Introduction

This work is concerned with sleight of hand, illusion and magic both on and off the medieval and early English stage. Thus, its central preoccupation is with pretence – its nature and purpose in the creation of magic. The kinds of communicated magic under consideration are of different sorts and brought about by different intentions, processes, skill and understanding. There is an inherent concern for the appearance of something as opposed to its existence in reality. These interrelated notions are extended to convince the witness that the appearance of something is indeed the reality. The same fundamental relationship between appearance and reality conditions the core of activity conducted by both conjurors and the staged presentation of illusion in the theatre.

The conjuror does not need a stage upon which to perform his work, any more than does the actor, although many in modern times do perform on the stage and exploit the physical circumstances of staging conditions and conventions. The conjuror only needs the immediate space that surrounds him in order to manipulate its interaction with the space of the witness. Magic created through staged illusions, however, operates in space that extends beyond the conjuror's ambit to that where the increased scale is implicit to the nature and purpose of the illusion. Such discrepancies in scale serve to condition the similarities and differences between the work of the conjuror and the creation of staged illusion in the theatre.

The extent to which perceived pretence and its purpose is communicated by the conjuror is different from that which is brought about by staging conditions. The theatrical event and its purpose, whether in a building or outdoors, acts as a constant reminder to the audience as to the artificiality of the proceedings. Thus, the audience becomes involved in a conscious process of pretence by virtue of the occasion and its declared and communicated purpose. The conjuror does not need to depend on a prearranged agreement with his audience as to the nature of the event; he is

able to create an agreement about pretence at the point of delivery through an implicit or explicit question: 'Would you like to see some magic?'

When it comes to the relationship between appearances and reality, there are no rigid lines of demarcation between conjuring and theatre. Some evidence exists of medieval characters who are seemingly required to perform magical tricks in plays. However, there is also evidence of scenes in medieval and early English plays concerned with conjuring as content that is realised by organisation of staging conditions involving, for example, trap doors, screens and curtains. This is particularly so in relation to appearances and disappearances.

Manipulation of pretence may be brought about openly in theatre where there is a tacit agreement about its nature and intention by those who create it and those who witness it. The audience knows what the pretence is. Pretence that occurs through the conjuror is not only the content but it is also the means; content and means are fused to determine the pretence. This convergence determines the nature of the agreement or collusion between conjuror and witness: the relationship is one of unequal collusion. A different, yet related, form of collusion occurs when the conjuror is supported by a confederate.

There is considerable evidence of the working of these concerns in medieval stage directions, civic records, ecclesiastical accounts, eye-witness descriptions, *books of secrets* and early books on magic from which to determine its significance – both to conjuring and the staging of theatre.

Today, the principal term that is used to encompass magical activity is *conjuring*. However, the action that relates to this word as it is understood in the twenty-first century, whether witnessed on television, on stage or in the open air, is not to be found in medieval or early English plays or documents that refer to itinerant performers. *Conjuring*, as a term employed to describe the act of performing magical tricks, was not used in its current sense in England until the nineteenth century. The words *conjuration*, *conjure*, *conjurer* and *conjury* first come into use with related meanings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[1] So, the term *conjuring* and its derivatives will not be used in this work unless it is to draw a modern comparison. Since the word *conjuring* is not to be found in relation to the sort of processes under discussion, what are appropriate terms to describe such activity? The chief designations in use from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries are: *tregetry*, *legerdemaine*, *prestigiation*, *juggling* or *jugglery*, *feats*, *feats of activity* and *sleight of hand*. *Conveyance* and *confederacy* are two of the named means of bringing about magical acts. The principal, and some tangential, perpetrators of these

processes are the *tregetour*, *praestigiator*, *joculator*, *circulator*, *mountebanke*, *emperick*, *quacksalver* and *juggler*. Each of these terms will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

