“Am I a Clowne?”

Clowning in Shakespeare

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

31 March 2011
To my father
Abstract

This study considers the importance of clowning in Shakespeare’s drama. In order to establish the foundations of my study I analyse the clown roles in three anonymous plays: Dericke in *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, Strumbo in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* and Mouse in *Mucedorus*. These plays represent the popular clowning tradition which Shakespeare drew on and modified in his work. In particular, I compare *Mucedorus* with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to show the extent to which the popular tradition informed Shakespeare’s work in this early play.

The key characteristics of clowning are improvisation, comic parody, contact with the audience, the importance of the clown’s body and physical performance, cross-talk, and a strategic refusal to understand. Clowning often parodies, disrupts or complicates the attempt to stage a fictional drama. At times the clown functions as a theatrical lord of misrule delaying the action with gratuitous verbal and physical clowning routines. The clown may restage and elasticise a successful comic moment. But the clown’s disruptive comic parody can also complete the drama by providing a contrary point of view which gives the play a wider vision, allowing the audience both to enjoy and to laugh at the main action. The clowning is often irrelevant to the plot but articulates the play’s themes. Similarly, the clown’s presentational physical performance can be in productive tension with the representational portrayal of a fictional character.

Shakespeare wrote to the talents of, and was influenced by, his specialist comic actors and the clown roles show a transition from the improvisational, independent and physical clowning of Will Kemp to the more integrated, self-
consciously witty and musical fooling of Robert Armin. Kemp and Armin were authors and celebrities in their own right, with their own distinctive clowning styles. I trace the transition from Kemp roles such as Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Launcelot in *The Merchant of Venice* to Armin roles such as Feste in *Twelfth Night* and Lear’s Fool in *King Lear*. But there are important continuities as well as important changes in the clown roles, and I compare Bottom’s dream speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Porter’s role in *Macbeth* as evidence for some of the contradictions in this narrative of transition. I consider the famously speculative question of why Kemp abruptly left Shakespeare’s acting company, with particular reference to the clown’s jig.

Finally, I consider Shakespeare’s distribution of clowning characteristics to roles played by actors other than the specialist clowns. I argue that Richard Tarlton’s clowning performance as Dericke was a valuable source of theatrical capital which Shakespeare drew on when he used *The Famous Victories* as a source for the *Henriad*. Shakespeare distributes Tarlton’s clowning energy to Falstaff, Pistol and Katherine. I consider the evidence for and against Falstaff as a clown, and as a Kemp role. I also argue that nostalgia for Tarlton had an impact on *Hamlet* and, in conclusion, consider the extent to which the antic Hamlet is a clown.
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Acknowledgements

My thanks to my supervisor Evelyn Tribble, Sue Stockwell, Nicola Cummins, Carol Bond and Nell Smith at the Student Learning Centre, Anton Angelo, Charlotte Brown at the University of Otago Library, and to the University of Otago for giving me a scholarship.
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Introduction

And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them . . .

*Ham. 3.2.39-40*

No longer is the clown considered unworthy of academic attention; there is renewed scholarly interest in the clowning in Shakespeare’s drama. Not only did clowning frame the plays since the clowns performed before, during and after the play itself, but the clowns were powerful and popular performers who were authors and celebrities in their own right. The audience for the clown’s jig may have been bigger than for Shakespeare’s play. In Shakespeare’s early clown roles, it may be the clown actor’s own voice we hear. The clown’s parts change as Shakespeare wrote to the talents of, and was influenced by, his two main clown actors: Will Kemp and Robert Armin.

The clowns were popular, but writers such as Sir Philip Sidney found it inappropriate that comic clowns could have a part in tragedies. Sidney made a famous complaint in *An Apology for Poetry* that clowning in tragedies mixed up the genres:

> their plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders, to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained. (112)

There is a clown role in almost every Shakespeare play and so the tragedies are “mongrel” in Sidney’s terms. Some scholars share this cultural ambivalence about clowning, believing that Shakespeare tried to control, and ultimately had to dispense with, the independent clown. For

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1 All Shakespeare quotations are from Proudfoot *et al.*
example, M. C. Bradbrook suggests that: “Perhaps the most difficult problem for Shakespeare the dramatist was the control of the clown” because it could “kill” a scene to have the clown extemporising with the audience (49). James Shapiro suggests that Shakespeare needed to sideline the clown in order to develop a new direction in his drama, arguing that Will Kemp left the company in 1599 because Shakespeare had asserted a writer’s theatre which put the clowns in their place: “from here on in, it was going to be a playwright’s and not an actor’s theater, no matter how popular the actor” (37). Bradbrook and Shapiro provide a coherent picture of a popular and disruptive clown: in general, the clowning tends to disrupt, parody, or complicate the staging of a fictional drama. But, as I will argue, the clown’s comic parody may serve the drama’s thematic concerns and add to the theatrical pleasure of the whole play in performance. The clown’s comic parody of the main plot provides a contrary and valid viewpoint which gives the play a wider vision, and which allows the audience both to enjoy and to laugh at the main action. In one sense the disruptive clowning completes the drama because, through its contrary comic point of view, it provides contrast and interplay. However, as I argue below, there is also a genuinely disruptive aspect to the clown, who can function as a theatrical lord of misrule by delaying the action with gratuitous comic performance. This argument about the clown’s parody of the main action holds true of the anonymous plays and the early Kemp roles.

Rather than considering the clown only as a disruptive force needing to be controlled within the fictional drama, the clown’s position as an outsider in various ways can create a productive tension between performance and playing a fictional role. Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster describe a tension between presentation (the actor’s bodily performance) and representation (playing a fictional character), and argue that these “two different modes of cultural production” (79) can work together or be in conflict. Weimann uses the concepts of “author’s pen” and “actor’s voice” (Playing 415) from the induction to Troilus and Cressida
Weimann rejects the idea that presentation and representation are opposites and instead suggests a “mutual engagement” between actor and playwright:

Rather than continue to attribute authority in an Elizabethan play either to the work of the author or to the institution of the stage, we should reject both the ‘either/or’ and the notion of a given opposition between them and come to terms with the ways in which the performed play thrives on the mutual engagement of text and bodies. *(Playing 420)*

Weimann suggests the clown’s bodily and verbal performance remains in play with the author’s work; they may draw energy from each other or be in conflict.

The clowns have distinctive characteristics which fall into two groups: those which place the clown outside the drama to some extent, and those which show the clown holding a contradictory position as both high and low in social and theatrical status. The following characteristics place the clown ‘outside’ the fictional drama in various ways. They are:

- improvisation which takes the clown beyond his scripted role, with consequent elasticity of performance; the importance of the clown’s body and physical performance; the clown’s heritage in the Vice figure of the medieval Morality play which makes him an interpreter or commentator on the action; the clown’s dominance in the subplot or parts of the performance beyond the play proper such as the epilogue or the closing jig; anachronisms which show the clown living in the contemporary world of the audience rather than within the fictional drama; contact with the audience and a self-consciousness about theatrical illusion; and the use of clowning to fulfil a practical purpose in the theatre, such as providing preliminary incidental entertainment or filling in gaps in the performance.

Improvisation is the first and most important of these characteristics. Kemp and Tarlton’s extempore clowning was famous enough to be remembered, albeit as something
old-fashioned, in Richard Brome’s play *The Antipodes* (1638):

LETOY. But you Sir are incorrigible, and
Take licence to your selfe, to adde unto
Your parts, your owne free fancy; and sometimes
To alter, or diminish what the writer
With care and skill compos’d: and when you are
To speake to your coactors in the Scene,
You hold interloquutions with the Audients….
Yes in the dayes of *Tarlton and Kempe*,
Before the stage was purg’d from barbarisme,
And brought to the perfection it now shines with. (Gurr, *Playgoing* 294-95)

The improvisation of Richard Tarlton, who was the most famous Elizabethan clown, was such a distinctive part of his style that Gabriel Harvey coined the term ‘Tarletonizing’ to describe it (Walsh 64). Brome’s character describes the clown as disruptive and self-authorising, both in the sense that he authors his own material from his “own free fancy,” and because he ‘licenses himself’ rather than deferring to the author. This speech suggests the clown’s improvisation could add to, cut, or change the script, as well as comprising the off-script exchanges involved in talking to the audience. Tarlton was famous for his impromptu wit as a comedian. An anecdote survives about Tarlton’s reputed response to a woman who heckled from the audience, threatening to cuff him. Apparently, he agreed if she would reverse the spelling (Wiles 16). But Eric Rasmussen suggests that: “Although theatre historians tend to glorify the ‘extempore wit’ of Tarleton and Kemp, Renaissance accounts demonstrate considerably less faith in the improvisational ability of clowns” (129). His study of what appear to be the clown’s improvisations added to the text of *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, show the clown struggling to the weak punchline of: “well then so much for yt” (129).
In acknowledging the clown’s specialist skill it is also worth remembering that “an actor improvising his jokes is bound to come up dry on occasion” (Rasmussen 129). However, it is also possible that the clown’s verbally weak punchline was still efficiently comic, but relied on some lost piece of physical performance.

The clown’s improvisation may have been beyond the script, but it could also be at the author’s direction. Traces sometimes remain in the text which show where space was left for the clown’s own material, such as the stage direction “Exit Clown, speaking anything” (Rasmussen 134) from The Trial of Chivalry (1605). In Christopher Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Dr Faustus, Robin the clown says: “I scorn you, and you are but an etcetera” (3.2.9-10). This line could mean the clown calls the Vintner a “mere whatever,” or “possibly a direction to the actor to improvise insults” (Gibson 147n2,). If the script directed the clown to improvise, the playwright probably had some trust in the clown’s skill, and knew the play could be under-written to some extent because the clown could both invent and deliver his own material. Weimann and Bruster suggest a lack of playscripts from the Red Lion theatre in its early days from 1567 to 1587 implies the importance of clowing improvisation (79).

Improvisation, which could be at either the author’s or the actor’s initiative, is a good example of Weimann and Bruster’s concept of authorship and performance as two different modes of cultural production which could work together or be in conflict. Improvisation is linked to audience contact, and holding “interloquutions with the Audients” suggests the audience talked back to the clown. Bradbrook makes the point that, like the onstage actors in Love’s Labour’s Lost, Shakespeare’s actors probably had to contend with banter and heckling, which was “a relationship highly provocative, not easily controlled” (49). Improvisation and contact with the audience are linked aspects of the clown’s performance outside the drama.

The clowns also performed outside the drama when they provided incidental preliminary entertainment. The play was only one part of the total “theatrical event” which
“could, and regularly did, take almost four hours” (Hirrel 169). The play proper, depending on its length, would have lasted from between one and a half hours to up to three and a half hours (Hirrel 176), which left a gap of variable length to be filled with other types of performance: “Plays were presented as parts of larger theatrical events that included additional, incidental forms of entertainment” (Hirrel 160). Clowning was just one element in a medley of other kinds of performance: “Preliminary entertainment probably consisted most often of instrumental music. But a variety of other entertainment forms also held the stage, including tumbling, juggling, rope and sword dancing, singing, clowning, and contests of wit” (Hirrel 176). The clown’s performance was elastic and could increase in duration to balance a theatrical event featuring a shorter play. Clowning framed the play, since the clowns performed before, during and after the play itself. The clown’s appearance ‘as himself’ both before and after the play proper complicates the idea of the clown playing a fictional role within the drama, since the audience saw him as ‘the clown’ as well as in character.

Even within the play, the clown’s role often had a ‘detachable’ quality. The clown’s part often barely touches the main action, instead dominating the subplot. This ‘detachable’ aspect gives the clowns an indestructible quality. Since the events of the story tend not to happen to the clown, he is unchanged at the end of the play and this reinforces his status as a familiar and popular stage type. There is little sense that ‘something happens’ to the clown, which makes the clown like a sitcom character while the other characters are in a drama. The audience can simply enjoy the clown without worrying that he will die,² or fall in love, or learn anything, or change. In chapter two I discuss Bottom as an exception to this idea because he is a clown fully-integrated into the drama as a main character.

The clown’s disjunction from the rest of the action is made fun of in the anonymous satirical play *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* (c. 1598), in which the clown is dragged on to the

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² Perhaps the only exception is the clown in *Titus Andronicus*, who is sentenced to hang (4.4.45-49).
stage by a rope, asks what he should do there, and finally is told to make room for the “other men” waiting to take his place (5.662-97):

DROMO. Giue vs a voyder here for the foole. Sirra you muste begone, here are other men that will supplie the roome.

CLOWNE. Why, shall I not whistle out my whistle? Then farewell gentle auditors, & the next time you see mee Ile make you better sporte. (5.693-97)

A “voyder” was a container for leftovers (Leishman 130n3.), and so Dromo calls the clown an unwanted leftover at the end of his single scene. The clown speaks directly to the audience as he says goodbye, and refers to “the next time you see mee” when he promises another clowning performance of the same type, but of better quality. The clowns, at least in the anonymous plays, are marginal to the main action. They also have a characteristic emotional detachment and tend to be in the same joking mood, no matter what the events of the story.

Weimann and Bruster argue that:

Shakespeare’s clowns and fools never insinuate themselves into the locus of love and friendship in comedy, nor into that of heroic action in tragedy. They may wittily deflate the dominant representations in either genre, but their role in the dramatic formation of ‘worthy matter’ remains marginal. (78)

This argument holds true for the clowns in the anonymous plays and Kemp roles such as Launce and Launcelot, but there are exceptions such as Feste’s conflict with Malvolio in Twelfth Night, or the centrality of Bottom’s character in A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

The clown’s detached position ‘outside’ the drama enables him to comment on the action and to provide a comic parody of the main plot. Wiles notes the clown’s “ancestry in the Tudor ‘Vice’” (1); a figure in medieval drama who was known as a comedian and game-maker (2), for his improvisation (4-5), and who often acted as a chorus, master of ceremonies
(2) or interpreter. The clown’s dominance in the subplot allows the clown to offer implicit commentary on the main plot through parallelism and contrast. His easy colloquial prose often parodies the high-flown language of the main characters, or sometimes the clown makes fun of pretension with mock learning. The clown’s apparent difficulties with language, such as mistakes and malapropisms, are another clowning characteristic shared with the medieval Vice figure. As Speed says about Launce’s punning in *The Two Gentlemen*: “Well, your old vice still: mistake the word” (3.1.280), suggesting that it is Launce’s vice, or bad habit, to deliberately mangle meanings; like the Vice in the Morality plays. Sometimes the clown’s mistakes with language have their own relevance, and he “speaks the truth in his malapropisms” (Garber 43). C. L. Barber suggests that the easiest way for the clown to improvise his own material was to parody the main story, and so the clown’s parody is linked to improvisation. The clown comments on the action in several ways, such as direct address to the audience, comic parallelism and parody, and apparent linguistic mistakes which have their own relevance.

The clown’s ‘detached’ position in relation to the drama may have made him a candidate for various kinds of practical work in the theatre. The clowns sometimes provide a necessary break, drag off the bodies, or help to train a boy actor. The clown would also cover for mistakes, and “one of his jobs was to fill with banter unexpected ‘gaps’ that for some reason occurred in performances” (Stern, *Rehearsal* 103). For example, a story survives from the Red Bull theatre that “it did chance that the Clown . . . being in the Attireing house, was suddenly called for upon the Stage, for it was empty” (Thornton S. Graves, qtd. in Stern, *Rehearsal* 103). The clown in *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* complains: “This is fine y faith: nowe, when they haue noe bodie to leaue on the stage, the[y] bringe mee vp, & which is worse, tell mee not what I shoulde saye” (5.675-77). This scripted scene may describe contemporary theatrical practice in which the clown improvised when no other actor was
available. The flexibility of the clown’s performance, which seems analogous to modern stand-up comedy, may have made it easy to ‘bring him up’ to fill gaps in the performance.

The clown’s physical performance is another key aspect of clowning outside the scripted drama, both in the sense of specialist skill and of the “clown’s base physicality” (Johnson 160). The clown’s physical performance involved “scatology and sex, probably in that order” as well as pulling faces, howling, weeping and vomiting (Skura 58). Weimann and Bruster also acknowledge the “breathtaking strength of [clowning’s] nonverbal performance,” such as the singing and dancing which were Armin’s and Kemp’s respective specialities (78). They argue that clowning’s “center of gravity was not semantic but close to a showmanship for which language served gesture and the body, often enough the needs of the belly” (81). The clown’s relentlessly practical attitude is connected to the body. Unlike the high-status characters, the clown tends to ask the practical questions in the plays such as: what will this cost? Will I get new clothes out of this? What about eating and drinking? What about staying alive? Meredith Anne Skura notes the clown’s combativeness as a source of physical comedy: “Much of his humor consisted of the slapstick aggression now relegated to cartoon animals” (58). The clown tends to be ready both to pick a fight and to run away from real danger. It may also be the clown’s bodily pragmatism which makes him misogynous, or anti-marriage. Jane Lytton Gooch notes that: “A typical source of humour for the Elizabethan clown is the jibe against women and marriage” (19), and the clown’s jig was often about adultery (Wiles 52). The comic violence which characterises the clown’s physical performance in the anonymous plays often involves conflict with women.

The early modern stage clown was a figure in transition: no longer a participant in communal medieval festivity, nor fully integrated into a fictional drama in which the audience were passive spectators. Shapiro notes the clown’s heritage in medieval festivity: “Clowns–closer to what we would call comedians–traced their lineage to older, popular forms
of festive entertainment, to the Lord of Misrule, to the Vice figure of morality drama, to traditions of minstrelsy, rusticity, song and dance” (39). Weimann’s phrase ‘laughing with the audience’ (Laughing 83) describes the clown’s performance as in transition between communal festivity and professional entertainment: “Such laughter rings with a late communal sense of gratification and relief at being one of them and yet having the wit and skill to cater for an occasion that pays” (Weimann and Bruster 100). This laughter shows the clown performing outside his fictional role as he enjoys both his own comedy and the audience’s response to it. At times, the clown is laughing precisely at his fictional character’s predicament. Skura argues that “what mattered more than the Clown’s character was the performative dimension of the role–its relation to the audience. The Clown was the player closest to the nonmimetic roots of theater in ritual celebrations, popular pastimes, and folk tradition” (58). The clown has close links with the audience, but is no longer one of them. Peter Thomson suggests that Tarlton was the first important stage clown who played, however nominally, a fictional role: “Just how and when the clown got in among the dramatis personae is a matter for dispute, but the decisive contribution was Richard Tarlton’s” (Jig 28). The clown’s appearance in scripted drama is a sign of transition from one form of entertainment to another, that is, from communal festivity to professional theatrical performance: it is the first stage of the clown’s integration into the drama.

The second group of clowning characteristics show the clown to be both high and low in social and theatrical status. The clowns were phenomenally popular performers who were England’s first celebrities and yet the clowns tended to play low-status characters, often rural men or servants; like actors in general they risked punishment as ‘masterless men’ while often also enjoying aristocratic and even royal patronage; the clowns exploited the connection between ‘natural’ (‘born’) and ‘artificial’ (clever) fools, since they sometimes claimed a form
of licence and protection by pretending to be genuinely vulnerable ‘born’ fools; the clown’s seemingly stupid yet strategic “refusal to understand” (Bristol 152) allows him to play ‘high status’ to other characters with his cross-talk and malapropisms; and, finally, the clowns were higher in fame and status than Shakespeare at the start of his career.

The clowns were both low and high in social status. Like actors in general, clowns could be at both the top and the bottom of the social scale:

The social position of the players and of their work was based on two contradictory presuppositions – that they were engaged in a business or industry, and that they were engaged in ‘service’ to their aristocratic patrons. This ambiguity was, to some elements of the community, highly objectionable, since the players were, like vagabonds and itinerant peddlers, at the bottom of the social ladder and yet had somehow become affiliated with its highest and most privileged spheres. (Bristol 112)

Actors risked being classed as “vagabonds” or masterless men and yet they could also enjoy aristocratic or royal patronage. Skura argues that: “As theater was to society and the player to the theater, the Clown was to the player: the epitome of everything lawless and base” (57). Clowns were potentially even more “base” than actors; but they could also be stars: “The first stars in England were clowns . . . . Clowns were often gifted writers or performers on their own; more than any other single group they seem to have shaped the period’s drama” (Skura 57). The famous clowns Richard Tarlton, Will Kemp and Robert Armin were all authors in their own right. Tarlton wrote the lost play The Seven Deadly Sins (1585), while Armin wrote a jestbook, Quips Upon Questions (1600); a taxonomy of natural fools, Foole Upon Foole (1600), and his own play, The History of the Two Maids of More-Clacke (1608). Kemp wrote an interlude in the anonymous play A Knack to Know A Knave (1594) as well as Kemps Nine Daises Wonder (1600), an account of his morris dance from London to Norwich.
Shakespeare’s clowns were celebrities, with a powerful stage presence, even while they used a low-status persona in order to be both laughed at and identified with. Skura says that part of the clown’s appeal was as a “hick” in the city (57), and there was a theatrical tendency “to treat in burlesque fashion whatever came from the country” (Baskervill 95). The term ‘clown’ originally meant someone from the country, as shown by the following line from Locrine: “Even as the country clowns with sharpest scythes / Do mow the withered grass from off the earth” (4.2.17-18). Tarlton used a determinedly low-status persona as “the archetypal rustic clown, dressed in a russet suit and buttoned cap” (Thomson, Jig 29). Andrew Gurr suggests Tarlton “probably invented, and certainly made famous, the figure of the cunning rustic clown” which he describes paradoxically as a “cunning innocent” (Playgoing 156). It was Tarlton’s rustic clown persona which “rendered indissoluble” the meanings ‘rustic’ and ‘comedian’ (Wiles 61), and clown came to mean a specialist comic actor. The clown’s rustic persona spoke to the anxieties of the provincial members of

Fig. 1. Richard Tarlton by John Scottowe (detail).
Shakespeare’s audience: “The majority of Tarlton’s London audience must have been visitors or first-generation immigrants” (Wiles 23). Sometimes the clowns courted failure and humiliation in order to turn the tables with a virtuoso display of comic skill which affirmed their high theatrical status.

The clowns played low-status rustics and servants, but they were also astonishingly well-connected. The spectrum of Tarlton’s fame ranged from his picture on privy doors and tavern signs (Halasz 19) to extraordinary access at Queen Elizabeth’s court. Tarlton had a “dual class positioning–at once of the people and part of the elite” (Halasz 20). Alexandra Halasz says Tarlton was “uniquely privileged in his access to the queen” (34):

When Queen Elizabeth was serious, I dare not say sullen, and out of good humor, he would undumpish her at his pleasure. Her highest favorites would, in some cases, go to Tarlton before they would go to the Queen and he was their usher to prepare their advantageous access unto her. (Thomas Fuller, qtd. in Halasz 33-34)

Tarlton’s ability to cajole Queen Elizabeth out of a bad mood suggests he had a privileged and familiar relationship with her. Tarlton was a star performer available on the public stage for everyone as well as a favourite performer of Queen Elizabeth’s. According to the Jests, Tarlton also owned two taverns in London (Thomson, Jig 28) and would entertain at the tables, improvising “those extemporized (often rhymed) responses to subjects suggested by drinkers” (Jig 29). Tarlton’s “transportation of this tavern-based tableside style to the public theatres was his peculiar contribution to acting in general and to jigs in particular” (Thomson, Jig 29). Halasz says the “condition of celebrity” is apparent in this combination of intense privilege and ubiquity (20). Sir Philip Sidney may have disapproved of clowns in tragedies, but Wiles notes: “It is a nice paradox that Sidney the man liked Tarlton well enough to stand godfather to his son” (62). Tarlton, who used a rustic persona but also had a familiar
relationship with the Queen, embodies the contradictions of the clown’s social status as both high and low.

Fig. 2. Will Kemp’s morris dance from the title page of *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (1600).

