

Shakespeare and the Drama of *Capital*

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“Dogberry and Verges with the Watch”
Henry William Bunberry, ca. late 18th C.

In the conclusion of his introduction to *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx writes the following paragraph about the relationship between the concept of childhood and its relation to art:

A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child's naiveté, and must he not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? Does not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children? Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm? There are unruly children and precocious children. Many of the old peoples belong to this category. The Greeks were normal children. The charm of their art for us is not in contradiction to the undeveloped stage of society on which it grew. [It] is its result, rather, and is inextricably bound up, rather, with the fact that the unripe social conditions under which it arose, and could alone arise, can never return.

(111)

Marx deploys the metaphor of childhood to highlight a disjunction inherent in one's relationship to art and culture of past eras. One views one's self as the child of the periods that have come before. For example, British culture claims to be descended from Greek and Roman culture and thus its art attempts to "reproduce its truth at a higher stage."¹ Marx, however, maintains that the conditions under which ancient artistic endeavors were undertaken remain the production of inimitable social conditions; thus, attempts to reproduce those truths are futile.

For Marx, this disjunction between past and present cultures possesses a kind of use-value, which centers on the word "charm." The distance between the two cultures enables the naiveté with which Marx's "man" finds joy. Part of this charm, according to Marx, stems from the fact that the undeveloped societies often produce the art which future societies come to value; that is, just as "certain significant forms within the realm of the arts are possible only at an undeveloped stage of artistic development," certain forms of art are also only possible at an undeveloped stage of societal development (110). With the advent of technology and developed society, what happens to artistic expression? Does this "charm" simply invoke a rustic nostalgia for a mythological past destroyed by the printing press and a culture that does not rely on its own artistic output for its foundation? Marx tells us that the crux of understanding the role of ancient art – rather than hinging upon the understanding of the role of "forms of social development" – relies upon the fact that "they [Greek arts and epic] still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model" (111). The use-value of ancient art can first be found in its ability to provide pleasure. The second use-value, and the one with which I concern myself for the majority of this article, is the usefulness of an object (art) that is both a "norm" and an "unattainable model" in expressing the social conditions of Marx's present day society. Art from previous eras has a use-value for Marx precisely because it is alien to the social conditions of the system of capitalism while remaining "inextricably bound" – through the childish attempts of man to recapture the past – to the modes of expression that are used to

¹ In her analysis of Shakespeare's use of classical Latin works, Heather James writes that "[t]he Troy legend . . . became a privileged topos for nationalistic endeavors in early modern Europe" (James 13-14). An example of a historical account claiming Britain's ancestral links to Troy can be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.

produce representations of those social conditions. Art is both familiar and unfamiliar. Marx capitalizes on this paradox through his own use of art to represent the incongruities of capital itself.

Marx's discussion of art in the introduction to the *Grundrisse* hints twice that the author will be discussing Shakespeare as one of his examples, only to omit this discussion in the body of the section.² While the focus of his discussion of art centers on the ancient art of the Greeks, Marx – through his invocation of Shakespeare – evokes a specter that haunts not only the *Grundrisse*, but all of his works: the specter of Shakespeare. Shakespeare serves as a looming presence over Marx's body of work. Shakespeare's plays operate as a cultural register to which Marx continually returns in order to find expression for his theories of political philosophy. Shakespeare's characters become the model for Marx's stereotypical capitalists, politicians, and, somewhat problematically, his proletariat. My invocation of the term "specter" serves to simultaneously evoke Jacques Derrida's work on Marx and to call attention to the Shakespearean specter which haunts not only Derrida's work but much of the critical history of Marx and Shakespeare: the character of Hamlet.³ My inquiry, however, proposes to depart from this trend in order to examine the ways that Shakespeare's own work operates simultaneously as an integral part of the British mythography and therefore as a cultural "norm," and as an "unattainable model" of a cultural legacy no longer available post-Industrial Revolution. This disjunction, articulated in the *Grundrisse* and present throughout Marx's work, provides Marx with a crucial system of linguistic and cultural reference through which he attempts to convey the problematic system of capital over the course of his career. Marx returns to certain key figures in Shakespeare to express the plight of the proletariat, the hypocrisy of politicians, and the greed of capitalists. For example, Marx refers to the mechanicals – the uneducated laborers attempting to perform a play for the royals – from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Jaques from *As You Like It*, Hamlet, and the title character from *Timon of Athens*. This article

