

**‘There be money to be gotten by foolery’: Jacobean City
Comedy and Commercial Metatheatre**

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‘There be money to be gotten by foolery’: Jacobean City Comedy and Commercial Metatheatre

Abstract

In John Cooke’s *Greene’s Tu Quoque* (1611), a group of characters consider going to a playhouse and, whilst discussing the relative merits of the Globe and Red Bull, the character of Bubble dismisses the appeal of the Queen Anne’s Men’s clown, Thomas Greene, noting that he ‘is as like mee as ever hee can looke’, drawing attention to the fact that this character is played by Greene. Similarly, in Robert Tailor’s play, *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl* (1613), the bankrupt gallant, Haddit, tries to sell a theatrical jig and is shown threatening a player-sharer with the prospect of an apprentice riot in order to demand more money for it. This article shows that these are not isolated in-jokes or throwaway allusions to theatrical practice, but are characteristic examples of a specifically commercial form of metatheatre that illuminates the material and commercial contexts against which these plays were performed. The employment of such strategies underpins a sustained meditation on their places within the theatrical market. I suggest that city comedy, with its themes of debt, credit, prodigality, and unstable social status, provides an ideal vehicle for reflecting on such concerns as precarity, demand, and consumer appetite that characterise theatrical commerce.

Keywords: metadrama, theatrical commerce, city comedy

The prologue to Robert Tailor’s play, *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl* (1613), hints at the riskiness of the theatrical venture by considering the prospect of the company being ‘pelted

off... / With apples, eggs, or stones' (27-8).¹ If, however, the play 'prove so happy as to please', then 'We'll say 'tis fortunate, like Pericles' (31-2). There is some debate as to whether this is a reference to the historical figure or to the collaborative tragicomedy by William Shakespeare and George Wilkins; given its relatively recent performance and the convincing evidence presented by Suzanne Gossett that the play did indeed enjoy remarkable popularity, the latter seems likely (Gossett 2004, 2-4). The highlighting of *Pericles* as a desirable theatrical enterprise ripe for emulation underlines the commercial dimension of the play. There is also something potentially double-edged about the comment as George Steevens pointed out as early as 1780: 'To say that a dramatic piece was *fortunate*, is not to say it was *deserving*' (Steevens in Reed et al, 1825, VI, 331). The utterance may therefore point to the seemingly arbitrary nature of theatrical success and the competitive nature of the world of theatrical commerce. Whilst the apologetic and diffident tone of the prologue is hardly unusual in similar prefatory material, I propose that Taylor's play is a case in which such rhetoric should be taken seriously as highlighting the dramatist's dependence upon the often fickle tastes of a popular audience. To do so, I will argue for the presence of a specifically *commercial* form of metatheatre, which goes further than exposing the artificiality of the piece by self-consciously drawing attention to the methods of theatrical representation by situating these productions squarely within the context of the theatrical marketplace. This approach is influenced by a range of recent critical interventions emphasising the self-reflexive qualities of early modern playing. William N. West, for example, has identified metatheatre as fundamental to the nascent character of early modern playing, which, 'as a new and emerging set of practices that were developing in part by naming and distinguishing themselves, reflected on itself because playing was in the act of

¹ All quotations from Taylor's play are taken from the edition in Kermode, 2009, subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically.

exploring, inventing, defining, and claiming possibilities’ and, as a result, ‘playgoers were reminded continually how the play was soliciting their attentions, and how their attentions made the play’ (West 2021, 9). The self-reflectiveness West identifies extends, according to Lauren Robertson, to the audience themselves, who were ‘required to make sense of a highly experimental art form while also making sense of playgoing as a new kind of social activity and “playgoer” as a new kind of social identity’ (Robertson 2023, 4). Such ideas about the creation of the ‘playgoer’ are crucial to my readings of the drama that follow, with an added emphasis on their role as *consumer* as well as spectator.² For this economic dimension, I am also indebted to Laura Kolb’s work on drama and the growing culture of credit. Kolb specifically emphasises how ‘credit relations intensify the rhetoricity of social life’ and ‘amplify its multiplicity, its element of flux, its danger’. This rhetorical dimension underpins its relationship to theatricality, as plays provide insights into ‘the experiential dimension of credit culture, investigating both its outward formal architecture and its inward phenomenology: what it *feels like* to live with credit – to live, that is, inside a fiction’ (Kolb 2021, 32). The metatheatrical effects of such representations are also, as Nina Levine argues, one of the key features of city comedy, the genre to which my two case studies belong. One key focal point for Levine is the effect of representing on stage the very urban environments in which the playhouses are situated: ‘to put the city on stage is to provoke self-awareness and understanding on the part of both playgoers and playwrights, and with it a more engaged and participatory theatrical experience’ (Levine 2016, 37-8). The commercial metatheatrical framework I propose also emerges as a vehicle through which questions of competition, rivalries between playhouses and companies, catering for audience taste, and the tension between cultural and commercial capital in defining ‘success’ can be interrogated.

² An excellent critical overview of scholarship on early modern metatheatre can be found in Dustagheer and Newman (2008), who note a ‘canonical bias’ towards Shakespeare in much of the twentieth century scholarship on metatheatre (8). Recent book-length studies on metatheatre include Rochester (2010) and Angus (2018 and 2020).

Scholarly work from the last few decades has seen an intensification of interest in the economic contexts against which early modern plays were performed, partly stimulated by a turn to the new economic criticism and repertory studies. These works have illuminated important aspects of such economic contexts, including the relationship between theatre and nascent consumer culture (Agnew 1986, Bruster 1992, Leinwand 1999), theatre's emulation of the structure of the London livery companies and its relationship with culture of the guilds (Knutson 2001, Kathman 2004), and literary responses to questions of demand (Baker 2009). Douglas Bruster has helpfully defined this commercial sphere as a 'representation market', in which 'the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were composed and on which they were retailed, purchased, and evaluated' meaning that any question of 'value' related to such works 'traces its origins and manifestations more specifically to the highly competitive market conditions under which they were produced' (Bruster 2013, 2). Importantly, Bruster goes on to highlight the widespread awareness amongst its participants about the commercial nature of their own productions:

Those involved with the production of cultural goods at the time possessed meaningful models of how these goods would be circulated and valued... whether they called it trade, trafficking, exchange, commerce, intercourse, bargaining, merchandising, market, or mart, the selling of cultural goods for money had become firmly installed in the cultural lexicon by the late sixteenth century (Bruster 2013, 10).

These qualities of commercial self-awareness, and the self-consciousness about the productive participation in a 'market', are crucial to the readings I will go on to develop in this article. Such commercial labelling of these cultural activities is, as we shall see, not simply confined to paratextual materials, as it also becomes a feature of the action of the dramas themselves in a variety of ways.

To examine this feature of early modern theatre, I draw on two Jacobean city comedies, a genre which, as varied critical readings have noted, provides an ideal vehicle for analysing both the commercial and theatrical contexts that underpin my readings. Richard Wawso, for example, emphasises the economic contexts in his remarks that ‘the perplexities of credit, credibility, and credulity are ubiquitous in both the real and imagined worlds of the London suburbs’ (Wawso 2004, 59). A question frequently posed in city plays is what these relations mean for the individual; as Levine notes, ‘if the metatheatrics of city plays are to be credited, it is also to insist that playgoers become aware of, and maybe even struggle with, their own place within the city scene’ (Levine 2016, 47). The self-reflexive nature of city comedy has provided an important purchase for numerous readings of the genre which have illuminated the relationship between theatricality and the urban economy with bearings on key ethical questions, including (to give a representative, if far from exhaustive, set of examples) immigration (Oldenburg 2014), intellectual labour (Boehm 2016), and connections between disability and dramatic authorship (Love 2019, esp. 39-68).³

Alongside Taylor’s *Hog*, I will also focus on John Cooke’s *Greene’s Tu Quoque* (1611). The dramatic and thematic effects of commercial metatheatre are, I argue, registered in two principal ways in these plays. Firstly, the mobilisation of theatricality is crucial to the development of the economic sub-plots in these plays. *Greene’s Tu Quoque* draws much of its comic energy from the role-reversal that takes place when the prodigal and debt-ridden gentleman, Staines, loses his estate only for it to be inherited by his servant, Bubble, who then retains Staines as his own servant. The conspicuous identification of Bubble with the company’s clown, Thomas Greene, is crucial to the play’s often cynical social comment, drawing attention to the fact that the clown is incongruously, and only temporarily, *playing*

³ For a range of further work, see also the essays in Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda’s important edited collection (2011)

the role of a gentleman who is vulnerable to Staines's underhand schemes to regain his estate. In Tailor's play, the gallant Haddit develops a similarly theatrical means of regaining his wealth to dupe the usurer, Hog, into returning his money with the aid of his theatrical acquaintances to convince him of the appearance of the spirit of Croesus. Secondly, I show that the plays continually allude to their own commodity status within these urban commercial networks through a variety of devices. The conflation of character and performer in the representations of Bubble and Thomas Greene in Cooke's play and the references in Tailor's play to creative labour, apprentice audiences, theatrical taste, and employment of Shakespearean pastiche, as well as a scene dramatising negotiations between player-shareholder and an amateur writer over the payment for a jig, all contribute to the plays' self-conscious meditations on their places within the 'representation market'. I suggest that city comedy, with its themes of debt, prodigality, and the instability of social status, provides an ideal vehicle for reflecting on such concerns as precarity, demand, and consumer appetite that characterise theatrical commerce. In particular, I highlight the ways in which both plays relate the instances of commercial metatheatre to their common urban theme of usury; what appears on the surface to be an antithetical relationship between usury and theatricality is complicated, I argue, by their co-habitation in the growing urban consumer economy.