Kemp’s marathon morris dance from London to Norwich in 1600 is also evidence for the clown’s contradictory position as both low and high in social status. Kemp transforms the morris dance, a form of communal medieval festivity, into a money-making venture both to generate and to cash in on his celebrity (Thomas 511): “Kemp’s values demand that spectators pay to watch what was once the possession of the community” (Thomas 520). He hoped to make money by taking bets that he could not complete his journey, as well as through sales of his written account *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (1600). Kemp uses an old form of communal entertainment in a new way: “he embodies the old and the new all at once” (Johnson 5), and this may be why he did not want other people joining in to dance with him, unless they were competing with him. It may also be why he refused to get drunk. Max Thomas says that the medieval morris tradition was “communal and participatory,” but that Kemp insisted on his status by accepting hospitality from local dignitaries (513). Kemp aspired to a high status celebrity, made in part out of precisely its opposite: the medieval festivity of the morris dance in which anyone could participate.
The title page of Armin’s play *More-clacke* offers another piece of evidence for the clown’s contradictory social and theatrical status. The image shows Armin wearing the plain coat of John in the Hospital. This character was based on a real and well-known ‘born’ fool,

![The History of the two Maids of More-clacke](image)

Fig. 3. The 1609 title page of *The History of the Two Maids of More-clacke*.

who was a ward of Christ’s hospital (Felver 17). In *More-clacke*, Armin plays both John and Tutch, a witty fool (Hornback 157). He has a ‘muckender’ tied to his belt, a cloth for wiping the nose and mouth – an emblem of the ‘natural’ fool (Hornback 157), as well as an inkhorn, which indicated “that its wearer was erudite – or pretentious” (Stern, *Stage* 70). The image shows Armin both advertising himself as an author while ‘playing the fool’ as the hapless John, or perhaps acknowledging his debt to him as a source of his play. The title page shows the contradictions of Armin’s status, since he appears simultaneously as a self-advertising author and as a vulnerable natural fool.

The contradictions of the clown’s status may explain part of his theatrical appeal. The clown’s comic strategies, such as mishearing and cross-talk, show him playing a high theatrical status despite the typically low social status of his character. Keith Johnstone, in his
classic book on improvisation, describes the way characters play for status as a useful way to
think about all kinds of dramatic interactions (and human behaviour). He suggests we find it
endlessly interesting to watch someone going up or down in status relative to someone else.
This is particularly the case with the clown who, as typically a servant, should be low status
but often ‘plays high’ with his questioning, cross-talk and deliberate misunderstanding.
Johnstone suggests that:

One status relationship that gives immense pleasure to audiences is the master-
Servant scene. A dramatist who adapts a story for the stage will often add a
Servant, especially if it’s a comedy . . . . The relationship is not necessarily one
in which the servant plays low and the master plays high. Literature is full of
scenes in which the servant refuses to obey the master, or even beats him and
chases him out of the house. (62-63)

The servant clown’s theatrical dominance over his master, which inverts usual social status
relationships, makes him a lord of misrule within the world of the play. The lord of misrule in
medieval festivity was a nobody who became king for a day. The clown’s onstage inversion
of social status was also only temporary, and part of the play world rather than real life. Wiles
explains the limitations of misrule, since it was both ‘safety valve and containment’:

temporary inversion is a safety valve which protects the system. He adds that “The rigid
social hierarchies of late medieval England relied on inversionary enactments of ‘misrule’ to
create a sense of release, and ultimately a reaffirmation of hierarchy” (20).

But the clown’s comic strategies often extend the moment of misrule because they
involve delay and elasticity. The ‘elastic gag’ means elaborating on a routine or anecdote for
as long as the audience is enjoying it. De Grazia says the “clown could take the occasion to
tell one joke or two or more, stretching them out or holding them back, depending on the
duration of the audience’s laughter, in a routine now known as an elastic gag” (177). This
elasticity was a key part of the clown’s comic method: such as restaging a successful comic moment to get a second laugh; obstructive cross-talk which holds up the plot; extended physical clowning routines; the added material of improvisation, or banter with the audience. The clown asserts his high theatrical status by extending his own performance. For as long as he does so the concerns of the plot are suspended by the clown’s theatrical misrule.

To sum up my discussion of these two groups of clowning characteristics (inside/outside and high/low), I consider their spatial expression on the early modern stage. The concepts of *locus* and *platea* offer a spatial representation of this status relationship: in general, centre stage is the *locus* or ‘stage as place’ while the *platea* or downstage area closest to the audience remained ‘stage as stage’ or somewhere outside the represented drama. Erika Lin suggests that although the high-status characters took centre stage relegating low-status figures to the *platea*, this was a “theatrically privileged” place for the clowns, because they could speak aside to the audience (284). There was no fixed division of theatrical space which meant the clowns always operated from the *platea*, but it is a useful way to bring together two ways of thinking about the clown’s performance: that he is simultaneously high and low status in respect of his position on stage, as well as being in an ambiguous position in relation to the drama. On the *platea*, the clown stands somewhere between the audience and the represented action and this is clowning at its most distinctive.

In order to establish the foundations of my study I analyse the clown roles in three anonymous plays: Dericke in *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, Strumbo in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* and Mouse in *Mucedorus*. These roles represent the stage clowning tradition which Shakespeare drew on and then modified in his drama, and they show the power and popularity of the clown. It is evidence for the clown’s popularity that there is a substantial clown role in each of these three very different plays. The clowning
works in the same way in all three plays to provide a comic parody of the main action, despite their different genres of history, tragedy and comedy. In chapter one, I compare *Mucedorus* with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to show the extent to which the popular tradition of clowning informed Shakespeare’s work in this early play.

Chapter two forms a structural hinge in my study as I consider how Shakespeare’s clowns develop. The clown roles change from rustic servants to household fools. In general, there is a transition from independent, physical and improvisational clowning to a more integrated, self-consciously witty and musical fooling. This transition coincides with Robert Armin replacing Will Kemp in 1599 as the star clown in Shakespeare’s company. Shakespeare ‘tames’ the independent clown with increasing integration but, as he does so, he also draws more explicit attention to clowning as a phenomenon. I study two further clown roles in depth: Launcelot in *The Merchant of Venice*, a clown’s role probably played by Will Kemp, and Feste in *Twelfth Night*, a more integrated fool’s part, probably played by Robert Armin. I then compare Feste with Lear’s Fool in *King Lear*, and consider how the similarities between these two roles were typical of Armin. Shakespeare wrote to the strengths of, or was influenced by, his specialist comic actors. I consider the famously speculative question of why Kemp left the company abruptly (no one knows for sure) and what that may tell us about Shakespeare’s attitude to clowning, with particular reference to the clown’s jig. In the final section of chapter two I consider some of the complications and contradictions in this narrative of transition and integration. The clowning in Shakespeare’s plays shows important continuities as well as important changes. For example, Kemp’s likely role as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* shows greater integration than Armin’s possible role as the Porter in *Macbeth*.

In chapter three, I consider Shakespeare’s distribution of clowning characteristics to roles played by actors other than the specialist clowns. Shakespeare takes the clowning
energy from Tarlton’s performance as Dericke in the Queen’s Men play *The Famous Victories* and distributes it to Falstaff, Pistol and Katherine in the *Henriad*. I consider the evidence for and against Falstaff as a clown, and as a Kemp role. Finally, I consider the antic Hamlet as a clown; while this is only one aspect of his role, he has several clown characteristics. Hamlet’s clowning is evidence for both the integration of the clown into the drama and the distribution of clowning energy. I also consider Richard Tarlton’s potential impact on *Hamlet*, first performed twelve years after his death. It is to him, the most famous Elizabethan clown, that I now turn: in his only securely identified theatrical role as Dericke in *The Famous Victories*. 
Chapter 1: The popular clowning tradition and

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

These three anonymous plays, *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* and *Mucedorus*, each have a substantial clown role which shows the power and the popularity of clowning. The clowning works in the same way in all three plays despite their different genres, providing a comic parody of the search for battlefield honour in the history, of the multiple suicides in the tragedy, or of romantic love in the comedy. The clowning tradition in these anonymous plays informed Shakespeare’s work, and there are many similarities between, for example, *Mucedorus* and an early Shakespeare play such as *The Two Gentlemen*. Charles Read Baskervill notes that the clown figure “with a mixture of knavery and naïveté” links Dericke, Strumbo and Mouse with Shakespeare’s early clown roles Launce and Launcelot (137). All four plays were written at about the same time, probably between 1585 and 1590.

1.1 *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*: Am I a Clowne?

Tarlton played Dericke, the clown role in *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, and the sheer impact of his celebrity detaches the clown somewhat from the world of the play. The play is under-written to give scope to the clown. Tarlton’s performance makes the most of his trademark exits and entrances, as well as his chance to elasticise the best joke: boxing the Lord Chief Justice on the ear. Dericke has many features of the clowning tradition such as audience contact, metatheatrical awareness, improvisation, mishearing, the implied
importance of physical performance and comic parody. He typifies the pragmatic and combative clown linked to the anarchic and carnivalesque lord of misrule: his concerns are eating and drinking, fighting and conversely self-preservation, stealing, breaking windows and threatening to set the house on fire.

Dericke is Tarlton’s only securely identified stage role (Thomson, *Tarlton* 23). *The Famous Victories* belonged to the Queen’s Men (McMillin and MacLean 88) and McMillin and MacLean argue that this acting company’s style was “visually-oriented” and well-suited to clowning: “There is always room for clowning in the plays of the Queen’s Men” (128). *The Famous Victories* “may be the earliest of extant English history plays among the professional companies” (McMillin and MacLean 89), although the extant text is “very short and defective” (Gurr, *H5* 227). The play was published in 1598 but, since Tarlton died in 1588 and William Knell who played Henry V died in 1587 (McMillin and MacLean 89), it must have been written and performed much earlier; Brian Walsh suggests the mid-1580s (62).

Critical evaluation of the play has been harsh. Geoffrey Bullough believed that “nothing shows the splendour of [Shakespeare’s] imaginative alchemy better than his handling of this decrepit pot-boiler” (168). Such evaluations neglect the play’s comic energy in which Shakespeare clearly found something of value. He used *The Famous Victories* as a source for the *Henriad* and “knew this play well when he wrote his series of three plays on the same material” (McMillin and MacLean 135). The play traces Henry V’s career from his wild days as Prince to the victory at Agincourt and marriage to the French princess Lady Katheren. Tarlton plays the clown role of Dericke, a carrier who has been robbed by Cutbert Cutter. At Cutter’s trial, the Prince claims the thief as his man and boxes the Lord Chief Justice on the ear. Dericke decides to live with John the cobbler and they are both conscripted
into the King’s army to fight against the French.

Tarlton’s fame was a source of metatheatrical self-consciousness in his role as Dericke; because Tarlton was so recognisable it was impossible for him to disappear into his character. The humour in Dericke’s role “depends largely on the audience knowing Tarlton as himself” (Gurr, *Playgoing* 155). Why else would Dericke’s first scene require him to ask “Am I a Clowne?” (2.132). This question allows Tarlton to “exhibit and examine the breach between his given comic performance practice and the lightly assumed imaginary identity in the playing of a role” (Weimann and Bruster 84). Dericke’s question is at least partly for the audience, who knew him as a famous clown. Tarlton is ‘laughing with the audience’ as he both plays the low-status rural Dericke from Kent and performs as a professional comic actor while enjoying the audience’s response. His first line, which sounds like a catchphrase, is directed to the audience as much as to the other characters: “Who, who there, who there?” (2.123). Tarlton as Dericke is both asking for the Watch within the fiction and greeting the audience. Tarlton may also have surfaced as an actor to make a joke at his own expense in his delivery of the line that he is a “proper hansome fellow too” (2.151), given the accounts of his own “rough ugliness” (Thomson, *Biography* n. pag.).

Dericke shares the combativeness in Tarlton’s clowning persona described in the anonymous, posthumously published *Tarlton’s Jests*. Since Tarlton was the “best-known player of his era, his own persona, or at least the public comic persona he cultivated, could always spill over into his putative stage roles” (Walsh 68). The *Jests* describes him as a prodigious plebeian, hard-drinking, provocative, often forced to improvise himself out of ignominy, outstandingly short-tempered, a misogynist, an adversary of radical protestantism, anti-Catholic too, inclined to draw attention to the functions and appurtenances of the human body’s lower half, verbally as well as physically agile, not infrequently violent, and almost always

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3 All line references to *The Famous Victories* are from Bullough.
combative. (Thomson, Biography n. pag.)

Tarlton (d. 1588) was perhaps England’s first theatrical celebrity, who was famous at all levels of London society. Because he toured with the Queen’s Men, Tarlton’s fame extended beyond London to the rest of the country, which made him the first “professional entertainer” to become a national figure, and most significantly his fame was equally potent at court, in the playhouse and in provincial towns. As a Queen’s comedian he travelled the country more extensively and systematically than any player did before or after. (Gurr, Playgoing 151)

Tarlton’s fame made him a legend:

Tarlton was not only a stage clown but a man of many parts, a maker of plays and ballads, a drummer, tumbler and qualified Master of Fencing. He became famous in the 1570s, a byword in the 1580s, and a popular legend for a century after his death for his extemporised jests. (Gurr, Stage 86)

Because Tarlton became a legend it is difficult to separate fact from fiction in what was written about him. Halasz says it is tautological to recreate a biography out of information in the Jests (21), and Thomson also deflates any hope of finding out the truth about Tarlton’s life: “Any attempt to reconstruct Tarlton’s life is doomed to failure since the life can no longer be detached from the legend” (Jig 28). Tarlton’s fame, however, is undisputed and his celebrity gave him an extradramatic visibility in The Famous Victories, whether or not his role as Dericke was tailored to aspects of his own personality or clowning persona.

Within the play, the clown has a metatheatrical awareness about performance as performance, and the key scene is when Dericke and John re-enact Prince Henry boxing the Lord Chief Justice on the ear. In the play, Dericke makes direct contact with the audience (Walsh 66), as he comments on the Prince’s arrest: “Sownds maisters, heres adoo, / When
Princes must go to prison: / Why John, didst ever see the like?” (5.377-79). Dericke suggests they act out the scene. John Cobler plays Dericke’s “feed” (Gurr, H5 226) and, in a great line for a double act, says:

JOHN. Come on, Ile be your Judge,

But thou shalt not hit me hard.

DER. No, no. (5.391-93)

As Walsh notes, their fictional replay begins to break down as they start to use each other’s real names (67). John takes the box on the ear and then tries to recover his dignity as the Lord Chief Justice:

JOHN. Well I am content to take this at your hand,

But I pray you, who am I?

DER. Who art thou, Sownds, doost not know thy self?

JOHN. No.

DER. Now away simple fellow,

Why man, thou art John the Cobler. (5.406-11)

Tarlton as Dericke plays with their unstable fictional identities (Walsh 67), and John’s tenure as the Lord Chief Justice lasts only as long as getting hit. Afterwards Dericke calls him a “clown” (5.417) for taking it (Skura 58). His insult plays on the term’s variable meanings since, on the face of it, John has been foolish by setting himself up for a blow to the head, but of course he is also ‘playing the clown’ for laughs. Dericke goes on to say “I thinke that thou art one of these Worenday Clownes” (5.419-20), which Bullough glosses as probably meaning “workaday, ordinary” (311n1.). Walsh suggests this insult is also a self-conscious joke that John is indeed a clown on weekdays because, at that moment, he is working as a stage clown (70-71). The clown stands aside from the action to comment to the audience in a moment of Vice-like interpretation of the action. The re-enactment elasticises the joke, which
both delays the main action and provides a comic parody of it.

There is also a tempting reference in Tarlton’s Jests to suggest that, in one performance, Tarlton went one better by also playing the Lord Chief Justice, and got hit himself, even though this would be an impossible doubling in the scene as we have it (McMillin and MacLean 89-90):

> At the Bull 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 owne part of the Clowne: and Knelt then playing Henry the fift, hit Tarlton a sound boxe indeed, which made the people laugh the more because it was he: but anon the Judge goes in, and imediately 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 eare. 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 still on my cheeke, that it burnes againe. (Gurr, H5 226)

Whatever the authenticity of this jest – Gurr suggests it has a “air of truth” (H5 226), and McMillin and MacLean “take it as valid evidence” for dating the play (90) – it is a good example of the clown extemporising and making the most of a one-off theatrical moment. Tarlton’s fame improves the joke, since the audience “laugh the more because it was he” when he gets hit, and then he makes a characteristic quick exit and entrance by going in as the judge and immediately coming back out as the clown. Tarlton disrupts the scripted drama by asking “what newes,” in order to extend the joke, shared with the audience, that he has just played the judge and therefore knows what has happened. In the Jests this anecdote is called
“An excellent jest of Tarlton suddenly spoken” (Halliwell 24, emphasis added), which acknowledges Tarlton’s improvisation. This story also makes a revealing distinction between Tarlton “in his Clownes cloakhes” as the clown and the rest of the company as “the Actors.” Tarlton elaborates on the scripted scene to get a second laugh about how the blow “burnes againe” on his cheek, which is a good example of the elasticity of the clown’s performance: he refers again to a successful comic moment because the audience has just enjoyed it.

Exits and entrances were a key element of Tarlton’s style, both to establish contact with the audience and to draw attention to performance as performance. Apparently Tarlton could get laughs just by poking his head out of the tiring house door (Skura 58). Henry Peacham, in Thalia’s Banquet (1620), wrote:

As Tarlton when his head was onely seene,
    The Tire-house doore and Tapistrie betweene,
    Set all the multitude in such a laughter,
    They could not hold for scarce an houre after. (Nungezer 362-63)

Rather than come on in character within the imaginary world of the play, Tarlton plays self-consciously with the fact the audience is waiting for him. Tarlton’s body is comic in itself (Johnson 24): just seeing his face was enough to make the audience laugh. According to another anecdote in the Jests, Tarlton would also tease the audience by keeping them waiting:

“It chanced that in the midst of a play, after long expectation for Tarlton, being much desired of the people, at length hee came forth” (Halliwell 14). This story suggests that even “in the midst of a play” the audience is thinking about Tarlton as himself, and wanting him to appear. The impact of his first entrance is increased by a preceding moment of calm on the stage; the members of the Watch are just falling asleep (2.122). His first stage direction is “Enter Dericke roving” (2.122 s.d.) which suggests he is moving around the stage (Corbin and Sedge 26) to enjoy his encounter with the audience. Thomson notes “The passage from the stage
door to the area of action was Tarlton’s playground,” and:

The area of interaction between the fictional circumstance and the non-fictional self is comic territory for a gifted clown; and, at the liminal moment of entrance—before, that is, the entering actor can be expected to have fully engaged in the fiction—performers like Tarlton are focused on the audience, not the play. (Tarlton 23)

Corbin and Sedge suggest that: “His first appearance provides several opportunities for the professional clown. Firstly, he searches everywhere and exits, comically missing the Watch who could help him in looking for the thief” (26). Tarlton’s first entrance involves a physical clowning routine of searching without finding. Having made his entrance, Dericke exits immediately (2.123 s.d.), before reappearing three lines later with almost the same opening speech. The clown’s sudden coming and going, which occurs again in the fifth scene with the stage direction “Exit. And straight enters again” (5.416 s.d.), is theatrically self-conscious and draws attention to the stage as a stage. Dericke’s role was one in which what was done must generally have had greater impact on the audience than what was said, but what also characterizes this raw text is the parade of opportunities it offers to Tarlton as Dericke to indulge his metatheatrical talent as a maker of exits and entrances. (Thomson, Biography n. pag.)

Dericke’s exits and entrances are characteristic of Tarlton’s style of clowning in several ways: they allow him to establish contact with the audience, draw attention to theatrical illusion and play with his fictional identity as a character, and they also give him the chance to repeat the crowd-pleasing moment of his first appearance.

The clown has a paradoxical relationship to the script in The Famous Victories. His role is both under-written since, presumably, the writer could rely on Tarlton’s skill to bring
the text to life in performance, and conversely there are also more detailed stage directions for the clown than for the other characters, which either capture or dictate the action. For example, the clown’s stage direction for his encounter with the French soldier is: “Here the Frenchman laies downe his sword, and the clowne takes it up, and hurles him downe” (17.1303 s.d.). Later, when Dericke describes this encounter to John, he stages an inset scene of his own within the drama, including a request for attention and applause. This scene shows how his part was under-written for the clown, although his speech also contains implied stage directions for the clown’s physical performance. When the battle begins, Dericke goes and hides behind a tree but, to his dismay, he encounters an enemy soldier:

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 over a hedge,

And he saw me no more there that day,

And was not this well done John? (19.1432-41)

This speech relies on the clown’s ability to act out the fight, probably by playing both parts. The repeated simple constructions of, for example, “Now he drew, and I drew” or “Now I set this leg before, and turned this backward” suggest the clown acts out what he is saying. The script does not reproduce Tarlton’s performance. Tarlton’s clowning as Dericke had a “nonsensical ingredient that not only precluded representational meaning but could not easily be reproduced on page” (Weimann and Bruster 81). Weimann and Bruster argue that:
“Peerless Tarlton, the Queen’s Men’s greatest player, wrestled with and exemplified this contradiction in a telling paradox. Himself an author or even dramatist, he did not wish to write down, or was unable to pen, the way he clowned” (81). The distinctive part of Tarlton’s clowning is in his performance rather than the script.

The clown’s comic parody mocks the main action. Tarlton’s style of clowning, which gives the play its “interplay of stately and comic elements . . . is the principal organizing device of The Famous Victories” (McMillin and MacLean 133). Corbin and Sedge argue that the use of the clown in a history play was an innovation: “One of the undoubted achievements of Famous Victories lies in its mingling of clowns and conquest at a time when ‘heroicall histories’ contained few examples of low-life humour” (25). Dericke is a low-status male conscripted, along with John, to do the fighting and dying in battle (10.897). The clown’s conscription undercuts the idea of the prodigal son Prince Henry redeeming himself by starting a war. Walsh argues that: “Derick’s words and actions dilute, perhaps even negate, Henry’s heady, protonationalist rhetoric” (69). Dericke is interested only in his own safety and his own advantage: he gives himself a nosebleed to be excused from fighting (19.1426-30), and he scavenges shoes from dead soldiers (19.1449-50). The clown’s actions mock the idea of the battlefield as a site of honourable action: “The image of Derick scavenging the battlefield and stealing the shoes off of corpses, the final battlefield image evoked in The Famous Victories, parodies the English invasion of France as a brutal act of theft” (Walsh 71). But the clown’s parody is not the final word; it is the interplay between the clowning and the main plot which gives The Famous Victories its structure and wider vision, and this interplay allows the audience both to enjoy and to question the English military victory.

All three clowns in the anonymous plays have episodes of comic violence with women, and Dericke fights with John’s wife just before they go off to war. The clown’s emphasis on self-preservation contrasts sharply with his readiness to pick a fight in everyday
DER. I marvell whose head you will throw the stooles at,
Now we are gone.
WIFE. Ile tell you, come ye cloghead,
What do you with my potlid? heare you,
Will you have it rapt about your pate?
_She beateth him with her potlid . . . Here he shakes her . . . . She beateth him_ (10.919-27)
The stage directions describe a physical struggle over the pot lid, which Walsh suggests Dericke may be using as a shield (68). The clown loses the fight and tells the captain he should “Presse her for a souldier” (10.933). The clown’s combativeness shows in some other anarchic tendencies, such as his intention, after a disagreement with John’s wife, to “go home before, and breake all the glasse windowes” (7.604-05). Similarly, on his return from France, he suggests to John that he will “go before and call my dame whore, / And thou shalt come after and set fire on the house” (19.1478-79). The clown’s comic violence, which is an important element of his physical performance, links him to the anarchic lord of misrule and indicates the clown’s misogynist, or anti-marriage, attitude.

Dericke’s clown role also emphasises the clown’s characteristic insistence on the body and practical concerns such as eating and drinking. His disagreement with John’s wife was provoked by a scene completely disconnected from the main plot, in which she serves him a meal consisting of only “a dish of rootes, and a pecaee of barrel butter” (7.596). When Dericke decides to live with him, John becomes anxious and says: “alasse I am not able to keepe thee, Why, thou wilt eate me out of dooers” (5.425-26). Dericke responds, with irony, that he only needs delicacies: “I am none of these great slouching fellowes, that devoure these great peeces of beefe and brewes, alassee a trifle serves me, a Woodcocke, a Chicken, or a Capons
When John tells Dericke he should be “glad of a dish of rootes” (5.433), Corbin and Sedge note the bawdy potential in Dericke’s response about rooting (163n1,). Dericke finds the idea of following the Duke of York’s cortege back to England appealing in part because there will be “cakes and drinke” (19.1468). The clown is connected to the carnivalesque lord of misrule through both his anarchic combativeness, and his insistence on the body.

Dericke “embodies theatrical energy” (Walsh 64) in the play. His clowning strategies include audience contact, metatheatrical awareness, elasticity of performance, comic parody, and anarchic combativeness combined with an instinct for self-preservation. This clowning energy was a valuable source of theatrical capital which Shakespeare drew on when he reworked *The Famous Victories* in the *Henriad*. As I will show in the final chapter, Shakespeare distributes Dericke’s clowning energy to Falstaff, Pistol and Katherine.
1.2 *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine*: Turning to the people

*The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* mingles kings and clowns and is therefore an example of the “mongrel tragi-comedy” of which Sidney disapproved, but the combination of clowing and formal, highly rhetorical tragedy suggests both were popular in performance. Perhaps more than any other clown in my study, Strumbo makes a complete contrast to the epic tragedy in which he appears. His clowning characteristics include an almost total independence from the plot, direct contact with the audience, mistaking the word, the implied importance of physical performance, and his comic parody of both love and war. The key clowning moment is his comic resurrection after playing dead on the battlefield. Strumbo also has a vividly confrontational relationship with his second wife which is characterised by extremes of comic violence.