² The most blatant example of this is when he states, "[L]et us take e.g. the relation of Greek art and then of Shakespeare to the present time," and subsequently does not consider Shakespeare in his argument (110).

³ See Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); Gayatri Spivak's "Marx after Derrida," in *Philosophical Approaches to Literature: New Essays on Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Texts*, ed. William Cain (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1984); and "Shakespeare after Derrida and Marx: *Death in Venice* and the Utopia of the Open Society," in *Arcadia* (1996, 31: 155-164).

focuses on a figure often overlooked when considering Shakespeare and Marx: Dogberry, the incoherent constable from *Much Ado About Nothing*. Dogberry, a character who at once represents the law and exists in opposition to the society whom that law would seek to protect, offers a lens through which Marx is able to depict the unintelligibility of capitalism through a series of intelligible examples and tropes. The main focus of this article is *Capital, volume one*, as it is in *Capital* where we see the culmination of much of Marx's theorization of his critiques of political economy. As this article demonstrates, Marx's invocation of Dogberry displays capital's façade through dramatic typecasting; however, these characters also demonstrate, through this (mis)understanding of the way language operates to support and manipulate hegemonic structures, the cracks and fissures that appear as the drama of capital unfolds.

Shakespearean drama serves as a most appropriate vehicle for Marx's expression of the workings of the system of capital and for his representations of the types of people who construct the system. Marx uses theatrical language to discuss the social roles that people assume under a system of capital. These roles, however, involve a shift from the idealized image of a relationship between a money-owner and a person with labor power as one that is harmonious and mutually beneficial to one that more fittingly represents the working relationship between these two entities under a system of capital, as Marx describes in the end of part two of *Capital*:

When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities, which provides the 'free-trader *vulgaris*' with his views, his concepts and the standard by which he judges the society of capital and wage-labour, a certain changes takes place, or so it appears, in the physiognomy of our *dramatis personae*. He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning. (280)

The use of the term *dramatis personae* not only invokes the theatricality involved in the roles of the worker and capitalist, it also shows how – with a simple changing of a few

terms and conditions – the parameters of a capitalist economy display the dramas that it plays out as a more menacing genre. This change in the physiognomy of *the dramatis personae* is grounded in theatricality. Marx importantly qualifies the changes with the phrase “or so it appears,” highlighting this change not as one of substance, but rather as one of appearance. The performance that is the capitalist economy is one that involves the changing of *dramatis personae*, but still requires actors to play those parts. Hence, one might infer that, in order to unmask what capital is, one has to simply take off the costumes to reveal the players underneath, much like one would remove a female player’s wig on the stage of Shakespeare’s England to reveal the boy actor underneath.

Attempts to unveil the *dramatis personae* under these shifting social roles proves difficult in *Capital*, and theorizing these attempts finds a useful, if unusual, analogue in the problematic epistemology of the moment of revelation on the early modern stage of Shakespeare. Until 1660 in England, male actors performed all speaking parts on the public stage. Shakespeare’s plays often explored and exploited the gender confusion for comic purposes, having male actors playing female characters who cross-dress as male characters, setting the stage for romantic imbroglios. In the “unveiling” of these “males” as “females,” the playwright winks at the audience, making them complicit in the problematic exposure of a gendered identity that is a construction of cultural mores. When considering this analogue of unveiling *dramatis personae* of capital, what do these exposures come to mean, and for whom do they have meaning?

The “players” in a capitalist system, according to Marx’s proposed theory of the perpetuation of *dramatis personae*, would simply don another mask because its current “role” was no longer viable. The players would evolve to fit this new, but never ultimate, understanding of the capitalist system. The “audience,” whether early modern playgoers or readers of Marx’s work, would experience a kind of rupture of perception, but that rupture would have no frame of reference to refer to outside of the system. Therefore, to “take off the mask” of capital is an impossibility of perception. Much like Althusser’s concept of the Ideological State Apparatus, where “individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects” and thus “individuals are always-already subjects,” the frame of reference for one implicated in a capitalist system cannot refer outside of itself without “gesturing towards nothing” (Althusser 164; Sedinger 74). Here I borrow

from Tracey Sedinger's work on representation and crossdressing on the early modern stage, which I believe can be usefully applied here to discuss theatricality and representation in terms of Marx's concept of *dramatis personae*. Sedinger writes:

At the moment of revelation, I would argue the link between perception and knowledge is sundered – what one sees is no longer consonant with what one knows – and the spectator is left to elaborate a knowledge based on a representation without a determinate relation to the object represented. When the crossdresser reveals him- or herself as a crossdresser, the mimetic space is ruptured. . . . At this moment the spectator experiences a representation that, as representation, gestures toward nothing. . . . Rather, for an indeterminate moment the spectator experiences a representation that necessarily gestures beyond itself, but the thing-in-itself that is presumed to lie behind or beyond the representation is nonexistent. (74)

The “moment of revelation” does not and cannot truly reveal what lies “underneath” a representation on the stage due to the problem of the spectator being a part of the system that constitutes the theatrical world. To achieve an understanding of capital, one would have to recognize the modes of exploitation and the masks that make this exploitation visible. To understand that these masks are the visible representation of the exploitative capitalist is a process similar to understanding that there are boy actors that play females on Shakespeare's stage. To ask what is underneath either mask, however, is to ask for a knowledge that has lost its frame of reference for both the “player” and “audience.” Thus, the use of *dramatis personae* is not only essential for capital itself; it is also crucial for Marx's efforts to show how capital works. Shakespeare's cast of characters offer Marx a useful cross-section of economic, social, and cultural figures from which Marx can create his own representation of the drama of capital. But, just as Marx is careful not to oversimplify the capitalist system, we must examine carefully the masks that each of these characters wears in order to determine the various roles that they play for Marx in his works.

Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* illustrates, rather emphatically, that things are seldom what they seem. The play emphasizes masquerade, role-playing, and

theatricality as means through which the characters interact with and understand the world. Shakespeare employs myriad and intertwining plotlines both borrowed – from sources ranging from *Troilus and Cressida* to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* – and invented, in creating his comedic work. Upon returning from a military campaign, Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon, and his men arrive in the town of Messina, and are invited to stay by the governor, Leonato. His fellow soldiers, Claudio and Benedick, accompany Don Pedro and his treacherous – yet supposed repentant – bastard brother, Don John. Romantic entanglements ensue: Claudio falls for Hero, Leonato's daughter, and Don John woos her in Claudio's name. The quarreling Beatrice, Leonato's niece, and Benedick, a confirmed bachelor, are tricked into falling in love with each other although they have expressed nothing previously but mutual detestation. Love and romance bloom, but Don John – proving himself a stereotypical early modern bastard son – disrupts these plots with mischievous glee.

Don John's treachery stems from his role as a self-proclaimed villain, and he attempts several times to foil the happiness of others. These plans focus on destroying the impending wedding of Claudio to Hero by proving her unchaste. This plan works, and Claudio jilts her at the altar, believing he has seen her the previous night with a man in her bedroom. In order to provide time to prove her innocent, Hero is proclaimed dead. When Claudio learns later that Don John has duped him, he is told that he will marry Hero's cousin instead. Only at the altar is Claudio told that the "real" Hero lives and that he will be marrying her.

