

and absolutely other is now reconstituted as a sign of sameness and contiguity because of the traditional signification of the kiss as a mark of equality or near equality. Certainly this kiss is and remains a very public act that resonates through a variety of social and theological contexts. But the way in which it is staged and performed here can help us see the ways in which private desire helps shape, and is in turn shaped by, such public performances.

Therefore, while I agree with Gardiner's statement that "the line between public and private was deeply etched in the Middle Ages," I would want to add, "but no more so than that line is in our own time." Attempts to police such apparently stable boundaries, however vigilant, cannot erase the private and institutional forces (like the ones I try to describe in *The Canterbury Tales*) that cross, recross, and blur them. We therefore should be wary of the desire to view the Middle Ages as a kind of mythical site of discursive purity whose lines are naturally and deeply etched in stone. This desire to stand objectively apart from engagement in the modern debates we are always already part of can produce its own, dangerous kind of discursive unconsciousness. Impeding that necessary denaturalizing of the past we study, such an effort thereby reduces the ability of our analysis of the past to denaturalize the present we inhabit and so to make the present too, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's phrase, "less destructively presumable" (*Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley: U of California P, 1990, 48).

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### A Renaissance Scene-Stealer

To the Editor:

Long before William Kemp danced from London to Norwich, this clownish Renaissance actor, portrayed in Max W. Thomas's "*Kemps Nine Daies Wonder: Dancing Carnival into Market*" (107 [1992]: 511–23), may have been the object of Robert Greene's scorn in the epilogue to *Groats-Worth of Wit* (1592). As a playwright Greene would have been angered by this kind of clown, who jiggled and sang and shook the stage and ad-libbed ribald lines of his own and who was a "Johannes factotum" in general, as Thomas notes, "prone to deviating from the script to aggrandize his part" (515). Greene's deathbed epithets for self-promoting actors seem justified by Kemp's later publicity stunt. Greene calls the type "apes,"

"puppets," "cleaving burrs," "antics garnished in our colors," "rude grooms," "peasants," and "painted monsters," the worst of whom has a "tiger's heart," is so conceited that he thinks he is the only "shake-scene" in the country, and is an "upstart crow."

Shakespeare's Hamlet likewise complains about the "clowns" who speak "more than is set down for them" and who "set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh," even while "some necessary question of the play be then to be considered." Using somewhat less derogatory epithets than Greene, Hamlet nevertheless sees such clowning as "villainous" and showing "a most pitiful ambition in the Fool that uses it" (3.2). Shakespeare would seem to have agreed with Greene that the disruptive actor who believed that his own bombastic blank verse was superior to the playwright's verse was a self-deluded fool. Shakespeare himself perhaps encouraged the replacement of Kemp in 1599 in the Lord Chamberlain's Company by Robert Armin, who, according to Thomas, "emphasized verbal and conceptual dexterity" in contrast to "Kemp's physical knavishness" (511).

In "The Crow Sits upon the Wall," a broadside ballad of 1592, signed "R.T."—Richard Tarlton, according to Joseph Lilly, in *Black-Letter Ballads and Broad-sides* (London, 1867)—the refrain urges men to please all women, no matter what they ask: "Please one and please all. / . . . So pypeth the crowe, / Sitting upon a wall." In a 1972 Johnson facsimile reprint, the ballad is combined with *Tarltons Jestes* and *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder*, indicating that the ballad was associated with Tarlton and Kemp and making it seem logical that if Tarlton, who died in 1588, engaged in crowlike pantomime while jiggling and improvising verses for the ballad, Kemp, who took over after the great clown's death, would be Greene's "upstart crow." In the prologue to *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder*, Kemp addresses the "witless beetle-heads," the "impudent generation of Ballad-makers and their coherents," as "notable Shakerags." If Kemp's vitriol in regard to writers is typical of his onstage performance, he seems a likely target of Greene's insults.

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### Unheard Melodies

To the Editor:

I was pleased to see Marshall Brown's article "Unheard Melodies: The Force of Form" (107 [1992]: