Staging Subversion: William Kemp and the Lord Chamberlain's Men

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Introduction

Subversive energies abounded in early modern English theater. This was partly due to evolving political and economic systems as England moved toward a capitalist society. As commercial enterprises, the early modern theaters became sites wherein the emerging conflicts of political and socio-economic changes both pressured the theatrical venture and were dramatized by it. Nowhere are these conflicts more manifest than in the clown characters. The theatrical clown may have functioned as a means of controlling the audience's (or specific audience members') subversive energies. By controlling audience responses, and encouraging audience interaction when, and only when, it served the drama, the clown may have been upholding the political and socio-economic *status quo* by encouraging textual veneration and ensuring a well-ordered and controlled theatrical event.[1] However, examining the careers of the actors who played the clown characters–their improvisations which resisted government censorship, the connections they forged with what we would today call working-class audience members, and their subversion of the play-text itself–suggests that early modern theatrical clowns could not be so simply categorized.

Richard Preiss usefully challenges "...if clowning ultimately suggests a tension between text and performance, it should prompt

Journal of the Wooden O. Vol 24, 1-22

ISSN: 1539-5758

us to ask why we 'read' theatre at all."[2] At the same time, we cannot recover a complete and accurate understanding of the entire early modern theatrical event, nor would every event (even subsequent performances of the same play) be identical. Therefore, we posit an approach that combines an examination of the texts that we can access alongside an examination of extratextual theatrical phenomena such as theatrical interludes that bookended or interrupted the play, audience interactions, and the actor playing the clown, in order to better understand the subversive potential of the clown. In this paper, we focus on William Kemp, and one of the characters he originated, Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*. We situate Kemp's work within both the continuum of clowning practices during the early modern period and our understanding of the political and socio-economic climate at the end of the sixteenth century. We also examine Kemp's textual contributions to the early modern theatrical *oeuvre*, including his jigs and his *Nine Days' Wonder*. Through this examination, we argue that Kemp represents a particularly subversive figure, and said subversiveness can be seen in his character Dogberry and in his relationship with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, especially in the ending thereof. Our argument will extend to the theatrical practices of clowning beyond the texts that have been retained, to the shift in the clown characters in Lord Chamberlain's Men plays that coincided with the hiring of Robert Armin as the main clown, and to Kemp's work after leaving the company.

Extratextual Subversion

As theatrical texts, the plays of the early modern period provide a majority of the evidence of the early modern theatrical event, and are woefully ineffective in telling us all that encompassed said theatrical event. Therefore, we begin by surveying the extant evidence regarding the broader theatrical events of the period, focusing specifically on extratextual theatrical phenomena involving the clown character/actor (for, the two were often conflated by audiences). In doing so, we will trace some of the ways in which the theater-state of the time sought to control the dramas, as well as the audiences, and examine some of the ways the clowns may have been subverting both.

Before the Play

As part of a day's entertainments, it is likely that there was some sort of musical prelude to the theatrical event. To our knowledge, the clowns were not necessarily involved in these, but there were other peripheral phenomena that did involve the clowns. For example, prior to the beginning of a play, the famous clown Richard Tarleton had created a ritual of "pulling faces" to grab the attention of the audience, and possibly to focus its attention upon the stage. Preiss notes that, in doing so, Tarleton "made himself a grotesque extension of the audience's will."[3] Additionally, in the early days of Elizabethan theater, clowns often "performed" the news on the stages of London.[4] This performance was often satirical in nature, but for the largely illiterate audiences, it was also the main source of news *qua* entertainment. While this solo practice seems to have died out in the 1580s, it is plausible that it continued as part of the preluding entertainments of the theatrical event. Both of these examples show the clown endearing himself to the audience members, connecting with the largely lower-class members of the audience through physical spectacles and/or the comical presentation of news. The clown thus served as something of the ringleader for the theatrical event, providing both the prelude and, as we shall outline in a moment, the encore.

The clowns of the early modern theater were its first celebrities. From Tarleton to Kemp to Armin (among others), the clowns were instantly recognizable figures to the audiences of their respective eras. By comparison, William Shakespeare would have been a relatively anonymous figure in the early part of his career, while Kemp would have been known to virtually every theatergoer. It is important to note that the title page of the 1600 quarto publication of *Much Ado About Nothing* does ascribe the play to William Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men. If that first printing happened, as is widely believed, within a year or two of its initial performance, then the primacy of the author and the company, as opposed to the clown, suggests a locus of conflict between the presumed authority of the author and the subversive popularity of the clown.

Improvisation

The clown's popularity not only influenced the preceding entertainments, but commanded attention during the play as well.