The most consistently used words to describe the production of magic throughout this period are *juggler* (for the exponent) and *juggling* (for the activity). The term *juggling*, however, has been referred to as 'the lexicographer's nightmare', for this meaning and its creator, the *juggler*, are perhaps the least understood and most misunderstood words used to describe the creation of acts of magic.[2] In the twenty-first century the term *juggler* is applied to that kind of entertainer who throws up objects from one hand to another in a continuous rhythmical sequence without dropping them to the floor. This meaning of *juggler* is a nineteenth-century development in England and was only recently defined by the *Shorter OED* (1993).[3] This modern definition does not occur in the 1901, 1933 (and supplement), 1970 (and supplement) or the second 1989 editions of the *OED*. Nor does this recent definition appear in the latest online editions of the *OED* until the Additions Series of 1997. It is curious that the first inclusion of the modern definition appears in the *Shorter OED* before being recorded in the complete *OED*. Although there is pictorial evidence that this kind of action was performed in the Middle Ages it was not the principal activity of those identified as jugglers. All the definitions contained in the *OED* concerning medieval use of the terms *juggle*, *juggler*, *jugglery* and *juggling* refer to *conjuring* in its modern sense. However, evidence exists of medieval jugglers in other countries who operated as skilled conjurors and jugglers (in the more recent sense).[4] These jugglers both performed sleight of hand and juggled objects. Evidence concerning the activities of medieval jugglers in England that identifies the nature of juggling overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, refers to conjuring or illusion as it is understood today. Thus, throughout this work, the terms *juggling* and *jugglers* will be used in all medieval references to *conjurors* as understood by the modern term and its use. The term *conjuror* is not therefore an appropriate one to use in this context.

Roger Bacon (1214?–94) offers a clear description of the juggler's art. Even so, this is a description by a witness of juggling and not one that might have been provided by a juggler:

> Nam sunt qui motu veloce membrorum apparentia singunt, aut vocum diversitate, aut instrumentorum subtilitate, aut tenebris, aut consensu multa mortalibus proponunt miranda, quae non habent existentiae veritatem. his mundus plenus est, sicut manifestum est inquirenti. Nam joculatores multa manuum velocitate mentiuntur.[5]

The earliest, and somewhat free, translation of Bacon's comments is offered by 'T. M.' in *Frier Bacon his Discovery of the Miracles of Art, Nature, and Magick. Faithfully translated out of D^r Dees own Copy, by T. M. and never before in English* [1618]:

> We have many men that by the nimblenesse and activity of body, diversification of sounds, exactness of instruments, darkness, or consent, make things seem to be present, which never were really existent in the course of Nature. The world, as any judicious eye may see, groans under such bastard burdens. A Jugler by an handsome sleight of hand, will put a compleat lie upon the very sight.[6]

The identity of many medieval jugglers as conjurors has not been known. Where identification of given jugglers has been made it may have been assumed previously that their skills were concerned with throwing up objects and not conjuring. Clear evidence of juggling activity in England exists from the thirteenth century and all such evidence where it identifies the nature of the activity does so in respect of the modern understanding of conjuring. No English evidence that identifies the nature of juggling from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries illustrates the activity as throwing up objects and catching them.

However, the act of throwing up objects and catching them may well have occurred as a skilled activity by those performers such as tumblers, vaulters and dancers on the rope whose skills and activity were collectively and individually known as *feats of activity*. Even so, there is no written evidence of this activity in England during the period under investigation. Since juggling is a qualitatively different kind of activity from the physically exacting activities of tumbling, vaulting and dancing on the rope, it is not possible to confirm that these skills were performed by the medieval juggler. It does seem clear, however, that this range of skills was performed by small groups consisting of distinctively skilled performers whose work developed from the core of family companies that included jugglers.

The purpose of this work has not been previously undertaken in monograph (or any other) form and thus the evidence upon which the examination is based permits the presentation of some material that has not been published since its original publication. Also, a considerable amount of hitherto unpublished material has now been published through the *Records of Early English Drama* (*REED*) project based at the University of Toronto. The present work makes extensive use of some of this information together with that collated in the *Malone Society Collections* series. Although it might be considered that some of the medieval

and early English records presented here are repetitious in their collective volume, particularly in respect of jugglers, it is important to appreciate both the quantity and quality of such records in order to point to their hitherto unfocused significance.