*Locrine* was printed in 1595 (Gooch 4), but probably written years earlier. The “available evidence suggests that *Locrine* was first written around 1585 and then went through several stages of revision, perhaps by a number of different hands, until it was completed in its final form in 1594 and entered in the Stationers’ Register” (Gooch 10). The clown’s role may have been added later (Gooch 16), although this speculation could be based on the clown’s almost total separation from the main plot.

There is a marked contrast between the clowning scenes and the main action. The main story is motivated by “a chain of cause and effect based on revenge” (Gooch 13) after Locrine succeeds his father Brutus as king of ancient Britain. The Scythians Humber and Hubba invade and defeat Locrine’s brother Albanact, and then Locrine avenges Albanact and defeats Humber. Civil conflict follows after Locrine discards his wife Guendoline in favour of an affair with the captive Estrild, Humber’s wife. The play’s language “is characterized by
a great amount of repetition, parallelism and the accumulation of mythological example” (Gooch 15). Bristol describes the heroic characters as “stiff and hieratic images of archaic violence” and the style as “turgid and exaggerated” (145). Strumbo the clown erupts into this world with his colloquial prose, and his bawdy and practical attitude to life. It is clownishly anachronistic that Strumbo is “at home in contemporary London” (Gooch 10), although the action occurs in ancient Britain. Strumbo, a cobbler, woos and then marries Dorothy, who is burnt to death when the invading army sets her house on fire. Strumbo is conscripted into the army, which allows him to play the clown’s trick of feigning death on the battlefield. Later, he is forced to marry the violent Margery. Finally, he encounters the starving and defeated Humber, who begs for food but is thwarted by Albanact’s ghost. The clown enters “with a pitchfork, and a Scotch cap” (4.3.21 s.d.), which is one of the few markers of individuality in the play, and his malapropisms give him an distinctive way of speaking. Strumbo is “(b)enign and invincible” and his character is “a kind of compendium of low-life appetite” (Palfrey 41). Strumbo’s invincibility makes him a ‘sitcom’ clown who seems to be in the same joking mood whether apparently desperate for love, mourning the death of his first wife, or getting beaten up by his second one.

Strumbo’s first scene parodies the extreme tragedy of the main action in which no fewer than five characters commit suicide. His first stage direction is “Enter STRUMBO above, in a gown, with ink and paper in his hand” (1.3.1 s.d.), as he plays the sleepless lover struggling to write a love letter. He laments his desperate state: “Nay, Strumbo, kill thyself, drown thyself, hang thyself, starve thyself. O, but then I shall leave my sweetheart” (1.3.24-27). Strumbo decides suicide is not the answer, since he would have to leave Dorothy: “mundane reality undercuts this romantic convention of dying for love” (Gooch 18). The clown’s rejection of suicide parodies Locrine’s later decision to kill himself in front of his lover Estrild (5.6.44 s.d.).

All line references to Locrine are from Gooch.
The clown steps aside from his fictional role to establish contact with the audience and to laugh at his own performance. Strumbo simultaneously plays the part of the sleepless lover and enjoys his own performance:

He is constantly the butt of satire—for instance for being ruled first by lust and then by the woman—but in his demotic significance undiminished because he is his own mocker and so his own audience. Strumbo’s orchestrations make him a type of ringmaster, or even playwright, who at the same time incorporates the audience, anticipating and in a sense forestalling their own potentially sarcastic judgements. (Palfrey 41)

Strumbo is self-conscious about his own performance as he laughs at his own predicament. He speaks directly to the audience: “Ay, masters, ay, you may laugh, but I must weep; you may joy, but I must sorrow” (1.3.6-8). This is a moment of the clown ‘laughing with the audience’ as Strumbo talks to the audience about their own enjoyment of his comic performance. He uses the same term as Dericke does, when he call the audience members “masters.” Alone on stage, he makes a bawdy direct address to the audience: “My pen is naught, gentlemen, lend me a knife” (1.3.31-32). He comments on his own actions, saying self-consciously: “Nay, masters, you shall see a marriage by-and-by. But here she comes. Now must I frame my amorous passions” (1.3.65-67). After a “brief and successful wooing” (Bristol 146), Strumbo turns to the audience:

Sayest thou so, sweet wench? Let me lick thy toes. Farewell, Mistress.

_Turning to the people._ If any of you be in love, provide ye a capcase full of new coined words, and then shall you soon have the succado de labres, and something else. (1.3.94-99)

Strumbo says goodbye to his beloved, and instead ‘turns to the people’ in an emblematic moment of clowning to ask the audience if any of them are in love. The clown’s direct
contact with the audience seems more important than his fictional character’s situation.

The clown is also at work in a practical and non-representational way in the theatre to help train a boy actor, and this aspect of the clown’s performance distances him from the fictional play world. Unusually, the clown in *Locrine* has a servant, and it is possible that the actor who played Strumbo was teaching clowning to the “pretty boy” (1.3.55) who played Trompart. Strumbo helps Trompart through critical moments such as his first entrance.

Strumbo’s friendly cue speech makes it easier for him by giving an implied stage direction as well as repeating his name three times: “Trompart, Trompart! What a villain is this? Why, sirrah, come when your master calls you. Trompart!” (1.3.51-53). The clown’s speech instructs the actor as well as the character. Evelyn Tribble’s work on Marlowe’s boy actors shows that the boys’ roles were sometimes written with repeated cues or “explicit embedded instruction” (8) to make performance easier for them. Weimann and Bruster give a similar example from *Summers Last Will and Testament* in which the clown’s line “Come and sit on my knee” gives direction to “boy actor all too prone to suffer from stage fright” (103). They argue that this practical stage work is another way in which the clown “defies the world of representation” (103), since he comes out of character to do it. The boys’ roles sometimes alternated “relatively restricted, highly scaffolded scenes with more voluble and demanding scenes” (Tribble 11). Trompart’s role shows a similar alternation; in his first scene Trompart says little other than “Ay sir” (1.3.58) when Strumbo gives him a love letter for Dorothy. Strumbo whispers the message to him (1.3.64 s.d.), which gives the clown the chance to instruct the potentially struggling boy actor. Trompart’s big moment comes in his comic exchange with the adult clown, who is playing dead on the battlefield:

\[\text{TROM. O, what hath he done? His nose bleeds. But, O, I smell a fox; look where my master lies. Master, master!}\]

\[\text{STRUM. Let me alone, I tell thee, for I am dead.}\]
TROM. Yet one word, good master.

STRUM. I will not speak, for I am dead, I tell thee. (2.6.92-97)

Trompart is surely playing a comic game here, rather than believing Strumbo really is dead, but nonetheless he launches into a “doggerel” lament (Gooch 17), which gives the boy actor the chance to show his ability.

Strumbo’s comic resurrection on the battlefield is the key moment of clowning in the play: it questions theatrical illusion, parodies the main plot and exemplifies the clown’s pragmatic attitude to life. Albanact, who has just committed suicide after a final speech in Latin to the Fates, is dead on stage (2.6.91 s.d.). The clown comes back to life after Trompart warns him about battlefield thieves: “Where be they? Cox me tunny, bobekin! let me be rising, be gone, we shall be robbed by-and-by” (2.6.114-15). Bristol points to the clown’s pragmatism: “Strumbo ‘falls in battle’ to save his skin and ‘rises from the dead’ to save his purse” (182). The clown’s playing dead questions theatrical illusion: Albanact’s body is still on stage and dead ‘for real’ while the clown comes back to life. The clown’s resurrection may remind the audience that the Albanact actor is pretending too.

Like Dericke in The Famous Victories (Gooch 17), the clown parodies the military conflict in the main plot. Strumbo has to leave his cobbler’s life when he is conscripted into the army: “The comic soldier was a familiar role for the Elizabethan clown, and traditionally the soldier-clown was a coward” (Gooch 17). The clown’s perspective, as a low-status male conscripted into the king’s army, questions the values held by the main characters, such as military honour and suicide in defeat. Strumbo asks a radical question about the king: “what have we to do with him, or he with us?” (2.3.59-60). Later, his comment to the audience on the aftermath of the battlefield is sharper for pretending to misunderstand what he sees: “Masters, I think this is a holiday; every man lies sleeping in the fields, but, God knows, full sore against their wills” (2.6.70-72). Strumbo’s audience contact “is in the tradition of clowns
such as Ambidexter who exist both as characters in the dramas and as independent commentators, licensed to make satirical remarks” (Gooch 20). Strumbo’s comment is a grim one, since the soldiers are dead, rather than asleep. He suggests that it was low-status rural men, who would spend their days off sleeping in fields, who were conscripted and died in the battle. The clown is, in a sense, a representative for these men, since he takes his rustic persona from them.

The clown’s marital defeat makes a comic parallel with Humber’s later defeat in battle in the main plot. Strumbo is forced to marry Margery after a physical fight. In the fourth act, Humber prays for death and torment, in a formal verse lament:

You ghastly devils of the ninefold Styx,
You damned ghosts of joyless Acheron,
You mournful souls, vexed in Abyssus’ vaults,
You coal-black devils of Avernus’ pond,
Come, with your flesh-hooks, rent my famished arms,
These arms that have sustained their master’s life;
Come with your razors, rip my bowels up,
With your sharp fire-forks crack my starved bones;
Use me as you will, so Humber may not live. (4.5.16-24)

The clown is also defeated, after a confrontation with Margery’s father and brother in which he has “fish[ed] her belly” (3.4.16) but sees no reason to marry her. Margery enters and, after an exchange of insults: “They both fight” (3.4.41 s.d.). In contrast to Humber’s formal verse, Strumbo’s speech of defeat is in colloquial, monosyllabic prose, as he takes a beating from his wife to be: “O, my head, my head! Leave, leave, leave! I will, I will, I will!!” (3.4.42-43). His lament is not to the inhabitants of Hades, but rather to his codpiece, now that he has to marry Margery: “O, Codpiece, thou hast done thy master; this it is to be meddling
with warm plackets” (3.4.57-58). The clown achieves the “destruction of epic distance through laughter” (Bristol 146). The comic parody allows the audience to enjoy both the formal splendour of the tragedy and the clown’s mockery of it, or perhaps just the contrast between them. The comic parallel between the epic tragedy and the clown’s personal defeat also makes the clown’s misogynist point that getting married is a bit like being sent to hell.

The clown’s monologue on the troubles of his married life with Margery also parodies the military conflict in the main action. This inset story, probably dramatised by the clown’s physical performance, interrupts another lament from the starving Humber who, it seems, remains on stage but has to stand aside for the clown (4.3.20 s.d.). Strumbo talks directly to the audience: “How do you, masters, how do you? How have you ’scaped hanging this long time? (4.3.21-22), and then goes on to describe arriving home late:

Now, when she saw me come with my nose foremost, thinking that I had been drunk, as I was indeed, snatched up a faggot-stick in her hand, and came furiously marching towards me with a big face, as though she would have eaten me at a bit, thundering out these words unto me: ‘Thou drunken knave, where hast thou been so long? I shall teach thee how to benight me another time’; and so she began to play knaves trumps. Now, although I trembled, fearing she would set her ten commandments [fingernails] in my face, I ran within her, and taking her lustily by the middle, I carried her valiantly to the bed, and flinging her upon it, flung myself upon her, and there I delighted her so with the sport I made, that ever after she would call me sweet husband, and so banished brawling forever. (4.3.32-47)

Strumbo’s description of his second marriage parodies the “thundering” words and military conflict in the main action, and he is “valiant” to take on Margery. Gooch notes that:

“Strumbo provides a humorous comment on the serious concerns of the main plot, and the
comic scenes parody bombastic language, the prevailing style of the tragedy” (17). It is also possible to hear clues to the clown’s comic delivery in this speech, for example, a pause between describing Margery’s belief that he is drunk and the punchline of “as I was indeed.” Strumbo’s monologue implies that he acts out both parts in the fight with his wife as well as the subsequent sexual reconciliation.

The clown also parodies the main plot through his deliberate mistakes with language. The Scythians become “the Shitens, the Scythians–what do you call them?” (2.4.61-62); King Albanact becomes “King Nactaball” (2.3.59), and the possibly “admirable” king (Gooch 75n2,) becomes “abominable” (2.4.53). When Albanact offers to rebuild his burnt out house, Strumbo indulges in scatological cross-talk:

ALB. And you, good fellows, for your houses burnt,

We will remunerate you store of gold,

And build your houses by our palace gate.

STRUM. Gate! O petty treason to my person! nowhere else but by your backside? Gate! (2.4.78-83)

Strumbo is “relishing his moment as carnival king, to identify proximity to the palace with the arsehole of a prince” (Palfrey 42). The clown also takes the opportunity to talk down to the king: when Albanact offers instead to rebuild by the tavern it was “spoken like a good fellow” (2.4.88). Strumbo’s mistakes with language make fun of the high-status characters, and allow him to dominate the king theatrically in this scene. In his first appearance, Strumbo’s mock learning parodies high-flown rhetoric and then dissolves into scatological humour as he considers his astrological misfortunes: when “all the particular stars of the pole Antastick, are adversative against me, or else I was begotten and born in the wane of the moon, when everything, as saith Lactantius in his fourth book of Constultations doth say, goeth arseward” (1.3.2-6). The high-status characters choose suicide when events go
“arseward” for them: namely Albanact (2.6.91 s.d.); Humber (4.5.34 s.d.); Locrine (5.6.44 s.d.); Estrild (5.6.64 s.d.); and their daughter Sabren (5.6.175 s.d.). But the clown comically insists on survival, and mocks his own situation using his individual way with language.

In Locrine, the clown’s parody works through his use of language, his moment of comic resurrection and his bawdy and violent relationships with women. Strumbo performs as a character while simultaneously making a direct connection with the audience. The clown’s comic strategies disrupt the main action with parody; while, paradoxically, the parody makes the drama more complete by providing a contrasting point of view which allows the audience both to experience and to laugh at the tragedy.
1.3 *Mucedorus*: Leaving Idle Talk

The clowning in *Mucedorus* is in part about the gratuitous pleasures of performance. Mouse, the clown, repeatedly holds up the action with cross-talk, irrelevant comic episodes and the elastic restaging of his physical comedy routines. The clown’s insistently practical attitude to life and colloquial way of speaking provide a contrast to, and parody of, the high-flown concerns of the characters in the main romance plot. Like the medieval Vice he stands aside from the action to comment on it and to make a direct connection with the audience.

![Fig. 4. The 1611 title page of *Mucedorus*, advertising “the merry conceites of Mouse.”](image)
The play’s success was at least partly due to the clown. *Mucedorus* ran to seventeen early editions (Jupin 9) and was perhaps the most popular play of its time, with “the merry conceites of *Mouse*” a selling point on the 1611 title page. The date for *Mucedorus* is vague. Arvin Jupin suggests about 1590, but this is based on the play’s style (3), rather than direct evidence. Jupin shows that in 1641 both the bear and the clown were still famous enough to be remembered with a “casual, unexplained” (30) reference in Abraham Cowley’s play *The Guardian*:

BLA. [Captain Blade] Didst not thou once act the Clown in *Musidorus*?

SERV. No, Sir; but I plaid the Bear there. (Jupin 29-30)

The cast list notes “Eight persons may easily play it” and this may be a reason for the play’s popularity since, with doubling, a small group could perform it. A version of *Mucedorus* was still being performed in parts of rural England early in the nineteenth century (Jupin 18), and this long performance history is evidence of the play’s theatrical popularity.

*Mucedorus* opens with a framing induction in which gentle Comedy and blood-smeared Envy dispute who should control the play. Mucedorus, the prince of Valencia, disguises himself as a shepherd and goes in quest of Amadine the beautiful princess of Aragon. Segasto, a nobleman, and Amadine are walking in the woods when they are chased by a bear. Amadine cries out for help but Segasto runs away. Mucedorus kills the bear provoking Segasto’s jealousy. Segasto asks his friend Tremelio to kill Mucedorus, but Mucedorus kills him instead. Mucedorus is banished, but he and Amadine declare their love for each other and agree to meet at a well in the woods. Mucedorus is late and Amadine is taken captive by Bremo, a cannibal. Mucedorus disguises himself again, this time as a hermit. Mucedorus kills Bremo and reveals himself not just as a shepherd, but a prince. Segasto takes Mouse, the clown, into his service. Mouse agrees to leave his former life after he was frightened by the bear in the forest while gathering food for his father’s horse.
Mouse functions as a witty counterpoint to the main action; the clown’s comic parody allows the audience both to enjoy and to laugh at the romance. For example, Mucedorus tells Amadine that if she wants to marry a humble shepherd she will have to go

To bed at midnight, up at four,
Drudge all day and trudge from place to place,
Whereby our daily vittel for to win. (5.1.140-42)\(^5\)

At this point Mouse calls Amadine “goody shepherd” (5.1.145), or ‘Mrs Shepherd,’ which implicitly questions the idea of giving up all her money, social status and material comfort for love. No one responds to the clown, so it sounds like an aside to the audience as, Vice-like, Mouse comments on the romance action. The pragmatic clown introduces a contrary and valid point of view to the play. Amadine insists she will have Mucedorus even though he is only a shepherd. But she sidesteps the question of whether she is prepared to live a shepherd’s life by suggesting that rather than marrying down to him, Mucedorus could marry up to her (5.1.146-47). Then, in true fairytale style, he reveals himself to be a prince (5.1.150-53). The clown’s comic parody allows the audience to mock as well as to enjoy this moment. Jupin argues that “a burlesque presentation does not necessarily do violence to the play’s conception of itself, for throughout there is a spirit of self-mockery, a conscious awareness of its own absurdities” (37). For example, Mucedorus’s disguise is a theatrical costume which his friend Anselmo has used in a masque (Addition Two 48-50). This puts at one remove the romance element of the prince in disguise as a shepherd. The contest between Comedy and Envy in the framing induction and epilogue is also a source of self-consciousness (Jupin 37). The clown’s contrary viewpoint is just one of the play’s strategies for providing distance from the improbable romance plot.

The clown’s play with names is another aspect of his comic parody. Mouse mistakes the title ‘King’ for a surname: “what kin is he to Goodman King of our parish, the

\(^5\) All line references to *Mucedorus* are from Jupin.
churchwarden?” (1.2.100-01). This allows him to ask the radical question: “King of the land? I never see him” (1.2.103). In Locrine, Strumbo makes the same point when he says about the King: “what have we to do with him, or he with us?” (2.3.59-60). Mouse also plays with his own name: “My name? I have [a] very pretty name. I’ll tell you what my name is: my name is Mouse” (1.2.69-70). “Mouse” connotes cowardice, as he freely admits: “bring twenty bears before me and bind their hands and feet and I’ll kill them all” (4.1.44-45). The clown’s name has its own satirical effect because Mouse seems to be a reduced form of Mucedorus, the hero’s name.

Mouse has distinctive moments of physical performance, described by detailed stage directions, which he then restages to elasticise the comedy. For example, Mouse has an entirely gratuitous fight with an old woman from an alehouse after he steals her pot: “She searcheth him, and he drinketh over her head and casts down the pot. She stumbleth at it; then they fall together by the ears. She takes her pot and goes out” (3.5.29 s.d.). This moment of physical comedy is clowning for its own sake, capable of extension in performance depending on the skill of the actors, and independent of the plot. Mouse also has a physical clowning routine about ‘looking for’ Mucedorus in a pot of ale:

Perchance a may be in this pot. Well, I’ll see. Mass, I cannot see him yet. Well, I’ll look a little further. Mass, he is a little slave if a be here. Why, here’s nobody . . . (3.5.9-11).

After his fight with the old woman, Mouse reprises the same joke when he is sent out to search. He plans to return to the alehouse and “drink as long as I can stand, and when I have done, I’ll let out all the rest to see if he be not hid in the barrel” (3.5.64-66).

The clown also restages his key moment of physical comedy with the bear. Mouse describes having been frightened by the bear in the forest and says he will avoid her by going home a different way, but then: “As he goes backwards the bear comes in, and he tumbles
over her, and runs away and leaves his bottle of hay behind him” (Addition Two 2.12 s.d.).

When he later describes this scene to Segasto, Mouse restages this moment in order to extend the comedy. Mouse returns to this story and adds in more detail because, presumably, the audience responded to it the first time:

CLO. I tell you what, sir, as I was going afield to serve my father’s great horse and carried a bottle of hay upon my head—now, do you see, sir—I, fast hoodwinked, that I could see nothing, perceiving the bear coming, I threw my hay into the hedge and ran away.

SE. What, from nothing?

CLO. I warrant you, yes, I saw something, for there was two load of thorns besides my bottle of hay, and that made three. (1.2.45-53, emphasis added)

Mouse tells the story to Segasto in order to reprise the earlier successful comic moment which the audience has already seen once, with extra detail added such as the “two load of thorns” as well as the original bundle of hay. The line “now, do you see, sir” implies he acts it all out a second time.

The clown’s role is about performance rather than plot. Even when Mouse has vital information he fails to impart it: he has met Mucedorus in the wood, but describes him as an emmet, or ant, rather than a hermit so no one understands him (4.3.4). Similarly, he returns to the court with the news that the missing couple has been found, but instead gets involved in a mishearing exchange in which he mistakes “knight” for “spright” (5.2.21-22), and so never conveys the message. Instead, there is a uniquely performative aspect to the clown’s role, which marks him out as different from the other characters. Mouse is the only character to sing (3.1.33 s.d.), with a refrain about Mucedorus’s banishment. Similarly, the text alternates between naming him “Mo.” for his character as Mouse or “Clo.” for his function as clown. It may be the clown’s detachment from the plot which leads to him carrying out essential stage
business, such as dragging off the bodies (Jupin 39) of both Tremelio (2.2.109-10) and Bremo (5.1.97 s.d.). Mouse fails to be shocked by the dead body, first wondering if Tremelio is drunk, and then asking Segasto: “What, do you use to kill your friends? / I will serve you no longer” (2.2.103-04). The clown’s jokes show him playing for laughs rather than taking the fictional situation seriously. He takes the pragmatic opportunity to claim the hangman’s privilege of having the dead man’s clothes: “I will have all his apparel if I carry him away” (2.2.106-07). The clown is also overtly at work as a clown, appealing for the audience’s response. He has a performative comic episode unconnected to the plot when he tries to call Segasto in to dinner. Mouse speaks aside to the audience when he finally succeeds: “I promise you I thought seven year before I could get him away” (3.2.49-50). When Segasto has failed to have Mucedorus hanged, Mouse speaks directly to the audience as he exits: “Laugh at him, I pray you” (2.4.91-92). These moments of audience contact show the clown standing apart from the fictional drama as he comments on the action.

The clown’s comic cross-talk is also performance for its own sake. Segasto signals that Mouse’s cross-talk is clownage unrelated to the story when he calls it “idle talk” (2.2.7). Similarly, the Messenger complains that Mouse is always interrupting him (3.1.31). When Segasto wants him to raise a search after Amadine elopes, Mouse refuses to understand his instructions:

SE. Go to, sirrah; leaving this idle talk, give ear to me.

CLO. How, give you one of my ears? Not and you were ten masters. (3.5.36-38)

Mouse bests Segasto, firstly by taking his master’s instruction to “rear the whole town” (3.5.43) literally, and then by managing to make Segasto accept his literalising as potentially reasonable:

CLO. But tell me, master, must I make a privy search, or search in the privy?
SE. Why, dost thou think they will be there?

CLO. I cannot tell. (3.5.56-59)

An earlier cross-talk routine also shows the servant clown playing high status to his master by refusing to leave idle talk. The cross-talk is performance for its own sake as well as a strategic way for the clown to avoid a task:

SE. Well, sirrah, leaving idle talk, tell me: Dost thou know Captain Tremelio’s chamber?

CLO. Ay, very well; it hath a door.

SE. I think so, for so hath every chamber. But dost thou know the man?

CLO. Ay, forsooth, he hath a nose on his face.

SE. Why, so hath every one.

