

Sarah CARPENTER, « Laughing at Natural Fools »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 3-22
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Laughing at Natural Fools

Sarah Carpenter
University of Edinburgh

The sixteenth century saw an explosion of folly discourses, many of which invoked what has now become a familiar distinction between “natural” and “artificial” fools.¹ The natural fool was the individual with a mental impairment of some kind who might be kept as a source of entertainment, especially in noble or royal households, up until the earlier seventeenth century. For some wealthy households, portraits of such fools survive, suggesting the value that might be invested in them. The unimpaired artificial fool, on the other hand, consciously crafted witty discourse and entertaining behaviour for professional purposes. The natural fool was an object of interest to philosophers, commentators and theologians discussing the relation of folly to rationality, the interpenetration of wit and folly, and how we can all be defined as fools.² This essay, however, does not consider these more philosophical questions but looks at something rather simpler and more immediate—though also for us probably more unsettling: how did natural fools make people laugh, and what was the function or effect of that laughter?

1 The history of fools has been well documented in Welsford, Billington and Southworth.

2 For a survey of contemporary philosophical and legal discourse and reflection on the natural fool, see Andrews (parts 1 and 2).

These are not easy questions for us to discuss in the twenty-first century. We are looking across a marked cultural divide, since we no longer think it acceptable, or even understandable, to treat those with mental impairments as a source of laughter. This makes it difficult for us to evaluate this Tudor institution. Modern unease, even with reading about the ways natural fools were used for entertainment, makes it hard for us to think through and analyse the cultural and theatrical implications of their role. But it is a project worth undertaking, if we are to understand many of the wider ramifications of folly discourses, of cultural attitudes and of performance practices in the early modern period. This issue was already raised by one of the most influential early commentators on the Fool, Enid Welsford, who pointed out in her classic study: “My concern, however, is not with the ethical but with the aesthetic significance of the subject” (p. 26). Is it possible for us, also, to look beyond our own ethical terms and try to understand the aesthetic and cultural value that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century society seems to have derived from their relationship with the natural fool?

We might begin from a revealing reflection on these values by Thomas More. In the *Utopia* he articulates one Tudor attitude to natural fools, which may help to illuminate the phenomenon. The Utopians, he says,

have singular delite & pleasure in foles. And as it is a greate reproche to do to annye of them hurte or injury, so they prohibite not to take pleasure of foolyshnes. For that, they thinke, dothe muche good to the fooles. And if any man be so sadde, and sterne, that he cannot laughe neither at their wordes, nor at their dedes, none of them be committed to his tuition: for feare least he would not intreate them gentilly and favorably enough: to whom they should brynge no delectation (for other goodness in them is none) muche lesse anye proffite shoulde they yelde him. (fol. 96^v)

This may seem to us a conflicting view: fools are to be protected and treated kindly; but pleasure at their limitations and laughter at their words and deeds is not only legitimate and encouraged, but understood as beneficial to both parties. Men who cannot take such pleasure are seen as incomplete human beings, while laughter is apparently not recognised as humiliating or aggressive to the fools. This is, of course, a Utopian view, with all the ironies that may involve, although we should remember that More himself kept a natural fool who by all accounts was well-loved and valued within his household.³ In spite of their ambivalent

3 For an account of More's fool, Henry Patenson, see Hall.

context, More's words suggest that laughing at natural fools should not be easily dismissed as simply callous or barbaric; it could be an ethically, and certainly a theatrically, more complex response than we are now likely to believe.

From this starting point, I aim to explore the contemporary discourse around the natural fool as entertainer. That discourse is sometimes explicit, as commentators reflect on the implications of natural folly; but more often it is only implicit, arising incidentally from accounts and descriptions of fools and their activities. I will not pursue the moral or allegorical paradigms by which the folly discourses sometimes interpreted fools as symbolic figures. Rather, I will focus on what was understood as the immediate pleasure or entertainment value they offered, how spectators judged and responded to that pleasurable encounter, and what they thought they (and perhaps the fools themselves) gained from it. While there is some discursive reflection around the figure of the natural to draw on, my focus will be primarily on some texts that give us raw material—texts that describe or enact these encounters, recording the natural fool in action. Central here are works by Robert Armin, well-known as a professional actor with the Lord Chamberlain's (later the King's) Men specialising in fools' parts.⁴ In 1600, Armin first published a work called *Foole Vpon Foole*, which offered vivid brief histories of the lives and habits of six real-life fools. Armin lays stress on the fact that his subjects are all naturals: "'tis no wonder for me to set downe fooles naturall, when wise men before theyle be unprofitable, will seeme fooles artificiall" (sig. A2^r). His selection of fools ranges from the iconic Will Somer, Henry VIII's fool, to fools kept by contemporary gentry or in hospitals, with some of whom Armin claims personal acquaintance. The work seems to have been popular: a second edition appeared in 1605, and in 1608, Armin published an expansion, *A Nest of Ninnies*, addressed specifically to university students.⁵ *Foole Vpon Foole* is an invaluable source of information, not only about the fools and their behaviour, but about their relationship with those who patronised them, the ways spectators reacted to them and the responses that Armin solicits from his readers.

4 For a biography of Armin, see Wiles, pp. 136–63.

5 This version introduces an allegorical, moralised frame for Armin's fool stories, a dialogue between a personification of The World and a supposed philosopher, Sotto. Between them these debaters offer satirically learned allegorised interpretations of the behaviour and significance of the fools in the inset stories. I am avoiding this version, in order to concentrate on Armin's direct presentation of the natural fools themselves.

Much of the pleasure of Armin's histories lies in the distinctive personalities and behaviour of the six fools he describes. Whether these arise, as he frequently suggests, from personal acquaintance with the fools or with those who report their stories, or whether they are simply creations of his lively and unaffected style, this conveys an illusion of authenticity that is an important feature of the work's appeal. But is it possible to draw from the particular portraits any broader principles about natural fools? A place to start may be the "contents list" he provides on his title page:

Six sortes of Sottes		
A flat foole		A fatt foole
A leane foole	and	A cleane foole
A merry foole		A verry foole.

He identifies his six fools not, initially, by name, but by largely physical characteristics. He then opens each history with a verse description that focuses first and foremost on the generally misshapen physical appearance of the fool. Of Jack Oates, the flat fool, he explains: "His upper lip turned in, but that was stranger, / His underlip so big t'might sweepe a manger" (sig. A3^r); of Jemy Camber, the fat fool: "A yarde hye and a nayle no more his stature ... / One eare was bigger than the other farre: / His fore-head full, his eyes shind like g [*sic*] flame, / His noze flat and his beard small yet grew square" (sig. B3^v); of Lean Leanard: "A little head, high forehead, one squint eye, / And as he goes he holdes his necke awry: / One hand stands crooked and the other right" (sig. C4^r). These descriptions draw us into immediate and intimate physical proximity to the fools; they offer their bodily idiosyncrasies both as a marker of identity and as an accepted source of fascination and humour. As Armin remarks of Jemy Camber, his "very presence made the King much sport" (sig. B3^r). Pictures of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century fools show similar interest and pleasure taken in representation of the detail of their physical appearance.