'I'll play the civil Citizen': Performance and Social Status in *Greene's Tu Quoque*

It is difficult to pin-point precisely when the play we now refer to as *Greene's Tu Quoque* or, *The City Gallant* became associated so explicitly with the clown for the Queen Anne's Men company, Thomas Greene. The court records indicate there were two performances of Cooke's play during the winter of 1611-1612: the first, on December 27, notes a performance

of 'A play called The City Gallant'; the second, on 2 February for the Candlemas entertainment, records a performance of 'A play called Tu Coque' (see Chambers 1923, 178 and Wiggins 2015, 176-80). The later identification of the play with the catchphrase repeatedly uttered by Greene's character, Bubble, may suggest the recognition of the commercial potential of the play as a vehicle for Greene's comedic persona. This point is perhaps further suggested by the frontispiece for the 1614 edition of the play, which appeared two years after Greene's death and was perhaps designed to commemorate the late clown, and contains an illustration depicting Greene performing as his character in the play with a speech bubble containing his catchphrase of '*Tu quoque* to you, sir' (Cooke 1614, A1r). Whilst this may have been part of a commercial strategy to memorialise Greene, the conflation of performer and character is strongly evident within the play itself.⁴ The question of whether to call it *Greene's Tu Quoque* or *The City Gallant* exemplifies some of the central conflicts in the play and places them in a commercial framing. In other words, which will be the bigger box office attraction: the buffoonery of the clown, Thomas Greene, complete with ubiquitous catchphrase, or the prospect of the strategic deployment of wit and cultural capital offered by the figure of the gallant?⁵

Cook's play contains two parallel plots, both dealing with the consequences of debt and prodigality. Much of the comedy from the main plot is derived from the role-reversal between Staines and Bubble, who has hired his former master as his steward in the hope that he will

⁴ For discussion of the play in the context of Greene's career and the repertoire of the Red Bull playhouse, see Griffith 2013, 213-18.

⁵ My reading of the play, and the role of the gallant, is influenced by a number of discussions of the tendencies for city comedies to establish sets of hierarchical standards predicated upon such factors as 'wit' and *habitus*, rather than social status alone. Key examples include Jean E. Howard on 'performative masculinity' underpinned by the 'ability to master codes of fashionability and comport oneself with distinction in the city's emerging arenas for mannerly display' (Howard 2007, 27). On the role of 'wit' as a 'different sort of social formation... which uses differences in taste, in aptitude, and in cultural fluency to supplement, to compete with, and at times to disguise entirely the developing economic and political relations of early modern England', see Zucker 2011, 3. On the 'gallant' as a 'critically overlooked character type' that reveals how 'the urban environment could disrupt cultural distinctions between gentlemen and citizens, helping to forge interclass modes of early modern masculinity', see Arab 2001, 158.

be able to provide him with some instruction in fashion and gentlemanly behaviour. Staines, however, is using his position to gradually claim back his lost fortune from Bubble in a series of confidence tricks. The '*tu quoque*' of the title refers to one of Bubble's most obvious attempts at presenting himself as a gentleman through the use of the one Latin phrase he knows. As mentioned above, the fact that the title, in the print edition at least, identifies the '*tu quoque*' with Greene points towards the play's consistent conflation between performer and character for this role. The most conspicuous example of this conflation comes in the play's eleventh scene, in which Bubble, adopting an affectedly diffident posture, discusses the prospect of visiting the theatre with two city gallants, Will Rash and Scattergood:

RASH: ...But what shall's doe when wee have dinde, shall's goe see a Play?

SCATTERGOOD: Yes fayth Brother: if it please you, let's goe see a play at the
Gloabe.

BUBBLE: I care not; any whither, so the Clowne have a parte: For Ifayth I am no
body without a Foole.

GERALDINE: Why then we'll goe to the Red Bull; they say *Greene's* a good Clowne.

BUBBLE: *Greene?* *Greene's* an Asse.

SCATTERGOOD: Wherefore doe you say so?

BUBBLE: Indeed I ha no reason: for they say, hee is as like mee as ever hee can
looke (11.1565-76).⁶

This exchange includes a number of moments of conflation between the character of Bubble and his performer, Thomas Greene. The admission that he is 'no body without a Foole' (11.1570), for example, takes on some very literal meanings, on both an intra- and extra-diegetic level. The character of Bubble relies upon a company fool or clown to present him;

⁶ All quotations are taken from Alan J. Berman's edition ([1984] 2018) and are cited parenthetically; this edition uses through line numbers.

his very corporeal presence is diminished completely without this performer. Similarly, within the world of the play, Bubble has no identity ‘without’ (i.e., outside of) the theatrical figure of the fool. As well as revealing the extent of his apparently limited cultural *habitus* in his taste for a specific aspect of the theatre, Bubble also reminds the audience (both on- and off-stage) of the performative framework in which he will be viewed by others. In other words, he is at this moment both a fool and an avatar for Greene the theatrical fool. As Richard Preiss notes, these exchanges demonstrate that ‘Bubble is always Greene, and Greene always Greene; the very notion of “character” here, indeed, is just a bubble, existing only to be popped’ (Preiss 2014, 76). There is, therefore, a certain inevitability, or a sense of theatrical determinism, about Bubble’s fate to return to his humble role as the comic servant. The conflation of Bubble and Greene, however, also works on another representative level. At this moment, we also see a conflation of labourer and consumer, a point illustrated by the references to the relative merits of the rival playhouses. In this section, I highlight that this moment of metatheatre is not an isolated incident. Through a pattern of metatheatrical references and allusions to other works, *Greene’s Tu Quoque* becomes situated explicitly not just in the ‘representation market’, but also in a wider urban economy characterised by competition, the use of wit to outmanoeuvre one’s rivals, and the dangers of debt. Doing so also implicates the theatrical audience who are, I argue, reminded of the extent to which they are providing a market for the humiliation of Bubble and the reinforcement of the status quo. The return of Bubble’s blue servant’s coat is both a literal and symbolic confirmation of the decidedly finite nature of his elevated status (19.2899-2902). Whilst commentators like Urvashi Chakravarty see this as a feature of the play’s conservatism – acting as a ‘reaffirmation of social and sumptuary hierarchies’ (Chakravarty 2012, 377-8) – I also highlight that the play’s apparent nostalgia is also accompanied by a sense of cynicism in its

representations of the relationship between the urban economy and social hierarchy, along with the often mercenary and self-interested harnessing of theatricality.