Because of the clown's popularity, Preiss suggests that the clowns in the early years of English theater were means by which the company mediated between its product (the play) and the audience. The clown "remained an intuitive figure of control" simply because he exerted control over the audience, at least as much as possible, since he was "the source of affinity for the audience."[5] As David Wiles notes, Tarleton drew from the familiar Lord of Misrule tradition, which influenced later clowns as well, and therefore clowning quickly began to rely on "inversionary enactments of 'misrule' to create a sense of release" for the audience.[6] This appears to suggest that the clown was little more than a puppet for the enforcement of social mores or class hierarchies. Alternatively, we argue that Tarleton's and Kemp's use of the tradition subverted the institution itself, since the Lord of Misrule was an elected amateur who served only once for a specific festival, yet neither Tarleton nor Kemp could be considered an amateur, nor were they "elected' to the position but chose the Misrule character for themselves, picking it up and setting it down at will depending upon whether or not they were on stage or in front of an audience.[7]

While in front of an audience, however, the clown–the self-appointed "Graund-Captain (of all mischéefe)," as Phillip Stubbs defines the Lord of Misrule in his 1583 *The Anatomy of Abuses*–controlled the stage through the chaotic use of improvisation, which often upended the play proper.[8] Molly Clark explains that theatergoers would not have been surprised by improvisations during the play itself, and may well have expected them, since there are plenty of anecdotes about Richard Tarleton's tradition of improvised rhyming, as well as the textual evidence of "Kemp's tiny role of 'Peter' in *Romeo and Juliet*, which is so slight on the page as to imply that a good deal of extemporary comedy must have made the casting of the star clown worthwhile."[9] In addition, she speculates that it is uncertain whether the scene where Touchstone ridicules Orlando's verses was fully scripted or partially improvised in the early performances of *As You Like It*.[10] Through all of these examples, clowns commanded the stage as they subverted the scripted play through their comedic improvisations. As Clark wryly comments, "With an audience constantly in suspense, half waiting for the actor to go off-piste, one can play tricks with expectations."[11]

Improvisation did, indeed, play tricks with expectations, to the consternation of both the playwrights and the political leaders of London. The Mayor of London attempted to outlaw improvisation in 1574 and the Master of the Revels insisted on reviewing the entire script before a play could be staged; however, the clowns' improvisations could (and often did) skirt the Master of the Revels' interventions since their antics were not scripted.[12] And of course, the most famous example of a playwright's frustration with the improvisation of clowns appears in *Hamlet* when the eponymous character gives advice to a hired company of actors:

> 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. (3.2.40-47)[13]

Though it is unclear whether the ambitious villainy of clown improvisation was the actual belief of Shakespeare and those in his company or merely a humorous joke made at the expense of the comic actors, this passage does demonstrate how improvisation could subvert the playwright's intended purpose and set the stage for a conflict of interest between clown and poet. Given that *Hamlet* debuted for the Lord Chamberlain's Men sometime between 1599 and 1601, and Kemp left the company in 1599, it is likely this passage does refer to Kemp and is a direct allusion to the Lord Chamberlain's Men's transition to being what Shapiro calls "a playwright's theater"[14] courting a higher-class, more intellectually engaged audience. Kemp's appeal to the working-class audience members would have been untenable in the company's new direction.

This conflict of interest was well-documented historically, especially the conflict between Shakespeare, along with other writers working with him, and William Kemp.[15] David Wiles suggests that "Kemp had to adapt himself to the demands of writers" but "writers had to adapt themselves to the demands of Kemp" as well.[16] Kemp appears to have gone off-script to extemporize so often that Shakespeare began to expect and plan for it. Preiss argues that the clown roles written for Kemp became more and more secluded from the play in order to mitigate the clown's,

and by extension Kemp's, subversive role. The company and its playwrights began to "compartmentalize the clown's parts into marginal scenes where his improvisations (and any corresponding audience participation) would minimally derail the plot, and to install the increasingly regular postlude of the stage jig in order to displace [the clown] from the plot altogether."[17] In doing so, we argue, a division was created between clown and company, with the playwright the prime representative of the company. The sequestration of the clown characters, and Kemp's undiminished popularity as a performer, led to conflict between clown and writer for control over the performance itself. This conflict, we suggest, is likely what led to Kemp's resignation from the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

Control of the clown character became an easier task once Kemp left the company. For example, during *King Lear*–performed during the years when Robert Armin was the company's comedian–the improvisational nature of the clown was written into the scripted play itself, since it is the characters who improvise, but not the actors themselves, though the doggerel rhyme used by the clown characters "reminds the audience of times in which these same actors were improvising."[18] Though now tightly confined to the script, the clown character continued to delight audiences with his comedic prowess, which may still have encouraged audience participation during the play proper. The audience would have remained an active participant in the play, and the audience "was not in the habit of keeping its reactions private."[19] In sum, we argue that in allowing the audience to fashion the performance in some ways (by interacting with the clown), the early modern theaters may have been trying to control the subversive tendencies of both actor/clown and audience, but the historical evidence suggests that this strategy of containment was not always successful.