This focus on the body informs one important strand of the humour and entertainment generated by the natural fools in Armin's tales. Apart from fascination with their features, undignified physical mishaps are a commonly repeated source of laughter, from Jack Miller, the clean fool, who burned off his beard and eyebrows by thrusting his head into a hot oven in search of pies, to Lean Leanard, who almost choked himself on the feathers of his master's favourite hawk, which he killed and tried to eat raw. The gross physicality of the body

is a key feature in generating laughter at the natural. Humour like this offers a Bakhtinian delight in the body as distorted, leaky, reductive. This is intensified in the case of the natural fool, who has less control over his physical faculties and impulses. Armin emphasises, for example, how several of his fools are “dribling ever”, with the natural’s “muckinder”, or handkerchief, always prominent.⁶

The cheerful acceptance of the natural fool as a physical spectacle presumably underlies the common impulse to play practical jokes on him. Unlike the professional fool, the natural is significantly more likely to be the target than the initiator of jests. Many of the tales report laughter provoked by deliberately setting the fool up as the victim of a trick which results in physical indignity or pain. So, for example, in one jest someone spreads butter mixed with itching powder under the saddle of Jemy Camber, the fat Scots fool. Armin explains:

The trotting of his Mule made the mingled confection lather so, that it got into his breeches, and workt up to the crowne of his head, I to the sole of his foote, and so he sweate profoundlye: still he wipt and he wipt, sweating more and more, they laught a good to see him in that taking. (*Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. Cr^v)

Jests of this kind are rarely simply private or personal interactions between trickster and fool. They are generally set up or exploited as deliberate performances: the discomfiture of the fool is staged to an audience, either contrived as, or turned into, a spectacle. Jack Miller’s burned face is a particularly rich example of such performance. Armin reports that the fool was persuaded to “thrust in his head into the hot Oven” by the boy actress of a visiting company of players, who “dressed them in the Gentlemans kitchin, & so entred through the Entry into the Hall”. After his painful accident, “Jacke was in a bad taking with his face, poore soule, and lookt so ugly, and so strangely” that the boy, making his own first entrance as the lady in the play, was overcome with laughter at the memory “and could goe no further”. When he explained to the audience what had put him off his stride, Jack was called out on stage so that all the spectators could share the joke: “but he so strangely lookt, as his countenance was better then the Play” (sig. D3^v). This accident, painful and disfiguring to Jack, is not only a source of uncontrollable laughter to the boy actor who initiated it; it is then staged to the audience in the hall in order to extend the pleasure of the jest. A network of performance events surrounds the incident, culminating in the spectacle of

6 See *Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. D3^r, and *A Nest of Nimmies*, sig. Gr^r.

the battered body of the fool itself both becoming and outdoing the play. Many of the incidents Armin describes, whether involving spontaneous actions by the fools or tricks played upon them, are similarly “staged” to public view, perceived as or transformed into performance and spectacle.

There is a good deal in this that we are likely to find troubling today: laughter at physical appearance and deformity, painful jokes practised against those who are unable to defend themselves, and the readiness to turn both physical and mental impairment into spectacle. It may be worth looking at the contemporary discourses of folly to see if they can help us to understand more clearly what such jests might have meant and how they might have been received in their own time. One place to start is with discussions not of folly itself, but of laughter. Aristotle’s influential explanation of laughter was much repeated throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period, and it has an obvious connection here: in the *Poetics*, Aristotle explains that we laugh at “some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive” (Section 5). The body of the natural fool could be understood as fitting this category: the fool is physically deformed, and though he himself may suffer bodily pain, it is of a relatively minor kind which does not affect others. However, Aristotle’s definition implies a certain distance and superiority in the spectator which does not seem fully to account for the cheerful laughter Armin describes. More’s report of the Utopians laughing at fools also suggests that laughing *at* the defective or ugly is not, or at least should not be, quite what is happening in these encounters. He explains: “To mocke a man for his deformitie, or for that he lacketh anye parte or lymme of his bodye, is counted greate dishonestye and reproche, not to him that is mocked, but to him that mocketh” (fol. 96^v). While More fully accepts that the fool’s body may generate permissible laughter, he appears to distinguish this from the cruel “mockery” at deformity.

There may, then, be other factors at play, beyond Aristotle’s definition. Early modern analysts tend to emphasise laughter as itself a radically physical phenomenon.⁷ Erica Fudge quotes Laurent Joubert’s *Traite du Ris* (1579), which tells us that when laughter

goes on for a long time the veins in the throat become enlarged, the arms shake, and the legs dance about, the belly pulls in and feels considerable pain; we cough, perspire, piss, and

7 See Fudge for a full discussion.

besmirch ourselves by dint of laughing, and sometimes we even faint away because of it.
(trans. Gregory David De Rocher; cited by Fudge, p. 280)

Laughter is profoundly and even grotesquely rooted in the body. Joubert's description, in fact, echoes the very kinds of physical features and actions Armin describes in his fools. It might almost seem as though the naturals not only provoke laughter in others, but embody laughter itself. Certainly, hilarity seems to have been commonly accepted not just as a reaction *to* fools, but as a symptom or behaviour *of* fools. William Phiston, in his conduct book, *The Schoole of Good Manners*, translated from French in 1595, points out that "To laugh at every thing, betokeneth a foole"; he advises young men not to "stirre and shake thy body in laughing". Fools themselves, he explains, link laughter grossly to the body: "These are wordes of fooles to say: I was like to be pisse my selfe with laughing: I had almost burst with laughing: I was like to haue died with laughing: or I had almost sounded [swooned] with laughing" (sigs. B7^v-B8^v). Through laughter, the gross physicality of the fool himself is actually reflected into those who laugh at him.

One of Armin's stories demonstrates the interdependence of this process of mutual laughter especially effectively. Jack Miller was a natural with a speech impediment, who was often asked to perform at feasts. At one, he "began in such manner to speake with driveleing and stuttering, that they began mightily to laugh". One demure and straitlaced gentlewoman, in attempting to suppress her own laughter at Jack ("because shee would not seeme too immodest with laughing"), found herself erupting in a fart. To her blushing embarrassment, this was quickly detected by the company, and "this jest made them laugh more". The company then "so hartily laught" that one old gentlewoman fell into a fit, and "shee was nine or tenne daies ere she recovered". Physical mishap and laughter spread through the company in escalating delight, gradually drawing everyone into the whirlpool. As Armin concludes: "Thus simple Jack made mirth to all, made the wisest laugh, but to this day gathered little wit himselfe" (*Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. Er^v). It is clear that the fool is understood as not only laughable himself, but the cause of both laughter and laughableness in others. Laughing at the reductive physicality of the natural can draw the spectator into the fool's own sphere, partly dissolving the sense of separation and hierarchical superiority between the two that initiated the jest.

However, it was not only the physical that provoked laughter. As More pointed out, the "sad and stern" man "cannot laughe neither at their words, nor

at their dedes". The naturals were rarely capable of the conscious or sophisticated verbal wit of the artificial fool, although some of the high-functioning natural fools like Will Somer were reported to be valued for their repartee. Yet many of them did offer verbal comedy or even wisdom. Such verbal entertainment tends to be of one of two kinds: either the fools' words reveal their laughable lack of comprehension of social and intellectual skills; or they may be valued for their truth-telling, their inability to use words to deceive, to flatter or to lie. Lack of understanding is central to many stories of naturals. Jemy Camber was apparently renowned for misunderstanding and misuse of words: one "marvelous hot day: O says *Jemy* how colde the weather is (so wise hee was that hee scrace [*sic*] knew hot from colde)" (Armin, *Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. Cr'). John i'the Hospital, a natural fool who lived at Christ's Hospital and was personally known to Armin, "was of this humour: aske him what his coate cost him, he would say a groate: what his cap, band or shirt cost, all was a groate, aske what his beard cost, and still a groote" (sig. F2^v). Laughter seems to be prompted by the obvious naivety and lack of understanding such words betray.

