

Lori M Culwell: "The Role of the Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre"

I. Introduction

During the Renaissance, dramatic forms were subject to a variety of changes. As audiences changed in composition and education, the theatre necessarily changed as well. The Renaissance began at different times in different areas of Europe, and was a slow process rather than a sudden ideological shift. Though the change was to be dramatic, the past could never be entirely forgotten. In London, the people had the task of incorporating completely new schools of thought, as well as people from all over Europe, into their culture. The question stands: what happens to a cultural symbol (i.e., the theatre) when an ideological shift, however gradual, occurs? Moreover, how was the drama of the previous century integrated into the new, more sophisticated drama that followed the hundred-or-so years of significant change and its effects on England? What follows is an attempt to approach an answer to these questions through an exploration of physicality and clowning in the early modern period.

Beginning with the liturgical drama in medieval ("pre-modern") England, a tradition of physicality was developed that was to be built on in conjunction with an emergent audience structure, influenced by the steady process of change. While the clown in the pre-modern drama functioned purely as a physical, comic tool to re-enforce the ideas of the church, the new clown would incorporate the physical appeal of his ancestors while growing into a cultural symbol---a repository for shared significance that would play on medieval humor for the benefit of everyone in the audience. An especially clear example of this occurrence can be found in Shakespeare's plays, where the clown clearly responds to the diversity of the audience (and culture) of his time, incorporating familiar physicality while moving a step further with colloquial references, political commentary, and social critiques. The role of the clown became increasingly important in this drama; the cultural "shift" produced such a multiplicity of Renaissance individuals that it took more than the standard tragedy, comedy, or ritual physical figure to satisfy them. Indeed, this was an audience of people who were affected by as well as influential on the drama of their time, as we will see through the study of the clown.

II. Pre-Modern Drama: Ritual and Tradition (c. 1300-1450)

In the drama of the pre-modern era, the ritualism of physicality appears as a dominant, prevalent theme on which the works are dependent for survival. Repeatedly in the Mummings Plays, The Plays of the Sacrament, and even in the later work Mankind, ritualistic clowning is an important performative device. The words of the fools are often identical: never belonging simply to one play, but floating in the non-representational performance space that the clown is known to occupy in the liturgical ceremony of the pre-modern theatre (Weimann).

As the term "pre-modern" implies, the theatre was based largely upon the ritual and ceremony of religion and had as its topics problems which only related to the production of a larger cosmic harmony. As there was no true sense of individuation, one function of the church was to teach the illiterate masses the proper template for a living a good life. The clowns served to provide a comic model for making sense of the world that all agreed could be figured out by no man. These dramas had predominantly Biblical themes, and were intended solely to instruct the people in religious matters, as a supplement to the sermons of the Catholic priests. Says Oscar Brockett in *The History of Theatre*:

Symbolic actions and objects--church vestments,
altars, censers, and the pantomime of the priests---
constantly recalled the events which Christian ritual

celebrates.

(Brockett, 87)

Pre-modern plays, then, served to dramatize the events and re-emphasize the Christian themes presented by the priests. As symbolic figures, these clowns were important as well: in the Non Cycle Plays and Fragments, the Pagan figure has its arms torn off for grabbing the loaf of Sacrament Bread. His arms are soon after reattached by the grotesque personification of a doctor, and the Pagan is converted to Christianity. In this case, the very nature of the drama is one of grotesque and over-exploited physicality, including broad, lewd gestures and simple, coarse language and using violence, profanity, and overindulgence. All of these properties are associated with evil, and are wildly humorous when taken to the extreme. The clown figure in this drama embodies the crude qualities of pre-modern man---identifiably hedonistic qualities which make the clown figure so appealing to this day. The function of this mimetic presentation was to reinforce universal truths already present in thought, and to insist that everything was part of the larger whole, the working order of the universe. In this example, it is only through the non-sensical style of the clown that these truths begin to make sense.

Accordingly, the non-representational acting space occupied by the pre-modern clowns provides the necessary closeness and audience rapport essential to clowning itself and is important to emphasize the didactic intention of the work. The clown in the pre-modern drama occupies the "locus" (Weimann), making himself one of the people by appearing in their space: "here shall a messenger come into the place, renning and crying Tidingys, tidingys..." (Passion Play, 523). Later the clown will continue to occupy the "platea" space in an "aside" position, where he is distanced from the main action and maintains audience rapport by offering commentary on the drama in the language of the common folk. Says Sylvia Feldman of this phenomenon: "the didactic function of these moralities is so important that...a statement of didactic intention frames the action" (Feldman, 43). This use of space can be observed in the Doctor in Abraham and Isaac, who breaks away from the main action of the play to address the audience directly:

Doctor: Lo, sovereigns and sirs. now we have
showed this solemn story to great and small...
showeth you here how we should keep, to our
power, God's commandments without grudging...