Bubble stands in significant contrast to his once and future master, Staines. Whereas Bubble is grounded in his clownish status and unable to successfully embody the role of city gallant, Staines is marked by his abilities to dissemble and engage in role play, a feature indicated most readily in a soliloquy in which he confides to the audience his scheme to reclaim his lost estate from Bubble:

I serve my selfe, and not him, for this Golde here is mine owne truly purchased... I'll carry things so cunningly, that he shall not be able to looke into my actions; my morgage I have already got into my hands: the rent hee shall enjoy a while, till his riot constrain him to sell it, which I will purchase with his owne money. I must cheate a little, I have been cheated upon, therefore I hope the world will a little the better excuse mee: what his unckle craftily got from me, I will knavishly recover of him: to come by it, I must vary shapes, and my first shift shall be in sattin:

Proteus propitious be to my disguise,

And I shall prosper in my enterprise (7.791-805).

Staines's speech crystallises many of the ambivalences and ambiguities around status and the urban economy that develop throughout the play. His intention to 'vary shapes' and his invocation of Proteus aligns him with the representative practices of the theatre. Furthermore, it exemplifies Agnew's arguments about the status of the theatre as a 'formal analogue of the increasingly fugitive and abstract social relations of a burgeoning market society', whose conventions were uniquely placed to 'convey the experience of conventionality, the sensed hollowness of ritual that the liquidity and impersonality of the money form conferred on the customary frameworks of exchange' (Agnew 1986, 10). The 'Protean' qualities in this speech are applied both to Staines's anticipated performance as a ruthless economic agent and,

notably, to the money and property he sets out to recover. Initially, he claims the gold is ‘mine owne truly purchased’, before later boasting of how he will reclaim Bubble’s property with ‘his owne money’. The ironies and inconsistencies inherent in economic exchange and the transference of ownership are very much apparent in Staines’s simultaneous assertion of his rightful claim to the estate that Bubble is now enjoying, along with the impersonal quality that underpins its fluid nature as a commodity to be exchanged. In other words, Staines can simultaneously view the estate as *both* ‘his’ and ‘mine’. The ambiguities in Staines’s views on the ownership of the money is representative of the play’s own uncertainty and evasiveness over the questions it poses about whether it is property, *habitus*, or gentlemanly rank that provides the true measure of social status in the society it represents.

The metatheatrical links between performance and the negotiation of the urban economy are also suggested by the sub-plot, in which Sir Lionel’s daughters, Joyce and Gartred, elope with Staines and Geraldine rather than settling for the husbands determined by their father. Their ability to negotiate this situation depends upon their skills in recognising and manipulating theatrical convention in the extraordinarily allusive and self-consciously derivative sub-plot, evidenced in a moment when Joyce gives Gartred a rope to escape from the house:

to let thee out at the window; doe not I know that thou wilt runne away with the
Gentleman, for whom you made the passion, rather than indure this same *Bubble* that
my father talkes of, t’were good you would let mee bee of your councell, lest I breake
the necke of your plot (5.536-40).

Joyce, at this point, seems to recognise that she is in a play and to understand what generally happens in this kind of plot. In the subsequent scene, Gartred and Joyce are ‘aloft’ at the window, in a burlesque of conventional ‘balcony’ scenes, with Joyce providing a running set of instructions to Gartred on how the romantic encounter should unfold, as well as a critique on Geraldine’s appearance at this moment: ‘I am asham’d to hear him, you shall have a

Country fellow at a Maie-pole go better to his work' (6.614-16). Another window scene takes place, this time with Joyce and Will Rash assisting Geraldine in the 'prosecution of the plot' to court Gartred (10.1167). When Gartred initially closes the window after critiquing Geraldine's attempt at serenading her, Rash comments on how 'she playes the terrible tyrannizing *Tamberlaine* over him: this it is to turne Turke, from a most absolute compleate Gentleman, to a most absurd ridiculous and fond lover' (10.1197-1200). One theatrical performance must be met with another as Joyce instructs Will to 'pursue your project, and deliver your friend from the tyranny of my domineering sister' (10.1205-7). From there, they stage an elaborate spectacle faking Geraldine's death in order to get Gartred to come down and admit her love to him upon witnessing what she assumes will be the 'spectacle of blood' and 'tragicke Sceane' (10.1253-4). When the two lovers are finally united at the end of this ruse, Joyce underlines the self-consciously derivative nature of the moments in her exasperated comment that 'heere's the end of an old Song, / Why could not this have been done before I pray?' (10.1315-16). Joyce's 'prosecution of the plot' reveals her ability to recognise and find opportunities to manipulate the theatrical or performative qualities of the city. It is thus suggested that successful mobility within the urban economy depends upon successful spectatorship and recognition of theatrical conventions, as well as performance itself.

