**CLOWNING ON AND THROUGH SHAKEPEARE: LATE 20th AND EARLY 21st**

**CENTURY CLOWNING'S TACTICAL USE IN SHAKESPEARE PERFORMANCE**

by

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This dissertation argues that contemporary clown performance (as developed in the latter half of the 20th century) can be understood in terms of three key performance practices: the flop, interruption, and audience play. I further argue that these three features of flop, interruption, and audience play are distinctively facilitated by Shakespeare in both text and performance which, in turn, demonstrates the potential of both clown and Shakespeare to not only disrupt theatrical conventions, but to imagine new relationships to social and political power structures. To this end, I ally the flop with Jack Halberstam's sense of queer failure to investigate the relationship between *Macbeth* and *500 Clown Macbeth*. Interruption finds echoes not only in the dramatic theories of Brecht, but also in de Certeau's notion of strategies and tactics, as expressed both in Shakespeare's play text for *King Lear* and Antony Sher's 1982 performance of the Fool. Audience play is put in conversation with the reconstructed Globe's theory of original practices in order to examine the relationship between the audience, performer, and history in Mark Rylance's clownish Shakespeare performances. Finally, in the conclusion, I use Bill Irwin to analyze the cumulative effect of these clown (and clown/Shakespeare) practices in the contemporary theatre. Whereas much of contemporary Shakespeare production emphasizes the psychology of the character and therefore prizes the rendering of a believable character, clown instead emphasizes the work that goes into creating a theatrical performance. The clown, then, draws force not through the power of creating a believable character, but from exposing the work

of artistic creation. A close analysis of clown and early modern Shakespeare performance practice reveals a complimentary relationship that proves one alternative to the dominant regimes of "realistic" performance.

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**PREFACE**


There are a great many people that should be acknowledged here. It is my goal to thank a few of them for the role they had in bringing this document into existence. First I should thank my family, namely Mary Ann, Matt, and Mike, for all the wonderful support they have given me since before this dissertation was even thought of. They have allowed me to pursue those things that I was most passionate about with unconditional support. Thank you.

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEMPORARY CLOWN AND MR. WILLIAM

# SHAKESPEARE

## 1.1 BEGININGS

In May of 2010, having just completed my first year of PhD coursework at the University of Pittsburgh, I encountered a performance called *Aga-Boom* at the Pittsburgh International Children's Festival. The festival is operated by the Pittsburgh International Children's Theatre and endeavors to stage work of high artistic merit for children of a broad range of ages and from diverse international origins. *Aga-Boom* was staged by a group of comic performers with roots in the United States and Europe. The show featured three performers in colorful costumes, with large red noses and white face paint.  They were clowns, but not the type I had associated with children's birthday parties or television's Bozo the clown. These entertainers were mainly silent. They kept fumbling through incidents such as trying to press a button or clean the stage until eventually they covered the audience with paper ranging from large sheets to confetti to toilet paper and even giant balloon balls. The children in the audience were ecstatic. It was such a wonderful feeling of beauty and chaos. The production stuck with me.

Over time my *Aga-Boom* clown experience would lead into this dissertation. I had long been interested in Shakespeare and particularly his fools. There was something enticing about the seemingly comic characters set among all of the tragedy, or conversely fools like Feste

that seem to be the only sane person in a world of comic madness. I had thought I might write a dissertation on contemporary performances of fool characters, as they are infamously hard to portray on the modern stage. However, I kept encountering clowns, and at each instance I was drawn in and fascinated by how they worked to dispense with so many conventions of the narrative drama, the expectations of the audience, and even the degree of interactions with the audience. As I began to look further into clowns I realized two things. First, I wanted to know more about the style of work that *Aga-Boom* was engaged in, but there was not as much scholarly work on clowns as I wanted to read. Second, I found (and several others scholars such as David Wiles, John Towsen, and Louise Peacock found) clowns and Shakespeare, although they may initially seem like very different styles of performance, had a great deal in common. This dissertation seeks to address both of these concerns in a complimentary fashion. Shakespeare's deep thematic and performative links to clown enable me to identify and position the practices of contemporary clowning within larger theoretical and social frames. I argue that clown performance in and with Shakespeare uniquely illuminates three key features of contemporary clown performance: the flop, interruption, and audience play. I further argue that these three features are distinctively facilitated by Shakespeare in both text and performance which, in turn, demonstrates the potential of both clown and Shakespeare to not only disrupt theatrical conventions, but to imagine new relationships to social and political power structures.

This dissertation attempts not just to articulate key practices of contemporary clown, but to elaborate on how these elements of clown (flop, interruption, and audience play) provide alternatives to theatrical and social power systems. As Donald McManus argues in his work, modernist artists gravitated towards clown to break with tradition (*No Kidding*). Picking up on McManus's observation, I wish to examine how the practice of clown (as clown has taken

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shape in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) on its own and in particular in conjunction with Shakespeare, disrupts established, hegemonic, and/or presumed systems of value in performance and society. To this end, I ally the flop with Jack Halberstam's sense of the queer failure. Interruption finds echoes not only in the dramatic theories of Brecht, but also in de Certeau's notion of strategies and tactics. Audience play is put in conversation with the reconstructed Globe's theory of original practices in order to examine the relationship between the audience, performer, and history. Finally, in the conclusion, I analyze the cumulative effect of these clown (and clown/Shakespeare) practices in the contemporary theatre. Whereas much of contemporary Shakespeare production emphasizes the psychology of the character and therefore prizes the rendering of a believable character, clown instead emphasizes the work that goes into creating a theatrical performance. The clown, then, draws force not through the power of creating a believable character, but from exposing the work of artistic creation. A close analysis of clown and early modern Shakespeare practice reveals a complimentary relationship that proves one alternative to the dominant regimes of "realistic" performance.

## 1.2    CLOWNS (RE)MEET SHAKESPEARE

In 2013 Bill Irwin and David Shiner created and performed a clown review entitled *Old Hats* at the Signature Theatre in New York. Irwin and Shiner are two American clowns, and through their Broadway and television appearances are perhaps the best-known contemporary American clowns. *Old Hats* recalls one of the duo's most well known earlier works, 1993's *Fool Moon*. One routine, entitled "New Hats", depicts the clowns finding a bottle. When they open the bottle the silent clowns can suddenly speak. This is a break with all of the routines in the show, as

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every other piece has the clowns either silent or making non-verbal noise. The premise is that

speaking is not a trait natural to clowns: they should be silent. Once the bottle is open the clowns

sing a bit of "Oklahoma", then one clown speaks lines from Shakespeare, proclaiming "oh that

this too too solid flesh would melt." The clowns revel in their newfound ability to speak-- until

Shiner's clown begins quoting fascist dictators. Irwin decides it is better if clowns don't speak,

and he corks the speaking bottle. The routine shows many enjoyable things that clowns can do

with speech, such as Shakespeare and singing, but also shows a slippage into the negatives of

speech, like demagogical rhetoric. By the end of the scene, the recapping of the bottle indicates

that clowns should remain silent, and for the most part they do remain silent for the rest of the

performance. *Old Hats* thus positions Shakespeare as belonging to the world of words, and

clown as physical, existing in a non-verbal world. The humor relies on a dichotomy that clowns

and Shakespeare are fundamentally different. Clowns are for the world of silent, and

Shakespeare is for the world of speaking. However, the differences between clown and

Shakespeare are more in perception than in actual practice.

      While Irwin and Shiner's routine lumps Shakespeare in with a group of things

that are "not" clown, the relationship between clown and Shakespeare is far more complex.

Despite the fact that Shakespeare and clowns have been linked since the creation of the

playwright's work, an antagonism toward clown is often cited in Hamlet's advice to the players

"let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them" (III.ii. ln34-5) Harold

Bloom claims this speech is Shakespeare providing his thoughts on playing (*Poem* 45-49), and

director John Barton cites it as "best guide to an actor who wants to play Shakespeare" (6).[1] Yet,

Shakespeare wrote robust clown parts and worked with some of the preeminent clowns of his

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[1] Also see David Wiles's examination of this speech in *Shakespeare's Clown* vii-ix.

day, notably Robert Armin as the Fool in *King Lear* and Feste, and Will Kemp in the role of Dogberry, and quite possibly Falstaff. (*Company*, Gurr 218, 232). The persistent presence of clowns in Shakespeare indicates that at the genesis of his drama, clowns and Shakespeare kept close company. In the 18th century, David Garrick was loathe to show clowning pantomimes over Shakespeare and stated, "Sacred to Shakespeare was this plot designed, To pierce the heart, and humanize the mind, But if an empty house, the actor's curse, Shews us our Lears and Hamlets lose their force, Unwilling we must change the nobler scene, And in our turn, present you Harlequin" (Quoted in Disher 260).  Garrick's quote draws a line between the "sacred" Shakespeare and the comic Harlequin. Additionally, Garrick positions clown as one who can fill seats, while Shakespeare is enjoyed by a more selective crowd. The moral and artistic hierarchy implied by the actor manager reveals more about his (and to some extent his cultural moment's) opinion of Shakespeare and clowns than any inherit value. Richard Schoch's engaging volume on 19th century Shakespeare burlesques shows "the paradoxical ways in which plays that are manifestly 'not Shakespeare' . . . purported to be the most genuinely Shakespearean of all" (4). Schoch's volume explains how burlesque artists saw themselves as fighting back against the theatre's "corruption" of the playwright's work ("Introduction"). These examples all point towards a longstanding intermingling and parsing of comic forms and Shakespeare.  Whether separated or comingled, Shakespeare and clown in relation to one another function to expose aesthetic fashion, intellectual and artistic politics and cultural anxiety.

While anxieties about mixing Shakespeare and clown are seen in such places as Hamlet's speech, Garrick's disdain for pantomime, and the burlesques Schoch analyzes, this dissertation is concerned with different ways clowns and Shakespeare are popularly constructed in the late 20th and early 21st century. S. Schoenbaum chronicles the chroniclers of Shakespeare

in his magisterial *Shakespeare's Lives*, and notes that in the mid to late 18th century Shakespeare was "the undisputed monarch of English letters", but over the next hundred years idolatry would only grow. He goes on to chronicle many more biographers of Shakespeare before concluding that with Shakespeare biography, " every age craves its own synthesis; inevitably the attempt will be made. Meanwhile, Shakespeare abides" (99-100, 568). As the early chapters traced the rise and canonization of Shakespeare, by the end, the attempt to analyze Shakespeare is merely a forgone conclusion; one that Schoenbaum himself participates in. Writing in the late 1980s, Gary Taylor observes, "One of the orthodoxies that every previous history of Shakespeare's reputation has perpetuated, usually without argument, is an assurance of Shakespeare's place among the world's greatest writers." He goes on to challenge those critics who argue that Shakespeare is also "the greatest" by questioning the ideologies that seek to make the claims (373). In his argument, Taylor makes clear the institutionalization of Shakespeare. The playwright comes to stand for the "official" knowledge, something that clown often seeks to define itself in opposition to.

Some Shakespeareans place fewer limits on Shakespeare's greatness. Harold Bloom has written a wide range of books praising Shakespeare, but in his rumination on the uses of knowledge gained from literature in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* he states, "Wisdom literature teaches us to accept natural limits" and Shakespeare in particular, "is so large a form of thought and language, of persons in spiritual turmoil, and of intimations of transcendence blocked by realities that we scarcely have begun to understand and to absorb him" (5, 122-3). Bloom's analysis places Shakespeare as an almost secular Bible, charting out ways in which humans can discover more about themselves and their worlds through deep analysis of text. While Bloom is not the only voice on what Shakespeare means, he is certainly a popular one,

finding his way into places such as Ben Brantley's *New York Times* theatre reviews. Even while Bloom champions the clown-like Falstaff as one of Shakespeare's greatest creations he is careful to remove the character from any clown like surroundings. He finds Falstaff is neither "lord of misrule" nor "jester". Instead, Bloom rests Falstaff's greatness on his intelligence, "The freest of the free are Hamlet and Falstaff, because they are the most intelligent of Shakespeare's persons". Additionally, Bloom seems skeptical of the role in the theatre, instead finding Falstaff's greatness in the world of literature and high knowledge, placing him not among clowns but with Socrates (*Human*, 272, 271, 272-75). Shakespeare is at the heart of so many Western scholars' canons, and many, like Bloom, would fight all challengers to the Bard's singular reputation (even perceived degradations through performances in the theatre). In the view of critics like Bloom, Shakespeare is an indisputable source of Truth. Clown offers, perhaps, another kind of truth.

Wes 'Scoop' Nisker differs from Bloom in outlook and in the source of his wisdom. While Nisker is a radio host, humorist, and teacher of meditation, Bloom is a professor at Yale. Nisker finds wisdom not in literary readings of texts, but in what he calls "crazy wisdom". In his book *The Essential Crazy Wisdom*, he looks to clowns, fools, Eastern religious thinkers, and even Jesus as sources of knowledge, but he does so by positioning them as fools who would disown the orthodoxies that have grown around teachings. While Nisker may cite many of the same thinkers as Bloom (but expands to include those outside of Western thought), he would reject Bloom's methods of deep examination and intellectual contextualization, because, "Another claim of crazy wisdom is that humans don't know how to think. Or maybe we just think too much" (15). Crazy wisdom, "won't necessarily keep us warm at night but can make us more alive during the day" (25). Nisker's wisdom comes from many prophets, and he

sees the clown as an "everyman figure," one who is "pathetic and loveable, trying hard, but always failing and failing"(32-33). Importantly, for Nisker, figures such as clowns ally themselves "with the common folk", eschewing high culture and order (31). The clown leads people to laugh at themselves and the world, hence gesturing to a kind of truth, "exposing the many sides of truth until there is no truth" (23). The contrast between Bloom and Nisker can work as shorthand for perceived differences between Shakespeare and clown's reputations. One is constructed as high-brow, of the cultural elite, full of knowledge. The other is low-brow, and fun, and hints at ways to view the world off the beaten path. So, as Schoenbaum points out, "Meanwhile, Shakespeare abides", the biographies and critical monographs keep coming, national arts money pours into his propagation at the theatres, and movie stars gain artistic merit by playing his rules. Shakespeare is the center, clown is a periphery.

I contrast these views to show extremes on how Shakespeare and clowns are viewed. My brief and general overview above serves not to showcase the full range of what Shakespeare and clown are, but to point out how clown and Shakespeare have been positioned on the spectrum of high-brow/low-brow cultural production and theatre performance. Clown is often seen as popular, comedic, and physical, as in the case of Nisker. While the latter two points are true in most cases, clown is not always popular. The Fratellini brothers, popular French clowns from the early 20th century, catered their work to the intelligentsia (McManus 27). Certainly Beckett's use of clowns was often for an elite audience. Even Irwin and Shiner's performance at the Signature Theatre was mostly for those who can afford Off-Broadway tickets (although each man has done more popular work). Finally, Jacques Lecoq's (one of the fathers of modern clown) school can be expensive to attend and often creates students that do work for elite

theatres more than popular or accessible entertainment. All this said, if clown is not always popular, neither is Shakespeare always "high brow."

Some scholars, such as Bloom, often position Shakespeare as high class, tragic, and verbal, but such contentions have been challenged again and again for over 400 years. Shakespeare has been deployed as both high-brow and popular depending on the theatre or cultural force that wishes to use him at the time. This split dates back to the earliest performances of the plays when both popular and royal audiences watched (although mostly not in the simultaneous and grand fashion, as shown, for example, in *Shakespeare in Love*). Shakespeare wrote comedies in addition to tragedy, and his comic characters often intrude onto the tragic. Finally, language is a key part of any understanding of Shakespeare and his reputation, but this can be taken too far. Bloom finds that any performance of a play such as *Lear* will diminish the high intellectual understanding engendered by language (*Human* 512). While not sharing the same anti-theatrical bias, even Taylor praises Shakespeare's "intensely charged verse, sometimes rhymed, full of rare words, neologisms, archaisms, rhetorical constructions, classical allusions, cultivated ambiguities, multiple meanings, dense aural and rhythmical patterning" (406). Language is key to Shakespeare, but understandings of the play and popular perceptions of Shakespeare have always been subject to performance conditions. Think only of how often a man in puffy pants and a ruff holding a skull instantly evokes *Hamlet* --and even Shakespeare himself. More precisely, Gary Jay Williams states that with the rise of scenic realism, "a theatrical dimension intrinsic to the plays was lost, arguably affecting meaning as much as did

the alterations of Shakespeare's texts" (20). Shakespeare "means" not just through words, but in the evolving theatre that houses him. [2]

A look at the history of Shakespeare production showcases the importance of elements beyond the text. Early modern performances contained boy actors, placing emphasis on the unstable body, Victorian artists placed such emphasis on scenic elements they change the order of scenes to accommodate the sets, and the reconstructed Globe theatre insists that the open air thrust is an essential way of understanding Shakespeare's plays. The stage has constantly been trying to "save" Shakespeare from their predecessors, from Garrick's rescuing of Shakespeare, to Macready's, and down through to the present. Taylor stands in a sort or resigned awe at the present and sees, "In the second half of the twentieth century interpretations of Shakespeare, all claiming to be genuine, multiply even more rapidly than the fruit of that mythic mulberry [the tree Shakespeare supposedly planted]" (308). Through the process of constant evolution in Shakespeare performance, each age finds the idioms they need to create Shakespeare in their own image. Summing up years of Shakespearean interpretation in biography, editing, criticism, and performance, Taylor finds Shakespeare is a "black hole" due to his accumulated mass, "We find in Shakespeare only what we bring to him or what others have left behind" (411). Hard distinctions between Shakespeare and clown in terms of actual practice are hard to sustain, but there are distinctions in terms of cultural prominence.

Bloom's passionate positioning of Shakespeare at the center of the canon, Schoenbaum's chronicle of an ongoing quest to understand the man, and Taylor's survey of the work that went and continues to go into creating "Shakespeare" all showcase that Shakespeare is

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[2] Of course Shakespeare's words are not stable either, look to the long history of textual editing, such as that explored in Taylors work, or the Introductions to Arden editions of the plays, especially Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor's *Hamlet*.

central to Western literature, theatre, and culture. Taylor notes that such centrality is so prominent that Shakespeare becomes (often for worse) the standard by which other work is praised or found wanting, "Alan Ayckbourn is berated because he can write 'only' comedy, Tom Stoppard is put in his place because he cannot create sufficiently rounded 'characters,' Edward Bond has to be dismissed because he does not have or want Shakespeare's 'wonderful philosophical impartiality'" (386). Shakespeare is the gold standard to which art must achieve.[3] Clown, by contrast, is often defined by its very exclusion from such a central place. Lowell Swortzell states, "More important that a rubbery face, a fright wig, or a card file full of jokes is a point of view, a way of looking at the world that is different, unexpected, and perhaps even disturbing" (2). Nisker's view of crazy wisdom is similarly situated as something outside of conventional thought. Brecht figured himself as bringing clown *into* established Western theatre practice in order to disrupt it. The difference between clown and Shakespeare is not in their performance styles or their thematic content. Rather, the two forms share common staging concerns such the involvement of the audience both on the early modern and on Rylance' stage, and common themes, failure in *Macbeth* and 500 Clown. The difference, then, lies in how Shakespeare has been placed at the center of a value system, while clown is not afforded the same degree of critical attention or noted cultural circulation. What makes a comparison so fruitful is that the object at the center and the one of the periphery share a great deal in common.

Looking to the early modern past, Shakespeare and clown are closely linked. The word "clown" begins to take shape and enter usage in and around Shakespeare's theatre.

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[3] It is pertinent to note how Shakespeare's centrality is seen in both the United States and England. Taylor cites British examples, but Bloom, an American author, uses Shakespeare as a standard against which to judge all work in all time, including those of American authors. Worthen's work on Shakespeare acting also showcases strong similarities on both sides of the pond. Barton's popular video series has remained a fixture for American audiences, and Taylor notes that the RSC functions not just as a British standard for Shakespeare production, but a world wide one (304-5). The idea of Shakespeare's "singularity" is a strong in the United States and England.

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Shakespeare's plays of course contain clown characters, and while these performers share key differences with contemporary clowns, they do tend to stand apart from the world of the drama in important ways. Moreover, contemporary clown and early modern Shakespeare share similar concerns. *Macbeth* is obsessed with failure much as clowns center on the flop, *Lear* is a play with a clown that interrupts the mimetic character of the drama, and *Hamlet* and *Richard* both hinge on the central character's relationship to the audience. Not only did Shakespeare use clowns in his drama, but his concerns and dramatic practices often overlap with those of contemporary clowning. Therefore, when clown and Shakespeare mix in a contemporary moment, the mixture allows for fresh insights into the plays themselves.

One of the biggest current differences between clown and Shakespeare are located in performance practice. With the prevalence of psychologically centered acting approaches, Shakespeare's work has often been adopted by realist modes of theatrical creation. While this approach has produced many timely and engaging productions, there is always an obscuring of some facets of the text.[4] Contemporary realist Shakespeare allows one to better see the practices of clown by providing a complex foil. On one hand those productions of Shakespeare rooted in realism contrast with clown, highlighting what makes clown different from dominant realist practices. On the other hand, Shakespeare contains within every production a tension between the past and present: the "pastness" of the text and older performance traditions, and the current regimes[5] of practice used to articulate those texts. Clown cannot only define itself in contrast to realist performance, but also illuminates the tensions between past and present within Shakespeare performance. Due to the complex nature of Shakespeare performance, clown can

[4] For an analysis of how presumptions about character influence contemporary performers see Worthen's *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance,* discussed later in the dissertation.
[5] See Worthen's introduction for a discussion of regimies of performance.

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both define itself through a relationship to the well-known practices of Shakespeare, but also by exploring issues of contemporary Shakespeare performance as they relate to an early modern clown past.

The productive cross-pollination between Shakespeare and clown in the current moment can be seen in many productions. This dissertation focuses on the clowns 500 Clown Theatre and Bill Irwin, and then clown elements in Shakespeare performances by Antony Sher and Mark Rylance because they best illuminate the flop, interruption, and audience play. However, the amount of companies and performers that combine clown and Shakespeare is immense. Some examples are the DC based Faction of Fools, the work of Christopher Bayes, the Flying Karamazov's *Comedy of Errors,* Geordie Productions' *MöcSplat*, Cirque du Soleil's *Amaluna*, Pig Iron Theatre, the work of Theatre de la Jeune Lune, the work of Complicite, Kenneth Branagh's use of comedians in his Shakespeare films, various works of Peter Brooks, the work of Giorgio Strechler, and Dario Fo's work, just to name a sampling. This dissertation analyzes 500 Clown, Sher, Rylance, and Irwin because they best expose the central concerns of contemporary clown and how those concerns are reflected in the text and performance conditions of Shakespeare's work.

## 1.3    WHAT IS A CLOWN?

Just as Shakespeare has taken on many forms through history, clown has had many permutations over the last 4000 plus years. The term "clown" is rather ambiguous and has been used throughout history to refer to a variety of comic performers. While my focus is the contemporary Western performance practice known as clown, it is useful to understand where clown comes

from. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the earliest use of the word "clown" in the mid to late 16th century refers to "A countryman, rustic, or peasant," quickly evolving to emphasize a perceived lack of intelligence. The first listed use of "clown" to refer to "A fool or jester as a stage character" is in 1600. By 1727 the word comes to mean "one of the characters in a pantomime or harlequinade; also a similar character in a circus" ("clown, *n.*").[6] This latter definition is the most common reference for the contemporary clown. The circus and pantomime figures, with their often-extravagant costumes and makeup, create the popular perception of the red nosed, white faced, comic entertainer, often intended for children. Andrew McConnell Stott describes the popular perception of a clown as marked by, "their flapping shoes, hoop-waisted trousers, and streams of multi-coloured handkerchiefs more evocative of forced laughter and jaded memories than genuine fun (XVI)". This conception of clown may be the most popular in the United States at this moment, but does not encompass the long historical roots of the figure, nor does it contain the current form of comic entertainer that is the primary focus of this dissertation. The contemporary clown, while the practitioner of a unique and historically situated performance style, is part of a long history of clown performers.

While the English word "clown" is relatively new, some form of clowning has existed for thousands of years, dating back to early Egyptian, Hopi, and Greek cultures. The clown can take on many forms, a buffoon, a fool, and parasite, and many other guises. John Towsen states that "In many cultures, the artificial fool – the clown, the jester – is an individual selected by the society to enact a very important role, and clowning thus becomes institutionalized, an integral part of the community life" (6). The clown has shown up across time to fill a variety of social and religious functions. While the English term "clown" dates from around the late the 16th

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[6] The OED lists "clown" appearing as a verb as early as 1600. The verb form refers to playing a clown part, or making something else clown-like or humorous.

century, fools or clowns in some form are found in Egypt as early as the 23rd century BCE (Welsford 36), in Greece at the latest by the 5th century BCE (Welsford 4), and Hopi religious ceremonies that may date as early as 1000 BCE (Zarrilli et. all 2). These wide ranging performances served various social, religious, and entertainment needs in a variety of cultures across a broad expanse of time.

Clown scholars Welsford and Towsen track the development over time in the form of religious customs, fool societies, the commedia dell'arte, court fools, stage clowns, and eventually pantomime and circus figures that form the basis for the current understanding of clown. Clown historians (Hoh and Rough 198, Huey 294, Speaight *Clowns* 29) often single out the 19th century British pantomime star Joseph Grimaldi as a key figure in clown history because his antics and costume helps shape the current conception of a zany and extravagantly costumed clown. In his biography of the famous clown, Andrew McConnell Stott is but one historian to label Grimaldi the "father of modern clowning" (xv). While clown is sprawling and imprecise in its history, Grimaldi did as much as any individual to create the modern sense of a Western clown. Rodney Huey also notes the importance to clown history the Frenchman Jean-Gaspard Deburau's Pierrot[7], a "hopeless romantic" to contrast with Grimaldi's "haphazard actions reminiscent of a country bumpkin." These contrasting images are where Huey notes the ancestors of contemporary wild "auguste" clowns and more dignified "whiteface" clowns (294-5). Grimaldi and Deburau are some of the earliest recognizable ancestors of the contemporary circus clown. They and their clown comrades' place in a diverse and long history points at an essential human desire to contact the comic and the earthly (in opposition or conjunction with the

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[7] For a further look at the melancholy clown and the Pierrot tradition look to Louisa E. Jones's *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots*. French Forum Publishers, Lexington KY, 1984.

divine). These roots provide the starting point for the particular articulation of this desire that is contemporary clown.

When this dissertation speaks of "contemporary clown" it refers to a theatrical performance style that draws on clown's long history in pantomime, circus, vaudeville, and drama to create a comic performance style rooted in failure, breaking the rules, and a relationship with the audience. In the 20th century, Brecht found in the clown's performance an example of the alienation effect, and praised Charlie Chaplin as an actor suited to the epic theatre (*Theatre,* 91, 56) Jacques Copeau observed of the clowns he found at the Parisian Cirque Medrano, "The superiority they have over theatre actors is that they are a real brotherhood, a corporation, people working together, unable to do without one another, people with a difficult craft and artisans of a living tradition" (162). Jean Cocteau found inspiration in the famous Parisian clown trio the Fratellini. These three men performed at the Cirque Medrano in Paris, often using elaborate stage props in their long form clown routines. Copeau and Cocteau sought to infuse their theatre practice with something that reached beyond the everyday to some form of truth or transcendence, while still seeming to be in touch with a popular audience. Clowns, such as the Fratellini, provided a perceived alternative to theatrical training of the day. McManus argues the Fratellini were actually catering to intellectuals, and so their acts were not popular entertainment at all, but rather possessed a sort of feigned naivety (McManus 25-27). Regardless of actual roots of performers like the Fratellini, many key figures of the 20th century theatre included clowns in their work.

Clowns became a go-to source for theatrical innovators of the 20th century. Among the artists inspired by clowns were Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Dario Fo, and Vsevolod Meyerhold, to name some of the most prominent. The great clown stars of the early screen also

infiltrated the imagination of theatrical thinkers, with the Marx Brothers influencing Antonin Artaud and Brecht drawing inspiration from Charlie Chaplin (Artaud, 142, Brecht, 56[8]). Most of these artists rely on clown to further their own artistic or theoretical projects, finding in the practices and/or imagery (red noses, white face paint, the Pierrot costume) of the clown a popular form in defiance of bourgeoisie values, an authentic expression of skill and emotion, comedy that challenged the seriousness of perceived high culture pieties, and/or anarchy in form. Artists like Beckett and Fo both used the practices and imagery of clown. They also created new clown images, such as the tragic-comic appropriation of the bowler hat for Beckett's sad clowns in *Waiting for Godot*. Of all the artists who used clown as part of the artistic agenda, Jacques Lecoq's use of clown in his school for theatrical movement did the most to influence 20th Century clown practice.

The mid-century Parisian clown teacher Lecoq positioned clown as a central feature of his actor movement-training program, and clown gained popularity as a form of theatrical training due in large part to Lecoq's teaching. At his school, founded in 1956, he postulated that an actor's private insecurities are the basis for clown performance, but stressed such personal material can only become worth presenting to the public via physical training. Lecoq states, "This discovery of how personal weakness can be transformed into dramatic strength was the key to my elaboration of a personal approach to clowning" (*Moving* 145). The essence of a Lecoq clown, and hence much of contemporary clown, is the playful exposure of personal weakness. Lecoq is perhaps the most important figure in the conception of the contemporary clown. When aspiring circus artist Duncan Wall searched for the roots of clown, he was told, "Lecoq is where we begin developing the spirit of the modern clown" (210 Wall).

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[8]  de Certeau, while not a clown scholar also draws on Chaplin in his theoretical work. See Practice of the Everyday pg. 98

As such, a vast amount of contemporary clown teachers use Lecoq as a starting point, even if they find alternative points of emphasis.

Most major clown teachers have some link to Lecoq. Philippe Gaulier, who has run his own schools with clown as an area of study both in Paris and London, started as a student and then teacher at Lecoq's school. He critiques Lecoq for too much of an emphasis on the physical look of a performance, but is still invested in a sense of flop and play. Gaulier has many famous students including Sacha Baron Cohen, Roberto Benigni, and Emma Thompson (Cavendish "From"). In the United States Carlo Mazzone-Clementi and Jane Hill (who had contact with Lecoq) founded the Del Arte International School of Physical Theatre and taught clown in Blue Lake, California. Along with other teachers, these individuals created practices of clown that emphasized clowning not just as ritual or circus art, but as a set of physical comedy skills of use to actors in all manner of dramatic context.

The work of Lecoq and his students, contextualized by Brecht, Beckett and others, has crafted a sense of clown as a theatrically sophisticated performance form. My dissertation seeks to contribute to the field of clown study and practice by identifying, theorizing and defining key elements of clown heretofore unexamined: namely the flop, interruption, and audience play.[9] This dissertation thus builds and expands on clown work that has come before it.

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[9] Related to the rise of the contemporary clown is new vaudeville and new circus movement. See particularly the work of Ernest Albrecht.

## 1.4     EXISTING WORK ON CLOWNS


While the contemporary theatrical clown's presence is clearly felt in theatrical productions, this presence is not as clearly reflected in academic discourse. However, various authors have contributed to a narrative of clown across time and in the contemporary moment. My work engages with this material, building on historical understandings and engaging with contemporary theoretical constructions. Existing work on clown falls into two primary categories. The first is histories of clown across time, which examine how the figure has evolved and often identifying a playful or irreverent spirit that pervades in many cultures, but manifests itself in different forms. The second category consists of pieces that examine the current practice of clown, either in the forms of teaching manuals or analysis of clown. While the latter category is more immediately pertinent to the dissertation's goal of situating contemporary US and British clown practice within social discourses through juxtaposition with Shakespeare, my work also adds to the continuing narrative of clown history and how clowns have interacted with Shakespeare across time.

While there are several strong books on clown history, there is a small trend, even among academics, to treat clown lightly both in terms of content and form.  At times the lack of seriousness in clown performances has resulted in a decision to not take them seriously in print. For this sort of work I would point to Lowell Swortzell's book *Here Come the Clowns*.  While containing a decent survey of clowns across time, the book sidesteps defining a clown, and its presentation with cartoon pictures and large type undercuts authority.  In addition, it is thinly sourced and most claims go uncited.  Additionally, Laurence Senelick has a book on clowns, and this too is a slender volume with only basic facts and was later turned into a coloring book.  At times academics turn to clown for lighter fare.

Of the several serious chronicles of clown history, one of the best is John H. Towsen's 1976 book, *Clowns: A Panoramic History of Fools and Jesters, Medieval Mimes, Jongleurs and Minstrels, Pueblo Indian Delight Makers and Cheyenne Contraries, Harlequins and Pierrots, Theatrical Buffoons and Zanies, Circus Tramps, Whitefaces, and Augusts*. The lengthy subtitle alludes to the wide diversity of clown characters throughout time. True to the cumbersome title, there are a wide variety of comic performers that fall under Towsen's rubric of clown. Not only does the book usefully catalog clowns, it also differentiates among temporally evolving trends. For example, Towsen astutely points to the evolution of several buffoon characters into wise characters as that clown's type grows in popularity. This sort of attention to historical continuities combined with the book's breadth gives a strong introduction to Western clowning through the 1970's. This publication date prevents Towsen from engaging with the rise of the contemporary theatrical clown, the main topic of this dissertation. As such, the book provides the context and roots of the contemporary clown, without actually addressing its own history or performance style. My work expands on Towsen, picking up where he left off. Other books on clowns have even an even greater focus on clown figures from the distant past.

Enid Welsford makes one of the strongest contributions to clown scholarship in *The Fool: His Social and Literary History,* a book with a focus on the distant past of fools. While differences exist between clowns and fools (ones addressed in detail in chapter two) they often share similar roots and functions. As such, the book is an impressive tome from 1966 and chronicles a wealth of comic entertainers with a great amount of historical detail. Looking to Rome and Greece, and then medieval Europe, Welsford identifies and chronicles a long history of comic mischief-makers throughout time. The aim of this book is to illuminate fool figures from the past, and once again shows the lineage and commonalities of clown figures across time

without ever addressing the rise of the contemporary theatrical clown. The book provides a great amount of information, but often does not clearly provide proof for some of its claims. While many clown scholars refer back to this work, some portions of the book must be taken on faith. Faults aside, Welsford does provide a great deal of social analysis and information of historically contextualized clowns and fools, if often from a very distant past.

M. Wilson Disher's 1968 book, *Clowns and Pantomimes,* takes a similarly long historical view, but with a tighter focus on clown figures, as opposed to just comic characters. Looking at various clowns from classical conceptions through Grock, Disher provides a chronicle history and posits ideas as to the function of clowning and humor. The book also contains a history of British pantomimes, and one section focuses specifically on tensions between Shakespeare and this popular form. Disher's history examines one point in this history of antagonism in the English world between Shakespeare and popular comic forms. One of the main drawbacks of this book is the publication date. Just like Welsford and Towsen's book, Disher's is published before the rise of the 20th century theatrical clown. All three books provide expansive narratives of clowns from the past and how these forms and practices changed over time. While my work does not take the transhistorical view, it does add to the narratives established by these clown scholars.

While the three previous books deal with clown on a macro level, there are several authors who deal with specific clown histories in eras immediately preceding my areas of study. Tristian Remy's *Clown Scenes* is a valuable archive of "clown scripts" from early 20th century France. In addition to preserving scenes performed by clowns, Remy gives a brief history of the French clowns. The fading of clowns and circuses of the mid twentieth century prompted his work. As such, in addition to the brief history of clowns, Remy provides an archive of clown

material, something that is usually only recorded in anecdotes or stories. While the actual clown scripts lose much of their power without the actual performers' execution, these scripts do provide some insight into actual clown material that inspired much of contemporary theatrical clowning.

Another specific clown history is Robert Hornback's *The English Clown Tradition From the Middle Ages to Shakespeare*, which provides multiple examples of the use of clown in the aforementioned periods of English history. Hornback pays special attention to the role of clowns in religious rituals and drama, pointing out how the characters were morally and racially inflected in terms of their intelligence. For example, he finds proto-black face in Middle Age devil characters, with performers conflating darkness of skin, moral deprivation, and a lack of intelligence. His analysis also looks at clown types that provided inspiration for Shakespeare's use of clown characters on stage. The focused histories of Remy and Hornback provide information on clowning that preceded the two key areas of this study, the contemporary theatrical clown and Shakespeare's drama. All of the histories add to an understanding of both what clowns are and how they have changed over time. The works also establish that clown and Shakespeare have long been associated with one another. My work seeks to explore one of the most recent iterations of this relationship between the two.

This dissertation adds to the history of clown, but also engages with emerging work on theorizing contemporary clown. One of the most sound and theoretically grounded investigations of clown is provided in Louise Peacock's book *Serious Play*. Here Peacock not only identifies a great deal of clown actors, but also creates a theoretical frame with which to talk about them. She draws from Lecoq and behavioral theories to state that "play" is the unifying idea of clown performance. She proceeds to analyze many clown routines across time (with a focus on the

contemporary) and notes that often clown play pushes against rules and accepted values. Peacock covers a great deal of clown material, and much of it focuses on contemporary clown practice. This dissertation builds on her work by giving more focused attention to clown in relation to Shakespeare. Additionally, while an idea of play informs my work, I identify three different areas of focus through which to understand clown as a uniquely contemporary performance mode.

Donald McManus's *No Kidding! Clown as Protagonist in Twentieth-Century Theatre* also examines clown practice in the contemporary moment, and focuses on the theatre. McManus traces the appearance and influence of clown on various directors and writers of the 20th century theatre. This book comes closest, in many ways, to my own project. His work focuses strongly on the ways playwrights and theatrical directors have used clown to provide alternative dramaturgical structures and exploited various connotations of clowns, such as humor, sadness, freedom, or playfulness. McManus's focus is on clowning as a system of performance and iconography taken from the late 19th and early 20th century, as opposed to an operational form in the late 20th and early 21st. As such, his work is less concerned with how clown has changed in the last fifty years, and more concerned with how theatrical artist have used older visions of clown to create their own work. This dissertation and McManus both start with many of the same clowns and theatrical teachers from the early 20th century, but while McManus tracks the influence on the scripted theatre, I look to the alternative world of the clown theatre.

Joel Schechter's body of work deals with developments in clowning and the use of clowns by dramatists throughout the 20th century. Through multiple works on clown, Schechter has covered both Brecht's persistent use of clowns and chronicled contemporary clowns like the

Pickles Family Circus. In *Durov's Pig* Schechter gives plentiful case studies of how clowns have operated as political agents, not just in Brecht, but across the 20th century theatre. Schechter identifies the clown's improvisation, wit, humor, and dramaturgy as having decidedly political implications. In addition to such politically invested work, Schechter's chronicles some of the most important 20th century American clowns in his interviews with the Pickles Family Circus members. This archive provides not just a history of the troupe, but reveals a multitude of practitioner's opinions about what clowns should be doing, with some clowns questioning how political the actions can be. My work is indebted to Schechter in a two-fold manner. First, he provides an example of how to examine the political and social implications of clowning, a central question of the dissertation. Second, his work has provided an archive of important contemporary clowns, giving access to their opinions and working methods. I see this dissertation as both employing the archives Schechter created and analyzing the previously under-investigated relationship between Shakespeare and contemporary clown.

Finally, there are books written by clown teachers about what constitutes clown and how one goes about learning to be a clown. These works form the backbone of the dissertation. They are selected because they are the existing texts that most clearly articulate what a contemporary clown is. While much knowledge about clowning is currently held exclusively in actual practices and schools, these texts provide a strong account of what contemporary clowning is. By treating their practice as theory, and putting the theatrical theory in conversation with social theories, it is possible to understand not just what a contemporary clown is, but what the significance of that clown is. Lecoq's two texts, *The Moving Body* and *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, are the foundational texts of contemporary clown practice. John Wright's *Why is that so Funny* incorporates the teachings of both Lecoq and Gaulier to create his definition and training of

clown practice. Wright is a British teacher and director who focuses on physical comedy, and has helped found the groups Trestle Theatre Company and Told by an Idiot. Eli Simon, is a professor at the University of California Irvine and wrote *The Art of Clowning* based on his experiences teaching and directing clowns, notably with the troupe CLOWNZILLA. Jon Davison trained under Gaulier, works professionally as a clown, and is pursuing a PhD focused on clown at Central School of Speech and Drama in London. His book, *Clown*, details not only a theory of contemporary practice, but gives a clown's eye survey of clown history. These four books are the bedrock of this dissertation's conception of the contemporary clown and represent the major thinking on clown training that is available in published form.[10] While these men have differences in their conception of clown, all of the works address the idea of the flop, interruption, and audience play (either explicitly or implicitly). As such, this dissertation seeks both to establish the presence of flop, interruption, and audience play in the existing clown literature, and then to position these terms within critical performance and social theory.

My work expands on and engages with all of the above work. In terms of clown history, my dissertation is an analysis of contemporary theatrical clown, a form not fully explored in the existing narratives. In relation to theoretical work, it engages with the ideas of clown theories, but purposes different points of emphasis. Namely, I argue that contemporary clown can best be understood in terms of flop, interruption, and audience play. Further, I add a specific account to an ongoing and transhistorical conversation about the relationship between Shakespeare and

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[10] There are other books on clown practice, such as Wes McVicar's *Clown Act Omnibus*, but this work seems geared towards clowns entertaining children or civic events, and is about a different style of clown than that discussed here. There are other clown books such as McVicars that are also not used because they are talking about a different style and conception of clown. Regrettably Veronica Coburn and Sue Morrison's *Clown Through Mask*, became available too far into the dissertation's creation to be used as a primary text. However, while their books does chart unique insights, it shares many commonalities with the works used in the dissertation.

clowns. Having looked at how my work fits into a broad and ongoing conversation about clowns, I will now explicate the specific way in which I further and engage with this conversation.

## 1.5    CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Each case study defines a key aspect of contemporary clown, positions this aspect within current performance and social theory, connects these concerns to those present in Shakespeare's work, then finally uses a Shakespeare/clown performance as a specific example of how the element of clown performance negotiates power systems both within the theatrical frame and beyond it. The chosen performances are each suited to highlighting a given aspect of clown, and how that aspect of clown relates to Shakespeare. The chosen performances also address the broad influence of Shakespeare and clown, covering clown performances, more conventional contemporary Shakespeare performance that uses clown, and the deep influence of clown on the original practices movement. The first case study focuses on the flop and its relationship to failure as seen in 500 Clown Theatre's *500 Clown Macbeth*. The second chapter addresses interruption's ability to upset the expectations of the audience as established by previous stage and cultural encounters with a given work. The chapter examines Adrian Noble and Antony Sher's 1982 production of *King Lear* at the Royal Shakespeare Company to understand interruption. Chapter three juxtaposes Mark Rylance's use of clown audience play with the reconstructed Globe's claims to authenticity. I use Rylance's 2000 performance of *Hamlet* and 2012 performance of *Richard* III to demonstrate how Rylance uses many of the same techniques as contemporary clowning , and in doing so creates an alternative clown style engagement with Shakespeare in the present moment. The conclusion addresses how the three key clown elements (flop, interruption,

and audience play) cumulatively create performances of clown Shakespeare that emphasize the process and effort that goes into creating a theatrical performance instead of focusing on "believably" creating a psychologically based character.