Much Ado About Nothing comes very close to being a tragedy. The devious plot is unveiled only because of the interference of Dogberry, an inept constable famous for his malapropisms, and the members of his watch. They overhear Don John's men discussing how Claudio has been tricked, and, although they have no comprehension of the content of the discussion, they take the men into custody. Dogberry and his men are the "shallow fools" who are able to expose a truth that remains incomprehensible to them. The happy ending of the play is restored and Claudio and Hero are reunited, but only through the actions of the inept members of the watch. The significance of the watch's discovery of the truth to an understanding of Marx's *dramatis personae* of *Capital* is discussed below.

Semblances, duplicitous meanings, and masks comprise the bulk of what constitutes the concerns of the characters in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Despite Don John's claims that "I cannot hide what I am," he and the rest of the characters in the play spend most of their time doing just that: they are deceitful, manipulative, and thrive on performance (1.3.10).⁴ Don Pedro poses as Claudio to win the hand of Hero for Claudio, Beatrice and Benedick's emotions are transformed from mutual detestation to adoration through the antics set in motion by Don Pedro, and Don John – the play's self-identified "plain-dealing villain" – wreaks havoc when he convinces Don Pedro and Claudio that Hero has been unfaithful through a bait-and-switch tactic (1.3.25). Shakespeare may attempt to delineate between "good" and "bad" versions of masking and dissembling through Don John's overt statements of his role as villain, but the play's structure offers a more complex view of the ways in which masks and deceptions operate in Messina.

The end of *Much Ado About Nothing* quickly, and somewhat problematically, cleans up quite a large mess. In *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, Jean Howard discusses how the play's tidy ending – the truth is exposed, Claudio and Hero (alive again) are reunited, Beatrice and Benedick are made to confess their love, and Don John is captured – serves to reinstitute and reaffirm the patriarchal hierarchy as it "relegitimizes theatricality as the vehicle for the exercise, by aristocratic males, of power" by eradicating the threat of dissembling bastards and, to some extent, the antics of women such as Beatrice by marrying them off (69). Howard's primary concern is here is a feminist critique of theatricality as a patriarchal paradigm; but her study provides a useful prologue to additional consequences of a hierarchy based upon illusion and theatricality. The play ends tidily with the "truth" of Hero's virtue being revealed, but Howard is less convinced, writing: "In several obvious ways the ending seeks to affirm the 'naturalness' of a hierarchical, male-dominated social order and to treat challenges to that order, and to the privileges of its beneficiaries, as mere illusions or temporary aberrations" (69). While Howard's assertion regarding the recuperative efforts at the end of the play offers an insightful and useful way to read the conclusion, these attempts to restore the hierarchy should also be considered in the context of the play's emphasis on

⁴ All references to Shakespeare's plays will be from *The Norton Shakespeare* and will be cited within the text by act, scene, and line number.

theatricality as a *modus operandi* for all of the characters. If the play legitimates theatricality through establishing Don Pedro as a master of revels figure, it would not seem possible to be able to discern between “mere illusions” and the “natural hierarchical order.” If the play advocates any philosophy regarding theatricality and social order, it should take into account the fact that, when everyone is acting, the roles meted out at the end are “temporary aberrations” rather than an absolute hegemonic structure. Howard’s use of the term “naturalness” in quotation marks, while potentially stemming from her book’s feminist critique of patriarchal ideology in early modern culture, offers an entryway into examining the ways in which Shakespeare includes a critique of the structure and culture of the society of Messina’s *dramatis personae*.

In her writings on *Much Ado About Nothing*, Howard refers to the characters of Dogberry and Verges as “God’s naturals” who “intuitively know a thief despite misunderstanding utterly his actual language” (60). As the character who reveals the “truth” in this play, Dogberry has been seen as one who can see through the illusion because of his inability to comprehend the idea that things may not be what they seem. As a representative of the law, however, Dogberry’s role as a constable in reestablishing order renders him indisputably one of the “players” – albeit not a very influential one – in the hegemonic structure of Messina. Just as Howard places suspicion on the “natural” order of the patriarchy at the end of the play, similar pressure can be placed on Howard’s own use of the term “naturals” to refer to Dogberry and Verges. Does Dogberry represent the hierarchical order; or, does his inability to understand the system of which he is a part provide him with a special role that exists simultaneously inside and outside of this hierarchy? How does his ability to reveal – reveal and not understand – the “truth” situate him in the world of *Much Ado About Nothing*? Moreover, how does an understanding of Dogberry’s character in the play facilitate a reading of Dogberry as Marx employs him? Specifically, I am interested in the way in which the idea of “naturalness” comes into play when Marx employs the character of Dogberry in *Capital*. Before I do so, however, I will provide some background information on Marx’s relationship with Shakespeare and, in particular, the character of Dogberry.