After the Play

The festivities in the early modern playhouses did not end when the actors finished their final lines. Roger Clegg and Lucie Skeaping explain that the play was "surrounded by a great variety of improvisational and un-play-like entertainment that was lumped together under the guise of the dramatic jig."[20] During

Tarleton's years, this entertainment was often a satirical ballad sung to a popular tune, but he was more famous for his "extemporized rhymes accompanied by pipe and tabor."[21] At the end of the play, Tarleton would "exchange quips with audience members; someone would pipe up with a 'theme', often a prepared rhyming question or observation, and he would respond with a cutting answer or put-down also in rhyme."[22] We conjecture that Robert Armin, who was considered Tarleton's heir to the rhyming tradition, used the time immediately following the play to practice his improvisational rhyming with the audience, interspersed with singing, for which he was also well-known.

However, it was in the hands of Kemp and other clowns of the last decade or so of the sixteenth century and into the first part of the seventeenth century that dramatic jigs quickly evolved:

> They became a meeting point of various branches of song, dance, slapstick, sword-play, satire, word-play and popular comedy, most characteristically taking the form of short musical dramas and featuring ebullient stock characters and dialogue feathered with *double entendre*. The scripts that have survived are likely to have been the starting point for the creation of a drama that revelled in the immediacy and veracity of the moment and allowed for reaction to the audience, inclusion of dance episodes, deviation to incorporate ephemeral or topical material and the display of individual skills and *shticks*."[23]

Jigs were spectacles that would have kept the audiences easily entertained and the jigmakers/clowns incredibly busy, as they were constantly pressured to produce new content that would appeal to those in the yard and the galleries alike. This would also mean that clowns in particular would have had their finger on the pulse of popular culture, so to speak, since they would be mining it for use on stage. Moreover, we argue that jigs were the counter-content of the play to which they were attached. They allowed the audience to "deconstruct the finale of the play."[24] For example, kingly tragedies were followed by a comedic jig where domestic quarrels reigned supreme, while comedies ending with romanticized marriage were countered by a jig concerning infidelity and other less romantic squabbles.[25] In terms of plots, the clown typically "starts the jig in a predicament, and the audience's pleasure consists in seeing

how he extricates himself. The clown is an anti-hero in the misrule tradition, for he is the lowest of the low in all respects–wealth, status, fighting ability, even intelligence (for his ploys are never his own idea)–in everything, in short, except dancing ability."[26] Therefore, there were multiple levels of subversive elements embedded in all that the clown did on stage during the dramatic jig.

The subversive impact of the jig was concerning to both ecclesiastical and civil courts; the latter finally ruled to suppress the jig in the October 1612 Middlesex General Session. As Clegg and Skeaping explain, the government recognized that jigs "brought into sharp focus opposition between literary ambition and sub-literary popular culture, civic order and public disorder, controlled and uncontrolled behavior, lawfulness and lawlessness, morality and immorality, and that they encouraged spectators to laugh *at* as well as, more controversially, *with* the performers."[27] In addition, these jigs often mocked the men and women of the galleries, "some of whom must have ostentatiously left the playhouse before the jig began–passing, on their way out, others who had waited until the play was over before coming in."[28] Evidence that many of the working-class came only to see the jig was captured in the 1612 suppression ruling: "...divers cutt-purses and other lewde and ill disposed persons in greate multitudes doe resorte thither at th'end of euerye playe many tymes causinge tumultes and outrages wherebye His Majesties peace is often broke and much mischiefe like to ensue thereby."[29] This would suggest that audiences may have literally shifted to a more working-class core group as the jig began. As David Wiles explains, from a sociological standpoint, "the economically dominant occupants of the sixpenny gallery and the lords' room, together with the actors' patrons in the Privy Council, were able to dictate the tone in the public theatres; but at the end of a day's performance the balance shifted, and the actors surrendered a degree of control to those who stood in the yard."[30] It is therefore reasonable to consider the jig as the dance of the working-class. As Kemp was the self-crowned king of this dance, he thus became the spokesman for the working-class members of the audience.

Kemp's Dogberry

Of William Kemp's beginnings, we know little. Scholars and historians have not been able to locate him in the historical record before his 1585 performance with Lord Leicester's Men, but some speculate that he may have had some connection to the gentry through the wealthy Catholic Kempe family in Kent. Even if this connection is accurate, Kemp did not attempt to cultivate a genteel persona; while other members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men pursued and secured coats of arms for their family–including Shakespeare and Burbage–Kemp, who certainly had the money to do so, eschewed such heraldic trappings. Instead, he was particularly adept at curating a clown character that appealed to the working-class majority in the audiences of the time. The character of Dogberry from *Much Ado About Nothing* is a particularly excellent example of the type of clown character Kemp often played, and the documentary evidence suggests the part was written specifically for him.