(Abraham and Isaac, 435-440)

This convention was effectively used to make the audience members learn from the religious presentation and apply the principles to their own lives.

Often the clowns were horrible and terrifying, shocking the people by urinating on stage and performing ritual acts of physical violence, completely steeped in the physicality that was their existence. The pre-modern clown made no attempt to interpret or to motivate the action by which he was defined. This clown is not a character, but functions as an institution of corporeality. This pure corporeality is based on a long-standing popular tradition deeply rooted in culture: that of singing, dancing, drinking, and overblown physicality (often blatant violence). His words need no consideration of originality, evidenced by the many repetitions of the phrase "Here comes I that never come yit, with my big head and my little wit...(Brody, 139)" by quite a few clowns of this era. These words need not correspond logically to any other figure in the play, as his presence is non-representational and therefore non-reactional to any represented reality. For example:

Mercy: Avoide, goode brother! Ye ben culpable
To interrupt my talking delectable.

Mischeff: Sere, I have nother horse nor saddle,
Therefor I may not ride.

(Mankind, 905)

This "conversation" between the two is hardly modern or logical discourse. Mischeff simply does not play by the rules of dialogue, subsequently exiting the "conversation" in favor of watching the unspoiled Mercy being taunted by the "three rowdies".

The corraling of the chaos presented by this clownish corporeality is furthermore a necessary part of the theme of the pre-modern drama: that of containing the confusion presented by the universe and unifying it into the necessary "whole". This implies that the religious paradigms mocked by Mischeff can be so mimicked because the figure presents this "critique" only for the sake of a good time, to tie the sermon to the real life of the observer through familiarity. This "game for the sake of gaming" was a means of including the totality of the audience in that which they could not read and only partially understand (Weimann). It was, says Huxley in *The Anthropology of Performance*, "a transformative process in the sense of transforming personal/ social life crises into occasions where values representing the unity/ community of total groups are celebrated".

III. The Renaissance and "Cultural Mingle-Mangle"

Soon, the "unity of total groups" was to be far from enough to satisfy the audience which was emerging. The "universal truths" of the pre-modern age were to be left behind in response to a number of events collectively known as The Renaissance—a rebirth of learning, knowledge, and thought. In the hundred years from mid-fifteenth to mid-sixteenth century in England, many cultural and sociological changes were taking place which would permanently change the European society and, on a smaller scale, the English theatre.

Beginning near the time of the invention of the printing press (1453), the spread of literacy, once reserved for clerics and scholars, was occurring. Though Shakespeare's audiences in the early 1600's still contained an illiterate contingency, this was a drastic leap from the nearly universal illiteracy which had predominated merely a century before. For the first time, middle to upper-class people had the opportunity to read. The effect of this Humanism in England was best expressed by Erasmus, whose publications "aspired to unite the classical ideas of humanity with the Christian ideals of love and piety (Kagan, 369)." The influence of Italian Humanism encouraged them to study the Greek and Latin classics and to form opinions of their own, away from the teachings of the church, and to express them freely.

This subtly different approach to religion, which deals with integrating the Bible's teachings into life as an individual, is thought to have paved the way for the spread of the Reformation in England. The Reformation, a gigantic Catholic Church reform started by Martin Luther in 1517, was intended to put man more in touch with a God that had been previously reserved for the Church. In Luther's opinion: "God's righteousness was not active and punishing, but passive and transforming (Kagan, 390)." This ideology supported the individual and his personal growth through faith in God---quite distinct from the universal truths and blind submission of Catholicism. England struggled with religious unity for centuries following this upheaval, only being politically and religiously reconciled for a brief period during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). Elizabeth was a ruler who acquired and maintained her success by remaining neutral in this shaky, religiously divided world.