CLO. That’s more than I know. (2.2.7-14)

Mouse ostensibly agrees with Segasto while obstructing him: he mishears ‘Tremelio’ as “the meal man” (2.2.23) and then as “Captain Treble-Knave” (2.2.45); he offers to leave a message with his dog, suggests his master goes himself, says he will bring the room back instead if Tremelio is not at home (2.2.39), and the punchline to this cross-talk routine is that Tremelio enters anyway (2.2.45 s.d.). The clown uses “a wilful deafness to explain disobedience and to pressure tired commands into exhausted puns” (Palfrey 40). Mouse ends up eating and drinking rather than doing any work (2.2.52-57). This verbal clowning episode shows the low-status servant clown to be a theatrical lord of misrule: Mouse plays the master to his master and makes the everyday into a holiday.

The clown’s comic parody in Mucedorus broadens the play’s vision by providing a contrasting viewpoint which allows the audience both to enjoy and to laugh at the improbable romance. The clown’s obstructive cross-talk and extended physical comedy make him a
theatrical lord of misrule within the play; his clowning sets aside the concerns of the plot as he indulges in elasticised clowning performance. The clown also sets aside his fictional role to make direct contact with the audience and to appeal for their laughter.
1.4 The Two Gentlemen of Verona: Mistake the word

An early Shakespeare play such as The Two Gentlemen of Verona has the same kind of
clowning as the three anonymous plays above. The clown dominates the subplot, parodies the
main action and holds in tension his presentational physical performance with his
representation of a fictional character. Shakespeare’s The Two Gentlemen and the anonymous
Mucedorus are the same kind of play and have many similarities. Both plays are comedies
with substantial clown roles which parody the improbable romance action in the main plot. In
both, the search for romantic love disrupts male friendship, because the friend either leaves or
stays behind for love; the male lover is banished and the couples escape to a forest (with its
various dangers such as a cannibal or a band of outlaws) and, against the odds, all ends
happily. The unwanted suitors, Segasto and Thurio, who have paternal approval, both
suddenly give up their claim. The clown roles barely touch the main action, but they provide
gratuitous comedy, memorable physical performances and implicit comment on the action
through parallelism and parody. Like Mouse, the lack of plot weight in Launce’s role has led
to speculation that he was added later, but this may simply be part of the clown’s detachment
from the main action. In both plays, the clown comments on his cheating master: Launce says
“I am but a fool, look you, and yet I have the wit to think my master is a kind of a knave”
(3.1.261-62), while Mouse says to Segasto that he could hang him instead of Mucedorus
(2.4.85-87). The two plays have the same kind of wordplay based on the clown’s apparent
difficulty with a fancy word like “banishment.” Launce tells Valentine he is “vanished”
(3.1.216), while Mouse mistakes the “shepherd’s banishment” (3.2.28) for the “shepherd’s
bastard” (3.2.29). Finally, both plays even share the same scatalogical clowning comedy
about dogs making bad smells (Mucedorus 4.1.62, and TGV 4.4.18-23).

The Two Gentlemen of Verona is an “early and experimental, but seminal, comedy”
Weimann, *Laughing 79*). Shakespeare added the clown roles, Launce and Speed, to his source story (Proudfoot *et al* 1219) and, with Crab the dog, they are “an important source of the play’s theatrical appeal” (Proudfoot *et al* 1219). The play’s date is uncertain, but possibly the late 1580s (K. Schlueter 2). It remains an open question whether Kemp co-authored his part. Launce’s role is largely independent of the plot, but his comic parody is relevant to the play’s themes. Both Launce the clown and Crab the dog share an instability in their representational roles.

The clown’s opening monologue as Launce raises questions about Kemp the clown actor’s potential co-authorship of his part. Launce tells a story about how everyone but the dog wept when he left home:

> 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. 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, sir, 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. O, the dog is me, and I am myself. (2.3.5-23)

Launce’s comedy is based on confusing human and animal characteristics: howling for the
maid, and hand-wringing for the cat. He expects human tears from his dog when, although it is appropriate his family is sad that Launce is leaving, there is no reason why Crab should cry since they get to stay together. Then he has a comic struggle to assign human identities to objects in order to act out the scene of his leave-taking. Marjorie Garber says: “Any aficionado of modern stand-up comedy will recognize this as an opening monologue, and an accomplished one” (53), although she adds that “Launce’s swipe at Jews cannot be wished away” (54). This prose monologue sounds different from the surrounding main action in verse. Kathleen Campbell makes the case for Kemp’s authorship on the grounds that Launce has a distinctive voice (180), while all the other characters tend to sound alike, and even the outlaws speak verse (180).

In the closing jigs, Kemp wrote and performed his own material, and perhaps he does so in this passage. It is possible to see Launce’s comic lament to his dog as analogous to the self-contained ‘merriment’ he wrote in the anonymous play *A Knack to Know a Knave* (1594). This interlude, “Kemp’s applauded merriments of the men of Gotham,” was popular enough to be a selling point for the play (Weimann and Bruster 84). William Carroll argues that: “The popular tradition also included a certain amount of unscripted, improvisatory humour, which found its way, often indirectly, into Elizabethan playtexts” (182). Kemp was a mature and famous performer when he played Launce and so he probably had a great deal of freedom as a clown. In contrast, Shakespeare was at the start of his career. Weimann and Bruster argue that “Kemp was obviously free to act as a perfectly self-sustained entertainer” (84). Kemp may simply have used the script as a starting point for his own improvised performance. Whether Kemp wrote this monologue, or Shakespeare wrote it for him or with him, it is clear that: “Shakespeare’s first completely masterful comic scenes were written for the clowns” (Barber 5). Wiles suggests a relationship of mutual accommodation between actor and author:
Though Kemp had to adapt himself to the demands of writers, it is no less certain that writers had to adapt themselves to the demands of Kemp. . . . To analyse an Elizabethan play as the product of a single mind is to impose a selective modern point of view. (42)

This model of mutual adaptation suggests, reasonably enough, that Shakespeare and Kemp had to take each other into account. There was no theatrical director (Wiles 42), and so the actors had more autonomy than their modern counterparts to organise their own performances. Both Shakespeare and Kemp were of equal status (Wiles 42) as sharers in the Chamberlain’s Men, and the sharers’ agreement was an “exceptionally cooperative act” (Gurr, Globe 189). Wiles adds that: “The historical relationship between the actor and the writer is inevitably elusive” (vii). Shakespeare’s attitude to the clowns could lie almost anywhere along a spectrum from a desire for writerly control and frustration with the clown’s antics to a trust in the clown’s skill and an appreciation for the clown’s popularity. The most likely speculation would be a relationship of mutual creativity, and possibly competition, between Shakespeare and Kemp.

While Launce’s opening monologue is a self-contained clown’s interlude typical of Kemp’s comic style and irrelevant to the plot, it is also a thematically well-integrated comic parody of the main action. Launce’s monologue suits Kemp’s clowning style in several ways: it gives him control of the stage as a solo performer; it implies physical action, such as taking off his shoes as he acts out his scene of leave-taking; there is potential for bawdy as he identifies the shoe “with the hole in it” as his mother; he addresses the audience directly when he says: “Now, sir, this staff is my sister” (2.3.19), and there is potential to elasticise and expand on the scripted scene as he acts it out.

Launce’s opening monologue is a key moment of clowning which questions fictional representation. The shoes, hat, staff and dog fail to take on their proper fictional identities as
members of Launce’s family. Weimann and Bruster argue that, in one sense, it is Kemp rather than Launce who says “I am myself” as he plays self-consciously with his role as a fictional character (106). Kemp as a performer is ‘laughing with the audience’ and enjoying the audience’s response to his comedy even while his character Launce is in tears. Kemp must at least partly set aside his fictional role to enjoy his own performance. For Weimann, Launce is both “the clowning object and the laughing subject of his own mirth and that of the audience” (Laughing 82) and, in turn, this is linked to the clown’s close connection with the audience which parodies the romance action and connects them in a kind of communal festivity. Weimann suggests Launce plays with as well as to the audience (Laughing 83). In this scene, Kemp clowns directly with the audience as well as playing a fictional character.

Launce’s monologue is also a thematically well-integrated parody of the main action. There is an explicit parallel between the clown’s scene in prose and the main action in verse. Proteus and Julia have just parted (2.2), with Proteus saying it is a sign of “true love” that Julia could not speak to him before she left (2.2.18-19). Then Launce enters in tears and berates Crab his dog for not saying a single word of farewell (2.3.30-31). Barber argues that:

It was of course a practice . . . for the clowns to present a burlesque version of actions performed seriously by their betters. Wagner’s conjuring in Dr. Faustus is an obvious example. In the drama just before Shakespeare began writing, there are a great many parallels of this sort between the low comedy and the main action. One suspects that they often resulted from the initiative of the clown performer . . . the handiest part to play was a low take-off of what the high people were doing. (12-13)

Barber suggests that comic parody was the easiest way for the clown to improvise, and so this scene’s parody of the romantic love in the main plot may in fact be evidence for the clown’s independence as he improvised his own material.
Launce’s bawdy, practical, and potentially misogynistic attitude to women also parodies Valentine’s idealising courtly love. Valentine sees himself as a servant to the goddess-like Silvia. He says the hem of her dress should not touch the ground:

lest the base earth

Should from her vesture chance to steal a kiss,

And of so great a favour growing proud,

Disdain to root the summer-swelling flower,

And make rough winter everlastingly. (2.4.158-62)

Launce, however, is interested in a woman who has both sexual expertise (Kiernan 144-45) and money. He introduces the unlikely offstage figure of a rich milkmaid as his beloved. Speed describes her ability to milk (3.1.295) in the catalogue of her qualities, and Launce replies with a rude joke: “Ay, that she can” (3.1.296). The catalogue is comically thorough, and Launce says: “Stop there. I’ll have her. She was mine, and not mine, twice or thrice in that last article” (3.1.348-49). In contrast, Silvia is a generic ideal to Valentine, who sees her as a “highly stylised idealisation of a woman” (K. Schlueter 5), which may suggest she is almost a stranger to him. The clown’s parody suggests this kind of idealising love will not survive Valentine getting to know his goddess. In contrast, Launce says: “To be slow in words is a woman’s only virtue” (3.1.328), and it is good that his milkmaid can wash and scour “for then she need not be washed and scoured” (3.1.306-07). Kurt Schlueter notes: “A quibble has been suggested on the meaning ‘knocked down and beaten’, as ‘wash’ is a Shakespearean form of ‘swash’ (= strike violently), and ‘scour’ can mean ‘beat’” (104n7,). This suggests the clown’s potential, joking or otherwise, for misogyny: a wife should do the domestic work to avoid a beating, and the only good thing about a woman is not talking too much.

The clown’s foreshadowing of the famously difficult to accept last scene provides a final example of comic parody. As Proudfoot et al suggest:
The psychological implausibility of Proteus’ sudden reform and, still more, of Valentine’s real or apparent offer to cede Silvia to the penitent friend who has just attempted to rape her, has been a stumbling-block to the appreciation of the play . . . (1219).

Valentine’s extreme forgiveness and renunciation: “All that was mine in Silvia I give thee” (5.4.83) is ludicrously self-sacrificial, but this has already been foreshadowed by the clown who has made the “ultimate sacrifice” of giving up Crab (Garber 55). Launce gave Crab to Silvia as a substitute for the lapdog Proteus intended as a present. The clown parodies the main action:

one could say a great deal about the way [Shakespeare] uses his early clowns to extrapolate the follies of their masters, notably about Lance’s romance with his dog Crab as a burlesque of the extravagant romantic postures of the two gentlemen of Verona. (Barber 14)

Launce, it seems, is devoted to Crab and is prepared to be punished in his place (4.4.13-33). Launce’s gesture of service to Proteus in giving up Crab is as inappropriate and unwanted as Valentine’s in giving up Silvia. Launce says that “the other squirrel was stolen from me by the hangman boys in the market-place, and then I offered her mine own, who is a dog as big as ten of yours, and therefore the gift the greater” (4.4.53-56). But Crab is comically the wrong lover’s gift for Silvia: he has cocked his leg against her skirts (4.4.36-38) and stolen food from her plate (4.4.9). In the end, Proteus rejects Silvia in favour of Julia; just as Silvia rejects Crab, and so Launce can have him back.

Unusually, both Mucedorus and The Two Gentlemen have an animal role: Crab, Launce’s dog, and the bear in Mucedorus. Both animals are strongly linked to the clown whether they were represented by real animals or fake ones. Mouse suggests the possibility that the bear is really an actor in a bear suit: “A bear? Nay, sure it cannot be a bear, but some
devil in a bear’s doublet” (Addition Two 2.2-3), while the list of props at the Rose theatre included “i. black dogge” (Campbell 187n5,). It breaks down theatrical illusion if the animals were played by a stuffed dog or a human in a bear costume. Alternatively, both bear and dog may have been real, and this would have provided a different kind of comedy, also linked to clowning. It is possible to argue that the animal was to the clown as the clown was to the drama: in their unpredictable stage presences the animals make a direct connection with the audience (is the bear really tame?), disregard the script and, while they may give an extemporised performance, they remain themselves rather than play a role. Launce assigns the dog on stage a fictional role as Crab, but the dog may refuse to play that representational game. Modern actors still caution against working with ‘animals and small children’ and performing alongside an effortlessly upstaging clown could carry some of the same risks. The clown may also refuse to play the game of representational drama. Weimann and Bruster suggest “Crab’s stage presence has a contiguity of a sort with the clowning Kemp” (106). Recall Launce’s difficulty as he re-enacts his leave-taking: “I am the dog. No, the dog is himself, and I am the dog. O, the dog is me, and I am myself” (2.3.21-23) which suggests a representational instability for them both. John Timpane, who quotes a review of a testicle-licking and potentially scene-stealing Crab (202-03), says: “Real dogs are not written down: they are a hors du texte” (202). In the sense that the best part of the clown’s performance may lie beyond the script, the clown is indeed like the dog.
Chapter 2: Kemp and Armin

Shakespeare’s clown roles changed when Robert Armin replaced Will Kemp in 1599. This chapter traces the transition, as well as some of the continuities, in Shakespeare’s clowning. Scholars make different interpretations about Kemp’s abrupt departure from the Chamberlain’s Men company, and what that might have meant for the performance of the clown’s closing jig at the Globe. Ultimately, Shakespeare’s attitude to clowning and jigs remains an open question.

There is little direct evidence for Armin or Kemp playing particular roles but I follow the consensus assumption that they each took the clown’s part during their tenure as the main comic actor in Shakespeare’s company. In general there is a transition from Kemp’s independent, physical and improvisational clowning to Armin’s more musical, self-consciously witty and integrated fooling. Kemp’s rustic clown who dominates the subplot is replaced by Armin’s household fool or jester, who is self-consciously at work entertaining both his onstage and theatrical audiences. The change in the clown’s roles is evidence of Shakespeare writing to Kemp’s and Armin’s individual strengths: “Inevitably the personalities of the actors contributed to the characterization. Their characters and talents are part of the source material of his plays” (Wells 30). Kemp and Armin were writers as well as actors, and their written work may also have influenced Shakespeare.

Wiles suggests Kemp played Launce in The Two Gentlemen of Verona (before 1595); Costard in Love’s Labour’s Lost (1594-95); Peter in Romeo and Juliet (c. 1594); Bottom in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1594-95); Launcelot in The Merchant of Venice (1596-97) and Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing (c. 1598-99) (73-76). Wiles lists Armin’s licensed fool roles as Touchstone in As You Like It (c. 1599); Feste in Twelfth Night (c. 1601); Thersites in Troilus and Cressida (c. 1601-02); Lavatch in All’s Well That Ends Well (c. 1602-05), and the
Kemp’s clowning style influenced the roles Shakespeare wrote for him. Kemp (fl. 1585-1602) inherited much of his style including jigs, improvisation and his rustic clown persona from Tarlton. Thomas Nash refers to Kemp’s inheritance from Tarlton when he dedicated An Almond for a Parrat to “that Most Comicall and conceited Caualeire Monsieur du Kempe, Iestmonger and Vice-gerent generall to the Ghost of Dicke Tarlton” (Nungezer 216). Kemp was “the finest Clown of his generation” (Thomson, Career 50), and he was the dominant clown of the 1590s after Tarlton’s death in 1588. Carroll suggests that, when Kemp joined the Chamberlain’s Men in around 1593-94, Shakespeare wrote parts specially for him: “Famous for his jigs and songs, Kemp with his unruly talents provided Shakespeare a unique comic talent, and soon parts were written specifically for Kemp to perform” (182). The Pilgrimage to Parnassus may indicate Kemp’s importance as a performer as well as providing a portrait of his clowning style. Dromo asks: “Dost thou not knowe a playe cannot be without a clowne? Clownes haue bene thrust into playes by head & shoulders, euer since Kempe could make a scuruey face” (129). Dromo’s speech suggests that clowns like Kemp were “thrust into” plays because the clown’s performance was popular, independent of their portrayal of a fictional character. Dromo goes on to describe this kind of physical, improvisational clowning:

Why if thou canst but drawe thy mouth awrye, laye thy legg ouer thy staffe, sawe a peece of cheese asunder with thy dagger, lape vp drinke on the earth, I warrant thee, theile laughe mightilie. Well, Ile turne thee loose to them, ether saie somwhat for they selfe, or hang & be non plus. (129)

Dromo advises the nameless clown to give various kinds of physical performance, which involves pulling faces, food and drink, bawdy gesture and verbal improvisation. This speech suggests the characteristic part of Kemp’s performance was his own improvisation, comic

6 I take the dates for the plays from Proudfoot et al.
bodily performance and direct contact with the audience, rather than his part in a fictional drama.

In fact, the most popular and distinctive aspect of Kemp’s clowns occurred beyond the frame of the play itself. Kemp’s star turn was in the closing jigs which he both wrote and performed. Thomson notes that the audience for the clown’s jig may have been bigger than for the play proper (Jig 27), and that the jig drew “excessive applause” according to a disapproving visitor to London (Jig 27-28). A satirical attack on jigs in E. Guilpin’s *Skialetheia* (1598) showed their popularity: “Whores, Bedles, bawdes, and Sergeants filthily / Chaunt Kemps ligge” (Nungezer 218). The alternation of law-breakers (whores and bawds) with law-enforcers (beadles and sergeants) suggests that Kemp’s appeal ranged across the social spectrum. The popularity of the jigs gave Kemp a high theatrical status and contributed to the success of his acting company:

Clowns had a playhouse status that would have been immediately recognisable in the responses of their audience and was fully acknowledged in the post-play jigs, of which they were often the authors and always the central performers. The popularity of Kempe’s jigs was an important factor in the early success of the Chamberlain’s Men. (Thomson, *Career* 116)

The jig gave theatrical dominance to the clown, since he had the ribald last word from outside the drama, whether the play had ended in tragedy or the multiple betrothals of comedy. Inevitably, the jig made an implicit comment on the preceding play. Shapiro suggests that the jigs: “Though nominally independent of the plays that preceded them, they were an extension of the clown’s part. If comedies were about love, jigs were about what happened after marriage—adultery, deception, and irrepressible sexual desire” (40). Wiles suggests that the jig was one of several aspects of the clown’s liminality: “Within the theatre, the clown is a liminal figure in relation to the physical margins of the stage. He locates himself in the
interstices of the plot. And he dominates the liminal period of the jig, when the play gives way to ordinary living” (174). The clown dominates in performances beyond the play proper such as the closing jig and the preliminary entertainment, and in both he appears as ‘the clown’ rather than ‘in character.’ It is possible to read the clown’s dominance in the jig as analogous to the clown’s dominance in the subplot which parodies the main action: the clowning both disrupts and completes the play. Wiles takes the view that the jig postponed the clown’s disruptive misrule until after the scripted play was over: “The old balance between order and carnivalesque inversion was maintained, but in a new way. As plays grew increasingly orderly, in respect of their writing, performance and reception, the traditional enactment of misrule was displaced onto the postlude” (43). The jigs certainly effected a wrenching change of tone, particularly after a tragedy, but it is also possible to argue that the jig’s bawdy provided a contrary viewpoint which contributed to the wider theatrical event in which the play was the principal, but not the only, element.

The jig was a comic endpiece starring the clown, described by Shapiro as a “bawdy skit with dancing” (33), usually performed by a group of four actors. The jigs were often about adultery. The text of Kemp’s jig *Singing Simpkin* (1595) was entered in the Stationers’ Register as “a ballad called Kemp’s new jig betwixt a soldier and a miser and Sim the clown” (Wiles 51). *Singing Simpkin* features a wife who is pursued sexually by two men despite her older husband’s ineffectual jealousy. It is a “sung farce” (Thomson, *Jig* 30) about cuckoldry: the clown takes the role of Simpkin whose seduction of the wife is interrupted by the arrival of “a Roarer” called Bluster. Simpkin hides in a chest, and Bluster’s seduction is in turn interrupted when the husband comes home. The wife suggests Bluster should pretend he has followed his enemy into the house. The pretence works and Bluster leaves safely. When Simpkin emerges “almost dead” (144) from the chest the husband, unaccountably, goes out to buy him some wine, leaving him alone with the wife to conclude with “a dance of

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*Singing Simpkin* line references are to Baskervill (444-49).
cuckoldry” (Thomson, *Jig* 32). The jig refuses to moralize, and the wife gets away with adultery.

The text of *Singing Simpkin* is suitably obscene, with the lovers’ hiding places compared to the wife’s body. There are sexual comparisons too for the unsuccessful men: the locked-out husband breaks the door open with his staff (104) and Bluster has no key to get into the chest, already occupied by Simpkin. Simpkin, concealed in his chest, speaks or sings the punchlines of several stanzas aside to the audience:

BLUST. Within this chest Ile hide my self,
If it chance he should come.
WIFE. O no my love, that cannot be,
SIMP. I have bespoke the room.
WIFE. I have a place behind here,
Which yet is known to no man.
SIMP. She has a place before too,
But that is all to common. *Old man within.*

OLD MAN. Wife, wherefore is the door thus bar’d?
what mean you pray by this?
WIFE. Alas! it is my husband.
SIM. I laugh now till I piss.
BLUST. Open the chest, Ile into it,
My life else it may cost.
WIFE. Alas I cannot open it.
SIMP. I beleeve the key is lost. (65-80)
Kemp writes himself a part which gives him bawdy comic punchlines, audience contact and the opportunity to show his skill in dancing. Wiles suggests that all four of Kemp’s extant jigs have features in common:

[the clown] 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. (52)

The entries survive for two further Kemp jigs, now lost, both from 1595: “a ballad intituled / A plesant newe Jigge of the broome-man” and “a ballad, of master Kempe Newe Jigge of the kitchen stuffe woman” (Baskervill 290).

The jigs were popular, but also a source of official anxiety, partly because their large audiences could threaten public order. In 1612, Middlesex justices of the peace made an order to ban jigs because their lewd content attracted a troublesome audience:

An order for suppressinge of Jigges att the end of Playes – Whereas Complaynte have [sic] beene made at this last Generall Sessions, that by reason of certayne lewde Jigges songes and daunces used and accustomed at the play-house called the Fortune in Gouldinglane, divers cutt-purses and other lewde and ill disposed persons in great multitudes doe resorte thither at th’end of every playe, many tymes causing tumultes and outrages . . .

(Laroque 35).

The ban describes the popularity of post-play jigs at the Fortune since they attracted people “in great multitudes,” as well as the public disorder or “tumultes and outrages” their audience created.

Some scholars believe the clown’s jig may have been caused friction between Kemp
and Shakespeare, although this is speculative. For example, Gurr takes the conservative view that Shakespeare’s company had an aspirational anti-clowning attitude and wanted, with their new Globe playhouse, to move away from old-fashioned clowning:

Will Kemp’s departure from the Shakespeare company in 1599 was one of a complex series of adjustments which started the company on a road leading firmly away from the jigs and knockabout clowning that were citizen staples at the northern playhouses until the 1640s. In 1599, when they were just starting in a costly new playhouse, Kemp’s departure left the company hazardously poised for a new beginning in conditions of unprecedented competition.