Many accounts of the period under investigation refer to the related operation of two concepts and their associated practices as used by the medieval and early English juggler: conveyance and confederacy. Conveyance refers to sleight of hand and confederacy is concerned with collusion of different sorts. Individually, or in association, these two processes account for much of the recorded activity of medieval jugglers.

The modern phrase, 'Now you see it, now you don't' embodies the central concern of the juggler in respect of that which appears and that which disappears. Most of the juggler's repertoire is concerned with these two states and their relationship. The same point may be made in respect of the conduct of theatre. Whether the delivery of appearances and disappearances is real or illusory depends on the existence of theatrical conventions by which the perpetrators communicate or deliberately deny communication of their intentions.

Another popular and yet fallacious phrase concerning sleight of hand is summed up by the modern saying, 'The quickness of the hand deceives the eye'. However, jugglers' hands cannot move fast enough to deceive the eye. In order to be successful, sleight of hand must be slow, deliberate and undetectable, unless the intention is to create a ploy to mislead the spectator by attracting his attention. This may amount to misdirection of the eye although such misdirection is not the only sensory apparatus by which the juggler works. Auditory misdirection is required by stage directions in some medieval and early English plays, and this is also the basis of communicated ventriloquial sound of which there is further evidence.

Development of ventriloquial sound may be inferred from many medieval accounts concerning puppetry. Such accounts exist from the thirteenth century in a variety of staging and presentational modes. Additional evidence in this area has been made available through the *REED* project.

The inanimate figure as represented by the puppet or mechanical image is linked to the substitution, or partial substitution, of bodies and/or their limbs. In general, such replacements are intended to portray or, alternatively, convince an audience of the authenticity of the body or limb(s) to their ostensible owner. Some ingenuity in their use is apparent in a number of accounts.

Perhaps the greatest inventiveness in respect of both juggling and staging considerations may be seen in the range of stage tricks that are articulated and, in some instances, explained. Evidence concerning tricks that involve knives, daggers, wounds, blood, hanging, snakes and water effects may be found in stage directions as well as eye-witness accounts.

Many of the perpetrators of these tricks and effects are unknown, but a surprising number of medieval and early English jugglers and other presentational personnel are recorded, as may be seen from what follows.

CHAPTER I

Jugglers: the creators of magic

Who were the jugglers that created magic and what is the nature of the evidence that identifies them? The spread of available evidence is determined at one end of the spectrum by brief references to jugglers in financial accounts and at the other by detailed descriptions from eye-witnesses or those who write in the eye-witness mode.

There are many accounts of named jugglers and these are more plentiful than might be imagined. However, as might be anticipated, a number of these records simply refer to the juggler by his first or last name and exist as records by virtue of payment to him. These sorts of records generally offer limited information concerning the nature of the activities of jugglers although they are useful in recording the juggling activity as a distinct one that is different from and identifiable with other types of performance. Sometimes these records offer information of place, event, patronage, context and purpose, and it is these concerns that affect the value of such accounts. Records of some payments are of additional value in that they demonstrate something of the variety and synonymity of the terms outlined in the Introduction that are used to identify the juggler as the *tregetour* and the *ioculator*. Even so, the prospective understanding that might develop knowledge of these individuals and their activities is limited. A few examples will serve to reinforce these points: a tregetour by the name of 'Janin' is recorded in British Library, Cotton MSS, Nero C VIII, fol. 86v as the recipient of a payment of 20s for performing before Edward II between 1311 and 1312. The account reads: 'Janino le tregettor, facienti ministralsiam suam coram rege, &c.' [to Janin le Tregettur, for making his minstrelsy in the presence of the King].[1] Another payment to a named 'Ioculator' occurs in the *King's College Mundum Book* for 1503–4 and on this occasion the juggler's name is Matthew: 'Item xxvj^{o} die Maij in regardis datis Matheo Ioculatori ij sx' [Likewise on the twenty-sixth day of May as rewards given Matthew, a juggler].[2] Frequent payments are recorded to jugglers in the *Account Book of Prior William More* of

