evoking the abyss implied in the play’s inversion of order yet carries with him embedded redemptive hope and offers more immediate solace. The cadences of his virtuoso voice in his snatches of song and verse poignantly combine with their knowing content, simultaneously recalling the “jigging rhymes” of earlier times (to use Marlowe’s term of contempt), and yet reaching a hitherto unseen level of pathos. The Fool’s presence changes the rhythms of the play, his appearances stemming in part the otherwise unrelenting and insistent build in tragic intensity, even as they edge Lear towards self-knowledge: even at his most bitter he is patently a beacon of devotion. Moreover, he does not need to be speaking or even present to exert an effect, his death as silent as dead Cordelia’s lips. In this context, Polonius’ extolling of the players in *Hamlet* for their genre-bursting variety (*Hamlet*, 3.2.395-402) reads less as the comic parody it descends into, and more as authorial pride in his company as the “best actors in the world” (395). Lear’s appearance carrying Cordelia is devastating in both versions of the play. In the revised Folio treatment embers of stubborn hope persist, endure and perhaps even triumph, amongst or against the equally profound darkness. In this moment Shakespeare reaches a pinnacle worthy of the ancients, if achieved by deliberately indirect and inclusive means anathema to seventeenth-century sensibilities. James Joyce, himself fascinated with Shakespeare, has his Stephen recall a critic praising Virgil for something comparable to Shakespeare’s achievement in the Folio Lear. Joyce in turn
manufactures a moment secular but transcendent, as Stephen is listening to his brothers sing, before joining in with them, an Irish Air, *Oft On A Stilly Night*:

He was listening, with pain of spirit, to the note of weariness behind their fresh, frail voices, and he remembered Cardinal Newman had heard this note in the broken lines of Virgil, giving utterance, like the voice of nature herself, to that pain and weariness, yet hope of better things which has been the experience of her children in every time.\(^{364}\)

FIN.
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PLAY TEXTS AND PRIMARY SOURCES


**CRITICISM AND SECONDARY SOURCES**


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NOTES

1 All quotations from Hamlet are from the Arden edition, edited by Harold Jenkins, (New York; London: Methuen, 1982), unless otherwise stated. All other Shakespeare quotations and line numbers unless otherwise indicated are from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed G. Blakemore Evans, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974).
2 Joseph Allen, Bryant, Shakespeare’s Falstaff and the Mantle of Dick Tarlton, (Studies in Philology, 51. 1954); 160-1.
5 Ibid., 29.
6 Ibid., 7.
13 Andrew Gurr describes Tarlton as “not only a theatrical clown but a man of many parts, a maker up of plays and ballads, a drummer, tumbler and qualified master of fencing. He became famous in the 1570’s, a byword in the 1580s, and a popular legend for a century after his death for his extemporized jests.” Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970), 64.
14 For a different approach to Hamlet as both prince and clown, see Weimann, Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice, esp. chapter 5. See also Nora Johnson, The Actor as Playwright in Early Modern Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
16 Richard Helgerson, Forms of Nationhood, 25.
17 Ibid., 10-11.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 6.
20 Ibid., 11.
21 Weimann, Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice, 152
22 See Weimann, Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice.
24 Ibid.


30 Again, see Robert Weimann (with Helen Higbee, and William West) *Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare’s Theatre*, and also Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. 2009).

31 “Clown” historically is a gendered term, and for consistency I use the masculine form in this study of a male performer. This is not to suggest that there are not extraordinary female clowns, quite the reverse.


33 Ibid., 9.

34 Ibid.


36 Ibid., 156. The quoted poem is from Humphrey King’s pamphlet *An Half-penny-worth of Wit in a Penny-worth of Paper, or The Hermits Tale* (3rd imprint 1613), and is also quoted in Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig*, 102.

37 ‘Delight’ will be a crucial word in this and subsequent chapters, as the following pages will suggest, specifically in relation to Sidney’s use of the term. Further paragraphs will reference the use of the word in direct relation to Tarlton.

38 Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 11.

39 Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. 2009), 52.

40 Tarlton’s professional origins were either working in taverns or as the rather more perambulatory water carrier. For brief biographical details see David Wiles *Shakespeare’s Clown* in his chapter on Tarlton, 14, or else Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, 64-6.


42 Ibid., 352.

43 Baskervill suggests that Tarlton’s forte was comic and satiric song, and that the stage jig transformed under his influence. See Charles Reed Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig, and Related Song Drama*, (Dover: New York. 1965), 101. This develops an idea found in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography which posits that “there is a strong probability that the transference of [Tarlton’s] tavern [clown jesting] style to the public theatres was Tarlton’s peculiar innovation as an actor and the basis of his extraordinary popularity.”