Another affecting element of the Renaissance was the series of "Voyages of Discovery", which greatly expanded collective knowledge of geography and cultural diversity. These voyages were made famous by explorers such as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, and Christopher Columbus, who made fantastic discoveries of previously uncharted lands. These discoveries would help re-open the trade routes of Europe and slowly transfer commercial supremacy from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coast. Europe was flourishing on many levels in this age of discovery----intellectual, geographic, and commercial. These voyages included travel to South America, Africa, and India; Spain and Portugal being most aggressive in the pursuit of land acquisition. The influx of gold, spices, and silver soon stimulated trade, filling London and other major cities with a number of people from varied heritages. From this time on: "foreign tourists visited the theatre often, since they were counted on as one of the famous sights of London (Gurr, 217)."

Thus, the world was no longer limited to the confines of England or the Catholic Church--this exciting hundred years was forever to alter the liturgical dramas prevalent in the years directly preceding it. The intellectual, religious, and geographic changes occurring in England, when considered together as an effecting force, provided the impetus as well as the constant stimulus for the development of some of the most sophisticated dramas yet to be seen. With the spread of heightened conventional knowledge, the English drama was an effective alembic for the dynamic change taking place. Of great importance was the role of the clown in this drama, where the ritual physical qualities of its predecessors were retained and put to use in the forms of contestation and variance of viewpoint.

The rapid cultural intermingling and change of the Renaissance is expressed most effectively by John Lyly's Prologue to *Midas*, in which he apologizes for the heterogeneous nature of the drama, stating that: "...Trafficke and travell hath woven the nature of all nations into ours...the whole world hath become an Hodge Podge..." (Lyly, *Midas*). "Trafficke and travell" being the aforementioned trade and endeavor that characterizes the Renaissance; voyages of geographic and intellectual discovery, the expansion of trade routes and the new Humanism which served as the stimuli for the emergence of an audience that would not be satisfied with the traditional pre-modern drama. As Lyly perceived, the change necessitated a new form of drama: the tragi-comedy. As Polonius observes upon the arrival of the itinerant players in *Hamlet*, the actors are well prepared to suit th, *Hamlet*, II,ii,392-397)

the best actors in the world, either for tragedy,
comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical,
historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-
historical-comical-pastoral, scene individable...
(Polonius, *Hamlet*, II,ii,392-397)

Shakespeare's plays, following Lyly's revelatory Prologue, reflect the changing and evolving nature of his audience, including as well a figure which picks up where the pre-modern clown figure left off while evolving with the time: in short, an "early modern" drama was evolving.

IV. Cultural Change and "Self " Development

By Shakespeare's time, the audience consisted of such a large number of mutable individuals that a more sophisticated form of theatre was needed to accommodate them. Shakespeare was clearly aware of this need:

In the Renaissance, the potential of the individual was beginning to be recognized, as Shakespeare's interest in and respect for psychology reflects.

(Boyce, 137)

In his work *Renaissance Self Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt addresses not only the emergence of man as a free individual in society, but also the primary tool used to shape this individual: rhetoric. “[Rhetoric mediated] between the past and the present...it offered men the power to shape their worlds...with an eye to the audience and effect (162). In consideration of the symbolic interaction between a society and its cultural objects, it follows that while this rhetoric theatricalized culture, it also “culturalized” the theatre. A more advanced form of one specific cultural object, the clown, was clearly in order to reflect the use of this introspective rhetoric and its results. This revised clown used exegesis rather than strictly practicing mimesis, thus integrating and mirroring the evolution of the self in the Renaissance.

V. The City Clown: A Transition

“Clowning” as an art form or distinguishable sport was probably best personified in the years directly preceding Shakespeare’s works by the famous clown Dick Tarlton. Tarlton’s universal appeal was due largely to the “rural and cultural unity of the time” (Weimann, 186). Tarlton was “the favorite of laborer, city-burgher, and Queen alike” (Weimann, 186). Tarlton was so famous in London that during his lifetime he was named “Queen Elizabeth’s first jester” (Wiles, 23). He became increasingly well known for his jests (which were published posthumously), his jigs, and for his universal appeal:

His comedy cut across barriers of class, proving acceptable both at court and in the tavern, because most people could accept the proposition that beneath every human exterior there lurks a coarse anarchistic peasant.