Worcester: William More [Peers], 1471/2–1552, prior of Worcester, kept a journal in which he recorded his day-to-day expenses. Records of payments to a wide variety of entertainers are contained in this work. In 1534 he records payment to 'William': '*A Ioguller* Item to William (blank) A Ioguller at crowle xij d'.[3] 'Crowle' was one of More's three manors; the other two being Battenhall and Grimley. The *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* for 1552–3 record payment to 'Jaques the Jouglar': 'Item, be commande of the said lordes, to Jaques the Jouglar . . . iij li.'[4] In a letter to Sir Thomas Carden, 'knight master of the kinges maiesties Revels' from George Fferrers, the Lord of Misrule to Edward VI, a request is made in 1552 for 'an attyre for Clarinse my Iuggler, now of late intertayned'.[5] Although detail in these records may be scant they do collectively inform of payment for juggling activity at the court of Edward II between 1311 and 1312; the Scottish court in 1552/3; the court of Edward VI in 1552 and an ecclesiastical estate in 1534.

So, some understanding may emerge from this sort of evidence although it needs to be supported, developed and clarified from more detailed information. In addition to the many itinerant jugglers who operated both with and without appropriate licences, there are records of a good number of jugglers who operated under the name of their patrons. Evidence accumulated by the *REED* project indicates considerable movement of itinerant performers throughout the country during the late Middle Ages and Tudor period. Performing troupes frequently claimed patronage from members of the royal family, nobility or gentry. The same is true of entertainers, such as jugglers, bearwards and minstrels, who worked alone or in small groups. The general position appears to have been one where respective entertainers received rewards from their patrons at Christmas and Shrovetide and yet were free to travel and earn money at other times of the year when not specifically obliged to the patron. Those records that deal with payment to jugglers and other performers frequently distinguish the contributions of jugglers from other entertainers as may be seen in the following examples of payments to patronised jugglers. For instance, the *Chamberlains' Account Rolls* for 1520–1 at King's Lynn, Norfolk, record: 'Et in regardo dat' Ioculatori & Berwarde ducis Suffolcie vj s viij d' [And given as a reward to the Duke of Suffolk's juggler and bearward 6s 8d].[6] The MS 27449 of the *Hunstanton Papers* in the Norfolk Record Office for 1533–4 records payment: 'To Mr Hogons/Mynstrells & to the Iogeler my lord Fytzwater's servant 0.3.0.'[7] The *St George's Guild Accounts* at Chichester, Sussex for 1543–4 record payment to a juggler under the patronage of the Earl of Arundel:

'Et Mimis Comitis Arundel ac ad vnum Ioculatorem infra et extra le hape et pro pane & vino apud Mr Molens vij s.' [And to performers of the earle of Arundel and to one juggler inside and outside 'le hape' and for bread and wine at Mr Molens 7s.][8]

Extensive patronage, particularly in the sixteenth century, clearly operated within a context in which the office of the 'King's juggler' also existed. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there was a growing number of records that refer to the 'Iogeler [Iugulatori; Iocular; Ioculatoribus] domini Regis', or the King's juggler. The bulk of these records are sixteenth-century ones. However, the earliest such record occurs in the *Anglo-Saxon Charters* for 1042–66, where land is granted to 'Nithard, formerly King Edmund's ioculator'.[9] Whether the meaning of *joculator* at this date refers to *juggler* in the sense that is being discussed here, or whether it refers to a wider meaning of *minstrel* is unclear, although given the date, the latter may be more likely. The *Chamberlains' Account Rolls* at King's Lynn for 1369–70 record: 'Item de. xx. Dat' Iugulatori domini Regis'[10] [Item, 20d given to the Lord King's juggler]. Here, too, it is not certain whether the role is one of a more generalised minstrel entertainer or one concerned with juggling in the terms under discussion. The earlier reference to 'Janino le tregettor' who played in front of Edward II between 1311 and 1312 may also have been the King's juggler. However, by the early sixteenth century the role of the 'King's juggler' as *conjuror* (modern meaning) is clearly established.