Chapter one, "Failure through the Flop and Playful views of Authority in *500 Clown Macbeth*", establishes the flop as one of the primary tools of contemporary clown performance. Drawing heavily on Lecoq, the flop is defined as clowns' ability to make engaging performance from a performer's anxieties or failures on stage. Clown flop, I contend, dovetails with Jack Halberstam's articulation of the "queer art of failure", whereby failure imagines alternative futures and ways of being in the world. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a play riddled with anxiety about failure, primarily centering around the power of royal inheritance. Within the play, the witches imagine a world that exists outside of binaries of traditionally conceived success and failure. 500 Clown theatre's production of *Macbeth* is based in the flop, ostensibly presenting the three actors' inability to perform the play. Through the flop of the play, the clowns find new means to succeed, hinting at an alternative response to restrictive power structures.

The second chapter, "There ought to be Clowns: Antony Sher and the Clowns Haunting *Lear",* identifies interruption not just as a key feature of contemporary clowning, but of clowns across time. Whereas flop is an internal structure of clown dramaturgy, interruption defines clown's relationship to the structures and genres it plays with. De Certeau's conception of strategies and tactics provides a linguistic and social frame to conceive of how clowns cleverly play within contexts (such as dramatic plays) in manners not intended by their creators. I argue, that a close understanding of clown reveals that Shakespeare's *King Lear* contains a clown character that interrupts the very play he exists within, thereby using the early modern clown performance tradition within the text of the play. Antony Sher's 1982 performance of the Fool

capitalizes on the clowning within the play itself to interrupt established expectations about the play at the RSC. In doing so, Sher and his production challenge a Conservative conception of static ahistorical British "heritage."

The third chapter, "Ambition in the Fool": Mark Rylance's Clowning for the Audience", charts the relationship between clown audience play and Original Practices. Davison explains how audience play is what leads to an association between clowns and authenticity. The reconstructed Globe reaches toward historical authenticity by supposed replications of early modern playing conditions. Both Hamlet and Richard III are characters that draw dramatic force from their relationship to the audience. Mark Rylance exploits the audience relationship to a degree not found in mainstream productions when he plays these two characters at the Globe. I argue that Rylance is using many of the same techniques of clown in order to activate Shakespeare's characters for a contemporary audience. Rylance's clowning uses not just audience play, but also flop and interruption in order to reframe the audience's experience of a "Shakespeare play". In doing so, Rylance creates a more intimate relationship with the audience, one based on sharing with Shakespeare instead of merely receiving great ideas from a bastion of cultural authority.

The conclusion examines Bill Irwin's Shakespeare work to showcase how flop, interruption, and audience play work cumulatively to chart out a vision of Shakespeare that differs from the contemporary theatrical practice as presented by major producers of Shakespeare such as the RSC or National Theatre. Significant contemporary Shakespeare performance and criticism focuses on the singularity and mimetic power of Shakespeare's characters as psychological entities.  In contrast, clown's power rests on exposing the work --.i.e. the physical labor, the material exertion--that goes into creating a theatrical performance. Irwin's

performance showcases the work that he puts into creating a theatrical character and a theatrical event as a whole. By decentering character Irwin emphasizes the audience's relationship to Shakespeare in this moment as opposed to a static value ascribed to mimetic character across time. Clown emphasizes the work of doing Shakespeare in the theatre instead of a notion that performance merely articulates a static meaning present in the text, and thereby creates the possibility of what Jill Dolan terms performative utopias, or fleeting moments of intense emotional engagement that imagine better futures without relying on transhistorical values.

This dissertation adds to an understanding of both Shakespeare and of clown. First, it adds theoretical understanding to the practices of contemporary clown, an area underrepresented in scholarly research. This dissertation positions clown not only as a theatrical practice, but as a social practice by enumerating how key practices of clown (flop, interruption, and audience play) model alternative forms of engagement with authority. Second, this work adds to ongoing discussions about how Shakespeare functions in performance. Clown charts out clear alternatives to practices of realism, and in doing so allows for interpretations of Shakespeare's work that stand outside of mimetic and character-centered analysis. My project also expands on existing scholarship about the initial productions of Shakespeare's work, and the vast difference in practice between the "then" and "now" of Shakespeare performance. By analyzing both contemporary clown and Shakespeare performance practice this dissertation seeks to voice an alternative way of going about a given task, a sentiment that is key to clowning. Even if that alternative will someday become normative, the spirit of investigating the "flops" and "what ifs" of another way of existing is at the heart of clown practice across time, with, in and on Shakespeare.

# 2.0 CHAPTER ONE: FAILURE THROUGH THE FLOP AND PLAYFUL VIEWS OF AUTHORITY IN *500 CLOWN MACBETH*

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

John Townsen recounts a performance of the early 20th century theatre clown superstar Grock:

> his partner tries to force him to remove his hat, Grock takes refuge on top of the piano rather than reveal his baldness, and then comes sliding down to the ground on the piano lid, which has been propped up against the side of the piano. Returning to his chair, he falls right through it when the seat collapses. The same thing happens with a new chair. Grock sits on another chair, and it likewise collapses. Here he executes his famous jump to the back of the chair" (251)

From here the clown begins to play the piano with his rear end. The Swiss performer started in the circus, moved into theatres, and became an international super star playing to sold out houses across Europe. His routines typically involved musical instruments, such as an act that involved trying to catch a violin bow. Grock could only catch the bow when standing behind a screen that hid him from the audience. Later in the act he catches the bow in front of the audience but only when the catch is no longer the center of the act. The piano and violin bow

routines derive their humor from an indicative element of clown performance: the flop. The flop is a standard convention of 20th century clown and is the inability to perform the given task within the context of the clown act. In order for a flop to function the audience must have an understanding of how a given object (in this case a piano and chair), task, or sequence is supposed to work. Henri Bergson theorizes that laughter results from watching others perform actions incorrectly. For Bergson, laughter serves as a corrective and encourages the object of laughter (the person performing wrongly) to amend his or her ways and perform the given task "correctly" next time.

Grock's adventures with the piano chair are an example of the flop; he attempts to sit but is unable to do so. While the flop relies on Bergson's idea of incongruous humor, the clown flop's end is not a restatement of a conventional relationship (ie, the correct way to play a piano). As opposed to Bergson's conceptualization of the "corrective," I suggest the clown flop offers a new way to find success. Grock cannot sit on the chair and play the piano in the proper sense, but he can repurpose the chair and use it to play the piano with his butt. The clown's actions are a *failure* to use the chair and the piano as their makers prescribed, and instead offer a new way to use the objects. The humorous repurposing of the piano and chair is a *flop*. In his appraisal of the practice of clowning, Jon Davison states, "This admission of failure is the bedrock upon which most clown training of the last half-century has been founded" (3, 2013). I argue that the flop's ability to find new success in what is conventionally seen as failure creates possibilities outside of standard practices of authority.

Grock subverts the authority of the chair and piano, but a clown can use the flop to fail with material of far greater importance. The furniture and instrument's authority rests in a sense of tradition; most of the clown's audience knows these objects and recognizes when they are

used inappropriately. The stakes of the flop can be increased when the object of the flop is changed from small objects like a chair to something as powerful as governmental authority. The flop creates ways to resist authority by failing to interact with it in the prescribed method. John Fletcher cites the example of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA). The group of clowns arrives at a convention of Minutemen who wish to decrease the passage of people through the Mexican/United States boarder. The clowns join in the protest, but their words take the Minutemen's rhetoric to satirical extremes. Fletcher summarizes CIRCA's modus operandi, "Clowns appear and do funny things that disrupt or confuse authoritarian semiotics" (230) and eventually concludes their playful tactics point to a world that not only resists the Minutemens' conservative rhetoric, but imagines identity outside of the neo-liberal construct of citizenship. Although Fletcher does not use the idea of clown flops in his analysis, CIRCA's tactics clearly demonstrate the flop's political potential when applied to discourses of state power instead of chairs. By using the clown, CIRCA fails to be citizens and imagines new relationships between the individual and the state. The clowns create resistance through idiocy; they don't know how to use the object or system of rules correctly so they must find success outside of conventional use. CIRCA demonstrates how the idea of failure can be used to analyze the implications of the flop outside of the immediate confines of a clown routine.

For the purposes of this chapter the flop refers to a technique of clown performance while failure is a social action that refuses, through incompetence or purpose, to comply with the prescribed use of the system or object. Using Judith Halberstam's[11] theoretical formulation of failure as a form of resistance, I will show how the Chicago based 500 Clown Theatre's production of *500 Clown Macbeth* employs the flop to ridicule and undermine a governing

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[11] Halberstam now identifies as Jack, but this case study represents the name and pronouns used at the date of *The Queer Art of Failure's* publication.

authority, the canonicity of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Shakespeare's play is particularly well suited to my proposed analysis because it uses representations of failure to interrogate cultural and social anxieties about governing authority (male succession, lineage, divinity of kings). 500 Clown exploits Shakespeare's *Macbeth's* depictions of failure to create a simplified universe that rejects prescribed usage through an inversion of theatrical convention's authority. Shakespeare's multifaceted view of authority provides 500 Clown with a raw material of failure; in turn, 500 Clown creates a fun house mirror that highlights not just Macbeth's elements of failure, but subjects the play itself and its performance conventions to the structure of the clown flop, expanding Shakespeare's use of alternate relations to authority through failure by flopping Shakespeare's own accumulated authority, imaged or otherwise.

Shakespeare and 500 Clown render their visions of governing authority with differing degrees of detail, but both rely on a system of expected interaction with that authority. The use of the term "governing authority" is meant to mark out the kind of authority used by these two plays as opposed to more mundane authorities, such as the use of a piano chair in the case of Grock. The logic of Bergsonian humor, the flop, and failure all rest on the idea that there is a correct way to interact with a given object or system. Clowns often employ "low stakes" objects to perform a flop. Lou Jacobs, the famed American circus clown, would try to brush a spotlight's beam away with a broom. Eventually the laws of physics are playfully upended and he found a solution (Fife 20). Jacob's action is not inherently political, but does suppose a way of existing outside of prescribed use and authority. Similarly, flopping governing authority may not have a specific political valence in *500 Clown Macbeth*, but the performance still offers an alternative form of interaction that imagines new ways of interfacing with the system of authority and, contingently, of engaging with Shakespeare. The emphasis of the clown flop is not on

charting a specific form of political opposition, but in humorously suggesting the limits placed on an agent's actions when they obey the given terms of use. A flop supposes there are many ways to productively deal with any system or object.

In this chapter I will look to the teachings of clown trainer Jacques Lecoq, and how his practice is indicative of the widespread use of the flop in contemporary clowning. Following this analysis I will use Judith Halberstam's study of failure to elucidate the social potentials of the flop. After establishing the terms of flop and failure, I will demonstrate how the witches' uses of failure within the mimetic world of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* demonstrate ways of existing outside of the prescribed system of monarchal power present in Shakespeare's lifetime. Expanding on this analysis of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* I will show how 500 Clown builds upon the failure of power systems in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and subjects that play to the practices of the clown flop in order to model incessant questioning as a way of existing outside of established systems of power in the early 21st century.

## 2.2    LECOQ AND HALBERSTAM: TOWARD A THEORY OF FLOP, FAILURE, AND PLAYFUL NEW WORLDS

The flop, or some form of the flop, is used in many iterations of 20th century clowning. As explained in the Introduction, Jacques Lecoq is one of, if not the most, important teacher in 20th century clown practice. Carlo Mazzone-Clementi and Jane Hill, founders of the Dell' Arte School in California and leading influences on modern clown development in the United States credit Lecoq alongside Marcel Marceau as great influences on their work (85 Mazzone and Hill). Lecoq's students include John Wright, Simon McBurney, one of the co-founders of the British

Theatre company Complicite, and Philippe Gaulier.  Lecoq has had an almost incalculable effect on the development of modern Western clown through his teaching, and through the teaching done by his students and his student's students.  Although not all of these subsequent teachers follow a strict outline of how to be a clown, they all draw from or react against concepts made popular by Lecoq, the most notable concept being the flop.

Lecoq directly and indirectly influenced the members of 500 Clown. Leslie Danzig served as a consultant on the first production, and soon became the company's director.  She studied with Lecoq in Paris and Gaulier in London. Her husband, Adrian Danzig, studied with Gaulier before becoming an actor, artistic director and founder of 500 Clown.  Another founding member of the group, Paul Kalina, worked with the Dell'Art School. Many of the artists also have a link to the Big Apple Circus, which roots' are in the new circus movements springing out of France at the same time Lecoq was developing his school.  These direct and indirect links to Lecoq's training and hence the flop indicate the diverse points of influence on 500 Clown.

Lecoq founded a theatrical movement school in Paris, the l'Ecole Internationale de Theatre Jacques Lecoq in 1956. He taught at the school throughout his life, and although Lecoq died in 1999, the school continues to function on his model: one year of work in basic types of theatrical movement, followed by a second year where selected students are invited to return and explore "dramatic types" in more detail.  One of these types is the clown. Essential to Lecoq's understanding of clown is the basic concepts of play.  Lecoq defines play as, "when, aware of the theatrical dimensions, the actor can shape an improvisation for spectators using rhythm, tempo, space, form" (*Moving* 167).   Play is focused on awareness of movement and situation, and is an extension of replay, which is an enacting of lived experiences.  Replay has no sense of an audience whereas play encompasses the ability to craft the movement and sensitivity of

experienced movement into material that is engaging for an audience. It is only authentic

sensitivity that results in improvisations. Lecoq uses an example of "The Childhood Bedroom."

The task does not require one to remember what her own childhood bedroom was like, but rather

to use past experiences to share with the audience the moment of remembrance relating to an old

object. Lecoq was moved by a girl improvising finding an old ring, it did not matter if this was a

real ring from her past or not, only that she was able to use the material of her life to create an

improvisation through play (*Moving* 30). The past is important, but it only informs the

improvisation that is created. The idea of play is vital to all of Lecoq's future work including the

flop.

Clown play requires the greatest amount of exposure from the performer. Lecoq's clown

tradition comes from his examination of the links between commedia and the circus clown, but

the result is vitally centered on the individual performer: "The clown doesn't exist aside from

the actor performing him. We are all clowns" (*Moving* 145). The mask work of previous lessons

comes to fruition in the red nose, "the smallest mask in the world, which would help people to

expose their naïveté and their fragility" (*Moving* 145). Exposure is key for Lecoq, for if the

clown starts from a personal space which allows him to reveal himself and play through a mode

that is often comic. Lecoq recounts when he asked all of the students to sit in a circle and for

each student to get up and make the others laugh. This proves immensely difficult. Laughter is

created only when the students returned to the circle in defeat, "It was at that point, when they

saw their weaknesses, that everyone burst out laughing, not at the characters that they had been

trying to show us, but at the person underneath, stripped bare for all to see" (*Moving* 143). It is

the clown's exposure of weakness and the resulting vulnerability, sensitivity, and openness that

defines the practice. Play is the tool that turns exposure into a performance.

Lecoq's exposure centers on the weakness of the clown and leads to the defining structural element of clown performance: the flop. Lecoq's conception of clown dramaturgy is predicated on failure. The teacher is not unique in using the idea of failure, multiple clown teachers locate the clown's dramatic struggle in performance as relating to an inability to perform the task s/he set out to do. Failure and defeat are a component of other dramaturgical structures, but the clown flop is usually with one's own immediate physical inability to perform a task that the performer should be able to accomplish. Lecoq stresses the clown must fail at something they should be able to accomplish. Although he distances his style from the traditions of a clown like Grock, both clowns share the situation of failing at a task the performer can otherwise perform with great skill. Grock was a master musician, but his routines centered on his inability to perform instruments correctly. The clown must succeed only when he does not mean to: "ask a clown to do a somersault: he fails. Give him a kick in the backside and he does it without realizing. In both cases he makes us laugh" (*Moving* 146).

The clown's skill lies in taking the kernel of failure, and using play to transform it into the flop. In Lecoq's formation, the ability to use play to transform personal experience into viable theatrical action is the difference between utilizing exposure and hence the flop, and simply failing to perform in an engaging way. The flop is not just an inability, but a way to productively utilize personally felt failures and turn them into engaging theatrical material. The failure ceases to be an unproductive end point; rather through play, personal failure is transformed into the theatrically productive failure of the flop. A look at other clown teachers reveals different ways in which some form of failure is transformed into an engaging theatrical event that leads towards clown as a model of productive uses of failure.

Louise Peacock's *Serious Play* focuses on the ways in which the concept of play operates in modern clowning. However, in her discussion of Lecoq and play she finds "the flop" to be a key link between Lecoq and other clown teachers such as Gaulier. Peacock is sure to point out differences in how these teachers articulate the flop, Gaulier for example emphasizes the difference between the intentional and unintentional flop, finding the first amusing and the second potentially uncomfortable to watch (36-37). Further, she emphasizes that Gaulier uses the threat of failure to produce clowns. The correspondences in the book show a less anxious feeling in Lecoq's classroom. I find there to be a degree of irony in how the "personal" nature of clown is employed through failure. While Lecoq finds failure, and clown in general, to be a deeply personal expression to the audience, albeit one mitigated through play, Gaulier seems to avoid the sense of personal exposure, even though the training relies on a degree of personal reaction and even physical violence toward the pupil. Both classrooms employ some concept of failure, but how it functions in training and performance reveals the diversity of the concept of the flop.

Peacock also speaks of John Wright's theories of clown and failure. Looking to Wright's book *Why is That So Funny* we can find a detailed explication of the flop in clown practice. For Wright the clown starts in what he terms "bafflement." He defines the term, "they come from occasions when we're flummoxed, caught out, or taken by surprise" (195). There are many ways to find the critical moment, and he lists Lecoq's "Le Flop" and Gauiler's "the big flop.' As with Lecoq there is sense of the "authenticity" of the failure. "Throw yourself completely into the action, so that when you both eventually realize that it's a disaster, you're both taken by surprise and you can't hide what you feel" (196). A sense of spontaneity and openness is what defines clown for Wright, but the clown must go on. In one exercise he uses the term "flop" not

in the Lecoqian sense, but as the point at which a performance ceases, "when the action had died" (199). In Wright's configuration the flop is, using Gaulier's phrasing "the angel of death sitting in the wings" (199). Bafflement is a tool that keeps "the angel of death at bay" (199).

Bafflement and the flop are both clown systems for engaging with a given challenge that presumes a benefit from not succeeding. The word flop translated across language and used to different technical meanings does not necessarily indicate a radical divergence of thought. A key similarity is that both Wright and Lecoq find not succeeding useful in accessing something genuine. Their language indicates a shying away from ideas of mastery present in certain realist and mimetic based acting, and instead works to expose the performer. In *The Art of Clowning* Eli Simon points out these differences, finding that "As a clown you're encouraged to *fail*, but when you're working on a script you have to get your lines *right*" (3). Exposure creates not just humor, but the flop creates a fundamentally different way of engaging with given circumstances, be it a dramatic text, a door, or a political rally.

Eli Simon relies on many of the ideas that undergird Lecoq, but also emphasizes what comes after the flop. Once again he encourages students to embrace failure but with a slightly more triumphant spin. In describing how to jump into a cup of water, Simon concludes the clown must fail, there is no way to get into the small cup, but the last step of his process is to, "8. Find your clown's solution to accomplishing this task. 9. Exit Triumphantly' (72). In Simon's configuration failure becomes a tool towards finding an alternative success. Talking later about a musical act, Simon concludes, "It became a singularly brilliant clown act after logical choices had been abandoned and inevitable failure had been fully embraced" (81). Clown extends past the logical and well rehearsed and into a new form of logic and success. Failure and the flop can only exist when playing by the previously established rules.

Clowns fail at tasks in order to amuse an audience, but there are social implications in the clown audience's laughter. When Grock continually fails to sit on the chair and play the piano the audience laughs. There are a great number of reasons why we laugh. Incongruity is a long standing formula for humor, when we know the rules and we see them broken, this can lead to laughter. Bergson contends that laughter comes as a corrective to fix those who have strayed too far from the rules. We laugh because Grock is doing it wrong. In a slightly different way Bakhtin sees laughter functioning as a release valve, allowing for an inverted order only to return to a more regimented stasis. The audience sees Grock use the chair incorrectly, but will all go home and use their chairs correctly. Judith Halberstam argues that failure is a way of understanding possible alternative ways of viewing the world. Grock's flop with the chair is not laughed at in order to correct or used to release audience tension. Rather, the flop becomes the tool through which to understand a new way to use the chair, to play the piano. Halberstam's sense of failure suggests that the flop opens new ways to see and be in the world.

In the book *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam explains her frustration with what she sees as "cynical resignation on the one hand and naïve optimism on the other" (1), so she makes it her goal is to find an alternative to the binary that formulates success as the only path to good and failure as inevitably leading to bad. The hegemonic success driven model is deeply implicated in a capitalist and heteronormative system of consumption and reproduction. For Halberstam, the answer lies not in greater competition within the established structure, but in the possibilities of failure as an alternative model, one that supposes, "losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising way of being in the world" (2-3). Her emphasis on alternative ways of knowing

elucidates the process by which 500 Clown adopts Shakespeare's *Macbeth's* elements of failure to create a clown's eye view of interactions with authority.

I suggest Halberstam's idea of failure resonates with Lecoq's articulation of the flop. As described above, the clown's fundamental dramaturgy is one of failure, of not being able to succeed at the given task and turning that failure into something theatrically engaging, but also of finding an alternative means to the end. What Halberstam's formulation allows is an analysis of how the clown flop functions beyond dramaturgy and as an argument about how to interact with authority. Drawing on Gramscian[12] notions of counter-hegemony and low theory, Halberstam argues that "failure" is a concept that can not just be theorized, but must be practiced by makers of cultural products, such as clowns. Halberstam's practical use-based theory allows for resistance and charting a new place and path. Specifically she looks at James C. Scott's study of how states formalize certain centralized knowledges by excluding ways of knowing that are local or eccentric. Halberstam finds failure can expose the "naturalized" rules of the state. When a clown flops they are similarly failing to abide by the rules of the system, and such failure points to the constructed nature of the rules. Negativity, via the failure of the flop, rejects the terms of the current social order and call attention to the failures within that system. To flop, thus, is to demand an alternative.

One of Halbertam's strategies of failure is stupidity, as demonstrated by an agent's lack of understanding the rules of a given situation. Drawing on Foucault's challenge to find

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[12] Halberstam finds that Gramsci was not a doctrinal Marxist and was much more concerned with the practical effects of ground level theory that interacts with a world and conditions Marx could not have predicted. She also focuses on the uses of counter-hegemony, arguing there is too much focus put on the monologue of hegemony as opposed to the politically useful dialogue of counter-hegemony. Finally she places Gramsci in a world of low theory, emphasizing practicality and practice. This stands in opposition to high theory invested in abstraction over action. I take from Halberstam the image of Gramsci as a practical thinker concerned with how to engage with the existing system in an alternative fashion. What is less pertinent is the economic prerogatives of the theorist. While some economic relations inevitably intrude on the dissertation due to the status of Shakespeare and the nature of his producers, the emphasis is far more focused on clown practice and their social implications.

"subjugated knowledges" to combat "all encompassing and global theories" (11), Halberstam wishes to use stupidity to resist mastering knowledges identified by the thinkers like Foucault and Scott. She rests her argument on ideas of heterosexual development, arguing for queer ways of life that resist the sequential order of heterosexual reproduction. Forgetting is a way of distancing one's self from the heterosexual narrative of progress. Looking to contemporary films, Halberstam finds that dramatic films, "equate memory manipulation with brainwashing, loss of humanity, and state intrusions on privacy, some comedic films in the same period tackle the same topic with different and wildly unpredictable results" (73-4). For Halberstam, comedic films say what the dramatic cannot, that forgetting may be a productive way of existing in the world. The emphasis on comedy dovetails nicely with clowns. The clown flop is a form of stupidity demonstrated in their inability to perform the task they attempt to perform. In the case of *500 Clown Macbeth*, as we shall see, stupidity allows the clowns to forget large portions of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and instead give a partial and non-linear alternative.

While Halberstam charts several ways in which forgetting and stupidity are tools of resisting the status-quo, she is also sensitive to how certain power structures have adopted stupidity. She cites a long line of Hollywood movies that rely on the stupidity of the white male to endear the audience and ultimately root for his progress and retention of a patriarchal society (57). Perhaps even more urgent was the stupidity of George W. Bush, who dangerously played into an "amnesiac cycle that solidifies U.S. hegemony" (68). Bush's stupidity prevents accountability or lessons from the past, whereas the stupidity of *Dude Where's My Car?* offers alternatives to the rules, robbing the white males of some of their power and presents possible alternatives. The double-edged sword of stupidity is pertinent to the 500 Clowns, who are a group of mainly white men. The gender of the clowns and their forgetting does not seek

alternatives from every vestige of power, and at times their performance masks the complicity of their white male bodies. However, there are substantial challenges to specific lines of theatrical and social authority even if the piece is not completely anarchistic. Through their stupidity, the 500 Clowns do present alternatives to governing power.

To argue for the alternative possibilities presented by failure, Halberstam turns to what she calls the silly archive, a terms she credits to Lauren Berlant. Halberstam's book includes popular or "strange" choices for analysis such as *Finding Nemo* or *Dude Where's My Car*. The alternative low culture archive is analyzed because she finds these works enable her "to make claims for alternatives that are markedly different from the claims that are made in relation to high cultural archives" (20). 500 Clown uses the high culture archive, specifically Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, to create their low culture alternative. In doing so, the clowns selectively employ the alternative ways of being in the world present in the Shakespeare text while flopping the theatrical and cultural practices that define the text at the beginning of the 21st century. While many clown shows feature the flop and could fit into the silly archive, 500 Clown is a particularly apt example because of its precarious balance between high and low culture. Through a direct confrontation with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the clowns make use of both the seeds of alternatives present in the source text while simultaneously casting Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as part of the authority they wish to eschew. The clowns are silly, but also linked to the high culture archive in a symbiotic relationship.

## 2.3    MACBETH AND AUTHORITY IN JAMES I'S ENGLAND

Before I begin with these analyses I wish to make a note on queerness.  Halberstam's work is invested in certain iconoclastic ideas, and is never universalizing or divorced from the cultural context of the works and their implications for queer identities that have been marginalized by specific oppressors, namely heterosexual white male Western capitalists.  My work looks mainly at heterosexual white male Western capitalists.  In adopting Halberstam's methods to look at clowns I hope to argue that 500 Clown is part of a process of queerness that resists current formations associated with existing power structures.  As such, while the clowns I look at here are not explicitly "queer" in artistic agendas or their sexual practice, I do contend that their practices, through their opposition to the aforementioned existing systems of power, have a strong affinity with types of alternative knowing that Halberstam identifies as queer. Since the clowns form their own system of failure their range of meanings fall outside of Halberstam at times, and so find alternatives through failure that are not a part of her project.

Both Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *500 Clown Macbeth* provide ways of existing outside of the normal lines of authority. Their alternatives are mapped via divergent dramaturgical strategies.  In addition to the varying strategies employed, the plays' initial productions are separated by almost exactly four hundred years.  The passage of time results in differences not just of style and structure but also of authority.  In order to understand how each play interacts with standard relations of authority, it is vital to understand the authority in place at the moment of each play's creation.  Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was created in London under the new monarchal rule of James I in the first years of the  1600s, and *500 Clown Macbeth* began in the early 2000s in Chicago.  Each performance piece was born into a distinct system of authority that conditions how the piece engages with that authority.

The individual works in Shakespeare's canon each give voices to many competing ideas. James Shapiro analyzes the many sentiments expressed about war in *Henry V* and comes to the conclusion, "It wasn't a pro-war or an anti-war play but a going-to-war play" (92). The play's refusal to yield a final answer on the morality of war is what allowed Laurence Olivier to use the script as a rousing show of patriotism and Kenneth Branagh to make a film deeply skeptical of the morality of war. The continual recycling of Shakespeare is made peculiarly possible by the equivocations of the text. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* takes as its primary concern equivocation, specifically in relation to kingship and the failures of and in that system. Similar to Shapiro, I argue that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is not a pro-king or anti-king play, but a "we have a king play". Looking at the work, the context of its initial production, and the potential staging of that production reveals the multi-faceted nature of the work's view of kingship. By staging strands of both 1) an assertion of the benefits of kingly authority and hence the need to avoid failure and 2) alternatives to the system of kingly authority afforded by failure, Shakespeare's play provides 500 Clown with the "we have a king play" strand which the clowns will make the heart of their work.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a play about a king that premiered when a king held authority. It was most likely performed in front of the king. James I became King of Scotland in 1567, and in 1603 became the King of England. James's rule followed the 44 year reign of the childless Elizabeth I. Elizabeth came to the throne after fierce religious violence created by her father's (Henry VIII) institution of a Protestant Church of England and subsequent reversal to Catholicism under his daughter, Mary I. Elizabeth's reign saw similar tension over the religious and political fate of the nation. While there was some stabilization in her long reign, many feared her lack of an heir would once again throw the country into disarray. When Elizabeth died,

James I King of Scotland was made King of England, and although a Catholic at the time, converted to the Church of England. Shakespeare's *Macbeth's* obsessions over kingship, lines of legitimacy, claims to the throne, and even the Scottish setting were pertinent issues when the play first premiered. But it was not just the anxiety over monarchal succession that was an immediate fear at the time, even the existence of supernatural elements was a point of equivocation in the time period.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* opens with three witches and most contemporary audiences view them as supernatural or non-realistic elements. Historical evidence indicates that James I believed in witches. In 1591 James mentioned witches in his *News from Scotland* and in 1597 he distributed *Daemonology* arguing that witches did exist. James was concerned that the witches were personally targeting him and his family and expresses the very real threat in the former document, "Further the said witch declared that His Majesty had never come safely from the sea if his faith had not prevailed above their intentions" (*News From Scotland* 143). Additionally James feared that women were particularly susceptible to the lure of the devil which accounted for the large number of witches, "The reason is easy for as that sex is frailer than man is so is it easier to be entrapped in these gross snares of the Devil" (*Daemonology* 146). For James, witches were a real threat to his kingship, and consequently the nation.

Shakespeare's drama opens with three witches. They soon taunt Macbeth with the possibility of kingship and Banquo, his companion, with the possibility of his offspring being kings. Soon Macbeth and his wife conspire to kill the king, Duncan, and assume the crown. Macbeth is paranoid about the stability of his regime and kills Banquo and then attempts to kill his son. In his ever-frustrated attempts to hold onto power, Macbeth descends further and further into bloodshed and violence, eventually seeking the counsel of the witches. The three

supernatural beings offer vague clues about Macbeth's future, but refuse to answer his questions directly.  Soon Macbeth is overrun by a group of Scotsmen lead by one of Duncan's sons.  In battle Macduff kills Macbeth, restoring Duncan's heir to the throne and ending the play. These events are riddled with failures, both of characters and systems, and the heavy implications of those failures.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a play about the danger of failing to put the best king possible on the throne. The most horrifying failure in the play deals with the inability to put an heir on the throne.  A quick look at Shakespeare's *Macbeth* emphasizes the importance of procreation.  It is Duncan's children that set the plot in motion, prompting the Macbeths' regicide.  The Macbeths in turn fail to have children and secure their line, instead turning to murderous destruction of other children, the attempt on Fleance's life and the successful eradication of MacDuff's path toward a familial legacy, his wife and children.  Macbeth's ultimate psychological collapse seems to stem from his inability to see a meaningful future without children.  I find Halberstam's critique of the inability to find a world outside of heterosexual procreation is exhibited by most of the characters in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but most obviously in the titular character.

Anxiety over succession is a defining trait of Macbeth as a character.  He understands that the appointment of Malcolm as heir will prevent his quest to the throne.  Once king, Macbeth's anxiety must rest on securing the line, and the kingship itself seems lacking if it lacks an heir, "To be this is nothing, but to be safely thus" (3.1 50).  Later in the same speech, before he dispatches the murders to kill Banquo and Fleance, Macbeth ruminates on the limitations of a seedless throne, "Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown, And put a barren scepter in my grip….For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind, For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered" (3.1 ln63-4, 67-8).  In these lines Macbeth's anxiety over his current position can only

by assuaged by looking forward.  His kingship has no value without a forward reaching heir, so he continues in his obsession with eradicating others' futures by killing MacDuff's sons and his wife, the sources of a future. Later he kills young Seward in the final battle.  Macbeth eradicates children precisely because of his inability to imagine the value of his own situation outside of a forward reaching view of lineal succession, a view that was one of the strongest narratives of power present in Shakespeare's time. Macbeth's actions demonstrate the dangers of the unexamined naturalized systems of authority that Halberstam wishes to expose.

The absolute inability to see a future or even meaningful present outside of the bounds of childhood marks Macbeth's character and is best represented in his nihilistic monologue near the end of the play.

> Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all of our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.
>
> <div align="center">5.5  ln 19-28</div>

Here Macbeth collapses time, finding "yesterdays" "tomorrow" and "the last syllable of recorded time" all terminate in meaningless darkness.  Macbeth cannot fathom the idea of a childless reign because it denies him control over the future, and his lack of control not only eradicates meaning from the future, but also the past and present.  There is no world outside of the master narrative of lineal succession; no queer alternatives exist for Macbeth.  The immediate circumstances of the play's first production indicate that the governing authorities of society share Macbeth's lack of alternatives to heterosexual reproduction and substitution.

The anxiety over who would be the next monarch was settled near the time of Macbeth's first presumed performance. With the long-ruling Elizabeth dying in 1603, James I of Scotland ascended to the throne (bringing with him two sons) and ending rampant speculation about who would rule England next. Since the play was produced sometime in the first years of the new monarchy, the link to the new Scottish family is hard to miss, and Shakespeare seems to have written James into the play. Macbeth, in an anxious rage, finds the witches and demands to know his future. They conjure a series of images giving cryptic clues about what is to come, Macbeth demands to know "shall Banquo's issue ever Reign in this Kingdom?" The witches answer with "A show of eight KINGS, and BANQUO last; with a glass in his hand." (4.1 102-103). Banquo is a supposed ancestor of James, and the line of kings on stage gives a clear glimpse at the king that may have been in the audience. Through the remarkable moment of performance Shakespeare links the mythic Scottish past with the English present, drawing a direct line between the bloodshed of the play and the desirable end of a stable monarch in England. But the link with the past is Janus-faced, looking within a system of procreation as the only way forward (literally represented by male bodies and the king's male body in the audience) but also showcasing the dangers of that system and a possible alternative.

King James's presence on stage via the mirror upholds the need to put him on the throne and the violent processes that undergird that power, but also implicates him in the lack of alternatives offered by a worldview consumed with the masculine passage of authority. The violence on stage stems from the Macbeths' ambition and the failure of Duncan's heir to squash the usurpation. MacDuff's ability to quell the tyrant is what leads back to the "correct" line of lineage that results in James. If violence is caused by those who deviate from the system (the

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Macbeths) then the play masks the failures of the system in a cloak of inevitability, as Halberstam finds most totalizing ideologies do.

Yet, it is important to keep in mind that the violence of Macbeth's world and the violence in England due to religious conflict were real dangers. The play's insinuation that righteous power can quell factitious violence is not dismissed. Instead it coexists with a critique of the system of masculine kingship, with the text of the play refusing to come down authoritatively in favor or the virtues of kingship or the violence inherent in the system. The play does not only present heir-based linear logic, but also offers the possibility of alternative ways of understanding the violence on stage.[13] For while from one angle the play glorifies James I's ascension as righteous king with clear lines of succession that can put an end to over a century of violence over lineage and religion, the play also questions the linear lines of patriarchal power that have put him on the throne through the decidedly queer device of the Weird Sisters. Their critique of the system of power corresponds with Halberstam's view of the, "alternative productions of the child that recognize in the image of the nonadult body a propensity to incompetence, a clumsy inability to make sense, a desire for independence from the tyranny of the adult, and a total indifference to the adult conceptions of successes and failure" (120).

The Weird Sisters deeply trouble the lines of progress and success embodied in heirs and kings thereby illuminating alternatives to the masculine lines of succession and the violence inherent in the political implications of that system. Starting off the play, they speak of when to meet and note, "When the hurly-burly's done,/When the battle's lost and won" (1.1 ln3-4), and conclude the scene, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair/" (1.1 ln. 11). By indicating that the battle is

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[13] Directors have often picked up on alternative to the narrative of progression in the play. Notably Roman Polanski's 1971 version of the play ends with Duncan's son Donalbain visiting the witches after his brother Malcom is made king.

"lost and won" they first upset a linear line of progress.  Admitting that some will lose the battle indicates there are multiple paths forward.  "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," is another equivocation opening up vague possibilities of equivocation that will later be used to frustrate Macbeth. Halberstam is disheartened by 21$^{st}$ century Western conceptions of success that rest on, "reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation" (2).  The prerogatives she identifies are not distant from those of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and the witches offer the sort of world beyond the dominant ideology that Halberstam seeks.

In a fictive Scotland ruled by men and their sons, the witches elude easy placement into binarized gender categories. The Weird Sisters' appearances upset Banquo because they posses the attributes of both man and woman due to their beards. The fact that boys or possibly men would have played the witches in all productions during the Early Modern era adds to the physical uncertainty about the gender of the bodies.[14]  Normative assumptions of gender are a requisite for the witches' presumed oddness, but their combination of male and female physicality marks them as queer bodies outside of the space of the normative world of Scotland to such a degree that Banquo questions if they are of the Earth and if they can understand his speech.  The witches also exploit normalized female roles by using an act of sexual intercourse as torture.  In Act One Scene Three the witches discuss a sailor's wife who will not yield her chestnuts, so the witch endeavors to find her sea sailing husband and "I'll drain him dry as hay" (1.3 ln 19).  The witches here hope to use sexual intercourse not towards means of succession but as a form of torture for the wave tossed sailor.  By failing to live up the masculine expectation of a woman, both in terms of appearance and use of sexuality, the witches provide a mode of existence Halberstam would praise for enabling, "escape   [from] the punishing norms that

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[14] For a fascinating analysis of how the gender of stage bodies functioned on the Early Modern stage, see Stephen Orgel's *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England.*

discipline behavior and manage human development" (3). The witches are living an alternative lifestyle to that ingrained in most of the characters of the play.

Furthering the witches' refusal to exist on a binary of woman or man is their strange relationship to children. When Macbeth comes late in the play to demand answers they summon three apparitions. The second is a bloody child and the third is a crowned child. Both images represent elements of Macbeth's future, but these strange bodies summoned by the witches are ominous harbingers for the king. The witches' relation to children, through their various summonings and predications places them as makers of children, but not in a traditional feminine sense. They defy any expectation of how female bodies create children; instead of bearing children they summon them as bearers of cryptic prophecy. The Weird Sisters are not completely separated from the "feminine" task of child creation, but do it in a way that undercuts any sign of passivity on the part of the woman, and even more troubling to the kings and nobles, that denies the permanency of children as surrogates. Macbeth wants a child because it will secure his kingship forever through an heir; the witches' children disappear in the moment they appear. The children offer no permanency, and instead the vanishing children of the witches are used to undercut the very myth of permanency of Earthly, and by extension Godly, authority that the male characters hope to uphold through their offspring. In this scene, the witches' cast an ironic eye on the idea of uninterrupted masculine permanence by staging both the vanishing children and the image of James in the mirror.

The witches' implication that children do not provide a steady continuation of power fundamentally undercuts the entire premise of the play as a valentine to James I since he is the product of clear lines of masculine power. Male heirs cannot end the violence and instability of the play, because the impermanent nature of both children and hence kingship is what causes the

violence. Queer agents in a normative world, the witches seem to suggest existing on the margins of a system, not dictating or dictated by it, enjoying a certain degree of disjunctive co-existence. And unlike Lady Macbeth, the witches' precarious balance is never silenced or brought under the dominant narrative of masculine power through heirs. They end the play on the same terms that they began, outside and unyielding of information they wish to withhold. Their presence is not in direct opposition to the narrative strand that glorifies James and male heirs, but rather exists alongside the dominant system, mocking its pretenses while living separate from its standards.

The Weird Sisters' ability to find agency outside of what Halberstam dubs, "static models of success and failure" showcases some of the joys of failing (2). It is unclear if the witches prophesies have caused Macbeth's lust to power or merely fanned it. The play makes it difficult to know if Macbeth would have committed regicide had it not been for the witches, hence their presence seems deeply disruptive of the male system of power. Conversely, if their predication put the tyrannical Macbeth on the throne, then their prediction of Banquo's line, which ends in James, also stems from their power. Their summoning of the line of eight kings further exacerbates the witches' prophecy's precarious link to James; it is their magic which physically placed James on stage through the use of a mirror. The witches refuse to be labeled as simply oppositional to the lines of kingly power, upsetting the simple relationship between witches and monarchs that James propagated in his writing. It is hard to locate the witches as either forces of lineal disruption or as agents of the progressive narrative ending in the current king. They never indicate a moral stake in the proceedings, nor are they scared by threats from the human characters, mainly they come across as bemused. When Macbeth is astounded by the line of kings and demands to know why the dead Banquo smiles at him, the First Witch simply responds, "Stands Macbeth thus amazedly?/Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites,/And show the

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best of our delights" (IV.1 ln 126-128). The witches then dance and disappear for the rest of the play. Their status remains elusive, as does their stake in and opinion on the matters of Scottish kingship. Instead of existing as direct, armed opposition to the current to the system, their failure to assimilate into the masculine system of power in the play proves an alternative exists to the binary of oppositional power struggles. The witches do not resist kingship through force, or by offering another world view, instead they refuse to play by kingship's rules while existing within the world that kingship wishes to express dominance over. They neither directly attack nor subscribe to any of the male conceptions of power, but rather live alongside side on their own terms, seeming to find fun in reducing the wars and struggles of kings and nobles to a game for their amusement.