(Wiles, 23)

“Clowning”, and the use of the oral and physical tradition by the clown, is not only a response to the cultural intermingling, but from the need therein for a unifying figure. This clown fit into the “Hodge Podge” that the audience had become by sampling from it. Building on the physical tradition, he became a patchwork of convention: topical reference, Shakespearean prose, and physical humor. The “mingle mangle”, the “trafficke and travell” described by Lyly indicates an undeniable change in culture that mandates a figure such as Tarlton or, later, the Gravediggers of Hamlet. They epitomized diversity of the “now”—an important element in the Elizabethan drama. Robert Greene of the University Wits, a group of Londoners far more educated than Shakespeare and frustrated by his success, directly chastised Shakespeare in the pamphlet “Greene’s Groats Worth of Wit...” for being a “Johannes fac Totum” (Jack of all trades) when, in actuality, Shakespeare (and his clowns) could not have been anything but.

The early modern city clown, then, picks up where the pre-modern clown left off, as a liminal figure in a now-representational drama. This is the liminality Victor Turner describes in the *Anthropology of Performance*, where liminality is the blurred line between the worlds of ritual and “represented” performance. This clown, who is more sophisticated than his predecessor, still retains many of the qualities of, for example, the Vice figure in Mankind. The early modern clown in the drama continues to occupy the non-representational performance space of the platea, creating the distance from the stage and audience rapport that is again essential to the art of clowning. The clowning scene was one which pleased the groundling contingency of the audience while being favorably observed by members of the upper class in the same audience (Gurr, 86). The theatre was a major unifying force in this new English society. For the first time:

people from the whole social gamut...attended plays
...citizens and artisans joined with gentlemen and
prostitutes, porters and household servants, gallants,
lawyers, and soldiers on leave.

(Gurr, 217)

The clowning scenes used in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are some of the finest examples of the incorporation of the city clown and its ramifications. The functions of these scenes is, then, to provide an alternate viewpoint by interrupting the main action of the play and playing specifically to that "mingle mangle". The clowns used the oral/ physical tradition to create diversity and to provide a more complete understanding of the theme by employing a "mingle mangle" of their own. This popular technique was to spread into the Shakespearean play, where it would undoubtedly be accepted by the audience as a whole, just as Tarlton had been accepted by the full class spectrum of England. This method of enhanced understanding and entertainment in the theater through the "buffoonery of clowning" (Lowers, 89) was certainly a wonderful development of Shakespeare's time. Joseph Hall's *Virgidemarium* acknowledges the presence of this heterogeneity, stating "...a goodly hotch-potch! when...vile russetings are matched with monarchs..." and of the success of this phenomena: "comes leaping a self- misformed lout [into the Prince's place] then doth the theatre echo all aloud..." Hall's statements (1597) were both insightful and foreshadowing: for not only did the clowning scene sit well with the entirety of the crowd, its importance grew as Shakespeare used the clown as a tool for the shift in focus necessary to convey more effectively the theme of the dramas. These scenes can also be viewed in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in the character of Launce, and in *As You Like It*, the famous clown Touchstone.

The use of these universal, identifiable figures provides a shift in focus from the subject matter of the play. By using recognizable references from contemporary times, the clown can, through the use of the oral tradition, make the audience understand the theme being played out by the court- dominated characters in the play. The clown at this point utilizes what M.M. Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia": another's speech in another's language--- engaging not only in his own intention (i.e. digging a grave), but in the "refracted intention of the author" (i.e. critiquing the Reformation in England) (Bakhtin, 324). The clown uses colloquial speech; playing to the common man with the permission of the nobility---for laughter is a powerful tool, and everyone loves a clown. This alternate viewpoint is helpful when combined with the remainder of the thematic content of the play, for it solidifies the ideas present by reiterating them through the eyes of a distanced (if not disinterested) third party. The synthesis of all perspectives used ends in a greater comprehension of the play as a whole.

VI. Shakespeare's Clowns: Two Examples

One clear example of these elements can be observed in Act V, scene i of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, known as the Gravedigger's scene, where Shakespeare identifies the two men who dig the grave of Ophelia as Clown One and Clown Two, giving them as well the physical humor associated with the clowning rituals of the pre-modern. These two "clowns" open the scene by throwing skulls up out of a grave and singing a little song; extremely humorous in light of the pervasive seriousness of the play until this point. The clowns likely received what would today be labeled obvious or gratuitous laughter; this lightness seems appropriately placed to contrast the forebodingly "heady" nature of the first four acts of this play. The topical, cultural themes are introduced immediately by the gravediggers: these men are by no means royalty. They speak in the informal and make references that clearly have nothing to do with Elsinore, or even Denmark. The First Clown is digging the grave of Ophelia, who is to be buried in Denmark (if one is "playing along" with the representationality of the drama). And yet this clown calls out to his counterpart to: "go, get thee to Yaughan, fetch me a stoup of liquor" (V, i, 18-19), simultaneously breaking the represented reality of the drama and creating an audience rapport through the humor implicit in his statement. As the playgoing audience would