Armin gives us a vivid example of how such incomprehension might be deliberately staged as entertainment in a scene from his play, *The History of the Two Maids of More-Clacke* (1609). The play has a significant part for John i'the Hospital, a part which Armin appears to have composed for himself to play. Sir William Vergir, an affectionate patron of the natural fool, sets him up in a performance for sport, to demonstrate how he "Utters much hope of matter, but small gaine" (vii.140 [p. 129]). Summoning John, he tells his dinner guests that they will hear a schoolboy "Aske him [John] such questions as his simplenes / Answeres to any: sirra let me heare ye" (vii.146-47 [p. 130]). The boy then "apposes" John with a mock schoolroom catechism:

Boy. *John*, how many parts of speech be there?

John. Eight, the vocative, and ablative, caret nominativo O.

Boy. What say you to reddish [*radish*] *Jacke*?

John. That it does bite. Ha, ha, ha.

.....

Boy. I'll give thee a point *Jack*, what wilt do with it?

John. Carri't home to my nurse.

Boy. I'll give thee a fooles head *Jack*, what wilt do with it?

John. Carri't home to my nurse. (vii.146-64 [p. 130])

Similar delight is generated at the uncomprehending answers of the natural fool to simple classroom propositions in John Redford's *Wit and Science*, where Idleness attempts to teach the natural fool Ignorance to read.⁸ Both plays stage performances of the apposition which invite laughter, both at the natural's incomprehension and at his patent inability to learn any better.

Like most of the laughter at fools, this kind of joke may seem both obvious and deliberately non-intellectual. But it is worth exploring how it was theorised at the time, how laughter at failures of understanding was thought to work.⁹ There is presumably a significant element of self-congratulation involved, as the spectators recognise the gap between the natural's skills and their own. Hobbes's famous characterisation of laughter is apposite: "The passion of Laughter is nothyng else but a suddaine Glory arising from suddaine Conception of some Eminency in our selves by Comparison with the Infirmityes of others" (cited by Skinner, p. 155). We can congratulate our own cleverness in contrast to the natural's incomprehension. Armin himself at times acknowledges and encourages just this sense of superiority, celebrating our difference from the fools we laugh at. When he introduces us to Leane Leanard, for example, he explains that his purpose in describing him is "that people seeing the strange workes of God, in his differing creatures, we that have perfect resemblance of God, both in sence and similytude, may the better praise his name, that we differ from them whose humors we read, see and heare" (*Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. C4^v).

Yet this pious explanation does not seem entirely to account for the apparent mixture of emotions Armin describes in these interactions. The natural's comical ignorance involves the less "glory to ourselves" in contemptuous comparison to him, because he is not responsible for it and can do nothing to change it. More, yet again, in his discussion of fools remarks how unwise it is to "imbrayde anye man of that as a vice, that was not in his power to eschewe" (*Vtopia*, fol. 96^v). It is no glory to us to be cleverer than the natural, because he cannot learn to be other than he is. An early seventeenth-century sermon preached on the death of a famous Pomeranian fool, Hans Miesko, explains almost admiringly how fools cannot "be influenced or corrected, neither with words nor with deed, neither

8 See Twycross.

9 For discussion of varying early modern theories of laughter see Skinner, as well as Steggle, pp. 11-24 (chap. 1).

with threats nor with punishment. They stay as they are.”¹⁰ Laughter at the natural’s ignorance is therefore not simply in scorn of his willfulness or laziness; it is not critical or satirical. It is perhaps revealing that Armin’s descriptions of the naturals’ patrons and guardians suggest that they frequently treated their charges like small children, acknowledging the fools’ lack of responsibility for their actions with a combination of discipline and affection. John i^the Hospital’s nurse in *The Two Maids of More-Clacke* speaks to him in just this way: “Wipe your nose, fie a sloven still, looke ye be mannerly, hold up your chinne, let me see ye make your holiday legge, so my chucking, that’s a good lambe, do not cry” (vii.197–200). John’s ignorance is presented as charming rather than culpable, his performances laughed at but also congratulated. This is not quite the same as glorying in the fool’s inferiority. Quentin Skinner alerts us to alternative Renaissance positions on laughter, one of which locates it not in scornful superiority but in joy and pleasure. In particular, he cites a number of writers who link laughter to affectionate observation of the behaviour of children: Italian commentators observe that “we often laugh and show our joy when we meet . . . our children”; or “a father and mother receive their little children with laughter and festivity” (Skinner, p. 435). Laughter at the natural fool seems sometimes motivated at least in part by this kind of affectionate pleasure.

These reactions may even be engineered, using the fool’s lack of comprehension or discrimination, to create a spectacle of childlike delight. Jemy Camber, for example, is several times described as being tricked by his masters into believing that he has successfully run at the ring, or won a race up the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, when of course he was capable of no such thing. The king and lords who set up the deceptions are said to derive great enjoyment not so much from the tricks played upon Jemy as from his pride in his own supposed achievements: “It was sport enough for the King a month after to heare him tell it” (Armin, *Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. C3^r). The jest depends on the gap between the king’s understanding and the fool’s; but the point seems to have been not simply to expose and laugh at the natural’s limitations or ignorance, but to enjoy his celebration of himself.

10 Cited by Bernuth, p. 250: “nicht einreden und corrigiren, weder mit Worten noch der that / weder mit drawn noch straffen / bleiben wie sie sein.” I am grateful to Dr Sabine Rolle for translations of quotations from this sermon.

These mixed responses may underlie a general readiness to enjoy transgressive behaviours and displays of ignorance on the part of the fools, because they are recognised as blameless. This notion of blamelessness, of the harmlessness both of the naturals and of the laughter they provoke, is especially strong in recorded reactions to the fool: “this innocent Idiot that never harmed any” (Armin, *Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. Fr^v). Accounts often emphasise the specific value of the fools’ function to lighten care with harmless fun, especially for those who themselves carried heavy responsibilities. Hans Miesko was praised because, the preacher Cradelius remembers, “with his presence [and his] entertaining talk of adventures he drove out many and varied melancholy and sad thoughts from those who bore a heavy burden”.¹¹ Will Somer is similarly frequently presented as having an important role in managing the moods of Henry VIII. Armin repeats one incident in which “the King upon a time being extreame melancholy & full of passion, all that Will Somers could do, wold not make him merry” (*Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. E3^v). Somer is then remembered as having staged a series of what are plainly, and probably deliberately, rather meaningless jests to gradually lure the king back into a good humour. The fool can thus offer a legitimate escape from responsibility, from intellectual and emotional demands. His harmless humour might therefore have a valuable moral and social function.