(Playgoing 182)

Shapiro also makes a case for Shakespeare asserting himself as a writer at the expense of the clown based on the epilogue of *Henry IV, Part 2* (32-37). He argues that Kemp as Falstaff spoke the original version (18-34) at the Curtain theatre. It would be logical for the clown to speak the liminal epilogue between the play world and the return to the everyday. In particular, the actor asks if the audience will “command me to use my legs” (19); an explicit reference to Kemp’s danced jig. But, according to Shapiro, the jig was inappropriate for a court performance and so Shakespeare wrote a new version and spoke it himself (1-17). In the new version, Shapiro asserts, Shakespeare had not only changed his mind about promising a new Falstaff play, but also signals a complete change in the direction of his writing. The promise of a new play featuring Falstaff was never kept, unless his appearance in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was what Shakespeare intended. He asks the audience to come in on a “venture” with him because he intends to try something new. This new direction discards Falstaff as played by Kemp and instead, Shapiro suggests, means a writer-centred drama with a different kind of play. He argues that:

The parting of ways between Shakespeare and Kemp . . . was a rejection not
only of a certain kind of comedy but also a declaration that from here on in, it was going to be a playwright’s and not an actor’s theater, no matter how popular the actor. (37)

It is a nice irony in Shapiro’s argument that Shakespeare uses the clown’s epilogue to talk to the audience: “what I have to say is of mine own making” (4-5) in order to distance himself from clowning. Shapiro believes that Kemp played Falstaff, then Shakespeare changed his mind about the kind of drama he wanted to write, which led to a falling out with Kemp and his departure from the company, and therefore the absence of Falstaff in *Henry V*. Shapiro argues that Kemp’s mention of a “Shakerags” in *Nine Daies Wonder* suggests Kemp was on bad terms with Shakespeare and wanted to insult him (39), although I argue that an insult is not necessarily unfriendly. Shapiro’s account of ‘a battle of Wills’ between Kemp and Shakespeare is coherent in its own terms but remains speculative.

Several scholars believe Kemp’s departure meant the end of the clown’s jig at the Globe, although there is little available evidence to decide the question. Hirrel believes that the jigs became less relevant to the Globe:

There are several reasons to believe that the Lord Chamberlains’ / King’s company did not offer long-form jigs after Will Kemp left the company in 1599. Kemp was known for such jigs; his replacement, Robert Armin, was not. Jigs are often mentioned in connection with other theaters after 1599, especially the Fortune and the Red Bull, but not with the Globe. They were offered at the Fortune by the company known after 1612 as the Elector Palatine’s. Their jigs were performed by John Shank, another comic actor, who left the Elector Palatine’s to join the King’s company. A patron of the former company wrote a verse complaining that at the Globe, Shank no longer presented his rhyming jigs: ‘Since Shancke did leave to sing his rhimes, / He
Hirrel’s work offers one piece of positive evidence that Shank, a comic actor, no longer performed jigs once he moved to the Globe. Weimann and Bruster believe the jig was excluded from the Globe: “Whatever resilience there was in the semi-sovereign stage presence of the comedian, for instance, gradually gave way until the relative triumph of an ‘author’s theatre’ (Richard Helgerson’s term) appeared to be confirmed by the exclusion of the rustic clown and, equally foreboding, the jig from the new Globe on Bankside” (86). Jacalyn Royce agrees: “The company discontinued post-performance jigs just before the move to the Globe, a decision that may account for Will Kempe’s choice to drop out of the company. After Kempe left, all dances and songs used in performance related to the action of the plays” (494). Royce suggests that, after Kemp left, the singing and dancing of the jig were integrated into the play itself.

Thomson, however, is a contrary voice suggesting that the jigs were too popular for the Globe to discard them: “There is very little doubt that Shakespeare and Kemp had different views on the relative merits of plays and jigs, but in 1599 it would have been an act of suicidal boldness to dispense with jigs altogether” (Jig 27). Nora Johnson argues in favour of scepticism, given Shakespeare’s silence on the matter:

In the absence of direct statements from Shakespeare in prefaces or prologues, critics have turned to reading his use of the professional clown as some indicator of his authorial self-positioning, some way of hearing information in the Shakespearean silence. Shakespeare’s apparent foreclosures upon popular tradition have seemed, in this line of reasoning, tacit attempts to make the dramatic author a sovereign controller of theatrical space, owner of his own words. Or, at very least, his texts are said to move the Chamberlain’s Men away from clowning, toward respectability. (154)
But, she says, the arguments about any potential move “away from clowning, toward respectability” are based on “a particular reading of Robert Armin’s replacement of Will Kemp as company clown” (154) and other “ambivalent” (155) evidence, such as Hamlet’s rejection of improvising clowns and Prince Henry’s rejection of Falstaff. Robert Hornback also questions what he calls “the commonplace Hamlet-as-Shakespeare fallacy” in Hamlet’s advice to the players, and “the overstated myth of Kemp’s banishment” (*Indecorum* 202). Hornback suggests it is a mistake to think Hamlet articulates Shakespeare’s own opinion about improvising clowns. I consider the ambivalence of some of the evidence about Hamlet and Falstaff in the next chapter. In conclusion, the evidence is too scant to say for sure that Kemp’s departure meant the end of jigs at the Globe.

The style of clowning at the Globe was changing, but Kemp’s work retained popularity since performance persisted in other venues; Thomson suggests that *Singing Simpkin* was probably performed at the Red Bull until the 1650s (*Jig* 30). Mark Bayer argues that Thomas Greene, a clown at the Red Bull, continued to offer clowning in Kemp and Tarlton’s style, based on “farce, visual humour, improvisation, and dancing”, while Armin’s new style at the Globe was “highly satirical, cerebral, and acerbic” (230). It is to Armin’s new style that I now turn.

Unlike Kemp, who wrote that he spent his life in “mad jigs and merry jests” (Wiles 24), Armin’s style tends to be more philosophical and less comic. Armin wrote a serious pamphlet called “R. Armin in praise and commendation of this briefe Resolution of a right Religion” (Armin n. pag.), and although his quips were sometimes bawdy, they could also be moralistic. For example, the quip to the question “What is light?” is “Lightly live, but dye with heavie conscience” (Armin 2AR). Bruce Smith argues that: “Armin’s clowning career came at a crucial moment in the social history of laughter,” when various social factors, including an increasing puritanism, “converged to circumscribe the comic” (363). There is a
melancholy aspect to Armin’s roles such as Feste and Lear’s Fool as well as a sense of belatedness. The household fool’s protected status becomes more fragile in the plays; often because the fool ‘belonged’ to the previous generation. For example, the Countess in All’s Well That Ends Well says about Lavatch that “My lord that’s gone made himself much sport out of him; by his authority he remains here, which he thinks is a patent for his sauciness” (4.5.63-65). In Twelfth Night Feste is described as “Feste the jester, my lord, a fool that the Lady Olivia’s father took much delight in” (2.4.11-12); while the Fool in King Lear keeps reminding Lear that his power is gone. Keir Elam suggests that: “A dead man’s delight in his jester is something of a Shakespearean topos” (226n8), in reference to Feste, Lavatch and perhaps Yorick.

Shakespeare draws increasing attention to fooling as a phenomenon with Armin’s roles, perhaps in order to accustom the audience to the break with the traditional rustic clown. The fool roles tend to be self-consciously performative since the fool is at work entertaining both the onstage and the theatrical audience. Charles S. Felver suggests that Armin “originated a new style of witty, songful, intellectual, and socially mobile clowning” (31). Armin wrote about natural fools and was interested in the distinction between artificial and natural fooling. Wiles notes that: “The sudden appearance of ‘fools’ in Shakespeare’s work at the end of 1599 has always, and rightly, been linked to Armin’s arrival in the company” (144).

There is revealing evidence for increasing integration in the way the clown is named. There are two stray speech headings which name Kemp as an actor rather than a character. For example, Stanley Wells shows that in the 1599 edition Romeo and Juliet, the speech heading for Peter the Nurse’s servant is “Enter Will Kempe.” In the 1600 quarto of Much Ado About Nothing, it is “Enter Kempe and Cowley” rather than Dogberry and Verges (30). This is evidence for Kemp performing ‘as himself’ to some extent, independent of his fictional
character. Shakespeare also references Armin as an actor, but he brings the reference within the frame of the play. Shakespeare calls attention to Armin as an actor by referring in his character’s name to Armin’s trade as a goldsmith. Touchstone, the fool in *As You Like It*, a character probably played by Armin, refers to the touchstone which tested if gold was genuine. Richard III uses the term ‘touch’ in this sense when he tests Buckingham: “Ah, Buckingham, now do I play the touch/To try if thou be current gold indeed” (*R3*, 4.2.8-9). Shakespeare’s reference means that Armin surfaces to some extent as an actor within the script. The reference to Armin as a goldsmith is more securely Shakespeare’s than the possibly scribal stage directions which refer to Kemp. Shakespeare draws attention to the clown actor even as he integrates the fool within the play.

Having discussed the different clowning styles of both Kemp and Armin, I turn now to specific roles which illustrate the transition from Kemp’s independent and physical clowning to Armin’s more verbal and integrated fooling. In the conclusion to this chapter I consider some of the contradictions and continuities within this narrative of the clown’s development and integration. For example, in the next section, Launcelot is a Kemp clown role which has the verbal wit and multiple voicing typical of Armin.
2.2  *The Merchant of Venice*: I will try confusions

Kemp’s role as Launcelot in *The Merchant of Venice* plays to his strengths as a comic performer. Like Launce in *The Two Gentlemen*, his role allows him to dominate with scenes of solo performance and audience contact. His clowning characteristics include his emblematic name, apt malapropisms, cross-talk and extended physical comedy routines. Some aspects of his clowning, such as his use of language, have thematic relevance to the main plot, while his extended physical comedy is for the gratuitous pleasure of its own performance.

Kemp holds the stage in his first scene as Launcelot with a display of solo clowning. His act opens with a monologue in which he voices all three parts in a mock Morality play confrontation between himself, the devil, and his conscience. The clown had a traditional link with the Vice figure in the medieval Morality play, who was known for commenting aside on the action and for mistaking the word. Launcelot argues with himself about whether or not he should run away from Shylock’s service: “‘Budge!’ says the fiend, – ‘Budge not!’ says my conscience. ‘Conscience’ say I, ‘you counsel well, – ‘Fiend’ say I, ‘you counsel well’” (2.2.18-20). Armin plays this kind of multiple voicing as Sir Topas in *Twelfth Night* below.

There are also parallels with Kemp’s performance as Launce ‘showing the manner’ of how he left home in *The Two Gentlemen*. The clown has a comic prose monologue in which he both describes and acts out his potential leave-taking. His opposing thoughts take on a kind of physical life in the scrambled description of his “conscience hanging about the neck of my heart” (2.2.12-13). His opening monologue is potentially elastic as he begins, but does not complete, a story about his father’s apparent infidelity: “being an honest man’s son, or rather an honest woman’s son, for indeed my father did something smack, something grow to; he
had a kind of taste” (2.2.14-17). Jay L. Halio suggests that Launcelot’s role was not only characteristic of Kemp’s style of clowning but also his own creation: “Lancelot’s humour exemplifies Will Kemp’s, who doubtless created the role” (130n5,) which is an appealing, but unproveable, speculation.

When his father Gobbo enters, Launcelot speaks aside to the audience, saying: “I will try confusions with him” (2.2.35), and “Mark me now, now will I raise the waters” (2.2.46). The asides suggest that Launcelot is standing in the clown’s liminal space between the action and the audience; he takes part in the drama as well as being an outsider commenting on his own performance. Launcelot takes advantage of his father’s partial blindness to pretend he is someone else (2.2.33-35). A series of physical clowning routines follows in which he may physically act out with his father the nonsense directions to reach the house they are standing in front of, in order to find the person he is already talking to. Launcelot instructs Old Gobbo to turn first right, then left, then not at all, which will bring him “down indirectly to the Jew’s house” (2.2.38-41). His malapropism of “indirectly” for directly is apposite. This routine parallels the physical comedy with Lorenzo in his final scene as he pretends he cannot find, and does not know, the person in front of him. There is a further physical clowning routine implied when he apparently kneels backwards to receive his father’s blessing:

GOBBO. . . . what a beard hast thou got! thou hast got more hair on thy chin, than Dobbin my fill-horse has on his tail.

LAUNCELOT. It should seem then that Dobbin’s tail grows backward.

(2.2.89-93)

The scene between father and son relies on the comedy of the clown exploiting his father’s blindness, and telling his father he is dead (2.2.57-62). This kind of clowning delays the plot and is for the mean-minded pleasures of its own performance.

Launcelot’s verbal clowning shows him deploying a literalising refusal to understand,
which leads to a cross-talk routine: Old Gobbo says his son was the prop and staff of his old age (2.2.63-64) and Launcelot replies: “[aside] Do I look like a cudgel or a hovel-post, a staff, or a prop?” (2.2.65-66). Launcelot’s refusal to understand a metaphor about being supportive, or a ‘prop’ to his father, echoes the clownish literalism which Portia relies on in court to defeat Shylock. Karen Newman suggests that: “Her defence depends on a verbal quibble, a characteristic linguistic strategy of Shakespearean clowns” (129). Like Launcelot, Portia refuses to understand (4.1.304-05). Since flesh contains blood, the flesh bond allows Shylock both. The clown’s refusal to understand resonates in the main plot. Launcelot’s malapropisms also have their own logic. For example, in his farewell scene with Jessica he says that tears “exhibit” (2.3.10) his tongue, which is a malapropism for ‘inhibit’ meaning that he cannot speak for crying. But saying the opposite of what he means also makes a kind of sense; tears do “exhibit” his tongue because his emotions show her the sadness he would otherwise describe verbally.

The clown’s way with language resonates through the play. For example, when Launcelot says goodbye to Jessica, he says “adieu” three times while calling her a “sweet Jew” (2.3.10-14). Adieu means ‘to God’ and Jessica is about to elope and convert. The repeated ‘adieu’ chimes ‘Jew, Jew, Jew,’ a word used to such great derogatory effect elsewhere in the play. Despite, or perhaps because of, Launcelot’s ability to make jokes with Jessica about conversion: “this making of Christians will raise the price of hogs, – if we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money” (3.5.22-24), the clown’s language questions the welcome she might get as a “stranger” (3.2.236) among the Christians. I argue that the occluded pun which repeats ‘Jew’ in Launcelot’s “adieu” shows an undercurrent of prejudice which cannot help harping on Jessica’s Jewishness. Launcelot’s pun is similar to the Duke’s “We all expect a gentle answer Jew!” in the trial scene (4.1.34). The Duke’s play on words suggests that, as a Jew, Shylock can give neither a
Gentile nor a gentle answer. Launcelot’s language articulates, in a hidden way, the anti-Semitism which is a theme of the play.

Launcelot Gobbo has an emblematic clown’s name which both marks him out as different from the other characters and connects him with the themes of the play. Launcelot’s name makes him sound different from the other characters who have Italian names (Wiles 8). In the quarto and First Folio his name is Launcelet or Lancelet Iobbe (Parker 96), or ‘little knife jabbing’ with a sexual pun. Therefore Launcelot has an emblematic, phallic clown’s name, which points to “the Elizabethan clown buried in the text” (Wiles 8). Launcelot’s name, which suggests the clown is an outsider in the play’s Italian setting, is an example of the ‘detachable’ clown’s thematic relevance to the play. Launcelot’s name suggests he is Shylock’s little knife as well as his servant. Therefore, the clown’s emblematic and bawdy name is also linked to Shylock’s intention to stab, or perhaps circumcise (Garber 309), Antonio. Patricia Parker says the clown’s “very name imports a cultural semantics crucial to both cutting and bloodletting” (96). She notes that his name occurs at least 27 times in the play (104). Launcelot plays incessantly with his own name: “‘Gobbo, Launcelot Gobbo, good Launcelot,’ or ‘good Gobbo,’ or ‘good Launcelot Gobbo” (2.2.3-5). It is interesting, therefore, that when Launcelot leaves his service, Shylock seems content to let him go:

The patch is kind enough, but a huge feeder,
Snail-slow in profit, and he sleeps by day
More than the wild-cat: drones hive not with me,
Therefore I part with him, and part with him
To one that I would have him help to waste
His borrowed purse. (2.5.45-50)

This suggests that, symbolically, Shylock does not mind losing his ‘little knife’ and with it perhaps his ability to stab Antonio. However, it may be that Shylock intends to send
Launcelot to Bassanio as a kind of economic weapon, to help him “waste / His borrowed purse.” After all, Shylock has already recommended Launcelot to Bassanio (2.2.138-39). Shylock may want Bassanio to get further into debt (taking on Launcelot as a servant will increase his entourage), because he would therefore have more need of him as a money-lender.

Launcelot seems transformed by his release from Shylock’s sober house. He suddenly becomes a “wit-snapper” (3.5.48), punning in a cross-talk routine with Lorenzo about getting ready for dinner. Launcelot takes “prepare for dinner” to mean get hungry for it, and then “cover” to mean put on your hat instead of set the table (Mahood 144n10). Lorenzo says “How every fool can play upon the word!” (3.5.42). This potential shift from clown to fool may be echoed in Launcelot’s costume: there is a possible implication that Bassanio’s “livery / More guarded than his fellows’” (2.2.147-48) could be clown’s motley and that Launcelot has been transformed from a servant clown into a household fool. When Launcelot reaches Belmont, Lorenzo refers to “many fools that stand in better place, / Garnish’d like him” (3.5.66-67), another possible reference to motley. This could also refer to Shylock’s recommendation of Launcelot as a servant for Bassanio: that Bassanio should have a fool wearing his livery because he is an indebted fool.

Launcelot’s extended physical comedy is another example of the clown’s elastic performance and delay. Lorenzo and Jessica are discussing tragic love in the moonlight when Portia’s servant enters to tell them she is on her way back to Belmont. He is followed by the clown who has a similar message from Bassanio. The dialogue between Launcelot and Lorenzo looks negligible, even meaningless, on the page, but it could come to life in performance. This passage is under-written for the clown as a form of theatrical efficiency in the same way *The Famous Victories* was under-written for Tarlton – it relies on the clown’s physical skill:
LAUNCELOT. Sola, sola! wo ha, ho! sola, sola!

LORENZO. Who calls?

LAUNCELOT. Sola! did you see Master Lorenzo? Master Lorenzo, sola, sola!

LORENZO. Leave hollowing man, – here!

LAUNCELOT. Sola! where, where?

LORENZO. Here! (5.1.39-45)

Launcelot gives a hunting cry as he pretends he cannot find Lorenzo in the dark. This exchange has the potential for Kemp to extend his performance and improvise for as long as he is able to maintain the physical comedy of searching without finding. This kind of physical comedy is like Dericke in *The Famous Victories* searching for the Watch and pretending not to find them although they are right in front of him. Launcelot can close his part of the scene with his exit line when he chooses. This exchange is a good example of gratuitous clowning which has no point beyond the pleasures of its own performance and, for as long as Kemp extends the routine, it delays passing on his message. Compare Portia’s servant’s functional message: “Stephano is my name, and I bring word / My mistress will before the break of day / Be here at Belmont” (5.1.28-30). Similarly, all Launcelot’s scene ‘needs’ to be is his exit line: “Tell him there’s a post come from my master, with his horn full of good news, – my master will be here ere morning. Exit” (5.1.46-48), but the plot point has to wait until Kemp has finished clowning. The clown’s comedy probably also played with theatrical illusion, since the darkness in which Lorenzo is lost was actually afternoon daylight. In this scene the clown, who within the play is a low-status servant, is a theatrically dominant lord of misrule who turns the play world upside down for as long as this moment of clowning pleasure can last.

Launcelot’s monologues, which at times are almost dialogues with the audience, and
his extended physical clowning routines show Kemp playing a role well-suited to his strengths as a performer. Some elements of his clowning, such as his literalism and mistakes with language, have thematic relevance to the play, while other aspects are purely crowd-pleasing performance. Launcelot is the last Kemp servant clown role in my study, and the next section concerns Robert Armin, the specialist comic actor in Shakespeare’s company who replaced him, whose roles were very different.
2.3 *Twelfth Night*: You must allow *vox*

The clown’s role in *Twelfth Night* shows both the integration of the clown and the distinctive acting style of Robert Armin. As Shakespeare integrates the clown, he also draws increasing attention to fooling as a phenomenon. Feste’s role plays to Armin’s strengths such as singing, doubling, ventriloquism and catechising. Unlike Kemp, who specialized in monologues, Armin’s role is suited to question and answer. Feste’s fooling may even require an opponent, which is shown by both his wit-contest with Maria and his conflict with Malvolio. When Feste attempts a ‘mad’ reading of Malvolio’s letter, he uses Malvolio in his act in the same way Armin used John in the Hospital in his own work.

The play is self-conscious about clowning. There is a cascade of references to both good and bad performance: “evaluation of performance is a recurring theme of *Twelfth Night*” (Booth, *Nonsense* 152). For example, Viola comments on Feste’s ability to judge his audience and to match his fooling to them:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,

And to do that well, craves a kind of wit:

*He must observe their mood on whom he jests,*

*The quality of persons, and the time . . . .*

This is a practice

As full of labour as a wise man’s art (3.1.60-66, *emphasis added*).

Viola notices Feste’s skill as a fool as well as how “full of labour” it is. Olivia reviews Feste’s fooling to him: “Now you see, sir, how your fooling grows old, and people dislike it” (1.5.107-08). Olivia asks Viola if she is a “comedian” (1.5.177), or a “professional actor” (Elam 196n4,). In the kitchen scene, Sir Andrew comments on the fool’s performance the
previous night: “thou wast in very gracious fooling last night, when thou spok’st of
Pigrogromitus, of the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus: ’twas very good, i’faith”
(2.3.22-25). Feste responds with more of the same extravagant verbal nonsense, to which Sir
Andrew replies: “Excellent! Why, this is the best fooling, when all is done. Now a song!”
(2.3.29-30). Sir Andrew then praises his own ability to sing, which was one of Armin’s
trademark skills, by saying: “I am dog at a catch” (2.3.60-61). Feste then praises Sir Toby’s
nonsense and singing:

CLOWN. Beshrew me, the knight’s in admirable fooling.

SIR ANDREW. Ay, he does well enough, if he be disposed, and so do I too: he
does it with a better grace, but I do it more natural. (2.3.80-83)

Maria praises her own wit as full of jests and simultaneously calls Sir Andrew a fool (1.3.75-
78). Sir Toby, who has tried to make Sir Andrew flirt with Maria (1.3.55-56), responds with
“O knight . . . when did I see thee so put down?” (1.3.79-80). When Feste goes as Sir Topas
to Malvolio, Sir Toby says: “The knave counterfeits well: a good knave” (4.2.19). When
Feste chops logic to prove it is better to have enemies rather than friends, Orsino replies:
“Why, this is excellent” (5.1.23). Feste draws Orsino’s praise into his routine, by taking it to
be the kind of ass-making compliment he has been complaining about: “By my troth, sir, no:
though it please you to be one of my friends” (5.1.24-25). Booth describes how, after the
gulling of Malvolio is revealed in the final act, Olivia calls Malvolio a “poor fool” (5.1.362)
meaning a “pitiable innocent” (Nonsense 190). This is followed immediately by Feste’s
repetition of Malvolio’s insult: “But do you remember, ‘Madam, why laugh you at such a
barren rascal, and you smile not, he’s gagged’?” (5.1.367-68), which is a reprise of Malvolio
calling Feste a ‘poor fool’ or an “ineffective professional clown” (Nonsense 190) earlier in
the play.

There is evidence for the integration of the clown in Twelfth Night. Feste remains
within the Tarlton tradition of the ‘warm’ improvisational clown who responds to his audience, but Shakespeare brings this improvisation within the frame of the play. Feste improvises, but only to his onstage audience: the improvisation is in the script – he improvises as a character rather than as an actor. For example, Feste chooses each song he performs to suit his listeners: a song to Orsino about dying for love (2.4.51-66); a song about how “Present mirth hath present laughter” (2.3.48) despite the fact of growing old for Sir Andrew and Sir Toby; and one about how “my lady . . . loves another” (4.2.74-78) for Malvolio. Feste’s final song in the epilogue about drunken “toss-pots” (5.1.395) is probably for the audience.

Shakespeare wrote to Armin’s talents in singing, catechising and doubling. Playing Feste even gives Armin the chance to sing and double voices simultaneously in the dialogue song he performs to Malvolio (4.2.71-78). Armin was skilled at witty verbal fooling based on catechising, or question and answer routines: “From the time that Armin joined the company Shakespeare very noticeably began to give his clowns the catechisms as a form of jesting” (Bradbrook 54-55). In Quips Upon Questions Armin provides quips to questions suggested by the audience and so joins in a question and answer routine with them. The audience does some of the work of comedy, since they provide the questions, as well as their laughter and applause. Wiles says: “the Elizabethan clown’s performance rested on the assumption, or illusion, that the audience are active participants, necessary helpers in the creation of theatre” (x). The clown and the crowd agree to “make comedy together” (Johnson 25), although Johnson suggests the identity of the voices in the quips is far from fixed (30). For an example from Armin’s Quips Upon Questions, the question “Wht’s [sic] neare her?” provokes a bawdy quip:

Her Smocke is neare her. I thats true indeed,
Of outward thinges, it is her nearest weed.
Nothing is nearer (I thinke) than her smocke.

Yes, her sknn’s nearer, that it is by cocke.

That is a weede to, to keepe out the weather.

