Editing for Performance or Documenting Performance?: Exploring the Relationship Between Early Modern Text and Clowning

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The complexity of the relationship between writing and performance on the early modern stage is particularly evident in its scenes of clowning. A performance tradition that relied upon a combination of scripted and unscripted speech, clowning resists documentation in printed form: indeed, printing turns it into something else entirely. As Richard Preiss has noted in his recent book on early modern clowning,

> [a] playbook is not a performance: it is the retrospective fantasy of one, abstracted from the play's synchronic and diachronic stage lives, privileging certain voices over others, retroactively framing playgoing as a continuous, monological, readerly experience. (6)

It might be helpful to think of the printed record of clowning scenes (and indeed of early modern drama more broadly) along the lines of the "geological metaphor" used by Michael Keefer in his 2007 edition of the play to describe the 1616 text of *Doctor Faustus*: as "the product of distinct phases of sedimentation and partial subduction" (20). Unlike those of a geological specimen, of course, the layers of sedimentation in a printed text are impossible to separate from one another. The metaphor is nonetheless useful to describe the multiple processes of scripting, performing, transcribing, copying, remembering, rescripting and reperforming that underlie the composition of an early modern playbook.

In 2012, I undertook an exploration of the *Doctor Faustus* clown scenes in an open workshop with actors from The Pantaloons theater company. This was not an "excavation" of the text: there was no attempt to recover original practice. It was,

rather, an attempt to gain an insight into the structures underpinning such scenes, and to explore the ways in which layers of textual sedimentation might build up through a new process of scripting, improvisation, remembering, and rescripting. The workshop explored the differences between the clowning scenes of the two surviving texts of *Doctor Faustus* (1604 and 1616), and encouraged the actors to analyze the structure of one scene in particular before generating their own semi-improvised version of it. In order to approximate the process of memorial reconstruction and gain a practical sense of the differences between semi-improvised performance and textual accounts of it, I then asked the workshop audience to take notes and translate the resulting performance back into text. This article gives an overview of some of the ways in which the scene travelled through its various performative and textual forms, and speculates as to the relationship between clowning and text on the early modern stage and page.

The texts of *Doctor Faustus* bear the traces of the play's early performance history. The 1616 text, or B-text, is considerably longer than the earlier version, containing 676 additional lines. Recent scholarship has tended to conclude that the 1604 A-text is probably closest to the version of the play that was performed towards the end of Marlowe's life (c. 1588), and that the B-text represents William Birde and Samuel Rowley's revised version (for which Philip Henslowe recorded a payment in 1602). The B-text alone includes such episodes as Faustus's rescue of Saxon Bruno from the Pope (3.1), and the three-scene sequence in which the knight humiliated by Faustus in 4.1, here named Benvolio, plots a revenge that subsequently backfires (4.1, 4.2, 4.3).[1] The B-text also features two additional comic scenes, in which the clowns meet the horse-courser who was earlier cozened by Faustus (4.5), and then return in the subsequent scene to be humiliated at the court of the Duke of Vanholt (4.6).

Curiously, though, despite the B-text's greater overall length, the first clown scene, 1.4, is longer in the A-text. This first scene stages the meeting between the play's primary clown, Robin, and Faustus's servant Wagner. Wagner's lines are substantially similar in both texts, but the A-text's Clown is much more verbose than his equivalent in B. The second clown scene, 2.2, features a similar scenario in both texts—Robin has stolen one of Faustus's books, and uses it to impress a sidekick—but the two versions are scripted so differently that as W. W. Greg argues in his parallel text edition of the play, "they are no more than correspondent, treating the same episode with only occasional similarity of phrase" (343). The third scene (3.2 in A, 3.3 in B) depicts the clowns stealing a goblet before they summon Mephistopheles, who then turns them into an ape and a dog. The A-text features an obvious mistake, in which Mephistopheles enters twice without exiting and twice transforms the clowns into animals, but the B-text does not replicate this error.

It may be helpful here to give a brief overview of the theories regarding the relationship between the two texts. We know very little for certain, other than that *Doctor Faustus* was first performed over a decade before the appearance of our earliest printed text; Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson suggest 1588 as the most likely date of the play's first performance (419). The earliest recorded performance was by the Lord Admiral's Men at the Rose Theatre in 1594, and though "a booke called the plaie of Doctor Faustus" was entered into the Stationers' Register by Thomas Bushell in 1601, the earliest text that survives is the A-version printed by Valentine Simmes for Bushell in 1604. In 1602, the Rose theater owner Philip Henslowe recorded a payment of £4 to William Birde and Samuel Rowley for "adicyones in doctor fostes" (Foakes 206), suggesting that the play was by this point in need of updating for a theatrical revival. The B-text was printed for John Wright in

1616, and from 1619 onwards, its reprints had the phrase "With new Additions" on their title pages.

In the mid-twentieth century, Leo Kirschbaum (1946) and W. W. Greg (1950) championed the theory that the A-text was a memorial reconstruction of Marlowe's text, and that the later B-text was, in fact, based on a more authoritative manuscript by Marlowe.[2] This theory, for a while very widely-believed, has been challenged more recently by critics including Constance Brown Kuriyama (1975), Michael Warren (1981), Michael Keefer (1983), and Eric Rasmussen (1993), who have posited the A-text as the closest one to Marlowe's version, and the B-text as Rowley and Birde's 1602 revision.[3] Rasmussen has suggested that the A-text's clown scenes were written not by Marlowe, but by an unacknowledged collaborator; though the bibliographic analysis upon which he based this conclusion has since been challenged by Keefer (*Tragical* 106-12), the hypothesis is not at all unlikely. Interestingly, 2.2—the second clown scene—is clearly misplaced in both texts, appearing after 3.1 in the A-text and after 2.3 in the B-text. Its apparent isolation from the main plot at every stage of composition reveals a great deal about Elizabethan clowning practice.