Through the witches, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* imagines queer futures outside of the dominant mode of power, and while the play does not seem to endorse the Weird Sisters or make them the final narrative word, they are present and clawing at the compliment the play seems to pay to James I. The failure of kingly power demonstrated by these female characters relishes, even if for a moment, the alternative joys of failing to conform to the existing system, and even more troubling, the ability to simply not comply. Shakespeare's play balances the witches' alternative view against the horrors of unregulated kingship seen in the tyrant Macbeth's reign of terror. It is difficult to make the play a mouthpiece for either the necessity of the masculine system of male heirs or the radical upsetting of that world seen in the female characters. Instead, each worldview is allowed to coexist in a complex drama that examines the nature of governing authority. 400 years later, *500 Clown Macbeth* exploits the witches' failure to exist in the masculine Scotland. By utilizing the clown flop, *500 Clown Macbeth* creates a world that

completely rejects the argument for stable male power that Shakespeare carefully balanced with the witches.

## 2.4 *500 CLOWN MACBETH* AND THE FLOP OF AUTHORITY

Whereas Shakespeare's *Macbeth* used failure as part of a mimetic world, the clowns reach their failure through the flop. As detailed above, the flop is a mode of clown dramaturgy that allows for adaption of both Shakespeare and theatrical form. The clowns build on Shakespeare's ambivalence to authority and then reject authority in almost all forms especially the structure of the dramatic event itself. What also becomes legible is the way in which the clowns use the adaptive power of the flop to capitalize on the alternative modes that exist within Shakespeare's text. In doing so, the clowns create their own world that, similar to the witches, lives (at least on stage) out some of the alternatives Halberstam sees created by failure. But whereas in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* this alternative world is limited to the witches, 500 Clown creates a world ruled only by clowns.

The 500 Clown Theatre is the product of a very different set of theatrical and social circumstances than Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and uses resistance to theatrical form in place of explicit political engagement. Coming almost exactly 400 years later and half a world away, 500 Clown contends with systems of authority that are radically different from the monarchal society that Shakespeare performed in. The immediate relevancy of debating Scottish kings is removed from the Chicago-based company's work. The clowns' alternatives to authority are not placed on the same specific set of issues as Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but they are also not based on an alternate set of specific political circumstances. That is, 500 Clown formed during George W.

Bush's tenure in the White House, but their shows do not specifically engage with his style of governing or his policies. 500 Clown is not explicitly political in its questioning of authority. Instead it uses a theatrical authority to model an irreverence that encourages individuals to refuse to use systems and objects in their prescribed manner, instead locating alterative ways to engage with the world around one's self.

Chicago provided two theatrical cultures that allowed the development of the 500 Clown Theatre. The first was the Off Loop theatres with an interest in forms of physical and comedic theatre. The second was a larger establishment of realist theatre that provided an authority for clown to play against. Leslie Buxbam Danzig, director of 500 Clown, credits the emergence of circus arts in Chicago as conducive to clown work. She cites a 1998 PerformInk article claiming "Circus trainings in Chicago: 10 years ago that would have been an oxymoron. But in the past five years . . . all of that changed" (40.) Both the article and Danzig cite groups such as The Actors Gymnasium and The Midnight Circus as indicative examples of agents in the development of circus theatre in the city. Additionally she found that Chicago provided the type of low cost large space that is hard to come by in New York, and a variety of city based arts companies that helped support their work (41, 47). These groups and conditions in Chicago combine with previous clown or circus work shared by most of the artists in the company to give the group aesthetic grounding.

In addition to supplying support, Chicago also provided a friction. Early in his study of clowns Jon Davison states, "In a way that's what clowns are: they go against the grain" (3, 2013). Danzig notes the group found a home amongst Chicago's "off-loop" theatre in opposition to "the aesthetic of realist meat and potatoes performance championed by . . . Steppenwolf Theatre Company" (36). And while Steppenwolf supported 500 Clown via use of their space,

the realist style of the theatre and others in the area (Goodman) gave 500 Clown an aesthetic their clowns could exist in opposition to. Danzig states, "Clown exists in relation to authority" (21 Danzig). The realist theatres provide some of that authority.

Danzig's explanation of clown[15] is heavily invested in the concept of the flop that pervades late 20th century clown practice. She cautions that her definition is not necessarily that of the company, and that neither her aesthetic nor the company's can be taken as the only form of clown available. Danzig gives eight actions of indicative of clown; "to discover, to follow impulses, to partner with everything, to solve problems, to care, to be resilient, to play with conventions, and to choose a context" (75). Danzig explicitly links "to care" with Lecoq, citing the exercises of making people laugh while standing in the middle of a circle as demonstrating "failure as a result of caring," and that this failure is shared with the audience, allowing them to vicariously feel that failure (83-84). Other actions are also heavily invested in some form of the flop. Danzig talks of how a clown must discover how a door works. The clown will rarely open the door as most people would, instead, like Grock and his chair, they find a new way to interact with the door. Their flop rejects the authority of the door, instead encouraging a new way to understand the operational logic. On the operational level of Danzig's "clown actions" the flop is present as a motivating force.

Just as important to Danzig's conception of clown actions is the relation of the clown to the dramatic theatre, an association that easily demonstrates the structure of the flop. Early on

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[15] Danzig provides an elaboration on what clown theatre consists of for 500 Clown. In order to do this she gives her own definition of clown and then contrasts it with the theatre. Clown is a word very specifically used, and in 2006 the group thought about changing their name. They note that many people have negative or noxious associations with clowns (like Ronald or Bozo) and that many groups that involve clown (either primarily or as part of larger comedic, circus, or physical theatre performances) do not use clown in their name. The name is seen as vital because it is "the first point of contact with the public" (67). The group chose to keep clown, and intended to forge new associations with the term for their audience. A. Danzig is found of saying, "Think Buster Keaton, not Bozo" (68). The word clown in their title then is no accident, at least not after 2006.

she states that, "Clown Theatre gets its dynamic not from a facile and complementary give and take of elements and conventions, but rather from tensions inherent in the interaction between clown and dramatic theatre" (3). Furthermore the clown/theatre tension cast theatre as the authority, "theatre itself provides a rich and multi-dimensional authority for the clown," but quickly qualifies that the authority is actually, "popular cultural knowledge of theatre" (21). The clowns, thus, flop the convention of theatre. By walking amongst the audience and chatting with them, the clowns flop the conventions of a realist theatre and find an alternative avenue for dramatic success. Danzig charts out some of the differences in theatre and clown. Clown contains an "immediate relationship with the audience", "privileging of spontaneous play…over predetermined and complex narratives", and "the unique presence of an individual performer as opposed to that of fictional character" (Danzig 21). Dramatic theatre contains "structures to sustain full-length production and numerous conventions, which, though culturally specific, address fictional coherence, role of the audience, and respectability of the event." The contrasting lists highlight the clowns' immediate presence in the theatre and a breakdown of structure.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* used the witches to demonstrate a playful failure to conform to kingly authority, whereas *500 Clown Macbeth* uses the flop to undermine perceived rules of the theatre. Shakespeare's work was not born into the realistic world of fourth wall drama, but many major producers have adapted his work to fit this model. Hence monologues that may once of have been conversationally directed towards groundlings in a lit audience, are now played as internal self –reflection in darkened houses. The clowns play on the latter adoption of Shakespeare and the cultural perception that attends this adoption. Shakespeare proves the ideal image to clown upon, because of his work's ubiquity in theatre and perceived high culture

connotations. Danzig is savvy to note that the oppositional authority rests not so much on the theatre, but a general understanding of the "dramatic theatre" as a closed mimetic world, a sense of drama born out of fourth wall realism. The company benefits from the prominent purveyors of the realist style that dominate the Chicago Theatre scene, Steppenwolf and the Goodman. Whereas the importance of the witches' assault on kingly authority clearly has high stakes, the literal friction between clown and dramatic theatre is less highly invested. There is no need to knock down theatrical norms that many other groups have done for over a century. The clowns' model is not a literal revolt against theatrical form, but rather uses the framing device of their stage world to imply the complete failure of authority. If the witches were only one strand of Shakespeare's complex meditation on power, the clowns in *500 Clown Macbeth* use the sorts of alternatives embodied in the witches to not just overturn the assumed "rules" of the dramatic theatre, but also use the flop to enact a world where failure yields fruitful alternatives.

Because Danzig construes theatre as tied to the complexity of pre-arranged narratives, the text of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* becomes part of the authority that the clowns flop. Danzig says the relation to the source text, in this case Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, is one where the clowns attempt to perform and "are thwarted." They then perform "the core" of the story, and both clowns and audience find points of resonance between Shakespeare's play and the clown theatre. (150, 144-46). Danzig maps out points of textual recognition in terms of structure and performance. The clowns flop in their performance of the play, but the flop is informed by and further articulates the threads of failure present in the source text. Danzig prides the company's moments where the clowns seem to accidently fall into performing pieces of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but the connection goes deeper (Danzig 145). It is not just snatches of dialogue or

events that the clowns stumble upon through the flop, but thematic resonances that the two performances share.

W.B. Worthen investigates the practices and frictions between text and performance in *Shakespeare and The Force of Modern Performance*. He argues that performance of Shakespeare must not be looked at in solely in terms of its relation to the Shakespeare text, or even other performances of Shakespeare, but within broader views of theatrical convention, matching with Danzig's conception of "theatre" as an authority in opposition to clown. Worthen states, "Shakespeare performativity arises not from the text of the plays, but is carved from a wider spectrum of performance [and] can only be demonstrated by thinking about the interruptions and continuities between Shakespearean performativity and other dramatic and nondramatic performances" (26-27). While he finds that many concepts of "performativity rely too heavily on the printed word", he wishes to refocus debates about drama's citation of text onto certain conventions of theatre that give the text meanings, "Plays become meaningful in the theatre through the disciplined application of conventionalized practices – acting, directing scenography – that transform writing into something with performative force: performance behavior" (9). Worthen's parsing of the performantive nature of a text allows an understanding of the literary text within a citational system that refers back to not just the text, but the performance traditions that house that text.

When 500 Clown disrupts the mimetic conventions of theatre through the flop, they do not just disrupt conventions such as the fourth wall, but also disrupt plays such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* which possess years of performances traditions steeped in the practices of the "dramatic theatre." Even if the current conventions of the closed mimetic dramatic theatre are not the set of theatrical conventions that gave initial force to the Shakespeare text, the current dramatic theatre

houses much of contemporary and even more so the previous century's practices of Shakespeare. When 500 Clown subjects a performance of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to their flopping of dramatic staging conventions, it upsets the primary set of conventions that have defined and given Shakespeare's *Macbeth* meaning on stage for several decades. Worthen's analysis makes clear that flopping is not confined to the performance or the text, but rather that the two mutually enforce an understanding of each other, and that 500 Clown's flopping of these conventions puts itself in opposition to the accumulated theatrical understanding of what the "text of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* should be." The relation is not solely oppositional, because 500 Clown uses thematic strands within Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in order to flop the theatrical conventions that have given life to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* over the last several decades.

An analysis of *500 Clown Macbeth* shows the subtle dance between using Shakespeare's text to create the flop and using the current staging conventions of that text as a foil to the flop. As the show begins three clowns descend from the scaffolding at the rear of the theatre.[16] They are Shank (Kalina), Kevin (Brennan), and Bruce (Danzig). Two are males, Kevin is a female. They are making various "spooky" noises one might associate with a stereotypical production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but the crude and obvious attempts to create a menacing mimetic word are already engaging in the flop as the audience is aware the actors are making the noises of the

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[16] The analysis of the performance is based on a 2007 recording of the piece at the Steppenwolf Upstairs. *500 Clown Macbeth* was born in Chicago and has played in many venues over the first decade of the troupe's life. First performed in October of 2000 at Charybdis, a converted bowling alley, a second run of the show occurred in March and April of 2001 at the City of Fools Clown Theatre Festival which Danzig helped organize. From here the group gained a booking with Pac/Edge Festival in 2003 and developed *500 Clown Frankenstein*. In 2004 they presented 500 Clown Macbeth at the Lookingglass theatre, now located on the Magnificent Mile. By the summer of 2007 they were performing the *500 Clown Macbeth* and *Frankenstein* in rep through Steppenwolf's Theatre Company's Visiting Company Initiative. From this time 500 Clown has developed new shows and partnered with other theatres as presenting organizations. They do not have a permanent theatre, but continue as an itinerant company that both performs and provides workshops. While all have other theatrical obligations, this group still forms the center of the existing company as of 2013. Danzig's dissertation is the source of this summary and of course provides a far fuller chronicle of the company's history.

hooting owls.  As the clowns descend they face various kinds of challenges getting off of the scaffold and into the back of the auditorium, for even this simple task is met with a degree of the flop. Grock could not sit on a chair.  The 500 Clowns cannot make it to the stage.  Soon they walk down the stairs onto the stage and begin with the witches' lines from the first scene of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.  However, every time they get to the word "Macbeth" one of the lights goes out and another turns on. The three performers continue until they realize they cannot proceed when they say the word "Macbeth."  Their inability to speak the words starts the production with failure.  If they say the words correctly the staging mechanics do not work, but in order to have their staging equipment work, they must avoid speaking the text that presumably is the source of the theatrical event.  The theatrical event thus begins on a note of failure. In the opening moments *500 Clown Macbeth* runs up against a physical demand of the theatre, in this case lighting equipment.  Instead of abandoning the whole enterprise they choose to go forward with the show. Accepting the failure to "do" the text in its entirety, they instead chart out a new approach to performing Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by skipping forward to the witches greeting Macbeth two scenes later.  The flop encountered with the lighting instrument does not stop the forward movement, but merely propels it in a new direction, one less concerned with the "completion" of the text via recitation of every line, and instead an emphasis on simply moving forward.

The clowns' inability to speak the word "Macbeth" and move on with the scene is a slight disruption compared to the larger textual deviances that occur immediately after the introductory routine. During the course of the production, different clowns play characters from Shakespeare's play, but these identities are often dropped to explore new characters. Kevin, as a witch, tells Shank. "Hail to thee Thane of Cawdor/Thou shalt be King hereafter" (Danzig 202).

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At this point Shank becomes the "king," but not Macbeth as king; rather a caricature of how a king might act. The "playing king" involves a great deal of audience interaction: sitting on them, talking to them, kissing them. The interactive sequence stems from an unmooring of the word "king" from its dramatic context.  While the word "king" is used as a prophecy to the character of Macbeth, the clowns use the word to launch into a routine where they "play king." This free associative relationship to the Shakespeare text comes to define much of the production.

After the "playing king" routine, the clowns continue to use snatches of Shakespeare's dialogue to launch into physical comedy routines or use uncontextualized bits of Shakespeare to comment on their own physical action. This flops a standard relationship of drama by having physical action work ironically with the author's words as opposed to using physical action to illuminate a writer's text. For example, the clowns knock on a piece of scenery trying to get it to stick into the scaffolding and one of them begins citing snatches of the Porter's speech in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.  The clown's knock is not in response to the textual demand to create a believable mimetic world, but rather the Shakespeare text is used to respond to the physical action completely unrelated to the textual moment.  The use of the words recasts both the text and plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in terms of primarily physical stage action; knocking is not an ambient noised used to mimetically recreate Scotland, but rather the knocking reminds the clowns of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* text. The clowns forge a new relationship between actions and words where Shakespeare's text is subordinated to the physical actions of the clowns.

The clown's centralizing of physical action allows them to flop certain dramatic themes from the Shakespeare text. In Shakespeare's text the primary power struggle is over ownership of the crown. The clowns put a physical crown on stage and for most of the production use physical attempts to reach the crown, thereby reducing monarchal power struggles to a physical

flop. The audience's primary entertainment comes in watching the clowns physically flop, regroup, and try again in their attempts to obtain the crown. During the course of the performance the clowns climb on the scaffolding, climb on each other, fall from heights small and large, begin to break apart the set, and eventually even fire a gun. During all of the clown routines the audience laughs and gasps at the unfolding physical action. The crown gives a sense of narrative via a physical goal to the proceedings; thereby reducing the lofty battles of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to physical actions easily flopped in an immediate way. 500 Clown is similar to Grock with his chair, but instead of the goal of playing a piano, these clowns create a world where the flop is in the attempt to obtain monarchal authority.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* demonstrates a deep skepticism of the crown through the witches, and 500 Clown's ambivalence about power draws on the witches' skepticism, but uses a contrasting approach to demonstrate their skepticism. Whereas the witches taunt Macbeth with half revealed prophecies, exacerbating his ambition while they sit distanced from the earthly struggles, the clowns take an opposite tact zooming in so close to the struggle for the crown that it becomes nothing more than a wrestling match. Both the witches' distance and the clowns' closeness reduce the crown, removing divine pretense and turning it into an earthly goal of all too physical men. The witches, however, exist on the margins of Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* literally fading in and out of existence. The clowns, on the other hand, are the only bodies (apart from the audience) present in *500 Clown Macbeth*. Shank, Bruce, and Kevin reduce the crown to nothing more than a small physical object. The clowns remove the crown's associations with divine right and absolute authority by turning it into a physical object that is farcically fought over. The clowns' flop their relationship to the crown, failing to treat it with the proper reverence, a reverence that is part of the crown/object's prescribed use. Through this flop the

clowns empty the meaning from the idea of kingship. In the world of 500 Clown, no authority is sacred; not Shakespeare, the theatre, or kingship. All is subject to alternative forms of use via the flop. The Halberstinian alternatives the witches use to haunt the edges of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* form the backbone of 500 Clown's worldview.

Both 500 Clown and their source text witches promote a view of kingship that is not centered on the permanency of the individual, which chafes with the desire of the male characters in the source play.  The masculine strands in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are compulsively looking forward to heirs, descendants, and the future monarchy of James I, which is all questioned by the witches.  When the Weird Sisters open up the line of eight kings it does show lineage, but it also emphasizes the ephemeral nature of kingship. No man can be king for long before death takes him. James's image in the mirror both sets him up as an end point of the line of kings, but also implicates him in kingship's fading nature. One day James himself will recede into the line of dead kings, yielding to a new living monarch. In addition to a slight to the permanency of kings, the witches themselves seem to live outside of the control of kings, making kingship both impermanent and lacking in absolute control. Whereas Shakespeare's *Macbeth* exposes the witches' ability to function by an alternative set of rules through their positioning in the mimetic world of the drama and staging effects like the mirror, 500 Clown's explores the themes of kingship's lack of permanency and control through a flop of performing a role.

The clowns' flop when they attempt to "play king" and their failure opens up a world unbound by kings. One of Halberstam's strategies for failure to unshackle contemporary subjects from the past is through the act of stupidity or forgetting. When the clowns attempt to perform the role of the king, their stupidity disallows a "correct" portrayal, and their performance is a flop. Once Shank starts playing king he runs around and plays with the audience, playing at a

king but not embodying the royal persona of a monarch. Soon, Kevin, the only female clown, asks if she can be king, which encourages an audience recognition of how precarious the other character's kingship is, but also hints at a certain absurdity in the notion of kingship. Adding to the oddness of the request "can I be king now" is that it is made by Kevin, the female. There is an unlinking of the concept and king and male, just as the name Kevin is also doing certain queer work. Kevin is allowed to be king and takes the opportunity to flex her muscles and then to dance. The female clown's dance differs from the earlier notion of kingship offered by Shank who walked amongst the audience. In both cases neither clown seems to know quite what to do with "being king," but the act of kingship is at least a far more pleasurable experience than Macbeth's tenure as king in Shakespeare's text, which is marked by paranoia, death, and war. The clowns' "stupidity" unlinks kingship from a traditional exercise of power and turns it into a form of play. Their flop enacts new modes of playing king, but also makes the role of king easily transferable and freed from a gender connation. Following Halberstam's argument, since the clowns do not know what a king is, they cannot perpetuate the same forms of oppression associated with the role. Their onstage flopping in the performance of a king demonstrates a world free of the top down authority, in which kingly power is reduced to childlike role-playing.

The flop enables further diminutions of masculine power that may not directly imagine queer alternatives but do reduce and expose certain systems of patriarchal power that stand in the way of these new worlds. When Kevin and Shank are dancing, Bruce feels excluded and the stage manger's script says, "Bruce fails at dancing" (Danzig 202). Bruce has flopped at dancing, which on stage is rather ridiculous. The dancing is not complex, nor does it seem to be choreographed. The two clowns that dance "successfully" simply move their bodies in unregimented ways. Bruce's inability to produce any viable movement in relation to the music is

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comic because the other clowns have not indicated there are any standards to the dancing. The flop of dancing encourages Bruce to find a new way to engage with the moment; hence he exits the stage and returns, lifting up his kilt to reveal a balloon positioned in his pelvic region. Bruce's balloon then begins inflating and continues to grow in size until it explodes.  In the stage manger's text Kevin and Shank bow to Bruce, and the crown comes down from the ceiling. Within in this moment the sense of a masculine future is exploded, quite literally. The overreaching of the Scottish kings, (the one both confirmed and mocked by the witches and their mirror in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) is reduced to a physical site gag brought on in response to a flop. The balloon easily becomes phallic, both in the region it is placed, its growth, and its use as a tool of impressing the other clowns in the wake of the dancing flop.  But the moment that is amazing is the destruction; it grows too large and bursts.  The balloon's explosion makes physically manifest the absurdity of the fights over heirs and legacy of the male characters in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, reducing them to little more than a "penis measuring contest".  In growing too large to sustain itself, the balloon phallus actually leads to its own destruction: failure is rooted in the (over)abundance of this ridiculous balloon (of phallus). Since Bruce's balloon is a physical reduction of systems of masculine power built on reproduction, the inflatable object condemns the system of authority in two ways.  First, the balloon replaces enjoyment with violence by interrupting the pleasurable dancing and ending the clowns' peaceable transfer of the status of "king" when it introduces the crown and its attendant physical strife.  Second, the balloon is fragile and overreaching, it wants to always be bigger and so leads to its own destruction.   Bruce's flop of dancing finds an alternative in the balloon, which the production uses to showcase the shortcomings of masculine power.

In the previous examples, the clowns use the flop to reduce masculine authority to a physical clown gag, but other moments of the play engage directly with the Shakespeare text and use the words to help in the imaging of alternatives. Gary Taylor concludes his analysis of Shakespeare's varied reception across time by stating, "Within our culture, Shakespeare is enormously powerful. Power corrupts and disfigures" (411). Just as the witches resist the king's authority through their ambivalent regard towards Macbeth the man, the clowns show a similar ambivalence towards the authority of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, or more accurately the 400 years of cultural process that has enshrined Shakespeare's work as a pinnacle of literature in the Western canon and the adoption of Shakespeare by various staging customs including realism. In *Performing Nostalgia*, Susan Bennett argues that Shakespeare is often used to bring back a sense of the past, for nostalgia is a site, "where claims for authenticity . . . are staged" (7). She claims that nostalgia is most often a conservative force that employs Shakespeare in wishing for, "the possibility of reviving an authentic, naturally better, and material past" (7). However, for Bennett the constant recitation of Shakespeare in performance and culture can work not just to reinforce conservative notions of a desirable past, but to dislodge performance from "the discipline implied in the recitation" (25). 500 Clown's performance taps into the excess of citation that Bennett sees as a tool for dislodging Shakespeare from conservative forces that enshrine him. When the clowns retell the story it undercuts the reverence and immutability required for Shakespeare to be a beacon of unchanging values lighting the way to a desirable past. Halberstam can also explain the clown performance via her assertion that, "forgetfulness can be a useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary" (70). Both of the theorists highlight the need for partial and radical changes to the text as ways of detaching those texts from power systems which have adopted them. The clowns (re)create an

"elastic" (Bennett 7) sense of "Shakespeare" with the flop, and this elasticity charts their own view of Shakespeare as malleable and useful as opposed to staid and codified.

Ironically, perhaps, 500 Clown's imagining of Shakespeare as unbound by 400 years of textual criticism, performance tradition, and cultural employment gestures towards the original performance conditions of Shakespeare's play. While the clowns are far from advocating a return to the "merry old England" of King James I, they are posing questions about the legitimatizing nature of the structures that house the performance. Shakespeare's play posed sharp questions to King James's authority, which was the very authority that allowed the play to be performed. Similarly, the clowns challenge the theatrical and cultural veneration of Shakespeare that gives their own performance a degree of cultural notoriety and legibility (one must know Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to fully appreciate *500 Clown Macbeth*). When the clowns use the language of Shakespeare it is often incidental and relates to immediate physical concerns on stage that differ from the mimetic concerns of the text's given circumstances and hence the prescribed use of the Shakespeare/object. The text/action relationship is an inverse of standard theatrical practice, "suiting the word to the action," instead of suiting "the action to the word." The reversal undercuts the supremacy of the text necessary for the deification of Shakespeare, in some ways restoring the early modern text to a place of questioning instead of perpetuating power systems.

The clowns undercut Shakespeare's canonical authority by reducing the text to an onomatopoetic joke. When Bruce wants to move a stage platform onto the scaffold he hits the platform with his hand resulting in a knocking noise. Kevin hears the knocking and states, "Hark! There's a knocking at the South Entry" (204). The action and response goes on for several lines, each knock from Bruce resulting in Kevin reciting a new piece of the knocking

dialogue.  Eventually Bruce gets the panel in place and the clowns move on to a new task.

Danzig describes this moment, "When Kevin makes connections to the source material she

conveys a sense that it is a game, almost as if to say, "Aha, I linked Shank's action to *Macbeth*.

Point for me" (145).  The re-using of dialogue points back to the initial flop at the beginning of

the performance, when the clowns cannot say the word, "Macbeth" without the lights going out.

The performances started as a flop of "performing *Macbeth*."  Now when the lines of text re-

emerge the clowns are using them as a punch-line, the creative clown alternative that comes from

the flop's inability to use the text correctly.  When Kevin repurposes the words as a response to a

physical action and noise on stage, the words become untethered from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*,

become free floating verbal patterns employed on the clown's behalf. The very text of

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is transformed into a tool of resistance, "failure recognizes that

alternatives are already embedded in the dominant and that power is never total and consistent"

(Halberstam 88 ).  Where the witches' resistance was within a closed mimetic world, the clowns

have set the play text itself, and even more specifically an audience's presumed assumptions of

Shakespeare's cultural status, as agents of power to be rebelled against.  500 Clown uses the text

of Shakespeare to rebel against the sort of stereotype of Shakespeare they set up as an authority.

The clown's irreverence towards authority mines the deep skepticisms of authority present in the

Shakespeare text. 500 Clown recaptures some of the immediacy of the source text's political

implications not by substituting some new political leader of Macbeth, but by encouraging the

audience to question the cultural forces that govern the theatrical event and that brought the

patrons into the theatre (or at least the cultural forces that the clowns presume the audience

posses).

Kevin's attempt to recite Lady Macbeth's famous speech showcases how the clowns drain the authority from the text of Shakespeare through the flop, in order to question even the most basic assumptions about life and death. Shank asks for audience forgiveness, and Kevin shames him with lines from Lady Macbeth exclaiming, "My hands are of your color/But I shame to wear a heart so white!" (Danzig 206). From here Kevin tries to perform Lady Macbeth's "out damn spot" speech, but meets with difficulty. First the spotlight keeps going out and she needs to ask the operator to turn in back on. Second, Bruce begins to emerge from under the stage. The stage manager's script claims that Kevin thinks Bruce is attempting to perform the scene where Banquo's ghost emerges at the Macbeths' banquet, and Kevin tries to force Bruce off stage while he tries to lend her blood from his gunshot wound in order to literalize her speech. An audience is given the image of a woman mourning over a dead body that has been re-animated. Instead of celebrating because she has no need for the speech, she instead becomes frustrated with the re-animated body's attempts to help her perform the speech. Kevin and Bruce's flop of the text exists on multiple levels, both technicians and performers accidently interrupt Kevin's monologue, as they attempt to literalize her words. Her flop is predicated on Shakespeare's language's incongruity with the current moment, and the primary incongruity is that the dead man is not dead.

The speech flops because in the world imagined by the clowns, not only is kingship or authority lacking in permanence, but even death itself becomes a flop. Bruce's reanimation limits dramatic continuity, and even turns death and murder into a flopped action. Shakespeare's Macbeth executed a terror-ridden reign, but he did find many moments of success in murdering his political opponents. The witches once again provide the only point of resonance, as they also seem less fixated on death than the mortal characters in Shakespeare's play. In *500 Clown* there

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is no such sense of death's finality. The stakes of Lady Macbeth's guilt, which Kevin tries to evoke via the speech, are rendered meaningless in the clown world. Shakespeare's text becomes the recitation of famous words, hollowed out by the context of the clown performance. Kevin's insistence on performing the words makes clear that the authority the clowns wish to question lies not in the text itself, but in the cultural machinations that lionize the text without understanding the dramatic context of the words. Halberstam finds her silly archive imagining new worlds and relations, and 500 Clown imagines an impossible world in which the characters even flop in their performance of death. Eradicating death is not a practical new vision of the future, but it does suppose that meaning and authority, in this case present in the Shakespeare speech, are contingent on certain dramatic context and ideological assumptions about what makes the reality of the world we live in. Kevin's assumption is that the dead stay dead. The wonder of the clown world is that no possibilities must be curtailed. And while resurrection is not true for the audience, the clowns still model alternate, playful, and more enjoyable ways of existing that beg for a re-examination of our own world and the efficacy of our goals. If we wish to recount a speech in order to find success, then flopping the speech is the only logical response to a world that has made its very sentiments of those words irrelevant.

## 2.5    CONCLUSION

The erasure of the permanency of death is the most radical implication of the clowns' many flops, and throws most pre-existing notions to the wind. *500 Clown Macbeth* contains many other failures of theatrical convention. The clowns coming down from the back of the auditorium, the lights that respond literally to speeches on stage, and even the direct interaction

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with the audience are all flops on the mimetic convention of dramatic theatre as imagined by the clowns. It is the incongruous failure of these flops that creates the show's humor, and it is an audience's understanding of these conventions and expectations that allow the unexpected nature to give the performance comedic force. But these very practices are the conventions of the clown theatre, and a flop is a success for a clown. The clowns' many flops showcase the ideological conditioning necessary for success and failure to exist as a binary. So the clowns' failure is one of useful theatrical production, and creates entertainment and perhaps even financial profit. These are the fruits of failure for the performers and the audience. Thus clown is a way to see the world, and Halberstam makes that world legible. Clown provides a way out of certain conversations and dialogues that pit antagonistic sides, such as authority and sedition, theatre and clown, and even life and death, against each other. The rejection of binary opposition is one of the most subtle and radical insinuations achieved by subjecting all systems to the flop. 500 Clown finds many of these tropes already exist in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but they use the flop to make a world in which insistent questioning through failure reveals the tenuous nature of authority, be it kingship, theatre, or Shakespeare.

It is not easy to attach a specific political ethos to the clowns, but they do constantly resist and question what is given to them.[17] It seems unlikely that death is a norm human beings will overcome, but the clowns do suggest that the question at least be posed. The clown's urge to incessantly question whatever the prescribed use of a system is, be it a chair, the rules of kingship, or even the rules of life and death is what activates clown on a structural level of the flop, but is also the pervading ethos it gives to its audience and encourages them to bring back to the world at large.

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[17] This clown trait is noted both in McManus's *No Kidding* and Davison's *Clown*.

All of this encouraged questioning is a form of equivocation, and the word "equivocation" makes an appearance in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but not explicitly with the witches. When Kevin begins reciting the knocking dialogue in 50 Clown the language is only slightly related to the actual clown stage action. In the clowns' failure to do Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as a "whole," Kevin instead finds a glee in resurrecting certain words within the context of the greater failure of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. It is fitting that the last of the knocking lines ("Knock, knock, knock in the name of Beelzebub" (Danzig 204)) is a paraphrasing of the Porter's use of knocking. The Porter has one brief scene in the play, but even more than the witches he introduces in a constricted instant the full ethos of clown skepticism into the world of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, all through his act of equivocation.

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, an eerie knocking at the door following Duncan's death summons the Porter, and he gives a long comedic speech on the idea of equivocation. The transformation of the knocking from ominous sounds scaring Macbeth to comic annoyance for a drunk worker is the Porter's first act of equivocation. The porter takes on the role of Hell's gatekeeper and lists several potential entrants. One he describes thus, "Faith, here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed reason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven' (2.3 7-9). The line may refer to Henry Garnet, a Jesuit accused of complicity in the Guy Fawkes plot, who wrote a pamphlet claiming that lying was fine in certain cases. Garent was hung for his supposed involvement (Miola 28). The word equivocation cannot forever evade a concrete reality; the moral truth of God will not stand for it. But "equivocation" does not exit the play with such a firm rebuke, instead the Porter drags the word into the bodily realm, talking of drink as a great equivocator, both bringing on sexual urges but impairing male sexual performance. The speech on sex once

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again seems to mark the limits of equivocation; not God's judgment, a line of thought the Porter has given up on, but in the failure of a sexual organ to function or the induced sleep of drunkenness. But even in terms of the physical effects of alcohol, the Porter finds more room for equivocation. He insists alcohol does not get the better of him, because he vomits. Equivocation is thought to reach a conclusion in the hell fire narrative of Garent, but when the debate is brought out the realm of the divine and into the world of the body, it can continue ad-nauseum.

The Porter in his comic way gives voice to the gnawing insistence that all things can be seen from a different angle, or equivocated. In a play that lacks a role assigned to the resident clown of the company, the Porter is the closest Shakespeare's *Macbeth* comes to a clown. It is fitting that he gives a speech that plays with language, but also asserts a certain grotesque end point in debauchery. All the lofty debates of heaven and hell, who can equivocate to what position, are reduced to bodily functions. Clowns put an end to abstraction, reducing the intellect and sophistry to the reality of the body and uses the reduction to the physical reality in order to subject lofty ideas to the immediate concerns of the flop. The seeds of the clowns' bodily refusal to engage with the given rules of the situation, the refusal to accept any answer as the final word on the use of a system or object, are tucked away in the Porter's brief scene. The clown's flop is always equivocating, be it the way to use a piano chair or the permanency of death.

# 3.0    THERE OUGHT TO BE CLOWNS: ANTONY SHER AND THE CLOWNS

## HAUNTING *LEAR*

## 3.1    INTRODUCTION: INTERRUPTING THEATRICAL EXPECTATION

In the previous chapter I analyzed how contemporary clown theatre performances utilize the flop to explore the possibilities of failure and find alternative and pleasurable ways of existing in persistent opposition to power. This chapter looks at interruption, which I define as the clown's ability (and imperative) to interrupt the established rules of a given performance or custom, or convention.  Interruption is a key part of clown practice's evolution over time. Interruption also functions to define clown relationship to dramatic theatre and circus.  By breaking the rules of the event, clowns create points of rupture in (seemingly) familiar material.  Whereas the flop is used in clown routines to create alternate relationships to authority, interruption occurs when clowns enter a non-clown performance and break the rules of that event.

Both the flop and interruption rely on an existing power structure for the clown to subvert.  Though flop and interruption may overlap, the flop emphasizes the clown's inability and stupidity in order to imagine new worlds. In contrast, interruption emphasizes the clown's

intellectual *prowess* and agency. When the 500 Clowns begin speaking text that was not written by Shakespeare, they fail to perform *Macbeth*, but they also interrupt a performance of *Macbeth*. In 500 Clown this interruption is staged; there is only the pretense of an actual performance of *Macbeth*. This chapter examines the type and degree of interruption caused by the introduction of contemporary clown practice into an actual performance of Shakespeare as opposed to the supposed performance conjured by 500 Clown. What the "Shakespeare" production possesses that the 500 Clowns do not is an actual interruption of not just the supposed frame of the theatrical event, but the actual rules of the event.

In this chapter, my case study centers on Antony Sher's performance of the Fool in the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) 1982 production of *King Lear*, directed by Adrian Noble. I will first situate both early modern and 20th Century clown practice within a history of interruption wherein interruption, to borrow from Michel de Certeau, functions alternately as both strategy and tactic. Clown history, I argue, demonstrates that interruption is inherent within clown practice on a micro and macro level, structuring acts but also interrupting those acts. Shakespeare's *King Lear* possesses a clown figure who uses a mastery of language to interrupt the authority of the dramatic text he exists within. In Sher's 1982 performance, the clown interrupts the traditions of Shakespearean performance. Marvin Carlson clearly delineates how such theatrical traditions and memories take up residence in the audience's mind, enabling the past to "ghost" future productions. I argue that clown can "interrupt" these ghosts by acknowledging their existence and playing against them for comedic effect. Sher's performance, imbued with clown, thus interrupts the ghosts of Lears and Fools past at the RSC. In the particular moment of 1982 Britain, Sher's clown interruption models ways of breaking with a theatrical convention, a cultural past, and a conservatively constructed "Shakespeare."

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## 3.2 INTERRUPTION: THE CONSTANT OF CLOWN

Sher's performance draws on a long history of clown interruption, a history that has often been observed and deployed by 20th century theatre practitioners. Several clown scholars have noted that clowns are agents of interruption because they refuse to play by the rules of a given circumstance, be that theatre, circus, or some other event. A survey of clown scholars and clown history reveals that clown interruption has been used not just for humor, but to reevaluate stagnant practices in theatre training, performance, and even in clown performance itself. Sher's use of the clown and subsequent interruption of expected Fool behavior is part of a long existing pattern exhibited by clowns.

Donald McManus clearly articulates the implications of interruption as a clown technique for the 20th century theatre. In *No Kidding* McManus assesses a range of clowns in modern drama. Although he does spend some time on productions that incorporate clowns into existing texts, he focuses mainly on authors who have written clowns into the dramaturgical fabric of the script. Attempting to come to a unified understanding about a figure as far ranging and diverse as the clown, McManus states, "Although clowns have varying costumes, makeups, dramatic, and social functions, their disruptive quality is constant from genre to genre" (13). McManus uses the terms "disruption" and "otherness" to signal a clown's difference from his surroundings. For

McManus the difference of clowns is predicated on on the clown's relation to dramas based on psychological characterization.[18]

McManus's study primarily concerns clown's relationship to modern theatre. He finds clowns differ from psychological characters because, "while the behavior of normative characters is based on their emotional responses to the plot and other characters, the clown's behavior stems from an attempt to logically negotiate the arbitrary rules that govern the plot and the characters" (12). McManus's formulation of the clown's relationship to the dramatic text depends on a specific understanding of drama. Much of his book centers on modernist artists who were rebelling against the type of theatre popularized by Stanislavsky and Ibsen's social realist works. Not only do clowns interrupt in the dramas, but, McManus asserts, they interrupt the whole direction of the Western theatre in the early 20th century.

*No Kidding!* convincingly argues for clowns' prominent influence on the last century of Western theatre. Beginning in the early 20th century, McManus states, "Clowns make an ideal protagonist of twentieth-century theatre because theatrical modernism was preoccupied with breaking the expectations of older genre system and exposing the mechanism of art-making" (12). McManus's book contends that clown's prominence in the work of 20th century artists (Lecoq, Beckett, Fo, Meyerhold, etc.) is due to rebellion against the conventions of the 19th. Implicit in McManus's work is the importance of late 19th and early 20th century French clowns.

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[18] The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of "disrupt" states, "To break or burst asunder; to break in pieces, shatter; to separate forcibly). While clowns certainly employ violent or shattering means, this is not the only form of interference their actions take on. I use the term interruption because it touches upon a sense of the clown's need to break with the past or established traditions, even if that rupture is not permanent. The Oxford English Dictionary defines interrupt as, "to break in upon (an action, process, or condition, *esp.* speech or discourse); to break the continuity of (something) in time; to break off, to hinder the course or continuance of, cause to cease or stop (usually temporarily)." Clown interruption is an act that inserts itself into already operating patterns. McManus's terminology is not identical, but does notice the same general clown behavior existing in opposition to a given performance event.

The clowns performing in the circuses of Paris provided direct references for these theatre artists. The French clowns of the early 20th century provided inspiration for late Modernist writers, such as Beckett, and teachers who popularized clown, such as Copeau. An analysis of French clowns specifies the type of clown routines that served as the inspiration for clown interruptions of dramatic and actor training traditions. Since clown is so wide ranging, it is important to understand what specific clowns inspired these theatre artists. Analyzing specific French clowns reveals the specific work that 20th century theatre artists drew on when they evoked the image and practice of clown.

Bernard Sahlin's selected translation of the French clown historian Tristan Remy's *Entrees Clownesques* provides documentation of the material French clowns performed. To introduce his series of clown routines, Remy explains how circus clowns developed in France over a hundred years. The influences were varied, drawing on English traditions, such as the physical and comic style of Joseph Grimaldi, and from Spain. Foremost, clowns existed for long periods of time within circus and variety shows that were tightly governed in terms of the amount of plot, dialogue, and characters that were permitted on stage (Remy *Introduction*). Over the course of their history the French clowns evolved and changed, adapting to innovation from over seas performers and the changing nature of venues. Remy is concerned with clowns as they appeared early in the 20th century, but his collection was published in the early 1960s. Although circus and clowning had fallen in terms of popularity and prestige, he endeavored to find old performers still practicing their craft in order to preserve an art form he felt was fading into oblivion. The resulting collection contains entrée pieces that are short - most are not more than ten pages. The entrée pieces often involve props and limited dialogue, and Remy notes they are

marked by a degree of cartoon cruelty.  These French clowns that Remy sought to preserve provided direct inspiration for Copeau and Beckett.

Of the style of clowns Remy sought to capture, none were bigger than the Fratellini Brothers, a trio of Parisian clown superstars in the years between the two world wars. Paul, Francois, and Albert Fratellini, were each born in different countries to a traveling performer father. The brothers subverted the traditional clown duo and become a trio after a fourth brother died (Townsen 233). McManus demonstrates that Copeau and Beckett drew inspiration and borrowed material from the Fratellini.  Copeau sought to use the brothers as actor trainers, but scholar/performer Jon Davison notes that while Copeau's idealization of unstructured clowns remains in many areas of theatre, the teacher was less interested in the actual working methods of the clowns: "[Copeau] was disillusioned when he saw the Fratellinis' rehearsal and performance techniques were not based on some kind of innocent playfulness but in large part on set routines" (196). Copeau's desire to harness the performance style of clown to interrupt current actor training paradigms chafed with the actual working methods of the Fratellinis.  The conflict points to the potency of clown as an image of interruption.  Copeau ignored the hard work and thought that goes into subverting a given expectation. So while Copeau popularized the idea of looking to clowns for actor training, he did not embrace the performance and training methods of clowns.[19] Lecoq scholar Simon Murray acknowledges that Copeau cast a long shadow over French alternative theatre, and while careful to note differences, details Copeau's influence on Lecoq. While Lecoq himself seemed skeptical of circus clowns, Murray reveals that Lecoq worked with Copeau's son-in-law, and that the teacher has indentified Copeau as an

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[19] The idea of circus and clown training is somewhat contentious in circus communities.  Where as old apprentice or family systems used to dominate pedagogy, training centers and schools rose up in the middle of the 20th century. See Duncan Wall's *An Ordinary Acrobat* for a further discussion of the topic.

influence (28). The Fratellini brothers were not the only clowns to influence avant-garde and modernist theatre movements in France, but their influence ripples outward to many practitioners and teachers of 20th century clown.

