

Singing Simpkin and Other Bawdy Jigs: Musical Comedy on the Shakespearean Stage.**Scripts, Music & Context**, by Roger Clegg & Lucie Skeaping, with an appendix of dance

instructions by Anne Daye, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2014, 340 pp., £30

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Clegg and Skeaping's monograph is the first dedicated study of the early modern jig in nearly a century, following from C. R. Baskervill (1929) and Johannes Bolte's German study of the English sung comedy on the Continent (1893). This is not only a thoroughly researched study with an informed edition of jigs created between the 1590s and the 1660s; Clegg and Skeaping are practitioners with a rich experience in staging jigs and that perspective has significant positive bearing on the book's qualities. The volume comprises an authoritative introduction 'A history of the dramatic jig' (1–65) with portraits of the prominent jig-makers (Tarlton, Kemp); meticulously annotated texts and possible tunes of nine jigs (66–250); an essay on 'Staging the jigs' with a view to the text, music and dance (251–295); and a practical appendix of 'Dance instruction' (296–311) contributed by Anne Daye. The book is more than a sum of its parts: it is a very important contribution to the understanding of the diversity of early modern English theatre practice not only in London but also elsewhere in Britain and on the Continent, complementing the researches of Lucy Munro, Tiffany Stern, Clare McManus, Natasha Korda, Teresa Grant, Gabriel Egan, Andrew Gurr, Sally-Beth MacLean, Lawrence Manly, Scott McMillin; in respect of the jig, Will West and A. E. Green; and of course the Lost Plays Database project.

Clegg and Skeaping trace continental variants of the extant jigs and provide a much desired update on Bolte's research (though I would be more cautious of Bolte's assumptions) and also contextualise the English musical comedy with French farces (*soties*) and the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. While comedic similarities between the jig and the Italian comedy are

pointed out, a striking omission is the madrigal comedy – a particularly relevant genre given the rivalry of the English and Italian comedians in the regions of central and northwestern Europe throughout the era. The international context could be a productive perspective even beyond the extant textual variants: Bolte posits that ‘Dialogue songs, in particular conversations between lovers, had, of course, long been known in Germany’ (Bolte cited 51) as well as in other European countries; combined with the popularity of the Boccaccian erotic tale, a transnational perspective of the genre could be elaborated even further. Another genre significantly bears on the jig: the popular tradition of dialogues of Solomon and his fool Marcolf – one of the forebears of the early modern clown. Clegg and Skeaping cite Marsh on fashionable European musical elements that ‘reached the streets of London via instrumental music played at court’ (Marsh cited 267); I would argue that there were other transmission routes than English vertical social mobility. Similarly early modern performance practice in music could be enriched by research on English *players (Instrumentist)* in Germany, eg. by Arne Spohr (*‘How chances it they travel?’: Englische Musiker in Dänemark und Norddeutschland 1579–1630*, Wiesbaden, 2009), a relevant point for the early modern labour division among the English actors and the musicians.

The jig – in any of its form, be it song, dance or sung dramatic dialogue – was not only an afterpiece of the main title of the day. Its social and artistic interactions were more complex as Clegg and Skeaping evidence in detail. I would personally be skeptical about the significance of the distinction and emulation between high culture of the ‘serious plays’ and the popular culture of the jig; that smacks somewhat of nineteenth-century sociology and ethnography. Roger Chartier (in *A History of Reading in the West*, 1999) argues for a qualified understanding of popular culture as nonelite; similarly Scott C. Shershow in his *Puppets and ‘Popular’ Culture* (1995). In other words, the bawdy jig doesn’t need apologising for. Although Lord Chamberlain’s/King’s Men are believed to be prejudicial

against the jig (23–24, 46–47), their playwright clearly took no objections at the subject matter: one of the most revealing connections that Skegg and Skeaping don't spell out but facilitate is the shared ground between the jig and Shakespeare's plays. Will Kemp's jig *Singing Simpkin* (c1595) treats the same material as Falstaff's basket episode in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597) – and Kemp played both Falstaff and the tricked would-be adulterer clown Simpkin. The bed trick of *Francis' New Jig* (earliest MS dated 1600–1603) is identical to that in *All's Well that Ends Well* (c1604–1607), including the token of the ring (an earlier version of the jig of 1595 provides an interesting context for the Portia's ring token of *The Merchant of Venice*); there is also similarity between the clownish constable in *Fools Fortune* (1621) and Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598). Of course this is not to argue that one served as a source for the other; that would be a very limited understanding of the creative process as such. *Fools Fortune* and *The Libel of Michael Steel* were shaming, libellous jigs made to mock members of the community – perhaps early version of what M. A. Katritzky discusses as the Skimmington or *charivari* (in Matthews-Greco's *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery in Europe*, Ashgate, 2014: 59–82). While these two jigs' provenance was in particular events (181–185, 199–204), I believe it is erroneous to see them as their sources; the plots of these two jigs are universal comedic fare. While these shaming jigs apparently have no identified foreign variants, other types of dramatic creation need to be taken into account. So *The Jig of St Denys' Ghost*, though it lacks a direct foreign version, explores the same *theatergrams* (to use G. L. Clubbs' notion) or structural patterns as Japanese farce *kyogen*, in particular the farce called *Shimizu* (Spring Water) which also features a makeshift ghost, a clown eventually discovered and beaten out by his master.

Such comparative drama perspectives are perhaps the next step to undertake in the research on the early modern jig. Clegg and Skeaping's brilliant book is an inspiration incentive.

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