Dogberry is the "Master Constable" (3.3.17) of Messina, and his position closely resembles the constables of Elizabethan England.[31] Historically, English constables were chosen from the village householders and were elected by the villagers to serve for one year.[32] However, gentlemen were exempt from this duty, so only those of the lower classes carried out this work. Therefore, all of the constables in the play, Dogberry included, belonged to the working-class. Not only was the constable of lower social status, but also the position itself was seen as an unwanted civic duty, and the eligible villagers who could afford to do so would have hired others to serve in their place.[33] This meant the men who held the position were often too old or too ignorant to execute the office properly, and therefore they did not command any real respect, particularly from those of the upper class.[34] Clearly, this is how Leonato, the governor of Messina, feels about Dogberry and his partner, Verges. He tells them, "Neighbors, you are tedious" (3.5.17) when they come to tell him about the arrest of Borachio and Conrade. Another example is when Don Pedro, the visiting Prince of Aragon, gives the sarcastic retort that "this learned constable is too cunning to be understood" (5.1.238-239) when Dogberry attempts to explain the prisoners' offenses. Clearly

Dogberry is one of the "too ignorant" serving in the constable position. Therefore, Dogberry not only typifies the working-class, but Elizabethan audiences would have seen him as a character so far removed from the world of the nobility that he would be unable to understand that world, no matter how hard he might try.

Yet, in his ignorance, Dogberry takes pride in what he sees as his rise in society. He believes the position elevates him above the other working-class people because he interacts with members of the upper class on official business. Louis Althusser considered such misbeliefs as those harbored by Dogberry a function of ideology. Robert Dale Parker explains Althusser's conception of ideology as "an unconscious set of beliefs and assumptions, our imaginary relation to real conditions that may not match what we imagine. […] In [this] sense of the term ideology, we mostly misunderstand the world around us and the reasons that lead us to act in the ways that we act."[35] Therefore, Dogberry misunderstands the world he is in because of his misbelief that his status has been elevated, and this is one of the reasons audiences find him so funny; he attempts to act as part of the bourgeoisie and gets it wrong time and time again. For example, in Act 4, Scene 2 he blindly walks into the examination of Borachio and Conrade, believing his position as constable makes him qualified to understand the law. However, it is clear to everyone, except him and Verges, that he has no idea about the true nature of an examination or how to wisely judge the information offered by the Watch:

First Watchman: This man said, sir, that Don John, the Prince's brother, was a villain.
Dogberry: Write down Prince John a villain. Why, this is flat perjury, to call a prince's brother villain!
Borachio: Master constable—
Dogberry: Pray there, fellow, peace. I do not like thy look, I promise thee.
Sexton to Watch: What heard you him say else?
Seacoal: Marry, that he had received a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully.
Dogberry: Flat burglary as ever was committed.
Verges: Yea, by Mass, that it is. (4.2.41-53)

In this passage, Dogberry misunderstands the First Watchman's testimony and incorrectly labels it as perjury–through context we realize Dogberry believes that Borachio is slandering the prince's good name. Dogberry also sees the exchange of money between Don John and Borachio as theft on Borachio's part. Neither of these conclusions are correct, but Dogberry is unable to see through his own misbelief. It is clear that he cannot think on the same level as his social superiors, though he repeatedly tries. While this passage is often viewed as nothing more than comic malapropisms, we argue that, following Althusser's understanding of ideology, the scene reveals much more about the character. Dogberry is of the working class, and he can only see the world through the eyes of a working-class man. Far from a simple confusion of vocabulary, Dogberry's telling misbelief in his own knowledge of the law indicates that, to most (if not all) of the largely illiterate commoners, the law was a complex entity wielded exclusively by those with power and money.

Ignorant though he may be, Dogberry is earnest in carrying out his duties to the best of his abilities. It is because of his willingness to do his part, his representation of the audience's own circumstances, and also because of his comedic manner that audiences root for him, and when he succeeds in uncovering Don John's plot, audiences were reminded that it is the dogged persistence of the working-class, and not the wisdom of the ruling class, that saves the day. For example, it is Dogberry's Watch that overhears Borachio brag to Conrade about being paid to ruin the reputation of Hero (3.3.87-170); it is Dogberry that sets up the examination of Don John's henchmen (3.5.55-62); and it is Dogberry's bumbling questioning that eventually brings Don John's villainy to light and clears Hero's name (4.2.1-89). Dogberry proves that his humorous, working-class ideology is a more potent force than the vain power flaunted by the bourgeoisie. In fact, the ruling class men of the play "are not only less successful than the fools in seeing truth, but are mocked by one fool's aping of their witty pretensions."[36] In essence, the clown's performance subverts class structures as it questions and mocks the dominant worldview.

Another way in which Shakespearean clowns–Kemp in particular–used their performances to subvert and overturn class structures and hegemonies was through their connection with the

audience. This strong connection could be seen at work in the clown's direct interactions with the audience, which often happened improvisationally. Kemp, and other clown performers, took advantage of the downstage position in these direct interactions, because downstage was "close enough to all the spectators for some facial expressions and breathing to register, close enough for [the clown] to seek inspiration from the audience as he seems to extemporize."[37] As Robert Weimann put it, downstage was where the audience could find "characters less inclined to accept the assumptions–social, ideological, and dramatic–of the localized action. These characters, by means of aside, wordplay, proverbs, and direct audience address offered a special perspective to the audience."[38] In other words, clowns, because of their proximity to the edge of the stage, were situated between the audience and the other characters, therefore creating a bridge between the real world of the audience and the world of the play.