The play's cynical commentary on the relationship between the market and urban identity is also reflected in the presence of Sir Lionel Rash. Whilst he seems on the surface to provide a degree of aristocratic and patriarchal stability, he is in fact a symptom of what Ronda Arab identifies as the play's tendency to foreground 'the financial sub-structure of urban status, fashion, and gallantry' (Arab 2021, 174). The play opens with Sir Lionel, a former master mercer, handing over the running of his shop to his prodigal employee, aptly named Spendall, and represents the move as a change from the 'Citty coate' to the 'Court jacket' (1.133-4).

Rather than a reward for virtuous and industrious labour, Sir Lionel's comments on his knighthood imply strongly that he is a so-called 'Thirty-Pound Knight', symptomatic of the early Jacobean 'inflation of honours' which included the opportunity to purchase titles: 'the sword of Knighthood sticks stil upon my shoulders, and I feel the blow in my purse, it has cut two leather bagges asunder; but all's one, honour must be purchac'd' (1.130-3).⁷ Sir Lionel underlines the highly transactional nature of social status in the play, in which 'honour must be purchac'd' (1.133). Sir Lionel's speech takes that premise to something of a rhetorical extreme by imagining that the same sword that knighted him has also cut loose his two money bags. The fact that he is so open about the very transactional nature of the honour he has just received is typical of the play's characteristically cynical outlook on social status. Sir Lionel's descriptions of his ascent to the nobility provide an analogue to the Bubble/Staines plot, with both reflecting the play's tendency to regard rank and status simply as an index of an individual's material resources. The parallelism of the two plots is also reflected in the shared motif of the exchange of coats, with Bubble and Staines's swapping of the blue servants' coat acting as an echo of Sir Lionel's resolve to 'give over my Citty coate, and betake my selfe to the Court jacket' (1.133-4). In both cases, there is a blurring of the literal and the symbolic that draws attention to this society's investment in material display as a marker of status.

The role reversal of Bubble and Staines and the upward mobility of Sir Lionel both act as indicators of the links between material wealth and status in the play. Whilst Sir Lionel may have secured some relative social stability through purchasing the knighthood, the superficiality of the social fabric in the play is indicated through the use of another theatrical feature in the form of the epilogue. The epilogue begins conventionally enough with Sir

⁷ The classic reading of these early Jacobean practices is Stone (1958). Perhaps the most notable stage example of this figure is Sir Petronel Flash in the collaborative *Eastward Ho!* by George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston (1605). For comment on Sir Petronel, see, for example, Howard 2007, 99-101.

Lionel, the most socially distinguished of the characters on stage, opening the speech with the traditional appeal for applause before effectively abandoning the principles of theatrical decorum and relinquishing his appearance of distinction by inviting the other characters on stage to deliver their own appeals: 'But let us know first how these sports delight, / And to these, Gentlemen, each bid good night' (19.2918-19). The remainder of the epilogue is then comprised of a number of the other characters going on to deliver, in turn, their own couplet addressing the theatrical audience. Whilst, on the surface, the epilogue seems to present a façade of social harmony through poetic collaboration, the metatheatrical device is a further sign of the play's slipperiness or cynicism in presenting class distinctions. Perhaps most telling is Staines's contribution: 'That I have cheated through the Play, 'tis true, / But yet I hope, I have not cheated you' (19.2926-7). In an important sense, he hasn't. Staines's speech underlines the very transactional nature of the relationship between audience and performer. In his performative prowess, along with his often predatory deployment of his superior wit against Bubble, Staines has dealt fairly with the audience in delivering an exemplary 'city gallant' promised by the play's title. In a remarkably ironic twist, the dissimulation and trickery practised by Staines become a means of measuring the fair bargain into which the audience has entered. The play concludes, then, with both Staines and the audience receiving returns on their investments. In a similar manner, it is also significant that Bubble is given the last word in the sets of couplets: 'To mirth and laughter henceforth I'll provoke ye, / If you but please to like of *Greenes Tu quoque*' (19.2934-5). We have at this moment a similar merging of performer and character to that which took place during the discussion about visiting the theatre. In this case, Bubble could be breaking character to refer either to the title of the play itself, or the catchphrase for which Greene is becoming known. Either way, applause from the audience involves some acquiescing to the economic situation and the play's determination of the winners and losers.

Applause signals approval both for the actions which have grounded Bubble in his humble social position and for the comic effects of the clown's inept attempts at temporarily impersonating a gentlemen. The ambiguous and dual nature of Bubble's final words also point to the effects of the apparently collaborative epilogue. Would the audience be rewarding the play or the clowning of the individual character? In both cases, the commodified nature of both the clown and the play itself are underlined. Both of them are situated within the often ruthlessly competitive marketplace and the audience are at this moment reminded of their own involvement as consumers in this sphere. Michelle M. Dowd notes that the play's "ends justify the means" approach to its largely unreformed protagonist... suggests that fraud and guile can be one route to financial and social success during a period in which patrilineal inheritance was being transformed by the diversification of commercial endeavors and the increasingly abstract mechanisms of proto-capitalism' (Dowd 2023, 24). By inducing applause, the players and their equivalent characters are highlighting the extent to which their audience is interpolated as consumers in this competitive economy that rewards often underhand and questionable practices.

'Disgrace me on the open stage and bob me off with ne'er a penny': Allusion and Commercial Metatheatre in *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl*

Whereas the print edition of *Greene's Tu Quoque* trades on the theatrical career of the play and the apparent success of the company's clown in his role of Bubble, Robert Taylor's *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl* is framed by the controversial circumstances of its first performance and subsequent suppression. These circumstances are the subject of the opening lines of the prologue, probably composed for the print version:

Our long-time rumoured Hog – so often crossed
By unexpected accidents, and tossed
From one house to another, still deceiving
Many men's expectations, and bequeathing
To some lost labour – is at length got loose...
Hath a knight's licence, and may range at pleasure,
Spite of all those that envy our Hog's treasure (Prol. 1-8).

The play has finally 'got loose' thanks to the licence permitting it to be printed after its amateur performance at Whitefriars on 21 February 1613 was raided and a number of the apprentices acting in the performance were arrested. As commentators have noted, the play was likely suppressed for its satirical attack upon the Lord Mayor, Sir John Swinnerton (Clare 1990, 171-2). The prologue, however, is not merely useful for recovering the circumstances of the play's censorship, as it in fact highlights several considerations relating to the commercial contexts. The play, acted 'divers times' according to its frontispiece, has been 'tossed' from 'one house to another' and has only managed to find a stable home in print thanks to a 'knight's licence' and its entry into the Stationer's Register. The prologue's emphasis upon the play's satirical content – 'Grunting at State affairs, or invecting / Much at our city vices' (11-12) – highlights the commercial riskiness of comedy and hints at the precarious nature of theatrical commerce and the rivalries characterising the 'representation market' both on stage and in print. *Hog* thus represents a distinctive case of an amateur production commenting upon the dynamics of the professional theatre.

The economic aspects of the theatrical experience are also evidenced within the play itself. As well as bearing structural and thematic similarities to Cooke's play, *Hog* also shares that play's implication that the energies of theatricality can be harnessed as vehicles for securing both heteronormative and economic stability. The main 'city' strand of the plot involves an

impoverished gallant, aptly named Haddit, who plans to elope with Rebecca, daughter of Hog the usurer, and abscond with the material wealth her father has accumulated. The play's sub-plot also features an elopement, this time involving Carracus, a young gentleman, and his fiancée, Maria. The action of the sub-plot begins when Carracus's friend, Albert, who is supposed to be assisting in the elopement, takes advantage of both Carracus's lack of punctuality and the darkness of the bedroom by tricking Maria into sleeping with him. Racked with guilt, Albert retreats into the forest where he plans to live a hermit's existence whilst carving penitent verses on the trees; he is followed, unwittingly, by Maria who fakes her own death and retires to the forest disguised as a page; the appearance of Carracus ultimately results in the reconciliation of the three and their return to the city. As these brief summaries suggest, both aspects of Taylor's play are, in an important sense, derivative. The main plot draws heavily upon the conventional 'gallant' plot from city comedies, and the plan for a daughter to escape from her overbearingly acquisitive father bears striking similarities with both Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Similarly, the love-triangle sub-plot follows the familiar trajectory towards redemption characteristic of the popular tragi-comic genre (MacFaul 2011, 27-8). The play is also abundant in allusions of which, as Kermode notes, Shakespeare seems to be the most common target (Kermode 2009, 52-3). The resolution to the sub-plot depends upon familiar theatrical conventions, including Maria's disguise as a male page and Albert's carving of penitent verses into the trees in a manner that burlesques the actions of Orlando in *As You Like It*. The theatricality of these episodes is heightened by the inclusion of a dance of satyrs and the fact that the Young Lord Wealthy, upon seeing his sister Maria beat a hasty retreat from him in her disguise, remarks that 'a is vanished as suddenly as a dumb show' (3.2.12), framing the experience as a decidedly theatrical one.

The resolution to the urban plot also depends upon a particularly elaborate theatrical set-piece initiated by Haddit with the help of a player that involves on-stage flashes of fire and ascents from the trap-door. In this way, the play presents a similar juxtaposition between theatricality and usury and, on the surface, makes a similar implication to Cooke's play that theatricality can counterbalance the negative influences of usury. Whereas the practice is in the background to Cooke's play, Tailor places it at the forefront through the character of Hog. The logic of the name is suggested by Lightfoot's comment that it 'fits him exceeding well, for as a hog in his lifetime is always devouring, and never commodious in aught till his death, even so is he, whose goods at that time may be put to many good uses' (1.1.66-9). David Hawkes highlights Tailor's play as 'a concerted exploration of this image's possibilities' and of the simultaneous view of usurers as 'threadbare misers and gluttonous hogs' (Hawkes 2010, 136). During the interlude that takes place in Hog's bedchamber, Haddit convinces Hog that he is the spirit of Croesus, assisted by two demons, played by his friend Lightfoot and a player, and gulls him into parting with his gold based upon his promise that he can take it to the underworld and convert it into pearl. Haddit uses this overblown theatrical spectacle in order to secure the capital he needs to marry Rebecca and to undercut the influence of Hog. In his final speech, Haddit highlights the factors that apparently justify the trickery he had enacted, asserting that:

We three are happy we have gained much wealth,
And though we have done it by a trick of stealth,
Yet all, I trust, are pleased, and will our ill acquit,
Since it hath saved a soul was hell's by right (5.3.102-5).