The printed record of clowning scenes evidently gives us only a partial view of what was actually performed. In the Preface to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* in 1590, printer Richard Jones explained that he had "(purposely) omitted and left out some fond and frivolous Jestures": though such scenes of popular clowning may have been "of some vaine conceited fondlings greatly gaped at, what times they were shewed upon the stage", he argued, "nevertheles now, to be mixtured in print with such matter of worth, it would proove a great disgrace to so honorable & stately a historie" (4-5). Clearly, then, certain printers regarded clowning scenes as dispensable ephemera.

A brief analysis of the anonymous play *A Knack to Know a Knave* raises some pertinent questions. The text as we have it was printed in 1594 by the same Richard Jones who had expurgated *Tamburlaine*; Henslowe's diary tells us that it was performed, not for the first time, in 1592. Jones's title page promises the reader

> A most pleasant and merie new Comedie, Intituled, A Knacke to knowe a Knaue. Newlie set foorth, as it hath sundrie tymes bene played by ED. ALLEN and his Companie. With KEMPS applauded Merrimentes of the men of Goteham, in receiuing the King into Goteham.

The allusion in the last sentence is to the famous comedian Will Kemp, who would go on to play such roles as Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*, and probably Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see Wiles 73-82). The title page seems to promise a set-piece which was evidently highly memorable (not to mention merry) when it was performed in the theater; the corresponding episode in the text itself, though, is disappointingly short and uneventful. Here it is in its entirety[4]:

> *Enter mad men of Goteham, to wit, a Miller, a Cobler, and a Smith.*
> MILLER. Now, let us constult among our selves,
>> How to misbehave our selves to the Kings worship,
>> Jesus blesse him: and when he comes, to deliver him this petition
>> I think the Smith were best to do it, for hees a wise man.
> COBLER. Naighbor, he shall not doe it, as long as Jefferay the Translater is
>> Maior of the towne.
> SMITH. And why, I pray, because I would have put you from the Mace?
> MILLER [COBBLER]. No, not for that, but because he is no good fellow,
>> Nor he will not spend his pot for companie.
> SMITH. Why (sir) there was a god of our occupation, and I charge you by
>> vertue of his godhed, to let me deliver the petition.

COBLER. But soft you, your God was a Cuckold, and his Godhead was the
horne, and thats the Armes of the Godhead you call upon. Go, your
are put down with your occupation, and now I wil not grace you so
much as to deliver the petition, for you.

SMITH. What, dispraise our trade?

COBLER. Nay, neighbour, be not angrie, for Ile stand to nothing onlie but
this.

SMITH. But what? beare witnesse a gives me the But, and I am not willing to
shoot: Cobler, I will talke with you: nay, my bellowes, my
coaltrough, and my water shall enter armes with you for our trade: O
neighbour, I cannot beare it, nor I wil not beare it.

MILLER. Heare you, neighbour, I pray consuade yourself and be not wilful,
& let the Cobler deliver it, you shal see him mar all.

SMITH. At your request I will commit my selfe to you,
And lay my selfe open to you, lyke an Oyster.

MILLER. Ile tell him what you say: Heare you naighbor, we have constulted
to let you deliver the petition, doe it wisely for the credite of the
town.

COBLER. Let me alone, for the Kings Carminger was here,
He sayes the King will be here anon.

SMITH. But heark, by the Mas he comes.

Enter the King, Dunston, and Perin.

KING. How now Perin; who have we here?

COBLER. We the townes men of Goteham,
Hearing your Grace would come this way,
Did thinke it good for you to stay,
But hear you, neighbours, bid somebody ring the bels,
And we are come to you alone to deliver our petition.

KING. What is it Perin, I pray thee reade.

PERIN. Nothing but to have a license to brew strong Ale thrice a week, and he
that comes to Goteham, and will not spende a penie on a pot of Ale,
if he be a drie, that he may fast.

KING. Well, sirs, we grant your petition.

COBLER. We humblie thanke your royall Majesty.

> KING. Come Dunston, lets away.
>
> *Exeunt omnes.* (41-43)

The dramaturgical structure of the scene is straightforward: a battle for precedence erupts between a group of low-status clowns, one of them playing the role of mediator and the other two squaring off against one another. The Miller seems initially to be the authority figure of the trio, setting up the premise of the scene and issuing instructions to the others, but it soon becomes clear that the Cobbler is the Mayor of the town, and that the Smith is his rival. The Cobbler then engages in a squabble with the Smith (the line beginning "No, not for that" is assigned to the Miller in the printed text, but since it is spoken in support of the Cobbler's argument against the Smith, contradicting the Miller's earlier endorsement, it appears to have been misattributed and probably belongs to the Cobbler). The Miller intervenes as the voice of conciliation, and diplomatically suggests that the Smith allow the Cobbler to present the petition to the King. The Miller and the Smith fall silent when the King enters, and the focus shifts to the Cobbler's crudely rhymed presentation to the King. The scene's punchline, such as it is, rests on the relative inconsequentiality of the subject of the petition, and the townsmen depart. They do not reappear anywhere else in the printed text.

Writing in 1926, Louis B. Wright drew the conclusion that "Without doubt, the bulk of the clownery was omitted in the printed version, or left for the improvisation of Kemp and his clowns" (519). As we have seen, Richard Jones was certainly no stranger to the exorcism of clown scenes, but it seems unlikely that even he would advertise a scene on the title page that he had edited to the point of inconsequence in the text itself. Perhaps it is more likely, as Peter Thomson suggests, that "In such knockabout scenes, the discipline of the cue sheet might be legitimately

displaced by the spontaneity of improvisation, with tempo and duration determined by audience response" (142).

Kemp could have taken the role of any one of the three townsmen. David Wiles sees the Cobbler as the "chief part" (33), and certainly it is the role that most obviously facilitates improvisation, in dialogue both with the Smith and with the King. The doggerel he starts to deliver to the King is vaguely reminiscent of the sorts of improvised verses documented in *Tarlton's Jests* (1613), a semi-fictional account of the celebrated improvising comedian Richard Tarlton, and it is certainly extendable. Though the Miller's malapropisms mark him out as a Kemp-like clown in the mould of Bottom and Dogberry, his dramaturgical role in the scene as the restraining force on his bumptious and chaotic fellow clowns is more reminiscent of Peter Quince. The roles of the Cobbler and the Smith allow more scope for a gifted improviser: while their squabble is playful and open to elaboration, the Miller's lines are mostly structural, interrupting the other characters in order to move the scene forwards. The Smith has some scope for interaction with spectators in the lines as written: towards the climax of his squabble with the Cobbler, he appeals to a third party ("beare witnesse a gives me the But") which could be the Miller, but could equally be the audience. Either he or the Cobbler might easily find opportunities for audience interaction if they were allowed to improvise.

Elizabethan clowns were widely characterized as being eager, as Hamlet famously complains, to depart from the parts "set down for them" and to improvise freely (3.2.39). Tarlton was described posthumously in *Tarlton's News out of Purgatory* (c. 1590) as having "famozed all Comedies so with his pleasant and extemporall invention" (1), and *Tarlton's Jests* gives some detailed illustrations of his improvisations in practice: while it contains numerous accounts of his rhymed

improvisations on "themes" in performances outside of the structure of a play, three anecdotes in particular describe the interruption of a play in progress. The first, "A Jest of an Apple hitting Tarlton on the Face," describes a performance by the Queen's Men in which Tarlton, "kneeling down to aske his father blessing," is hit on the cheek by an apple thrown from the audience; Tarlton then humiliates the disruptive playgoer by improvising an insulting rhyme (6-7). The second anecdote, "How Tarlton and one in the Gallerie fell out," details a more extended interaction between Tarlton and a spectator, in which Tarlton, "to make sport at the least occasion given him," mocks a playgoer whom he sees pointing at him during a play; when the audience member heckles back, Tarlton responds again, and the narrator tells us that "this matter grew so, that the more he medled, the more it was for his disgrace," until "the poore fellow, plucking his hat over his eyes, went his wayes" (7). The last of these anecdotes, "An excellent Jest of Tarlton suddenly spoken", describes Tarlton augmenting his script more metatheatrically:

> At the Bull at Bishops-gate, was a play of Henry the fift, wherein the Judge was to take a box on the eare, and because he was absent that should take the blow, Tarlton himselfe (ever forward to please) tooke upon him to play the same Judge, besides his owne part of the Clowne: and Knell then playing Henry the fift, hit Tarlton a sound boxe indeed, which made the people laugh the more, because it was he. But anon the Judge goes in, and immediately Tarlton (in his Clownes clothes) comes out, and askes the Actors what newes. O, saith one, hadst thou been here, thou shouldest have seene Prince Henry hit the Judge a terrible box on the eare. What, man, said Tarlton, strike a Judge? It is true, yfaith, said the other. No other like, said Tarlton, and it could not be but terrible to the judge, when the report so terrifies me, that me thinkes the blow remaines still on my cheeke, that it burnes againe. The people laught at this mightily, and to this day I have heard it commended for rare; but no marvaile, for he had many of these. But I would see our Clownes in these

dayes doe the like, no I warrant ye, and yet they thinke well of themselves, too. (11)

I have quoted this at length, because it illustrates several things. Firstly, like the previous anecdote, it depicts a Tarlton "ever forward to please" who went out of his way to find opportunities for improvisation. Second, it shows the importance of Tarlton's extra-dramatic comic persona to his performance: the incident "made the people laugh the more, because it was he." Finally, it suggests that although Tarlton had "many of these" sorts of jests, clowns "in these dayes" (probably the 1590s) are characterized as being less likely to engage in such improvised playfulness—or at least, not with as much success.

Such a view was not shared by all. When Thomas Nashe dedicated *An Almond for a Parrat* to Will Kemp in 1590, he described the comedian as "Vice-gerent generall to the Ghost of Dicke Tarlton". The surviving accounts of Kemp's performances are less detailed than those of Tarlton's, but certainly Kemp too had a reputation for improvisation. The 1607 play *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* depicts a fictional version of Kemp sparring with "an Italian Harlaken" (an Arlecchino or "Harlequin" of the *commedia dell'arte*), claiming to be "somewhat hard of study" but willing to engage in "any extemporal merriment" (40). Richard Brome's 1638 play *The Antipodes*, meanwhile, recalls Tarlton and Kemp as equally emblematic of an age of theatrical improvisations when the clown, Biplay, is censured for the practice:

LETOY. But you Sir are incorrigible, and
      Take licence to your selfe, to adde unto
      Your parts, your owne free fancy; and sometimes
      To alter, or diminish what the writer

> With care and skill compos'd: and when you are
>
> To speake to your coactors in the Scene,
>
> You hold interloquutions with the Audients.
>
> BIPLAY. That is a way my Lord has bin allow'd
>
> On elder stages to move mirth and laughter.
>
> LETOY. Yes in the dayes of Tarlton and Kempe,
>
> Before the stage was purg'd from barbarisme,
>
> And brought to the perfection it now shines with.
>
> Then fooles and jesters spent their wits, because
>
> The Poets were wise enough to save their owne
>
> For profitabler uses. (31)

None of these accounts of either Tarlton or Kemp prove incontrovertibly that improvisation was practiced on the Elizabethan stage—they are all, to a greater or lesser extent, fictionalized portrayals. They demonstrate quite clearly, though, that both men were skilled and willing improvisers in the popular imagination.

A handful of sources seem to confirm the practice of improvised speech on the Elizabethan stage. It was, of course, technically illegal: an Act of the Common Council of London in 1574 forbade the performance of "anie playe, enterlude, Commodye, Tragidie, matter, or shewe, which shall not be firste perused and Allowed in suche order and fourme and by suche persons as by the Lorde Maior and Courte of Aldermen for the tyme beinge shal be appoynted," and the Act made it clear that no material could be "enterlaced, Added, mynglydd, or uttered in anie suche play" without permission (Chambers 274-5). Nonetheless, a small number of printed plays seem to have actively called for precisely this: in Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV Part 2* (1599), for example, "Jockie is led to whipping over the stage, speaking some wordes, but of no importance" (87); the Forrester in *The Trial of Chivalry* (1605) likewise has the stage direction "*Speaks any thing, and Exit*" (34). Certainly Philip

Powell's commonplace book records an instance of theatrical improvisation in 1620, when "on[e] Kendal a foole in a stage play in Bristoll being meerie acctinge the part of the vize, spake extempore" (Pilkinton 215). In 1633, William Prynne complained that "sometimes such who act the Clowne or amorous person, adde many obscene lascivious jests and passages of their owne, by way of appendix, to delight the auditors, which were not in their parts before" (930).

It is my contention that the clowning scenes of *Doctor Faustus* allow space for such improvisation. Their characters clearly belong to the here-and-now of the playhouse, rather than the play's nominally German setting: when the Clown contrasts suspiciously foreign "French crowns" with more familiar "English counters" (A-text, 1.4.34-35), he articulates a distinctly English identity, which is only confirmed in 2.2 when we learn that his name is "Robin," and his companion's name either "Rafe" (A) or "Dick" (B). The A-text allows both Wagner and the Clown to make explicit reference to the presence of the audience, in a pair of lines reminiscent of the Smith's appeal for someone to "bear witness" in *A Knack to Know a Knave* (though these lines are much more clearly directed towards the audience, due to the absence of any third party on stage):

> WAGNER. Bear witness I gave them him.
> CLOWN. Bear witness I gave them you again. (A-text: 1.4.41-2)

In 3.2, in fact, the text might be read as giving positive instruction for its clown to improvise, with a double use of the abbreviation "etc.":

> CLOWN. I, a goblet? Rafe, I, a goblet? I scorn you, and you are but a etc. I, a goblet? Search me. (A-text: 3.2.10-11)

> CLOWN. *Polypragmos Belseborams framanto pacostiphos tostu*
> *Mephistopheles*, etc. (A-text: 3.2.26-7)

While the first of these examples may indicate the censorship of an expletive (as in, for example, Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, 6.181), the second makes sense only as an invitation to improvise nonsense. We see something similar, for example, in *Guy, Earl of Warwick*, when the clown is given the following speech and stage direction:

> SPARROW. …therefore I'le wake him sure, Whoop whow, &c.
> *He Hollowes in his Ear.* (42)

As Laurie Maguire has noted, the early modern etcetera "can embody the body and the bawdy" as well as being "a material mark for things that cannot be said, or have been said previously but are now omitted or censored" ("Textual Embodiment" 1); it can also "invite the actor to supply his own dialogue or noise" (12). It is, she concludes, "a textual moment which gestures beyond the text—whether in prose or in performance" (18).

In an attempt to explore the textual cues for improvisation in *Doctor Faustus*, I organized an open workshop at the 2012 conference of the British Shakespeare Association, working with two actors from The Pantaloons theater company, Martin Gibbons and Helen Taylor. We chose to focus on 1.4, the scene in which Wagner (played in the workshop by Taylor) convinces the Clown (Gibbons) to become his servant, using a combination of promises and threats. Prior to the workshop, Gibbons, Taylor, and I met to analyze both versions of the scene, and to produce a conflation of the two that could be used as the basis for an improvised version. Our comparison of the texts revealed a great deal about the structure of the scene. Wagner's lines tend to

be broadly similar in both, while the Clown's lines are much more straightforward in B than they are in A. Compare, for example, the following passages:

A-text	B-text
WAGNER. Alas, poor slave, see how poverty jesteth in his nakedness! The villain is bare and out of service, and so hungry that I know he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood-raw.	WAGNER. Alas, poor slave, see how poverty jests in his nakedness! I know the villain's out of service, and so hungry that I know he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood-raw.
CLOWN. How? My soul to the Devil for a shoulder of mutton, though 'twere blood-raw? Not so, good friend. By'r Lady, I had need have it well roasted and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear. (1.4.6-12)	CLOWN. Not so, neither. I had need to have it well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear, I can tell you. (1.4.6-11)

The speech of the Clown in A is full of lines in which, as Peter Davison points out, "the second speaker repeats a key part of the first speaker's statement in order that the point be punched home and the audience primed as to just when to laugh" (44). While some of these, such as the above, are direct repetitions of Wagner's words, more are corruptions: the A-text's Clown misinterprets "stavesacre" as "knave's acre" (1.4.16-17), "guilders" as "gridirons" (1.4.31-2), quibbles over Wagner's offer of "French crowns" (1.4.33), and adds some quickfire back-and-forth play around rejecting the guilders (1.4.39-42). The A-text Clown is also allowed some bawdy digressions, speculating as to the difference between "he-devils" and "she-devils" (1.4.52-4), and

fantasising about being turned into "a little, pretty, frisky flea" so that he might "tickle the pretty wenches' plackets" (1.4.61-64). Crucially, none of the lines unique to the A-text are strictly necessary to the structure of the scene; all of them are examples of superfluous linguistic play. The handful of lines unique to the B-text, on the other hand, tend to be clarifications of the plot:

> WAGNER. *[to Clown]* How now, sir, will you serve me now?
> CLOWN. Ay, good Wagner. Take away the devil, then. (1.4.35-36)

Gibbons, an experienced clown, found his initial preference was for the B-text, since it allowed the improvising actor more scope: the A-text, he argued, was too prescriptive and messy.[5]

For the workshop, we produced a script that conflated both texts, in order to expose the underlying structure of both scenes. Where lines were substantially similar in both texts, and formed part of the structural backbone of the scene by introducing new ideas, offers, or threats, we incorporated one of the two versions directly; these were generally Wagner's lines. Everywhere else, we replaced the lines of the text with a verbal action. The first four lines of the script thus read as follows:

> WAGNER. Come hither, sirrah boy.
> CLOWN. *[objects to being called "boy"]*
> WAGNER. *[asks about Clown's income]*
> CLOWN. *[jokes about "outgoings"]*

When the actors performed the script during the workshop, therefore, they were improvising the majority of the lines.

The aim of the improvised performance was not to recreate Elizabethan practice, but to investigate the dramaturgical structure of a script that seems to have

accommodated improvisation from the start. In order to facilitate what was necessarily a modern-English improvisation, the exchange surrounding "stavesacre" was replaced with references to "lice powder". The actors were also encouraged to make references to the here-and-now of the performance whenever the opportunity struck them in performance. One example was Gibbons's response to Wagner's offer of "guilders" halfway through the scene:

> CLOWN. They're Greek, aren't they? *(audience laugh)* I'm not going
> anywhere near Greek money.

Gibbons's improvised reference to the then-current financial crisis in Greece allowed for a playfully anachronistic self-awareness.

The scene as performed was perhaps slightly more chaotic than had been intended: Gibbons, who was awaiting dental surgery, lost his temporary replacement tooth just prior to the beginning of the performance, which gave him a very conspicuous "here-and-now" around which to improvise. Gibbons made frequent reference to his missing tooth—a motif that was picked up by Taylor in the closing moments of the scene, when she jokingly castigated her co-performer for getting carried away with an audience member (and addressed him by his own name, rather than by his character's):

> CLOWN. Aw, that sounds pretty cool. But could you turn me into a flea?
> Fleas are really, really quite tiny, and I could creep up this lovely
> lady's boot, and I could nibble there, and I could nibble there, and I
> could get right up to her knee, and I could nibble—
> WAGNER. Martin.
> CLOWN. No, no, I could, I could—
> WAGNER. Martin. What are you doing? You've lost your tooth.

> *Pause.*
> CLOWN. I can't nibble without a tooth, can I?
> WAGNER. No. *(audience laugh)* We're at the British Shakespeare
>   Association. *(audience laugh)*

The improvised nature of the performance meant that the actors' portrayal of the status relationship between the two characters misfired occasionally, but the sense of Wagner as a controlling force, restraining a chaotic and self-indulgent co-performer, provided a strong seam of comedy and what one audience member described as a "ringmaster/performer" dynamic.

The supposedly "controlling" role played by Wagner was, however, rooted in a very practical necessity. Whereas Gibbons's role allowed him to use his scripted cues from Taylor as the basis for improvised flights of fancy, Gibbons provided Taylor herself with very few distinct cues. In order to continue with the scene, she simply *had* to correct him or interrupt him. This provides a possible answer to the conundrum raised by Maguire in her study of the early modern "etcetera": "the actor who sees '&c' as his cue [. . .] does not know what he is listening out for" ("Textual Embodiment" 15). In a scene that is built to facilitate improvisation, the non-improvising actor is likely to have the more authoritative, structural role: from a narrative perspective, it does not matter in the least *when* he interrupts the clown's improvisations, just as long as he does so. As we have seen, we can understand the Miller in *A Knack to Know a Knave* as having played the same dramaturgical role: he provides the structure within which the Smith and the Cobbler can improvise. It is possible to see Peter Quince as playing a similar role in his double-act with Bottom (probably Kemp's part) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Bottom's lines "To the rest" (1.2.23-24) and "Now name the rest of the players" (1.2.35) encourage the actor playing Quince to attempt to move on to the next part of the scene (assigning Francis

Flute his role), and if he does so, each attempt will be derailed by another burst of clowning from the actor playing Bottom. In *Doctor Faustus*, though, there are potentially two improvising clowns: Robin is later joined by a fellow clown called either Rafe (in the A-text) or Dick (in the B-text). Wagner provides the structural role in our scene; the Vintner does something similar in act three. It is significant that it is the scene in which the clowns are left onstage without a structuring character—2.2— that differs most wildly in the two texts.