This is of course part of the natural’s recognised status as the “innocent”, the other term which is often used to identify him. The natural fool is morally innocent because he does not have the wit to make ethical judgements, or thus to sin. This is another feature which links him to the child. In John Heywood’s *Witty and Witles*, a dramatised debate about fools, the advocate for the natural fool explains:

Wher God gyvythe no dys[c]ernyng God takethe none acownte;
In whyche case of acownt the sot dothe amownt,
For no more dysernythe the sott at yeres thre score
Then thynosent borne wythe in yeres thre before. (ll. 345-48)

The fool, like the infant, is incapable of “discerning”. As the play explains, this innocence lies at the root of the natural’s spiritual advantage over others, an advantage that counteracts his impairment in this life, which is his certainty of

11 Cited by Bernuth, p. 248: “mit seiner gegenwart / kurtzweiligen Ebenthewrlichen geschwetz und vornehmen unter den schweren Regiments unnd Haussorgen viele unnd mancherley Melancholische und trawrige gedanken vertrieben.”

salvation. Incapable of sin, the natural is thus incapable of damnation: “the wytles ys sewer of salvashyon” (l. 357). His innocent lack of discernment equally accompanies the general perception that the natural fool cannot deceive and cannot lie. The sermon on Hans Miesko praises him for embodying “the common saying: fools and children usually tell the truth”.¹² This kind of innocence is presumably one foundation for the “wise fool” so fascinating to the Tudor stage. The natural, it is assumed, can see truth undistorted by the complexities of deception, imagination or intellect, even if he cannot fully understand its implications.

Armin’s real-life fools, in fact, rarely if ever display this sort of unconscious wisdom, although the traditional tales of Will Somer suggest that he, like Hans Miesko, was certainly remembered as having had this capacity. But Armin’s stories suggest that the natural’s fundamental innocence was recognised by spectators, and might at times contribute to the pleasure taken in their performances. Innocence makes it possible for onlookers to laugh at behaviour that in a non-fool would be culpable or annoying rather than funny. Spectators are often credited with recognising and accepting the natural’s lack of malicious intent, thus allowing them to enjoy what would otherwise be unacceptably unsociable or challenging behaviour. An anecdote of Jack Oates shows how this might operate. Jack one day stole a quince pie that was being made with great effort and expense for a special feast for his master, Sir William. The pie was hot, and Jack ran away and “leapes into the Moate up to the arme-pittes, and there stood eating the Pye” (Armin, *Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. B2^v). When this was reported to Sir William and his guests, “they laught and ran to the windows to see the jest”. After a furious exchange between Jack and the Cook, the pie was eaten and the fool came out of the moat. Yet in spite of the loss of the pie, Jack was not held accountable or punished, and laughter remained the dominant response to the spectacle: “the Knight and the rest all laught a good at the jest, not knowing how to mend it . . . to chide him was to make worse of things then twas, and to no purpose neyther” (sig. B3^r). The innocence of the fool excuses the theft, and in fact encourages Sir William to accept it as a jest against himself.

While the innocence of the fool could provoke this kind of tolerant laughter, that response was closely tied to an evaluation of his mental incapac-

12 Cited by Bernuth, p. 248: “das gemeine Sprichwort: Narren und Kinder reden gemeinlich die Wahrheit.” Modern explanations of mental impairment recognise similar traits as characteristic of various conditions: for example, we are encouraged to understand the social difficulties experienced by those with autism as arising from an inability to lie, or to understand anything but literal truth.

ity. This could subtly but significantly affect the perception of his behaviour as either entertaining or insulting. Another anecdote of Jack Oates illustrates this very precisely. A very eminent nobleman came to visit Sir William, whose wife “as is the Courtly custome, was kist of this Noble man” (Armin, *Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. A4^v). Jack Oates immediately started up and boxed the nobleman’s ear: “knaue quoth hee kisse Sir Willies wife?” Sir William was mortified and ordered Jack to be whipped, “but the kinde Noble man knowing simplicity the ground of his error, would not suffer it”. At this point, then, the fool’s lack of understanding excuses his behaviour, allowing it to be forgiven and even laughed at as innocent. But the story then has a revealing sequel. Armin reports that “Jacke seeing they were sad, and hee had done amisse, had this wit in simplicity to shaddow it”. He approached the Earl with an attempt at deliberately witty wordplay. Shaking the nobleman’s hand, he apologised for his mistake, “knowing not [y]our eare from your hand being so like one another: Jacke thought he had mended the matter, but now he waa [sic] whipt indeede and had his payment altogether” (sig. A4^v). This anecdote highlights very exactly the boundaries of the licence allowed to the natural fool. When his invasive truth-telling behaviour is spontaneous, and understood as springing from natural innocence or simplicity, it can be tolerated and even enjoyed. But if it is seen as conscious—when Jack attempts to perform the artificial fool’s crafted mockery to manipulate others and their opinion of him—it becomes culpable. Once he strays beyond his natural limitations, he loses his licence; there is no laughter, and he is held responsible and punished for insolence.¹³

From the various ways in which the natural fools are recorded as generating laughter, it is plain that they provoked mixed and sometimes conflicting responses of scorn and affection, superiority and identification. The same conflicts can be seen in the broader social attitudes that form the context for the entertainment role of the fools. It is undeniable that there appears to be a general social acceptance of aggressive behaviour towards natural fools. Heywood’s *Witty and Witles* is particularly graphic about this. One character asks,

Who cumth by the sott, who cumth he by,
That vexyth hym not somewey usewally?

13 Armin emphasises this difference in another tale which sets Jack Oates against a deliberate jester: “Here you have heard the difference twext a Flat foole natural, and a Flat foole artificiall, one that had his kinde, and the other who foolishly followed his owne minde” (*Foole Vpon Foole*, B2^r).

Some beate hym, some bob hym,
 Some joll hym, some job hym,
 Some tugg hym by the heres,
 Some lugg hym by the eares

 Not evyn mayster Somer the Kyngs gracys foole
 But tastythe some tyme some nyps of new schoole. (ll. 29-34, 41-44)

Heywood implies that it is normal for people to torment natural fools. He suggests that even the most valued and highly patronised of household fools can expect a degree of casual violence.

More, in spite of his own affection and tolerance for naturals, confirms this social response. In *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, he tells a story of his own fool, Henry Patenson, who had accompanied him on a visit to Brussels. The anecdote is perhaps the more revealing because it is not told in order to illustrate any point about attitudes to naturals; it is rather introduced as a playful allegorical example to help explain an issue of theological controversy. The treatment of the fool is incidental rather than central to the story. More records that, out in the streets, Patenson was observed by the passers-by in Brussels, some of whom “caught a sporte in angryng of hym / and out of dyvers corners hurled at hym suche thynges as angred hym, and hurte hym not” (II: 900). In response, he tells us, Patenson collected stones, “not gunstonys, but as harde as they”, proclaimed that those who had not tormented him should leave, and then threw back his stones against the crowd, inflicting some bloody injuries. Patenson’s stone-throwing is then interpreted as an allegory of the unjust exertion of power, based on the jest that although the fool had excused himself for his indiscriminate retaliation by warning the innocent in the crowd to leave before he hurled his missiles, he could not realise that they did not understand English. More raises no questions about the tormenting of the natural and his angry response, which form the context and background for this parable; he passes no judgement on either the crowd’s or Patenson’s behaviour. Mutual aggression seems to be expected and tolerated, reported as familiar and attracting no particular reproach.