If the logic of this justification is to be followed through, Haddit highlights the positive potential for theatricality. Just as the subplot provides an instance in which theatrical allusion (and illusion) appears to contribute to the restoration of heteronormative stability, theatricality

here is seen, on the surface, as a restorative agent for moral and economic stability. Haddit states his use of theatrical energies has led to the restoration of his wealth, as well as putting an end to Hog's damaging usurious practices. By putting an end to the viability of Hog's usury, Haddit introduces a moral element as he insists that his elaborate theatrical interlude 'hath saved a soul was hell's by right' (5.3.105). This intervention, coupled with the uses of theatricality in the subplot, gives the impression that it is a potentially positive and stabilising force that requires, like Cooke's play, an audience's acquiescence to its ends-justify-the-means outlook.

Even if taken at face value, the positivity attached the theatrical interventions relates rather awkwardly to the play's continued underlining of its instability as a source of income and its exposure of the factors that have a persistently adverse effect upon drama as a profession. As we saw from the prologue, factors like censorship and the pressures of rivalry have an impact upon the professional viability of the theatre. Yet Tailor's play also points towards other factors. The Young Lord Wealthy's description of the enraged Hog as one who 'appears more terrible than wildfire at a play' (2.1.26-7) is most likely a reference to the recent destruction of the Globe playhouse during a performance of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* on 29 June 1613 (Kermode 2009, 296). Just as the prologue had complained of the theatrical displacement that was affecting their own company, the reference to the destruction of the Globe further underlines the lack of stability in professional dramatic activity. Furthermore, the fact that the fire at the Globe took place *after* the first controversial performance of Tailor's play means that this reference would have been added as the play was being revised. By doing so, Tailor places the problems affecting his own play (particularly the difficulty of securing a performance space) on a similar footing to those of the more lucrative King's Men company. Even his 'fortunate' professional rivals are not immune from commercial risk.

The most explicit on-stage analysis of the implications of the commercial dimension of the theatre, however, comes in the play's first act when Haddit is visited by a player-sharer, who, it is revealed, has commissioned Haddit to write a theatrical jig in order to capitalise upon what he sees as a quick source of ready income. At the time of *Hog*'s composition, theatrical jigs would commonly be the after-piece, usually a song and dance routine that would follow the main play in the public theatres. As Roger Clegg and Lucie Skeaping point out, such jigs were 'frequently bawdy, sometime libellous, often farcical, and were set to, and accompanied by, popular tunes of the day' (Clegg and Skeaping 2014, 1). Jigs were also the subject of considerable controversy, especially around the time that *Hog* was first performed. Clegg and Skeaping, again, summarise many of the attitudes expressed towards the place of jigs in theatrical culture, noting that:

the antics of the clowns were as vigorously reviled in print as they were applauded in the theatres: they were crude, a vulgar insult to the theatrical art; they drew into the playhouses the lowest sort of people; they turned crowds into mobs; they were disrespectful of authority; and they could be "obscene" in gesture, subject matter and language. And, moreover, playwrights were jealous of their popularity' (Clegg and Skeaping 2014, 28).

In Tailor's play, Haddit's jig focuses upon a seller of St Thomas Onions and Martin Wiggins suggests that it may well be a parody of a lost jig, most probably the one John Taylor, the water poet, refers to as 'the Jig of Garlic, or the Punk's Delight' (Wiggins 2015, 128 and 292). Haddit's jig seems to share similar subject matter judging by the two lines sung by the player: 'And you that delight in trulls and minions / Come buy my four ropes of hard St Thomas Onions' (1.1.136-7). Haddit asserts of his jig that the player will 'find it worth *Meg of Westminster*, though it be but a bare jig' (1.1.112-13), highlighting again the pressure to emulate commercial successes and pointing to a system of 'worth' indexed by theatrical

popularity. Such points are complemented by the player's wish that 'it had but half the taste of garlic' and Haddit's subsequent assertion that 'Garlic stinks to this' (1.1.115).

Haddit makes similarly bold claims about the potentially broad appeal of his jig and its apparent ability to suits the demands of a broad range of theatregoers, stating that 'what I have writ is both witty to the wise and pleasing to the ignorant, for you shall have those laugh at it far more heartily that understand it not than those that do' (1.1.130-2). These assertions follow the player's reservations about the possibility that there might be some 'dark sentence in't' (1.1.127), or obscure matter that the audience will not understand. He further cautions that 'our audience commonly are very simple, idle-headed people, and if they should hear what they understand not, they would quite forsake our house' (1.1.127-9). However, there are numerous implications that the player, clearly an actor-shareholder, is not in the best position to judge matters of taste. He does not understand one of Haddit's Latin proverbs and, after having pointing out the faultiness in Haddit's metre, is convinced by his response that 'The dismembering of a rhyme to bring in reason shows the more efficacy in the writer' (1.1.140-1). Haddit later assures Rebecca that they can trust the player to participate in their plot to gull Hog if they 'give him a speech 'a understands not' (3.3.19). In this way, the play continually underlines the player's inability to judge the value of the material his company will trade.