In an effort to try to understand what happens when improvised dialogue is turned into script, I invited everyone present at the workshop (including the actors) to attempt their own memorial reconstruction of the improvisation.[6] I also transcribed an audio recording of the performance, allowing me to compare what was said with what people *thought* was said. The most precise account, perhaps unsurprisingly, was the one by Taylor, who recounted all her own lines accurately, and most of Gibbons's improvisations as semi-accurate paraphrases. Gibbons, however, took a strikingly different approach—perhaps in keeping with his dramaturgical role. His account missed out whole sections where the dialogue had been led by Taylor. He also simplified his own improvisations into basic verbal actions. For example:

Recording transcript	Actor transcript
WAGNER. Sirrah, wilt thou serve me? And I will make thee go like *Qui mihi discipulus*.	**W.** Serve me, and I'll give you money, and lice powder.
CLOWN. How, in Spanish?	
WAGNER. No, slave, in Giorgio Armani! And lice powder.	
CLOWN. Aw, nice chowder? Yeah! Like I say, I'd like some lamb,	**C.** Nice chowder?

with a bit of mint sauce…	
WAGNER. No, sirrah, I said "lice powder".	**W.** No, lice powder.
CLOWN. Oh, lice powder! So if I serve you, I'll be covered in lice?	**C.** So if I serve you, I'll be lousy.
WAGNER. So thou shalt, whether thou beest with me or no. But sirrah, leave your jesting, and bind yourself presently unto me for seven years, or I'll turn all the lice about thee into familiars, and they shall tear thee in pieces.	**W.** You are already lousy. I will make the lice into familiars if you don't serve me.
CLOWN. Well I can assure you sir, they're very "familiar" with me already. In fact, I am a veritable Hilton for lice. I have an en suite in my hair.	**C.** They are already familiar. I'm like a lice hotel.

Gibbons and Taylor had clearly memorized the text in completely different ways—Taylor as a series of "parts," Gibbons as a series of cues for improvisation. This is certainly characteristic of their different approaches as performers, but is also a potentially useful insight into the structure of the script itself.

The documentation produced by the audience members revealed that the reconstruction of a sequence of improvised clowning is rarely a mechanical act of faithful transcription, but rather a creative literary effort in its own right. Seven audience members chose to compose a script as their means of documentation. The moments which were recalled accurately by all seven were few: Gibbons's repetition of the word "boy" at the start, his first reference to his missing tooth, Wagner's question about his income, and Gibbons's improvisation about a roast dinner. The majority (but not all) remembered the actors' incorporation of specific modern

references: to "Greek money," "Armani," "chowder," and the "Hilton." Clearly specific gags were the most memorable elements for the audience—perhaps because these were the most obvious anachronistic additions to Marlowe's text. This was in stark contrast to Gibbons, who stripped his account of nearly all such references.

Others took the opportunity to re-improvise the scene in their imaginations, joining up the actors' garbled improvisations into lines that made much more sense. For example, what Gibbons rather clumsily improvised as "Um . . . . No income, but I have plenty of sad outcomes, if you get my drift. . . . Financial state. . . . Nothing I can really do about it . . ." was rendered variously as:

- "No, but I've got a very sad outcome. Sign of the times, I'm afraid."

- "Yes, some, and plenty of outcomes too. Not much I can do, just the current state of financial affairs."

- "No—nothing in this financial climate. Nothing I can do about it."

- "No, sadly no income, only outcomes, as you can see."

Gibbons's improvisation, while rather incoherent in transcription, had evidently conveyed the sense of the line clearly, as shown in the re-articulations by audience members in formats much more suited to the page.

Some audience improvisations were quite overt:

Recording transcript	Audience transcript
CLOWN. I laugh in the face of devils! I'm a veritable boxer to devils, a veritable Muhammad Ali to devils! I float like a devil butterfly, I sting like a devil bee!	**B.** Devils? I don't fear your devils. I'm as lusty as a devil myself. I'm a match for any devil. [OK, I'm improvising myself, now.]

One explored possible alternatives to the actors' improvisations, suggesting that "some 'dinner' combo from McDonald's" or the "latest delicacy from KFC" would be more suitable for "younger audiences" than the "roast dinner" sequence, and even suggested an opportunity for a *Harry Potter* reference. Others were technically imprecise but highly imaginative, finding new ways in which to segue from one point in the script to another. One audience member, for example, took the following fairly accurate notes as the performance was in progress:

Recording transcript	Audience notes
WAGNER. Alas, poor slave! See how poverty jesteth in his nakedness! The villain is bare and out of service, and so hungry that I know he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood raw.	poor slave poverty jesteth in his nakedness
CLOWN. How? My soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood raw? I wouldn't. Maybe for a nice bit of lamb, and some mint sauce, and some nice roast spuds—I do like some nice roast spuds— and maybe a bit of gravy—then, then, sir, you have my soul.	roast spuds & gravy
WAGNER. Sirrah, wilt thou serve me? And I will make thee go like *Qui mihi discipulus*.	
CLOWN. How, in Spanish?	
WAGNER. No, slave, in Giorgio Armani! And lice powder.	lice powder
CLOWN. Aw, nice chowder? Yeah! Like I say, I'd like some lamb, with a bit of mint sauce…	nice chowder bit of gravy
WAGNER. No, sirrah, I said "lice powder".	