As the Fratellinis came to fame in the years following World War I, their performance grew beyond the confines of a circus act. Since the circus had provided the clowns a source of authority and a structure to interrupt, the Fratellinis had to create new structures and authorities to interrupt. As mentioned above, the Fratellinis became famous for the introduction of a three-man clown team. As their popularity grew, their acts were growing in length, turning their show into one-act entertainments that could be experienced apart from the structure of the circus. The challenge is that interruption rests on the clowns inserting themselves into the circus program, often to the displeasure of the ringmaster. At the time most clown routines were made up of an authoritarian whiteface clown and a dimwitted auguste[20]. Their performances, at such Parisian locations as the Cirque Medrano, created the impression that the three brothers, "raised clowning to the level of art" (Townsen 233). By adding a second or counter Auguste to the then usual whiteface/auguste pairing the brothers found "richer dramatic contrasts than those of their competitors" (Townsen 236). Additionally, Albert's counter-auguste helped popularize extravagant makeup and the ubiquitous red nose. The development of the lowly counter-auguste stratified the levels of authority within the clown routine. This further amplified the authority of the white face in contrast, and created the opportunity for interruptions of authority and expectation amongst the three parts of the clown trio.

The Fratellinis' success in performance rested not only on their precision and training, but on the various levels of interruption afforded by the three member team. Remy's transcribed

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[20] Western clown is often divided into three roles, the white face authoritarian clown, dim-witted auguste and later the even more absurd counter-auguste.

routines demonstrate the levels of interruption. For example, in one routine Paul is replaced by Georges Loyal in the role of the ringmaster.  The move presumably stems from the fact that Paul had died by the point Remy was able to transcribe the routine.  Francois tries to shoot an apple off Albert's head, parodying William Tell, and also the sorts of dangerous talent acts one might find in a circus.  However there is a great deal of confusion trying to attach the apple to the head, then the apple is slowly eaten, and finally Francois uses his gun to squirt water in Albert's face. When Albert takes the gun and tries to squirt his brother, water comes out of the rear of the gun hitting him in the face a final time. The whole routine is based on stalling to reach the William Tell moment of shooting the apple.  The ring master character tries to get the brothers on track representing the authority of the circus which the brothers' routine is interrupting, but different failures keep popping up; the apple falling, banter with the ringmaster.  Each moment delays the eventual payoff of firing the gun. The Fratellinis' moments of interruption are accomplished through the flop (the flop to keep the apple on the head), and each flop perpetuates the interruption of the circus program. Whereas the circus is about great physical success, the clowns bring their amusing failure.  The flops work in contrast to the other circus performers' displays of skill and the clowns draw further humor by interrupting the ringmaster's show with their failure.  When the Fratellinis and Grock moved away from circuses and into self sustaining routines, failure became key to their performances as they had no one to interrupt, no natural authority figure to challenge.[21]  Flop becomes a popular tool and focus of clown training in the 20th century as clown performances are isolated as evenings of their own.  Interruption can only be played at when the clown is not the central focus of the entertainment event. This is, unless the clown interrupts its own tradition.

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[21] This is why Grock often had a small partner to play straight man and why the three man Fratellinis had to calibrate a hierarchy.

The Fratellinis provide one example of clown's need to interrupt their own traditions in order to keep their material fresh and funny, but there are many others. M. Wilson Disher repeatedly argues for clowns' necessary mutability in his study of clowns and pantomimes. Looking at the evolving role of commedia stock types across history, Disher concludes, "Clowns maintain their distinctive characteristics despite, not because of tradition" (33). Clown costumes demonstrate the need for change. For example, society's dupes and outcasts repeatedly provide new inspirations of clown clothing. Disher uses many examples, but Chaplin's tramp costume is perhaps the most recognizable usurpation of society's down trodden into an emblem of the clown (30). Finally, in his assessment of the English pantomime, Disher finds that Grimaldi brought new energy to the form, but after his death too many clowns tried to copy his antics, and the resulting erosion of novelty depleted the form of its vigor. "The strength of (Grimaldi's) new vintage had stretched (Pantomime) to the uttermost. Once emptied, it could not be completely refilled" (143). Disher's study demonstrates the need for clowns to interrupt their own traditions to maintain the vitality of the comic form. Other clown historians have noted the need for interruption within clowns' own histories.

Towsen's clown history chronicles interruption as a vital part of the clown tradition. He notes the whiteface clown evolves from the rustic buffoon of Grimaldi into "a very clever trickster" (214) thereby forcing the development of new clown roles around the beginning of the 20th century. The development of the auguste clown stems from the whiteface clown's need of an oafish companion. As time went on, the auguste became the central focus of clown acts and therefore needed to find a new foil, just as previously Harlequin rose from a dullard to a trickster and so required Grimaldi's clown to be his foil. Towsen's history charts the need for new conceptions of clowns as popular types become too clever to remain incompetent. When

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Harlequin became too clever, clown entered to fill his place, and when in turn the white face clown became a clever trickster, the auguste entered to play the imbecile.

Interruption is sewn into the fabric of clowning. It is the context within which many routines function and it is a process by which the clown renews its own humor. Interruption, in this sense, is different from flop in that it relies on the presence (or insertion) of a non-clown structure to house the clown performance. Dramatists and theatre teachers used the interruption associated with clown performance in order to challenge the aesthetic and cultural dogmas of the mid twentieth century. The association of clown and interruption is not just noted by clown and theatre scholars, but marks the use of clowns by major theorists of the 20th century. Because of the symbiotic nature between clowns and their objects of interruption (such as the circus), clowns often use a given object in a way not intended by the rules that govern the object's traditional use. It is through the unintended use of objects that clowns interrupt the proceedings of a given performance by subversively using the very tools of that performance.

## 3.3    INTERRUPTION AS SOCIAL TACTIC

It is not just clown theorists and historians who have identified interruption as a key element of clown practice. Bakhtin, Brecht, and de Certeau all associate clowning with interruption. For these theorists, the fascination with clown focuses less on the aesthetic or the humor created through interruption, but instead in how clown excites the potential to disrupt a given status-quo. By using interruption to refuse to play by the rules around them, clowns practice intentional autonomy in the face of hegemonic power structures. Understanding each theorist's relationship to clown illuminates the potentials that clowns can activate through interrupting a given power

system. Each theorist, especially de Certeau, provides not just a language through which to analyze clown but also elucidates the potentials of clown performance to interrupt social schema they exist within.

Bahktin's work examines the subversive potentials of the low bodily humor of the under classes, and clown is one of the exemplars of this potential subversion. Bakhtin's theory of carnival is heavily invested in a sense of interrupting the established social hierarchy, "It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (10). His theory proposes that carnival relies on the bodily over the spiritual, functioning as a release valve. The carnival release valve is only employed during the contained temporality of carnival, and hence the carnival contributes to the status quo. Bakhtin acknowledges the clown's specific disruptive power. Bakhtin states "Clowns and fools . . . were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season" (8). He differentiates clowns from actors because the latter only assume a role for a temporary amount of time. The Bakhtinian clown (where and when it exists) brings carnival's interruption of social hierarchies into everyday life.

More immediately relevant to the theatre is Brecht, who drew inspiration from clowns precisely because of their ability to interrupt the situation they found themselves in. One notable clown influence on Brecht was Karl Valentin, a comic performer in Germany between the two world wars. Brecht found much to admire in Valentin's musical hall sketches, and the two worked on projects together, with some accounts giving Valentin a primary role in Brecht's initial conceptions of an Epic Theatre (*Durov's Pig*, Schechter 26). Broadly, Brecht sought to create a theatre that dislodged the audience from a supposedly passive role and forced them to intellectually engage with the choices of the characters on stage. He employed a variety of metatheatrical devices to call attention to the performance in order to shift focus to the

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implications of the character's actions instead of reflection on the actor's craft. As a comic performer, Valentin's work often interrupted the expected flow of events and broke down the mimetic frame that sealed the audience away from the production. For instance, at the end of one of his performances, Valentin took an axe to the stage and destroyed, "not only the scenery, but also the floorboards, much to the surprise of the audience and the other actors" (*Durov's Pig*, Schechter 24). Despite audience surprise, the management had actually sanctioned Valentin's actions since the theatre was due to undergo renovations. The comic took the opportunity to create a stage moment that fundamentally upset the conventional rhythms of the theatrical event, surprising almost everyone in the room. The impropriety of the action interrupted the expected progression of the evening.

Valentin was not the only clown that inspired Brecht. A 1920 diary entry shows clowns' early influence on the director/theorist. He recounts a violent clown in Brussels who, "shot at the lights with a little pistol, banged himself on the head, developed a large bump, sawed if off and ate it: I was enchanted" (Brecht, *Diaries* 32). Brecht saw clowns as one of a variety of tools to help audiences resist complete absorption into the mimetic circumstances of the drama and instead focus on the political argument of the piece. To achieve the goal of keeping audiences aware of their circumstances and the arguments of the play, Brecht insisted his theatre would someday have clowns on staff and these clowns would parody all that is happening in the play between scenes (32). The presence of the clowns will "bring reality back to the things on the stage," achieving Brecht's goal of political rather than aesthetic contemplation: " For God's sake it's the things that need to be criticized –the action, words, gesture – not their execution." (32-33). In his essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", Brecht looks to the circus for methods to "make the incidents represented appear strange to the public" and finds, "The way the clowns

speak and the way the panoramas are painted both embody an act of alienation"(Brecht, *Theatre* 91). Alienation (via clown) can be read as a kind of interruption that jolts the audience member away from preconceived notions or purely aesthetic judgments and encourages the audience to look anew at the given situation. As demonstrated above, interruption has existed across the history of clowns, but 20th century theatrical practitioners, Brecht most notably, used the clown practice within the confines of the dramatic theatre in an attempt to force the audience to reflect on the political implications of the character's actions.[22]

Verfremdung is often translated as alienation, but Sarah Bryant-Bertail argues for a more precise definition in *Space and Time in Epic Theatre*. "Making strange" and "defamiliarization" are more precise translations that better reflect, "an active verb, a dynamic process rather than a finished product." Further, this process does not rest on a static conception of audience and performance space, but rather Epic Theatre allows, "at least two ideologically coded contradictory spatial dimensions at any moment, in an ongoing juxtaposition with each other" (19). Clowns wonderfully demonstrate the competing spatialities by interrupting the stage world and creating alternate worlds apart from usual progression of the linear dramatic plot. Further, Bryant-Bertail defines gestus, "It materializes the social relationships of characters, both in the separate scenes and for the work as a whole" (22). The clown can be understood as a gestus: "a nexus where contradictory spatio-temporal dimensions and their ideological valuations cross paths at one material object" (22). The clown's emphasis on a physical reality and interruption of the intended uses of objects (including the act of dramatic theatre itself) creates different

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[22] While the focus of this analysis uses Brecht, others have picked up on the interruptive nature of the clown, notably Dario Fo and Samuel Beckett.

spatialties within the performance space and also opens up various possible meanings for particular objects.[23]

Returning to Valentin, the comic's destruction of the playing space allowed for the theatre to be both the mimetic world of the theatre act, but also the physical stage that was contained in that space. His axe becomes a gestus, both a prop in his act and tool of actual destruction, uniting the competing spatialties of the stage in one object. The verfremdung (new stage use) that is made clear by the gestus (the axe) is at heart an act of interruption, one that does not allow for a unified mimetic representation, and instead splinters (literally) the reality of the stage revealing the constructed nature of all acts taking place in the performance space.

As Brecht apprehended, the clown can use the immediate circumstances around him to create new meaning from those familiar circumstances. These clown interruptions can also be seen as tactics that resist existing power structures, whether the traditions of clown or the "rules" of a given drama. Brecht wished to capitalize on the clown's interruptive potential in order to allow the focus of a theatrical performance to be on the events of the play and not the execution of those events by an actor. In his essay "The Street Scene," Brecht describes how an epic theatre should function as a bystander reporting an accident on the corner. The focus on such a demonstration is not the skill with which the bystander recounts the information, but that a narrative is offered which those surrounding the storyteller can then engage with, agree or

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[23] Brecht's use of clown in his drama is catalogued in Joel Schechter's *Durov's Pig*. Schechter finds Brecht borrowing from Valentin to create the white faced, stilt walking soldiers in *A Man's a Man* in 1931. The play's central character also sells two men dressed as an elephant under the pretense that is truly is an elephant, and offers for proof the fact that someone paid for the "elephant" (29-30). In 1929 Brecht caused a riot with one scene in *The Baden Learning Play* wherein two clowns had different parts of his body sawed off in order to help him recover from an illness, "'Help' from his fellow men (or fellow clowns) can sometimes be quite harmful" (47). The clown inflected performances interrupt the closed mimetic world and thereby open up competing realties in the same stage space. While many of Brecht's later clown figures are more completely subsumed into a dramatic space, clown's power to interrupt left a lasting imprint on Brecht's evolving urge to create a theatre that makes the familiar event strange.

disagree. Brecht champions Epic Theatre's ability to, "portray social processes as seen in their causal relationships" (*Brecht on Theatre* 121). The epic model forces theatre to cease to be about theatre and becomes a tool for exposing the processes of class exploitation. Clown interruption is recognized as a force for challenging the dominant economic and social ideologies through its Epic tendencies. Clowns can use interruption to expose the systems of power that govern the theatrical event, thereby readjusting audiences focus on the content as opposed to style of the performance event. Clowns assert their identity in terms of resistance to dominant authorities, be those authorities theatrical or economic. I suggest that Michele de Certeau's *The Practice of the Everyday Life* enables a discussion of clown practice that makes the familiar strange, but does so through repurposing the already existing traditions of the dramatic theatre to interrupt existing narratives.

De Certeau maps potential resistances to dominant structures through innovative use. In the 1980s essay "Walking in the City," de Certeau explains how a walker cutting through a building or taking a shortcut while wandering around an urban grid resists the totalizing intentions of city planners. Clowns have the potential to make innovative use of any material they encounter, opening up new possibilities for relating to the theatre. De Certeau divides interaction with an object into two categories of use, strategies and tactics. Strategies are those forms of interactions prescribed by agents of power within a system. The tactic, in contrast, is unforeseen use of the object, one that is not intended or prescribed by those in positions of institutional power. As such, "[the tactical user] takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings" (37). When Valentin was presented with the opportunity to destroy the stage, he took the moment and employed tactical revision of the space, morphing it from a priori of the performance to part of the event.

I suggest that what specifically links clowning to the use of tactics is the embodied nature of the act. Because clown's history is marked by a continual interruption of standardized practices that must be reinvented to remain humorous, the clown can only exist as a practice in the moment, a tactic. Clowns resist institutionalization by the tactical use of their own performance tradition. When clown practice becomes overly institutionalized, such as Grimaldi's pantomime tradition, the form withers and decays, and instead moves on to new locations such as the circus. Through alterations of content and form over time, the clown has allied itself with a popular ethos, and one that depends so specifically on the audience and the playful conditions of its moment of execution that it refuses to be absorbed into the power structure. This is not to say that clown has not at various points had its iconography and elements of its practice subsumed by various power structures. Rather, despite these usurpations, clown has persisted as a form that seeks to interrupt its own traditions in order to remain tactical as opposed to strategic. Clown is not a form that challenges accepted use only to be co-opted. Rather through its elusive nature (its tactical core), clown resists institutionalizing its practice or becoming a dominant regime. This allows clown to become tactical user of canonical objects.

de Certeau's recurring example of the tactical use of a prescribed text is the repurposing of religious rituals of Christian Europe by Amerindians in his book *The Practice of the Everyday*. The resistance was not immediately visible to those in the position of power, but rather "[the Amerindians subverted [Christian Europeans] not by rejecting or altering [Christian tradition], but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept" (xiii). de Certeau explains that the Amerindians used the rules and customs of the Spanish, so that outwardly they appeared reverent. However, they were able to make these rituals refer to their own culture, giving the outsider a view of compliance by repurposing the

new practices to uphold an older pre-Columbian way of knowing (32). The Amerindian example is used several times due to its powerful demonstration of how engagement with a given set of structures does not necessarily mean compliance. Clown possesses some surface similarities to the normative traditions of the theatre, but it differs through rejecting the idea that the text must mean in a certain way or that the theatrical system must function on certain terms. Clowning repurposes the object of current theatrical practices, and by doing so interrupts the status quo. Such interruption is a vital part of how clown reinvents its identity across time and resists institutionalized clown practices.

The use of tactics as opposed to strategies is geared towards specific social imperatives. In de Certeau's formation, official language and practice have worked to neurtalize individualized or eccentric practice in modern industrialized society. The most well known example is the friction between a city as conceptualized on a grid from a theoretical standpoint versus the rather idiosyncratic uses that grid is put to by individual walkers. The planners try to organize the movement of daily life, but the walker will resist this organization through simple acts such as short cuts or crossing through buildings. Complicit in the organizational strategies are capitalist models of use, time as money, and productive use and engagement. Resistance then becomes a mode of escaping the system while living in it. I argue that interruption in clowning functions similarly: not solely a tool toward overthrowing a system, but one of coping. Tactics are less the educational staging ground of the revolution than, "an art of manipulating and enjoying" (xxii). Interruptive tactics map alternatives to the hegemonic power within the power itself, living in the cracks and shadows. Modernist theatre practitioners employed clowns

against what they saw as stagnation in the art form. Clowning is a tactical interface that subverts the rules of the existing systems of the theatre by using the very tools of that system.[24]

In his discussion of mapping the city de Certeau cites what is perhaps the most famous 20th century clown, Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin's use of the cane becomes indicative of the walker's agency in the cityscape, enacting a possibility that moves beyond what is prescribed by intended use. "Charlie Chaplin multiplies the possibilities of his cane: he does other things with the same thing and he goes beyond the limits that the determinants of the object set on its utilization" (98). The use of the cane is not just amusing, but rather points towards the expansion of possibility, that a cane is not just a cane. It is in this way the clown is able to engage with established systems of order, by both literally using the objects of that system outside of prescribed use, but also by fostering a mentality of resistant tactile use of given material, or in de Certeau's words, of "making do." Early Chaplin films and early animation are especially primed to be tools of interruption because they created new use for emerging mediums. Chaplin and his cohorts' (animated or otherwise) innovations are examples of interruption's ability to change the

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[24] Although de Certeau does not explicate or heavily engage with clown's role in a subversive structure, he does use clowns on several occasions to demonstrate metaphors or modes of tactile use. He explains how overextension of expertise is similar to Felix the Cat walking past the edge of a cliff, only to realize later his feet have left the ground. In this case, although the initial authority of the expert was conferred by knowledge, it is over extended by the power systems that would convert, "competence into authority" (7-8). The clown type performance of Felix and use of space serves as a metaphor for larger issues of misuse of authority granting systems. This is similar to Bergson's theory of laughter that explains how laughter is evoked by bringing to light human's mechanized behavior that fails to fit the situation at hand. The clown like Felix serves as a clear, physical metaphor to elucidate the damaging operations of over extended knowledge.

These sorts of clowns as metaphors are located not just in cartoons of the early 20th century but also in earlier literary configurations. de Certeau finds Scapin and Figaro to be literary embodiments (but limited by their literary nature) of these sorts of trickster figures that find, "a certain art of placing one's blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space" (18). These figures use the rules of the system to turn them on their head, interrupting the prescribed use with tactical intervention. Craftily subverting, if not overthrowing rules, becomes a form of resistance and pleasure. The clown goes a step beyond these figures through her actual embodiment and engagement. If Scapin and Figaro (much like Rabelais) lack corporeality, it is the performance clown in his interruption of performance practice that resists being brought into the world of strategic use. Later de Certeau uses an actual clown in his configurations of space, confirming the clown's power to engage on the immediate level.

course of a given medium. In some ways this is a limited critique of power. It is not the revolution that Brecht was after. Rather, it is the careful reusing of time and space, using interruption to encourage new ways of engaging the material one currently possesses. The clown's constant need to interrupt the traditions of its own practice encourages a rejection of stagnant power and prescribed use.

Clown interruption is thus a process that ruptures specific power structures. While failure and flop create alternative worlds, interruption exposes the constructed nature of the present world. The word "clown" emerges during the early modern period in English history; a popular performance form that resisted the power of emerging professional scripted drama. As the playwright grew in importance the clown's role diminished, and their tactical power in face of the regulated drama appears to have diminished as well. However, Shakespeare demonstrates a unique middle road, in which his clown characters leave behind the improvisation of the past and instead use scripted words to challenge the supremacy of the playwright's power to express the world through words. *King Lear* works tactical clown interruptions into its very *textual* fabric, with Shakespeare using his own mastery of language to question the limits of that very language.

### 3.4    THE GREAT STAGE OF FOOLS

Shakespeare's plays continuously employ clowns and fools as interruptive forces. The playwright's relationship to clowns and fools generally follows this narrative: Shakespeare started writing interruptive rustic clown characters for Will Kemp, when Kemp left the company and hence Shakespeare wrote more dramatically integrated Fool characters for Robert Armin.

This narrative insinuates that later work allowed the fool a smaller degree of interruption because of his integration into the plot. A close reading of *King Lear* illuminate a more permeable line between clowns and fools that exist not just in Shakespeare's plays, but in the early modern stage and society. The Armin fools were not a rejection of clown interruption, but rather represent Shakespeare's translation of the clown's physical and improvisational interruptive potential into a more literary form. The Armin clown/fools show that interruption was not an early barbarism that Shakespeare overcame in the later plays, but rather clown interruption was an essential tool that Shakespeare chose to employ in his drama.

Clowns and fools possess some differences. A reading of Shakespeare's plays showcases the difference between the early career clowns like Launce of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, most likely played by Will Kemp, and the fools like *Twelfth Night*'s Feste, played by Robert Armin. Clowns are often country rustics, buffoons of some sort who create humor through a lack of knowledge. Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost* mixes up information due to a lack of literacy and common sense. Both Launce and Costard find themselves in close proximity to characters of higher status, and humor results from their inability to fit into the aristocratic world. These early clowns are outsiders, and their humor rests on the disruption of the ordered, well-mannered worlds they enter. Perhaps the most well known example is Bottom, whose unpolished manners create incongruous humor both in the court of the fairies and of Theseus. Fools on the other hand are often close to the sources of power (kings and nobles) and their humor is the result of intelligence. Still, despite a clear difference between the early clowns and later fools, the two identities are not mutually exclusive on the early modern stage. In *Twelfth Night* the character of Feste was in all likelihood played by Armin and falls into the category of fool in terms of his wit and proximity to power. Yet for all his fool like qualities, in the Folio's speech headings the

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character is referred to as a clown, or to be precise a Clo (abbreviation) or Clowne (Early modern spelling). For the purposes of stage types, a fool was a kind of clown.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* provides information on the etymological history of both clown and fool. "Fool" is first used to denote a performer potentially in 1370, but definitely by 1440. The earliest English uses of the word "fool" in any context appears in 1275, and refers to "One deficient in judgment or sense, one who acts or behaves stupidly, a silly person, a simpleton." Clown shares a similar trajectory of pejorative adjective transformed to type of performer, but comes into usage later. The earliest uses of clown is in the mid to late 16$^{th}$ century refers to "A countryman, rustic, or peasant," quickly evolving to emphasize a perceived lack of intelligence. 1600 is the first listed use of "clown: to refer to "A fool or jester as a stage character" ("clown, *n.*"). It is vital that the term clown encompasses those who play a fool's part on stage. Contemporary scholars can see a difference between the shrewd fool and rustic clown, but the meanings of the terms were not hard and fast, and could refer to each other. The word clown's evolution continued and in the first third of the 1700 the term clown begins to refer to a character in the Harlequinade of the British pantomime, and to the circus character that provided perhaps the most concrete example of a modern audience's understanding of clown. The contemporary definition of clown as a performer is heavily influenced by events that occurred after Shakespeare's use of the terms and the types of performers that followed. During Shakespeare's time, a fool was a type of clown.

An examination of the structure of playing companies reinforces the etymological overlap between clowns and fools. Records indicate that a single performer took on the roles of both clowns and fools. When Kemp left the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Armin replaced him and took over the role of Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Wiles 144). Dogberry is a

doddering simpleton, more suited to the Kemp style, so Armin's assumption of the role indicates the proximity between the demands of the fool and that of clown.  While the roles "written for" Armin are more in line with the conception of a court fool, there is overlap in what a company's "clown" was expected to perform. Shakespeare's fools were a type of clown, and the shift from rustic clowns to fool clowns was a difference in style, but not a fundamental difference in type.

Just as the word "clown" can currently be associated with circus, actor movement training, and children's entertainer, so too the term "clown" was multivalent in Shakespeare's own moment. The early modern designation of company "clown" meant that the performer was set off in some ways from the other members of the company. David Wiles argues that the degree of distance between performer and text in Shakespeare's drama relies heavily on the distinction between Kemp and Armin.  Looking to the use of the second person pronoun, Wiles demonstrates that Kemp often refers to audience members as individuals and "constructs his audience as a community of peers, Armin acknowledges the audience only as a collection of individuals" (103). Additionally, Kemp's clown names are always English, even when the play is set in a foreign locale. Armin's names maintain a greater degree of mimesis, correlating to the setting of the play. Wiles makes clear that Kemp's characters were closer to the audience and stood apart from the drama, while Armin's are more fully integrated into a literary world of the play.

The shift from Kemp to Armin signals a departure from the power of improvisational performance in the clown and toward the scripting power of the playwright. Shakespeare moved away from entertainments with autonomous clown roles towards clowns who are integrated into the world of the text. James Shapiro observes the movement away from Kemp and jigs and towards a more unified dramatic world: "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 theatre, no matter how popular the actor" (37). Andrew Gurr also notes the growing popularity of jigs, song and dance numbers often lead by clowns occurred immediately after the dramatic event, during the 1590s. This popularity came with a backlash, and authors, notably Shakespeare, worked to eradicate the jig. Gurr argues that Feste's song at the end of *Twelfth Night* represented a new form of dramatically integrated and less "bawdy" jig that, "may therefore have been written into the script precisely to clarify the new way of doing endings (*Shakespeare Company*, 73). Shakespeare's later plays seemingly ameliorate the interruptive quality of the clown by both using Fool clowns instead of rustic clowns due to a smaller (but important) gap between the former and the aristocratic protagonist and in scripting the jigs that were once the province of clowns.

Armin's clown did not stand apart in the same way as Kemp's. Gurr shows that Armin was both a clown and playwright while Kemp's jigs were separate from the scripted drama and by the 1600's jigs and Kemp were associated with "barbarisme" (*Shakespearean Stage*, 86, 174-5, 231). Alex Davis argues that the shift in style from Kemp to Armin need not be seen as "the desire of the Chamberlain's Men to purge themselves of any taint of vulgarity" (84). Rather, the later clown/fools possess a greater degree of social ambiguity than the rustic clowns who statically remain inferiors and outsiders. Speaking of Lear's fool Davis states, "What . . . are we to make of Lear's Fool – a 'knave' (1.4.42) at his master's beck and call, continually threatened with whipping (1.4.108)- and yet on a mock-familial footing with his 'nuncle', the king himself – and this in an era when power could be measured in terms of a person's intimacy with and ready access to the person of the monarch" (85). The move to the clown/fool of Armin is a distinct

stylistic shift from the early rustic clowns, but the new fool/clown still has the ability to interrupt the mimetic power relations that reflected the stratified Jacobean society.

Armin's performance of Lear's fool creates a different challenge to the power of language than Kemp's performances. While Kemp's jigs and performances interrupt the dramatic worlds Shakespeare created, Armin's performances use the words of the playwright to question and thereby interrupt langauge's power to create a stable world. Kemp's jigs and extra-textual insertions into the performance of the Shakespeare script are tactical interactions with that text. However, when Kemp and his style left the company Shakespeare did not allow the tactical interruptions of his textual worlds to leave with the dancing clown. Instead, just as Brecht later co-opted the figure and some practices of clown in his dramaturgy, so too did Shakespeare attempt to use the interruptive tactics of clowns. Shakespeare uses the later fool/clowns to both interrupt and confirm his own consolidation of power in the role of the playwright. By scripting clown interruptions of the dramatic world (and of language's power to render that world) into his text, Shakespeare seems to usurp the clown's role and eliminate the tactical nature of the interruption by converting it to a strategy. However, through Shakespeare's scripted clowns, the supposed goal of a tightly controlled mimetic world is tactically subverted, showcasing an ironic lack of internal textual supremacy intentionally created by the playwright. Shakespeare becomes a tactical interrupter, taking for himself the clown's knowledge that something exists outside of the supposed power of language to create a closed mimetic space. Instead of using physical comments such as jigs to tactically interrupt the text, Armin's fool/clowns uses Shakespeare's mastery of language to subvert the power of language. A strategic use of Shakespeare's play now incorporates a tactical interruption of language's power to create. The tactical use of language, the supremacy of the text tradition that houses it, and

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Armin's fool are not just absorbed into the completed mimetic world, but stand on the edges of that world, the fool challenges the dominance of text through a mastery of language itself.

A textual analysis of Lear's fool indicates similarities with contemporary clown's relationships to power, and moreover showcases how the resistant practices of de Certeau provide a lens through which to understand the movement of the play. The clown's tactical interruption is most clearly felt in tragedy because of the contrast between the humor of the clown, that relies on a degree of distance to laugh, and the empathy needed to identify with the tragic figures of the play. While *Lear* strategically endeavors to create a cruel world through language that reflects the emotional concerns of its audience the clown persistently interrupts the ease of this mimesis through tactical inversions of language's power to relay coherent information. *Lear* shares with clown an instance that funny and serious can and must coexist. For while the play is marked by the old man cast out in the storm, bodies exposed to the godless elements, traitorous children, a savage blinding and abandonment, and cruelty from servants, humor endures.  If Sidney opposed the mixing of kings and clowns, *Lear* is one of Shakespeare's great examples of the fruits of that mixture. The play does not allow humor to dissipate tension, nor does it heighten it in the way the Porter does in *Macbeth*.  Rather in *Lear*, comedy is a necessary way of knowing the world. The Fool's task is to teach Lear how to see the world with humor. The play's tactical linguistic interruption of its own mimetic construct elucidates links between the fool/clown and recurring clown uses of interruption. Since interruption is always contingent on accepted practices of a given time, Shakespeare's unique interruption lays the groundwork for contemporary clown interruption 400 years in the future, but the interruption can only draw from Shakespeare's model and not merely replicate it.  To replicate would be to tell a stale joke. Instead, understanding Shakespeare's play in is own time allows for a better

understanding of how it enables new forms of interruption in future performance contexts, "In states unborn and accents yet unknown" (3.1 ln 116, *Julius Caeser*).

*King Lear* is the story of an old man who divides his kingdom. He cuts his youngest and most caring daughter out of his will and banishes her, along with those who question his decision. Lear is soon exposed to the ingratitude of his older daughters, whose words of flattery are not borne out by kind action. Similarly, Gloucester's bastard deceives the old man into banishing his faithful child. Both old men pay dearly for their lack of judgment, and in blindness and madness find lucidity heretofore absent. Both are ultimately reunited with their loyal children. These conversions come too late, as the ensuing stress and civil war leaves most of the parents and children dead.

The Fool pushes the King toward both clarity and madness. He relentlessly mocks his king, though his livelihood is based on his association with Lear; he is servant and serves at the pleasure of the king. When he displeases the king he is subject to repercussions including physical abuse. The Fool forces Lear to see the error of his ways, but as the king descends into the madness the Fool disappears from the play. Although the lessons of folly are learned, they are ultimately superseded by a construction of mercy and tenderness taught by Lear's youngest daughter, Cordelia. Nevertheless, Lear allows for the use of humor as a challenge to the system that used to support his kingly power. Similarly, Shakespeare's keen implosion of language via the Fool mocks the supremacy of the playwright's own linguistic art. The most obvious way in which the Fool uses humor is to encourage Lear to "see better." After the king divides his kingdom and disowns Cordelia, the Fool chides the monarch, especially in scene 1.4. When the disguised Kent pledges loyalty to the king, the fool makes his first appearance and encourages the disguised Kent to take the Fool's coxcomb because, "if thou follow him, thou must needs

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wear my coxcomb" (1.4 ln 102-3). For the rest of the scene the Fool endeavors to make the king see the foolishness in his ways. Here Armin's character trades on a dual conception of the word fool, one as an adjectival description of a person's lack of intellect and as a noun indicating the position as entertainer. The latter sense of the word is itself possesses multiple meanings, implying both those entertainers who display comic wit and those who are without wit and whose behavior is displayed for the amusement of those with a presumed greater degree of intelligence. Lear's fool is of the witty variety.[25] The Fool continues to push Lear into admitting his foolishness, implying that giving away his lands was a foolish act, hence making Lear a fool, or one lacking sense. The king then asks "Dost thou call me fool, boy?" to which he responds, "All thy other titles thou hast given away" (1.4 141-2). Lear eventually admits to foolishness, not just in himself, but in the world around him.

Lear's use of the term fool is persistent and telling. Before the king delivers his curse of sterility on Goneril at the end of 4.1, he begins to use the language of folly. Hitting his own head the king states, "Beat at this gate that let thy folly in/And thy dear judgment out" (1.4 163-4). Later in 1.5 the Fool insists that Lear, "wouldst make a good fool (1.5 36)." By this point the monarch is distracted, half talking to the Fool, half talking to himself. Yet when the Fool talks of Lear being his own fool, the king does not resist, but asks further questions. Lear ends the scene imploring heaven to "let me not be mad" (1.5 43). Here madness and folly become associated, and in the coming scenes they mix further. When Lear meets Poor Tom on the heath, the king descends into something seeming like madness, only to come out a half-mad, half-fool figure in

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[25] R.A. Foakes article "Textual Revision and the Fool in King Lear" surveys various interpretations of the character based on the textual differences between the Quarto and the Folio texts. Robert Hornback addresses similar issues of difference in the Fool between the two texts in *The English Clown Tradition from The Middle Ages to Shakespeare.*

his conversation with Gloucester. As Lear stretches further towards madness, the Fool's role shrinks, and his direct interaction with Lear diminishes. But in these early scenes he plants the roots of a folly infused view of the world that enables Lear to become a fool himself in 4.6 before his sentimental conversion by Cordelia.

The Fool's conversion of Lear is accomplished through jokes employing a slippery use of language. While many of the characters in the play use the styles of metaphors and image clusters that mark Shakespeare's plays, puns and the purposeful distorting on the usage of language mark the Fool's use of words. He playfully repurposes meaning in 1.4 when evoking the image of an egg, only to turn the egg into the crown, indicating Lear gave away the contents of the egg crown and split it in half. The joke is typical of the Fool in that he leads in with an innocuous sounding item, such as the egg, only to then use it as an entrance into conversation about a subversive or taboo subject. The linguistic free association creates a fluid use of language resulting in the Fool's dexterous relationship to power.[26] He uses associations of words to establish a safe place, only to pull the rug out from under the established use of the language. Again he tells Lear, "If a man's brains were in his heels, were't not in danger of kibes?" (1.5 8-9). At first the sentence seems to be a nonsense question, until the Fool turns it around, implying Lear's lack of brains keeps him out of danger. The morphing words create a lack of stability that undermines the sense of a strict relation between words and reality that Lear maintains (When Kent asks Lear in 1.1 to change his mind Lear exposes a fear of opening the disjunction between language and reality, "Thou hast sought to make us break our vows, which we durst never yet" (169-70)). The disassociation between words and the actual reality, especially between King and otherworldliness, is a key movement of the play. The Fool's

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[26] One might also look to Feste's punning on the wantonness of language.

contribution is one of playful subversion that turns words into adders in the grass, waiting to pounce on those authorities that ought to have a stable sense of language. The playful use of language escaped the strategic use of stable mimetic creation and slips into the realm of the tactical.

The Fool continues such usages when he sees Kent, telling him his presence in the stocks are "cruel garters" and "wooden nether-socks" (2.2 198,201). Through his twisting and punning on language the Fool is able to create humor. There is not as much open defiance of authority of the king, but rather a rearrangement (or interruption) of language to suit new ends. The Fool troubles and upsets a worldview of stability by turning the gentle fabrics of domestic life into the cruel instruments of pain. This language of course mirrors larger plot level inversions of familial care which turn into violent attacks. As the world descends into chaos, a chaos noted by Gloucester's late observances of the stars, the Fool agentically plays out such subversion through linguistic tricks. He both uses language to playfully interrupt authority, but also interrupts the authority of language that such ideas of kingship rest upon.

When the Fool disappears for the latter part of the play, Lear assumes his folly's upending of language in an amazing scene of the fool-king. A broad survey of critics note that Lear in some ways takes on the role of the Fool. (R.A. Foakes 137, Videbaek 127, Prentiki 108, Bell 121). The king undoubtedly plays the comic provocateur in the style of the Fool during his confrontation with Gloucester in 4.6, but his riffing never reaches the slippery misuse of language that the Fool does. There are of course echoes of disrupting the world with language, when he offers Gloucester his own eyes. More striking is the moment asking him to "Look with thine ears" (4.6 147). This sort of language is more often associated with buffoonish characters at other places in Shakespeare's work. Bottom has his senses all disordered as do many of the

mechanicals in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*. But here, the seeming mismatch of noun (ears) and verb (look) is put in the mouth of King, and shows not just his madness, but another way of seeing the world. Even if Lear's corruption of language does not reach the Fool's level, he does echo the wisdom of clowns creating a disjunction between words and realities through tactical revision of language itself. Shakespeare stages a king who doubts his own senses' ability to comprehend the world.

Lear's most striking moment of the gap between words and reality comes in the same scene. Talking of his daughter's flattery, the king concludes, "When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not men o' their words: they told me I was everything; 'tis a ie, I am not ague-proof" (4.6 96-104). In Peter Brook's famed RSC production the phrase "ague-proof" was changed to "nothing." In either case the phrase is not humorous, but does emphasize the disjuncture between words and action, the hollowness of flattery is laid bare. Lear has come to realize that words are not stable, and that speaking does not make things so. The Fool has made a humorous effect of pointing to language's instability, an egg can be a crown, and such instability for a monarch, one who relies on the irrefutable nature of his speech, deeply upsets the authority and promises Lear sought to live upon. What had been the Fool's playful employment of tactical revisions of language becomes a threat to the governing system via the stability of language thought to reinforce that power. Moreover, this challenge to the authority of language challenges the very basis on which Shakespeare's theatre relies. Thinking back to *Henry V*'s prologue demonstrates Shakespeare's self-awareness of language's necessity to make reality on the early modern stage. The Fool teaches Lear the troubling knowledge that

words can be unmoored from reality, and challenges not just kingly assumptions of power, but the basis of the dramatic force of the work of art he appears in.

As the play moves forward Lear goes through further change, Cordelia's actions soothe his heart and not the words expressed by duplicitous siblings. Cordelia recognizes language's shortcomings in honestly expressing any sense of emotional reality when she ponders her own speech's inability to sound as polished as her sisters, yet knows her heart cares more for their father, "I am sure my love's more ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.77-78). The hollowing of language's ability to interpret and express the world is clown wisdom across Shakespeare. That Cordelia, a character linked on several occasions with the Fool, should speak clown knowledge is entirely appropriate.[27] When father and daughter are reunited in 4.7 it is the acts of touching and seeing and not words that confirm emotion. The textual traces of the Fool try to hollow out strategic uses, and Lear takes the advice, if not formally, then at least in terms of content. In a writer's theatre, the Fool's slipperiness can only go so far, and his upsetting of language could destroy the very tools that give the play's ending such potency. The impact of the play's conclusion is delivered by the simplest of phrases ("Never, never, never, never, never."), but nevertheless relies on language. The Fool must be removed so as not to interrupt this ending.[28]

The Fool's departure from the play seems to tacitly admit his difference from more mimetically created characters. As the plot progresses and Lear sinks further into madness his relationship to his jester is strained, and the Fool becomes a sort of comic onlooker or commentator, as observed by R.A. Foakes (136). In order to become such a commentator the

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[27] In 1.4 the Fool is said to be saddened by the youngest princess's departure and both are referred to as fool during the course of the play.

[28] Harold Bloom notices a similar need between plays, explaining Falstaff's absence in *Henry V* as the result of the plump knight's ability to derail the entirety of the play's heroic vision on kingship. See Bloom's *Shakespeare Invention of the Human*.

Fool speaks directly with the audience. The only other characters to do so are Edgar and Edmund, the latter perhaps recalling the vice figure of medieval plays. Lear does not talk with the audience, only the gods.[29] The Fool and Edmund both resist circumvention into the mimetic world. As Edmund becomes more attached to the machinations of the plot, he loses his relationship to the audience. Edgar seems to provide the moral compass for the audience, so in being forced to take on the role of both villain (framed by Edmund) and madman (his poor Tom disguise) he seems to also adopt their habit of speaking to the audience. The Fool on the other hand moves closer to the audience as the play moves forward. Originally confined to talking with just characters within the play, at the end of his second scene the Fool is left alone on stage and 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). The sexually aggressive joke[30] does not seem immediately relevant to the surrounding circumstances, and is best seen as direct address to the audience, chiding them for laughing at his departure from Goneril's to Regan's. Here the Fool first makes contact with the audience, and comments on the predicament he finds himself in. This interrupts the flow of the story on stage, but also (by stepping of the story) the illusion of the dramatic event. The metatheatrical comment indicates the Fool's eventual removal from the play itself.

The Fool's next moment of direct address is only present in the Folio. Here the character comments on both a distopic and utopic vision of the world. The distopic vision bleeds into the utopic, mixing the world that presumably exists currently, which contains corrupt priest and greedy brewers, with a utopic vision of malice-less thieves and whores who engage in public service projects. The speech concludes with, "Then shall the realm of Albion Come to Great

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[29] This is not as much of an anomaly as it may originally seem for a Shakespearean protagonist. Looking to Bradley's four major plays, only half involve an intimate relationship between the title character and the audience.