Then nothing’s nearer, we conclude togeather.

Quip. Yes one thing’s nearer than her smocke or skinne,

Of which I speake not, but will keepe it in. (Armin C2R)

Armin appears to be asking for the audience’s agreement that “we conclude togeather” before giving his quip in the final two lines. Feste uses catechising, a form of quipping upon questions, in order to ‘prove’ Olivia a fool for planning to stay so long in mourning for her brother:

CLOWN. Good madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool.

OLIVIA. Can you do it?

CLOWN. Dexteriously, good madonna.

OLIVIA. Make your proof.

CLOWN. I must catechise you for it, madonna. Good my mouse of virtue, answer me. (1.5.54-60)

Feste makes his proof, or quip, by saying Olivia is a fool to mourn when she says she knows her brother is in heaven (1.5.67-69). Feste’s verbal fooling suits Armin’s style and, like Armin’s quips which relied partly on the audience, Feste needs an audience and perhaps an opponent.

Feste’s role also plays to Armin’s skill in doubling and ventriloquism. Wiles suggests Armin wrote his play More-clacke as a “vehicle” for himself, which allowed him to double both as John, a ‘natural’ fool, and as Tutch, a clever one (140). He also played a Welshman in the story to extend his display of skill at doing different voices. Armin was probably more skilled as an actor than as a writer. Felver calls More-clacke “complex and baffling” (16),
while Bradbrook says it is “one of the most confused, overcrowded farces of multiple
disguise to survive from the Elizabethan stage” (56). In the dark house scene in *Twelfth Night*
Feste is alone on stage as he alternates between talking to Malvolio in his own voice and as
Sir Topas:

    CLOWN. [as Sir Topas] Maintain no words with him, good fellow! [as
    Topas] Marry, amen! [as himself] I will, sir, I will. (4.2.99-102)

Feste uses the multiple voicing to insult and silence Malvolio while saying “I am shent for
speaking to you” (4.2.104-05). In fact he is using the voices to refuse to speak to him as
Malvolio, fruitlessly, calls out in turn for both the fool and Sir Topas. There was a clue for
Malvolio in the first of his confrontations with Feste if he had chosen to listen to it: “*cucullus
non facit monachum*: that’s as much to say, as I wear not motley in my brain” (1.5.52-54).
Feste says in Latin that the hood does not make the monk, and here he is only counterfeiting
as the curate: the gown does not make Feste into Sir Topas. Armin performs both as Feste and
as Sir Topas and, necessarily, as himself. Wiles suggests that Armin may surface as an actor at
the start of the scene when he says: “I am not tall enough to become the function well” (4.2.6-
7) when he dresses up as Sir Topas, because of his own “dwarfishness” (148). Elizabeth Story
Donno suggests this scene “allows the actor (originally, it seems, Robert Armin) to reveal his
skill in impersonating by quick shifts of voice” (128n4,). It is possible to hear a potential pun
on ‘marry, Armin!’ in “marry, amen!” in Feste’s final line as Sir Topas. The pun could show
Armin’s self-consciousness about his own characteristic line in clowning of playing with
different voices as he brings his Sir Topas routine to a close, and perhaps also an evaluation
of his own performance, as in ‘well, Armin! That was a good bit of performance.’ The dark
house scene gives Armin the opportunity to indulge in gratuitous verbal clowning which
seems to be just for virtuosity’s sake. As Maria says, he could have done it without his beard
and gown (4.2.63-64), since Malvolio cannot see him. Feste has one final act of
ventriloquism at the end of the play when he repeats Malvolio’s lines back to him: “By the
Lord, fool, I am not mad” (5.1.366). In Kenneth Branagh’s 1988 production of Twelfth Night
Feste mimicked the broken, tearful voice in which Malvolio spoke in the dark house.

Feste’s clowning brings another aspect of Armin’s comic method within the frame of
the play. In Feste’s attempt to give a ‘mad’ reading of Malvolio’s letter, he is using the
supposedly lunatic Malvolio in the same way Armin used John in the Hospital. Like Armin
who based his own role in More-clacke on a real person, within the play Feste is making his
performance out of the words and actions of a ‘real’ natural fool, Malvolio. When he begins
to read Malvolio’s letter (5.1.288), Olivia’s reply suggests he does so in a ‘mad’ voice:

OLIVIA. How now, art thou mad?

CLOWN. No, madam, I do but read madness: and your ladyship will have it
as it ought to be, you must allow vox.

OLIVIA. Prithee, read i’thy right wits.

CLOWN. So I do, madonna. But to read his right wits is to read thus:

therefore, perpend, my princess, and give ear. (5.1.289-94)

Johnson suggests Armin’s published work complicates the idea of authorship because he
“makes himself up as a writer out of the voices of others” (1). She argues that Armin derives
his status from a complex mixture of factors, such as his written work, stage performances,
and his use of the contributions and biographies of others. She notes that: “[Armin] stands as
an example of the implications of print and performance for one another, the ways in which
the two media worked together in early modern England” (53). In Armin’s book Foole Upon
Foole he gives an account of six natural fools, who were genuinely stupid, disabled or
disturbed real people. One of these natural fools was John in the Hospital who Armin both
wrote about and also performed on stage. Within the frame of the play, Malvolio in the dark
house is a real natural fool (or, at least, Maria, Sir Toby and Feste pretend he is), and Feste tries to use him as the basis for his clowning performance. But Feste’s appeal to be allowed *vox*, or permission to perform, is refused, since Olivia cancels Feste’s performance and gives the letter to Fabian to read. But Johnson notes that: “Feste may not be failing as a comic; he may instead be consolidating a form of comic authority that has relied upon adversity from its first moments in *Twelfth Night*” (159). If so, this links Olivia’s rejection of Feste to Prince Henry’s rejection of Falstaff: what looks like failure may in fact be a challenge to display further clowning virtuosity. Johnson cites “Armin’s complex power to please while courting displeasure” (159), although Olivia’s silencing of Feste brings his role to an end, at least until the epilogue.

Feste’s verbal wit may depend on having an opponent, and this combativeness may also be characteristic of Armin’s style. The title page to *Quips Upon Questions* contains the “combative sparring” (Johnson 32) of: “Floute me, Ile floute thee; it is my profession” (Armin n. pag.), and the work is dedicated to his marotte: “SIR TIMOTHY TRUNCHION: /
Alias BASTINADO, euer my part-taking / friende” (Armin A2R) which suggests Sir Timothy may have taken Armin’s side in a fight (Johnson 32). Feste has a wit-contest with Maria in which both “use their talents” (1.5.15). Maria, who may have been played by Armin’s apprentice (Madelaine, address), auditions to Feste by trying out her skill at jesting (Booth, *Nonsense* 152):

CLOWN. Let her hang me: he that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no colours.

MARIA. Make that good.

CLOWN. He shall see none to fear.

MARIA. A good lenten answer . . .

CLOWN. Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage: and for turning
away, let summer bear it out.

MARIA. You are resolute then?

CLOWN. Not so, neither, but I am resolved on two points.

MARIA. That if one break, the other will hold: or if both break, your gaskins fall.

CLOWN. Apt, in good faith, very apt. Well, go thy way: if Sir Toby would leave drinking, thou wert as witty a piece of Eve’s flesh as any in Illyria.

(1.5.5-28)

Feste says the regimental colours of an enemy army are nothing to fear – if you are dead, an answer Maria dismisses as “dismal” or appropriate for a Lenten fast (Elam 184n9,). He hits back with the clown’s misogynist joke that “many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage” which may be directed at the possibility of Maria’s marriage to Sir Toby. Then he applauds her pun in which she takes the two points that Feste is resolved on to be the laces holding up his trousers (Elam 185n7,), which could fall at any moment. The contest with Maria generates Feste’s performance, although arguably she wins the contest. Johnson suggests that Feste’s performances “follow a kind of adversarial logic that makes it very difficult to tell the difference between an attack on clowning and a building-up of the clown’s comic authority” (159-60). Feste is anxious about whether his fooling will succeed, which he admits before his first performance to Olivia: “Wit, and’t be thy will, put me into good fooling!” (1.5.31).

There are at least two reasons for this anxiety: perhaps his “allowed” (1.5.91) status as Olivia’s household fool been revoked by his truancy, or perhaps his extempore wit will fail him; he says his wit depends on its own “will.”

Similarly, Feste and Malvolio have two major scenes of confrontation: in their first meeting and then in the dark house scene. Their first scene contains an explicit discussion of the difference between artificial and natural fools:
OLIVIA. What think you of this fool, Malvolio, doth he not mend?

MALVOLIO. Yes, and shall do, till the pangs of death shake him. Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool.

CLOWN. God send you, sir, a speedy infirmity, for the better increasing your folly! . . .

OLIVIA. How say you to that, Malvolio?

MALVOLIO. I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal: I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool, that has no more brain than a stone. Look you now, he’s out of his guard already: unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged. I protest I take these wise men, that crow so at these set kind of fools, no better than the fools’ zanies (1.5.70-86)

Feste is a witty ‘artificial’ fool, but Malvolio insults him by taking “fool” to mean a ‘natural’ fool, whose genuine foolishness will improve with increasing infirmity. This insult paradoxically leads Malvolio to answer Olivia’s question “doth he not mend?” with “Yes.” In his eagerness to insult Feste, Malvolio admits he has been in the “ordinary,” or tavern, which suggests he sometimes takes a break from his repressive role in Olivia’s household. This is at odds with Barber’s assertion that “The butts in the festive plays consistently exhibit their unnaturalness by being kill-joys” (8). In fact, Malvolio is already fantasizing, albeit as a means of social climbing, about having a relationship with Olivia (2.5.47-48), even before he sees Maria’s fake letter. He says Feste failed in a tavern wit battle with another fool because he saw him “put down.” In this example, it is Malvolio who refers to the contemporary world of the audience: Elam suggests Malvolio probably makes a “barely disguised allusion to the well-known Elizabethan jester John Stone” who performed in taverns (189n5,). Malvolio anachronistically describes spectating at an bout of combative clowning between the fictional
Feste and potentially a real London fool.

The conflict between Feste and Malvolio could have its origins in the contest between Lent and Carnival: both characters have an emblematic name; Feste, or festivity, and Malvolio as ‘ill-wishing’ or puritanism. Smith suggests that Festival’s win against Ill Wishing in *Twelfth Night* is only temporary (363), because of an increasing puritanism in society. Contemporary social conditions could make Malvolio a real threat to Feste as a household fool:

Malvolio’s conflict within Olivia’s home represented the changing social dynamics of English country life . . . . Audiences, according to Draper, would have recognized in Olivia’s household the medieval model with a licensed jester and dependent relatives in conflict with a lower class, but valued servant. In difficult economic times, when dismissal meant homelessness and hunger, an ambitious and puritanical serving man, such as Malvolio, could present a tangible danger. (Kemper 43)

In the dark house scene Malvolio, who has insulted both the clown and fooling, is reduced to being the straight man, or ‘feed’ in Feste’s act. He becomes one of the “fools’ zanies” (1.5.86), a stooge or “assistant to the clown,” or “poor imitator” (Elam 189n10,). The clown takes centre stage with *Malvolio within* (4.2.19 s.d.), which probably meant Malvolio remained in the tiring house or within the discovery space. Kemper says: “the scene becomes a showcase for a clown. The actor playing Feste has the entire stage and audience to himself, which shifts the focus, empathy, and ultimately the story told” (47-48). She argues that, because the audience can only hear rather than see Malvolio, there is a profound limitation to the audience’s sympathy for him, while Feste stars: “Safely out of sight behind a curtain, Malvolio’s complaints become the straight man’s set up for the clown and his comedic alter ego to dance, sing, create an entire two-character scene with himself, and play with the
audience” (48). Malvolio, Feste’s opponent, paradoxically becomes Feste’s assistant in this scene.

It is also paradoxical that Malvolio has the funniest scene in the play, the cross-gartered wooing of Olivia, as well as the rudest joke when he reads Maria’s letter: “these be her very C’s, her U’s, and her T’s” (2.5.86-87). Elam notes that Malvolio must invent a “C” in the salutation in order to make the joke (242n4). Johnson argues that, in the wooing scene, Malvolio “a figure who stands for the end of festive mirth, is a wildly effective revival of what Weimann has famously called ‘laughing with the audience’” (160). Although Feste and Malvolio are opposites, Malvolio sometimes generates Feste’s performance, since his antagonism provokes Feste’s wit and then, in the dark house, he feeds Feste lines. Malvolio is also, curiously, Feste’s rival as a comic performer, although only for the theatrical audience.

Feste is self-consciously witty as a “corrupter of words” (3.1.37). For example, he appeals to Quinapalus as an instance of mock learning: “For what says Quinapalus? ‘Better a witty fool than a foolish wit’” (1.5.34-35). Feste shows his wit by naming his mock authority Quinapalus, or “who has not read it” in French (Alexander et al 123). Feste also plays with language by using cross-talk. Felver notes the similarity between Feste’s cross-talk routine about ‘living by’ his tabor and Robin’s clowning in George Wilkins’s play The Miseries of Enforced Marriage (1607):

   ILF. Well Sir, are you of the house?
   CLOW. No Sir, I am twenty yarde without, and the house stands without me.

   (Felver 63)

The clown Robin wilfully misunderstands the question about whether he belongs to the household, and pretends he was asked if he is literally part of the house. Feste takes the same literalising approach with Viola:

   VIOLA. Save thee, friend, and thy music! Dost thou live by thy tabor?
CLOWN. No, sir, I live by the church.

VIOLA. Art thou a churchman?

CLOWN. No such matter, sir. I do live by the church, for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church. (3.1.1-7)

Feste deliberately mistakes Viola’s meaning by taking ‘live by’ to mean live next to, rather than ‘make your living by.’ In this way he takes what she has just said to him to be nonsense: as if she had asked him ‘do you live next to your musical instrument?’ Feste shows his own wit by pretending Viola’s speech is foolish. Smith argues that Feste is portrayed with a pipe and tabor in this scene because of the musical association between the fool and the morris dance: “A standard figure in morris dancing was a Fool who not only interacted with the crowd of on-lookers but tried to trip up the dancers. In effect, that is just what Feste attempts with his fellow actors in *Twelfth Night*” (362). Smith suggests Feste’s cross-talk is trying to trip up Viola in the same way. Clowning thus both generates and disrupts the performance.

Feste’s clowning is also self-consciousness about theatricality. At the start of the dark-house scene Feste says “the competitors enter” (4.2.10), which is a self-conscious reference to the fact that they are all about to act in or to be the audience to a performance. Feste asks Sir Toby and Sir Andrew: “Did you never see the picture of ‘we three’?” (2.3.16-17). This refers to a contemporary satirical picture called ‘we three’ which showed two fools or asses with the spectator making the third (Elam 212n4.). Feste makes a stage picture of all three of them as fools which also self-consciously refers to the audience watching them. Sir Toby shows he understands the joke with his reply: “Welcome, ass” (2.3.18). Feste shows his wit by referring to the others, and the audience, as fools and therefore in a sense he is refusing to be one. Feste may be making the clown’s anachronistic contact with the world of the audience in his ironic reference to clerestories in the dark house scene. There were windows of this kind in the Middle Temple, where *Twelfth Night* was staged in 1602 (Elam 309n7.).
Similarly, Feste says to Orsino: “the bells of Saint Bennet, sir, may put you in mind – one, two, three” (5.1.36-37). This may refer self-consciously to the bells of a church of St Benedict in London which was within earshot of the Globe audience (Elam 323n3,). These two references to the world of performance suit two different audiences of *Twelfth Night*. It is worth noting that, although Weimann and Bruster’s point is valid about the power of clownish anachronism to connect with the audience, it is not only the clowns who do so. For example, Antonio says it is best to lodge at the Elephant “(i)n the south suburbs” (3.3.39), which was a real Bankside inn and brothel near the Globe theatre (Elam 272n4,), and this reference probably also gave the contemporary audience a similar moment of recognition.

A final aspect of Feste’s theatrical self-consciousness as the clown is in the epilogue, or the liminal part of the performance between the play proper and the return to the everyday world. It may be Armin who comes out of character to say “But that’s all one, our play is done, / And we’ll strive to please you every day” (5.1.399-400). The clown comments on the fictional play as a performance for the theatre audience. Booth makes the point that when Feste admits to having been “one” in the interlude of gulling Malvolio, he was actually two: because he was also Sir Topas. Booth suggests that in the epilogue: “the actor is two here too. He is what Feste is: a professional entertainer” (*Nonsense* 211).

The clowning in *Twelfth Night* integrates Feste as a fool, since he performs his scripted improvisational fooling to almost everyone in the play, and Shakespeare also brings Armin’s comic method of using a real natural fool within the drama. Feste uses Armin’s clowning style of singing, catechising, doubling and multiple voices and, at times, Armin surfaces as an actor; both in the dark house scene and in the closing epilogue. Feste’s status as the professional fool in the play is both challenged and confirmed by his conflict with Malvolio and his wit contest with Maria. Malvolio’s attack on his fooling provokes Feste into
showing his skill, although his final effort to recruit Malvolio as a natural fool for his own performance is arguably a failure. In *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare both integrates and draws attention to fooling, as well as making explicit the effort and the anxiety which go into its performance.
2.4 *King Lear*: Thou wouldst make a good fool

Feste and Lear’s Fool share striking similarities, and both are characteristically Armin roles. They are suited to Armin’s talents in singing and catechising, they are self-conscious about performance and theatrical illusion, and both roles are more witty than they are comic.

The Fool’s role may refer to Armin’s career. In both *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night* the fool has unexplained absences: Feste’s truancy (1.5.3-4) and the way the Fool simply drops out of the play halfway through. In *Twelfth Night* Maria says “let the fool make a third” (2.3.170-71) in her stage management of the box tree scene although, for whatever reason, Fabian replaces Feste. Feste has other unexplained absences in the play; for example, there is no exit given for him at the end of the ‘kitchen’ scene (Elam 221n2,) and so he could slip away any time after his final speech. This may refer to Armin’s “promiscuity” (Elam 134) of performance, since he played with other acting companies. Wiles suggests that Armin worked “in a freelance capacity” since he acted in *More-Clacke* at the private Whitefriars theatre and also “apparently clowned at the Curtain at the same time as he played in stage plays at the Globe” (143).

In one sense Edgar replaces the Fool and there is an appealing speculation that this role would have been attractive to Armin because of its “multiple impersonations” (Ringler 129). In Armin’s own play *More-clacke*, as mentioned above, his role involved doubling, doing different accents, and disguise. Edgar disguises himself as the disturbed Poor Tom, invents a history as a decadent courtier, pretends to be a peasant as he leads Gloucester to ‘Dover cliff’ and, after Gloucester falls, is someone else at the bottom. While in disguise, he also surfaces to some extent as Edgar when he calls Gloucester “father” (4.6.72), although ‘father’ could also be a neutral form of address to an older person. When Oswald appears,
Edgar suddenly begins to talk in a deep country accent:

Good gentleman, go your gait and let poor volk pass. And ’ch’ud ha’ been
zwagged out of my life, 'twould not ha’ been zo long as 'tis by a vortnight.
Nay, come not near th’old man; keep out, che vor ye, or I’se try whether your
costard or my baton be the harder. (4.6.233-38)

These different voices are in part gratuitous and apparently for the pleasure of performance.
As Maria said about Feste’s disguise as Sir Topas: “he sees thee not.” In one sense, Edgar is
the fool’s role since he impersonates a mentally disturbed ‘natural’ fool as Poor Tom and says
he “must play fool to sorrow” (4.1.40). It is interesting to speculate that Armin was well-
suited to playing Edgar but, as the specialist clown in the company, he was still most likely to
take the Fool’s part.

The Fool has his own characteristics which are suited to Armin’s style, particularly
singing and catechising. The Fool and Feste sing part of the same song “When that I was and
a little tiny boy,” which links the two fool roles together as well as linking them to Armin,
who may have written the song (Elam 388). Sharing a song across two plays is a self-
conscious decision which draws attention to Armin as the actor who performed both. In both
King Lear and Twelfth Night the fool breaks down theatrical illusion. For example, Feste
hints he has seen through Viola’s disguise as a boy: “Now Jove, in his next commodity of
hair, send thee a beard!” (3.1.45-46), which breaks the theatrical convention that no one sees
through a disguise in Shakespeare. Similarly, the Fool hints he has seen through Edgar’s
disguise as Poor Tom: “Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a
yeoman?” (3.6.9-10). He suggests he knows that Poor Tom is really the aristocratic Edgar.

Feste and the Fool also share both their social mobility and their isolation. Both are
household fools, but belong to the previous generation. Weimann and Bruster suggest that,
 socially, the fool ends up in a “melancholy nowhere” (88). Thomson suggests that
Shakespeare created the “alienated Fool” for Armin: “This unplaced character, admitted everywhere but belonging nowhere, was Shakespeare’s intuitive response to the qualities of Kempe’s successor, Robert Armin” (Career 165).

Shakespeare draws attention to the figure of the fool even as he ‘tames’ the independent clown and integrates him into the drama. Lear’s Fool is named only for his function (presumably he has a name) and is dressed in the specialist fool’s motley (1.4.140) with a coxcomb (1.4.96), or jester’s hat. The Fool is self-consciously at work performing to both the onstage and the theatrical audience. He speaks (or sings) in jingles which are performative rather than ordinary dialogue; we see the Fool at work as a fool:

A fox when one has caught her,
And such a daughter,
Should sure to the slaughter,
If my cap would buy a halter;
So the fool follows after. (1.4.310-14)

The Fool risks criticising Goneril as he leaves, by suggesting she is a predator in her treatment of Lear, and he also suggests that his own fooling might get him hanged.

There are two examples of the Fool closing a scene with the kind of extra performance implied elsewhere by the stage direction “Manett Clowne” (Rasmussen 133); manet signalled the actor to remain when others exit (Dessen and Thomson 139). The clown remains on stage to do something extra for the theatrical audience, after his part in the scene has really come to an end. For example, the Fool says: “She that’s a maid now, and laughs at my departure, / Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter” (1.5.49-50). Lear has just exited, leaving the Fool alone on stage to address this bawdy couplet to the audience. Armin as the Fool works his catechising routines for Lear as his onstage audience, as well as performing self-consciously to the theatre audience. Booth notes that the Fool performs, in
effect, two different roles to his two different audiences: “A real-life professional clown could have been expected to perform a comic routine at his exit; so could a character who is a professional clown. The Fool’s double action—as comedian retained by King Lear and comedian performing before a theatre audience—is here a single action” (Indefinition 40). This is arguably a self-conscious moment of ‘laughing with the audience,’ although it is not particularly comic, which makes explicit the tension between Armin’s presentational performance and his representation of his fictional character. In this example Shakespeare scripts independent clownage for the Fool, which shows him acting as a between the scenes entertainer independent of the plot, while also drawing self-conscious attention to the Fool’s double audience. In the second example, the Fool says: “I’ll speak a prophecy ere I go . . . . This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time” (3.2.78-95). The Fool’s nonsense prophecy has no particular relevance to the preceding scene, apart from its sense of moral malaise, and is another example of the Fool’s extra solo performance which closes his scene. Shakespeare both integrates the independent clown within the frame of the play and draws attention to fooling.

Lear’s Fool is the archetypal wise fool who speaks uncomfortable truths about Lear’s own foolishness. Enid Welsford describes the court jester as a “privileged truth-teller” (251), but the protection of the Fool’s status as a ‘retained’ household fool becomes increasingly fragile. The Fool is not a fearless satirist; in effect, he echoes what Regan says to Lear: “being weak, seem so” (2.2.393). If he is wise, then so is she. In his pragmatism, the Fool has more in common with the practical clowns in the anonymous plays. Like Mouse in Mucedorus who says “I’ll know the price of it first” (2.2.41), the Fool respects the value of money, material comfort and social status. The Fool reminds Lear that “the rent of his land” (1.4.131-32), which Lear has discarded, does have value. Garber suggests the Fool’s common sense is radically limited because it seeks to avoid Lear’s tragic confrontation with the self during the
storm on the heath (674): “court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o’
door. Good nunce, in, and ask thy daughters blessing” (3.2.10-12). The Fool takes the
practical attitude that it does not matter if Lear has to humble himself to his daughters, so
long as he gets physical shelter by doing so. “Court holy-water” was proverbial for “flattery
or fair words” (Foakes 264n1,). But it is also worth noting that the Fool fails to take his own
pragmatic advice, since he follows Lear out into the cold.

The Fool’s wisdom is of an emotional kind: he is trying to keep the connection going
between him and Lear as communication starts to fail. Lear and the Fool know each other
well and have fallen back into tired question and answer routines as Lear begins to lose touch
with reality:

   FOOL. The reason why the seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty
   reason.