Only one such opportunity for Dogberry to directly address the audience appears in *Much Ado About Nothing*. At the end of Act 4, Scene 2, after Conrade has called Dogberry an ass and Dogberry has responded, the constable tells his officers to take the prisoners away. Dogberry then gives his one-sentence monologue–the last recorded line of the scene: "O, that I had been writ down an ass!" Though short, this line is important, not only because it allows Dogberry to address the audience, but also because it would have given Kemp an opportunity to ad-lib additional lines and action as the rest of the characters exited. Kemp was known as a great improviser and would often "engage the audience in conversation, an activity called 'gagging' in the theatre."[39] He rarely changed or removed lines, but he frequently added to what was already written.[40] In fact, Wiles argues that all the roles written for Kemp were structured in such a way that at least one of his monologues came at the end of a scene so that he could "extemporize without risk to the rhythm of the play or direction of the narrative," as demonstrated here in Act 4, Scene 2.[41] This opening would have given Kemp a chance to make a connection with the audience, particularly with those of the working-class who stood closest to the stage. Therefore, Kemp, like his predecessor, Richard Tarleton, "performed not so much *for* an audience as *with* a community of spectators who provided him with inspiration."[42]

Dogberry's brief moment in Act 4, Scene 2, also illustrates the ways in which the clown's opportunities for extemporization were increasingly sequestered by Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Earlier plays with prominent clowns–such as Nick Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the aforementioned Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Lancelet Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*–all include opportunities for extemporaneous clowning, whether it be physical or verbal. If modern stage practice is any indication, Bottom's portrayal of the death of Pyramus in Act 5 of *Dream* provides an opportunity for physical humor, audience-baiting, and improvisation that has the potential to, as Hamlet's advice quoted earlier suggests, distract the audience from the "necessary question of the play." Lancelet Gobbo's part in *Merchant* is even more interesting when we look at the dramatic text for implicit evidence of clowning practice. In Act 3, Scene 5, Lancelet teases Jessica about her heritage, in a scene that is often drastically cut in modern performance because of its anti-Semitic overtones. When Lorenzo engages the servant clown, he presents an interesting accusation: "The Moor is with child by you, Lancelet" (3.5.38). Other than the Prince of Morocco, no Moorish character has been introduced to the audience in this play, nor are Lancelet's romantic/sexual pursuits a topic of conversation at any other time. This suggests to us that the extramarital and interracial pregnancy mentioned here is likely the predicament from which the clown must extricate himself in the jig that would follow the conclusion of this play.

The crucial element of these three examples, all dating to earlier in the relationship between Shakespeare and his clown Kemp, is that the clown is afforded the opportunity for verbal and physical action as *part of the scene*. Given the reputation Kemp had for adding to the script, and his noted physical prowess, there can be little doubt that he would have taken these opportunities for improvisation, endeared himself to the audiences, and in the case of *Merchant*, set up the plot of the jig that would follow the play, in which Kemp/Lancelet would become the central figure in his own drama. What Dogberry's sequestered opportunity for improvisation and audience connection suggests to us is that by the final years of the sixteenth century, the partnership between playwright and clown had become strained. Rather than a clown

part that is fully integrated into the action of the drama in the sense of the character not only being essential to the plot but also being afforded the opportunity to clown, Kemp/Dogberry's lone moment to truly go off-script is confined to the final lines of not only the scene, but also the act. He appears only once more in the first scene of Act 5, when he is mocked by Don Pedro, Borachio speaks on his own behalf, and Dogberry is finally dismissed by Leonato with a presumably modest reward for his actions. It is in this final scene that we, the audience, realize that Dogberry is the true hero of this play, without whom the peaceful resolution of the plot's conflict would not have been possible. His final lines show us his attempts to rise to the level of the nobility. As Leonato dismisses Dogberry, the constable compliments Leonato's speech as that of "a most thankful and reverent youth" (5.1.330-331). He is likely attempting to flatter his employer, who is clearly not young. As he prepares to depart, Dogberry fills his final lines with rhetorical devices that mimic the style of the nobility, saying "God keep your Worship! I wish your worship well. God restore you to health. I humbly give you leave to depart, and if a merry meeting may be wished, God prohibit it" (5.1.338-341). As his social and economic superiors tend to, Dogberry fills his speech with amplifying pleonasm, repeating the phrase "your Worship" far more than is necessary, and continuing to add details, most of which are nonsense. In fact, immediately after Dogberry and Verges exit, Leonato and his brother unironically engage in exactly this practice, with Leonato saying, "Until tomorrow morning, lords, farewell," and his brother echoing, "Farewell, my lords. We look for you tomorrow" (5.1.343-344). While the nonsensical nature of Dogberry's valedictions may demonstrate his subservience to his social superiors, he has adopted their language patterns, seeing in his good service the possibility for social mobility.