Records of payment to the King's juggler from 1517/18 to 1540/1 frequently refer to the occupant of the role as Thomas Brandon. Sometimes he is labelled as 'Brandon the King's juggler'. Whether he is named as the 'King's juggler' or 'Brandon', the two kinds of records support identification of Brandon as the King's juggler between these dates and lend support to identification of his business as that of conjuring (modern sense). Some slightly earlier records concerning the King's juggler from 1511/12 to 1517/18 also refer to the title/role but not to him. It seems likely, however, that these too might be records concerning him. Some of these records are as follows: at Lydd in Kent, the *Chamberlains' Accounts* for 1511–12 record payment as: 'Item paid in reward to a Iugeler of the kynges xijd'.[11] The *City Chamberlains' Accounts* at Canterbury for 1515–16 record payment to the 'kynges Iogler': 'Item paied to the kynges Iogler the xxth day of May gevyn to hym for reward ijs'.[12] The *Chamberlains' Accounts* at Dover, Kent for 1515–16 record: 'It[em] payed for reward*es* gevyn to the kyng*es* mynstrell my lord wardens mynstrell & to diu'se other mynstrell*es* & to the kyng*es* Iogeler xvij s.'[13] Records of further payments to the King's juggler in Kent exist at

Sandwich and New Romney.[14] Also, in 1515–16 the *Chamberlains' Accounts* at Rye, Sussex, record: 'Item payd to the kynges gogeler ij s iiij d'.[15] A similar payment is recorded in the same accounts in 1518.[16]

The preceding records of payments to the King's juggler simply refer to the office; they do not identify the role by the name of the holder. Three occupiers of the role are known to have held the position in the sixteenth century. In addition to Brandon, two jugglers by the names of Smyth and Stanweye are also recorded. Payment of 'iij^{s} iiij^{d}' is recorded to 'M Smyth ioculer domini rege' in the *Assembly Books* at Thetford, Norfolk for 1538/9.[17] The same payment is recorded in the same accounts for 1536/7 in payment to 'M Brandon the kyng*es* ioguler'.[18] Do these two records mark a possible changeover from Brandon to Smyth as the King's juggler? This seems likely since there are currently no further records of payments to Brandon as the King's juggler after 1536/7. Whether Smyth's engagement as the King's juggler continued up to Elizabeth's reign is unclear for the role was taken over by Stanweye as recorded in the *Corporation Chamberlains' Accounts* at Gloucester for 1563–4: 'Also geven Stanweye the Quenes Iugler for shewinge pastimes and other *of* his Iuglinge feates to Mr mayor and other of his bretherne'.[19] The Ludlow *Bailiffs' and Chamberlains' Accounts* for 1575–6 record: 'Item geven to Stanney the Queens man in waye of reward by assent of a nomber of the companie x s'.[20] Before he became the Queen's juggler payment is recorded to Stanweye in the *Bailiffs' Accounts* at Shrewsbury for 1553–4: 'Et Datum in regardo Thome staney Le Iugler ijs'.[21]

A growing amount of evidence has emerged concerning Brandon and this may be used to extend already cited evidence concerning the King's juggler. Although Brandon and Smyth are referred to as the 'King's juggler' and Stanweye is recorded as the 'Quenes Iugler' at different times in the sixteenth century, later individuals are not described in this way. For instance, William Vincent worked during the first half of the seventeenth century and did so 'with Commission from the Kings Majestie'.[22] Many of the records concerning Vincent refer to his activities as being licensed by the King.

Brandon is first recorded by name in the *St George's Guild Accounts* at Chichester for the years 1517–18. The record reads: 'Et solutum Magistro brandon Iogeler ijs'[23] [And paid to Master Brandon, juggler, 2s]. It is not until the accounting period of 1520–2 in the *Bailiffs' Accounts* at Shrewsbury that Brandon again appears by name and this time he is also recorded as the 'Joculatori domini Regis' [the lord king's juggler]. The role of the 'Joculatori domini Regis' is recorded as early as the eleventh