   LEAR. Because they are not eight.

   FOOL. Yes indeed, thou wouldst make a good fool. (1.5.33-36)

The Fool indeed “labours to outjest / His heart-struck injuries” (3.1.16-17) in this catechising
routine as Lear becomes increasingly unresponsive.

The Fool plays with the linked but contrasting concepts of natural and artificial
fooling as he tries to disrupt Lear’s delusions with humour. The Fool’s responses are
simultaneously commonsensical and inappropriate. For example, during the trial scene he
says to the invisible Goneril: “Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool” (3.6.51), which
was proverbial as a mocking way to apologise for overlooking someone. Of course a stool is
all there is to be seen, and so the Fool is apologising for being right. When Lear asks Poor
Tom if his daughters have reduced him to poverty: “Couldst thou save nothing? Wouldst thou
give ’em all?” (3.4.63), the Fool replies: “Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all
shamed” (3.4.64-5). Having nothing but a blanket is clearly evidence of destitution, but the
Fool says he does have something, since he can cover his nakedness. In the storm he tries, sensibly, to stop Lear stripping off his clothes: “Prithee, nuncle, be contented; ’tis a naughty night to swim in” (3.4.109-110). He pretends Lear wants to take off his clothes to keep them dry while he goes for a swim, when they are already soaking wet. The Fool tries to disrupt Lear’s delusions with a mixture of common sense and nonsense.

Armin’s role as the Fool is suited to his talents of singing and catechising, and the Fool’s mixture of truth-telling and apt nonsense is relevant to Armin’s interest in both artificial and natural fooling. The Fool’s role holds in tension presentational performance and the representation of a fictional character emotionally connected to Lear. Shakespeare integrates the fool while drawing attention to fooling as a phenomenon, particularly by referencing Feste in *Twelfth Night* as another Armin role, in part through the shared song in both plays.
2.5 Bottom and The Porter

There are contradictions and exceptions to take into account in any narrative suggesting a clear-cut transition from ‘clown to wise fool’ or from Kemp as an independent performer to Armin as an integrated character within the drama. Although Shakespeare’s clowning was changing, “A good deal of evidence, in fact, underlines continuity in the midst of important transformations” (Weimann and Bruster 87). For example, Armin probably reprised Kemp’s role as Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing, since he wrote that he “hath been writ downe for an Asse in his time” in his preface to The Italian Taylor (1609) (Armin A3R). Johnson suggests that Armin had his own independence as a clown:

the narrative of Shakespeare as a sanitizer of early modern drama has to answer to the hardy successes he scripts for the self-staging performer, even after Robert Armin has replaced Will Kemp as the comic star. (160-61)

She argues that: “the distinction between clown as character (Armin) and clown as charismatic actor (Kemp) may ultimately be very slight” (156). For example, I would argue that both Launce’s monologue of leave-taking in The Two Gentlemen and Feste’s multiple voicing as Sir Topas in Twelfth Night show the clown’s skill for its own sake.

Hornback suggests that Shakespeare resists the pressure to conform to neoclassical ideas of decorum regarding the clown: “Shakespeare indeed characteristically unleashes the power of performance by allowing for the boldest possible displays of stage presence . . . such as . . . the popular clown whose winking ‘self-resembled show’ and ‘personation’ play with the line between player and fictional role” (Indecorum 184). He argues that this power of performance persists until Armin’s retirement in about 1613 (Indecorum 185), which complicates the idea of Armin replacing Kemp in 1599 as the key moment of transition in Shakespeare’s clowning.

Bottom’s dream speech in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1594-95) and the Porter’s
scene in *Macbeth* (1606) provide further evidence of some of these contradictions. Bottom, the earlier role “(a)lmost certainly” (Weimann, *Author’s Pen* 99) played by Kemp, is a main character more integrated into the story than the Porter’s single scene interlude, perhaps played by Armin. Both examples have clowning characteristics and a thematic relevance to their play. Firstly, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Bottom appears to have several characteristics of the detached clown while also being integrated into the drama as a wise fool.

As Bottom wakes up he begins to forget, or to censor, what has happened in the wood:

> BOTTOM. I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was – there is no man can tell what. Methought I was – and methought I had – but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. 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. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called ‘Bottom’s Dream’, because it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke. (4.1.203-15)

Bottom seems to be both clown and fool. In this scene he has several clown characteristics which would normally place him outside the drama: like the medieval Vice figure he ‘mistakes the word’ with his mangled recall of the passage from Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:9-10); he draws attention to theatrical illusion by talking about his cue at the start of his speech (in fact, his cue is “recount our dreams” which he tries to do); he is alone on stage and talks directly to the audience or perhaps to himself; he mentions the clown’s afterpiece – the ballad
which might follow Pyramus and Thisbe; and he has a self-conscious awareness of his own role when he mentions clowns directly—“man is but a patched fool.” Weimann suggests that the planned Bottom’s Dream afterpiece to be written by Peter Quince “hath no bottom” because it will be Kemp, no longer in his fictional role as Bottom, who will perform it (Author’s Pen 99).

But Bottom is fully integrated into the drama as a main character: unlike the Porter his role cannot be cut and leave the story intact. He also sounds like a wise fool in this passage; when he says that “man is but a patched fool” he is talking about foolishness as part of the human condition, rather than an individual failing. The next chapter in Corinthians goes on to say: “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1 Cor. 3:18). His speech stands within the drama as one of the play’s most thoughtful discussions of the disparate meanings of dreaming, which include religious revelation, fantasies of transgressive sex, or something trivial.

Bottom’s name is another example of his paradoxical status as seemingly both clown and fool. He appears to fit the type of the rustic clown with an emblematic name based on his trade as a weaver, since a bottom was a large spool of thread (Rosenbaum 15). But Ron Rosenbaum notes that Shakespeare may have been using the Geneva bible, which translates “the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10) as ‘the bottom of God’s secrets’ (Rosenbaum 16, emphasis added). So Bottom’s name could refer to “deep things of God,” which perhaps can only be understood with a kind of wise foolishness, or glimpsed in a dream. Suddenly the clown’s name is the most metaphysical word in the play. Bottom’s speech also plays on his own name when he says his dream “hath no bottom”: this could mean that he was not himself in it, because he was ‘translated’ with his ass’s head; that it was unfathomably profound; or that it had no basis in reality. In deciding whether Bottom is inside or outside the drama, as a
fool or a clown, it is possible to argue that at this liminal moment between sleeping and waking, between night-rule and everyday reality, Bottom has a glimpse of wisdom, before returning to his usual clownish and commonsensical status as an enthusiastic and literal-minded amateur actor. Bottom is unchanged by his experience in the woods and this is part of his appeal as an indestructible ‘sitcom’ clown.

Armin’s role as the Porter is more detached from the plot than Kemp’s as Bottom, which runs counter to my argument about the integration of the clown. The Porter opens the gate to Macduff and Lennox just after Duncan’s murder with a speech on the effect of drinking alcohol on male sexual desire and performance:

MACDUFF. What three things does drink especially provoke?

PORTER. Marry, Sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine. Lechery, Sir, it
provokes, and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the
performance. Therefore, much drink may be said to be an equivocator with
lechery: it makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off;
it persuades him, and disheartens him; makes him stand to, and not stand
to: in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep, and, giving him the lie,
leaves him. (2.3.26-36)

A critic like Coleridge considered this passage an interpolation of the actors (Kermode 211); he believed it showed the clown standing outside Shakespeare’s drama with bawdy improvisation inappropriate to this moment in the tragedy. Frank Kermode, however, finds thematic relevance in the concept of equivocation (211). Equivocation means to speak ambiguously in order to deceive: alcohol’s ambiguity is in both provoking the desire and taking away the sexual performance. Similarly, the witches equivocate to Macbeth; everything they say to him is both true and deceptive, so it is reasonable to conclude that this piece of clown’s bawdy belongs to the script. But the Porter’s joking is also ‘outside’ the play
because he makes an anachronistic reference to the 1605 Gunpowder Plot of the previous year. He mentions the “farmer, that hang’d himself on th’ expectation of plenty” (2.3.4-5) as he pretends to be the porter at Hell gate. Farmer was the alias of one of the conspirators, and the Porter also refers to equivocators and treason (2.3.10-11). Weimann and Bruster suggest this is an example of the clown’s “presentist” energy which gives the audience an extra frisson of recognition by reminding them of the here and now of performance. This breaks the fictional illusion that the story is taking place in a Scottish castle in remote chronicle history (82). I argue that the audience’s recognition of this reference to contemporary London politics would be tinged with fear. Fear is the main emotion in Macbeth (Leggatt 93), and the Porter’s jokes are about fearful subjects: impotence, terrorism and damnation. The Porter’s single scene stands inside the drama because what he says is thematically relevant, while also remaining detachable like a clown’s interlude because it carries no plot weight. Mahood suggests that even the bit part clowns articulate the play’s themes: “Yet always in such interludes, and in this lies their chief demand upon the actor, the concerns of the play are being kept alive” (84). She argues that the bit part clowns in tragedy, such as the Porter in Macbeth, or Peter in Romeo and Juliet, are not necessarily evidence of compromise:

In these interludes Shakespeare was giving his public what it wanted, but there is no reason to think that he was adulterating his art. Rather the contrary, the presence in the playhouse of a born entertainer was a gift to be capitalised.

(83)

Armin’s part as the Porter is a sophisticated example of the seemingly irrelevant detachable clown being both thematically apposite as well as resolving a practical problem in the theatre. Clowning fills the necessary gap for the actors to wash their hands after Duncan’s murder. This necessary delay is also put to thematic use:

When, in Macbeth 2.1, we are acutely aware of the urgency of what is going
on behind the two stage doors – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth frantically trying to efface the signs of their guilt, Macduff and Lennox growing increasingly impatient as their knocks are unheeded – the Porter enters with all the time in the world. As he repeatedly lurches away from the outer door and towards the audience, his fantasies about Hell’s gate become a wilful extension of the devil-driven parenthesis which the murder scenes constituted for De Quincey.

(Mahood 84)

The clown’s comic delay extends the interim after Duncan’s murder. Thomas De Quincey believed that with the banging on the gate “the pulses of life are beginning to beat again” (Leggatt 54). If so, it is against the resistance of the clown’s delay. These two examples show the Porter to be outside the plot but inside the drama for thematic relevance, while Bottom is paradoxically both inside and outside the drama because he plays a main character fully integrated into the story while retaining several characteristics of the independent clown.

Having considered both the development and the continuity in Shakespeare’s clown roles played by the specialists Kemp and Armin, I now consider clowning characteristics and clowning energy deployed by other characters. In the next chapter, my study comes full circle as I return to the power and influence of Tarlton’s clowning energy as Dericke in The Famous Victories which Shakespeare distributed to Falstaff, Pistol and Katherine in the Henriad. In the final section, I argue that theatrical nostalgia for Tarlton also had an impact on Hamlet.
Chapter 3: Distributed clowning

3.1 Falstaff: The disease of not listening

When Shakespeare reworked *The Famous Victories* in the *Henriad*, he distributed the clowning energy from Tarlton’s role as Dericke to Falstaff, Pistol and Katherine. Falstaff seems to have enjoyed some of the clown’s popularity and celebrity with his contemporary audience which led to the promise, unique in Shakespeare, that there would be another play with him in it (*2H4*, Epilogue 27-28). Falstaff has other clowning characteristics: he has a pragmatic and self-interested attitude to life, as well as a strategic use of mishearing and cross-talk. He also shares a common ancestry with the clowns: he is associated with both the medieval Vice and the carnivalesque lord of misrule.

There is evidence both for and against Falstaff as a clown, and as a Kemp role. Falstaff, like Bottom and Hamlet, is a one-off. All three roles use elements of the clowning tradition and all three exceed it. The idea that Kemp played Falstaff is widely accepted, but speculative. In my view, Falstaff is too central to the drama and too high status as a character to be a clown role. However, the best piece of evidence against Falstaff as a clown is itself ambiguous. When Prince Henry rejects Falstaff there is a sense that ‘something happens’ to him in the drama and this would be absolutely unusual for a clown role. But scholars such as Wiles say this is just one more opportunity for Falstaff to manoeuvre himself out of humiliation, and that this was typical of Tarlton’s style of clowning.

Falstaff has links with both the medieval Vice and the carnivalesque lord of misrule (Garber 325), but his connection with the Vice is different from the clown’s. The clowns are Vice-descendants because they tend to stand somewhere between the audience and the action.
as commentators or interpreters. Falstaff is closer to the moral sense of ‘Vice’ because he tempts Prince Henry with a perpetual holiday of riot and misrule. The Lord Chief Justice says to Falstaff that: “You follow the young Prince up and down, like his ill angel” (2H4, 1.2.163-65). Falstaff as a moral Vice is an important part of the play’s structure and world view: the Prince must choose between his dissolute Eastcheap life, with Falstaff as the ill angel on one shoulder, and his royal duty, with King Henry IV as the good angel, on the other.

Falstaff is also associated with another of the clown’s ancestors: the carnivalesque lord of misrule. The play repeatedly draws attention to Falstaff’s fat body. The images of food associated with Falstaff are festive in themselves. For example, according to J. Dover Wilson, Doll calls Falstaff her “whoreson little tidy Bartholomew boar-pig” (2H4, 2.4.230), which refers to suckling pigs eaten at Bartholomew Fair “the most popular annual festivity of Elizabethan and Jacobean London” (30). Falstaff is also described as “that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly” (1H4, 2.4.446-47) which Dover Wilson explains as “an ox roasted whole and stuffed with sausages, after the fashion of the annual fairs at Manningtree” (30). The famous tavern bill found in Falstaff’s pocket for “but one halfpennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack” (1H4, 2.4.534-35) is further evidence of Falstaff’s link with drunken misrule and revelry. Weimann and Bruster describe Falstaff as “the clownish marriage of Vice and Lord of Misrule” (101). He represents the carnival pleasures of the body which, in turn, were associated with clowning.

Falstaff has other clowning characteristics, such as mishearing and cross-talk. For example, he tries to avoid the Lord Chief Justice because he has no wish to talk to him about his part in the Gad’s Hill robbery. When, reluctantly, he finally has to meet him, Falstaff falls back on the clown’s trick of not listening:

FALSTAFF. . . . it is a kind of deafness.

JUSTICE. I think you are fallen into the disease, for you hear not what I say to
At the end of the exchange he mishears the “effect of gravity” (2H4, 1.2.161), the putative effect of the white hair in his beard, as the “effect of gravy, gravy, gravy” (2H4, 1.2.162). This mishearing shows Falstaff clowning as he attempts to avoid the Lord Chief Justice’s reprimands. Dover Wilson suggests that: “For dexterous evasion and brilliant effrontery, Falstaff is at the very top of his form. Yet neither evasion nor effrontery will serve; in the end he is compelled to stand and listen” (100). Falstaff’s language has other links with the clowns, and Wiles suggests that Falstaff’s part is written to give his speech “the impression that he is extemporizing, inventing verbal ploys on the spur of the moment” (129); Falstaff’s scripted speech has a clownish improvisational quality. He gives the example of “if I fought not with fifty of them I am a bunch of radish” (1H4, 2.4.183-84) as evidence of Falstaff starting a sentence without knowing how it will end, and therefore apparently thinking on his feet like an improvising clown.

Shakespeare drew on Dericke’s role in his source text when he wrote Falstaff’s part. Like Dericke hiding behind a tree during the battle in The Famous Victories Falstaff plays dead on the battlefield (1H4, 5.4.75 s.d). Falstaff, like Dericke and Strumbo, has the clown’s practical sense of self-preservation. But Falstaff is also different from the clowns: he has the aristocratic command of the ragamuffin soldiers who, to him, are merely “food for powder, they’ll fill a pit as well as better” (1H4, 4.2.65-66). In Locrine and The Famous Victories it is the clowns who are the conscripts.

Dericke’s role in The Famous Victories, in which he and John re-enact the Lord Chief Justice getting boxed on the ear, may have inspired Falstaff’s suggestion that he and the
Prince act out a “play extempore” (1H4, 2.4.275-76). John and Dericke’s fictional roleplaying breaks down when they start to use each other’s real names; when Falstaff plays the King, he begins to speak in his own praise about a “goodly portly man, i’faith, and a corpulent . . . his age some fifty, or by’r lady inclining to threescore” (1H4, 2.4.416-19). The Prince rebukes Falstaff’s failure to criticise himself: “Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I’ll play my father” (1H4, 2.4.427-28). They change places and, as Prince, Falstaff refuses to understand the Prince’s description of him as “an old fat man” (1H4, 2.4.442):

FALSTAFF. I would your Grace would take me with you: whom means your Grace?

PRINCE. That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

FALSTAFF. My lord, the man I know.

PRINCE. I know thou dost. (1H4, 2.4.454-59)

Falstaff’s clownish refusal to understand allows him to play with his real and roleplayed identities in this scene, just as John and Dericke do in their re-enactment of the ear-boxing scene.

There is some evidence for Falstaff as a Kemp role. Tarlton as Dericke may have made the Falstaff role more appealing to Kemp, since Kemp inherited much of Tarlton’s style. The fact that Falstaff fails to appear in Henry V fits with Kemp’s departure from Shakespeare’s company in 1599 (Wiles 116-17). There is also a stray speech heading “enter Will” (2.4.20) in the quarto of Henry IV, Part 2 which may refer to Falstaff as acted by Will Kemp (Shapiro 40). Philip Henslowe had “giant hose” made for Kemp, which may have been the equivalent of a fat suit to play the fat knight. But Roger Bourke argues that Henslowe’s reference to giant hose dates from 1602 and is therefore years too late for Kemp as Falstaff since he left in 1599 (183). Bourke suggests the giant hose were probably intended for a
different play, although he agrees it is “widely, but not universally, accepted” that Kemp played Falstaff (183). David Ellis suggests that Kemp’s progression to Falstaff from roles such as Launcelot would have been a “quantum leap” (87), if it happened. Weil and Weil suggest that “Shakespeare perhaps conceived Falstaff’s role as a clown part; then, when the role became more challenging, it might have been assumed by the actor who would eventually play the King to Burbage’s Hamlet” (42). Martin Butler argues that Falstaff as a Kemp role remains a “difficult case” to decide:

[Falstaff] has self-evident clown features, such as direct audience address and farcical misadventures, but his role is much more developed than Kemp’s usual parts, and his age, size, and gentility do not match Kemp’s athleticism and plainness. (n. pag.)

Kemp may have played Falstaff, but there is evidence both for and against.

The strongest evidence against Falstaff as a clown is the sense that ‘something happens’ to him in the drama. When Prince Henry becomes king he rejects Falstaff: “I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers. / How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!” (2H4, 5.5.47-48) which shows Falstaff as a dramatic character at the centre of the action. However, even this evidence is ambiguous, since some scholars suggest the clown must court humiliation to win in the end, and the King explicitly compares Falstaff to a “fool and jester.” Wiles suggests that: “[Falstaff] shares Tarlton’s skill of extracting himself from a situation of hopeless disadvantage” (129). Perhaps Falstaff bounces back from rejection rather than being heartbroken: “I shall be sent for soon at night” (2H4, 5.5.90-91). The rejection may be an episode similar to Falstaff pretending he fought innumerable assailants on Gad’s Hill, when in reality “Falstaff after a blow or two runs away too” (1H4, 2.2.102 s.d.). When Prince Henry catches Falstaff out by revealing that he and Poins were the buckram men, Falstaff fails to be humiliated by this exposure of his cowardice, and pretends he knew it was them all
PRINCE. What trick, what device, what starting-hole canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame? . . . .

FALSTAFF. By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters, was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? (1H4, 2.4.259-65)

Similarly, Wiles gives the example of Tarlton’s apparent stage role as a youngest son at his father’s deathbed. His father chastises him at length for a life spent in and out of prison, and bequeathes him nothing but the gallows and a rope. The comedian plays out his humiliation as long as possible before delivering the punchline which gives him the final laugh: ‘Tarlton weeping and sobbing upon his knees, as his brothers, said: ‘Oh father, I do not desire it. I trust in God you shall live to enjoy it yourself.’ (17)

Therefore it is possible, although not likely, that this dramatic moment of rejection is in fact congruent with Falstaff as a clown.

Falstaff has both clowning characteristics and carnivalesque clowning energy, some of which show the influence of the clowning in Shakespeare’s source text The Famous Victories. However, much of the evidence which links Falstaff to the clowns also shows his difference from them: he is like the Vice but not in the same sense as the clowns; he shares the conscripted clown’s battlefield cowardice while also being an aristocratic military commander; and the key dramatic moment of his rejection shows Falstaff to be both like the clowns and absolutely unlike them.
3.2 Pistol: Lambkins, we will live

Pistol is the first of two further examples of distributed clowning in the *Henriad*. His clowning characteristics include comic parody, an emblematic name, and the clown’s pragmatic insistence on survival. He plays the equivalent of John, Dericke’s associate in *The Famous Victories*.

Pistol’s extravagant way of speaking parodies high-flown language. In *Henry IV, Part 2* he speaks in scraps of quotes from other plays as if self-consciously appearing in the sequel of a remake. Marlowe’s pampered jades of Asia (Melchiori 128n11,) become Pistol’s “hollow pamper’d jades of Asia” (*2H4*, 2.4.162). He says “I kiss thy neaf” (*2H4*, 2.4.184), which is a slang translation of *beso las manos* or ‘I kiss hands’ in Spanish (Melchiori 129n12,), which Dericke renders as “Basillus Manus” (10.915) when he makes his light-hearted goodbye before going off to war.

Like Launce, Launcelot and Falstaff, Pistol has an emblematic, phallic clown’s name. Garber suggests part of the parody in his name was based on the fact that “an Elizabethan pistol was a relatively primitive weapon, likely to go off, without warning, at any time” (349). Pistol’s phallic name suggests both the bawdy humour in his intention to “discharge upon her, Sir John, with two bullets” (*2H4*, 2.4.112-13), and his unreliability as a soldier.

Pistol and Falstaff, like Dericke and Strumbo, all have a moment of posing as brave just before they go off to war. Falstaff pretends his truncheon is a fife (*1H4*, 3.3.87 s.d.); while Dericke uses the wife’s pot lid as a shield and Strumbo has his staff (*Locrine* 2.5.19). Pistol declares: “Die men like dogs! Give crowns like pins!” (*2H4*, 2.4.172), but during the battle he wishes he were at home (*H5*, 3.2.15). Pistol agrees with the Boy who would “give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety” (*H5*, 3.2.13-14). When the fighting starts the clown’s instinct for self-preservation takes over. Pistol has an “killing tongue and a quiet sword” (*H5*, 3.2.15).
3.2.35). Pistol’s conflict with a French soldier over ransom may be based on Dericke’s confrontation with the French soldier when he tricks him about laying crowns on his sword (Corbin and Sedge 192n1). Corbin and Sedge note Dericke’s influence on Pistol: “Tarlton’s role as Derick points the way to Shakespeare’s anti-heroic use of Pistol on the battlefield in *Henry V*, offering the audience cynical instruction on how to avoid the dangers of combat” (27). Pistol, like Dericke, is determined to survive and, if possible, profit from the war.

Pistol has the clown’s pragmatic attitude to life: “for, lambkins, we will live” (*H5*, 2.1.126-27). He says “profits will accrue” (*H5*, 2.1.111) and plans to turn bawd and cutpurse which, Garber argues, links Pistol with anarchic misrule:

Yet our last glimpse of Pistol shows him, unfazed, swearing to turn bawd and cutpurse, and planning to return to England to make his fortune in the stews.

The Pistols of this world cannot be killed in battle because they never go to battle. They represent the irreducible mischief in humankind, a mode of misrule that is not holiday, but rather anarchy and animal energy. (406)

Dericke, who says he will break all the windows in John’s house, or that he will “go before and call my dame whore, / And thou shalt come after and set fire on the house” (*Victories*, 19.1478-79), may be the source of the “irreducible mischief” which Garber identifies in Pistol as a pimp and a survivor.