Apart from such everyday random violence, the household fool might also expect physical punishment, even for faults he might not understand. As Wolsey is reported to have reminded Will Somer, “A rod in the schoole, / And a whip for the foole / Is alwayes in season” (*Pleasant Historie*, sig. C1^v). Armin’s stories of fools certainly confirm that rough treatment is both normal, and accept-

ably productive of laughter, even from kindly and protective patrons. He tells a sad tale of Jack Miller, who, entranced by the clown in a company of visiting players, ran after them across a frozen river. Although he got safely across, he was scolded for doing something so dangerous. At this, “he considered his fault, and knowing faults should be punished, he entreated Grumball the clowne whom he so deerely loved to whip him but with rosemary, for that he thought wold not smart: but the Players in jest breecht him till the bloud came which he tooke laughing: for it was his manner ever to weepe in kindness, and laugh in extreames” (*Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. D4^v). Violence, along with laughter, seems to be accepted by both sides as part of the contract between the fool and his protectors.

On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence of apparently real and deep affection of masters for fools. This is attested from many quarters, and Armin is explicit about the intimacy often involved. His narratives are full of phrases asserting, for example, “he loved the foole above all, and that the household knew” (*Foole Vpon Foole*, sig. Br^r); “the Knight . . . made no small account of his wel-faire” (sig. B2^v); “though the Gentleman loved his hauke, yet he loved the foole above” (sig. D2^r); “many . . . so much loved him, that they were loath to disease him” (sig. E2^r). Such love is apparently not only a personal idiosyncrasy of warm-hearted individuals; it is asserted in some discussions of folly as the appropriate response to the innocent. Hans Miesko’s sermon urges: “one should show [fools] goodness and love, take them in, host, clothe, feed them . . . protect, shield and defend them, and not abandon them even at the time of death.”¹⁴ This affection, as Armin’s anecdotes reveal, often plays significantly into the ways in which the fool’s behaviour was understood, valued and laughed at.

This mixture of aggression and affection, contempt and delight that informs social attitudes to these fools helps us to estimate the value that was placed on the laughing encounters with them. On the one hand, scornful laughter at the deficiencies of the fool justifies violence against him and should sharpen the spectator’s gratitude for his own capacities. Hans Miesko’s sermon tells us that by fools “we are reminded of sin, of the wrath of God and his punishment as well as of the gifts of soul and body, which we received from God, so

14 Cited by Bernuth, p. 251: “sondern ihnen viel mehr alles gutes und liebes bezeigen / sie aufnehmen / Herbergen / Kleiden / Speisen . . . sie schutzen / beschirmen und verteidigen / auch im Tod nicht verlassen.”

that we use them properly”.¹⁵ On the other, affectionate laughter at the harmless simplicity of the fool may acknowledge his superior innocence and spiritual grace. The sermon also claims that the fool’s “natural lack of reason, and spiritual wisdom” teaches us as much as “the life of one of the wisest, most talented and respected of men”.¹⁶ The sermon thus suggests opposing interpretations of the fool, yet in both laughter depends on, and reinforces, the sense of difference, of our separation from the natural who is either less, or more, than ourselves. Yet Armin’s accounts suggest that at times laughter could work to draw the spectators into a shared identity with the natural. We may be invited or even compelled to recognise the fool’s deficiencies, mental and physical, as our own; laughter can establish a bond rather than a division. So the natural may not be different from us, but intensely and comically the same. A famous sixteenth-century epitaph for a fool laments:

Lobe, God have mercye on thy innocent sowle,
 Whyche amonges innocentes I am sure hath a place,
 Or ellys my sowle ys yn a hevy case;
 Ye, ye, and moo foolys mony one,
 For folys be alyve, Lobe, though thou be gone.

 Nowe God have mercye on us alle,
 For wyse and folyshe alle dyethe;

 God amend alle folys that thynke themselfe none.¹⁷

This may, of course, record a romanticised view, tinged with nostalgia and a reverent attitude towards mortality. But it does confirm that laughing at natural fools can be understood to have included responses significantly more complicated than simple mockery. In the fool, the spectacle of difference and deficiency combines with and plays against a recognition of the innate and shared folly of all human beings.

- 15 Cited by Bernuth, p. 251: “dz wir dadurch nicht alleine erinnert werden der sunden / Gottes Zorn und strafe / sondern der gaben des gemuthes und Leibes / die wir von Gott empfangen haben / das wir sie recht gebrauchen.”
- 16 Cited by Bernuth, p. 249: “seinen naturlichen unverstandt und Geistliche Weissheit”; “als an einem der weisesten hochbegabtesten unnd wolverdienensten Mannern.”
- 17 “Elegy on Lobe, Henry VIII’s fool”, pp. 44–46.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- ARISTOTLE. *The Poetics*. Trans. S. H. Butcher. 1902; online at Project Gutenberg (2008): <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1974>>. (Accessed 9 March 2014.)
- ARMIN, Robert. *Foole Vpon Foole, or Six Sortes of Sottes*. London: [E. Allde] for William Ferbrand, 1600.
- . *The History of the Two Maids of More-Clacke*. Ed. Alexander S. Liddie. New York: Garland, 1979.
- . *A Nest of Ninnies Simply of Themselves without Compound*. London: T. E[ast] for Iohn Deane, 1608.
- “ELEGY on Lobe, Henry VIII’s fool”. *Nugae Poeticae: Select Pieces of Old English Popular Poetry, Illustrating the Manners and Arts of the Fifteenth Century*. Ed. J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps. London: John Russell Smith, 1844. 44–46.
- HEYWOOD, John. *Witty and Witles. The Plays of John Heywood*. Ed. Richard Axton and Peter Happé. Tudor Interludes. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991.
- MORE, Thomas. *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*. Ed. Louis A. Schuster et al. 3 vols. *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St Thomas More*, vol. 8. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973.
- . [Vtopia]. *A Frutefull Pleasaunt, [and] Wittie Worke, of the Beste State of a Publique Weale, and of the Newe Yle, Called Vtopia, etc.* Trans. Raphe Robynson. 2nd ed. London: [Richard Tottel for] Abraham Vele, 1556.
- PHISTON, William. *The Schoole of Good Manners. Or, a New Schoole of Vertue, etc.* Trans. W[illiam] F[iston]. Orig. *L’ABC ou instruction pour les petis enfans* (Antwerp: C. Plantin, 1564). London: I. Danter for William Ihones, 1595.
- A Pleasant History of the Life and Death of Will Summers and How Hee Came First to Be Knowne at the Court*. London: I. Okes for F. Grove and T. Lambart, 1637.

Secondary Sources

- ANDREWS, Jonathan. “Begging the Question of Idiocy: The Definition and Socio-Cultural Meaning of Idiocy in Early Modern Britain: Part 1”. *History of Psychiatry* 9.33 (1998): 65–95.

- . “Begging the Question of Idiocy: The Definition and Socio-Cultural Meaning of Idiocy in Early Modern Britain: Part 2”. *History of Psychiatry* 9.34 (1998): 179–200.
- BERNUTH, Ruth von. *Wunder, Spott und Prophetie: Natürliche Narrheit in den Historien von Claus Narren*. Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 2009.
- BILLINGTON, Sandra. *A Social History of the Fool*. Brighton: Harvester, 1984.
- FUDGE, Erica. “Learning to Laugh: Children and Being Human in Early Modern Thought”. *Textual Practice* 17.2 (2003): 277–94.
- HALL, Noeline. “Henry Patenson: Sir Thomas More’s Fool”. *Moreana* 27.101–2 (1990): 75–86.
- SKINNER, Quentin. “Why Laughing Mattered in the Renaissance: The Second Henry Tudor Memorial Lecture”. *History of Political Thought* 22.3 (2001): 418–47.
- SOUTHWORTH, John. *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*. Stroud: Sutton, 1998.
- STEGGLE, Matthew. *Laughing and Weeping in the Early Modern Theatre*. Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.
- TWYXCROSS, Meg. “‘Say Thy Lesson, Fool’: Idleness Tries to Teach Ignorance to Read”. *Medieval English Theatre* 33 (2011): 75–121.
- WELSFORD, Enid Elder Hancock. *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*. London: Faber and Faber, 1935.
- WILES, David. *Shakespeare’s Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Roberta MULLINI, « “These six parts of folly”: Robert Armin’s Moralising Anatomy of Fools’ Jest »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 23–40
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

“These sixe parts of folly”: Robert Armin’s Moralising Anatomy of Fools’ Jests

Roberta Mullini
Università di Urbino Carlo Bo

Introduction

“Pardon my folly in writing of folly” are words printed at the end of a book published in 1600, whose author used the pseudonym “Clonnico de Curtanio Snuffe”. Eight years afterwards the same text was reprinted with additions and minor changes, but on this occasion a clear authorship was declared: the writer of what followed was Robert Armin, at the time not only a well-known actor with the King’s Men, but also a sharer in the Globe theatre. *Foole upon Foole*, the title of the first edition, was changed to *A Nest of Ninnies*, while the major additions consisted of a philosophical (or pseudo-philosophical) frame in a—generally speaking—dialogic form, the protagonists of which are Sotto and the World, and of short paragraphs interspersed here and there within the six sections of the first edition.¹ On the one hand, the epigraph on the title page (“Stultorum plena sunt omnia”) seems to connect this new version of Armin’s work to the Erasmian tradition of *The Praise of Folly*, but, on the other, the frame and some speeches

I Armin’s two works will be abbreviated in references as *FuF* and *NoN*. Quotations from both texts will be drawn from the facsimile edition (Armin, *Collected Works*). All quotations and names are modernised with respect to i/j, u/v and w/v.

exchanged in the sections which precede and follow the tales appear to look back to the allegorical world of the morality plays.

By 1600 Armin had been a member of the then-Chamberlain's Men for about one year (or two at the most), that is, since Will Kempe had left the company, thus offering a new clown the possibility of playing that role in Shakespeare's plays. How Armin's entry effected deep changes in Shakespeare's comic parts and in the creation of "new" fools is now widely acknowledged with respect to not only the turn-of-the-century festive comedies (*As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*), but also the "problem" plays (witness the characters of Lucio in *Measure for Measure*, Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* and Lavatch in *All's Well that Ends Well*), in addition to aspects of *Hamlet*, where the prince's "antic disposition" mimics representational and performative features of a fool.² Actually, *Foole upon Foole* was reprinted (with some elisions) in 1605, but again the author used a pseudonym: this time "Clonnico del mondo Snuffe", with a not-so-hidden hint at the Globe theatre, where the King's Men performed at the time.

In 1608, Armin's fame was even greater, partly due to his own plays, as well as to his becoming, very probably, the co-creator of many comic parts in Shakespeare's. This is likely the reason why he dared to show his name overtly as the author of *A Nest of Ninnies*, and—perhaps to prevent his readers from remembering his activities in a far less prestigious venue than the Globe—cancelled everything that might remind them of his previous connections with the Curtain theatre. Above all, he transformed what can be called a "jest book" (*Foole upon Foole*) into a philosophy of folly (*A Nest of Ninnies*).

To Robert Armin as an actor, rather than as the author of *Foole upon Foole* and of *A Nest of Ninnies*, John Davies devoted thirty lines in his collection of epigrams entitled *The Scourge of Folly*—a volume printed in 1611 when Armin was still alive (Davies, pp. 228-29)—while only eight lines were written to celebrate William Shakespeare, "our English Terence" (pp. 76-77). Davies praises "Honest Robin" (p. 228, l. 15), urging him to "play thy part, be honest still with mirth" (l. 23), and ends the poem by referring once again to Armin's profession as a theatre performer, who "wisely play[s] the fool" (l. 30). In Davies's thirty lines, there are also some echoes of Armin's words in *Foole upon Foole* and of Viola's comment on Feste in *Twelfth Night*. Davies ends his verse with the couplet, "So thou, in sport, the happiest men dost schoole / To do as thou dost, wisely play the

2 See Felver, p. 31; Wiles; and Aspinall, p. 48. But cf. Somerset.

foole"; Viola begins her praise of Feste with "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool / And to do that well he craves a kind of wit: / He must observe the mood on whom he jests" (*TN*, III.i.59–61).³ Armin writes, when telling anecdotes about Jacke Oates, his first fool:

Naturall fooles are prone to selfe conseit,
 Fooles artificiall, with their wits lay waite
 To make themselves fooles, likeing the disguises,
 To feede their owne mindes and the gazers eyes. (*FuF*, sig. B2^r, ll. 1–4)

The three texts share a similar concept of the folly shown by an artificial fool, whether actor or court fool. Evidently, late Elizabethan and early Stuart discourses of folly had abandoned the religious condemnation of the *stultus* and used *fool* and *folly* with a wider social and cultural meaning.

What follows aims both at analysing the idea of folly which underpins Armin's two works on folly and at evaluating how the writer describes the fools he presents, especially from a physical point of view. It is a description which he might have kept in mind when performing not only "John of the Hospitall" in his own *Two Maids of More-clacke* (1609), but also Shakespeare's fools.⁴

The Two Texts about Folly

Foole upon Foole and *A Nest of Ninnies* present episodes from the lives of six fools. The events and their textual rendering are exactly the same in both works, but, as already mentioned, *NoN* embeds the narrations in a frame in which Sotto introduces Lady World to the tales and their protagonists. The various episodes begin with an initial header, "The description of...", which includes the name of a specific fool. Each "description" is a poem of a variable number of lines and of stanzas, which acquaints the reader with the physical features of the fool whose biographical episodes are narrated soon afterwards. In *NoN*, though, there is no header to the introductory poems and they are shorter than in *FuF* and different in some issues, as will be discussed later. In writing his jests, Armin always appears very scrupulous about the historicity of the events, or—at least—of the

3 This and other quotations from Shakespearean plays are drawn from Shakespeare, *Collected Works*, ed. Wells and Taylor.