44 The contemporary improvisatory comedian and filmmaker Christopher Guest keeps this tradition alive as a game on long car journeys; I hope to participate one day.

45 The existence of responses to *Tarlton’s Jest’s* suggest that it was widely circulated, or at least known, very soon after the clown’s death. Of these, the earliest I can find is the anonymous: *The Cobler of Counterburie. Or an inuictuiue against Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie. A merrier lest then a Clownes ligge, and fitter for Gentlemens humors. Published with the cost of a Dickar of Cowe hides. [Printer's mark]. London, Printed by Robert Robinson, 1590.*

47 Ibid.

48 For more on the jig’s history see Charles Read Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig, and Related Song Drama*. (Dover: New York. 1965).


50 Ibid.

51 This of course, uncannily anticipates the licensed Fool Feste’s risky strategy toward Olivia in *Twelfth Night* amid the stalemated courtly-love politics of that play. Tarlton is very much in Shakespeare’s head in 1599/1600.


54 Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, 3.


56 Ibid., 353.


58 Ibid.


60 Peter Thomson, Entry on Tarlton, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

61 Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men*, 49.

62 Ibid., 66.

63 Ibid., 69.

64 Clare, *Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic*, 154.


66 Ibid., 94. The dimensions given are for the Globe, but comparable with earlier fixed London stages like the Fortune and the old Theatre that it replaced. Touring stages and platforms were likely no quite as large.

67 Peter Thomson, in his Tarlton section, for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.


69 Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men*, 65.

70 This scene is discussed more fully in the next chapters section on Falstaff and *The Famous Victories*.


72 Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men*, 61.
The exchange of weapons also suggests a famous moment between Peter Lorre and Humphrey Bogart disarming each other in *The Maltese Falcon*, a noir take on clearly an old routine. This represents a comic if tacit or unintended nod to Priam’s slaughter that might have struck a young playwright.

Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men*, 67.


Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men*, 67-8.

Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men*, 54.


In Chapter 4 I discuss Robert Armin, another short man, and the cluster of dog and related images associated with him and the character’s written for him. Here again, the language of dogs and curs is usually pejorative.

Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men*, 53.

I suggest that Sidney, in reworking his *Arcadia* after the early version was lost, was himself unable to maintain the strict sense of decorum and genre purity for which he so influentially called. Perhaps in response to Tarlton’s influence, the “New” Arcadia, as distinct from its predecessor, leaves pastoral way behind, as it embodies and enacts subversion within its capacious and generically fluid enlarged and unfinished narrative. This claim will be developed further in subsequent iterations of this manuscript.

Cited in Lawrence, *Speeding Up Shakespeare*, 19. The passage is from the sixth stanza of “Thalia’s Complaint.”

Bohun, *Queen Elizabeth*, 354-5.


Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre*, (Cambridge; CUP, 2014). Preiss suggests that the clowns through their publications were themselves progenitors of authorship rather than merely an alternative to it, “gradually disembodying the one and solidifying the other” (17).

Ben Jonson was perhaps Shakespeare’s most voluble critic in his lifetime, while Voltaire expressed the neoclassical disdain for theatricality as late as the nineteenth-century. Robert Weimann has noted the late
Elizabethan denigration of players and clowns specifically, see Robert Weimann, *Actor’s Pen and Author’s Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare’s Theatre*, (New York; Cambridge, U.K: CUP, 2000). Similarly Richard Preiss has reclaimed the clown as “collaborative producers” (7) of the theatrical event, noting that Hamlet’s famous criticism of the figure “is the derogatory statement around which post-Romantic discussions of the clown crystallized,” Preiss, *Clowning And Authorship*, 3.

95 *Hamlet*, 3.2.42-3


97 Ibid., 3.

98 “Padding,’ in the theatrical sense, means the same as the regular dictionary sense of adding to enlarge or filling out, be it a resume or a garment. All performance grows out of doing, clown logic and performance practice just seeks to extend the playing or performing as long as feasible; the detail and physical inventiveness of much Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin routines catches on film this expansion and attending to every physical possibility. In these films, of course, the clowning is constituent of the intended performance not a delaying or withdrawal from it.


100 Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig, and Related Song Drama*, (Dover, New York, 1965), 335.

101 See Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, 113-4, and 142, the latter quoting Thomas Platter on the jig from his *travels in England*, 166-7.


103 The history of the word is complicated and fluid, in the early 1580s, some kind of jig was among the court dances, and the presumably coarser stage jigs survived into the new century, if not (for a time) at The Globe. Baskervill notes “a less tolerant attitude is discernible” (111) after 1600, and as such, Hamlet is merely among the first to use it in the derogatory sense that it assumed amongst the elite around the turn of the century

104 Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig*, 111.


106 Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship*, 186.

107 Ibid., 144.

108 For a further discussion on the casting of Kemp generally see Wiles, Chapter 6 “The Roles of Kemp the Clown,” in Shakespeare’s Clown, and as Falstaff, see Appendix.

109 All quotations and line numberings from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed G. Blakemore Evans, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

110 Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown*,125-6

111 Ibid.,

112 All quotations and line numberings from *Romeo and Juliet*, unless otherwise noted, are from the Arden edition, ed. Brian Gibbons, (New York; London: Methuen, 1980).


115 *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Gibbons, line note 1.2. 57-63, 97.

117 Ibid., 86.

118 Ibid. This dagger, Wiles suggests, was likely the same clown’s toy wooden prop likely worn by Falstaff in place of a gentleman’s metal sword or foil, *Shakespeare’s Clown*, 120-1.

119 Ibid., 89.

120 Ibid., 90.

121 Ibid., 92

122 Ibid., 91

123 Ibid., 94

124 Andrew Stott, “‘The Fondness, the Filthiness:’ Deformity and Laughter in Early-Modern Comedy,” *Upstart Crow*, 24, 2004; 15.

125 Ibid.

126 I contend that Shakespeare conceivably acted in *The Famous Victories*, saw it on tour, or else certainly referred to a copy of it. I also contend that Shakespeare seeing Tarlton perform would readily explain the clown’s lasting impact on the young playwright, and that by whatever route his ghost informs the fat knight as Bryant saw.

127 Humphreys, *1 Henry IV*, xxxii


129 Traces of the first name remain in *1 Henry IV*, Shakespeare had already written a drunk knight Falstoffe in his *Henry VI* plays, and the modified name proved an inspired choice when Oldcastle proved too controversial.

130 When the prince promises Ned a promotion to Lord Chief Justice on his accession, Jockey’s response is “Nobly spoken Harry, we shall never have a merry world til the old king be dead.” (6. 475-6.)

131 Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown*, 119. Wiles suggests here that “In a sense, killing time is at the symbolic heart of the role.”

132 Joseph Bryant, “falstaff and the Mantle of Dick Tarlton,” 151-2. Bryant continues: “to hold in perpetuo the field he dominated during his lifetime” but Falstaff alone curiously does not “hold in perpetuo Tarlton’s field,” it is also Kemp who does so.

133 Ibid., 152.

134 Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown*, 118


137 Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 222.

138 Ibid., 223.

139 I address the casting of Kemp as Falstaff, and of Burbage opposite him, more fully in the Appendix to this chapter.

140 Preiss asserts that “the abandonment of the Curtain for the south bank came with a refinement in repertory” and the decommissioning of the jig, *Clowning and Authorship*, 151.

Ibid., 2.


Ibid., 20. In the circumstances, I cannot but hear Kent’s final lines in *King Lear*, “I have a journey shortly to go / My master calls me, I may not say no” (*King Lear*, 5.3.320-1).


Ben Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humor*, Act 4, Scene 8, lines 127-8

Andrew Stott, *Comedy*, (New York; Routledge, 1995), 89.

Ibid.


Jeffrey Doty, *Shakespeare Popularity and the Public Sphere*, Preface.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 80

Ibid., 81

This phrase is used of Tarlton and of Hamlet, signifying their popularity specifically across class lines. See notes 30 and 175.

Jeffrey Doty, *Shakespeare Popularity and the Public Sphere*, 66.


Robert Weimann, *Actor’s Pen and Author’s Voice*, 152.


See the examples given in the chapter, and Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clowns*, with chapter-length discussions of Kemp and Armin’s roles.

Ibid., 118-9.

CHAPTER 3

All quotations from *Hamlet* are from the Arden edition, edited by Harold Jenkins, (New York; London: Methuen, 1982), unless otherwise stated. All other Shakespeare quotations and line numbers unless otherwise indicated are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed G. Blakemore Evans, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974).


There is also to be noted the aural similarity of “Yorick” to “Your- Rick,” as in Richard, which may have rolled off the tongue more elegantly than “Your-Dick.”


Margreta De Grazia, Hamlet Without Hamlet, (CUP, New York, 2007), comprehensively explores the play’s cooption by subsequent generations of critics into cultural, aesthetic and later psychological discourse. These discussions take something from what they perceive of Hamlet’s expressed position but lose sight of the materiality and theatricality inherent in its creation, and the essence of its revenge plot. As is discussed further herein, De Grazia sees this process as Hamlet being dissociated from the “land plot,” and a consequence is the further distancing of the play from the conditions of its original performances.

De Grazia, Hamlet Without Hamlet, 8.

Ibid.

De Grazia, Hamlet Without Hamlet, 5.

Helgerson, Richard, Forms of Nationhood, 11.

Weimann, Robert, Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice, 152.

From John Lyly, A Whip for an Ape: Or Martin Displaied. London, 1589. The term comes in the books dedication to Kemp, and reads in full: ‘To that most Comicall and Conceited Cavaliero, Monsieur du Kempe, Jestmonger and Viceregent-generall to the Ghost of Dicke Tarlton.’ Similarly, Thomas Heywood, in his ‘Apology for Actors,’ (1612) speaks of Kemp’ succeeding Tarleton, “as wel in the favour of her majesty as in the opinions and good thoughts of the generall audience.”

Most critical editions of the play discuss these texts and their provenance in their introduction, but for a recent book length study see Zachary Lesser, Hamlet After Q1, An Uncanny History of the Shakespearean Text. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).


Robert Weimann, Actor’s Pen and Author’s Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare’s Theatre, (New York; Cambridge, U.K: CUP, 2000), 23. Weimann also observes “the culture of Renaissance humanism and the practice of antic performance engag[ing] each other” in Hamlet, concluding, “thus Shakespeare’s theatre can celebrate the pinnacle of its inclusiveness at the very moment when the impact of socio-cultural differentiation began to seriously challenge the integration of the Globe’s components” (152).

Telescoping centuries of subsequent criticism into a sentence, De Grazia tells us, “the role of the impertinent antic vice gives way first to neoclassical judgment and then to psychological analysis. ”De Grazia, Hamlet Without Hamlet, 196.

From Voltaire’s Dissertation sur la Tragedie (1752), the original phrase was “grossiere et barbare”

The reference to Hamlet is from Antony Scoloker’s Daiphantus, or the Passions of Love, where in his “Epistle to the reader,” he hopes “like Friendly Shakespeare, where the Comedian rides, while the
Tragedian stands on tip toe," that his work "Faith it should please all, Like Prince Hamlet." Recorded in Charles Wells Moulton, The Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors. Buffalo, NY: Moulton 1901, 500. De Grazia notes that Scoloker, having concluded that if the price of pleasing all (or the cause of Hamlet's popularity) was his sanity, reconsideres the proposition (8). The original reads "Insooth, I will not be moone-sick to please. Nor out of my wits though I displeased all." For the Tarlton reference see Chapter 1, note 30.


187 Ibid.


189 De Grazia, Hamlet Without Hamlet, 185.

190 Ibid., 186.

191 Falstaff of course has two plays to speak in. Iago and Henry V are the largest single play roles.

192 See Weimann, Author's Pen and Actor's Voice, 192-196.


194 A more direct phrase is the theatrical old saw "it’s all about the effect on the audience."

195 Andrew Stott makes a compelling case for Grimaldi occupying this position which is, of course, technically correct. The same irressparible—and popular—energy animates both figures, Hamlet's debilitating condition informs his every word, and comedy, through his interrogation of forms allows him to 'be' and to do when it would otherwise only unpack his words. That he shares his words and his melancholy state through clown forms of direct address and expressions of his antic disposition prefigures, in fiction the tragic life and career of the later clown. Grimaldi's depression was similarly debilitating, expressing itself in perpetual nerves and anxiety except, Stott says quoting a contemporary account "until he was in the heart of his mystery, [on stage] and then he had no fear" (Grimaldi, Introduction, xxvi). Stott is at pains not to endorse the myth, in part stemming from Grimaldi's fame and fall, that comedy somehow conceals an ineffable sadness. Rather, he points out that "comedy demands sacrifice" (xxvii) and Grimaldi would be its first martyr. Hamlet is paralyzed by his allotted role but animated by his adopted one, death awaits and devils leer ominously beyond his playground, and in this his condition and its irony mirror and prefigure the later clown.

196 I discuss the parts Shakespeare wrote for Kemp in the previous chapter, they include Peter in Romeo and Juliet and Falstaff in the Henry IV plays, both of whom affect melancholy, and Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream. See also David Wiles, Shakespeare's Clowns, Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Theatre, Chapter 3 "The Roles of Kemp the Clown."