The system of value is further suggested by the negotiations over Haddit's fee for writing the jig. The player initially offers Haddit the sum of £1 (or 'a brace of angels') 'besides much drink of free cost if it be liked' (1.1.148-9). Haddit, however, objects that this fee is far too low and warns the player that 'if you do so juggle, look to't. Shrove Tuesday is at hand, and I have some acquaintances with bricklayers and plasterers' (1.1.154-5), implying the provocation of social disorder which points to recent concerns and controversies surrounding the jig. In 1612, for example, a General Session of the Peace in Middlesex heard a complaint

that ‘certayne lewde Jigges songes and daunces used and accustomed at the playhouse called the Fortune in Goulding lane’ were becoming a magnet for ‘cutt-purses and other lewde and ill disposed persons in great multitudes’ (Gurr 1987, 225-6). In contrast to his earlier claim to be writing a more socially-levelling entertainment, Haddit exploits fears about mobilised working class violence and the threat of disorder which such entertainments were apparently supposed to contain. In response, the player tries to calm Haddit by doubling his initial fee and offering him a complimentary ‘box for your friend at a new play, although I procure the hate of all my company’ (1.1.174-5), presumably for forfeiting such a potentially lucrative source of income. It is unclear, ultimately, whether it is the threat of violence or the potential loss of the jig itself that prompts this offer. West suggests that ‘jigs must have seemed nearly as important as the play to at least some of their early audiences’ and that they continued to be part of the overall theatrical experience (West 2009, 202). John Astington also suggests that jigs could have ‘attracted a second or supplementary audience, presumably at cheap prices, to see and hear the afterpieces only’ (Astington 2014, 109). The play, then, presents a mixed impression of the jig as both a vital constituent of the commercial viability of the theatre and as a container of social disorder.

Taken together, these points amount to an ultimately ambivalent outlook towards the theatre. Through the resolution of its two plot strands, Tailor’s play can be seen as representing an idealised view of theatricality as an apparently positive force and a potential vehicle for social and economic stability. This positive outlook, however, requires evading questions about the end-justify-the-means approaches to these resolutions. It is also at odds with various commercial realities of the professional theatres voiced by the play, particularly the potential instabilities, fluctuations in public taste, and rivalries, along with the attentions of the censor, that threaten to undermine its viability as a professional enterprise. The play’s adoption of a

peculiarly commercial metatheatre provides a lens for scrutinising the tensions between these conflicting views of theatricality and its situation in a similarly vexed consumer economy.

Conclusion

There have been two key objectives for this article, the first of which was to shed further light on the material and commercial dimension of early modern metadrama. As we have seen, focusing on the two plays provides numerous examples of commercial metatheatre, which goes beyond simply drawing attention to the artificiality or the representative strategies of the production. To address this first objective, I have been building upon critical work that has drawn attention to the relationships between comedy and the ‘representation market’, particularly work that has emphasised what Zucker calls ‘the materiality of cultural competency and wit in the theater and in the city at large’ (Zucker 2011, 55; see also Munro 2010), as well as Agnew’s analysis of the transformation of *theatrum mundi* trope ‘from a simple, otherworldly statement on human vanity into a complex, secular commentary on the commodity world’ (Agnew 1986, 12). Both of the case studies I have examined are notable for the very explicit and direct ways in which they voice and represent their relationship to the business concerns of early modern theatricality. Rather than being the province of the ‘great playwright’ and a hallmark of literary exceptionalism, as Richard Hornby contends (1986, 32), use of metatheatrical devices can also relate, as I have shown, to the material and commercial contexts against the which the play was produced. It can, therefore, be viewed not as a sign of literary value, but as a marker of concerns around the commercial value of the piece and its vexed position in the ‘representation market’.

My second objective has been to discuss the implications of the self-conscious theatricality in relation to the urban consumer economy, thereby contributing further to the rich vein of

scholarship on city comedy and urban economics. In both plays, theatrical devices and conventions are employed to recover fortunes lost to usurers by impoverished urban gallants. On the surface, this highlights theatrical trickery and dissimulation as a positive corrective force, recovering the ill-gotten gains of usury. However, any correction is complicated by the instances of commercial metatheatre that make explicit the place of these plays within a competitive cultural marketplace and, by extension, in an urban consumer marketplace. Whilst theatricality and acquisitiveness may appear as antagonistic or even morally polarised forces, the moments of commercial metatheatre in fact remind the audience that they are cohabitants; both of them operate within and depend upon the very same urban economy that is represented in these plays. The comedic conclusions of the two plays – involving both the outwitting of economic rivals and overcoming the obstacles to marriages – involve the protagonists' successful negotiation of this economy, along with their abilities to deploy theatrical conventions. By applauding their efforts, an audience signals simultaneously their approval of these actions and the commercial viability of the dramatic venture for its consumers. Through these case studies, I have further highlighted the rich potential exhibited specifically by the city comedy genre – with its attendant themes of debt, credit, and competition as core characteristics of urban economic agency – and the opportunities to continue the critical conversations around how productions in this genre can act as an important vehicle for these reflections on the interdependence between theatrical and urban commerce.

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