4 Cockett analyses how Armin's studies of natural fools might have helped him in the performance of the major Shakespearean fools, especially Touchstone in *As You Like It*.

characters. So, for instance, the first character, Jacke Oates, is said to be Sir William Hollis's fool, probably a personage recognizable by the readers, at least in the north of England, since events are located near Lincoln. Similarly, Jemy Camber, "borne in Sterlin but twenty myles from Edinborough" (*FuF*, sig. B4^r), is said to be the fool of the (unnamed) King of Scotland, and connected with such courtiers as the Earl Huntley, the Earl Norton, and Lady Carmichell (sig. B4^r, C2^r, C2^v, respectively). The third fool, Leanard, is "now living well knowne of many" (sig. C4^r); Jacke Miller, the fourth, was "borne in Wostershire, / And known in London of a number there" (sig. D3^r, l. 24). Will Sommers, "the Kings naturall Iester", comes fifth, and is presented "as report tells me" (sig. Er^v), while the last fool, Iohn of the Hospital, is "Knowne to all London since he liu'd so late" (sig. Fr^r, l. 2). In other words, Armin seems to take special care of historical details, so as to stress the truthfulness of what he narrates in the jests.

The key words in Armin's *Foole upon Foole* and in *A Nest of Ninnies* are, obviously enough, "fool" and "folly", both of which seem to have lost their religious content. The latter word has a rather secularized meaning, roughly in the sense of "lack of understanding", while the former acquires very specific denotations pertaining to the medical and the social spheres: a fool is either a person afflicted by some mental disorder or a person living in a household as a jester.

Armin thereby introduces a distinction within the world of fools, who are divided into "fools naturall" and "fools artificiall", but in his work it is not easy to separate the two categories clearly, since nearly all of his six characters, in spite of being labelled as natural because suffering from weak brains and mental disorders, show certain signs of wit. All the fools he describes are "domestic fools in gentlemen's households" (Feather, n.p.), but the author shows moral concern rather than exact medical awareness in dividing (and defining) the protagonists of his own anecdotes. In fact, the first part of the introductory paratextual paragraphs in *Foole upon Foole*, entitled "To the Printer health, to the Binder wealth, and to both both", reads:

many now a days play the fooles and want no witte, and therefore tis no wonder for me to set downe fooles naturall, when wise men before theyle be vnprofitable, will seeme fooles artificiall: Is it then a profit to bee foolish? yea so some say, for under shew of simplicity some gaine love, while the wise with all they can doe, can scarce obtaine love. (*FuF*, sig. A2^r)

Armin's language seems to come straight from the mouth of Erasmus' Stultitia, or at least it shows the latter's long and powerful legacy, and to be connected to

the humanist issue also debated by John Heywood in his play entitled *Witty and Witless* (1525?), whether it is “[b]etter to be a foole then a wyse man”, or, rather, “be / Sage Saloman then sot Somer” (Heywood, l. 3 and ll. 659–60, respectively). By giving the name “Sotto” to the main speaker of the frame in *NoN*, Armin also seems aware of the French tradition of the *sottie*, and—even if it is impossible to ascertain—of Heywood’s use of the term as a synonym of “fool”. When introducing the six individual fools whose stories his book contains, Armin utilises adjectives that do not necessarily denote moral or mental weakness, thus avoiding any judgement on them. So Jacke Oates, the first fool in the collection, is “a flat foole naturall” (*FuF*, sig. A3^r), and Jemy Camber, the second, is a “fatt Foole naturall”, but Leanard, the third, is just “a Leane Foole” (sig. C2^r), and Jacke Miller, the fourth, is “a cleane foole” (sig. D3^r). Will Sommers, Henry VIII’s famous court-fool, is simply a “merry fool” and “the Kings naturall Jester”, whereas John of the Hospitall (of Christ’s Church hospital), who is called “a very foole” (sig. Fr^r), is overtly labelled “This innocent Idiot”, that is, with words connected to the medical lexicon, and so are Jacke Oates (mentioned as “this Idyot” [sig. A3^r, l. 6]) and Jack Miller (“A simple Idiot” [sig. C3^r, l. 4]). In Armin’s definitions, then, the adjective “naturall” is used explicitly for two men, and partially for Will Sommers, who was still remembered by many as the King’s “naturall Iester”, where the adjective seems to specify the role rather than the man.

In the end, though, Armin focuses on some events in these people’s lives which actually denote them as mentally disordered, even if, as I mentioned above, most of them (and Sommers more than the others) show common sense, kindness and a certain wit in their behaviour. But—as Armin always underlines—his protagonists were well known by many, so that, because to keep to historical accuracy appears to be one of his main purposes, he does not change the definitions attributed to his fools, and therefore those who were known as “natural” had to be written down as such.

What strikes one most in Armin’s two books on folly is the interest shown in the physical descriptions of his fools, a fact which emerges not only from the anecdotes themselves, but particularly from the verses preceding each fool’s stories. This is something which leaves Erasmus’ irony far behind and introduces elements of physical realism,⁵ thus displaying Armin’s interest in observation

5 Cockett writes that Armin’s collection “is less concerned with the philosophy of folly and its ironies than with the actualities of the lives of known natural fools” (p. 141).

and—why not?—his concern to help his reader visualise his “heroes”, before making them “perform” on the stage of his book.

The Fools' Clothing and Appearance

A Fools' Fashion Show

Robert Armin's presentation of his fools' clothing is not always greatly detailed, even if some items he mentions can help his reader to see what the fools literally looked like.⁶ Jacke Oates, the first fool, is described as wearing a red and blue straw hat (*FuF*, sig. A3^r, ll. 1-2), two colours which belong to the traditional costume of court fools,⁷ but, nearly at the end of the verses devoted to this fool, Armin adds that Jacke's hat was not a fool's cap, while showing him dressed in motley:

Motley his wearing, yellow or else greene,
A collored coate on him was seldome seene.
No fooles cap with a bable and a bell. (sig. A3^r, ll. 49-51)

One is here reminded of the famous illumination in the *Psalter of King Henry VIII*, where Will Sommers is portrayed in green motley, seemingly with a hood of the same laid on his shoulders, but no cap and bells, or a bauble.⁸

No detail is given concerning Jemy Camber's clothes, save that “a pearle spoone he still wore in his cap” and that “he ever wore rings rich and good” in the fingers of his “big hand” (sig. B3^v, ll. 23 and 25-26): from the precious material of which both spoon and rings are made one can deduce the latter were gifts from the King of Scotland, whose jester Jemy was.

Leanard, “leane as plagu'd with want”, is always dressed “In his long coate of Frieze both hot and colde” (sig. C4^r, l. 7), therefore in a coarse woolen fabric never changed during the year but worn both in summer and in winter. No other detail is mentioned. Little information is also given about Jack Miller's clothing, who goes “unhatted ... / Neate in his cloathes being course or never so gay” (sig. D3^r, ll. 2-3). About Will Sommers' clothing nothing is said, since—as Armin states—“how ere I do descry him, / So many knew him that I may belye

6 The 1605 edition of *Foole upon Foole* presents only two “descriptions” of fools, introducing Jemy Camber and Will Sommers only, instead of the six of the first printing.

7 This can be seen in the *Psalter*, Autun, ca. 1470, held by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (National Library of the Netherlands), The Hague.

8 *Psalter of King Henry VIII*, illumination for Psalm 52, fol. 63^v (British Library). For a discussion of British fools' costume, see Hotson, and Wiles's answer to the former's hypotheses.

him” (sig. D2^r, ll. 15–16). Nevertheless, we are able to visualise him, since of Sommers, the best known of all Armin’s fools, some portraits are still extant.⁹

For a different reason, John of the Hospital is also well known, because Armin included him among the characters of his *Two Maids of More-Clacke*, a play the title-page of which has a picture generally considered to be that of Armin himself when playing John. The description of this fool indeed resembles the appearance of the personage on the title-page: “Flat cap, blew coate, and iekorne [inkhorn] by his side” (*FuF*, sig. Fr^r, l. 6).