197 Weimann, Robert, Author's Pen and Actor's Voice, 152.

198 Hamlet, ed. Jenkins, line note to 3.1.80.


201 Ibid., 54-5.


203 It is interesting to note, that such is the implicit almost unconscious elevation of tragedy that Rosencrantz praises them as specifically "tragedians."

See Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poet’s War*, 1-11 and 225-256 particularly. The former notes that “War of the theatres” and other such names derive from nineteenth century criticism (5), the latter is a chapter, “Ben Jonson and the ‘Little Eyases,’ Theatrical Politics in Hamlet.”


Jenkins, *Hamlet*, note to line 2.2.337.


Kastan, David Scott, *His Semblance is his Mirror*, 113.

Ibid.


Kastan notes, in recalling the speech that Hamlet oddly, “wishes to imitate the player rather than Pyrrhus [he] envies the player’s dramatic technique,” (116) the skillful representation rather the bloody original. In the context of this chapter’s thesis however, wherein inquiry into performance and its intersection with honesty, survival and being is baked into the play structurally and thematically as a constituent of Hamlet’s identity, this peculiarity is less surprising and certainly not out of place.


Jenkins, *Hamlet*, line note to 3.2.90.

Jenkins, *Hamlet*, long note to 3.2.133 S.D, 501.


Kastan, David Scott, *His Semblance is his Mirror*, 116.

Jenkins, line note to .2.2.446.


Calderwood, James L. *Shakespeare & the Denial of Death*. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1987, 118.


Jenkins’ cites Francis Douce in his *Illustrations of Shakespeare* observing that, “some books of heraldry refer to Adam’s spade as the most ancient form of escutcheon,” line note to 5.1.29.

Halliwell in his edition of *Hamlet* (1865) spoke of a custom of the Gravedigger “untill within a very recent period” stripping off a dozen waistcoats before speaking, and speculated this dated back to the time of Shakespeare’s company. The comic business is of course timeless, but nicely mirrors Hamlet’s description of himself as “set naked” back in Denmark, which would be entirely characteristic of the clown -prince parallel and absorption that Shakespeare establishes in the play as a whole.


Jenkins, line note to 5.1.133-4.


Ibid., 4.
Originally composed by Saxo Grammaticus in the twelfth century, a popular French translation of the legend by Francois de Belleforest was published in 1570, and an English one in 1608 which existed in manuscript for some years and could have been available to Shakespeare.


Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 244.


Ibid., 84.

Ibid., 88.


Ibid.

De Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, 204.


CHAPTER 4


See “‘Where’s My Fool?’: Some Consequences of the Omission of the Fool in Tate's Lear,” Lawrence D. Green, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1972), pp. 259-274. Green notes that Tate confusingly removes the Fool’s lines but not Lear’s responses to them. As such, lacking the Fool’s contrastive presence, “when Lear flashes from rationality to madness there is no way to grade the difference,” and meaning that the actor “must single-handedly convey Lear’s madness, and the reason for it, all without textual support.” (268) The result is that Betterton (the first actor to play Tate’s Lear) and subsequent actors see Lear not making sense in the text with the play around him as evidence for “something being wrong with Lear’s mind,” (270) such that both a performance tradition, and a critical one, grow up around Lear’s supposed psychology.

To be sure, what performance tradition the Fool has had was more influenced by contemporary theatrical fashions (and editorial practice) than its Jacobean iteration.
Charles Felver, Robert Armin, Shakespeare’s Fool, 52. Elsewhere Felver asserts that Armin “not only surpassed the clownish witticisms and turns of the Tarlton-Kemp tradition, but originated a new style of witty, songful, intellectual, and socially mobile clowning.” (31) but also says Armin “did not hesitate to use what was good from the older clowning tradition as well” (36).


Hornback states that, beginning around 1599, (when Armin either joined or was promoted from with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men) “for more than a decade thereafter the artificial fool became the most prominent comic role.” Robert B. Hornback, "The Fool in Quarto and Folio King Lear," English Literary Renaissance 34, no. 3 (2004): 310.

As Felver rightly suggests, this is Shakespeare introducing Armin’s new type of clown to the Globe audience (46), The melancholy Jacques is delighted by Touchstone and expounds on the advantages of being a fool, even folly’s medicinal effect, at the same time essaying on the idea of the fool’s license (As You Like It, 2.2). Similarly, in Twelfth Night, Felver sees Viola’s description of Armin’s Feste (in 2.2) as “an explanation and justification of the new fool’s role to an audience accustomed to the older comic clown” (30). Equally, Wiles sees Kemp’s old style of clowning being symbolically dismissed in the William and Touchstone episode, (As You Like It, 5.1) (Shakespeare’s Clowns, 146) the witty fool superseding the plebeian buffoonery.

Burgess, Shakespeare, 172. Burgess notes that Sir John Harrington, in inventing the water-closet, entitled his book on it The Metamorphosis of Ajax, and Shakespeare shifted the existing humoral name for a malcontent and “Ajax became A Jax or A Jakes.”

James I had his own court-fool Archie Armstrong, and Queen Elizabeth had kept a court dwarf, a woman named Thomasina, for a period.

Felver, Robert Armin, 46.


Ibid., 309.

David Wiles notes that “the complex relationship of clown and fool is regularly explored in Armin’s fool roles in a manner that relates closely to the actor’s interest.” Here, as elsewhere, Wiles hints at the creative reciprocity between actor and poet-playwright necessary to create a fool as potently and richly detailed as that in King Lear, without fully acknowledging the likely symbiotic dynamic between the two actor/playwrights, and students of clown. David Wiles, Shakespeare’s Clown, 146.

The evidence for Armin’s diminutive stature is cumulative, in part drawn from multiple allusions to his characters in a range of plays, (not least Volpone’s Nano the dwarf) and supported by contemporary attitudes and historical precedent that held physical grotesqueness as a prerequisite for fooling. In Armin’s own play The History of the Two Maids of More-clack with the life and simple manner of John in the Hospital (1609, but performed much earlier) the character of John is described as “Something tall, dribbling ever, body small, merry never: /Splay footed, visage black; little beard, it was his lack.’ (CITE) There is also the visual information from the wood-cut on the play’s title page which portrays Armin in the role of John, contained within a rectangular frame. While there is no second figure for comparison, the character is clearly squat, he has no visible neck, and stands comically turned out with his hands on his hips. This pose, and the placing of his left foot centrally within the rectangular frame, I suggest, inverts emergent ideals of proportion as epitomized in Leonardo Da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man. See Valerie Traub, “The Nature of Norms in Early Modern England: Anatomy, Cartography, King Lear,” South Central Review 26, no. 1 (2009): 42-81, which explicates this “universalizing logic of the grid by which humans would be identified and differentiated, classified and compared.” (Abstract). Traub considers the representation of Poor Tom in these terms, but not the implications for the Fool which I will return to below. Wiles points how many of Armin’s character names, like Snuff, Pink, Frog etc., are diminutive, and lays out the many references to Armin as a dog, notably Jonson’s description of Carlo as a ‘banquet beagle.’ (Jonson, ed Wilkes, Vol 1, 281). “Armin’s shape and size” Wiles states “gave point to the
recurrent image of the cringing dog” (148). Moreover Wiles explicates how comedy is built around his stature in several situations. Among these, Feste as Sir Topas say “I am not tall enough to become the function well, nor lean enough to play the student well.” (Twelfth Night, 4.2.5-8). The parson’s gown likely swamped him, a comic visual detail enjoyed by the audience and not seen by Malvolio. See Wiles, Shakespeare’s Clowns, 146-155.

Wiles, Shakespeare’s Clowns, 150.

As Wiles notes Touchstone is artificial while fooling with Corin, “but in his lust for Audrey he is altogether natural.” Wiles, Shakespeare’s Clown, 146.

Wiles, Shakespeare’s Clown, 158

Indeed, the distinctly British setting of Lear allows Armin in his “last straight ‘fool’ role,” as Wiles puts it “for the first time in the extant repertoire, to don the traditional motley and coxcomb of medieval tradition” (155). While this assumes details of Armin’s earlier costuming as Touchstone and Feste that cannot be verified, Wiles’ larger point stands, namely that “Armin’s researches and observations of real-life idiots had hitherto led him away from the old emblematic stage tradition,” but, in Lear his “cycle of fool roles came full circle” (155).

Wiles correctly identifies this as a new element in Armin’s later publication Nest of Ninnies (1608) and a result of his time working with Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s Clown, 140.

The ambiguity inherent in ideas of banishment, Smith suggests, was central to its fascination, and in both religion and poetry resulted in “the same struggle to control the meaning of exile.” Jane Kingsley-Smith Shakespeare’s Drama of Exile, (New York; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19.

Smith, Shakespeare’s Drama of Exile, 28 and 106.


Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine the Great, Part 1, Prologue, lines 1-2, and 5.

Smith, Shakespeare’s Drama of Exile, 24.

Twelfth Night, 5.1. 389-408, King Lear, Q1. 3.2.71-4, and 3.2.74-7.