certainly have recognized, Yaughan was a pub around the corner from the London Playhouse where Hamlet was playing (Weimann). This likely warranted as much raucous laughter as did: "...[insanity] will not be seen in [Hamlet] there [in England]; there the men are as mad as he" (V, i, 18-19). The importance of these references is twofold: they give the audience a much-needed laugh, and provide the proper distance from Elsinore to view what the clowns say as discreet parallels, not direct commentaries: the clowns, though they speak with Hamlet, are assuredly not his contemporaries. The subsequent incongruities of intellectual argument are the real meat of the scene—the "seriousness through buffoonery" for which these scenes are famous. The clowns begin to engage in what appears to be a serious, philosophical discussion but which ends in hilarity, even going so far as to mock the classical Latin and Aristotelian studies of the Italian-influenced Humanists. The first clown, when speaking on the nature of Ophelia's death, describes it as "in self defense," then proceeds to misquote the Latin in labeling it "se offendendo" (self offense), then changing the word "ergo" into "argal". These references would certainly have been recognized by the Shakespearean audience---if only the parts of the audience that had studied Latin. The clowns also delve into complex Aristotelian logic, saying that "...if I drown myself wittingly it argues an act, and an act hath three branches: it is, to act, to do, to perform..." (V, i, 10-11). Clearly the argument is incongruous and wholly inapplicable to the situation at hand; he really has no point. But the comic element lies in the confidence with which both parties continue the conversation, delving into a religious discussion which, given the circumstances of the Reformation and the unresolved religious dissention in England at the time, was likely to have been a hot topic. The clowns take a Protestant viewpoint, discussing whether Ophelia is to have a Christian burial, going so far as compare themselves to Adam to prove that they are indeed gentlemen capable of such a discourse and decision:

First Clown: There is no ancient gentlemen...
but ditchers and gravediggers: they
hold up Adam's profession.

Second Clown: Was he a gentlemen"

First Clown: ...what, art a heathen?...the Scripture
says Adam digged...

That the clowns discuss the Scriptures on stage during a time of heated religious tension is a brilliant theatrical choice on Shakespeare's part. Who better to discuss the most serious topics than those characters who appear to be complete idiots? The threat of blasphemy, disrespect, or other negative connotation decrease. Macbeth thinks he might actually be insane and says that he has murdered sleep. This scene is necessary to maintain the thematic focus: to equate Macbeth's sins to the sins of the London townspeople both distanced the audience from the main traumatic action of the play and made them think about it on their own terms. Once again, the synthesis of these diversified parts leads to a greater understanding of the play as a whole. This scene is another example of Bakhtin's heteroglossia: while the Porter's discourse is with MacDuff and Lennox, Shakespeare's "refracted intention" (Bakhtin, 324) is to refer to the Gunpowder Plot in order to bring the tragedy of Macbeth down to a realistic level.

Placement of the clowning scenes is extremely important: the appearance of the clowning scene usually occurs just as the shock or trauma level of the play has reached a point when the minds of the audience members begin to become desensitized. The clowning scenes "give spectators a chance to catch their breath and mentally prepare themselves for what follows" (Epstein, 306). These scenes provide a break from the murder, treachery, and death of the plays while still remaining focused on the central themes of the play. They give the audience a "breather" of sorts, and allowing the necessary time to process the copious, complicated information just presented.

Both Hamlet and Macbeth are set in countries other than England, yet in both plays the audience is temporarily returned to England, if only for “a stoup of liquor” or to consider the “tailor’s hose”. Each time the play leaves the main action, the audience returns better able to grasp the entirety of the theme and to synthesize the alternate viewpoints into one cogent, unified theme. The clowning scenes in these plays are excellent examples of the alternate perspective caused by distance. These scenes support Lyly’s theory of the “mingle mangle” that was the composition of the Elizabethan audience: this diversity is reflected in everything from the dramatic structure to the discourse and is prevalent in the clowning scenes. Indeed a mingle mangle of dramatic conventions are used in these plays. All, however, yield the same conclusions as to the function of the clowning scene. Primarily, identification is extremely important to the understanding of the fundamental scenes of the play. What cannot be understood when expressed by the Prince of Denmark makes logical sense when simply outlined by the gravedigger and put into contemporary terms, as transcription into a different idiom facilitates understanding and comprehension. The clowning scenes, through the use of cultural topicality, interrupt the main action of the play to provide diversity of perspective, or alternate viewpoint. This necessary shift of focus allows the audience to stay focused on the main theme of the play, and must be placed at some time before desensitization of the audience occurs, hence the timing of placement is also critical. The audience of Shakespeare’s time had indeed become a “Hodge Podge”: the sophisticated drama that Shakespeare’s Hodge-Podge audience were witnessing had evolved from their own social mobility and advancement: it was through the Clown that it both spoke and understood.

V. The Clown as a Cultural Object: Shared Significance Embodied

In her book Renaissance Revivals, Wendy Griswold studies the history of revivals in an attempt to understand the ongoing, mutually influential relationship between a society and its cultural products (Griswold, 5). The theatre is an effective convention through which we can view this relationship—that the theater and its symbolic figures shift along with society and reflect as well as influence it is readily apparent, as we have seen. The clown in this period is usefully studied as a cultural object, its staying power directly dependent upon its ability to distill the humor from an increasingly complicated world and still function as a repository of shared significance embodied in form, where:

Significance refers to the object's incorporation
of one or more symbols, which suggest a set of
denotations and connotations, emotions, and memories.

(Griswold, 6)

Thus, a Shakespearean clown could be easily identified by his incorporation of the time honored tradition of physicality and familiar speech—breaking the tension as well as interrupting the represented reality to make some familiar and useful jokes. This clown samples from society to suggest the appropriate set of connotations and denotations for whatever topic he addresses. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, for example, the character of Launce appears in a variety of scenes, almost always as the comic relief. But it is in his several monologues where we begin to see him as this cultural object, using the familiar symbols and placed in the proper area, thus meeting the criterion of the clown. In one especially effective moment, Launce appears after a touching “parting of the lovers” scene (which is soon to be forgotten by Proteus, one of the lovers in the play), performing a parody of the scene with a cast of characters which includes his dog, his shoe, his hat, and a broom, all of whom he speaks with and for, ending the speech with a comparison of his mother’s breath to the scent of his shoe. This scene is an excellent example of the “mutually influential relationship” between society and its art; while maintaining the qualities of his ancestor the pre-modern clown, Launce impersonates the “parting of the lovers scenes” popular in the tragedies of the 1590’s. Later in the play, Launce will ask his dog Crab: “when didst thou see me heave up my leg and make water on a gentlewoman’s farthingale?” (IV, iv, 37-39). Again, physical comedy, this time in the

form of bathroom humor used as a cultural reflector, here of the class structure in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (and in Elizabethan England); not only does Launce, a commoner, have no idea how to perform in the house of Sylvia, an upper- middle class lady, but Proteus has misjudged his ability to perform an important errand, sending a clown to do a man's job.

VI. Conclusion

The clown which evolved as a response to the many influences of the Renaissance and the self-development that followed retained from its pre- modern ancestors elements of the familiar and universal. This clown, which was enormously popular during its time, influenced the many forms of theatre which ensued, including the outlandish, satirical physicality of the Harlequin, and the tradition of English pantomime.

Shakespeare's clown was, nevertheless, lodged in a specific cultural context, and as time moved on, this liminal figure, however useful, was to be short lived in the evolution of the "modern drama" in England. For, however effective as a theatrical convention, the clowning figure, in fact the phenomenon of clowning, was to be stifled by a 17th-century action known as the "expulsion of the Harlequin (Weimann)." In this period, prominent religious leaders decided that the time and place for ritual tradition was at an end, and took it upon themselves to rid the stage of this "menace." In an act appropriately named "The Reform of the Stage," the ritual figure was excluded from new dramas.

Traces of this art form were to reappear in the form of vaudeville, slapstick, or today, the postmodern Archaos clowns, whose leader Pierrot Bidon is quoted as saying: "To survive, the clowns have to mutate and re-use the scraps of society's refuse" (Jenkins, 64). This was the same method used by the pre-modern clown to survive in the newly modern world. The Renaissance clown is effectively studied as a cultural object responding to a period of intense change---change which necessitated the clown as well as providing it with a plethora of material on which to draw, and which forced the clown from the stage. The clown figure is a seminal theatrical convention in society and will continue to "mutate" and to be present in some form as long as theatre has a society with which to interact.

VIII. Afterthought

To study the Renaissance and its effects on the development of the conventionality of clowning is only useful to a point; it is the application of this study to contemporary thinking and practical application to the theatre that is the ultimate focus of my work. The repository, the archive of which Griswold speaks is evident in the nameless clowns of the pre-modern, in Shakespeare's clowns, and in the comic influences on every kind of theater following them. However, it is the "action"--the magic of live, contemporary theater done well--that is the real life's blood of these clowns. This fall, I saw Robert Cohen's production of *As You Like It*, and saw the true meaning of my studies come to life. Michael Thomas Holmes brought *Touchstone* to life in contemporary readings of the famous clown's monologues; interpretations that, I think, would have made Shakespeare proud. Holmes included references to Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator movies, Elvis Presley, Jack Nicholson, and Robert DeNiro, to name a few. Combined with the physicality he brought to the performance, he was the overwhelming favorite of the audience, which came alive every time he took the stage. It was then that the clown figure was most evident to me as an actual sponge--immersed in a culture, soaking it up, extracting the humor, and giving it to the audience in the form of laughter. Through that performance, I began to understand the staying power of the convention itself.

Primary Sources

Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments. Edited by Norman Davis. London /New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe. Edited by Fredson Bowers. London: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

The Mummer's Play. Edited by R.J.E. Tiddy. Folcroft: Folcroft Press, 1969.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Prince. Edited by Lester G. Crocker. New York, Washington Square Press, 1972

English Mystery Plays. Edited by Peter Mappe. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1975.

William Shakespeare: The Complete Works. Edited by George Lyman Kittredge. Boston, New York: Ginn and Company, 1936.

Lamb's Criticism: A Selection from the Literary Criticism of Charles Lamb. Edited by E.M.W. Tilyard. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1923.

Everyman and Medieval Mystery Plays. Edited by A.C. Cawley. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1956.

Rymer, Thomas. " A Short View of the Tragedy", The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer. Edited by C.A. Zimansky. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.

Drama of the English Renaissance. Edited by M.L. Wine. New York: Random House, 1969.

Secondary Sources

Bakhtin, M.M. The Dialogic Imagination. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Barker, Stephen. Lecturer. "Contemporary Dramatic Theory and Criticism" "Performance Theory". University of California, Irvine. Winter 1993/ Spring 1994.

Becker, Howard. Art Worlds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Boyce, Charles. Shakespeare A to Z. New York: Bantam Doubleday Publishing Group, Inc. 1990.

Brody, Allen. The English Mummings and Their Plays. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.

Brockett, Oscar. History of the Theatre. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991.

Calandra, Denis. Notes on Macbeth. Lincoln: Notes Inc. 1979.

Epstein, Norrie. The Friendly Shakespeare. New York: The Penguin Group, 1993.

Feldman, Sylvia D. The Morality Patterned Comedy of the Renaissance. The Hague: Mouton, 1970.

- Greenblatt, Stephen. Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Griswold, Wendy. Renaissance Revivals. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Gurr, Andrew. The Shakespearean Stage, 1574- 1642. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Jenkins, Ron. Urban Slapstick: From Chaplin's Tramp to Archao's Metal Clowns. Theater, v23, n3 (Summer/ Fall, 1992).
- Jones, Louisa E. Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots: Literature and the Popular Comic Arts in 19th Century France. Lexington: French Forum Publishers, 1984.
- Kagan, Donald (editor). The Western Heritage, 1300 - 1815. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1991
- Kaula, David. Shakespeare and the Archpriest Controversy. The Hague: Mouton & Co. N.V., Publishers, 1975.
- Lowers, James K. Notes on Hamlet. Lincoln: Notes Inc. 1971.
- Mayer, David. Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Pearce, Richard. Stages of the Clown. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 1970.
- Pickering, Jerry V. Theatre: A History of the Art. St. Paul: West Publishing Co. 1978.
- Schell, Ed. Lecturer. "Renaissance Drama". University of California, Irvine. Fall 1994.
- Taylor, Gary. Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History From the Restoration to the Present. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Weimann, Robert. Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Weimann, Robert. Lecturer. "Performance Theory" and "Shakespeare and His Theatre". UC Irvine, Winter/ Spring 1994.
- Wiles, David. Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987
- Williams, Raymond. Culture. Glasgow: William Collins and Sons Ltd., 1981.