[30] The sexual covetousness and violence employed by the Fool is part of an often overlooked heterosexual masculine appetite indicative of Western clowns. Look to Grimaldi's role in the pantomimes for an early example.

confusion" (3.3 91-92). This ominous reckoning is followed by a statement that when these times come people shall go on their feet.[31] If the lines are kept as they were printed the speech confuses the moral and immoral deeds, positive and negative outcomes. In this speech meaning seems to be emptied out and sense is not discernable. The ability of language to translate into tangible results and prophecy is gone. The link between the actual and the verbal is severed. The Fool ends the speech claiming Merlin will state this speech, although he acknowledges he lives before the famed wizard. While Shakespeare's work is littered with anachronism, the Fool seems to make a point of noting the anachronism, calling attention to the interruption of this specific rupture of mimesis. In doing so, he positions himself as self-consciously outside the bounds of the mimetic construct, but also outside of language, all through a nimble deployment of interruptive clown language.

The rest of the Fool's lines are within the mimetic bounds of the play, and his final line, only present in the Folio, is, "And I'll go to bed at noon" (3.6 82). There is a good deal of disagreement over what the line means, but regardless it signals the textual cessation of the Fool.[32] After this line the character is not seen again. There have been claims that this is because he doubled with Cordelia, a notion refuted by a look at performance practices of the time.[33] Instead the line ends the Fool's part on a bit of nonsense and an assertion of his own role within both the drama and on structural level as clown/fool. His absence is never mimetically explained

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[31] Foake's notes suggest that the "confusion" portion may be inserted after the distopic list, but rejects the idea.

[32] Prentki sees it as eleborate word play on "Lear Shadow" and the Fool disappear in the noon sun (115), Bell refers to John Southworth's contention that it may refer to the sleep prone Will Somers (157), while Foakes catalogues various meanings in the Arden notes (292-3).

[33] In *Actors and Acting In Shakespeare's Time,* John Astington quickly summarizes the stage conditions that make double casting Cordelia and the Fool unlikely. "The Fool, in the first performances, would have been played by the adult Armin, and Cordelia by one of the three talented boys required to play the three daughters" (125). Astington looks at actor trainings and specializations throughout the book, and sees little possibility of over the lap in the two specialized areas of performance.

or remarked upon.  Instead the Fool seems to remove himself from the drama.  Viewed as an active abdication from the plot, the Fool removes himself once his structural purpose in the mimetic world has ceased to exist.  The character plays within the existing structure of the drama, but also plays around it, annunciating his difference by exiting the play structurally as opposed to mimetically.  Since his critique of language will be carried on by Lear and discarded to maintain the integrity of drama's ability to represent emotion through words, the Fool removes himself, allowing the play to continue.  This is not a mimetic erasure through death, capture, or other logical elements within the plot, but rather his departure makes a final statement on the constructed and strategic nature of the entire mimetic illusion. The Fool's voicing of clown interruption is not just a critique of Lear and kingly power, but of the power of the drama itself. Shakespeare interrupts his own dramatic powers through the Fool's persistent questioning of languages ability to rely an accurate sense of the physical world.  He then allows the exit of the interruptive Fool to go un-contained by the rules of mimetic story telling, and to linger through its unexplained absence. The Fool's exit from the play is a tactical use of mimetic language because it does not work to bring the Fool into the confines of mimetic logic but keeps him out of the closed world. As with *Macbeth*'s witches, discordant views are allowed into the work, and *Lear's* critique is executed not just by the mimetic details of the plot but by employing the structural properties of interruption of authority associated with clowns across time. The Fool's interruptive clown voice is part of the discordant harmony that defines the play's multi-faceted view of authority, language, and life.

The Fool thus possesses the nature/enacts the function of an interruptive clown.  Only instead of standing apart from the drama, Lear's Fool uses language to trouble the limits of language to represent the world.  He accomplishes this through a humorous reusing of language,

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pointing out that puns and nonsense speech are not just amusing, but also tactical uses of language that allow a pleasure in the disruption of language's attempts to make order of the world.  So as Shakespeare chooses to create a world through his ordered language, he employs the Fool to work as a voice of the disorder not just of that world, but of the tools the playwright has used to construct that world.  By exiting the play and calling attention to his own function as a clown and a mimetic representation, the Fool refuses to be completely integrated into the text and instead serves as a reminder of the alternatives to scripted drama.   This is the Fool's great wisdom, that there is always an alternative outside of the current representation of the situation, and his interruption of the world of *Lear* is accomplished through a tactical use of the very tools of language which render that world legible.

## 3.5    GETTING OUT THE GHOST

A contemporary interpretation of Shakespeare's work does not face the same set of dramatic and social conditions as the initial artists (Shakespeare, Armin and the King's Men) did. Changes in the social position of the theatre, Shakespeare's canonical status, and mass proliferations of print culture and literacy in the Anglophone world alter the nature of clown interruption. Armin's Fool subverted language using language because in his historical moment there was a specific theatrical tension between comic-improvisational performers and the increasingly centralizing role of the playwright. Antony Sher's Fool also employs interruption, but does not focus this interruption on language's role in drama. Instead he uses the interruptive clown role of the Fool to interrupt received cultural understandings of Shakespeare in late 20th century England. Armin and Shakespeare used a scripted dramatic language to question that very language.  Sher and

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Noble use Shakespeare's script to challenge constructed notions and accumulated understandings of institutional "Shakespeare" on both the artistic and cultural levels. As argued above, clown interruption always rests on the moment of execution, so while Sher draws on the inherently interruptive qualities of the Fool as textually constructed, he cannot interrupt in the same manner as the original staging did. Sher's performance demonstrates affinities between the early modern clown/fool created in the text of *King Lear* and contemporary conceptions of clown practice. It is through a resurrection of a ghost of clown interruption (one based not in a literal recreation of a past but on exploiting the text's own internal tensions manifested in the clown) that Sher uses the role to challenge accumulated understandings of the role, the play, and the playwright.

Lear's Fool uses language to interrupt language's ability to create a legible mimetic world. Shakespeare created this type of character once Armin was a member of his company, a shift often associated with a consolidation of power in the playwright over the clown. The playwright's use of interruption is a clown technique used throughout history to upset the rules of given event, be it theatre, circus, or even clown acts themselves. In the intervening four hundred years Shakespeare's productions have accumulated their own given practices. Just as past clowns interrupted rules of the circus or pantomime, clowns can interrupt traditions that govern Shakespeare production. Marvin Carlson clearly articulates the idea of theatrical ghosting as memories of past productions that audiences bring to their theatrical experience. For Carlson, there are a variety of ways ghosts exercise their presence on performances and texts. Most pertinent for my examination of clowning are the ghosts of bodies and of entire productions. These character ghosts and production ghosts haunt the spectator and provoke comparisons between, "the same grounding literary text and its implied patterns of action conceived by a different interpretive ensemble in different ways" (99). While Carlson posits that

differences between past productions and the present one are part of any theatrical event, I suggest that clowns exploit the expectation established by similarities of ghosts over time in order to create interruptions. That is: clown interruption subverts the expectations established by theatrical ghosts. Carlson notes that Shakespeare's ghosts are particularly omnipresent, due to the texts' prominent presence in Western culture and the theatre (78-79). In the twentieth century the Royal Shakespeare Company produced some of the most widely known productions of Shakespeare's work. As such, many past Shakespeare productions, especially those iconic performances produced at the RSC, haunt this particular company.

When a contemporary producer attempts to stage *King Lear*, it is not a direct dialogue between the script, audience, and production.  Rather the play and the actors carry an associational baggage that Carlson poetically refers to as ghosts.  He enumerates the propensity of Hamlets and resulting effects on the audience:  "Here new literary retellings of the story are extremely uncommon, but new theatrical embodiments are innumerable, and so we have in every generation new embodiments of Hamlet onstage, each seeking to reshape the cultural memory of the character according to its own abilities and orientations" (78).  While Hamlet is surely the most ubiquitous example, it is easy to see the interaction of past and present performances of Lear as well.  This ghosting effect does not just apply to a single actor in a production, but to characters across time and the play as a whole, often facilitated by a director.  Such ghosting can exert a strong influence, and Carlson himself recounts how Andre Serban's flying Osric will forever be part of his experience of any production of *Hamlet*.  Haunting is an apt metaphor for Carlson precisely because of the involuntary nature of the act of remembering.  Like Proust's madeleine, past *Hamlets* or *Lears* (both as characters and productions) can invade and compete with one another whether the audience wishes it or not.  Carlson notes competition between

actors and directors, but also among contemporaries and with the past: "The successful new Hamlet will add his unique voice to the tradition and join the ghosts with whom Hamlets of the future must deal" (79). The unsuccessful are consigned to the dustbin of history. At any production of *Lear*, many audience members may carry with them past performances of the role (whether full productions, college readings or movie parodies, etc.), and these memories will inhabit the stage along with the current production.

Antony Sher contended with many forebearers when he played the Fool 1982. Armin most likely played the character in the first production, and future clowns in The King's Men plausibly continued to play the role, drawing on Armin's initial interpretation. After the theatres closed during the Restoration, the character disappeared from the play. For the next two hundred plus years (from 1681 to 1838) the role of the Fool was cut from scripts, and Nahum Tate's version of the play held the stage. William Charles Macready reintroduced the character in 1838, where the role was played by the young, and female, Priscilla Horton. The gender swap (and the preceding exclusion) was the product of inevitably changing theatrical climates: the theatrical world of Armin's Fool was not the same as Horton's Fool. Gary Jay Williams eloquently articulates the significance in the change of theatrical practices, "When Shakespeare's plays came to be staged in [more illusionistic theatre], a theatrical dimension intrinsic to the plays was lost, arguably affecting meaning as much as did the alterations of Shakespeare's text about which text-centered Shakespearean scholars complained for so long" (20). The challenge of all contemporary Shakespeare performance is finding the modern staging idioms that best bridge the divide for a modern audience. Macready's dual urge to bring back the Fool, but also to fundamentally change the part, points to the conflict Marvin Carlson identifies in Kabuki theatre,

but that applies across theatrical practice: "a desire for innovation is pitted against the force of tradition" (82).

Macready's production haunted both subsequent productions of the play and critical understanding of the text. In 1845, a Victorian reviewer rebuked one of the first male post-Restoration Fools for not being gentle enough. The reviewer claimed the Fool must serve as a "second Cordelia" and the Fool's harsh scolding of Lear was not inline with the affection the king bares towards his servant (Rosenberg 108). In 2011, Bill Irwin felt the ghosts of Armin and Kemp when he performed the Fool: the director of the production placed Irwin in line with the past clowns, and Irwin himself talked of researching the early modern performers and their supposed styles (Simonson). The process also works on a microcosmic level: Antony Sher in 1982 was haunted by his previous performance of the Fool (*Beside Myself* 164). Many of the reviews mentioned later in this case study compare his 1982 performance to previous versions of the role. Carlson illuminates the particular valence of *Hamlet.* Due to its haunting of both critical and theatrical minds, the play has become a testing ground for actors. Carlson writes: "every new major revival of Hamlet is doubly haunted, on the one hand, by the memories of the famous Hamlets of the past . . . and, on the other hand, by memories of the new interpreter" (79). While *Lear* may not enjoy quite the same hold as *Hamlet*, the British monarch does challenge the Dane for prominence in the post-war theatre. Alexander Leggatt's book *Shakespeare in Performance: King Lear* traces a handful of Lears across half a century. The past Lears are present with the current productions, and while no audience is the same, many, if not most, who saw Sher's Fool at the RSC will have had some run-in with the play in the past, especially at the RSC.

The RSC houses one the most intimidating ghosts of *Lear* in the 20th century: Peter Brook and Paul Scofield. Although the 1962 production garnered both positive and negative responses, its presence hangs heavy in the production history of *Lear*, and especially at the RSC. While Leggat notes that the play is never confined by one production, Brook's creation had a strong and lasting note: "Shakespeare production, in England at least, was never the same again, and for some of us who experienced the shock and revelation of that Stratford opening, it became part of the history of our own imaginations" (61). The staggering bleakness and cruelty of Brook's vision hung in the air at the RSC, and was compounded by a 1971 film version of *Lear* based on the production (a film Leggatt finds even crueler than the stage version). Despite a sentimental streak in the play's history, Brook and Scofield's bleak and uncompromising vision of *Lear* powerfully haunted Sher, Noble and Gambon's production. Michael Billington starts his review by stating Noble's production is, "much the best since Peter Brook's" (Billington, London Theatre, 422) and Francis King finds both faults and "advantages" in Noble seeming to "never seen or read about any previous productions" (*Sunday Telegraph*). Brook's production was an inescapable ghost haunting the RSC in the 1980s.

The presence of clown uniquely positions Sher's performance, as it both hopes to exploit a discontinuity with the past to create clown interruption, but also draws on ghosts of clowning and interruption present in the text of *Lear* to interrupt the contemporary ghosts of the play. Sher's performance does not just play against ghosts of Lear such as Brook's, but draws on ghosts of clowns, such as Chaplin and Grock, in order to discordantly mix the world of high culture Shakespeare and popular clown. In doing so, Sher is actually resurrecting something of the spirit, if not literal practice, of Armin's Fool. In this way Sher positions his performance in

line with a certain forgotten lineage of ghosts, a lineage obscured by four hundred years of theatrical performance and literary heritage.

The more immediate ghosts of Lears past provide a lens through which the audience sees the play. Any production (or, rather, successful production per Carlson) adds itself to the long line of ghosts with which future productions must contend. The clown, I suggest offers not just a new "take" or character study, but a challenge to style upheld across several ghosts. Clowns do not wish to supplant ghosts from past productions, but rather rely on a sense of continuity or repetition established by ghosts of the past in order to interrupt these traditions and cause humor. The clown does not overtake or encourage forgetting, but rather wishes for the audience to remember the past in order to create humorous friction. This being stated, clowns can carry their own associational baggage, but these are often at odds with the predominate style of the play. With Sher, this clown performance style is not solely in rebellion against the text, but rather finds precedence in the text's own clown history. Just as Shakespeare challenged his theatre's mode of linguistic representation through the Fool, so too Sher's contemporary clown interrupts the representational traditions/ghosts that house *King Lear*. Thus, in 20th Century performance, it is the ghosts of Lears past—rather than or in addition to the text-- that clowns interrupt in production. Sher's performance of the Fool interrupts traditions/ghosts of Lears past at the RSC by drawing on ghosts associated with contemporary clown to tap into the forgotten clown ghosts of Shakespeare's text. In doing so, I contend, his clown performance challenges static notions of history and "Shakespeare" present in the Thatcherite Britain of the early 1980s.

## 3.6     SHER'S CLOWN FOOL

Sher's Fool used specific practices of 20<sup>th</sup> century clown to interrupt an accumulated image of Shakespeare created by past theatrical ghosts. While Sher does not use the same clown techniques deployed by Shakespeare or Armin in Jacobean England, he does exploit the same sense of clown interruption. Sher's revival of past performance modes is not a replication of past clowning, but a use of clown's interruptive nature, which is sewn into the text of *Lear*, in order to deploy clown to interrupt a new set of historical and artistic circumstances. In this way, Sher's performance draws force from a friction between the present ghosts and the forgotten ghosts. The specific techniques of clown are not absolute or constant, but the sense of interruption is. The recapturing of clown's interruptive mode is not just of artistic relevance to the RSC, but to a British cultural move that would ameliorate the changing nature of history. Susan Bennett identifies, "a determined attempt to preserve a single vision of History, of a past which forms a continuous trajectory in to the present and through into the future" as "an important strategy in the politically regressive governments of the New Right" (4).  Sher's clown interruption does not then recapitulate an existing sense that "current Shakespeare is the only Shakespeare", nor does it nostalgically look to the past to create a more "true" performance of Shakespeare via clown. Instead, Sher uses the clown qualities of the play text in conjunction with contemporary clown practice in order to interrupt the artistic and cultural positioning of Shakespeare at the RSC and in Thatcher's Britain. An examination of the specifics of Sher's clown techniques showcases the particular interruptive interventions.

As examined above, the Fool in *Lear* complicates the closed mimetic world and the authority of language—through language, via interruption. The Fool stands apart from the rest of the play and interrupts the authority of text, but Shakespeare was a master of synthesizing

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disparate elements of theme, content, sources, and style into cohesive wholes that blossom more fully due to discordant cross-pollination. Adrian Noble's 1982 production of *King Lear* at the Royal Shakespeare Company with Michael Gambon as the king and Antony Sher as the Fool attempted to employ contemporary and early 20th century clown techniques in order to interrupt the accumulated ghosts of Lears and Shakespeare performance haunting the RSC in the 1980s. Whereas Shakespeare interrupted the authority of mimetic language with clown infused language, Sher and Noble attempted to interrupt the accumulated ghosts of Shakespeare performance through contemporary clown practice. With Noble and Sher both relatively new to the theatre, there was a sense of interrupting the status quo. Sher states, "Lear was directed by the RSC's new discovery, Adrian Noble. He'd had a strong of successes in smaller theatres and he was being given a go at the big one" and as a director he was "brimming with fresh, off-the-wall ideas" (*Beside My Self* 164). Further the production was marked by "a strong element of bravery, almost reckless bravery in the whole rehearsal process" (Sher, *Players of* 159). Noble and Sher's eventual use of a clown nose fits with a production that embraced newness and iconoclasticism embodied in the new director and actor. The clown is an outsider in terms of performance style, both in the contemporary and early modern conception of the role/archetype. This outsider nature allows for the interruption of the different traditions that production in the 1600s and 1980s wished to engage with. Shakespeare used clown to meditate on the friction between humorous improvisation and scripted drama, while the clown also announced a new era at the RSC, embodied in Sher as part of Noble's fresh take on the canonical work.

The ghost of Peter Brook and Paul Scofield's relentlessly dark and spare *Lear* lingers in the memories of many RSC audience members, but these were not the only images and traditions of the past present at the RSC. The director, Adrian Noble, was new to the RSC. Nine years later

in 1991, Noble would become artistic director of the organization, but in the early 80s he was a new voice to the arts establishment. Colin Chambers notes other changes in RSC policy in the early 1980s. Trevor Nunn gave a directive toward "enhancing physical presentation" which Colins states, "was an apparent reversal of the anti-decorative, actor-based approach associated with the RSC's best work" and "the minimalism of previous seasons" (76). Finally, the RSC was facing funding decreases and charges of elitism from the Thatcher government (Collins xii). Carlson speaks of the power of company aesthetics: "[C]ertain dramatists, certain companies, certain actors, certain designers, often remain for years or even decades at a particular location, and so the audience memories of the previous work of those various theatre artists are reinforced by the fact that much or all of that previous work was experienced in the same physical place" (142). Further, when talking of Bayreuth, Carlson notes that the journey or "pilgrimage" to the site is part of the experience (157). Stratford, with its outside of London quasi-bucolic setting, is part of the unique experience of the RSC. Noble's production was not the first to clash with the powerful ghosting of the RSC, but the company aesthetic and removed setting heightened the strength of the ghosts for the audiences. The aura of change hung around the production and the RSC's institutional practices in the early 1980s. The accumulated and storied history, from Hall to Brook to Nunn, haunted the stage that Noble and Sher stepped onto. Clown was an excellent tool to interrupt these ghosts.

Whereas *500 Clown Macbeth* was a clown performance that took Shakespeare as its raw material, this RSC production uses clown as one raw material in the creation of a production that would more easily be identified as a production of Shakespeare's work than an adaptation of it. Additionally, Noble's production did not bring a theatrical clown into the Shakespeare

production[34], but rather asked an actor of dramatic texts to learn and engage in certain techniques associated with clown performance. But just as the performances of clowns and fools on the early modern stage certainly possessed key differences, the separation between a contemporary actor and a clown is in no way absolute. The contemporary dramatic actor and clown can share points of commonality.  Sher's career and training demonstrate influences of clown style performance. In fact, the comic performer and director John Wright labels Sher a clown:

> I remember teaching half-mask work to Antony Sher. His physical command of an idea was extraordinary. He played each mask with an engagement that was quite uncompromising, but the moment he didn't understand something or I managed deliberately to catch him out, her would declare it immediately; a bit like a child admitting he was in the wrong. His vulnerability was astonishing. At that moment he was an extraordinary clown, but I doubt he'd ever describe himself as such. (197).

Still, Sher is known primarily an actor of the dramatic theatre. Wright's comments point out that clown is not an absolute, and clowning influences a wide variety of actor training programs. In terms of Sher, it is more appropriate to comprehend the influence and effects of clown as a collection of practices and attitudes with broad influence as opposed to a single identity or strict classification.  The clownish elements in Sher's training expose the potentials and challenges of using contemporary interruptive clown performance techniques within the confines of a Shakespeare production. Examining the clown elements of Sher's performance makes contemporary theatrical clowning's interruption of the authority of the theatrical ghosts legible.

Sher's trainings and experiences up to the 1982 production of *King Lear* indicate a predilection for physical theatre. Looking back at the late sixties and early seventies when he was a student of the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art, Sher professed an affection for

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[34] For an example of this kind of production see Bill Irwin in the Public Theatre's 2011 production of *King Lear*

physical work more than for Shakespeare, "I never imagined a classical career for myself – the bard was somehow the preserve of the honey-voiced, middle-class English students among us – and my favorite classes involved physical acting. Mime and Improvisation" (*Beside Myself*, 107). Later he joined the Liverpool Everyman Theatre, which he admired for seeming "more like a riot than a play, or a carnival maybe" and goes on to praise the actors: "The cast all seemed to be supermen, super-performers; all able to clown, sing, dance, do backflips and eat fire" (*Beside Myself* 113). It is unclear in what precise sense he uses the word "clown," but it is clear that Sher appreciates the company's physical immediacy. He recounts how Alan Dossor, the director, instructed him not to ignore when his watch fell off during a monologue, advice reminiscent of Lecoq's imperative to embrace rather than hide one's skinny legs. Dossor encouraged Sher to accept this sort of interruption as part of his performance. While improvisation is not always part of clown work, the tenent of taking what one is given, and working in the shared moment with the audience underpins much of clown, and is indicative of tactical revision of given material to create alternate meaning. To the clown, the flying watch's interruption is not a mistake, but an opportunity.

When Sher played the role of Lear's fool in 1982 he struggled with the part. He had played the Fool before at the Everyman, but the previous interpretation would not work for this production. Sher recounts taking stock of himself halfway through the process and still not connecting to the role. Noble suggested experimenting with different types of clown performance tools and the red nose was the first and last item used. Sher writes, "There is something very liberating about wearing a red nose, both externally and internally; you look, feel, and sound odd, exaggerated, caricatured" (*Players*, 157). Sher goes on to explain how the nose worked as a mask, and released inhibition as masks did in drama school. This talk mirrors

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Lecoq's explanation of the red nose as a tool of self-exposure, "the smallest mask in the world" (*Moving*, Lecoq 145). The Fool's nose was not just an aesthetic but a performative choice, and Sher drew from this nasal feature to create an interruptive performance. Just as Armin's Fool used clown to interrupt the stability of the text, so Sher's Fool used clown to interrupt the traditions of Shakespeare established by the RSC's ghosts. The latter interruption reverberates not just at the RSC, but against the cultural canonization of Shakespeare.

While critical response to the production was divided, the Fool stood out, both from previous Fools in the reviewers' memories and from the production as a whole. Ned Chaillet's *London Times* review, entitled "Expressive range of a brilliant Fool", begins by approving of Gambon's decision to take the Fool by the hand during the curtain call as an "exceptional tribute…which lifted the…production of *King Lear* well beyond the ordinary" (11). The review highlights the importance of past productions, of the ghosts in Chaillet's theatrical memory, that made this particular *Lear* legible. What made this *Lear* memorable is breaking with those expectations, especially in a location such as the RSC, so steeped in tradition, specificity of place, and long shadows of theatrical legends. By looking at specific elements of contemporary clown used in the performance it is possible to understand how clown interrupted ghosts of Shakespeare by drawing on, not replicating, practices native to the language's own interruption of the text's closed mimetic world.

In addition to Sher's red nose, many physical trappings of clown evoked the ghosts of clown's past. Sher's Fool also included, "bowler hat, long shoes, a tail-coat," and physically, "feet and knees turned inwards as well as . . . [an] lower jaw underbite" (*Players,* 157). This set of clothing evokes Chaplin and the music hall tradition. Michael Gussow, in the *New York Times,* saw the visual elements supporting the Fool's relationship to the rest of the play: "Mr.

Sher is a baggypants, bulb-nose vaudville clown and conjurer, who treats the king's court as his private circus" (A.3). By exploiting the ghosts of vaudeville and Chaplin to establish himself as an outsider through the visual aspects of the clothing and the performance styles attendant to those fashions, Sher created an interruptive presence. He tactically adopted aesthetics from low or popular clown theatre and inserted them into the high theatre production of the Royal Shakespeare Company, like many of the past clowns Disher noted above. Carlson notes that the clown figure of Harlequin was (and is) recycled on the stage and, "broken free of the cluster of relationships and narrative frameworks that originally accompanied him", in order to "cut down on lengthy orientation" (48-9). An audience knew the zany manner in which Harlequin would act, and so too the RSC audience knew that the red nose and bowler hat would evoke playful or comic clowns. In addition to these traits, the tramp clothes hinted at the outsider, the seedy music hall, and a past age. Ghosting function as a sort of theatrical short hand the lets the audience know what to expect from a clown. This sort of clown (low class and from the early 20th century) was not what was to be expected at the RSC (high class and with roots in the early modern but planted in the present).

The sense of the clown as outsider, both in society and on the RSC stage, was also present in the identity of the performer. Sher himself is an outsider to English culture, a man from South Africa who had to hide and change his accent (and sexuality) to "pass" on the British stage. As such, Sher accessed and presented a Shakespeare unbound from the domain of the high class and strictly English, a Shakespeare that accommodated a variety of outsiders and their influences, from music hall trickster to a cultural pariah. The use of low culture via the music hall and Sher's own national outsider status correspond to interruptive forces present in the original text. Shakespeare's use of clown language contrasts with the more refined and logical

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texts of the play.  Similarly, music hall clashes with the high art associations of Shakespeare. Further, Sher's outsider status is indicative of the early conception of clowns as outsiders in the major city. These interruptive tactics that trouble a homogenous *Lear* are not interruptions of the text per say, but of the accumulated ghosts that have come to define the production over 400 years, and particularly, borrowing from Carlson, at the cultural "pilgrimage" site that was Stratford. In fact, by drawing on the interruptive elements of the text itself, Noble and company were able to interrupt the ghosts of *Lear* by bringing in evocations of different theatrical styles, just as Shakespeare did.

While the physical costume and identity of the body served an interruptive use, so too did the tools in the performance. Sher's entire performance was riddled with the sorts of tactical uses of objects that define the modern clown.  He used a Suzuki violin, but in doing so found other uses of the object through the flop. Chaillet praised Sher for, "accompany[ing] his lamentations [with the instrument] as if they were ditties"(11).  The Fool exploited the juxtaposition of "lamentations" and "ditties" to create an interruptive counterpoint.  The text is the same the ghosts of *Lears* past used, but by tactically underscoring the text with frivolous music the words and character took on new resonances. The reviewer concluded his brief assessment of the Fool by stating, "His handsprings and jokes are offered in great solemnity, but his rhythmical speech carries comedy in its severe pronouncements." The result is, "One of the most remarkable Fools ever offered in *Lear*" (11). For Chaillet this juggling of the comic and the serious was the key to Sher's success despite a production the reviewer found a bit wanting in overall emotional impact. The clown music of Sher's performance interrupted Chaillet's expectations of the Fool, dislodging the ghost he carries with him.

While reviewers like Chaillet reveled in witnessing the interruption, not all voices were willing to reconcile an older interpretation with a new ghost. One reviewer, Irving Wardle, saw too many discordant ghosts:

> If you dress the Fool in a Grock costume complete with violin case, and plunge him anachronistically into a fairy tale court to perform routines form the old Edware Road Met, it is not surprising that he sticks in the memory at the expense of the more immediately Shakesperian elements. If, moreover, he is played by a comic actor as dazzling as Anthony Sher, who can do everything from George Formby ukulele numbers to playing a ventriloquist doll, and underscore the fun with spine chilling intimations of catastrophe, then it is quite difficult to attend to anything else on stage. (Wardle 10).

For Wardle, the clown ghosts overwhelm those of Shakespeare, and interruption does not create insight into, but an eradication of Shakespeare. Other reviewers possessed skepticism, but were more open to the friction between competing ghosts. John James titled his *Times Education Supplement* review of the production "Wonderfully Wrong." While praising the execution and entertainment value of the piece, and even encouraging audience to see the production he maintains it is "mistaken," "fundamentally misconceived", and "willfully, wonderfully wrong" (24). While he admits that one line he previously found serious now appears to him as a laugh line, James gives little detail on what is so wrongheaded about the production. In summation he does state, "The clown's part in *King Lear* is meant to heighten the tragedy, not overwhelm it" (24). Carlson speaks of how strong cultural knowledge ghosts any production of *Hamlet*, and makes the play a challenge for young actors (78-79). The same challenge is highlighted in James's review; immense experience with a play positions an audience to compare, and perhaps dismiss, the production based on strong preconceptions. This coercive power of ghost can perpetuate the sorts of singular history of the play and its place in culture that Bennett identifies as a goal of the New Right. If the past ghosts tend to homogenize or cut off the possibility of new interpretation, then James's review also highlights a new production's potential to challenge

these ghosts, as seen in the reviewer's altered opinion on the comedic potential of a line, and conflicted approval of the production as theatre. Other reviewers found in the production a new way to view the relationship between the king and fool that was less determined by previous ghosts.

Traditional clown roles informed one of the play's central relationships, that between the king and fool. Sher's white face, red nose, and tramp outfit physically positioned him as an auguste. Such casting made performative sense as the King would naturally play a ringmaster or whiteface clown role and cast Sher in the interruptive role. The idea that both Gambon and Sher were clowns is born out in the latter's remarks, "Gambon's Lear…enjoyed playing the fool" (*Players*, 158) and "Gambon, himself a superb clown" (*Beside Myself*, 165). The fluidity of who is the Fool and who is wise is part of what makes the production powerful for Gussow in the *New York Times*, "As the King, Lear can play the Fool, and the Fool is both coxcomb and wise man of the kingdom" (A.3). Jeffery Simpson in *The Globe* and *Mail*, makes a similar observation, emphasizing the tragic, "[The Fool] is the professional comedian who sees the unraveling tragedy, whereas Lear, who ought to have seen it prefers to play the comedian" (Simpson, via *LexisNexis*). Simpson's sentiment is present in the original text. Shakespeare's *Lear* encourages a disruption of roles, and Lear's transformation into a fool is both part of his downfall and redemption. But Noble's keen use of clown performance techniques makes the Fool's disruption of kingly authority speak with new clarity four hundred years later. While Lear's assumption of foolishness is part of the play, Sher's physical appearance makes that transformation more jarring. Instead of merely cloaking the Fool in motley that seems to be part of Lear's universe, Sher's clownish attire more forcefully separates him from Lear than the ancient seeming motley would. Sher's Fool's attire made him fundamentally different in *kind*

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from the king, just as Armin's Fool used language to set himself apart in both style and temperament from his King.

The costume choice interrupts the ghosts' flattening of history and reintroduces with modern urgency the schism between the characters. Carlson identified Harlequin as a character that was able to transcend plays and hop from narrative to narrative (48-9). In both recurring characters and stock types, a key part of their ghostly appeal is stable visual signifiers. In Shakespeare's theatre Fool characters appeared in many plays, with reference to their motley clothing. Lear's Fool describes himself as "The one in motley here" (1.4 ln 140). Motley is spoken of as visual signifier of type by characters in other plays, such as Jacques describing Touchstone in *As You Like It*. The word describes both the clothing worn by a jester or fool, and the accompanying mental foolishness. The clothing worked as a sort of ghost, preparing the audience for the antics of the character. Armin's own identity would have been ghosted by the fool parts he played. These sorts of ghosts that Shakespeare relied on are not present in the same way for the 1980s RSC audience.[35] What is lost is a class differential made clear in the costume choices. The motley showcased the distance between the king and the fool. Add to this that Armin was associated with comics and Burbage with kings and high born characters, and the ghosts help articulate the class difference. While Gambon and Sher surely had personae to draw on, Sher's was far from defined at the RSC, and he would go on to play kings. The use of clown attire allows for the sort of Harlequin ghosting, the associations of class difference to carry over. The Chaplin-like tramp is clearly of a different world than the king. For a contemporary audience, the ghostly association with the clown garb is stronger than motley because the motley

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[35] Casting based on comic persona is still used. Sylvester McCoy was Ian McKellen's Fool in a 2007 production. Robin Williams and Steve Martin were cast in a 1980s production of *Waiting For Godot* at Lincoln Center. These performances hoped that comic ghosts of the performers public personas would enter the theatre with the actors.

is part of a past that is strange in many ways. The clown clothing is strikingly different in a legibly ghosted way.

The production also used clown performance to rearticulate differences between King and Fool and to heighten Lear's descent into madness during the duo's moments of communion. For example, the clown aesthetic heightened the textual interplay between King and Fool in the ventriloquist routine in 1.5 by drawing on the low comedy ghosts of the music hall. In Noble's production, the scene was played downstage and was lit as if they were in a musical hall routine. He staged the interaction as comic banter in the style of musical hall comedians interrupting each other, but then Noble interrupted this framing device. In the RSC production the auguste looking Fool engaged in patter with Lear, the Fool assuming the authority position in the routine. The ghosts of music hall or circus worked as a short hand for the upended power relation. But the subversion flipped, Lear began to wade off topic and move away from the two-man comedy routine as he ruminates on the wrongs he has committed. At this point the king played the interruptive role; using the text, Lear interrupted the very clown routine the production created to frame the moment. While the production's music hall aesthetic and performance style set up an interruption of *Lear* as a mimetic story, so too the King then interrupted this style of performance by breaking out of the routine. Lear's interruptions were not comic in this moment, but did exploit the production's clown routine's structure to heighten the textual loss of mental control. By bringing in the ghosts of music hall to mix with the ghosts of Shakespeare, Noble placed conflicting performance modes, each with their own associations, on the stage and highlighted not just the kings descent into folly, but even a departure from sanity as the ghosted performance styles spill into one another.

This was reminiscent of Brecht's conception of a gestus.  By mixing a late 20<sup>th</sup> century realistic production of Lear with a an early 20<sup>th</sup> century musical hall spatio-temporality the ventriloquist moment becomes a strikingly clear image of Lear's madness achieved through the interruptive power of clown. For critics that embraced the production, these comic moments and their quick switches to the tragic or darker tones mark the production. Simpson's positive review summed up this *Lear's* power, "It is the comedy for two…that lingers when the last guts are spilled and the bodies are heaped about at the play's end."  It is testament to the power of Noble's production (and a result of the emphasis on the clown's difference from Lear and the rest of his play) that a reviewer's conception of the play can be made to accommodate a vision that remembers the comedy most clearly and counts the piece as a success. The visual difference of the clown highlights and reframes the white face/auguste interplay and allows for the jarring juxtapositional comedy of the original *Lear's* performance power to remerge on the contemporary stage.

Gambon himself noted the power of the Fool's interruption when the production was remounted in London. Sher was injured during the Stratford run of the show, and recovered before the London transfer.  Preceeding an opening in the capital, Gambon wished to remove the music hall moment, stating "It is called the *Tragedy of King Lear* . . .I'd feel a tit prancing around like fucking Archie Rice." Sher bemoans the loss because he feels it was precisely the comic elements that gave the production something special and unique (*Beside Myself*, 171). Gambon asserted his authority, and alternative ways of knowing the play—via the interruptive clown-- were disallowed. A solemn ghost of *Lear* was reasserted. The lead actor decided the play was about the text, and about Lear. What Gambon's attitude misses is how the text delicately allows for other ways of seeing the world. Sher relishes the music hall routines, and they come

close to the spirit of the text, if not Shakespeare's expert use of various forms of performance to create a play that deeply questions its own stylistic and epistemological authority. The fear that *Lear* is too tragic for comedy is seen in the perceptions of both actors and critics. The anxiety about the Fool is long-standing, as demonstrated by Tate's cutting of the role. Michael Billington expresses the symbiosis of the roles quite beautifully in a review of Noble's production:

Coming out of this production I was reminded of Wolfit's legendary advice to an actor about to play Lear, "Watch your Fool." Mr. Noble renders that advice redundant since, instead of an acting competition, we have the first production I have seen in which Lear and the Fool become as indispensible to each other as Laurel and Hardy, body and soul, ego and id. (Billington, "Noble vision…"). Lear is not solely a play of weeping solemnity or, conversely, only clown routines. The dramatic work expresses a melding of the comic and the tragic, the linguistic and those performance forms that exist apart from the linguistic. These competing tensions form the text and initial production of *Lear*, and a history of interpretation has defined the subsequent meaning and ghosting of that text. Sher's performance demonstrates clown's interruption and insertion into the ongoing renegotiation of that ghosting.

While the production did employ interruptive clown tactics at various points as described above, Noble and his team ultimately shied away from embracing the text's greatest structural moment of interruption: the Fool's disappearance. Noble had the Fool explicitly killed on stage in his production. Sher recounts that the production team decided to have Lear unwittingly stab and kill his jester ("The Fool" 163). The choice of killing creates a mimetic solution to an interruptive moment in the text. Whereas other moments in the production embraced styles that resist mimetic conventions of the psychological theatre by reintroducing elements of the clown's

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interruptive relationship to the text's mimetic storytelling, Noble's choice for the Fool's exit worked to bring a disjunctive moment of text within the bounds of that mimetic authority it originally resisted. The team's choice may well have been dramatically effective; the accidental murder heightens the tragedy of the Fool's position and of Lear's madness. However in making this choice, the production missed an opportunity to call attention to the nature of the text as an artistic construction, and not reality. The text's interruption could remind the audience there is knowledge in performance outside of the dramatic theatre, the knowledge found in the clown. In this moment the production muzzles not just the Fool's critique of kingly power and absolutes, but of the dramatic theatre as a mode of knowing the world. The death of the Fool marks the limits to which Noble's production will disturb the ghost of the show at the RSC. Whereas Shakespeare used his mastery of language and dramatic character to create a clown that pulls on the strings of the well crafted world the characters and language usually create, Noble's production ultimately relies on the accumulated ghosts of Shakespeare as a dramatic poet who creates characters of psychological consistency. In a production that stirred many critical feathers for its interruptive choices, Noble chose to use the Fool's final moments to bring the character firmly within a mimetic world that he had interrupted, whereas Shakespeare took this final Fool moment to firmly reassert the interruptive distance of this clown character from the mimetic world he had created.

## 3.7    GHOSTS, TACTICS, STRATEGIES, AND MARGARET THATCHER

While Noble and his cast rehearsed *Lear*, Britain was engaging in actual military conflict. Sher recounts one outdoor rehearsal: "It was the spring of 1982 and the Falklands War was raging.

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Harrier jets from the nearby airbase would shoot by and Gambon used their terrifying, deafening noise to pit 'Blow winds' against" (*Players* 160). Sher's clown can be seen as its own howl against Thatcherite heritage politics. The war was but one sign of the social pressures bearing down on Britain in the early 1980s. Margaret Thatcher attempted to change the face of Britain to accommodate multiple crises, and one strategy was clear appeals to nostalgia. Narratives of the Falklands War harkened back to former military might and global dominance. Domestically, in addition to massive scale downs of government services, "heritage" became a way of linking contemporary Britain with a selective and romanticized past. New Right movements attempted to transform the past, heritage, and Shakespeare into strategic tools of hegemony. As detailed above, clowns can present a tactical alternative to such strategies of power. More significant than challenges to the RSC's ghosts, then, was Sher's model of history that challenged Thatcher's narrative. Sher resurrected the ghost of clown that Shakespeare preserved in his text, but that years of performance and criticism had blunted. By bringing clown practices to the RSC stage, Sher not only recalls the lost ghosts of clown in Shakespeare, but also showcases the ghosts of popular clown traditions native to Britain in years past. Sher's clowning interrupted the narrative of an idealized Shakespearean past, allowing for an alternative ghost of Shakespeare and of popular clowns to claim the stage at one of Britain's most sacred Shakespeare sites.

Thatcher's attempts to change Britain and nostalgically revive a specific version of the past were born out of contemporary hardship. Britain was in poor economic shape in the beginning of the 1980s, and these decreases in financial fortunes highlighted other fault lines. Between 1980 and 1983 the employment rate rose from two million to over three million people. Experiencing recession and inflation at the same time, cuts were made to health, education, and the arts. The 1970s saw the heightening of problems in Ireland, racial riots in Britain in 1981,

and by spring of 1982 armed conflict in the far-off Falkland Islands (Morgan 649-54). Many of these challenges were met with shrinking government and waving the flag of nationalism on the part of the Thatcher government. Sher's performance existed in a Britain in the middle of cultural transformation, and such a transformation had impacts on the arts and Shakespeare in particular. Kenneth Morgan argues that anxiety over Britain's declining prominence in world power and culture lead to (in some parts), "an almost religious reverence for ancient forms and ancestor worship, as in the veneration of the royal family, or the ambiguous notion of 'heritage', which often entailed a distinctly selective and sentimental reading of British history" (660). Thatcher's government passed two National Heritage Acts in the 1980s, both seeming to remake the past and culture along the lines of business.[36] The combination of economic and social conservatism is demonstrated in Barbara Hodgdon's analysis of Anne Hathaway's Cottage; she argues the site, "exemplifies a 'countryside of the mind': ancient, stable, and cozy, it represents a bulwark against industrial society, perfectly harmonized and moralized vision of the English way of life most recently reified in the rhetoric of Margaret Thatcher's New Victorianism" (213). Hodgdon's reading of the physical site of a tangential "remain" of Shakespeare illuminates the selective ways that Thatcherism portrayed British cultural capital, as unchanging and idyllic. The Shakespeare country estate ignores the urban roots of Shakespeare's drama, and leaves little room for such disruptive figure as a clown. Moreover, the RSC tourist audience could easily visit the cottage before an evening performance. The goal of heritage was a singular view of an unchanging past, as opposed to a past constituted by competing tensions in single moments and

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[36] For brief discussions on Heritage and Thatcher see both Ryan S. Trimm's "National Heritage and Hospitality in Britain After Thatcher" in *Comparative Literature and Culture* and Dr. Simon Thurley's lecture "From Boom to Bust: The Politics of Heritage 1997 to 2009" available at http://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/from-boom-to-bust-the-politics-of-heritage-1997-to-2009

change over time. Sher's clowning provides an interruption not just of RSC ghosts, but of the sentimental Shakespeare propagated by a conservative culture.