The audience member concerned then joined these notes together into a much less accurate, but arguably much funnier, new exchange:

> **W.** Poor slave. How poverty jesteth in his nakedness. Do you like spuds and
>   gravy?
> **C.** Oh yes, I love me spuds and gravy, nice round spuds, a bit of gravy,
>   sounds—
> **W.** And lice powder?
> **C.** Oh yes, I love a nice chowder, like I said I love a good bit of gravy, and
>   spuds, and a good bit of gravy—
> **W.** No, sirrah, I said "lice powder".

This gravy-fixated Clown was nowhere to be seen in Gibbons and Taylor's performance, but rather a whole new comic creation.

The various scripts produced by this exercise in retextualising improvised clowning revealed some interesting correspondences with the two texts of *Doctor Faustus*. Broadly speaking, the tendency among some audience members to re-improvise the scene on the page produced a text much closer in style to the A-text, while the contrasting strategy of recording merely a skeleton sequence of cues for linguistic improvisation (employed primarily by Gibbons) resulted in something more like the B-text. Writers concerned with producing either a *record* of the scene as performed, or a script that *read* like improvised clowning, tended to preserve specific gags, or even to invent new ones, while those who were thinking about the script as a *cue* for performance tended to strip away the gags in order to expose the scene's structure. It is tempting to speculate that we might thus understand the A-text version of the scene as a recollection, or even simulation, of a real or imagined past

performance for an audience of readers, and the B-text as the anticipation of a new one.

       With this in mind, I turned to another early modern clowning sequence that has survived in multiple versions: the gravedigger's scene in *Hamlet*. The nature of the relationship between *Hamlet*'s early performances and the texts of the 1603 quarto (hereafter "Q1"), the 1604 quarto ("Q2") and the 1623 Folio is far from clear. Since the publication of George Duthie's *The "Bad" Quarto of "Hamlet"* in 1941, the critical orthodoxy has been that Q1 was the result of an acting company's attempts to reduce a longer text's cast size and running length: Duthie posited the text as "a memorial reconstruction, made for provincial performance by an actor who had taken the part of Marcellus" (273). Others have suggested that Q1 was a more deliberate abridgment for performance, or a memorial reconstruction of that abridgment (Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts*, 256); by any of these accounts, Q1 stands as a record of the play as it was performed in a way that Q2 and the Folio do not. This notion, once widespread, has come under fire in recent years: Paul Werstine, for example, has demonstrated that Q1 cannot have been the reconstruction of a single actor, and concludes that "assumptions of the 'bad' quartos' special relation to the stage would have to be grounded, if they are to have any ground at all, on some other evidence besides that supplied by the theory of memorial reconstruction" (329). Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass have likewise critiqued the notion that Q1 is "only a dim recollection of a performance through which we can glimpse the oral culture of the Elizabethan playhouse," and though they do not deny "that Q1 testifies in some way to a version of the play as produced on the early modern stage" and accept "that memory in some form has helped to produce this text" (379), they argue that it "cannot be considered simply a performance text, as opposed to a written or a

reading text" (410). More recently, Terri Bourus has argued that Q1 was Shakespeare's earliest version of the play, performed in 1589 at the Theatre, and that many of its textual variants can be explained as memorial errors by the compositor rather than by a pirate actor (49).

I wondered, on the basis of my *Doctor Faustus* experiment, whether a conflated scenario based on the three versions of the gravedigger scene would reveal something about the *Hamlet* texts and their early modern performance. Where the shorter *Doctor Faustus* A-text contains more nonstructural linguistic play than its longer counterpart, however, *Hamlet*'s Q1 does not. The scenario I produced for the gravedigger scene revealed immediately that this scene, in all its incarnations, has a very different dramaturgical design. In all three versions, the structural role is played by the principal clown (the gravedigger) rather than his stooge. Whereas *Faustus*'s clown has numerous opportunities to improvise upon the various open offers made by his partner, *Hamlet*'s is tied to specific jokes: when Q1's Second Clown remarks that Ophelia "did not drown herself" (16.5), for example, the line is a setup for the First Clown's punchline "No, that's certain, the water drowned her" (16.6) rather than an open invitation for repartee. Similarly, the gravedigger's claim in Q2 and the Folio that Adam was the first gentleman "that ever bore arms" (5.1.33) only really makes sense in the scene when it gets a payoff, as it does in just the Folio, that "The Scripture says Adam digged. Could he dig without arms?" (5.1.36-37). Hamlet's subsequent dialogue with the gravedigger is broadly similar in all three texts, taking the form of a series of questions from Hamlet and witty replies from the Clown, though the questions occur in a different order in Q1.

There is still some space for improvised play. All three texts script a sequence of bickering between the clowns at the beginning of the scene, and the gravedigger's

extended parody of legal wrangling in Q2 and the Folio shows that the simpler version of the sequence in Q1 is open to extension. The Q2 and Folio texts also provide a rather directionless sequence of open-ended play at the end of the clowns' exchange, when the gravedigger demands a second answer to his riddle and his partner repeatedly fails to provide one:

> CLOWN. … To't again, come.
> OTHER. Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?
> CLOWN. Ay, tell me that and unyoke.
> OTHER. Marry, now I can tell.
> CLOWN. To't!
> OTHER. Mass, I cannot tell. (5.1.49-55)

In Q1, on the other hand, the Second Clown is allowed to provide two successful answers to the riddle—though we should note that the riddle is a different one. Whereas the Q2 and Folio gravedigger ask "What is he that builds *stronger* than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?" (5.1.41-2), the Q1 clown asks simply "Who builds *strongest* of a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?" (16.19-20)— a question that seems to invite a formulaic, three-part response rather than implying an as-yet-unrevealed answer. In all three texts, the First Clown provides an answer to the riddle at the end of the exchange—though this is somewhat nonsensical in Q1, where it is not really an answer to the question posed.