Ibid., 146.

Ibid., 144

Kingsley Smith, Shakespeare’s Drama of Exile, 28-9. Sir Thomas More (Add.II.D.83-6)


See Note 238 above. Perhaps ironically in retrospect, Green notes that this lead to increased interest from actors in Lear’s mental state that became central in the play’s subsequent performance history even after the Fool was restored. Shakespeare’s contribution to interiority and psychological realism is duly mangled in this regard.

Ibid., 67.

Ibid., 48.


The 1606 Act “to restraine Abuses of Players,” imposed heavy fines (10 pounds) on anyone “jestingly or prophanely” using the holy names of God. See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 54. Gurr notes that “this is one reason pagan gods begin to be called upon in the drama after this date.”


Mack, *King Lear In Our Time*, 49.


Mack, *King Lear In Our Time*, 111.


Curtis Perry, in *The Making of Jacobean Culture: James 1st and the renegotiation of Elizabethan literary practice*, (Cambridge, CUP; 1997), finds himself agreeing with what he cites as Jonathan Dollimore's criticism of "essentialist humanist" readings of the play (see Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, (Chicago: CUP, 1994, 189-203), “which find something salvational in the emotionalism of the play's finale,” arguing that “whatever the pull of the reconciliation scene [5.3], it marks a political tragedy: a failure to imagine a political solution” 135. However, this emotionalism, especially in the revised form of the Folio, invites its contemporary auditors to precisely this homiletic reading. Even as the play still expresses the full political tragedy, it holds the hope of (future) salvation in tension with the unremitting bleakness of its deliberately hostile and indifferent post-lapsarian landscape. The skepticism of later critics, while supported by the play’s pre-Christian milieu and deliberate ambiguity, may distort and not fully account for the effectiveness of the play’s powerful emotionalism in consort with the prevailing and pervasive structures of religious belief.


Snyder, *The Comic Matrix*, 141. Her thoughts on Lear are discussed below.

Kerrigan, “Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool,” p.219

The dates for the revisions are disputed, Kerrigan follows his editor Gary Taylor in arguing for 1609/10, see Kerrigan, “Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool,” 215 in *The Division of the Kingdom*, where he notes Taylor’s point that while the Folio is not published until 1623 it was likely used much earlier, and that the Quarto text may not actually have been performed in its entirety at all. Also see Taylor’s own *The Date and Authorship of the Folio*, (Oxford UP, 1983). Hornback argues for a date around 1613.

See “King Lear and Censorship,” in *Division of the Kingdom*, 107-8. Here Taylor suggests that the F text actually “manages the transition in a way entirely characteristic of the peculiar dramatic style Shakespeare created for the Fool” (108).


Ibid., 319


Valerie Traub’s reading of this moment, while not concerned with the cutting, is exemplary and illustrates the eggshells powerful associations thus: “The Fool intimates how the fragmentation of one figure will entail the destruction of another when, in his own didactic demonstration of the foolishness of Lear’s abdication, he conjures the image of an egg, ‘cloven... i’th' middle,’ likens this split egg to Lear’s divided royal ‘golden crown’ and his aged ‘bald crown’ (1.4.159-60), and then, by comparing both broken crowns to Lear’s ‘pared wit,’ describes Goneril as ‘one o’ the parings’ (1.4.183-4). With Lear’s rebellious daughter now in possession of half the kingdom, the Fool’s trenchant parable adumbrates how the king’s division of his realm will rebound on his own head. This lesson is reiterated and intensified when, as the play nears its climax, Lear himself tropes on the macabre image of his dual and divided crown to signify the loss of his wits: ‘Let me have surgeons,’ he calls, ‘I am cut to th’ brains’” (4.6.190-1). Traub, “The Nature of Norms in Early Modern England: Anatomy, Cartography, King Lear;” 51.


This reading accounts for the continued inclusion of the three lines before the cut, wherein the question is still raised, and which otherwise trouble critics who think the question is left unresolved.

Muir, LN at 3.21.157-9, credits the fable. The Moral can be found stated at the outset of any version of the Fables.


Ibid.

Scholars disagree on the dating and reason for the revised version, see note 62 above. Hornback suggests a later date (1613) than either Kerrigan or Taylor. Taylor makes a compelling case for censorship as being the primary reason behind the revisions, noting in addition to the cuts in 1.4, that the excision of the provocative language suggesting foreign invasion around France and Cordelia’s return. See Taylor, “Censorship and King Lear.”


Ibid., 322.

See Taylor, “Censorship and King Lear,” in *Division of the Kingdom*.

Ibid., 105.

Ben Jonson was imprisoned (his third time) along with co-writer John Marston for mocking references to Scottish people in their play *Eastward Ho* (1604).

Kerrigan, “Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool,” 219. As we’ve seen Hornback reads the drift in the other direction.
323 Ibid., 219.
324 Ibid., 220.
325 Muir, Lear, LN. 1.5.48-9
327 Traub argues, because nature in King Lear paradoxically is a reflection of the divinely sanctioned hierarchical, patriarchal social order, and an instinctual repulsion from it, it is impossible to settle on [the play’s] ultimate meaning. Traub, “The Nature of Norms in Early Modern England: Anatomy, Cartography, King Lear;” 62.
328 Mack, King Lear In Our Time, 56.
329 Kerrigan, “Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool,” 221.
330 Ibid., 220-1.
334 The soliloquy will of course be absorbed into the naturalist tradition, the Greeks are full of them obviously, but a tradition developed for centuries wherein actors would purposely not connect with audiences, and the soliloquy was simply overheard speech.
335 Wiles, Shakespeare’s Clowns, 161. Wiles’ point—that Armin is more usually and effectively employed as part of a group—stands, but Armin was also a practiced solo entertainer, and the play was performed both on the Globe’s large stage and much smaller indoor ones at court and on tour.
336 Halliwell in his edition of Hamlet (1865) spoke of a custom of the Gravedigger “until within a very recent period” stripping off a dozen waistcoats before speaking, and speculated this dated back to the time of Shakespeare’s company. The comic business is of course timeless, but nicely mirrors Hamlet’s description of himself as “set naked” back in Denmark, which would be entirely characteristic of the clown-prince parallel and absorption that Shakespeare establishes in the play as a whole.
337 Muir. Lear, LN 3.4.30-1
338 Wiles, Shakespeare’s Clown, 148
339 As previously discussed Valerie Traub explores the notion of proportion in Lear with emphasis on Poor Tom. For Traub: “In focusing our gaze on Poor Tom’s material body and asking us to extrapolate from it to a general human condition, the play invites a metaphysical and epistemological appraisal, the aim of which, like that of anatomy, is to constitute a universal corporeal standard” (47/8). Traub asserts how “read in relation to the play’s invocation of nature, Lear’s creation of an abstract, representative human reveals a genealogy of the modern concepts of norms and the normal” (Abstract). Traub notes how “With a self-conscious medievalism, King Lear intertwines residual and emergent understandings of nature in its effort to saturate this concept with signification”(62). Medieval concepts of nature reflecting divine reason “(the macrocosmic belief in man’s vertical placement between animals and celestial beings),” jostle with the classical idea of man “as the microcosmic measure of God’s creation” or indeed as “the measure of all things”(62). Leonardo DaVinci’s Vetruvian Man expresses this ideal and the resultant concern with measurement and proportion. I note above how the portrait of Armin may consciously or otherwise parody this image, or at least its governing concept (note 14). Traub shows that Lear’s encounter with Poor Tom, “summons an evaluative, didactic logic—“Is man no more than this? Consider him well”—that forges a lateral comparison between man and man,” and that such lateral comparison, “would also emerge as the constitutive basis of a style of reasoning governed by a concept of norms” (63).

Snyder, _The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare’s Tragedies_, 166.

Ibid., 132.


Ibid.

_The True Chronicle of King Leir_ has an initially happy resolution, Leir reigns till old age, after his death Cordelia’s nephews balk at being under the governance of a woman so attack and imprison her. Weary of hope, she takes her life.

Thomas, B. Stroup, “Cordelia and the Fool,” _Shakespeare Quarterly_ 12, no. 2 (1961); 127-132.

Ibid., 130.

Ibid., 131.

Ibid., 127

Ibid., 131

53 Charles Lamb judged the role unactable in his “On the Tragedies of Shakespeare” (1808), and almost a hundred years later A.C. Bradley called the play “too huge for the stage,” in his _Lectures on Shakespearean Tragedy_ (1904).

I am indebted to Margreta De Grazia in her, _Hamlet Without Hamlet_, (Cambridge CUP, 2007), 204, for pointing out the Folio addition in _Hamlet_, from which I noticed the parallel with Lear’s dying words in the Quarto.

See my Introduction for its discussion of Bakhtin’s import, and framing of this changing nature and uses of comedy.

The restoration playwrights will have their own frustrations attempting to control rowdy audiences in the clown/fool’s absence.

Taylor, _Division of the Kingdom_, 105.