Thatcher, in both the propagation of heritage and references to past military glory, worked to erode the differences between the past and the present. Dennis Kennedy draws on several scholars when he notes the incredible rise of cultural tourism and "heritage" in early 1980s Britain, and of course the RSC was itself a site for such cultural tourism (179). Cautioning against the perils of Shakespeare as a stagnant tourist item (particularly at the Globe) Kennedy states the theater must, "Show that Shakespeare is not us, he is a strangely surviving other in a world of the same, and our fascination with him is a fascination with something that we can never fully assimilate" (188). This is opposite the goal of heritage, a system of emphasizing our link to the past. The ghosts of *Lears* provide familiarity, and through repetition of standards set by current performance fashion (as opposed to fidelity to early modern performance practice), the ghosts help erase strangeness and assure the audience that *Lear* is indeed theirs. Moreover, the strangeness of that past Shakespeare, a playwright competing with low popular entertainers and mixing various modes of performance style, is sacrificed to the image of the Romantic poet.

Sher's clowning interrupts the tendency towards flattening the past by pointing up an alternative and strange ghost in Shakespeare: the linguistically strange Fool that challenges the very power of language that made Shakespeare into an icon of heritage. Moreover, in addition to challenging a monolithic or unchanging view of Shakespeare, Sher brings back a host of alternate stage histories drawing on popular music hall and lowbrow clowning as parts of an alternative heritage of theatrical performance. As shown above, many critics bristled at the mixing of the lowbrow popular clowns with high culture Shakespeare kings. Additionally, for those that know, Sher's South African identity presents a challenge to ideas of who owns a

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British Shakespeare. Clown allows Sher to interrupt a nostalgic, nationalistic and heritage-based construction of the unchanging pastoral bard, and instead brings out not just multiple images of Shakespeare, but multiple forms of performance and Britishness.  Part of the strategic use of Shakespeare's text is a tactical challenge to the language's ability to create a stable mimetic world. Similarly, Sher and Noble found Shakespeare the best tool to challenge the institutional ghosts of Shakespeare.  They found such tactical uses within the systems themselves, as de Certeau states, "the trajectories [in this case Sher's performance] trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the system in which they develop" (xviii).  In 1980s Britain, on a stage in Stratford, Antony Sher used clown's tactical nature to interrupt traditions of *Lear* by capitalizing on the tensions present in the older ghosts of the text, but without recreating those practices in a nostalgic manner. While it is aesthetically exciting to see the ghosts of Brook upset, the higher stakes belong to the ghost outside the theatre, in that critical and cultural haunting of venerated text that Carlson alludes to.

James Fenton examined how Sher's clowning interrupts not just theatrical ghosts of Shakespeare on stage, but the cultural icon of Shakespeare, "This is not the Fool of criticism, not an A-level "assess-the-significance-of-the Fool" fool. This is your genuine professional fool" (Fenton).  Fenton's juxtaposition of the performed Fool and a literary conception of the character recalls the text's own ambivalence about the stability of language as expressed through the Fool. By further linking Shakespeare and standard governmental testing as foils to Sher's performance, Fenton hit on the clown's tactical power to interrupt the strategic uses to which a certain object is being put to use. He casts A-level tests as something stable, and in the 1980s carries an air of establishment Shakespeare in the service of "heritage." In the case of Sher's performance, clown interruption upsets the conservative, unchanging view of Shakespeare propagated by a

government seeking to redefine British values. Instead Sher's performance made use of the text's own ambiguities about the ability to create a definitive artistic world and brought back in the clownish riff-raff. Contemporary clown served as a modern idiom to express tensions about the role of theatre and art present in the early modern text while also calling attention to the ways that Shakespeare has changed over time. Sher's Fool brought to the stage in Stratford not just an alternative ghost of an extra-literary clown present in Shakespeare's *Lear*, but also ghosts of Chaplin, Grock, and the music hall that challenged the sterile and monolithic sense of heritage propagated by Thatcher and her allies. In doing so, Sher used clown not just to interrupt a singular Shakespearean past, but to introduce a multiplicity of theatrical pasts that while they may lie hidden, haunt theatrical performances.

# 4.0    "AMBITION IN THE FOOL": MARK RYLANCE'S CLOWNING FOR THE AUDIENCE

## 4.1    INTRODUCTION

Mark Rylance is a very funny actor. His work in Shakespeare's comedies (most notably his cross-gendered Olivia), his Tony winning turn as the "foul corrupter of youth" Rooster in *Jerusalem*, another Tony winning turn in the sex farce *Boeing-Boeing*, and many other roles such as the Moliere inspired *la Bete,* illustrate the actor's supreme comic gift. The oddity of Rylance is that he is both one of the contemporary Western stage's greatest comic actors and one of its greatest Shakespearean actors. A glance through the previous generation of Shakespeare luminaries does not produce actors with the same propensity for comedy. Olivier is remembered for the intensity of his Hamlet and Henry, and Gielgud had a regal air that permeated almost everything he did. Their domain was the histories and tragedies.  Though both men performed in the comedies, their comic performances are nowhere near as well remembered as their tragic turns. Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart, Rylance's nearer contemporaries,  are both Shakespeare stars with proven comedic pedigrees. Take for example their much lauded performance in Beckett's clownish *Godot*. But even here their Shakespeare work and comedic

work often stands apart[37]; they play tragic leads in Shakespeare and revel in the fun of television comedy or sentimentalized tragic-comedy. And as shown in the previous chapter, Gambon ultimately became leery of making his king a clown. All of these actors uphold, to varying degrees, a separation of the comic and tragic in Shakespeare.

Rylance is different. His comic persona and Shakespeare persona are tightly interwoven, and not just because of his notable roles in comedies. What makes Rylance a singular Shakespearean actor is how funny he is in the tragic material. While serving as the first artistic director of the reconstructed Globe theatre on London's South Bank, he created a highly amusing Hamlet and over a decade later, a similarly comical Richard III. While the presence of humor is at times attributed to his engagement with Original Practices (OP), Rylance's performances display many of the attributes of contemporary clown. This chapter argues that understanding Rylance's comic relationship to the audience in terms of clown makes legible a new actor/audience relationship that emphasizes Shakespeare's relevance not only through transhistorical truth showcased in the physical structures of the reconstructed Globe, but in the clownish power of creating a uniquely intimate relationship with the contemporary audience.

The preceding chapters demonstrated that the flop and interruption are not only constitutive elements of contemporary clown performance, but that both of these elements offer alternative relationships to power systems. Through the flop, clowns unwittingly insist that normalized systems of success and failure must be reexamined, and that failure, instead of being an undesirable end, can instead open up new and fruitful possibilities that had been obscured by a success/failure binary. Next, interruption allows clowns to exploit existing dramatic material

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[37] Ian Mckellen has often stated that he does not wish to play Falstaff, finding the role difficult or simply of poor quality. See for example John Halperin's interview with McKellen in *Vanity Fair* from December 2012. http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2012/12/sir-ian-mckellan-hobbit-on-coming-out

and traditions for comedic performance. Interruption defines the clown's relationship to existing traditions in a parasitic manner, relying on the established rhythms of existing traditions in order to interrupt them. While a flop may be used to interrupt a certain dramatic event, interruption more clearly identifies clown's relationship to the larger theatrical cultures it exists within. Interruption defines the clown's ability to use the tools of power to alternate ends.

This case study builds upon the work of the previous chapters but introduces the essential relationship between clown and audience. Examining clown theorists reveals that clowns use the audience as part of their performance, not just acknowledging them, but making their presence one more of the scene's "given circumstances." Further, the clown incorporates the audience's reactions into the structure of the clown performance, authorizing the forward movement of the dramatic event. Simultaneously, the analysis of OP performance theory reveals how the clown/audience relationship shares key similarities with OP in terms of actual practice. The points of commonality indicate both clown and OP are expressions of Western theatre's late 20th century reactions to realism. The clown-like element in OP points toward a tension in performance: OP engage with a powerfully situated contemporary audience while also looking to the past as a repository of theatrical truth. For clowns, the authorizing force of performance is the specific relationship in a contemporary moment in time. OP looks both to the present and the past. The thrust towards the present in seen in the audience relationship. The move to the past is demonstrated in OP's attempts to access a fidelity (imagined or real) to give the performance a sense of authenticity. The "authenticity" makes the performance, in the eyes of the audience (some practitioners hope), "authentically Shakespeare." The danger in such a practice is that it makes the performance "about" imparting a transhistorical sense of Shakespeare to the audience, whereas clown foregrounds not the "pastness" of the theatrical event but rather the essentially

contemporary nature of the audience and the event. By highlighting the presence of clown in Rylance's OP Shakespeare performance, critical discourse can move away from debates about the authenticity of OP methods and instead focus on the actual work of the productions in the contemporary moment.

After establishing the performantive similarities and ideological differences between OP and contemporary clown, this final case study will move into an examination of audience-actor relationships in Rylance's performances of Hamlet and Richard III. The goal is not to compare claims of authenticity between OP methodology and the historical record, but rather to identify the ways in which the relationships that Shakespeare created between certain protagonists and the audience finds an echo not just in the attempts of OP, but in clown practice itself. The goal of such similarities is not to recreate the early modern condition, but to understand how the past provides provocations for future performance, rather than mere blueprints. That is, many of Shakespeare's plays were written with a visible and perhaps active audience in mind; current productions would do well to access this energy even if not replicating the actual practices that animated the original productions. Finally this case study will examine Rylance's clown-ness. An examination of his training, public comments, and performance in and outside of Shakespeare reveals that the practices and ethos of clown are part of Rylance's performance style. Looking to his OP Shakespeare work it becomes possible to understand this work not as a retreat to the past, but as an animation of an actor/audience relationship clearly invested in a sense of the present and the future.

## 4.2    CLOWNS NEED AN AUDIENCE

As shown in previous chapters the idea of the flop is ubiquitous across many contemporary clown training methods. The concept of interruption is demonstrated throughout the history of the art form. Both of these practices/concepts are predicated on audience expectations. To say that audience interaction is an element of clown performance is obvious. In his introduction to *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook indentifies the audience as one of three essential components of any theatre, "A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (9). Audience acknowledgement, sharing, or even interaction is hardly unique to clowns. It is what clowns do with an audience that distinguishes the relationship. It is not only the acknowledgement of the audience, but the active *playing with them* that is the hallmark of contemporary clown. The degree of audience interaction differs from performer to performer and teacher to teacher, but most major clown pedagouegs emphasize the centrality of the audience/clown relationship as an essential element of what constitutes an act of clowning. Examining several of these teachers reveals variations in how the audience is conceived of, but reaffirms a general clown belief that the audience is part of the structure of the performance, and clowns must not just acknowledge the audience but use them as part of the fabric of the performative event.

James W. Gousseff wrote a concise volume, appropriately titled *Street Mime*, which outlines how one publicly practices the art of mime. Comic mime shares many practices with clown, and the two often overlap.  Part of Gousseff's instruction to aspiring street mime performers is that they learn how to interact with the audience as part of their act. He notes the similarity between clowns and street mimes, "Clowns are mimes' cousins and they aren't that far removed!" (17). It could also be noted that clowns can often act as street performers that may be

hard to distinguish from a mime; see David Shiner or the fictionalized street performers in Alan Clay's clown guide *Angels can Fly* (Wall 206, Clay). Noting the similarity between mimes and clowns, Gousseff uses an example from a clown to demonstrate the level to which audience interaction is essential in both forms. Recalling his aunt and uncle's trip to a *Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey* show, he states, "They [the aunt and uncle] were barely inside (the tent) when they were sneaked up on by Emmett Kelly [the real one] who took Aunt Dorthy's arm and walked her some sincere distance before she looked his way and was duly shocked to be holding elbows . . . not with Uncle Bob but with Kelly's incomparable tramp clown, Woeful Willie" (17). Kelly demonstrates that clown routines can create a relationship with the audience that goes beyond simply acknowledging them in the act, but actually bringing them into the staging/performing space (or bringing the staging/performing space to them) making the audience another player in the performance, or at least a highly sophisticated prop.

Jacques Lecoq demonstrates a strong commitment to the audience. Although clown is only a small, but notable, part of Lecoq's physical based actor training, his extensive explanation of play and audience are basic building blocks of the teacher's conception of clown. At several points in his training Lecoq employs the audience/performer relationship to clarify the goals of his program. As stated earlier, when he introduces the ideas of play and replay, he differentiates the former by noting that it is crafted with an audience in mind, and is not just for the performer (*The Moving* 29). Lecoq's skepticism of psychologically based actor training is rooted in the form's limited ability to communicate with the audience, because they overemphasize their own emotional experience and "the experience becomes too private" (*The Moving* 18). Conversely the physical actor that appeals to Lecoq lets the audience in, "I always look for an actor who 'shines', who develops a space around himself in which the spectators are present." The

undesirable converse is to, "absorb this space into themselves excluding spectators, and the experience becomes too private." Sharing allows for the work to be separated from the performer and be given over to the audience, "The aim of this act of creation is to bear fruit which separates from the tree" (*The Moving* 18). These basic tenents of Lecoq training locate a central focus on the audience. The clown training gives ways to incorporate this relationship into the dramatic event.

With clown the use of audience goes beyond direct communication and brings the audience into the act, as collaborator in the event. Lecoq describes a performance by Raymond Devos, who had been invited to teach on clown at the teacher's school in France: "The smallest reaction, a movement, a laugh, a single word from his audience was used by him to take off in a new direction. It was an impressive display of great clowning" (*The Moving* 147). Here, the audience does not just take on the role of receiver of energy or bodily communication, but gives back information to the performer which then changes the course of the proceedings. It is the essential use of the audience in driving the course of the dramatic structure that gives rise to Lecoq's assertion that, "It is not possible to be a clown for an audience; you must play with your audience" (*The Moving* 147). The sense of complicity defines the clown/audience relationship for Lecoq.

Lecoq is merely the beginning in a long line of clown teachers who (sometimes literally) embrace the audience. Eli Simon is a teacher at UC Irvine as well as artistic director of the New Swan Shakespeare Festival and CLOWNZILLA, a contemporary clown troupe. Simon's book, *The Art of Clowning*, condenses his practical knowledge into a manual for clown creation and training. Early in the book, Simon remarks that clown need not be seen as contrary to Stanislavsky-based acting methods, and on the contrary that clown can compliment other forms

of character-based work.[38] He does note there are some differences, the primary difference being the audience, "In clowning, the performers must always remain aware of those who are watching. This knowledge allows them to consciously and conscientiously bare their souls" (3). The move towards audience awareness is part of Simon's overall project of creating honest and emotionally open clowns. He makes the claim that not all clowns need to be funny, and rather the goal is not laughter but to, "find a powerful cord that reaches directly into the audience's heart" (36). Not all clowns would agree with Simon's assessment about the lack of need to be funny. Lecoq for instance defines the clown's "core theme" as "clowns make you laugh" (*Theatre of* 115). However, Simon does strike a common cord in emphasizing that the clown's connection to the audience is key to the power of the performance style.

For Simon the audience seems to provide two vital purposes: it works as a check on the performer and provides something to play off of. He states, "Audience response is instantaneous and honest – a pure indication of whether your act is living, dying, or hanging in the balance. Cueing off those reactions is an acquired skill that flourishes with practice" (93). The quote elucidates both the necessity of using the audience as a barometer of how the performance is fairing, but also using those responses to drive the performance forward. In fact it is not just an incidental relation to the audience, but rather the relationship gives the clown its animating force, "In clowning, what you are doing is important only insofar as you connect discoveries with your audience. If blowing bubbles is frustrating because they burst, look out and share your frustration" (28). The way the audience reacts can change the course of the show. But Simon cautions on over generalizing the audience, "Each audience is comprised of a unique collection

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[38] Lecoq also sees a place for clown as a pedagogical instrument towards the growth of other styles of performance (*Theatre of* 115-16).

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of individuals. If you anticipate funny moments, they usually fall short" (93). The audience must be reacted to, and the clown can only proceed with assistance of the audience.

Jon Davison, another professional clown with his own book on clown history and practice, is deeply dismissive of Simon's written work. In an online review he states, "It's a sad day when people who are so clueless about clowning are actually publishing books telling us how to do it" ("Review:*"). The primary source of Davison's frustration is Simon's conviction that clown need not be funny. Davison goes on to dismiss the exercises that Simon offers. Yet, despite the stern rebuke, both men emphasize the essential role of the audience in clowning. Davison wrestles throughout his own book with what role "truth" and "spontaneity" play in clown training. For Davison, the flop is a key part of the clown's relationship to the audience, and the perception of "authenticity." Looking to Philippe Gaulier, Davison finds that flop is a "learnable technique" but he and others feel this technique puts clowns, "in contact with something deep and authentic in themselves rather than a mere technique" (*Clown* 199). The sharing of moments of failure with the audience is the nature of the flop and "the origin of contemporary clown's alliance with authenticity" (*Clown* 199). In Davison's assessment, Gaulier advocates "pleasure" of the "pretense" of the performance over "naturalism", and clown rests on notion that "the performer's pleasure becomes bound up with the joy of laughing at yourself and how stupid you are" (*Clown* 209). This laughter is then shared with the audience and creates an essential relationship between the two (*Clown* 209). While Davison over-determines differences between Lecoq and Gaulier, his analysis of the latter still serves as an instructive example of how clowns connect with their audiences in ways that other forms of performance do not. The connection between audience and performer (be it Lecoq's sense of insecurity or Gaulier's sense

of the joy of the performer's insufficiency) employs a shared sense of inadequacy as a corner stone of some kind of "authenticity."

Further, in Davison's analysis of clowns he maps out how the tension between "authenticity" (be it pleasure, flop, revelation, etc.) and repetition in clown routines each night in a theatre is resolved by using the audience. The notion that only improvisation can be construed as "authentic" frustrates Davison, and he emphasizes that clowns do have planned and practiced routines. The audience solves Davison's dilemma over the "authentic" vs. the planned in clown: "it is only the relationship with the audience which must be improvised, then we are freed from the obligation to constantly freely improvise our material" (*Clown* 292). For both Simon and Davison the clown's relationship to the audience is vital because it allows a performance to move forward. The audience's permission to move forward, and sharing what works and what does not is present in both teachers' concepts of clown. The clown/audience relationship represents a spectrum. Improvised work contains a sensitive attention to potential changes based on how the audience reacts, such as in Lecoq's example of Devos. For Davison and Simon there is a sense that the clown reacts in subtler ways to create humor and move forward. These are not differences of kind, but of degree. The clown must use his audience to go forward, and when the clown fails to acknowledge the audience they slip into a performance mode that departs from clown and rests on mimesis.

### 4.3    ORIGINAL PRACTICES AND THE AUDIENCE

The above section establishes that clown needs the audience as a collaborator whose authorization/permission/complicity allows the dramatic event to move forward. Authorizing

dramatic movement can be as subtle as acknowledgment of failure through laughter or as large as providing a scene partner or prop from which to function. Lecoq, Simon, and Davison's conceptions of an audience do not mark out clown as unique in acknowledging the audience, but rather mark out the specific tactics clowns use to engage audiences at clown theatre events. In Shakespeare performance, 'original practices' (OP) also use specific tactics to cultivate a uniquely OP audience. This section seeks to identify ways that OP creates and interacts with an audience, noting how these practices overlap with or encourage clowning. An understanding of OP reveals the way much of Rylance's performance draws on or parallels clowning. In clown, the audience authorizes as opposed to the alignment of reconstructed relics. Rylance uses contemporary clown, as accessed through certain structures of the past, to perform with the aide of the audience.

Before moving forward it is important to specify what style of OP is under examination here, as the form is diverse. Alan C. Dessen[39] has noted the variety of stage practices that exist under the banner of OP. In addition to the most notable employer of OP (Shakespeare's reconstructed Globe in London) various sites use the term, including the Atlanta Tavern Theatre and American Shakespeare Company located in Staunton Virginia.[40] Dessen finds "The on-stage practices linked to the term, however, can vary widely, for few common denominators are to be found among the practitioners (45). This case study is primarily concerned with OP as conceived by the Globe and even more particularly, as practiced by Mark Rylance. As such, this

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[39] Dessen's essay appears in an anthology edited by Cristie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper entitled *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*. The book offers a variety of essays that brings together reflections on the first active years of Shakespeare's Globe penned by practitioners and scholars. Far from a hagiographic project, the opinions often differ sharply on issues of historical authenticity and theatrical practicality.

[40] There are a variety of sites beyond these three that engage in some way with OP. For brief example the following organizations engage in some way with OP: The Pigeon Creek Shakespeare Company, The Queens Men Project, The Original Practice Shakespeare Festival, and the Maryland Shakespeare Festival.

analysis does not specifically engage with the large variety of concepts used by OP, but rather focuses on the most notable exemplar of OP in order to illuminate the present-minded clown audience relationships enabled by the seemingly past-minded Globe practices.This analysis has implications for other OP companies and festivals, but the exact relationship between clown and other practitioners needs to be more thoroughly dealt with in other case studies. As such, when this chapter refers to OP it refers to the reconstructed Shakespeare's Globe's conception of the set of practices.

There are a variety of practices that constitute Shakespeare's Globe's OP but not all productions at Shakespeare's Globe are or have been "full" OP productions.[41] Mark Rylance explains that OP productions differ from the "free-hand" productions in that the former attempt "being faithful to a period" (Rylance "Principles", 104). But the actor does believe "free-hand" productions "revealed many aspects of how the space might have worked originally" and lead to "discoveries about the play" (105). The "authentic" nature of the OP work at the Globe, for Rylance, is based on research, materials, and craft. The first refers to the work of scholars such as Andrew Gurr and John Orrell. The second is about the actual material used to create the site and costumes, and other parts of the performance. Finally, craft refers not just to performers, but to the methods used to create the physical objects of and in the site (Rylance "Principles" 103-4). This rediscovery work is aimed toward "harnessing the nature of theatre" a force akin to "the great river falling over Niagara Falls" (112). Rylance's linking of these practices and "authenticity" troubles many scholars.

Returning to Dessen's work, the scholar notes there are many strengths of OP, but is skeptical of many aspects of the performers' craft. For example, he sees period costumes, period

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[41] Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment provides a list of all Globe productions from 1996 to 2007. With the exception of the 2003 season, most seasons have more non-OP productions.

music, and all male casts as "strengths" of the Globe. Additionally he notes some features, such as universal lighting, standing audiences, and the thrust configuration are mandated by the physical structure itself (46-45). Dessen's primary concern is what he terms "theatrical essentialism, "Proponents assume that, regardless of other changes in language, culture and social practice, a basic core of truths about theatrical practice persists and can therefore be best understood by those in theatre community regardless of the findings (and structures) of scholars and other laymen." Practitioners often believe in a trans-historical sense of "'character' and psychological or narrative realism (46). Dessen finds even when scholars have reasonable conjectures about how a scene or type of interaction with the space may have occurred, they are often met with voices of "theatrical essentialism." He acknowledges that choices that are not historically founded can still create engaging contemporary theatrical productions, but is frustrated by artists' failure to capitalize on the Globe's potential to better understand practices of past theatrical performance, or worse yet assuming that contemporary practice mirrors that of the past.

Even voices in support of the reconstructed Globe have aired concerns about OP. In his introduction to Carson and Karim-Cooper's anthology Franklin Hildy, a scholar involved with and sympathetic to the Globe project, finds that "The 'original practices' productions developed by [the initial artists] have held the promise of creating a coherent approach to staging of the plays at Shakespeare's Globe, the promise of this approach has not yet been realized" (17). While Hildy seems to blame reactionary detractors for disallowing this potential, there is still a sense that in the first ten years, the Globe did not meet a standard of "authenticity" or exploration of academic ideas based in solid history. These views of "authenticity" at the Globe create tension between the past and present in performances.

Christie Carson situates the Globe not as an anomaly, but as an expression of contemporary theatrical concerns, specifically engaged with a more present audience. She first notes moves toward greater audience engagement have marked Western theatre at least since the 1960s but also that the Globe's architecture offers unique provocations to the constant negotiation between audience and player. On the Globe, she states, "Therefore to see the establishment of Shakespeare's Globe Theater as being outside this general movement towards readdressing the audience as active participants in the meaning-making process of the theater is misleading" (117). She argues the trajectory of the Globe is toward inclusivity and a more agentic audience, in opposition to the quote from one British critic, Bryan Appelyard:

> From its inception this project seems to have been specifically designed as a provocation or rebuke to English cultural attitudes. Shakespeare is, after all, more than just the greatest creative artist we, or perhaps humanity, has produced. He is also an embodiment of England. What you do to him, you do us. (Carson 123)

Carson's interest in audiences is shared by Globe practitioners. It is clear that Globe and clown not only share in a larger theatrical move towards open audience engagement, but that Rylance in particular highlights several facets of clown performance including the vital link with the audience.

At Shakespeare's Globe under the artistic directorship of Mark Rylance OP attempted to actively create a dialogic relationship with the contemporary audience. Much of the relationship is mandated by the audience members' visibility due to the common lighting imposed by the open air Globe recreation. Tim Carroll, a frequent director in the early years of the theatre and a frequent collaborator of Rylance, states, "Perhaps the most unpredictable element of all in the Globe is the audience itself. Again, I think it is because there is no roof. Because they are in the same light as us, their own reactions are much more significant (and somehow volatile) than in a

dark theatre" (40). Carroll's essay serves as a sort of defense of the audience, and privileges audience reaction over critical assessment, speaking to a moment where the audience laughed in the "wrong" place, Carroll states, "It [the laughter] meant that they [the audience] had shared with Jasper [the performer] a moment of beautiful revelation, vouchsafed by the beauty of chance. At this moment I felt very proud of him and of the audience" (40). Directly juxtaposing audience and critic, he states, "They [the audience] really can cope with anything – a lot more, at any rate, than most critics" (42). For Carroll, the audience's imagination allows the shows to exist.

Further, Carroll does not conceive of the audience as a solitary unit. He explains Rylance's view that audience members in the yard are a sort of appetite, the seated middle audience the heart, and those high up in the gallery are the mind (this recalls Simon's caution to keep in mind the heterogeneity of a clown's audience). For Carroll, this implies that consistency of tone between scenes or even within the same moment need not exist because different members of the audience will experience the play in different ways in the same moment. Carroll's intense faith in the audience gives them a great deal of agency in the meaning making of the piece. However, at one point when juxtaposing audience and critic, he claims the audience to be on his side when they appreciate "low entertainment" in *Macbeth*, and moreover "I think we might have been nearer to an 'authentic' experience than even we realized" (42). At the end of the essay Carroll also insists that the imaginative present day audience gives understanding to one of Prospero's lines. What Carroll's essay suggests is a tension between the immense imaginative power of the audience and what that imagination is put in service of. Does the OP audience engagement serve the audience's need or some sense of a past Shakespeare, vested with canonical and cultural authority?

Rylance certainly casts his audience interaction in terms of a re-discovery. He mentioned unearthing the natural Niagara Falls-like force of the plays. Additionally, Rylance emphasized that the Globe is not an actor's theatre per sey, but "The Globe is an audience's theatre" (108). He does speak of letting go of past conceptions of Shakespeare, of the accumulated baggage of the cultural icon, by interacting more directly with the audience: "Shakespeare comes to life when we speak and move with the audience in the present" (106-7). There is also a sense that the material reconstruction of the space often engendered the audience with "a wild spirit" (106). But all of this language comes back to a rediscovery, an attempt at getting back to what Shakespeare[42] might have wanted, "I feel the writer [Shakespeare] wanted us to laugh much more than we do at his plays. We are still a bit Victorian in our reverence" (109). Rylance's own expressions of what the Globe does are suspended between the present audience and a searching backwards towards the past.

This tension between "now" and "then" can be explained by contradictory movements within OP. On one hand practices and structures are built upon an idea of the past, and these ideas and various modes of research create objects and practices with various degrees of "fidelity" to the past. At the same time, certain practices, and especially the push towards the audience, is clearly a movement at work in Western theatre outside of the Globe and OP. One of the impulses present in Rylance's performance is a sense of clown that draws to various degrees on humor, flop, interruption, and most notably a conceptualization of audience as collaborator.

Rylance's performances at the Globe in various degrees of OP style as the titular character in *Hamlet* (2000) and *Richard III* (2012) demonstrate his clowning with the audience.

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[42] Rylance does not believe that a man named William Shakespeare from Stratford wrote the plays attributed to William Shakespeare. This does add one more dimension, albeit one not explored in this study, to the issues of authenticity and historical evidence.

Both performances were heavily praised, and particularly so for his interaction with the audience and his comedic style. While such techniques are often described as OP, clown offers an alternative explanation for both the force and authority of these performances. Instead of finding authority in the recreated past structures, clown finds animating force in the intimate audience relationship. Clown then is not in opposition to the Globe project. Rather clown is a contemporary answer to the challenge of the Globe physical condition, i.e. a thrust stage, with a visible and often mobile audience. Before looking directly at Rylance's performance of these two roles, it is vital to establish that both roles are strongly influenced by early modern conceptions of clown and audience interaction. Recognizing how these clown features work in the early texts allows for an analysis that links the contemporary clown features to those of the past, while also differentiating the source of performance power. If OP structures a return to Shakespeare in terms of deification, then clown positions the partial restoration of performance practices based on direct audience and actor relationships, practices rooted in audience play instead of historical recreation.

## 4.4    RICHARD AND HAMLET, VICE AND JESTER

*Hamlet* and *Richard III* vary in terms of formal structure and time of composition, but both share roots with earlier comic traditions, namely the jester and the Vice figure. In addition to comedy, each play's titular characters cultivate a strong relationship to the audience. *Hamlet* is often held up as a paragon of Western culture, the greatest drama by the world's greatest dramatist. In their introduction to the most recent Arden edition of *Hamlet* Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor cite the play's immense popularity in the non-English speaking world, over 400 publications on the play

in any given year, and the mass familiarity of so many elements of *Hamlet*, most notably the "To be or not to be" speech, as evidence that the play remains the best known and most studied play in the canon (15-6*). Richard* has proven immensely popular on stage, but it is rarely counted as a work of similar literary strength, Harold Bloom sees the work as "cumbersome and overwritten" (*Human* 70). Yet both plays share a fixation on the central character. Far more charismatic than those that surround them, Richard and Hamlet share an exceptional relationship with the audience. Few characters in Shakespeare's canon share the same degree of familiarity with the audience as these two. The deep links to the audience are also predicated on a degree of humor, and owe in large part to formal inspirations for each character. Richard draws on the Vice and works to share with the audience in order to implicate them in his Machiavellian schemes. Alternately, Hamlet often solicits the audience in order to authorize his action in a world bereft of comic or intellectual companions.

Richard uses many of the intimacy-forming techniques of the clown, but toward dastardly ends. While surely abominable, what other than his violent charisma sustains the extremely long play (second only to *Hamlet* in length)? Richard's need to play with his audience, to share with them his schemes and plots, gives the play dramatic force. More chilling is the implication that through sharing with the audience Richard does not reach a level of communitas or openness with the audience, but instead reaches toward a sort of terrifying anti-clown. Richard exploits the conventions of clown, but becomes a foil to the clown. Whereas a clown often shares and amuses by forming an intimate bond with the audience, Richard uses the same conventions but then abandons the audience one he has gained the power he needs to execute his plans.

Richard is a sort of grotesque[43] mirror of many forms of contemporary clown. Jan Henderson is a Canadian based clown teacher, who shares clown techniques based in the Canadian clown Richard Pochinko through her workshops and university teaching. Her clown philosophy states, "Clowning is about the freedom that comes from a state of total, unconditional acceptance of our most authentic selves, warts and all. It offers us respite from our self-doubts and fears, and opens the door to joy" (Henderson). This sounds like an inversion of Richard, when he states "But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks….I am determined to prove a villain" (I.i.ln. 14 & 30). Richard revels in his faults and defects, but instead of turning them into a sort of playful humor as Lecoq or Henderson espouses, Richard turns them into comic cruelty, such as his curt dismissal after "winning" Lady Anne, "I'll have her, but I will not keep her long" (I.ii. ln232). The clown and Richard use their "warts" to create comic performance, but while the clown often leads to joy, Richard leads to savagery. In mining supposed deficiencies for perverse humor, Richard is not unique, and instead draws on the long line of Vice characters that existed in the morality plays of the medieval and late Tudor periods.

The Vice's comic and corrupting attributes encapsulate the play's titular character. Richard casts himself in a variety of theatrical roles during the play, and one such image is the Vice: "Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity, I moralize two meanings in one world" (3.i ln. 82-3). The line is delivered to the audience and asks them to place Richard in the same line as a figure that many in the audience may recall from the dramas of the past age. Describing the Vice of later Tudor morality plays, F. P. Wilson begins, "Whatever else the Vice may be, he is always the chief comic character" (59). Wilson goes on to elaborate on the connections between jesters

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[43] My use of the term grotesque draws less, at this moment, on the Bahktinian sense of carnival and release, and instead simply employs the term to elicit Shakespeare's exploitation of Richard's physical irregularities to indicate moral deficiency.

and Vice, seeing the two as closely linked from the earliest references to the Vice. While acknowledging a great many influences on the Vice, he locates one as "the creative zest of the actors speaking more than was set down for them" (61-2). Apart from comedy the Vice has strong associations with the corrupting influences of the material world, "He is not the devil but he is the devil's disciple" (Wilson 62). The Vice often leads the protagonist astray, pitted against ministers of God, but is almost always more entertaining than his opponents.

In addition to the use of comedy, Vice most closely resembles contemporary clown in its association with the audience. Meg Twycross states that compared to the forces of "good" in a morality play, "Virtue is no fun; vice is," and further, "While Virtues exhort and appeal to the audience, the Vices play games with them" (73). The idea of "playing with" echoes Lecoq's assertion that clowns must include the audience in their sense of play. Twycross goes on, "All the Vices invite and expect our complicity, and we go along with it because they let us into their secrets" (74). Further, Wilson notes that the Vice will often play not just with a generalized audience, but with individuals, singling them out, "In several plays he greets 'cousin cutpurse' and advises the spectators to look to their pockets" (65). Twycross finds that Vice is so engaging, modern audience often side with Vice on the grounds of his charisma alone. She insists that a medieval audience would have taken the virtues much more seriously (82-3). The Vice's strong relationship with the audience did not end with the morality plays; the charismatic character lived on in the clowns of the Elizabethan and Jacobean era.

There is a well-established link between the early modern clown and the Vice figure. Robert Hornback finds that Dick Tarlton, the noted Elizabethan clown, drew heavily on the Vice figure in creating his clown identity (18-19). Both Kemp and Armin claimed artistic lineage to him. Further Welsford links folly and Vice several times in her study on fools. She states that

over time "Elizabethan actors did not wholly abolish the role of the Vice or Fool but transformed it out of all recognition. He retained his traditional traits of absurd mentality, grotesque physical appearance, familiarity with the spectators and partial independence of the plot" (288). Shakespeare's Richard complies with this list: his morality is absurd, he is physically grotesque, he possesses a strong association with the audience, and his staging of historical events seem to translate into a role as meta-theatrical ringmaster.  Other scholars have noted the affiliations between the Vice and Shakespeare characters such as Lear's Fool, Edmund, Iago, Feste, and of course Richard (Weimann 70 and Wilson 65).  The historical link between Richard and the Vice is most clearly seen in their humor and close relationship to the audience.

The Vice and Richard both endear themselves to the audience by openly acknowledging the systems, both theatrical and social, he is playing within. When Richard proclaims to the audience, "I am determined to prove a villain" (1.i. ln. 30), he exposes the categories and strategies used by stage characters to manipulate audience response. Acknowledging his position as a character in a play, he seduces the audience through a dual gesture. First, Richard appears to diminish distance with the audience by acknowledging the pretense of illusion, openly acknowledging the theatrical performance as something both he and the audience are "in on". Second, by positioning himself as merely a stage character Richard's actions are framed as make-believe, blunting the severity of the blows. While the actions on stage are of course fictional, Richard is still working with the audience to create a strong sense of complicity through exposing the very structures of dramatic form. Similarly, Jan Kott articulates how Shakespeare's histories, especially *Richard*, showcase the "Grand Mechanism" of history, whereby, "Feudal history is like a great staircase on which there treads a constant procession of kings. Every step upwards is marked by murder, perfidy, treachery" and finally, "From the

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highest step there is only a leap into the abyss" (7). Richard gives his audience a sort of "inside view" of the treacherous climb to power, a climb the audience make with him. By making the audience aware of the theatrical and historical processes Richard does not just ingratiate himself to the audience, but makes them complicit.

The audience's complicity with Richard is established early on and lingers throughout the play. After seducing Lady Anne he constantly poses questions to the audience such as, "And made her widow to a woeful bed? On me, whose all not equals Edward's moiety? On me, that halts and am misshapen thus?" (1.ii. ln.251-3). The major audience communications monologues establish this rapport early in the play and set up a feeling that the audience is on Richard's side, in on his scheming. Although he does not often return to such direct audience address, the powerful and potentially intimate relationship established early on creates complicity with the audience. The play insinuates, "we had a chance to stop him, he told us his plan, he asked us questions, and we reminded silent". Richard's early complicity mirrors Davison's model of clowns asking permission from the audience: Richard shows us each step and we assent to his brutal rise because we are being entertained. However, his audience play is ultimately part of his deception. Slowly the king becomes less involved with the audience and more involved in fighting for his own crown. The audience has gone along with Richard and while they have been entertained, they have gained this entertainment by allying their sympathies with a murderous sociopath. Richard's sharing with the audience does not gesture towards any of the positive movements of community that clown teachers talk of, but of the dark underbelly, more reminiscent of Lecoq's buffoons.

Buffoons, along with clowns, are one of Lecoq's primary dramatic territories.[44] If the master teacher conceived of clowns as failures who shared their stripped down joys and frustrations with an audience, the buffoon has a much darker edge. They are often physically grotesque, scoff at traditional values and power systems, and "their function [is] not to make fun of a particular individual, but more generally of everyone, of society as a whole" (*Movin,g* 117-118). Additionally, Lecoq links buffoons to figures such as "the king's fool," Antoin Artaud, and Jarry's Ubu (*Moving*, 117, 121). While Lecoq draws distinctions between buffoons and clowns, they both exist outside normalized power structures and find their dramatic momentum in opposition to traditional terms of success. The buffoon is much more caustic than the clown. This buffoon image nicely coincides with the concept of the Vice, and even more particularly, Richard.

But while Richard starts with a clear link to clown, Vice, and buffoon, the movement of the play takes Richard away from the audience. Kott identifies Richard as a clown, and notes, "He begins his performance with buffoonery, and buffoonery is the substance of his part. All his attitudes are those of a clown: the sly and cruel ones, as well as the gestures of love and power," but that finally, "Richard ceases to be a clown only in the last act." For Kott, Richard is a clown because he is not actually afraid (46-7). In this formation the clown is separated from the authentic. Harold Bloom sees Richard's late play collapse as merely dramatic failure on the part of the author, complaining that when Richard moves from "speaking cartoon to psychic inwardness" the play becomes, "poetic bathos and dramatic disaster" (*Human* 66-7). Instead, Richard's collapse late in the play need not be seen as failure of dramatic art nor as the entry into an authentic self in opposition to the clown. Rather, by the end of the play Richard becomes

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[44] While Lecoq separates the two forms, I wish to emphasize their similarity. For further explorations of buffoon see Davision 264 and Wright 298.

subsumed in the dramatic event, and can no longer play with his audience. As he becomes more a part of the drama he is cut off from the audience, and the resulting isolation strangles the clown.

Richard's mistake is feeling that once power is maintained the audience is no longer needed. Throughout the play, Richard's exploits audiences, both on stage and off, in order to achieve his political goals. For example, Richard wishes to trick the people of London into assenting to his coronation. Ever the self-conscious performer, Richard insists on knowing "How now, how now, what say the citizens" (3.vii. ln1) before his attempted coronation. When Buckingham informs him of the citizen's silence, Richard stages himself as a pious religious man, attempting to dupe the people into acquiescing to his rule. Richard realizes (even in a monarchal society) his audience must be convinced and brought into sympathy in order for him to succeed. As he gains power he forgets that these carefully staged seductions brought him the crown, and in abandoning the relationships to various audiences he loses his footing.

Late in the play Richard delivers an inward looking speech that stands in dangerous contrast to performative speeches shared with audiences earlier in the play. Like the speech after Lady Anne's seduction in1.ii, the speech in 5.iii involves a litany of questions. After seducing Lady Anne, Richard charts new ways forward, such as hiring tailors. In act five Richard is fighting a battle to maintain his fragile kingdom and seems lost in confusion. Unlike the speech he shared with the audience after wooing Anne, at this late moment there is no audience connection and no way forward. Richard's questions cause self-doubt; "Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am. Then fly! What, myself upon myself? Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good That I myself have done unto myself? O, no. Alas, I rather hate myself" (5.iii. ln. 184-9). Where as the former Richard found fun in turning to his audience and staging himself for an

audience, during the battle he turns only to himself. Without sharing with the audience there is no way forward, only failure. Lecoq finds "If [the clown] never succeeds, we are tipping over into the tragic" (*Moving*, 146). By limiting his relationship to the audience, Richard cuts off his only form of power, the way to move forward through audience assent. Here the king's assumed roles become burdensome, "I am a villain" (5.iii.ln.191) and finally he finds that this title is constricting, "every tale condemns me for a villain" (5.iii.ln195). Without the self-conscious stagecraft of turning to his audience, Richard is left with no more room to play, and like a Vice deprived of the vital energy of play, suffocates and so drowns on the sword of Henry VII.

Whereas Richard is an anti-clown through his connection to the medieval Vice figure, Hamlet draws on court jesters, demonstrating many attributes of contemporary clowning, notably audience interaction, the flop, and interruption. David Wiles notes that Hamlet works as an ambassador between play and audience. He supposes that the wandering players that visit Elsinore lack a clown because Shakespeare was making a direct allusion to Kemp, whose clowning would have connected the real world and play world. Shakespeare makes up for this when, "Hamlet casts himself as the fool of both 'The Mousetrap' and *Hamlet*". He does so by his comic music making after the play and by taking on "the function of mediating between play and audience" (57-60). Videbaek also notes the similarity between Hamlet and the clown. Once again picking up on audience relationship, "He is the one mediator between stage and audience, and he even to some extent mediates between the gravedigging clown and the spectators" but he also finds, "Hamlet chooses to make himself into a combination of the 'natural fool' and the court jester clown, and to draw on this figure's license in order to expose the truth he needs" (177-8). Harold Bloom goes so far as to invent a narrative where Hamlet is a sort of adopted son of the play's long dead jester: "Hamlet is his own Falstaff (as Harold Goddard remarked)

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because Yorick, "a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy," raised him until the prince was seven. The Grave-digger, the only personage in the play witty enough to hold his own with Hamlet, tells us that Yorick's skull has been in the earth twenty-three years, and that it is thirty years since Hamlet's birth" (*Poem*, 5). These scholars provide a foundation for an analysis of Hamlet in terms of the contemporary clown through his associations with the audience, but Hamlet also shows signs of the flop and interruption.

Much as *Macbeth* can be read in terms of failure, Hamlet is a perennial flop in his failure to act the part of a typical revenge tragedy protagonist. The prince's oft remarked upon indecision is its own kind of perpetual failure. If the play is a revenge tragedy in terms of genre, Hamlet flops when he delays his imperative to "take arms." Hamlet's propensity for the flop culminates in the very clownish moment of killing the foolish Polonius. Attempting to summon the courage to act in the noble manner demanded by circumstance and genre, Hamlet instead stabs the doddering man behind the drapes. His mother asks what he has done, "Nay, I know not. Is it the King?" (3.iv.ln.24), and upon finding the body states, "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell" (3.iv.ln.29). Hamlet in this moment does not come off as overcome with grief, but annoyed with his mistake, the grand moment of revenge becomes the unintentional stabling of an old "fool." Hamlet's subsequent engagement with Claudius compounds the flop moment even if Hamlet is simply playing the fool. When the King asks where the dead man is, Hamlet japes "At supper" (4.iii.ln.17), and then elaborates, "Not where he eats, but where 'a is eaten" (4.iii.ln.19). The comic responses are part of the "antic disposition" Hamlet puts on. For much of the play Hamlet chooses to play the clown instead of the revenger.

Hamlet further shows this clowning in his word play. Early in the drama the prince plays word games with Polonius, finding alternate meanings in the advisor's language. Polonius asks

Hamlet what he is reading, and he flippantly responds, "Words, words, words". He then pretends to misinterpret Polonius's question, "What is the matter"(2.ii.ln.189-190). Instead of telling the old man what he is reading about, Hamlet asks to know who is quarrelling. Examples proliferate throughout the play, for example, during the "Mouse Trap" the prince puns on Ophelia's sexuality. Later he jokes and then berates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for attempting to play him like a recorder. These instances set up Hamlet as a witty fool, similar to Lear's. He perverts the meaning of language for comic effect, positioning himself as slightly mad. Hamlet's clownishness affects a distance between the prince and the rest of the characters.

The titular character's difference from the other characters of the play is further enforced by his strong relationship with the audience. Hamlet's five soliloquies constitute his strongest relationship to the audience and find a parallel in the contemporary clown's use of audience. Andrew Gurr notes Hamlet enacts the clown's part and establishes a strong relationship to the audience. In putting on the "antic disposition" Hamlet will, "make himself a royal clown" (*Staging,* 132). Gurr further observes that Shakespeare and his company would have made extensive use of the down stage area to have Hamlet deliver his soliloquies as conversations with the audience, all of which would have been delivered as conversations (except, according to Gurr, "To be or not to be") in order to establish Hamlet's closeness to the audience (*Staging*, 10, 129, 137, 147). The prince's relationship to the audience is differentiated from Richard's by the use of actual instead of feigned intimacy. If, as Bloom contends, there is no one in the play able to mentally match Hamlet, save perhaps the gravedigger (*Poem*, 124-25), then the audience is positioned to speak with Hamlet in terms of an intimacy that cannot be achieved with others. Hamlet does not "use" the audience but rather goes to them for lack of another confidant.

Richard and Hamlet may relate to the audience differently, but both eventually leave their audience. Hamlet breaks with the audience when he delivers his last soliloquy to the audience before leaving for England. When he returns to Denmark (and the play) there is some degree of clowning, most notably with the gravedigger and Osric, but there is no more direct interaction with the audience. Whereas early monologues seemed to delay action, seeking the permission of the audience to act on his revenge, Hamlet returns without the need for audience authorization. Before the final sword fight, Horatio offers to intervene, to delay the revenge once more. Hamlet contends, "Not a whit. We defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow If it be, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all, since no man of aught he leaves knows what is't to leave betimes. Let be" (5.ii.ln.197-202). At this point, Hamlet accepts mortality, and in doing so accepts his place within the genre confines of the play. When Hamlet becomes the hero of a revenge tragedy he ceases his communication with the audience, leaving much of his clown nature behind.

Despite constantly seeking force to move forward with his revenge from the audience, it is a group of soldiers that force Hamlet toward his bloody deeds.  Each soliloquy is about action; Hamlet seeks out the audience as a means for authorizing action. However, a band of soldiers, off to fight and die for "a little patch of ground That hath in it no profit but the name" (4.iv.ln.17-8), finally spurs Hamlet to action. Before putting away his role as clown/audience mediator, Hamlet takes time to converse a final time with the audience: "O, from this time forth My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth" (4.iv.ln.64-5). Once he gets to the point of action, he no longer needs the permission to move forward. In this way, since clowns also need authorization to take the next step, Hamlet leaves behind what can be seen as his affiliation with contemporary

clown. Of course he still jokes, but his interrupting of the drama ceases, he no longer interacts with the audience, and any flops from this point on become tragic.

Videbaek argues that since Hamlet no longer needs the freedom of the clown he puts the role away (189). I agree that Hamlet puts away the formal trappings of clown in Act Five, but he does so in order to more fully enter the drama. Lear's fool leaves the play without explanation and so offers a dream of escape from mimesis and by association the rules of reality itself. Hamlet, however, must ultimately be consumed by both the mimetic world of the play and rules that govern human mortality. In the case of both Lear's Fool and Hamlet, the rest is silence, but the latter grasps a realization of mortality. His "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" speech (significantly to Horatio and not the audience) recognizes the limit of art to build a dike against mortality. While elsewhere Shakespeare finds a place to outlive a mortal life through poetry, Hamlet, like all those in the audience, "must come to dust." My previous case studies saw 500 Clown imagining breaks from the grip of death, and the Fool in *Lear* rejecting the confines of the mimetic narrative and thereby finding an escape from death by refusing the terms of mimesis. Hamlet finds no escape, and ultimately dies because his sense of play, humor, and seeming sense of superiority over the structure and conventions of the play are not enough to save him. In the end Hamlet must die, and because his clowning created such an intimate audience relationship, we are all the sadder to seem him go.

In both plays, clowning grants the titular characters an immense power drawn from a direct contact with the audience. When this relationship is compromised or ceases to exist, the characters fall into the terms of mimesis. Richard eventually collapses upon himself when he looks inward instead of thriving on the fun of acting. The lack of audience connection denies him the authorizing power he needs to move forward, and he dies. Hamlet seeks the audience's aid in

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allowing further steps forward, but when he makes his final step, he must leave most of his clown vestiges behind. In both cases, the characters leave their clown elements behind to be more fully subsumed into the mimetic world of the drama, and in doing so, both men die.

## 4.5    MARK RYLANCE: CLOWN

Mark Rylance's work can be described as clown not just because he is a superb comic actor, but because much of his performance draws vital force from clown's relationships to the audience. In addition to a strong connection to the audience, Rylance also exhibits interruption though his humorous friction with institutional practices, be they Shakespearean drama or award shows. Interruption and audience play are connected in Rylance's works. Specifically, he draws heavily on playing with the audience in order to authorize the movement of the performance and interrupt established rules. While flop is often more readily apparent in clown routines than clown performances in established text, Rylance finds the kind of chaos that flop thrives in as vital to his performance. Rylance demonstrates his clown nature in his methods and training in addition to non-Shakespeare performances. I examine the presence of these clown qualities mined not for the purposes of clown taxonomy, but rather to understand how clown functions as a lens through which we might apprehend the particular force of Rylance's unique performance style.

Rylance showed an inclination toward theatre forms closely associatied with clown early in this career. Although born in the UK in 1960, Rylance's family relocated to the United States when he was two years old. Rylance did return to the UK to train at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1978 (Escolme, 408).  Commenting on deciding to move to the UK for actor

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training, Rylance recalls feeling that American actor training was too psychologically based, "I needed to play, and at RADA acting students are performing in front of live audiences within six weeks. That wasn't the case in American acting schools that I was aware of in the 1970s" (Margolies). Further, Rylance worked early in his career with Mike Alfreds, affiliated with Shared Experience, "whose presentational narrative techniques and metatheatrical aesthetic must have proved something of a perfect training for eventual work in [the Globe]" (Escolem, 408). The playful audience engagement, a cornerstone of much clown work, is thus demonstrated in Rylance's foundational training and aesthetics.

Rylance readily demonstrates an affinity towards the type of confusion and panic that clowns call the flop. He admires directors who find chaos: "They [directors he prefers working with] encourage actors to surprise each other, to keep it fresh, to bring the sense of discovery and fun from the rehearsal room into the performance. You have to move into chaos. For the audience to have a sense that something has happened, there needs to be a fleeting moment of confusion" (quoted in Cooke). Rylance's embrace of chaos echoes John Wright's description of the point of "bafflement." Wright locates bafflement in both Lecoq (Le Flop) and Gaulier's (the big flop) training, and he summarizes the idea, "It's [bafflement] the point where we know [the audience], know for sure, that you're not acting and that you don't know what to do, and you've got nothing in your head, but it's still OK" (Wright 195). What Rylance is embracing is what clowns identify as the flop, the moment of failure when things could go wrong. Instead of identifying the lost control as negative or break in the performance, it is precisely these moments which must be capitalized on and shared with the audience.

This engagement with a moment of chaos (or flop) explains Rylance's affection for improvisation, which is a clown tool often used to train for engagement with the flop moment.

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As stated above, Lecoq saw improvisation as a tool for shaping reactions to/from the audience, and Davison also found improvising with the audience key to clown. Rylance has stated his favorite acting classes in the 70s were improvisation classes. Going further Rylance explains, "I want to experience people who are totally lost, confused and vulnerable. Trust is required and improvisation builds this trust and presence" (Abbott, x).  Rylance goes on to explain that he and the cast of *La Bete* often engaged in games of volleyball before performances, " It brings everyone into the present, and you notice the way their minds work and whether each of us has had a bad day or a good day. In the end acting is all about passing and receiving something, and hopefully taking risks and being attentive to the unusualness of stage work". The newspaper article also details how Rylance taught a master class on improvisation using masks (Healey). For Rylance there exists a vital dynamic in keeping the senses open to new moments and discoveries on stage, all reminiscent of Lecoq's praise of the clown's ability to adjust its performance to the new material provided by an audience. Rylance uses improvisation to exploit moments of flop/chaos between the actor and audience, thereby utilizing play and the audience authorizing power of the clown.

Rylance uses the audience to help him move through a play in a fashion similar to clown. Playing Richard III made Rylance anxious each night:

> I always get nervous for those first two scenes, because it's like a first date with the audience. It's a first date. Are they going to listen to me? Are they going to believe me and accept me? Because I'm talking a lot with the audience. And you [in the audience], of course, express yourselves very differently every night. Though I could try and force you into certain reactions, I don't really like to do that if I can help it—if I can be brave and actually just talk with you, and see where you want to go, and so use your energy rather than force my energy onto you. So those scenes are always the most exciting. (Feldman)

Rylance's description of listening to the audience in order to move forward is mirrored in Davison's description of clowning: " The clown must cross the space in front of the audience, but each step requires a real laugh from the audience." Davison notes that this exercise can be extrapolated to many forms of theatrical material, including Shakespeare (291). Rylance's focus on the audience is part of what constitutes the performance each night, and because the audience differs, so does Rylance's performance. By sacrificing some of his artistic autonomy, Rylance shares with his audience the nightly creation of his Richard. His specific alchemy of actor and audience reflects the same sort of relationship and driving force as that of clown.

This audience play is central to Rylance's acting/clowning, but other elements of clown also showcase Rylance's propensity for the form. When performing Shakesperean roles, Rylance often starkly breaks from the traditions of those role. This, in itself, is not quite clown interruption, but the force of Rylance's own performance leans on his ability to play with the audience through flop and less on the audience's conception of traditional ghosts of the roles. However, in other contexts Rylance has proven himself an able interruptive clown. In 2008 and 2011 Rylance won Tony Awards, the first for *Boeing-Boeing* and the second for *Jerusalem*. In both cases Rylance recited the work of Louis Jenkins. The first piece seemed to be absurd advice about how to equip one's self when moving through a specific area, such as a city. The second piece concerned walking through solid objects. In both cases Rylance broke with the expectation of how the award ceremony event should be played. By not only refusing to use his own language, but also offering speeches that seemed to make no sense, Rylance drew laughter from his audience. These specific situations were clown interruption because they relied on the audience's former knowledge of how an award speech should be given in order to create humor in the friction between expectation and execution. Rylance gleefully threw the rules out of the

window, making his acceptance an absurd bit of humor instead of a moment of reveling in adulation. These bits of interruption show that the ethos of clown--flop, interruption, and especially audience --are vital parts of Rylance's sense of play. When he became the reconstructed Globe's first artistic director, Rlyance brought this sense of play with him.

## 4.6    CONTEMPORARY CLOWNING ON EARLY MODERN CLOWNS

Rylance's tenure at the Globe theatre used an intimate relationship between audience and performer to give productions a sense of immediacy. That Rylance's performances locate authority in the audience is significant: the site and the discourse surrounding the reconstructed Globe often locates authority in the material reconstructions of the past. While a sense of the conjured past does inform the audience's understanding of the performance to varying degrees, the essential authority and force of the performance is located (in specific productions) in Rylance's clown relationship with the audience. The early modern structures that are recreated in the Globe stage foreground the audience and therefore encourage contemporary clown. Clown allows a move beyond the Globe's "pastness" as a primary or sole lens.

The contemporary audience may not even see Rylance's clowning as essentially linked to the historically recreated environment. In *Engaging Audiences*, Bruce McConachie explains the differences between visuomotor and visual perceptions, "On one hand, humans viewing the inanimate world generate 'visual perceptions.' On the other hand, watching others act in intentional ways use a different mental system to generate 'visuomotor representations' (56). When watching a performance, audience members' minds switch back and forth from one mode of processing to the other, and a strong human interest in an other human's intentional actions

means that how we receive a performance need not be over-determined by the visual field it exists within, "because spectators are primarily interested in an actor/character's intentions, crossgarterdness and redness are secondary effects, and not the focus of attention" (63). In this way, the physical trappings of the Globe become less vital to the audience experience than the ways these physical trappings encourage performers to act in new ways, or to draw upon existing traditions (clown) in order to make sense of Shakespeare.

Scholars, notably Bridget Escolme, have argued that Rylance reframes the actor/audience/Shakespeare relationship through the Globe. My case study offers clown as a means through which he accomplishes this end. Rylance's performances in *Richard III* and *Hamlet* use contemporary clown practices to access the early modern clown elements written into the roles. The reconstructed Globe encourages this contemporary clowning due to the visibility of the audience, both to actors and each other. Therefore, the power of Rylance's performance rests not on the conjuring of the past through physical structures, but by the use of contemporary clown practice in a contemporary moment at a site that approximates a Shakesperean past. Rylance opens up alternative relationships to Shakespeare by –through clown--capitalizing on a space that encourages an open and active relationship with the audience.

In the summer of 2012 Mark Rylance returned to perform at the Globe Theatre for the first time since resigning as artistic director in 2005. In the years between these Globe performances, Rylance had won two Tony awards and worked with the Lecoq influenced Complicite in a production of *Endgame*. While Rylance had always been an actor with a strong sense of comedy and his audience, these years seem to have increased his profile as a comic performer. However, to say that these experiences radically changed Rylance is to go a bit too far his clowning was present even while artistic director. While many critics used the word clown to

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describe his 2012 *Richard III*, his 2000 *Hamlet* also draws a similar source of clown authorization from the audience relationship, demonstrating that clown was key the way Rylance engaged with the Globe space in particular and theatre more generally. First I will show how Rylance's Richard III demonstrated strong clown attributes, with mainstream press reviews often using the word "clown" to describe the performance. Then I will look to *Hamlet*, a production critics did not label as "clown" with the same frequency. However, in both productions Rylance drew on practices associated with contemporary clowning to establish a direct audience relationship encouraged by the Globe's open space.

Many commentators used the word "clown" to describe Rylance's performance of Richard III. "His Richard is a genuinely funny, crafty clown who ultimately goes mad" (McCleary), "Here, Rylance plays the ultimate clown" (Durell), "Rylance…lends melancholy even to the villain's clowning aspect" (Cavendish), "Rylance turns the physically deformed schemer, one of Shakespeare's great evildoers, into a simpering clown" (Zoglin), "Rylance clowns it up shamelessly" (Cote), "Acting like a sad, bumbling clown" (Vincentelli), "He is clownish even when no one is looking" (Teachout) and "Mercurial, often clown-like false emotion" (Cohen). These critics do not use the word "clown" to describe a contemporary form of theatrical practice; rather "clown" is used to articulate a sense of broad comedy and playing with the audience. Many critics employed the word "clown" to praise Rylance's interpretation, while other used to term to degrade the performance. Despite these differences, all critics found Rylance's Richard outside of expectations and many used clown to aide in articulating this difference.

Rylance's production of *Richard* opened along with *Twelfth Night* in the summer of 2012 at the Globe Theatre in London. It soon moved to the West End, and in the fall of 2013 came to

Broadway. I witnessed the performance in October of 2013 while the production was still in New York previews. Rylance's performance was electric, and what defined this magnetism was the direct relationship with the audience. The play was engagingly funny, and the audience at the Belasco theatre seemed to enjoy going along with Rylance as his Richard murdered his way to the top of the "Grand Mechanism."  By the time the play concludes Richard has committed horrible acts in his quest for the throne, but the clown relationship with the audience was never completely washed away, leaving the darker potentials in the script somewhat untapped. What Rylance accessed instead of tragedy was a strong sense of complicity with the audience. No longer did the audience merely receive and contemplate the 400-year-old work, but they were playing along with Rylance. This difference was noticeable from the first moment of the play.

*Richard III* begins with a monologue of direct address. Even when artists adapt the play to the naturalistic world of film, they have tended to keep the speech as a piece of assertive charm between Richard and his audience. Olivier stared at his audience with an unnerving intensity in his 1955 movie. Ian McKellen gave the first part of the monologue to a court audience, before delivering some of the lines to himself in a bathroom mirror, and finally turning to acknowledge the film's audience at the end of the speech. Both men exuded a sort of forceful (if slimy) charm through silken voices and confidence. Rylance could not be further from these two iconic performances. In contrast to their smooth and measured voices, Rylance's seems halting, gravelly, and, in a trick of ear, almost weak. Unlike the resonant voices of so many famous Shakespeare actors, Rylance's voice almost seems to fall just short of filling the space. While perfectly audible, his voice ironically sounds weak on occasion, infusing the character with a certain sense of sadness. Rylance's first speech as Richard comes across as a plea for

sympathy instead of a display of vigor. He is less seducing the audience into acquiescence than making the audience feel bad for him.

Rylance's unique voice helps to both elicit sympathy and set him apart from other performers. The oddness of Rylance's voice is similar to vocal trends in clowns, and clowns share vocal qualities with puppets. George Speaight identified strong similarities between clowns and puppets, with many puppet traditions descended from clowns, most notably Punch. Specifically, he notes an "English tradition of the hunchback clown running like a thread from the old Vice to Tarleton and the clown of the mummers." For Speaight one manifestation of such lineage is the Punch clown of the Punch and Judy puppet shows (44-51). The link between Richard and Vice has already been explored, and Speaight's observations on Punch further put Richard in a line of English clowning, but the similarities between puppet and clown also give insight into Rylance's voice. Kenneth Gross reflects on the puppet's voice: "This need to link the alien voice to the voiceless figure is one reason that puppet's voices are so frequently stylized, distanced, half compressible" (67). By going with a strange or halting vocal quality, I suggest, Rylance absorbs the dominion of the puppet, and by (vocal) association, clown. His otherworldly voice not only elicits sympathy, but seems to set Rylance apart, vocally distinct from the rest of the characters in the play.

During the play Rylance's intimate relationship to the audience sets him apart from the rest of the cast. As previously discussed, Shakespeare often gives certain characters more direct access to the audience (Lear's Fool and Gloucester's sons), and Richard is one of those characters. Rylance takes this access one step further. He actually plays off of the rest of the cast and their lack of access. In 1.ii the actor plays with the audience and clearly demonstrates a difference between Richard and the rest of the cast. The scene depicts Richard wooing Lady

Anne over the corpse of her father-in-law. Richard has killed both the father-in-law and Lady Anne's husband, but still manages to win her hand in marriage. At one point Rylance/Richard offers Anne a sword, and provokes her to kill him. When she attempts to follow his instructions he stops her. As he stops her Rylance/Richard looks to the audience and shares with them his surprise at her actions as he fumbles to save his life. As demonstrated by his bumbling response, Rylance's Richard clearly does not expect her to lunge towards him. He must quickly reevaluate his plan of attack, and this moment is similar to a clown flop, because his failure in this moment is shared with the audience. Because he is so open with his audience, Rylance/Richard almost plays the Lady Anne scene as a routine for the spectator's entertainment. Instead of slickly bulldozing over Anne, his plans go awry, and he must improvise a new solution in this moment of chaos/flop. The audience laughs at his response because they have been invited in to play a game with this Richard, thereby creating a clown moment.

When the dialogue with Anne ends, the would-be king talks directly to the audience. Richard asks, "Was ever woman in this humor wooed? Was ever woman in this manner won?" (1.ii. ln. 230-1). Instead of being a rhetorical boast, Rylance/Richard actually asks the audience. He shares a genuine surprise that his gambit paid off, the moment of flop was turned into a moment of clown success. Moreover, when Rylance asks the first question he actually waits for a response. When the audience did respond with laughter, he reacted to this laughter, much as a mimetic actor would respond to a scene partner. This moment of response reflects Rylance's previous comments that he endeavors to, "be brave and actually just talk with you, and see where you want to go". This of course implicates the audience in the deeds, which is a stock trait of Richard's and something Rylance here both exploits, but furthers. This Richard is a sort of shy underdog who the audience goes along with, often out of a sense of empathy for the pathetic

figure before them. What makes this particular form of audience interaction clowning is that it lets the audience guide his next move. Of course this does not extend to what actually happens in the plot, but how Rylance/Richard plays the subtleties of the scene. The audience becomes in effect another scene partner via Rylance's performance.

The rest of the cast does not have this clown relationship to the audience. Rylance/Richard's audience relationship works to isolate him from the play, and his humor rests on his sense that the rest of the cast is playing in a more "traditional" story and he is a more sentient agent on par with the audience. While Rylance/Richard is the audience's buddy, the rest of the cast are merely characters in play. In fact, Rylance seems to actually play off of his fellow performers, interrupting a "traditional" performance of *Richard III* to create the vitality of his own performance. The questions after the Lady Anne scene highlight this sentiment. Richard/Rylance is shocked by how his gambit and improvisations paid off. Anne is a character in a play, while Richard is actually playing against such a sentiment. The separation between Richard and the rest of the players is further highlighted when one of his ministers implores the audience to cheer for his coronation. The moment of audience interaction lacks Rylance's impression that the next moment of the play hinges on the audience's response. While the rest of the actors play "at" the audience (even when talking to them) Rylance's Richard plays with his audience. His own difference in style and audience relationship sets him apart from the rest of the play, in the manner of a clown.

Because of this clowning the audience is closer with Rylance's Richard than other notable interpreters of the role, and perhaps even more so than textually scripted, changing some of the play's dynamics. For example, when Richard kills other cast members the act of violence lacks "bite" because Richard's clowning has downplayed our sense of these characters as

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mimetic beings and instead encourages us to understand the characters as dramatic constructions. There is an element of this divide in the play, but Rylance takes it much further. Conversely, when Richard leaves the audience at the end of the play, the audience feels a sense of pain at being separated from Richard, or even a sense of betrayal. The play shifts from the tragic murder of the princes or his backstabbing of Clarence (actions the audience may regret being party to in other productions), and instead becomes a play about a clown establishing intimacy with the audience only to betray this relationship when his stage crown is in danger. Because the audience is closer to Rylance's Richard, the betrayal of the audience is more keenly felt than the death of the stage characters. Such performance draws on the scripted character's affiliations with the clown-like Vice, but ultimately expands on the characteristics of the stage type through contemporary clown.

Rylance strongly draws on the comic audience relation allowed by contemporary clown just as Shakespeare drew on the comic tradition of Vice to give his Richard dramatic vibrancy. However, Shakespeare's plays were fiercely anachronistic. The clock that appears in *Julius Caesar* is an obvious example of a certain disregard for time. In speaking of a production of *Twelfth Night* (one starring Rylance and revived and in rep with this *Richard*), Bruce R. Smith looks to critical response and concludes, "Even if the play's story was imagined by the original audience to have taken place at a romantic distance, at some unspecified time in he past, they would still have expected to see it in contemporary costume, not in historically accurate garments" (76). When I saw the play at the Belasco in the Fall of 2013, the production seemed to go out of its way to emphasize fidelity to the past and not anachronism. There are two program notes (rare for a Broadway *Playbill*) explaining the historical accuracy of the costumes, set, and music. As noted above, much ink has been spilled over the possibility and desirability of

returning to a point of "original practices." What Rylance's clown points to is the way in which that reconstruction is always partial, a mixing of "then" and "now". If the Globe is an experiment, then the performances that will fill that space need not be conjured from the past by the "correct" alignment of physical properties, but rather will create new theatrical challenges. The way the challenges are met is through current theatrical means, in this case clown.

The experience of watching Rylance's Richard is different from that of watching McKellen's or Olivier's. Because Rylance has created such a strong link to the audience, partially by emphasizing a difference between his vitality and the stilted nature of the rest of the cast, some of his murders seem to land with less dramatic impact. This production of the play need not be seen as more "authentic" to early modern theatre, but rather the reconstructed Globe space encourages Rylance to use clown because of the forced confrontation with the audience. Therefore Rylance's production understands Richard less as a conniving war criminal or dangerous snake oil salesman, but as a metathearical entertainer, a clown. Rylance, Olivier, and McKellen all offer compelling Richards. What sets Rylance apart (in nature if not value) is a lack of dependence on psychology and an emphasizing of audience relationship via clown. While surely resurrecting some of the clown practice native to the part, Rylance does leave behind the reality of violence and civil war that must have hung over an Elizabethan audience. The immediacy of this violence was perhaps better captured in McKellen's production, set in a Nazi inspired 1930s England. The updating of setting makes the play seem less like a fairy tale encased in the distant remove of the "past". Rylance and the Globe have not found the "original" Richard as conceived by Shakespeare and embodied by Burbage (if such a things exists), but rather Rylance allows a clown Richard to engage with the audience in a direct and entertaining

way that finds new tragic resonances located less between Richard and other characters and more between Richard and the audience.

Rylance's earlier performance in *Hamlet* showcases the same relationship to the audience that Richard did. Critical discourse is less explicit in the use of the word clown, but humor and audience come up repeatedly: "humorous capable of combining whimsical dottiness with a troubled inner life" and "master of the space as he traverses the stage playing off the audience" (Billington), "gravely funny" and "ability to still a sometimes restless crowd sets him apart" (Wolf, 32), "create a magically intimate rapport with the audience " (Taylor, 7), and "this was a tragedy with a lot of laughs in it" (Potter, 130). This combination of humor and audience interaction indicate that Rylance's use of clown is not limited to a single performance, but rather clown is a persistent tactic which Rylance uses to answer some of the questions of staging posed by the physicality of the space. While Michael Billington's review seems to savage the other audience members as distractions (with a bit of xenophobia towards American tourist), he eventually finds that his experience with the audience is what animates the play, "as so often at the Globe, I found the play came most alive when I quit my assigned seat to roam around the yard: if you can't beat the distracting multitude, canoodling and flicking through their tourist guides, the only thing to do is to join them" (Billington). What the critic does not entertain, or at least make explicit, is that Rylance's performance thrives on just such energy. It is not that the audience is getting in the way of the Rylance/Billington relationship that would create some ideal Hamlet, but rather that Rylance is clowning with the group to create a self consciously communal experience that responds to the space. Rylance's clown has interrupted Billington's view of *Hamlet*, and we see at the end of the review the possibility that this interruption could be productive instead of merely construed as a failure to meet expectations.

Several critics also noted that the other performers in the production were not in the same world (or level of talent) as Rylance: "the other performances were mostly workmanlike rather than distinguished" (Potter, 129) and "the rest of the production is no more than competent" (Taylor, 7). Returning to the early point, it might be useful to see these "workmanlike" performances as part of what gives Rylance his animating force. In the manner of a clown, Rylance distinguishes himself from his surroundings, interrupting the "classic *Hamlet*" in order to create a new type of performance. His audience relationship, the unique privilege it affords in both emotional proximity to the character and the humor, stems from the rest of the class dutifully playing the straight man, so to speak. Rylance's auguste is predicated on the unknowing whiteface clown of the rest of the cast.[45]

Using Rylance's Hamlet as a case study, W.B. Worthen speculates on the type of world the Globe creates and how an audience makes sense of that world. Watching *Hamlet*, he notes many of the same attributes that other critics did, the humor, terming Rylance, "A trickster Hamlet" and notes the relationship between Rylance, the audience and rest of the cast, "Rylance's energy and engagement with the public is infectious, and places him in a somewhat different relation to the audience than the rest of cast, who seem hemmed in by the play, stuck in character, while Rylance seems to be playing them as he play with us" (*Force* 106). Here again

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[45] While it is true that clown is part of his theatrical persona even when not performing at Globe based productions, but most of these come after his time at the Globe. In this way the Globe did not teach Rylance how to be an early modern actor, but a contemporary clown actor.

It is worth noting that while clown is present in *Hamlet*, *Richard*, *Le Bete*, *Boeing-Boeing*, *Jerusalem*, and his Tony acceptance speeches, it is not the only mode Rylance plays in. His Olivia in *Twelfth Night* does create the same sort of relationship to the audience. Whereas Hamlet and Richard demand the space be used to engage directly with the audience and clown provides a contemporary method through which to do so, his Olivia is much more of a mimetic character. Because she does not acknowledge the audience, her moments of crisis do not become flop moments shared with the audience, there is no sense that performer is going to fail at his craft, merely that the character may not get what they want. Additionally, due to the mimetic quality of Rylance's performance, there is no interruption; the character is part of a highly stylized comic world.

we see that Rylance's Hamlet is not just "better" or "acting harder" than other members of the cast, but his difference from the other performers actually gives force to the performance by playing with the clown friction of interruption. Worthen argues that the entire Globe project can be see as working, "at the intersection between the early modern experience of theatre it labors to restore, and the postmodern regimes of theatrical performance and of history-performance that are its means of production" (83). The experience of the Globe is caught up in other themed sites, such as Plymouth Plantation or Disney World, however Worthen emphasizes the role of the audience as active player in the creation of Globe meaning. He places emphasis in the desire of those who work at the site to rediscover some form of history or sense of lost Shakespeare. For Worthen, the Globe's themed experience, that of the early modern or "authentic" Shakespeare, is part of how an audience makes meaning of the event. But there is another performance "regime" besides that of themed history attraction that may be vital in understanding how Globe performance actually work: panto.

English pantomimes are a traditional Christmas entertainment, and the broad, audience-acknowledging humor is a source of some anxiety for those that work at the Globe. Pantomime has roots in clown. The form initially used commedia stock types, and reached its artistic zenith around 1800 with Joseph Grimaldi, the father of Anglo-Saxon clowning. Pauline Kiernan, a research fellow at Shakespeare's Globe, engages with how one might see the work at the site as pantomime. Because of the interactive audience, and their hissing and booing, some critics leapt to the term as a form of derision, but Kiernan asks, "How do we know the original Globe audience did not turn moments of the play into something resembling pantomime?" (25). This turns out to be more of a rhetorical investigation than defense of panto, for later she states Globe productions "demonstrate that labeling what happens when the space of the audience and the

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acting space join forces with the word 'pantomime' will not really do" (34). The assessment seems to stem from a sense that the audience does not overtake the production, and there is a conviction that the Globe presents more morally or intellectually engaging fare than panto. Director Richard Olivier states that the audience interaction was "not getting in the way of the story" and that "It's not like pantomime" (Kiernan, 140), showcasing both anxiety about the similarities and a need to differentiate. Rylance recognizes that while audiences and actors may need to learn some new customs for how the audience/actor relationship can/should function at the Globe, pantomime most likely is the clearest reference point for audience convening of an interactive relationship with the staged event (Kiernan, 132). Rylance's attitude does not seem as judgmental towards the popular entertainment form.

An openness to elements of pantomime need not be feared. Shakespeare used clown even when the form began to fall out of favor. While Hamlet and Richard are not only clowns, we have seen that both draw in strong ways on clown elements. By calling the productions pantomimes, critics hit on an anxiety about what Shakespeare "should" mean. To think the Globe resurrects an absolute sense of Shakespeare, or a true one is most likely impossible. What the Globe can do is use contemporary performance forms, most notably clown, to access certain parts of Shakespeare's scripts that current regimes of performance do not emphasize.

Returning to a lengthened Lois Potter quote from above, the academic review states, "This *Hamlet* showed, for those who had doubted, that the Globe can play tragedy; if this was a tragedy with a lot of laughs in it, that is true not only of *Hamlet* but of most tragedies from this period" (130). Further Potter notes a moment when Rylance has his back to the audience during his first scene, and turns around to reveal he is crying and has been trying to conceal the fact from the audience (128). In this case we are reminded that Burbage's Hamlet most likely related

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to his audience intimately and moreover took on the role of a clown throughout the play. The soliloquies gesture towards a dramatic character that relates to his immediate audience as opposed to his post-Freudian psychology. This complex relationship implies that Rylance has used to the Globe to re-emphasize certain aspects of Hamlet that were not emphasized in current dominant conceptions of the character (simply look to the reviews that often seem chagrined at liking Rylance's performance). This does not mean that the Globe has "found" authentic early modern acting, but rather that the reconstructed Globe space has met with contemporary clown practice in order to highlight certain aspects of Shakespeare. Surely Rylance's performances do not encompass the totality of what the roles are or can be, but they do use clown and the Globe to give theatrically powerful performances in ways often outside of mainstream Shakespeare performance.

Rylance is not a clown at all times, nor is he always a clown at the Globe. What he does is exploit many of the features of contemporary theatrical clowning to deal with the challenges the reconstructed Globe imposes on contemporary theatrical practitioners. Rylance is not so much going back to the past's methods to bring back the past, but using contemporary performance modes in conjunction with structures from the past to enable an audience to view a play script in a way they might not have before. While Rylance's use of clown is undesirable to some critics, it is questionable if their objection to the actor is one of fidelity to "Shakespeare" or more likely based in their own conception of how Shakespeare should be performed and understood. As shown above, both Richard and Hamlet have strong clown associations and also strong links with the audience. Using clown as an idiom to communicate with the audience may limit some understandings of the play. For example, my experience of Rylance's Richard did not give a sense of Kott's great mechanism of history, a sense of the play I have received in both

reading and other performances. However, I did gain a new experience of the play and character, as pathetic and humorous, and of my own complicity in Richard's machinations. Just as psychoanalytic productions exclude some sense of play, clown-infused OP productions also make exclusions. The Globe may allow us to see new things from the past, but always through our own tools.

## 4.7     TOO MUCH AUDIENCE?

A fear often expressed by those encountering the reconstructed Globe is that the audience may get out of control. Director Richard Olivier complains, "In one performance, the actor was playing so much to the groundlings – interacting with them so much that it was actually getting in the way of the story." Mike Alfreds, of Meathod and Madness Theatre Company, is quoted as saying "Initially the feeling of a lot of people in the space was exciting, but I sense there can be danger of a sort complacent self-indulgence on the audience's part and to treat the whole thing as a sort of jolly outing – anything goes, not really serious" (Kiernan, 21,25). Worthen finds that the Globe is interested in creating a specific kind of audience, "a lively yet decorous responsiveness to the play that avoids too much playing around" (102).  There is an ambivalence about how much meaning-making can or should be passed over to the audience.

Scholar Terence Hawkes attacks the enshrining of Shakespeare as a high cultural icon. To drive his point home, Hawkes compares the drama of Shakespeare's age with a parallel activity:

> Our notion of a fundamental opposition between 'drama' on the one hand and 'bear-baiting' on the other derives from nothing in the essential nature of these activities. By and large, it is our own, modern idea of what a 'play' is that produces the notion of bear-baiting as its opposite: a horrific 'sport', with values completely opposed to those of the theatre. (87-88)

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Hawkes identifies a commonality in plays and bear-baiting: "And at the centre of both spectacles, the focus of attention, there throbs a 'live', unpredictable quality of immediacy in the sense that both seem to frame, manage and work with contingency, with unshaped, actual, 'here and now' experience, making that a fundamental part of what they have to offer" (89). Rylance's clowning capitalizes on this sense of immediacy that the bears and Shakespeare shared. Generally, clowns make use of the "here and now" of an audience, sharing a sense of "contingency" via the flop. While surely not as violent as the bear pit, clown does activate this element of Shakespeare and gives a sense of the audience's agency in the event.

The Shakespeare that the Globe seeks to venerate is not the image of one akin to blood sport. Moreover, the above quotes indicate an anxiety about what role the audience does have at contemporary Globe performance. Even Rylance has stopped a performance to demand more appropriate audience behavior (Worthen, 102). Worthen contends that while the audience is an essential part of the Globe experience, there is a general sense of Shakespeare's importance: "Rylance's Hamlet is anxious in its own way, not so much about the power of theatre or of Shakespeare (we've bought into that, timbers and all), but about the ability of theatre, Shakespearean theatre, to occupy a distinctive place in modern life" (115-6). By empowering the audience, the Globe does not seem to surrender all control, it is not a free-for-all of meaning and cultural value. To the opposite, any sense of fun can often be put in service of re-establishing Shakespeare's cultural importance. Clown can serve this end in surprising ways.

Although clown is an ethos and performance mode that animates Rylance's performance, it is not, finally, an abdication of Shakespeare's meaning or cultural power to low comedy anarchy. Rather, in using clown's potential to talk with the audience, moments in Shakespeare

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can mean in different ways. Rylance's 1997 Globe enactment of Henry V is not a visibly clown influenced performance, either in text or in the actor's interpretation of the part. But his St. Crispin's day speech does demonstrate the possibility of executing Lecoq's sense of an actor, "who develops a space around himself in which the spectators are present" (*The Moving*, 18). Instead a boasting Henry who works as a cheerleader for his troops, he instead talks gently to specific members of his team. He opens up his own fears and shares a bit of gallows humor. This speech shows that the clown techniques present in Rylance's Globe performance can bleed into the meaning of the plays in performance that do not explicitly call for clown. Rylance's Henry shows how the clown ethos works to envelope the audience, speaking with instead of at them.

For comparison one can look to Branagh's 1989 film of *Henry V*. The speech is stuffed with bombast and filled with the sort of low camera angle shots that frame Henry as an inspiring leader and action hero. The goal of his monologue is clearly to rouse the men of England to fight valiantly against the French. Those on stage (and the unacknowledged film audience) listen in awe of Branagh's Henry, and take from him inspiration. This models one form of the audience/Shakespeare relationship in performance. The audience is the passive recipient of knowledge or emotion brought from on high. Branagh's speech is emotionally stirring, but it is a one sided affair, we merely marvel at the strength and valor. This is, of course, a deep contrast to Rylance.

Rylance enters, as does Branagh, enquiring why his cousin would ask for more soldiers.[46] But Rylance seems hurt, instead of defiant. In the ensuing speech Rylance keeps an air of melancholy, an attribute of many clowns.[47] Instead of encouraging an air of invincibility or

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[46] The speech can be seen online at the following link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTrnn0qzzCU as of Jan. 20, 2014.

[47] See Jones, Lousae E. *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots*. Lexington, KT: French Forum Publishers, 1984. Print.

indifference in the face of death, Rylance seems saddened by the thought. As opposed to hoping that dashing bravery will be replicated in the men, he commiserates with them and makes jokes. During the course of the speech he moves to speak to each member of the group as an individual. He finishes the speech not with a rousing crescendo, but by laughing with his cousin. Then finally, before leaving, Rylance touches his cousin's head and looks in his eyes, a look that indicates he may be leading these men to their deaths, and so takes this moment to savor their connection. The speech does not model bravado in the face of death, but companionship. Rylance brings his onstage audience within his light instead of merely shining brightly himself.

While the role is not clown, it does model a way of being with others, even if only the actors on stage. Rylance creates a relationship to Shakespeare that shares and brings the audience in, instead of merely observing. The performance does not challenge the cultural importance or depth of Shakespeare, but does suggest different specific expressions of that meaning. The delicate and measured Crispin's Day speech may seem out of place at a venue that is often associated with broad acting or comedy, accused of lacking depth and leaning on that which is joyous and funny. But this sense that the audience is sharing in something vital instead of just observing it is one way the clown infuses Rylance's performance, even outside of those that can be seen as heavily clown-invested. Clowning creates a community, and through this style of performance, encouraged by the physical structure of the Globe, asks the audience to come within and participate in the power of Shakespeare's work instead of merely observe it.

# 5.0    SHAKESPEAREAN CHARACTER AND CLOWN WORK

## 5.1    SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTER

Each case study herein examined a practice of contemporary clowning: the flop, interruption, and audience play in order to codify key elements present in contemporary clown performance. By investigating the use of Shakespeare in clown (and clown in Shakespeare) on the contemporary stage, my study illuminates how clown defines itself by exploiting or disrupting narrative and textual traditions of Western theatre practice. However, my study further reveals that both original performance conditions and textual characteristics of Shakespearean drama possess many analogous elements to contemporary clown. Each case study has also demonstrated the shared impulses between Shakespeare and clown. The first case study demonstrated the relationships between Macbeth's failure and the flop, the second examined mixing of mimetic dramatic character with clowning and interruption, and the final case study explicated mutual conceptions of audience play in Mark Rylance's performances of Shakespeare and clown.

While early modern performance and clown share many similarities, this dissertation has explored how clown differs from contemporary performances of and expectations about

Shakespeare. The proceeding case studies compared clown with contemporary realistic[48] conceptions of Shakespeare performance (as seen at the RSC and critical analyses, such as Worthen's) making clear the two work towards different stylistic goals. As such, clown serves as an option that offers an alternative to the dominant regime of realistic Shakespeare performance. Clown does not attempt to "return" Shakespeare to an imagined sense of singular artistic identity imagined to have existed at the initial moment of production. Rather, contemporary clown exploits selected similarities between contemporary clown and Shakespeare plays as conceived in the early modern period.