Marx’s love of Shakespeare was long-standing. He could recite Shakespeare before he could actually speak English, and he instilled that love of Shakespeare in his

family (Padover 51, 635). When he moved to London, Marx read Shakespeare every day. On Marx's reading of Shakespeare, Franz Mehring wrote:

After Marx had become permanently domiciled in London, English literature took first place, and the tremendous figure of Shakespeare dominated the field, in fact the whole family practiced what amounted practically to a Shakespearean cult. (Baxandall and Morawski 1973)⁵

Also, according to Peter Stallybrass, "towards the end of Marx's life, Shakespeare play-readings were held at Marx's house by a group who called themselves the Dogberry Club" (20).

Throughout Marx and Engels' writings, Shakespearean figures like Shylock, Thersites, Puck, and Dogberry serve as often-cited references. In the *Condition of the Working-Class in England*, Engels, writing about the imprisonment of coal miners, states "so it went on for a time until these Dogberries came to have some respect for the miners" (542). In a letter to the *New-York Daily Tribune* in 1859, Marx depicts one Lord Elgin as nodding "assent in the same way that Dogberry nodded assent to the suggestions of the sexton" (*Works* 16.523). These two examples demonstrate Marx and Engels' employment of Dogberry as a rather superficial representation of his job description. Dogberry, as a constable, represents the law, and as such exists as the part of the institution against which the proletariat (the miners, for example) are struggling. In this line of interpretation, the uses of Dogberry's figure becomes little more than caricature, a theory expanded upon by R.S. White, who asserts:

Marx uses the bumbling constable of *Much Ado About Nothing* as his "prototype" for a living person...In most of these uses of Shakespearean characters, Marx is partly constructing a literary context in which to place a living person, but more pertinently, he is quite consciously, in his own word, "alienating" (or "estranging") people in order that they can be more effectively mocked. (97)

⁵ Quoted in Peter Stallybrass' article "Well grubbed, old mole": Marx, *Hamlet*, and the (un)fixing of representation," in *Marxist Shakespeares*, ed. Jean Howard.

White's assessment of Shakespeare's use of the figure of Dogberry certainly falls in line with one of the uses of art discussed in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*: by alienating people with an artform that is both a "norm" and an "unattainable model," Marx demonstrates another level on which individuals may be ridiculed and/or critiqued. White's use of the term "prototype," however, draws attention to what I believe is an oversimplification of Marx's understanding and deployment of Dogberry's character, which I will explore by looking at Dogberry's appearance in *Capital* as well as an examination of Dogberry's destabilizing presence in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

At the end of the first chapter of part one of *Capital, volume I*, Marx critiques economists who claim that "the use-value of material objects belong to them independently of their material properties, while their value, on the other hand, forms a part of them as objects" which is in contradiction to Marx's own claim that "[s]ince exchange-value is a definite social manner of expressing the labour bestowed on a thing, it can have no more natural content than has, for example, the rate of exchange" (177, 176). Marx continues his critique, stating:

What confirms them in this view is the peculiar circumstance that the use-value of a thing is realized without exchange, i.e. in the direct relation between the thing and man, while inversely, its value is realized only in exchange, i.e. in a social process. Who would not call to mind at this point the advice given by the good Dogberry to the night-watchmen Seacoal?