Kemp's Jigs

As the sequestration of Kemp/Dogberry indicates, the concluding jig became the locus for staging subversion, both socio-economic and dramatic. Unfortunately, relatively few jigs remain, and the texts that do are woefully inadequate evidence for a complete understanding of this element of the theatrical

event. David Wiles's study of what evidence we have reveals that Kemp's jigs were more tightly constructed than those danced by other clowns of the period, which tended to "focus on a clown who is controller rather than butt of the humor."[43] This means that, though the lower-class clown character appears to be the initial ridiculous figure of the jig, he "rapidly makes everyone else appear more ludicrous."[44]

An excellent example of Kemp's subversion of authority in this way can be seen in the jig, *Singing Simpkin*. This jig, which Clegg and Skeaping suggest is probably the Stationer's Register entry on October 12, 1581, listed as the "ballad called KEMPS new Jygge betwixt, a souldier and a Miser an Sym the clown," was attributed to Kemp, but it is unclear if he wrote it or simply popularized it.[45] In line five of the extant text, a later version preserved by Robert Cox in his 1655/6 book, *Actaeon and Diana*, the clown, Simpkin, has cuckolded an old man who is wealthy enough that he "often a hunting goes out."[46] The husband is unaware of his wife's infidelity and is deceived by his wife into thinking that Simpkin is an "honest friend" who has been wrongfully accused of thievery by a blustering soldier, who is actually another suitor courting the wife behind her husband's back.[47] Once the soldier leaves the house, the old man is further portrayed as a fool after he rescues Simpkin from the chest where he was hidden from the soldier:

Wife:	Good husband, let the man [Simpkin] stay here 'tis dang'rous in the street.
Old Man:	I would not for a crown of gold the Roarer [soldier] should he meet. For should he come by any harm, they'd say the fault were mine.
Wife to Simpkin:	There's half a crown, pray send him out to fetch a quart of wine.
Simp:	There's money for you, Sir–Pray fetch a quart of Sack.
Old Man:	'Tis well, 'tis well, my honest friend, I'll see you shall not lack.
Wife:	But if he should dishonest me, for there are slipp'ry men.
Old Man:	Then he gets not of his half crown one peny back again. *Exit* [*Old Man*].[48]

In this passage, not only is the upper-class husband sent away by his wife and her young lover, the working-class clown of the jig, but is paid by them for allowing them to continue their infidelity. Kemp's character hilariously upends the intentions of both husband and soldier, both of whom are of a higher class than his character. The clown mocks upper-class wealth by paying the wealthy man whose wife he will bed. In addition, the wealthy man becomes the servant of Simpkin, sent to fetch wine for the clown and his lover. Clegg and Skeaping suggest that the original jig likely ended with Simpkin inviting the audience to a christening in forty weeks, as seen in line one hundred of Cox's version of the jig, though the extant version includes two additional stanzas likely added by Cox that give the power back to the old man: he catches Simpkin with his wife and beats him.[49] If line one hundred is the original ending, as evidence suggests, then Kemp's clown in this jig has subverted the socio-economic structure of Elizabethan society by bringing the working-class to the top of the social strata–for a few moments, at least. Drawing from Antonio Gramsci's theories on social change, the clown, therefore, took on the role of an *organic individual*, a leader "who arise[s] from within the people and can use civil society–education and the media–to express the people's ideas that the people might not be ready to express for themselves."[50]

That a jig happened after every performance speaks to the power Kemp's clown character could (and did) tap into. Day after day, performance after performance, he upended the dominant class and power structures of Elizabethan England every time he took to the stage, bringing the working-class audience along with him. Therefore, as Wiles suggests, his jig was an important dramatization for the Elizabethan proletariat:

> In most discussions of Elizabethan theatre the jig is brushed aside and forgotten. Yet from a sociological standpoint the jig has to be seen as an essential component in the fragile balance with the Elizabethan theatre set up between popular and courtly modes. To a large though far from complete extent, the economically dominant occupants of the sixpenny gallery and the lords' room, together with the actors' patrons in the Privy Council, were able to dictate the tone in public theatres; but at the end of a day's performance the balance shifted, and the actors surrendered a degree of control to those who stood in the yard.[51]

The jig, then, was an opportunity for Kemp, as representative of the working-class, to overwhelm the bourgeoisie and assume a sort of anarchic power–a temporary but spontaneous proletarian revolution couched in raucous song and dance, which delighted the working-class audiences and worried the upper-class spectators. As Kemp's jigs also tended to subvert the unity of the dramatic event that preceded them, as evidence from *Merchant* suggests, then the very existence and popularity of the jig suggests that the clown's potential to subvert the authority of the playwright–and the government authorities to whom the playwright was subservient, such as the Master of the Revels–was a likely source of significant conflict within the company, so much so that by 1598-1599 and the first performance of *Much Ado*, the clown's role had to be sequestered in the drama so as to avoid intrusion.