By first looking at popular conceptions of Shakespeare in scholarship and performance and then contrasting this with clown, it becomes clear that clown deemphasizes a sense of psychological character. In place of "character" as a stable and unified concept, clown offers the display of the work of performance. That is to say: clown, through flop, interruption, and audience play incessantly draws focus to the very processes of artistic and performance creation, physical labor as well as creative. A survey of several major Shakespeare scholars and contemporary artists indicates an emphasis on the unchanging nature of Shakespeare work as displayed by psychological character in modern productions. Conversely, looking to clown exposes an interest that is less based in psychological character and is more interested in displaying the "work" of performance. This tension between psychological character and work is showcased in Bill Irwin's clown performances of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Transcendent Character

Shakespeare's work is tied up in a long history of interpretation and critical evaluation. Two key ideas from this are: the idea of transcendence and the creation of character. When using

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[48] In this conclusion I use the term realistic and realism to refer to theatrical production that foregrounds the psychology of the characters as members of an on stage world that closely corresponds that that of the audience.

the word "transcendence", I am referring to a notion that Shakespeare's work possesses a constant and unique meaning, which thereby obscures the constant artistic and intellectual labor that goes into creating new meanings for Shakespeare across time. Looking to Ben Jonson's statement that Shakespeare, "was not of an age, but for all time", many modern critics take this to mean that Shakespeare rises above the circumstances of his own time, beyond the limitations of art, and above other artists to become a sort of unique truth giver. At times, critical discourse ignores how the interpretations and artistic creation of Shakespeare is contingent on the present moment. Analyses like those by critic Harold Bloom, the contemporary actor's focus on psychological details, and Gary Taylor's analysis of Shakespeare reception all demonstrate the tendency to see Shakespeare's characters as his greatest accomplishment. The intense interest in the creation of "Shakespearean character" manifests itself on stage in a production's attention to creating a mimetic psychological character. As character is often linked to Shakespeare's singular greatness, so his transcendence relies on the creation of the psychological character. An examination of multiple critics shows how these two ideas are intermingled.

Multiple critics emphasize a static meaning in Shakespeare's work across time, gesturing towards the transcendental, and ignoring those aspects (largely performance or production based) which are constantly reevaluated over time. Contemporary scholar Elaine Scarry articulates a view of "beauty" rooted in transcendence: "[beauty] prompts a search for a precedent, which in turn prompts a search for a still earlier precedent, and the mind keeps tripping backward until it at last reaches something that has no precedent, which may very well be the immortal" (30). Several critics use the idea of transcendence seen in (but in no way exclusive to) Scarry's work in order to explain Shakespeare. For example, the well known mid century critic Erich Auerbach struggled with Shakespeare's mixing of the common and the sublime, but he ultimately found

that "Shakespeare includes earthly reality, and even its most trivial forms, in a thousand refractions and mixtures, but that his purpose goes far beyond the representation of reality in its merely earthly coherence; he embraces reality but he transcends it" (327). Auerbach found that though Shakespeare portrayed his characters through many styles, often in one character, the result was an ability to transcend reality. Accordingly, Shakespeare's work is, "freer, harder, more unqualified, more godlike in its nonpartisan objectivity than the realism of his admires" (330). He sees Shakespeare as removed from the limitations of other humans. In his ability to render the human form, Shakespeare transcends other artists and even attains a "godlike…objectivity" (330). There is no sense that the intervening years have change the reception of Shakespeare, or that his work's meaning is redrafted in different ages via performance.

One of the most well-known contemporary interpreters of Shakespeare also describes the playwright as transcendent. Stephen Greenblatt's cultural poetics or new historicism often sought to contextualize Shakespeare's work within complex webs of intertextuality, but even Greenblatt argues (at least in his later work) that Shakespeare's art exemplifies an almost Platonic ideal: "Only by leaving the world behind, only by freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit, can the poet lead himself and his readers toward redemption" and further "that the objects created by artist cannot be known or judged in scientific or philosophical terms; that art is a sphere of radical freedom" (*Freedom* 117). There are many other scholars (including Harbage, Schoenbaum, and Rowse) who point to Shakespeare's spectacular "exceptionality". In these constructions, critics that claim "god-like objectivity" or "radical freedom" can imply that Shakespeare's work is for all times and all places, that meaning does not change over time. This is the meaning of "transcendence", the claim by many critics that Shakespeare's relevance goes

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beyond time and place, and even taste, to be an established fact.[49] And, one of the most specific

points of entry for Shakespeare's transcendence is character. Indeed, Taylor sees the creation of

character as the *most* commonly cited proof of Shakespeare's brilliance and his works'

transcendent quality (404-5).

The intense analysis of Shakespeare's characters as psychological beings is related to his

transcendence in two ways. First, Shakespeare's creation of character is championed as an

achievement that sets him apart. Second, actors have taken the idea of the fully formed

psychological being to be the cornerstone of Shakespeare performance, often eliding differences

in performance style and thematic interpretation over time.[50] As mentioned in the Introduction,

Harold Bloom is a prominent voice in public perceptions of Shakespeare. His work positions

Shakespeare at the center of the literary world by praising his creation of character above all else.

Recently, Bloom powerfully espoused the literary emphasis on Shakespeare's characters, notably

in his *Invention of the Human*. Bloom makes the bold claim that, "Shakespeare, by inventing

what has become the most accepted mode for representing character and personality in language,

thereby invented the human as we know it" (714). Bloom's work sets Shakespeare as a standard

for representations of human character at all times for all people. Bloom clearly argues that not

only do Shakespeare's characters make his art "for all time", but that the characters themselves

transcend any immediate interpretive frames of an audience due to their universality[51]. For

Bloom, Shakespeare is not recreated overtime, but rather he is restated again, and again, and

again.

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[49] For a full examination of Shakespeare's transcendence, or as Taylor terms it "singularity" see the final chapter of his excellent *Reinventing Shakespeare*.

[50] For a look at the history of character criticism as a scholarly and theatrical practice see Chapter 2 of Lynne Bradley's *Adapting King Lear to the Stage*.

[51] See Bloom *Wisdom* 123-4 and *Human* 422.

Though Bloom himself is often antagonistic toward the theatre, an attachment to the creation of characters as full psychological beings defines much contemporary practice. The previous case study looked to Alan Dessen's comments that contemporary actors assume a modern sense of psychology to understand the characters (46). The emphasis on psychology in the characters is key to many practitioners. Worthen spends a book analyzing how scholars, directors, and actors find authority in Shakespeare and concludes that much Western acting rests, in the minds of actors, on an imagined authority of Shakespeare that is reinforced through attention to psychological character that "elide body, text, and author" (*Authority*, 108). There is an erasure of the actor; instead we are meant to see Hamlet or Lear, and actors must not obscure the path towards this already realized individual. After all, if one takes Bloom's approach, Shakespeare's characters may be more full realized humans than the actors playing them. In all of these cases the idea of the psychologically realized character is a key part of understanding Shakespeare: he has created fully realized humans, and these human creations then gesture past the ordinary towards something transcendent.

RSC director John Barton framed contemporary Shakespeare performance as an act of balancing "two traditions", that of contemporary naturalistic acting and that of heightened acting. Barton acknowledges a challenge in the gap between contemporary Western acting practices and the practices that reigned in Shakespeare's day. Barton's distinction of two traditions highlights the gulf between the "then" and "now" of Shakespeare performance-- that there is something imposed by modern acting. Barton reminds us that modern conception of "character" and "motivations" are results of ideological movements –notably Stanislavsky-- that started long after Shakespeare died (Barton 10). Actor Ian McKellen disagreed with Barton, stating, "I think the style of acting against which modern actors, of whatever generation they come from, rebel, is

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not so much the style of the writing as the style of the actors of the previous generations", further

he surmises all actors are, "concerned with truth, reality, and nature" (Barton 20). Dessen could

construe Mckellen as falling prey to "theatrical essentialism", or the notion that many practices

maintain similar fundamental goals over time. However, even if one does agree with McKellen's

emphasis on the centrality of "truth, reality, and nature", these three concepts help explain a

difference between clown and Shakespeare. Whereas McKellen's conception of Shakespeare

performance is on "truth," achieved through presenting a believable psychologically based

character, clown instead finds "truth, reality and nature" by exposing the process of artistic

creation. Clowns may have a similar aim as McKellen's Shakespeare acting, but they include the

artificiality of the theatrical event as part of their "truth".

When clown encounters Shakespeare the two in tandem work to undo not only the

emphasis on psychological character, but also a view of the work as universal and transcendent.

The 500 Clown performance calls attention to their clown characters, their Shakespeare

characters, and themselves.[52] The flop points to the frictions between their identities: they cannot

seem to master Shakespeare but do have their own talents, especially physical agility. Through

performance the clowns destabilize a monolithic sense of identity not just in themselves but in

the Shakespeare characters they fail to master. In fact, since they constantly slip between

characters, including multiple Shakespeare characters, they destabilize a sense of fully realized

individual psychology on stage. Further, the clown's emphasis on their complicity in "creating

Shakespeare" undermines a sense of transcendence. The clowns do not hide that they are

remaking Shakespeare's meaning, as many performances do. The performance itself walks a fine

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[52] Bruce McConachie addresses how the various identities (real and imagined) of the performer on stage influence audience experience in *Engaging Audiences*. The idea of the conceptual blend, whereby the audience mixes various portions of "actor", "character", and "identity" to create an "actor/character", see particularly pages 42-3. While this process occurs in all dramatic performance, clown exploits these differences as part of the performance.

line; as the clown's flop they actually show off their own mastery of a certain skill set. The clown's skill set rests not on the creation of a fully realized psychological character but rather on seeming to expose the failure to create a stage performance. The clowns are not staging character but the attempt to stage character, the process of artistic creation, the work, effort and sweat of the performer.

When a clown tries to perform a Shakespeare play, their frantic work does not produce a contemporary "realistic" Shakespeare that calls for a singular view of unified psychological character, but rather creates something "strange and new" in the conflation of play and work. The body of the clown is not completely a representation of a "person" as he or she would be in Shakespeare performance at many RSC or National theatre productions, nor is she or he the performer in front of the audience, nor is he or she simply a clown character, but something of all three. Lecoq's sense that a clown draws on their fears to perform while also using skill to present these fears approaches the slippage between the various identities. The clown draws on the blurring of lines between the various to types of performances/identities that need to be executed on stage to create their particular mode of performance. In doing so, the clown shifts Shakespeare away from transcendence and into a mode of performance that destabilizes character to emphasize the effort that goes into performance, and all artistic creation.

## 5.2    BILL IRWIN, WORK FOR THE AUDIENCE'S PLEASURE

Looking to Bill Irwin allows for a clear examination of how tensions between psychological character and displaying the work of performance are present in contemporary productions. Irwin is ideally suited because he both plays Shakespeare in settings with

expectations of psychological character and in what I would call clown theatre. His performance of Lear's Fool at the Public Theatre and then  his Shakespeare work in *Regard of Flight*, are prime examples of Irwin performing in both the psychological world of character and the clown world of work. What becomes clear in Irwin's clown work is the considerable pleasure that can be gained through performances that showcase (or pretend to showcase) how much work it is to perform.

American clown Bill Irwin is an exceptional example of a clown that makes his effort on stage a spectacle for the audience to enjoy. His status as an alumnus of both Herbert Blau's experimental Kraken group and of the Ringling Brother's Clown College points to the variety lineages in the clown/actor. First coming to prominence with Pickles Family Circus in the 1970s, the comic entertainer has created multiple clown and variety shows on Broadway, as well as portraying famous clowns from Moliere, Beckett, and most relevantly, Shakespeare (*Pickle*, Schechter 62-3).  Irwin is one of, if the not the most, famous contemporary American clown, yet his range extends to scripted drama. It is this identity, one that incorporates both clown and the scripted drama, that makes him ideal for discussing clown's penchant for undercutting the sealed creation of character, especially in his 2011 performance in both *King Lear* and a closely associated evening of clown.

Irwin's 2011 clown retelling of *King Lear* ideally demonstrates how the exposure of the effort of performing works across various expectations from the audience. In 2011 Irwin played the Fool in *King Lear* at New York's Public Theatre, but he also appeared at another of the Public's venues, Joe's Pub, a smaller cabaret-like venue of music or other performing arts. Here, as part of a larger clown program, Irwin engaged in telling a 45 second rendition of *King*

*Lear.*[53] Starting in a vest, tie, and boater's hat, Irwin changes to a small ruff and a pierrot-esque

bowler's hat for the faux-Shakespeare monologue. Here the audience sees a clashing identity:

Irwin as the evening's MC/Irwin as Shakespearean/Irwin as clown. He credits the piece to his

time working on the *Clown Bagatelles* with Doug Skinner, then traces the inspiration back to

Dan Rice, the famous Civil War-era American talking clown. Irwin introduces the story of *Lear*,

and says we know a version by "Shaxasperare", but concludes, "You know this bard he doth

ramble so, He tells the story artfully, but he tells it slow." The slant rhyme of "so" and "slow"

showcases Irwin's use of rhyming couples, but the strain in the poetry, its obvious obtuseness,

calls to mind Irwin's effort in the creation of the ditty. The audience sees the work he engages in

throughout the poem to find the rhymes he needs to keep the piece going. The poetry did not

come to the artist complete; rather he has to work for it.

The content of the poem also brings to mind Shakespeare's "shortcomings" in

creating his *Lear*, and Irwin's work to improve it. Irwin says we may know the tale from

"Shaxaspeare" and then comments on Shakespeare's telling of the tale. In raising awareness of

the bard's "artful" rendition of the tale, Irwin suggest the artistic labor present in creating *Lear*,

but also suggests there are alternative ways to tell the story. Irwin then lists the major events and

relationships of the play, but warns, "This is only speaking nobility wise, the common folks they

died like flies." Finally, he reminds the audience that all of these events led to a civil war, "which

so distressed the ladies and gentleman that the king gave some speeches and went coo-coo in the

end." Irwin emphasizes that the speeches of both Lear and Shakespeare are not naturally

occurring events, but rather words created to fill a purpose. This humorous retelling of the story

also suggests those elements that Shakespeare left out (the common folk) while reducing the

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[53] All references to this Irwin performance are drawn from the clip posted to You Tube by the Public Theatre. It is located in the bibliography under Irwin "Bill Irwin – 45 Second King Lear – Joe's Pub."

nobility to a mere list. The mechanical workings of the plot are laid bare, reduced to the number of dead and presence of speeches. By making the work that goes into creation present (and removing the body of the Shakespeare performers all together) Irwin destabilizes character; Lear is reduced to an accumulation of words instead of a majestic or beggarly king. Irwin's version of the play covers all the major points, but (purposefully) misses the import of the play almost entirely. Instead, the short ditty is meant to show the performer's skill as he races to fit in the all of the events in time. By announcing the piece as "45 second *King Lear*", Irwin adds temporal pressure to himself to get all the material finished in a short amount of time. The clown finds his unique from of success in two ways. First he exposes Shakespeare's authorial labor, especially the creation of character.  Second, the clown performs frantically to accomplish his own task. Irwin highlights Shakespeare's work, which then emphasizes his own work in retelling the story, frantically attempted to create the product within 45 seconds.

The loud cheers of approval that accompanied Irwin's performance at Joe's Pub were a far cry from the critical derision he received from the New York press after his performance in Shakespeare's play on the Public mainstage. When performing the playwright's work outside of the cabaret the expectations were different. Instead of showing the work of performance, Irwin  was expected to take part in a transcendent piece of art at the Public's mainstage opposite Sam Waterston's Lear. Many critics were quick to register their displeasure with seeing Irwin's work on stage. One review marks Irwin's work as "consistently unintelligible" (Finkle), another as, "an insufferable bundle of tics, a constipated clown in a play of his own" (Rooney) and "all performance flash, no substance" (Schwarzbaum). These reviewers are negative, but also emphasize their displeasure in seeing certain "work" of the performance. The "tics" and "flash" are not only seen as out of place, but also as making the

work of performance too obvious to the audience. Since he is "unintelligible" or "in a play of his own" Irwin cannot be assimilated into the presiding aesthetic of the production. Irwin's Joe's Pub performance is engaging because it troubles an easy conflation of actor and role. However in the main stage *King Lear* this same blurring of character and performer works against the production's aesthetic principles, and hence many audience members' enjoyment of the piece. Gavin Hollis is more open to the performance in an academic review noting, "Bill Irwin's Fool was strange and intriguing to behold" and the actor, "found range in the role's odd diction, and the eccentricity of his performance was perhaps forgivable given how otherworldly the character is" (332). Even here there is an insistence that Irwin's performance subscribe not to a clown world, but to a sense of Shakespeare personified in stability of character. Irwin's Fool finds its biggest champion in Ben Brantley of the *New York Times*.

Brantley starts his review praising Irwin as "a daffodil in February amid the gray slush" of the rest of the production, with clown serving as the single noteworthy aesthetic even in an otherwise uninteresting production. The critic praises the performer for bringing "an enlightening new interpretation of a well-worn character," and notes Irwin's above-mentioned clown pedigree. He admits that not all theatergoers will enjoy the performance, but he insists it will give them something to talk about. The adjectives used to describe the role are, "Insolent, fearful, desolate and touched with the antic brilliance of madness" and also, "A bizarrely mannered and cerebral creation" which creates for Brantley, "a study of what happens when a man — especially a crazy man — is dislodged from his role in the scheme of things." When the critic finds a "bizarrely mannered" quality to the Fool, he observes qualities that reveal work. For Brantley, this work of making art is part of the Fool and not Irwin. Nevertheless, the clown does seem to stand out from the dominant aesthetic of the production. (He concludes by noting that

Waterston carried Cordelia on his own in final scene, but notes, "Picking up one of the heaviest plays in world literature, alas, requires other sets of muscles.") Despite needing to assimilate Irwin's performance into the realm of psychological character, Brantley relishes the presence of strain and how the character stands apart from the rest of the production.

Irwin's performance as the Fool was divisive in a way that much of his previous performances, and even his engagement in Joe's Pub, did not seem to be. This is precisely because his mainstage performance worked to highlight the effort that goes into creating a theatrical event as opposed to a production that hides the work. Having won a Tony Award and been well received in dramatic work, it is hard to believe his failure to please most critics with his Fool was simply the result of not being up to acting in dramatic work. Rather it may be that when Irwin capitalized on the clown present in the character he so distanced himself from the rest of the production's world of discernable psychological entities that audiences and critics were unable to integrate him into the production as a whole. A quick look at the *New York Times'* photos of the production (in Brantley's review) showcase the Fool's bright shiny clothes in contrast to aged or dark tones for the rest of the cast. Visually, Irwin's difference is made clear, and while such friction between role and performer is ideally suited to the clown, it is less well received in a production of Shakespeare that seeks to represent fully realized psychological characters. Like Sher's performance of the Fool, Irwin drew mixed responses, although far more negative than Sher's, because of the clown elements in the performance. However, Irwin differs due to his clown persona outside of the theatre, and how his clown fit into what otherwise seemed to be a rather barebones production. *Lear* at the Public drew mixed responses from the clashing aesthetics, but Irwin makes the work that goes into the creation of Shakespeare performance one of the primary subjects of an early clown show.

Irwin's 1982[54] clown show, *Regard of Flight,* comically exposes the work that goes into creating an evening of theatre. The three-man show chronicles a clown (Irwin) and pianist/MC's (Doug Skinner) attempts to create a "new theatre", but they are thwarted by a critic/director (Michael O'Connor). Throughout the piece Irwin enacts several clown routines, such as leaning out from behind the proscenium arch. Skinner then explains the use of weighted leaning shoes (in a deadpan voice) that Irwin used to performed the trick, and then comments on how it takes time to change shoes, hence theatrical practitioners must be careful when using such shoes, all while the audience waits for Irwin to change his shoes and return. The explanations of various technical aspects of the production are part of the duo's attempt to create "a new theatre" in opposition to the "old theatre." Early in the performance a critic seems to get out the audience and pester Irwin about why he is engaged in this process. The critic relentlessly tries to make sense of Irwin's routines, asking if he does hat tricks (no, he does "hat moves") and when only Irwin's head is visible in a steamer trunk the critics asks if the clown is trying to evoke John the Baptist (Irwin dismisses the idea until the critic talks of Thomas Becket, who a flattered Irwin thinks means Samuel Beckett). The performance uses flop (such as Irwin trying not to be dragged off stage), interruption as a frame (such as the curtain keeps coming down), and audience interaction (such as running through seated patrons and speaking to them) in order to create a show that playfully ribs the conventions of "old theatre", "new theatre", and clown theatre.

During the performance Irwin evokes the power of Shakespeare in order to lampoon the work that goes into (re)creating Shakespeare for a modern audience. Late in the show Irwin is being chased by the critic and uses a thick tome containing Shakespeare's play to

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[54] References to the piece draw on a 1983 recording of the performance, cited in the bibliography under "Irwin."

repel him, yelling, "Shakespeare" and "this is unabridged pal!" The critic demands to know who the director is and Irwin responds, "There is no director, only the actor who interprets the myth he finds in 'Shakespeare'". The critic then comes onto the stage and takes over the role of the director. He cites the sort of vague direction often used to mock pretentions of theatre practitioners, telling Irwin to "loosen it up" and "let it flow." The director's impulses seem at cross-purposes when he both wants a "looser" interpretation and then tells Irwin to "classicalize it." All the while Irwin continues to pose in stereotypical Elizabethan postures and changes his tone to that of a vocally commanding but emotionally disconnected actor. Eventually the director decides Irwin needs a prop and gives him a gun. The hapless clown tries to negotiate between the play, the director, and the musician who has now started playing an Elizabethan-sounding underscore. In all the confusion Irwin accidentally shoots the pianist and observes he is dead. The incredulous director misunderstands and challenges Irwin, "what sort of fascicle anachronism is that, the playwright is dead?" The conflict is eventually resolved when Irwin escapes by tricking the critic into thinking Arthur Miller is in the audience.

Irwin's struggle to perform places Shakespeare in the world of clown by showcasing the work of the production. The whole scene is predicated on the flop. Irwin keeps trying to "perform Shakespeare" (much like 500 Clown) but he cannot. He struggles due to the conflict with the director and the musical intrusions of the pianist. The critic is of course a cast member, but by pretending he is of the audience there is faked sense of interruption. The whole performance also engages with form, pretending to be an experimental piece of theatre, but in actuality it is more of a clown show. Finally the audience is fully acknowledged throughout the piece, and even in the Shakespeare scene the pretend Arthur Miller is supposedly in the audience. All of these clown elements combine to create a clown world where seeing the strings

of the artistic process (or at least the strings the clowns want you to think you see) is part of the entertainment.

In *Regard of Flight* a sense of Shakespearean character evaporates and so does the sense of transcendent art removed from the process of creation of that work. Irwin and the director never discuss the specifics of the character being presented, merely a vague notion of how to do "Shakespeare." When the critic asks Irwin which play he is performing, the clown responds it does not matter; he is grappling with "the myth in Shakespeare," a concept clearly removed from the very specific choices actors must make when presenting psychological portraiture. In this way, the role being played is that of "Shakespeare actor." This erosion of character highlights the decisions of actors and directors that go into create a sense of "character." Furthermore, Irwin's clown must negotiate his multiple roles, that as conduit for Shakespeare, that as actor obeying director, that of actor interacting with musician, and even that of performer/clown juggling these identities for the entertainment of the audience. Add to this the fact that Irwin's clown attempts to please potential arts funders (he speculates they may be in the balcony) and the critic (he checks his notepad to see what the review will look like) and the audience sees that despite all of this, the clown needs to eat after the show tonight. Irwin constantly undermines the sense that Shakespeare has created a psychologically realized character that need only be expressed by the actor. By metatheatricaliy framing the event as an examination of the theatre, he shines a light on the tensions present in any theatrical body. While exposing the work that goes into the creation of "character," and more over an evening of theatre, Irwin creates enjoyment not through art that transcends material circumstances but revels in it.

In *Regard of Flight*, Shakespeare becomes a cultural icon, something that intimidates actor, critic, and director because the very notions of the art's transcendental nature ironically make it work. The artist can capitalize on Shakespeare's name recognition, but the image of Shakespeare also must be constantly maintained through work that artists do on stage. The anxiety that Shakespeare produces in these theatre artists makes it impossible for any of the characters on stage to "perform the work of staging the show" without failing. Irwin's routine of course mocks those who interpret Shakespeare, recalling Richard Schoch's argument that 19th century Shakespeare burlesque often held up a notion of the sacred play in the face of theatrical perversions (*Not Shakespeare*, Introduction). But Irwin also stages how Shakespeare production is work, and that work creates a play's meaning. In so doing he challenges the idea that there is a transcendental aesthetic value or even absolute quality of the characters in the play, and instead showcases the plays' propensity for adaptation and appropriation by whatever theatrical trend is currently in fashion, be it actor poets of the "new theatre" or deranged directors of the "old theatre." In either case, Shakespeare is moved from a focus on realizing psychological characters that transcend the present moment and into the frantic, hard-working, and even schizophrenic world of the clown, thereby challenging a conception of character and exposing the immense effort that goes into creating art. All this implies that seeing the "strings" of theatrical performance may be just as enjoyable as masterfully hiding them.

## 5.3    FLOPS, INTERRUPTIONS, AND AUDIENCE PLAY

Irwin showcases the way that clowns offer alternative points of entry into a Shakespeare play, but the previous case studies can also be understood in terms of the clown's rejection of

psychological character and transcendence. The case studies showcase how clown emphasizes the frantic work of performance, while deemphasizing the mimetic piece of art and psychological character. This is most clear in *500 Clown Macbeth* where the audience watches the clowns work to stage Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The opening sequence with the performers attempting to get the stage lights to work properly reframes the emphasis on the labor of staging Shakespeare in contrast to character. The rest of the piece shows the physical struggle of staging the play, with scenery falling apart and lines interrupted. The clowns' frantic energy highlights the effort of performers that goes into creating Shakespeare, and moreover foregrounds the theatrical enterprise itself as a labor-intensive process (there are lots of heavy moving pieces!). While rejecting the mimetic frame of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the clowns are none the less creating their own mimetic world, one in which they can not adequately perform the play they supposedly set out to perform. The piece shows impressive physical comedy skills and the audience is more primed to note the display of talent and skills (much like a circus frame) than they would in a theatre that works to emphasize that a certain actor *is* Macbeth. All the bumbling about the set is actually the work of the production. The pratfalls and failures are not just the intimate routines of a rehearsal room, but rather this personal sense of failure and play becomes the actual work of *500 Clown Macbeth*. In the end the performance is no more "real" than a production of Shakespeare, instead, 500 Clown is presenting actor's physical and creative labor that goes into the work of Shakespeare production as opposed to holding up Shakespeare as a script to transcend to a sublime realm. Clown art emphasizes the work that goes into creating a character instead of the character itself.

Sher's Fool highlighted a tension between Shakespeare as transcendent art and theatrical craft within a single production. Within the world of the play the Fool works hard to entertain

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the King, pulling out eggs, playing on his guitar, and even engaging in comic routines with the monarch. This playful routine is the livelihood of the Fool, but also of Sher. The comic gags and affective relationship with the king is no longer just the personal, but especially in the character's paid position as the king's intimate, this relationship is the Fool's work. As shown above, some critics found the antics of the Fool overwhelming, feeling they were watching Sher much more than a character called the Fool.  If a frantic onslaught of comic behavior is seen as "of the character", then Noble's *Lear* remains a more traditional contemporary character-based world of Shakespeare performance. Rather the production utilizes a strong clown element in conjunction with psychological character to create a piece that works towards transcendence. Conversely, if the work seen on stage is Sher's and not the Fool's then the audience is encouraged to recognize that the performance in front of them did take effort to create. Critics who fear that Sher's Fool would "take over" the play may have been voicing a concern that Sher was highlighting that any vision of "Shakespeare" on stage is the result of an immense amount of play and emotional work on the part of the actor. This work not only creates the given performance, but also over time creates and maintains expectations of what Shakespeare is. Productions do not simply succeed or fail to "be" Shakespeare, but are always caught up in a process of playing within while also adjusting expectations. Sher, as both a character and actor, labored intensely and the result was either comic effect or distraction. What links critical reaction is the sense that the work of the clown stands apart from "something" transcendent identified as "Shakespeare."

While 500 Clown is clearly in the world of the clowning, and Sher's performance showcased tension between traditionally "clown" and "Shakespeare" elements within a single production, Rylance's performances at the Globe are the most distant from clown in an explicit way. As stated before, whereas 500 Clown is clearly a clown performance and Sher explicitly

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draws on clown both in and outside of the mimetic frame of *Lear*, Rylance's use of clown is subtler. He draws on the audience relationship and sense of flop that animate clown, especially in forming a largely comic relationship to the audience. But since Rylance is not playing a clown or in a clown show, his clowning may be more pronounced than other tragic players, but it is not ultimately the sole defining feature of his Hamlet or Richard. To be sure there is a sense of the clown energy in particular moments. After Lady Anne attempts to stab him his frantic response and quick recovery seem like a moment in a clown show. Again, after the act break Richard and his fellow conspirators create noise and position "dead" bodies as if a battle has happened. This strange moment seems to ease the audience back into the quasi-mimetic world the company is creating. There, Richard and his men's stage work is comic and frantic as they hope to create an image of carnage and battle. Moments such as these show that Richard foregrounds his relationship to the audience and showcases his work in orchestrating the plot (primarily the two major monologues early in the play). Hence, Rylance's Richard uniquely shows a sort of frantic showmanship that differs from smoother or more dominating interpretations of the character. The clown that emerges from Rylance performance, in conjunction with the tragic mode, explores transcendent "truths" of the human condition. Rylance simply uses clown, rooted in exposing the work that goes into the creation of the theatre, to access themes, such as the relationship between power and performance, a theme often associated with the domain of "Shakespeare". His Globe performance reinforces Kott's sense of *Richard* as play that illuminates the mechanisms of feudal power and theatre. In the case of Rylance there is not a tension between clown and Shakespeare, but rather they work together to mediate on the power of the theatre and corresponding ideas about politics and power.

There are other points in Rylance's production that call attention to the work that goes into theatrical enterprise, but these are not moments of clown. For instance, the Broadway program notes emphasize the craftsmanship of the play, Rylance and his cast mates dress on stage before the performance, and even Rylance and his other male actors performing as women, at times, call attention to the constructed nature of their performance. While these moments do emphasize the work of artists to create the production of Shakespeare, they do not suggest the same sense of frantic energy and destructive production associated with the clown. Rather, these aspects of OP are part of a project of legitimization that foregrounds the "authentic" nature of the work. These aesthetics are tied more closely to an idea of transcendence, "we got it right, so this is "true" Shakespeare". Nevertheless, the creation of clown moments and the default to clown playing in Rylance's OP work indicates the necessity of drawing on current theatrical forms aesthetics to create the "reconstructed" drama of the Globe. The clown audience interaction is part of Rylance's new Globe experience. While 500 Clown, Sher, and Rylance each have elements of clown, these elements, flop, interruption, and audience play, each participate in clown's project of emphasizing the "here and now" nature of the theatrical event.

Flop, interruption, and audience play are all part of how clown creates a world that revels in the play and work of the theatrical event happening in the moment. Clowns, through their inability to create complete artistic productions (at least on terms they pretend to engage in) find alternate modes of success outside of the process of production they seem to be working in. 500 Clown purports to be creating Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but they of course are not. They entertain by failing to create the "Shakespeare" they supposedly set out to create. The flop always demands alternatives to the system it is working within. The demand emphasizes that failure can be fun, and while not "productive" in a traditional sense, the playing around in failure creates a

new possibilities. Flop is the utilization of this playful failure. When clown flops Shakespeare it often fails to reproduce an image of psychological character that transcends immediate circumstances. This failure not only provides for comedy, but emphasizes that Shakespeare must be brought to stage through the work of artists.

Interruption likewise highlights the work that goes into the artistic process being interrupted. In this case clown highlights the rules of a given mode of performance by breaking them. Both the flop and interruption threaten mimesis because they attempt to expose the dramatic workings that mimesis hides in order to create an image of the world as the audience understands it, and, moreover, of psychologically realized characters. Interruption's clowning is compounded by the need to reinvent. Since interruption is fresh only as long as it challenges the existing formal rules, clowns must constantly be on the move. Moreover, the clowns only seem to be playing if "play" is not the dominant mode through which theatrical interaction is understood. There needs to be formalized rules in order for play to be an interruption. This is why so many clowns need to set up older formal systems to oppose. In Irwin's *Regard of Flight* he sets up a rather traditional view of the theatre and the proscenium rules of performance (a trope he returns to many times throughout his career) in order to interrupt those forms that are in some ways long past.

Clown often sets up the theatre as a conservative institution to rebel against, and innovations in the theatre often lead clowns to tilt at windmills. As the dominance of the proscenium theatre erodes, many clown routines still wish to rebel against it. In this way it makes sense why clown would often wish to portray Shakespeare in a conservative light. If their interruptions or flops require a solid idea of theatre to rebel against or fail to achieve in, it is hard

to do so in a moment of post-modern doubt about form itself. Clowns construct Shakespeare as monolithic because it serves their interruptive ends.

Moving finally to audience, this aspect of clown also stems from older conceptions of a "fourth wall theatre." Audience interaction is most playful and clownish when it interrupts a given theatrical convention. The engagement with the audience can emphasize the audience's complicity in the event, or even literally make them complicit in the event by bringing them onstage. However, clown audience interaction need not reach this frantic level. The calmer clown evokes Eli Simon's suggestion that clowns need not be funny, and that the sharing of something authentic is more important to the form. If the audience is only employed on a small scale or moreover in sharing some sadness, then the act itself need not be an amusing clown. Audience relationship and its specific articulation may define differences between types of clown, especially between the more existential European clowning and broader American traditions, but this is a difference of degree and not absolute value.

Any act that reaches out to the audience in a direct way and then solicits their consent for the action to move forward highlights the audience's own role in creating the theatrical event. There may be less of clown's direct sense of failing or upsetting theatrical convention, but by letting a moment of theatre hang in the balance as the untrained non-professionals allow the show to move forward suspends the rules of artistic autonomy and instead surrenders the act, for a moment, to a certain degree of improvisational chaos. Further, by asking the audience to play along with the clown, theatre becomes an interactive event. This play is then part of the clown's art (and work), an art (and labor) the clown always positions as in process. On its own, the audience interaction can be the least clown like, but it does not lack the forms imperative to emphasize the present moment of performance.

Analyzing flop, interruption, and audience play in isolated terms is not faithful to the cumulative sense of clowning. It is how these attributes (and others) play off of one another that create the mode of contemporary clown. When 500 Clown interrupts their imagined sense of a Shakespeare play they do so with a large degree of audience interaction. Their flop from moment to moment is often predicated on routines involving the audience. Sher's interruption is the most salient because his clown is actually interrupting a Shakespeare performance tradition in a major site of traditional (in terms of mid-twentieth century England) performance, but he still uses audience interaction, often with the other actors on stage in order to create his strangely frantic Fool. Rylance's work with flop and interruption is outlined in the previous chapter. Irwin uses flops, supposed interruption, and the audience to create his clown performances. All of these examples highlight that each attribute is tied to the others in order to create the performance mode of contemporary clown. The analyses of flop, interruption, and audience play in isolation does not create a litmus test for clown, rather the isolated analyses create an understanding of how clowns use these key practices to create a contemporary performance practice. While clown cannot be reduced to any one thing, it certainly does have key features. Moreover these features have potential ramifications for the power systems they exist within. These power systems can be imagined rules of Shakespearean drama, theatrical convention and a government's deployment of an imagined past, or the relationship between the individual, the theatre, and history. Each case study highlights clown's ability to upset established orders in order to center the experience on the audience and the now.

This dissertation does not establish Shakespeare as a conservative or normative force (although occasionally the clowns do) but rather highlights clown's ability to use similar performative modes embedded in the text of Shakespeare to actualize contemporary clown

practice. The historical circumstances of the plays' initial stagings' show this clown/Shakespeare relationship. When clowns "rebel" against Shakespeare they are more often rebelling against accumulated performance traditions than any inherently "Shakespearean" quality. Conversely, clowns are using elements of Shakespeare's plays to realize a Shakespeare performance outside of current standard practice, however the clowns (or Rylance) conceive of that standard practice. The flop and interruption clearly draw performative power from the friction between the "expected" or "standard" of dramatic theatre and the "deviant" clown practice. Audience play can be seen as "deviant" in conservative notions of a fourth wall theatre (a notion that the Globe likes to propagate as being espoused by other producers of Shakespeare). Clowns are rebelling against the conventions of theatre they exist within, and the contemporary usage of Shakespeare (or the ways clowns depict contemporary use of Shakespeare) is a very well known object to rebel against.

In resisting norms, clowns do not just challenge, but also chart out their own kinds of achievement. As looked at earlier, clowns often find alternatives to established ways of doing theatre or existing within power systems. Exposing the work of theatre is not about degrading the theatre, or even Shakespeare. Rather, by exposing the workings of artistic creation, contemporary clowns hope to access some kind of "authentic" or "honest" relationship with an audience, they merely do so by acknowledging the system of performance they work within. In creating a close relationship with the audience, based in the acknowledgment of the theatrical event, clown does find moments of a transcendence, but not ones rooted in the universal or timeless, but in the specific influences, such as work, that surround the performance in a given moment.[55]

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[55] Dolan refers to utopian performatives as, "relatives of the famed German director and theorist Bertolt Brecht's notion of the gestus". For Dolan, utopian performatives link to Brecht because, "they provoke affective rehearsals for the revolution" (7). I argue that Dolan's view places greater agency in the affective response to such moments of

## 5.4    CLOWNS AND UTOPIA

Jill Dolan's 2005 book charts out the idea of utopian performatives. In contrast to monolithic utopias of past ages, the theatre articulates not just unchanging values or static futures. Rather performance can imagine utopia as a momentary and fleeting vision of the future, one always heavily rooted in the circumstances of the contemporary moment. This is the sort of transcendence that clown accesses. Dolan argues that performers can create a community in and with the audience that allows the audience to imagine utopias that are not static conceptions of a fully realized better world, but rather, "a utopia always in process" (6). Dolan praises that theatre's ability to explore, "ephemeral maybes of this magic place [the theatre]" and ultimately imagine, "a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectivly intense" (4, 5). Dolan finds these intense moments of imagined and shifting futures in a variety of work, from queer and lesbian performance art, to the *Laramie Project*, and even in a contemporary production of *Medea*. Ultimately, Dolan concludes, that "moments of liminal clarity and communion, fleeting, briefly transcendent bits of profound human feelings and connections, spring from alchemy between performers and spectators and their mutual confrontation with a historical present that lets them imagine a different, putatively better future" (168). These brief moments of emphasis on the now are achieved in the clown's great insistence that any event happens in the present moment, in a theatre, with an audience. The flop acknowledges the

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theatrical crystallization. It makes sense that clown serves both Brecht and Dolan, as both of their projects can involve dispelling illusionistic qualities. However, where Brecht was interested primarily in the clown's ability to stimulate thought, I ally Dolan's interest in affective moments with the deep sense of exposure that so many clown theorists see as essential to the form. Both theorists are heavily invested in how ideas that emphasize the given circumstances of a moment in time can be staged to imagine better futures. Brecht and Dolan highlight different ends and points of emphasis, with Dolan better capturing the affective emphasis in many contemporary clown pedagogies (a form that developed after Brecht's death).

clown's own work in the moment, interruption sees the "reality" of the theatrical frame, and the audience play emphasizes that the clown does not labor in isolation, but with her audience.

When clown makes (or remakes) Shakespeare into its own image, it accesses a power in Shakespeare to reach these moments of performative utopias. Harold Bloom is merely the most public articulator of an idea that Shakespeare is universal and applies to all people. He concludes his *Invention of the Human* by stating, "Whether male or female, old or young, Falstaff and Hamlet speak most urgently for us and to us" (745). This is distinctly not the sort of utopia Dolan speaks of. Disregarding Bloom's insinuation that two characters that are troublingly sexist, if not misogynist, can speak equally across all gender identifications, he is most at odds with Dolan's sense of utopia because his is transcendent, universal and of all time. There is not a sense of the fleeting and ever changing nature of a performative utopia. This speaks of course to form, as Bloom treasures a "true" text of Shakespeare, scoffing at both performance and other critics as incomplete, while Dolan speaks of a performance space always bound and unbound by time, so that any vision, or more accurately feeling, of the future must be constantly rearranged. De Certeau and Halberstam also imagine more fleeting tactics for existing within hegemonic systems instead of replacing them with new utopic hegemons. Clown finds this, not just because it is often a deeply personal form (in Lecoq estimation that tiny mask that reveals us instead of hides us), but because it is a form of the now. Flops can be staged, but they must focus on now. Audience and interruption, likewise, always rely on the particular moment of execution to make sense of the performance event.

Dolan provides a model of what clown's relationship to Shakespeare might be. Speaking specifically of Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*, Dolan states:

> Tales are punctuated by "she said" (21), calling attention to the telling of the story so that the audience doesn't forget that we're witnessing a reenactment. That is, the production

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resisted a kind of monumentalism that might have left it as museum piece, the fate so many remountings of classic plays suffer, and instead undercut its own authority with references to contemporaneity and history, at once. (156)

When the 500 Clowns use the knocking of set pieces into place to conjure the knocking of the porter scene, when Sher reminds the audience of their own memories of fools , when Rylance shares his tears with the audience but hides them from actors, or when Irwin sings his 45 second *Lear*, we are given a Shakespeare performance that appeals to the very literal "now". This "now" ultimately resists the sort of "monumentalism" that some Shakespeare production and scholarship endeavor to produce, and in doing so is a utopia based not on the on the established past, but instead in the very contingent and frantic world of the clown working in this moment. Clowns create moments of joy with their audience, intensely felt aesthetic moments that hint at not a new world per sey, but that, "performance allows us to see utopia as a process of spending time" (Dolan 13). By accessing a different theatrical mode through flop, interruption, and audience play, the clown emphasizes the theatrical work of the now, and creates a world outside of the logical confines of the given moment and singularity of psychological identity. This knowledge is wonderfully articulated in clowns performing Shakespeare because so many of the fundamental impulses that animate contemporary clown were present in Shakespeare's theatre.

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