"To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune; but reading and writing comes by nature." (177)

Marx's invocation of Dogberry, read in a straight-forward manner, highlights the incongruities present in the ideas of both the economist and Dogberry: just as exchange-value has nothing to do with the "natural content" of an object, reading and writing do not "come by nature." Aligning the economists with the "bumbling constable" of *Much Ado*, Marx renders their logic of theorizing exchange-value as an innate characteristic of an object even more absurd than simply letting his phrasing of their methodology stand on its own, in accordance with White's assessment of Dogberry's function. A closer look

at the scene from which Marx takes his quote as well as investigation of Dogberry's role in the play as a whole, however, shows a more complex picture of Marx's deployment of this awkward figure of the law.

In Act 3, Scene 3 of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare introduces the constable Dogberry and his companions on the watch. Constables in England were normally an elected position, with eligibility requirements tending to be an attachment to a household or tenement. Dogberry thus would be considered a bourgeois politician in Marx's England (Spinrad 162-164).⁶ The section of the scene Marx selects involves Dogberry determining the best man to be the constable while Dogberry is away from the watch. Although Dogberry himself cannot read and write, he selects George Seacoal because of these particular skills. The interaction is as follows:

DOGBERRY: First, who think you the most desertless man to be Constable?

SECOND WATCHMAN: Hugh Oatcake, sir, or George Seacoal, for they can read and write.

DOGBERRY: Come hither, neighbor Seacoal, God hath blest you with a good name. To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune, but to write and read comes by nature.

FIRST WATCHMAN: Both which, Master Constable —

DOGBERRY: You have. I knew it would be your answer. Well, for your favour, sir, why give God thanks, and make no boast of it. And for your writing and reading, let that appear when there is no need of such vanity. You are thought here to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch, therefore bear you the lantern. This is your charge: you shall comprehend all vagrom men. You are to bid any man stand, in the Prince's name. (3.3.8-23)

⁶ While the play is set in Italy, Shakespeare's use of foreign locales often represented a thinly veiled England and thus we can look at the role of English constables to get a sense of Dogberry's character.

Dogberry establishes himself as a creative wordsmith in his first appearance in the play, using “desertless” for deserving, “senseless” for sensible, “comprehend” for apprehend, and “vagrom” for vagrant, as the reader is inevitably informed in modern editions of the play. And while this may be obvious wordplay performed for the amusement of the audience, what would happen if we were to take Dogberry literally? Oatcake was not elected constable and is thus desertless of the post, and, indeed, none of the watch possesses much sense. Dogberry, asking the watch to “comprehend all vagrom men,” indicates that in order to apprehend a vagrant, one must be able to identify them first. What is both amusing and true about this statement is that, senseless as these men may be, they are the only ones in the play that are able to comprehend the plots of the villains, and in doing so, apprehend them.

Taking Dogberry at his word is more than a defense of an illiterate character: Dogberry’s entire mode of operation involves the literal meaning of things. To identify a thief, he tells his watch to “let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company” (3.3.54-55). Moreover, his allegiance to literal meaning translates into his belief in the written word, hence his choice of Seacoal as constable of the watch. This is evident in his interrogation of Borachio and Conrad, when Dogberry expresses vehemently his desire to have Conrad’s insult, that “you [Dogberry] are an ass” written down as to somehow prove that this is true: “O that he were here to write me down an ass! . . . Though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass” (4.2.66, 67-68). Dogberry’s belief in the spoken word and his faith in the veracity of the written word serve as the source of his ability to discern the “truth” in the play, albeit circuitously: Borachio and Conrad are apprehended because the watchmen are convinced they work with a villain called Deformed (a result of the watchmen comprehending them literally), while the information they provide about Don John’s plot only becomes important to them later in the play.

The problem of misapprehension is an issue for all the characters in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Characters hear something and understand it to be the truth. This “truth” then proves to be inaccurate and perpetrated purposefully by another party, but not before the characters have taken steps to lead that truth – Hero’s unfaithfulness, Beatrice and Benedick’s love for one another – to its logical conclusion: Hero is left at the altar and

Beatrice and Benedick confess their love. And even though the designated “truth” – of Hero’s innocence and Don John’s guilt – is revealed in the play’s denouement, the ending resonates falsely. The restoration of patriarchal order, the happy ending, and the end to deception orchestrated in the finale serves only as a temporary panacea for an unstable hegemonic structure. One’s faith in the social hierarchy is no more restored than the stability of language itself: “true” expression has been irrevocably damaged in the world of the play. Rather, what Shakespeare leaves us with at the end of *Much Ado* is an understanding that masks and deception – in language, appearance, and society – are the only things on which one is able to count. Like Marx’s *dramatis personae*, what we have at the end of the play is merely a shift in roles, where the reassurance comes not from knowing what is “true,” but from knowing that there is no such thing: truth is not an absolute.

What we learn from Dogberry in this process is that it is necessary to “comprehend” what roles people are playing before one apprehends them. The fundamental flaw in Dogberry’s assessment of people, however, lies in his reliance on the truth of the written word. Thus, taking things literally is both Dogberry’s major asset and his fatal flaw. In Messina, his ability to take things as they are presented to him enables him to expose a plot to disgrace Hero, but this is also the same logic that leads him to condemn himself as an “ass.” Dogberry indeed does not understand that things sometimes are not what they seem, and this is his asset and his liability.

Marx’s economists display tendencies similar to the inhabitants of Messina in *Much Ado About Nothing*: they follow false truths through to their logical conclusions, and they instill “natural” qualities in concepts that are not, by Marx’s definition, natural. The economists claim that pearls and diamonds have inherent “value (i.e. exchange value,” while Dogberry believes that reading and writing “comes by nature.” Moreover, Dogberry sees things just as they seem, and while this makes him susceptible to the trappings of capitalism, there is something to his naiveté that is similar to Marx’s comprehension of *dramatis personae*. Dogberry’s fundamental inability to see things as other than they are may also be the only way to render capitalism intelligible while one is already performing a role in the drama of capital. Through slips of the tongue and accidental wordplay, Dogberry is unable to undo the plots of Shakespeare’s “plain-

dealing villain”; while, by using Dogberry as the trope for the logic of his economists, Marx opens up a fissure in their arguments that exposes part of the system of masks and deceptions that is capital.

Incongruities in *Much Ado About Nothing* are much like incongruities of capital itself: from within the system of capital, one cannot render these incongruities intelligible. Marx writes in *Capital* that “[c]lassical political economy stumbles approximately onto the true state of affairs, but without consciously formulating it. It is unable to do this as long as it stays within its bourgeois skin” (682). Dogberry, while still remaining within his hegemonic system, stumbles upon the incongruities in the system through his misunderstanding of the way in which language serves to construct, manipulate, and shield the façade of capital’s form. Indeed, the comment made by the Borachio regarding Dogberry’s revelation of his crime is most apt: “what your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light” (5.1.27-29). As Marx’s selection of Dogberry demonstrates, depicting capital through a figure which operates in both familiar and unfamiliar ways in Marx’s critique of political economy produces alienated readers while providing them with an alternate lexicon by which to refer to the mirage-like nature of capital itself. Opening up the dramatic space of capital enables the use of theater as a metaphor for capital, a metaphor which opens up the space for an unveiling, a moment of revelation. Although this moment is, as discussed earlier in the context of Sedinger’s work, “indeterminate” and the representation one may see in the unveiling “gestures beyond itself, but the thing-in-itself that is presumed to lie behind or beyond the representation is nonexistent,” this rupture in the perception of the system of capital allows for an opportunity to see that capital itself “gestures toward nothing,” and therefore is reduced to mere performance (74). Thus, while the drama of capital continues – although we may not be able to take off the mask of capital from within the system – we may be able to “catch a glimpse of the Medusa’s head behind it” while it changes roles between the acts; a glimpse which will sunder the link between perception and knowledge and render the “value” of capital itself unintelligible (*Capital* 91).

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