A final example of Pistol’s clowning, which links him to Katherine in the next section, is his scene of gratuitous physical comedy in which Fluellen forces him to eat a leek, a symbol of Welsh national identity (*H5*, 5.1.14-78). Like Katherine’s language lesson, his physical performance is irrelevant to the plot, but linked to the play’s theme of conflicting national identities.
3.3 Katherine: *Mots de son mauvais*

Katherine’s bawdy language lesson in *Henry V* is a second minor example of distributed clowning. I read this scene as a clowning routine with Katherine as the clown and Alice, her gentlewoman, as the ‘feed.’ Pauline Kiernan suggests: “The opportunities for the actor playing Catherine to really work the crowd, make the scene a mini dramatic masterpiece” (64). This kind of scene can come alive in performance for its own sake, irrespective of its place in the play. The language lesson is a self-contained comic prose episode completely detached from the main action. The scene has no plot weight, and the audience is not even told her name (Gurr, *H5* 128n7,). This suggests that, in a sense, it is the kind of clowning performance Weimann and Bruster describe as “unmediated by character or story” (82). Katherine’s performance is elastic as she stages and then restages the dirtiest part of the joke:

KATHERINE. *Comment appelez-vous le pied et la robe?*

ALICE. De foot, *madame*, et de coun.

KATHERINE. De foot, et de coun? *O Seigneur Dieu, ils sont les mots de son mauvais, corruptible, gros, et impudique, et non pour les dames d’honneur d’user. Je ne voudrais prononcer ces mots devant les seigneurs de France pour tout le monde. Foh! De foot et de coun! Néanmoins, je réciterai une autre fois ma leçon ensemble: d’hand, de fingres, de nails, d’arm, d’elbow, de nick, de sin, de foot, de coun. (3.4.45-54)*

There is implied physical action and gesture as Katherine learns the words for different parts of the body, almost all of which have a sexual double meaning. This culminates with “foot” and “coun” which sound like the French swear words *foutre* and *con* (Gurr, *H5* 130n13,). Katherine says these are naughty words which are inappropriate for her to say – and then she
‘elasticises’ the joke by repeating them all over again. In the closing line of the scene Katherine wraps up the bawdy talk with what sounds like a self-conscious admission that this has been a scurrilous clowning interlude in the action: “C’est assez pour une fois. Allons-nous à dîner” (3.4.56).

On the face of it, this scene adds nothing beyond its own humour to the play, but there is thematic relevance to the clowning bawdy. Katherine’s obscene mistakes with language are like the clown’s malapropisms which, in fact, turn out to have their own meaning. Garber suggests her malapropisms have a parallel with Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* (406). The French princess itemises her body like a conquered territory being renamed in English which, in a sense, it is. Garber notes Henry’s “deliberate Englishing” of her name as Kate rather than Katherine (407). Gurr says: “Henry explicitly relates Katherine to a besieged French ‘maiden city’. Henry’s conquest of Katherine is of a piece with his successful sieges of the French cities” (*H5* 15).

The clown’s comic energy from *The Famous Victories* is distributed to the language lesson scene. The scene shows Katherine’s clowning characteristics such as malapropisms and mistakes with language, separation from the plot but also thematic relevance, implied physical performance and bawdy elasticised comedy. In this scene, Katherine shows that some Shakespeare characters do clowning rather than being clowns.
3.4 Hamlet: Infinite jest

The antic Hamlet in *Hamlet* is an example of clowning distributed from the specialist clown actors to other characters. While this is only one aspect of his role, I argue Hamlet has several clown characteristics, including cross-talk, anachronisms, an emblematic name, exploitation of the link between artificial and natural fools, distinctive moments of physical performance, and a negative attitude to women and marriage. Secondly, *Hamlet* contains three potential examples of the impact of Tarlton’s celebrity on the play: the advice to the players in the ‘bad’ quarto which simultaneously enacts and criticises Tarlton’s comic method as a ‘warm’ improvising clown; the portrait of Yorick which may be a tribute to Tarlton, and the possible reference to a Tarlton catchphrase in the play’s opening line.

The first piece of evidence for Tarlton’s influence on *Hamlet* is the advice to the players in the ‘bad’ quarto. In the good text, Hamlet famously says “let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them” (3.2.39-40), and so he criticises clowning improvisation in favour of sticking to the script and naturalistic acting. The ‘bad’ quarto text is shorter and simpler and therefore it is a good assumption that it is corrupt and comes second to an original version. But occasionally it also adds things in, as it does in this passage, and so it probably records a performance. It is as if the Hamlet actor reached the point in the script where he is meant to criticise improvising clowns, but then could not resist ‘doing a Tarlton’ and starting to improvise himself:

And – do you hear? – let not your Clown speak more than is set down. There be of them, I can tell you, that will laugh themselves to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh with them – albeit there is some necessary point in the play then to be observed. O, ’tis vile and shows a pitiful ambition in the
fool that useth it. 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 in 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. (Thompson and Taylor, 1603
9.23-38)

The ‘bad’ quarto passage criticises the clowns both for being too inventive, since they make
up their own jokes, and not inventive enough because they also repeat them. For Weimann
this passage is “perhaps the most tantalizing scene in Shakespeare’s theatre” because it stages
the “administering of cultural authority” between playwright and performer (Weimann,
Author’s Pen 23). Margreta de Grazia says that Hamlet’s advice to the players would “revoke
the very license on which the clown’s function and popularity depended” (176). Even while
this passage seems to be in favour of shutting down the performative potential of the clown, it
is itself apparently expanded to record an actor’s improvisation. The actor playing Hamlet
improvises while complaining about improvisation, and rehashes old jokes while
complaining about that too.

The ‘bad’ quarto passage may also describe Tarlton’s improvisational style. There is a
wonderful description that the ‘warm’ clown can only make a good jest “by chance, as the
blind man catcheth a hare,” which suggests the joke has to jump straight into your arms like a
panic-stricken rabbit. Tarlton was a ‘warm’ clown who was responsive to the audience and
alive to the potential of what might happen at a particular moment in the theatre, unlike a ‘cold’ clown who simply performed rehearsed material. The passage suggests some clowns had only one “suit of jests” which meant that their jokes were already well-known, and the audience could have them written in their tables, or quote-books, before coming to the theatre. Tarlton’s improvisation allowed him to exploit the comic potential even in just seeing someone up in the gallery pointing him out to a friend, according to an anecdote in Tarlton’s Jests (Halliwell 14-15). The Hamlet actor is both improvising and repeating old jokes. He refers to sour beer and a missing livery badge which were jokes “that Tarlton is on record as having used” (Weimann, Playing 419).

In two different ways and perhaps self-consciously the actor is doing what he complains about. I have reformatted the speech as Wiles does in his discussion of this passage (viii) to give an idea of how these jests about porridge and beer and wages were in fact ‘elastic gags,’ or just the starting points of comic stories which could be elaborated on if the audience was responding to them. These four jests, such as “Cannot you stay till I eat my porridge?” are situations, or openers, rather than punchlines. There is plenty of implied potential physical action such as eating porridge or drinking sour beer. The list shows how an unsuccessful performance could rattle through the clown’s material too quickly in a “cinquepace of jests,” but if the jokes were going across well, it would make sense to give more detail and expand each one. Modern comedians must have similar lists in their heads, in order to go on to the next piece of material if the first joke fails. This passage, which has already been extended by improvisation, becomes even more elastic because the jests are themselves setting-off points for further performance. Indeed, the script as we have it may have been extended in this way in performance, and perhaps the actor did tell the joke about the missing livery badge. The ‘bad’ quarto advice to the players both uses and describes Tarlton’s comic method and material. In one sense Hamlet is being self-critical when he
criticises the clowns.

The second example of Tarlton’s influence on Hamlet is the verbal portrait of Yorick which may describe Tarlton’s comic style. Hamlet famously talks to Yorick’s skull, who had been his father’s jester:

> Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy . . . . Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? (5.1.182-90)

This speech may refer to Tarlton (Thompson and Taylor, Hamlet 422n1,). It describes him not just as a stage clown but also “wont to set the table on a roar” and therefore perhaps at work in taverns or aristocratic houses. It describes him entertaining with singing and dancing as well as with insults and flashes of wit. Yorick’s “infinite jest” and “excellent fancy” may be a tribute to Tarlton’s skill at improvisation. Thomson notes Tarlton was “an unofficial jester to Elizabeth I. There is, then, some legitimacy in the association of Yorick’s skull with Tarlton, whose death in 1588 would have been remembered by the greater part of Hamlet’s first audience” (Jig 29). Thompson and Taylor also note that the ‘bad’ quarto’s mention of Yorick’s dozen years in the ground fits with Tarlton’s death in 1588 and the performance of Hamlet in around 1600 (Hamlet 422n1,). This topicality, if it exists, is a good example of clownish anachronism which reminds the audience of both the here and the now of performance, despite the play’s fictional setting in Denmark.

The third example of Tarlton’s possible influence on Hamlet is in the play’s opening line. I speculate that the “Who’s there?” (1.1.1) spoken by the sentry on guard at Elsinore may echo Tarlton’s opening line “Who, who there, who there?” (2.123) as Dericke in The Famous Victories. A verbal echo would be the most conventional of these three potential references to Tarlton, compared to an apparently off script moment in the ‘bad’ quarto, or
talking to a skull to evoke his memory. However, Corbin and Sedge in their edition amend
the original text to “Whoa! Whoa, there! Whoa, there!” (152n7,) since John refers to horses
in the next line: “Why, what ailst thou? Here is no horses.” My speculation is based only on
Bullough who follows the 1598 quarto (Hanabusa 7). Corbin and Sedge do agree that Dericke
is looking for someone: “Derick is in pursuit of the horse thief. The comedy of Tarlton’s entry
and exit lies in the fact that he completely fails to see the very people whose job it is to
apprehend thieves” (152n6,).

Tarlton’s fame makes this potential reference to The Famous Victories in Hamlet a
possibility. The “Who’s there?” refers to a memorable part of his act: his opening catchphrase
addressed to the audience. Another contemporary play refers to Tarlton’s entrances as a
memorable source of nostalgia. In the induction to Ben Jonson’s Bartholmew Fair (1613) the
stage-keeper talks about how in his time he has seen Tarlton come in. He remembers the
striking nature of Tarlton’s entrances: “And yet I kept the stage in Master Tarlton’s time, I
thank my stars. Ho! an that man had lived to have played in Bartholmew Fair, you should ha’
seen him ha’ come in” (Hibbard 32-5). Clearly, Jonson expected this reference to be
understood in 1613, more than 25 years after Tarlton’s death.

Without wanting to push this point too far, I think it is possible to see the first
audience’s likely theatrical nostalgia for Tarlton as a kind of ghost in Hamlet. Thomson says:
“No other Elizabethan actor was so much spoken and written about during his life and after
his death” (Jig 28), while Gurr says Tarlton remained “a legend for sixty years after his
death” (Playgoing 151). One of the stories in Armin’s Quips Upon Questions is evidence for
the audience’s theatrical nostalgia for Tarlton which persisted after his death. The question
“Wher’s Tarleton?” leads to an anecdote about a theatregoer, a “simple man that knew not
Cheese from Chaulke,” who refused to believe that Tarlton was dead, and called out for him
at the end of a play. When he was shown Tarlton’s picture he went away satisfied. Armin
agrees that Tarlton lives on in his fame: “I must thinke he liues, / When but his name
remaines in memorie” (Armin 2A2R-V). In the opening line of *Hamlet* Shakespeare may
have been responding to his audience’s nostalgia for Tarlton. They may have remembered
Tarlton’s opening line in *The Famous Victories* when they heard it again at the beginning of
*Hamlet* and it is possible to see this resemblance between the two plays as a kind of clue that
there will be more clowning to come in *Hamlet*.

Although Hamlet is clearly a major tragic protagonist, his antic disposition also has
several things in common with the clowns. De Grazia argues it is useful to think back beyond
the Romantic figure of Hamlet which is now part of the role’s heritage, and instead look at
Hamlet’s links to what, at the time, would have been an immediately recognisable clowning
tradition. Hamlet’s annoying obstructive cross-talk is classic clownage. For example, he
refuses to give a straight answer in the following exchange between him and Polonius:

POLONIUS. What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET. Words, words, words.

POLONIUS. What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET. Between who? (2.2.191-94)

Hamlet responds with a witty literalism that he is indeed reading ‘words’ and then he takes
‘matter’ to mean problem rather than subject matter. Later, he has a similar confrontation with
Claudius:

KING. Now, Hamlet, where’s Polonius?

HAMLET. At supper.

KING. At supper? Where? (4.3.16-18)

In the final act Hamlet is bested in this kind of question and answer routine by the
Gravedigger, probably played by Armin. This kind of catechising was part of Armin’s comic
HAMLET. Whose grave’s this, sirrah?

GRAVE. Mine, sir . . .

HAMLET. What man dost thou dig it for?

GRAVE. For no man, sir.

HAMLET. What woman then?

GRAVE. For none neither.

HAMLET. Who is to be buried in’t?

GRAVE. One that was a woman, sir; but rest her soul, she’s dead. (5.1.117-35)

Hamlet makes four unsuccessful attempts to get an answer, while the Gravedigger continues to withhold the fact that this is Ophelia’s funeral: “Hamlet is here brought to the very edge of discovering that this grave over which he so serenely chops logic is Ophelia’s” (Granville-Barker 154). Harley Granville-Barker shows that the clown wins this contest because he quibbles over each of Hamlet’s questions and so he manages to avoid giving the “shattering answer” (154); the punchline of this ‘whose grave?’ routine is all too relevant to Hamlet. The exchange shows Shakespeare integrating a clowning routine into the drama, while also drawing explicit attention to clowning, by staging a kind of competition, which Hamlet loses, between him as a would-be clown and the Gravedigger as the specialist comic actor.

Hamlet has other clowning characteristics, such as an emblematic clown’s name: Amleth means “a fool, ninny, an idiot, trickster feigning simplicity” in Old Norse (J. V. Jensen, qtd. in de Grazia 172). His name keeps in play the idea of Hamlet being both an artificial and a natural fool. Hamlet pretends to be mad rather than stupid when he puts on his antic disposition, but a natural fool could also be someone mentally disturbed. For example, in Foole Upon Foole, Armin describes a natural fool called Leane Leanard who was clearly mentally disturbed rather than stupid. Armin reports that Leonard, a household fool, once
seriously injured himself after an argument all alone in a room (Armin C4V-DR). Like the artificial fools, Hamlet believes his antic disposition will give him some protection.

Hamlet also has distinctive moments of physical performance. De Grazia argues that Hamlet’s leap into the grave “might well have been the high point of his antic act” (151). Hamlet’s leap may have been an example of the athletic, physical clowning for which Kemp was famous. Hamlet calls himself a “jig-maker” (3.2.127) in the Mousetrap scene or, in other words, a clown like Kemp. According to Thompson and Taylor, Hamlet “bitterly casts himself as the clown. There may be an allusion to Will Kempe, the Chamberlain’s Men’s famous jig-maker, who left the company in 1599 to undertake his marathon jig from London to Norwich” (Hamlet 305n3,). Later in the same scene Hamlet says: “Thus runs the world away” (3.2.276) which could also refer to Kemp’s departure from the Globe theatre. In Nine Daies Wonder Kemp wrote that he had “danced myself out of the world” (Wiles 58-59).

The clowns tend to break down theatrical illusion because they often appear to live in the contemporary world of the audience, rather than in the fictional world of the represented drama. The clown’s speeches tend to include contemporary references and anachronisms which do not fit with the world of the play. For example, Hamlet talks about London theatre gossip even though he lives in Denmark. He also seems to be making an in-joke as an actor that he and Polonius played in Julius Caesar together the previous year:

HAMLET. What did you enact?

POLONIUS. I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i’th’Capitol. Brutus killed me.

HAMLET. It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. Be the players ready? (3.2.103-07)

Gurr suggests that “Richard Burbage as Hamlet could still step outside his role to joke about Polonius having previously played Caesar and his killer playing the ‘brute’ part” (Playgoing
De Grazia suggests the “dilatory punning” at this point holds up the action:

At the beginning of this scene, in his advice to the Players, Hamlet had singled out such stalling tactics as the particular vice of the clown. In order to get laughs, the clown extemporizes, and thereby holds up the action of the play, by both his interpolated jokes and the laughter they trigger, his own as well as the audience’s . . . (175).

If Hamlet is surfacing here as an actor, then this exchange is a distinctive moment of clowning, with several possible interpretations. Firstly, it is an intensely self-conscious metatheatrical moment, just before the Mousetrap play within a play, which provides what Weimann and Bruster call the clown’s “presentist” energy (82). They suggest: “The audience’s sense of immediacy derives not from an absent, purely imaginary character but from a visible, audible performer right in front of them” (83). In this example, the Hamlet actor reminds the audience not just that they are watching an actor talking about acting, but also reminds them of their own recent experience in the theatre. Secondly, there may be a in-joke between the Hamlet actor and Polonius: because as actors but not as characters they know how the story ends. Hamlet could be making a joking apology to Polonius that he is a “brute” because within the story he will kill him, bringing his part to an end, while Hamlet is the star whose death closes the play. Finally, the exchange about Julius Caesar could be read as idle clowning talk which only delays the action, and shows the play to be mired in irrelevance, since the actors have started talking amongst themselves about something else. This moment of irrelevant joking holds up the action from beyond the frame of the play and yet it remains apposite; as Hamlet says in the “How all occasions do inform against me” soliloquy: “I do not know / Why yet I live to say this thing’s to do” (4.4.43-44), and so the clowning delay has thematic relevance to the play.

Without making too much of this point, the so-called ‘O groans’ in the Folio show
Burbage, as the actor who played Hamlet, to have clowning aspects of his performance. Presumably he improvised Hamlet’s speech in the ‘bad’ quarto above, and was the one who came out of character to make the joke about Julius Caesar. In a minor way Burbage, who was famous for tragedy, also acts like a self-conscious improvising clown. In the script, Hamlet’s last line is “the rest is silence. [Dies]” (5.2.364). Hamlet, who has been talking for the whole play, comes to the end of his scripted part. But in the Folio, the line is extended: “the rest is silence. O, o, o, o” (Thompson and Taylor, Hamlet 460n2). This extension probably recorded Burbage’s performance, much as the ‘bad’ quarto recorded his extemporising. These dying groans give Burbage “his last chance to exceed the script” (de Grazia 204). Like an improvising clown, the Hamlet actor speaks more than is set down for him.

Finally, Hamlet has even been mistaken for an improvising clown by one of the Arden editors. Harold Jenkins omits one of Hamlet’s lines, although it appears in the Folio text which he follows, because he says it has a “subtle incongruity” (526) and, on balance, is probably a “stage accretion” (339n2). The line is “Hide, fox, and all after” (Jenkins 526), which occurs just before Hamlet’s arrest, and means something like ‘let’s play hide and seek’ or ‘let’s chase around the castle looking for a corpse.’ This minor example of confusion between Hamlet’s scripted role and an actor’s improvisation shows that, at times, Hamlet’s behaviour is sufficiently antic to be mistaken for an improvised stage accretion. The power of the clowning in Hamlet’s antic mode is shown by the range of his clowning characteristics: he rants against marriage: “I say we will have no mo marriage” (3.1.148); jumps into Ophelia’s grave; dances a jig; refuses to give a straight answer with his uncooperative cross-talk, and surfaces as an actor.
Conclusion

This study of clowning began with the influence of Tarlton’s fame and comic energy on his role in *The Famous Victories* and ended with Tarlton’s potential influence on *Hamlet*. Tarlton’s question “Am I a Clowne?” encapsulates the key clowning issues in my study: the tension between his presentational clowning performance and the representation of his fictional role. Tarlton, as a phenomenally high-status theatrical celebrity, makes self-conscious use of his own fame as he plays the low-status Dericke.

Each section in my study emphasised a different constellation of clowning characteristics. Strumbo’s stage direction “*Turning to the people*” in *Locrine* sets aside his own concerns as a character to ask if anyone in the audience is in love. Mouse’s “idle talk” in his cross-talk routines show the clown’s pleasure in playing with language, which gives him theatrical dominance over his master, as he refuses to give a straight answer. Launce and Speed, the two clowns in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, joke about the ‘vice’ of “mistak[ing] the word.” Launcelot’s extended physical comedy in *The Merchant of Venice* shows the clown’s desire to “try confusions” not only with his father but also with Lorenzo. Feste, who needs an onstage opponent as well as an audience in *Twelfth Night*, appeals to Olivia that “you must allow *vox*.” The Fool’s comment to Lear that “thou wouldst make a good fool” shows the play’s self-conscious awareness of fooling, particularly since it is addressed to the dispossessed king rather than to the clown. Falstaff has the “disease of not listening” which evokes clown’s mishearing as one of his strategies for evasion. Katherine’s “*mots de son mauvais*,” or naughty sounding words, recall the clown’s insistence on bawdy and the body. Pistol embodies the clown’s pragmatic emphasis on survival and material comfort: “lambkins, we will live.” Finally, Hamlet may refer to Tarlton’s improvisational comic style in his praise of Yorick’s “infinite jest” which, in the ‘bad’ quarto, he cannot help imitating.
There is a transition in the clown roles which reflects the different styles of Kemp and Armin; the household fool replaces the rustic clown. The Kemp clowns like Launce or Launcelot, early in Shakespeare’s career, are similar to the clowns in the popular tradition who provide a comic parody of the main action from the subplot. Shakespeare then integrates the clownage within the drama with Armin roles such as Feste and Lear’s Fool. But there are continuities too, and roles such as Launce and Feste are linked through the gratuitous, self-staging quality of their clowning performances. Even as the fool becomes more securely a character in the drama, Shakespeare draws increasing attention to the phenomenon of clowning. There is also evidence of continuity in Armin reprising Kemp roles, such as Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*, in revivals of old plays.

One possible direction for further research, which lies beyond the scope of the present study, is the extent to which there is a further transition in the Armin roles in the late plays. There seems to be a return to a more physical clowning, perhaps similar to Kemp’s style. It is by no means clear cut which role Armin would have played in the late romances but, for example, Autolycus in *The Winter’s Tale* performs a physical clowning routine as he picks the young shepherd’s pocket (4.3.50-83). In *The Tempest*, there is the potential for extended physical comedy as Stephano and Trinculo clown around under Caliban’s gaberdine (2.2.57-106).

Improvisation, which is the hallmark of the disruptive, independent clown could be performed at the direction of the playwright as a form of under-written efficiency. The script may also mimic improvisation to recreate clowning energy such as Falstaff’s way of speaking which suggests he is thinking on his feet, or Feste’s variations in his singing act to suit his audience, which brings improvisation within the frame of the play.

Clowns like Tarlton, Kemp and Armin surface as themselves in various ways as they perform and this complicates the idea of their playing a fictional character. The clowns were
celebrities which gave them an extradramatic visibility. Similarly, seeing the clown in his own person, or at least his own clowning persona, as he provided incidental entertainment before the play, or afterwards in the jig, must have changed the audience’s experience of the clown as a fictional character. At times the clown sets aside purely fictional role-playing to enjoy the audience’s response to his own performance. To use Weimann’s phrase this self-conscious enjoyment of clowning is ‘laughing with the audience.’ Launce as a clown enjoys his performance in the monologue about his leave-taking even though his character is in tears. Dericke asks “(a)m I a Clowne?” and at that moment stands aside from his fictional character in order to enjoy the audience’s response to his own performance. Strumbo is apparently both desperate for love and talking to the audience about their laughter at his performance when he says “you may laugh, but I must weep.” Weimann and Bruster note the complaint in Hamlet’s advice to the players which describes the clown laughing with the audience (100): “there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some barren quantity of spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered” (3.2.41-44). The clown’s comic method of laughing to make the audience laugh means setting aside the “necessary question of the play” or the representational world of the fictional drama.

The clown is sometimes strenuously irrelevant to the main action, which has led to speculation that the clown role was a subsequent addition to a completed play. This speculation suggests the clown was indeed, in the terms of Sidney’s neoclassical complaint, thrust in by head and shoulders just to give a part to a popular performer. But the clowning almost always articulates the play’s themes and so it does have decency and discretion in the sense of thematic relevance. Launcelot’s clownish literalism which deliberately misunderstands the meaning of words foreshadows Portia’s reliance on a legal quibble to defeat Shylock. The Porter in Macbeth appears just after Duncan’s murder with bawdy joking
which turns out to have thematic and emotional relevance to the story. Hamlet’s joking with
the Polonius actor about *Julius Caesar* is a moment of irrelevant clowning beyond the frame
of the play, but its own delay is apposite to the play’s theme of delayed action.

The clowning often has thematic relevance, but sometimes it is simply about the
gratuitous pleasures of performance. Delay, or the extension of performance, is important to
cLOWNING. Many of the clown’s comic strategies are elastic: they stretch out the performance.
Mouse’s clowning cross-talk, and Launcelot’s physical comedy of searching for Lorenzo are
similar in this respect, they both give the low-status servant clowns theatrical dominance
since, for as long as they can extend their performance, their clowning sets aside the concerns
of the plot and makes them a theatrical lord of misrule. The clown wants the festive, holiday
moment of pleasurable performance in the theatre to last.


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