At Benedick's command, and in the Folio stage direction, the play concludes with a dance to celebrate the double wedding. It is unknown how the Lord Chamberlain's Men transitioned from this dance celebrating the resolution of the principal plot to the masque which would have brought Dogberry back to the foreground. We could conjecture several possibilities, but rather call for further research and experimentation. Modern reconstruction theaters such as the Blackfriars in Staunton, Virginia, the Globe in London, or Utah Shakespeare Festival's Engelstad Shakespeare Theatre could utilize research-supported original practices to experiment with how this transition could have happened on the early modern stage. But as we have shown, Kemp's Dogberry and the jig that followed the play, including the tension potentially created by this unknown transition, represented the economic and social turmoil that continued to boil under the surface of Elizabethan society and the theatrical endeavors burgeoning within it.

Kemp's Departure and Subsequent Ventures

In 1599, the Lord Chamberlain's Men embarked on their most ambitious capital venture: the building of the Globe in Southwark. Kemp was a shareholder in the company, and thus stood to make a good deal of money if the venture was successful. And yet, by the time the new theater opened, Kemp had left the company. One important physical feature of the Globe has often been overlooked

in conjecture over Kemp's departure. At the Theatre, as at most of the playhouses from the early era of English theater (1574-1599), the audience entered through a single set of doors, and only separated to the galleries or the yard once inside. At the Globe, however, two entrances were constructed, one that led to the yard, and the other to the galleries.[52] The segregation of the working-class audience, the half-decade of seeing his parts increasingly pushed to the margins of the stage dramas, as well as the possible entrance of a rival clown in the figure of Robert Armin, are all indicative of the deeper contention that precipitated Kemp's departure: the struggle over control of the performance. Leslie Hotson suggests that Armin was hand-picked by Shakespeare, who sought a newer, word-centric comedy for his plays.[53] This is possible, and while we know Armin was on the Globe stage by August 1600, there is no evidence precluding him from having joined the company sooner.

After leaving the Chamberlain's Men, Kemp embarked on several performance ventures, including a tour on the continent, but his most notable production was a marathon morris dance he completed between London and Norwich in February 1600. Kemp was famous for his impressive morris dancing skills–he was able to leap higher and further than most dancers–which had made him popular with audiences when he was on stage as well as his morris dancing in public.[54] He was powerfully built, as the only image we have of Kemp illustrates, which appears on the title page of Kemp's own record of his London to Norwich morris dance. That Kemp was able to dance the nearly 120 difficult miles between the two cities attests to his stamina. Preiss says that this event "was reversing English social history, returning a beloved and endangered pastime to its provincial roots and renewing the bond between the people and their ritual festivity. It was a triumphant piece of capitalism in defense of pre-capitalist ideas."[55] Indeed, as with most of his financial ventures, it seems that the art was more important to Kemp than the spoils, and his own account suggests he collected little of the money promised him. But Preiss also ties the morris dance, the jig, and Kemp, to the ritual origins of festive comedy: the fertility and harvest festivals that preceded the organization of commodified dramatic events. These pre-dramatic festivals were truly of, and for, the common people in pre-capitalist societies, and it is to these origins, we argue, that Kemp returned

in this performance. His own final commentary on his morris dance both draws attention to the tumultuous socio-economics of the time period and seems to hearken back to the "simpler" days when social class and financial well-being were fixed elements of a person's identity:

> If our merchants and gentlemen would take example by this man, gentlemen would not sell their lands to become bankrupt merchants, nor merchants live in the possessions of youth-beguiled gentlemen, who cast themselves out of their parents' heritages for a few out-cast commodities. But, wit, whither wilt thou?[56]

While Kemp may have crafted his stage persona as representative of the working-class, he seems here to champion a more feudalistic sense of class division, one that kept merchants and gentlemen in their "proper" places, a position subverted by both his characters and his performances, as our reading has suggested.

From Clowns to Fools

Kemp's exit precipitated significant stylistic changes in the company's plays. When exactly Robert Armin came into the Lord Chamberlain's Men may be unclear, but upon Kemp's departure from the company there can be no doubt that he became its chief clown. Armin was short and slight, not the physical presence that Kemp was, and he had made a name for himself as a singer and writer prior to joining the company. From Shakespeare's works, it is likely that Armin originated the roles of Feste in *Twelfth Night*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and the Fool in *King Lear*, among many others, and the evolution from clown to fool that we see during the Armin-Shakespeare years of the company leads Stanley Wells and Paul Edmondson to conclude that Armin "effectively invented the dramatic character of the motley fool."[57] These fool characters become much more integrated into the fabric of the dramas, as Armin's style of satirical improvisation was far less likely to sidetrack the play itself. Catherine Henze suggests that, like Kemp, Armin's stage characters and his own identity as an actor often became conflated,[58] but his fools did not present the working-class audiences with a mirror of their own position. Armin's fools served the nobility, and were comfortable walking in the world of monarchs. As Armin was not a dancer, we conjecture that the