The relationship between these texts and their early performances is thus much harder to speculate upon. While Q1 could be read as having simplified its clowning in the manner of the *Faustus* B-text, it also seems to be a garbled version of an earlier text (the riddle, for example, is clearly phrased incorrectly), and it both cuts *and* extends the interplay between the gravediggers. It is probably uncontroversial,

therefore, to identify it as a transitional text, a marker-point between a previous theatrical incarnation of the play and a forthcoming one. The Q2 *Hamlet*, meanwhile, claims to be "enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie", but we might usefully ask to which point in the text's performance history it has been restored: why does it script a sequence of clowning which reads like *failed* improvisation? Is this also a record of extra-textual performance, or an attempt to simulate one?

There is, of course, reason to believe that the clowns in the earliest performances of *Hamlet* were strongly discouraged from improvising. When Hamlet delivers his advice to the players, he instructs them, in Q1 just as he does in Q2 and the Folio, not to let their clown speak "more than is set down" (9.24; 3.2.39): such a practice, he argues, shows a "pitiful ambition in the fool that useth it" (9.28-9; 3.2.44). Interestingly, though, Q1's most playful piece of verbal superfluity occurs at precisely this moment. Here, Hamlet seems to do precisely what he advises the players against, launching into a full-blown quotation of a "suit of jests" or comic catchphrases:

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

It is possible that this passage is a record of a previously-unscripted interpolation by the actor playing Hamlet (hence its absence from Q2 and the Folio), but whatever its

origin, the passage asks the actor at the very least to mimic what Robert Weimann calls the "ancient, almost ubiquitous practice of unscripted, unsanctioned performance" (24). But as Preiss points out, the clowning technique described by Hamlet here is "a reversal of playhouse stenographic practice" in which "the clown's catchphrases and mannerisms prove so familiar and predictable that "Gentlemen quotes his jests down / In their tables" *before* they go to the play, not during it" (152). The clown recycles his scripted catchphrases, and Hamlet, quoting them, seems to improvise. Duthie notes "a certain mild resemblance" between two of these catchphrases and two corresponding episodes from *Tarlton's Jests* (233). In this account, the historical clown and the fictional one, the real and imaginary spectators, Hamlet and the actor playing him, are engaging in the practices of scripting and improvising, remembering, transcribing, rescripting and reperforming clowning. The sedimentary layers are jumbled, but discernible.

The complexity of this passage illustrates a moment of flux in the early modern theater, describing a clowning practice that is becoming more scripted just as it seems to record a moment of improvisation. The narrator of *Tarlton's Jests*, like Letoy in *The Antipodes*, seems to identify a shift away from extempore clowning over the late Elizabethan period ("But I would see our Clownes in these dayes doe the like"), but we should note that this transition must have been slow if Powell and Prynne's references to the practice in the 1620s and 30s are to be believed. Certainly the printed texts of *A Knack to Know a Knave* and *Doctor Faustus* allow room for improvising comedians in a way that those of *Hamlet* do not, but if the *Faustus* B-text is indeed Birde and Rowley's 1602 version, we have a performance text that is roughly contemporary with *Hamlet*, yet still in some sense anticipating (or at least allowing room for) improvisation. We might conclude by observing that all of these

texts are Janus-like, looking forward and backward at once: they document past

performance at the same time as they edit that document for future performance,

remembering performance at the same time as simulating it, claiming authority at the

same time as they relinquish it.

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Notes

[1] All quotations from *Doctor Faustus* are from Bevington and Rasmussen's edition, 1993.

[2] Greg finds a possible reference in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (c. 1597-98), for example, to the Benvolio episode unique to the B-text when Bardolph reports being set upon by "three German devils, three Doctor Faustuses" (4.5.61-65).

[3] The removal of references to "Christ" in the B-text suggests a theatrical text post 1606 (when a parliamentary act forbade the use on stage of "the holy name of God or of Christ Jesus"). Bevington and Rasmussen list borrowings from the A-text in other plays of the 1590s: *The Taming of A Shrew*, *Mucedorus*, and *A Looking-Glass for London and England* (65-6).

[4] All quotations from Shakespeare are from the second edition of *The Oxford Shakespeare* (ed. Jowett, Montgomery, Taylor & Wells, 2005), aside from quotations from *Hamlet*, which are from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, London: Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, 2006.

[5] Our analysis also identified the presence of different catchphrases in each text. The A-text uses the phrase "do you hear" five times (spoken four of the five times by the Clown), and the line does not appear at all in the in B-text version of the scene. The B-text's Clown, meanwhile, uses "I can tell you" twice, and the phrase does not appear in the A-text version. The natural assumption is that these lines were scripted for different clowns, each with their own catchphrases. A participant in the workshop drew a parallel with the twentieth-century comic Frankie Howerd's catchphrase, "no, listen…". Such phrases may function, in performance, as a means of "riding" audience laughter, or of delaying a punchline for comic effect.

[6] Participants had access to the various scripts, which they were told they could refer to while preparing their reconstructions if they wished. They were also encouraged to take notes as the performance unfolded.