jig fell out favor with the company, replaced, perhaps, by solo performances by Armin which may have included "improvising responses to audience suggestions, sometimes in song, and employing multiple voices in ventriloquist acts."[59] Though Armin was a popular entertainer, it is unlikely that his performances allowed the working-class audience members the same level of anarchic power that they wielded when the clown led the jig.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men, and later the King's Men, cultivated a more genteel audience during this time period, in both the Globe and the Blackfriars' playhouses, and the bawdy jig and physical clowning that characterized Kemp's clowns fell out of favor as the company's audiences became less populated by the working-class of early modern London, which gravitated more to other theaters during the early Jacobean period. These changes ushered in a new era of drama, which was tightly controlled by the playwright and the company, giving space for a modicum of verbal improvisation, but within the context of the drama. While some texts of this time period suggest the possibility that fools could reflect working-class attitudes,[60] the subversive energy of the clown, and especially the clowns embodied by William Kemp, directed both at the actual socio-economic hegemony outside the theater and at the burgeoning autocratic power of the "author" inside it, was largely dispersed.

Notes

1. Richard Priess, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 63.
2. Priess, *Clowning and Authorship*, 5.
3. Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship*, 9.
4. Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship*, 70.
5. Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship*, 65; 76.
6. David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 20.
7. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 22.
8. Phillip Stubb. *The Anatomie of Abuses: Contayning a Discoverie, or Briefe Summarie of Such Notable Vices and Imperfections, as Now Raigne in Many Christian Countreyes of the Worlde: but Especiallie in a Verie Famous Ilande called Ailgna: Together, with Most Fearefull Examples of Gods Iudgementes, Executed Vpon the Wicked for the Same, Aswell in Ailgna of Late, as in Other Places, Elsewhere* (London: John Kingston, 1583).
9. Molly Clark, "Folly and Improvised Rhyme in *King Lear*," *The Review of English Studies* 72.306 (2021): 697, https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgab042.

10. Clark, "Folly," 697.
11. Clark, "Folly," 697-698.
12. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 14.
13. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).
14. James Shapiro. *A Year in the Life of Shakespeare*, 1599 (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 42.
15. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 35.
16. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 44.
17. Priess, *Clowning and Authorship*, 143-144.
18. Clark, "Folly," 705.
19. Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 46.
20. Roger Clegg and Lucie Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin and Other Bawdy Jigs: Musical Comedy on the Shakespearean Stage: Scripts, Music and Context* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2014), 12.
21. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 12.
22. Clark, "Folly," 690.
23. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 12.
24. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 56.
25. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 26-27.
26. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clowning*, 52.
27. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 3.
28. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 28.
29. "Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1612," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 2, 1603-25*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1887), 78-84, accessed October 7, 2024, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol2/pp78-84.
30. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 46.
31. All references to Shakespeare's play, *Much Ado About Nothing*, are taken from William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, eds. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1995).
32. Phoebe S. Spinrad, "Dogberry Hero: Shakespeare's Comic Constables in Their Communal Context," *Studies in Philology* 89.2 (1992): 162-163, www.jstor.org/stable/4174417.
33. John W. Draper, "Dogberry's Due Process of Law," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 42.4 (1943): 546-547, www.jstor.org/stable/27705048.
34. Draper, "Dogberry's Due Process," 565.
35. Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 237.
36. Carl Dennis, "Wit and Wisdom in Much Ado about Nothing," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 13.2 (1973): 237, www.jstor.org/stable/449736.
37. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 102.
38. Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 221-222.
39. William Babula, "Shakespeare and His Actors: An Essay on Clowns, Fools, Tragedians, and Women, and the Men and Boys Who Played Them," *Journal of the Wooden O* 8 (2008): 2.

40. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 35.
41. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 107.
42. Weimann, *Popular Tradition*, 213.
43. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 52.
44. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 53.
45. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 101.
46. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 109.
47. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 112.
48. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 113.
49. Clegg and Skeaping, *Singing Simpkin*, 113; 102.
50. Parker, *How to Interpret Literature*, 228-229.
51. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 46.
52. Gurr, *Playgoing*, 16.
53. Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare's Motley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 84.
54. Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 24.
55. Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship*, 158.
56. William Kemp. *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder: Performed in a Daunce from London to Norwich* (London, 1839; Project Gutenberg, 2007), 13, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/21984/21984-h/21984-h.htm.
57. Stanley Wells and Paul Edmondson, *The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 271.
58. Catherine A. Henze, *Robert Armin and Shakespeare's Performed Songs* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 29.
59. Henze, 20.
60. For example, Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, likely first performed at the Blackfriars' by a boy company, features a tightly scripted interruption by the audience which leads to the apparently spontaneous composition of a new play starring the Citizen's Apprentice, Rafe. However, this play is widely considered to be a satire, poking fun at the poor taste of the audience, rather than empowering them.