The Fools’ Physiognomy and Their Bodies

To the physical appearance of his fools Armin devoted more space than to their clothing, and he also enriched his lines with considerations about their attitudes and behaviour. But before presenting Armin’s portraits, a glance must be given to at least one sixteenth-century treatise dealing with physiognomy, the *Epytomie . . . of Phisiognomie* by Bartholomeus Cocles, published in 1556 (first edition 1504, in Bologna), and translated by Thomas Hill from Latin into English.¹⁰ This volume is just one of many such, but the reason for choosing it here is the fame it enjoyed all over Europe, as is witnessed by the many translations also made into Italian, French and German.

In *Epytomie of Phisiognomie*, the author, grounding his statements on Aristotle’s *Physiognomica*, analyses the shape of the body and of the head in particular, evaluating physical details in moral, psychological and medical terms. Just a few quotations—all bearing on the definition of foolish people—will be sufficient:

That head which is long, having the face long and bigge, and deformable: declareth that man to be a foole maliciouse, or very simple, vayne or a lyer, sone beleiving the thyng heard or tolde him, a caryer or teller of newes, and also envious or hatefull. (sig. A5^v [chap. 11])

That head which is very great, and the necke with the sinowes and bones small: declareth an evill condicion or qualitie of the brayne, and that man to be a dullarde and foole, compared to the asse. (sig. A6^r [chap. 11])

9 Apart from the illumination in Henry’s Psalter, Sommers also features in a portrait of the royal family at Hampton Court, and in another painting discovered in 2008 at Boughton House (Northamptonshire), where he carries a monkey on his shoulders.

10 Thomas Hill reworked Cocles’ volume when he published his own physiognomic treatise, *The Contemplation of Mankinde*, in 1571. The full title of Cocles’ text is *A brief and most pleasaunt Epitomye of the whole art of Phisiognomie, gathered out of Aristotle, Rasis, Formica, Loxius, Phylemon, Palemon, Consiliator, Morbeth the Cardinal and others many moe, by that learned chyrurgian Cocles: and englished by Thomas Hyll Londoner*.

The eyes verye small: declare that manne to bee a foole, weake in strength, applying in maners to the ape: that is, to be fearful, and a deceaver. (sig. B3^r [chap. 16])

The mouthe standinge farre oute, and rounde, by meane of the thicknes of the lypes, and the mouthe somewhat wrythinge withall: declareth that manne to be unclenlye or nastie, a foole, fierie or churlysh, compared to the hogge. (sig. B8^r [chap. 18])

The lippes not sufficiente equall thoroughe oute, To that the one is greater then the other, declareth that man to be more simple, then sapiente, of a grosse wit, and dull understanding, having a diverse or variable fortune, as the autentikes affirme. (sig. Cr^r [chap. 19])

As is evident, Cocles draws his outlines connecting behaviour to physical traits, all of which, in the quotations transcribed, result in attributing the label of “fool” to the person with the characteristics he specifies.

Is such a physiognomic interest present in Armin’s descriptions? It is nearly impossible to give any answer to this question, even if physiognomic thought was known and widespread in Elizabethan society;¹¹ it is interesting, however, to see how rich in facial and bodily features Armin’s portraits are, and this invites us to build a parallel between Cocles’ and Armin’s fools.

The “flat foole” Jacke Oates ranks highest in Armin’s collection as to physical details: seven stanzas out of the ten devoted to his presentation deal with Jacke’s features, described from l. 7 to l. 48 from head to foot (*FuF*, sig. A3^{r-v}). His brow is “wrinkled” (l. 7), his nose is “short” and “hooked” (l. 11), his eyes and cheeks are “hollow” (ll. 10 and 12, respectively), his mouth is irregular, the upper lip being “turned in” (l. 13) and the under lip “so big t’might sweep a manger” (l. 14). On an upward slanted chin Jacke has a little beard “like to a swallowes tayle” (l. 15); he has a lot of hair on his dark neck, a big belly, long and lean but small-fingered hands, powerful wrists and arms but short legs, swollen knees painful with gout, two “broad and big” feet (l. 37), huge hips, a stooping back, and long hair shorn at the back of his head. If seen through Cocles’ lenses, Oates would certainly qualify as a fool, at least according to the shape of his mouth, as in the fourth passage quoted above.

If Oates does not seem to be particularly disabled, what Armin writes about the “fat foole” Jemy Camber makes the latter a more than plump dwarf (*FuF*, sig. B3^v, l. 5): “A yarde hye and a nayle [1/16 of a yard] no more his stature” and “Two yards in compass and a nayle” (l. 7), with short legs just one foot in length and big hands. He has a small head, long hair, one ear bigger than the other,

11 On this point, see Baumbach.

shining eyes, a flat nose and a square beard, little lips but a wide mouth with few teeth. About a person with a flat nose, Cocles observes:

The nose flatte, declareth that manne to be violente or hastye in hys wrathe, vayne or envyouse, a lyar, leacherouse, weake, unstable, soone credityng one, and convertible to good or evyll. (sig. B5^v [chap. 17])

The author does not include such a flat-nosed person in the fool category, but nevertheless he defines him in a very negative way.

The “leane foole” Leanard is described as slender and “reasonable tall” (*FuF*, sig. C4^r, l. 5); his head is little and his forehead high. His body is also a little misshapen (even if not with the same disabilities as Camber’s), since one of his hands is crooked, his neck is held askew and one eye is squint. His “great” legs have swollen knees (l. 13). Nothing else is described about Leonard but his bad character, so that “Few takes delight in him or joyes, / He is so fraught with envy not with toyes” (ll. 25–26). As for lean people, Cocles once again underlines negative aspects which border on a moral condemnation:

in fleshe leane, as it were sharpe, declareth that man to be most wycked or ungracious, symple, bolde proude or hautie, a threatner, envyous, warie in expenses, deceatefull, soone angrye, Iracundious, a betrayer or traytoure, a thefe, and a surmyser. (sig. C8^v [chap. 25])

One is certainly struck by the coincidence between Armin’s and Cocles’ judgments about the “sin” of envy in lean people: the abstract principle presented by the latter is embodied in the real fool—Jemy Camber—introduced by the former.¹²

When describing Jack Miller, “A Cleane Foole”, Armin presents him as a clumsy person “plodding on his way” (*FuF*, sig. D3^r, l. 1), with no education at all (education is not mentioned with regard to the other fools). His body has nothing particularly relevant: he has white skin, a round face and a body to match; but his lips are dirty with the continuous rheum dropping from his nose. To this the author adds a very peculiar feature concerning this fool’s way of speaking: Jemy, who is also able to sing and to “speake a Players part” (l. 19), stutters. Armin’s comment is also interesting, since the author laments that Jemy’s stammer causes sorrow in the onlookers (“made the saddest heart” [l. 21])—a sign of

12 One is reminded here of Julius Caesar’s remarks about Cassius: “Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look; / He thinks too much; such men are dangerous” (Shakespeare, *JC*, l.iii.195–96).

Armin's compassionate attitude towards mental and/or physical disabilities. This can at least partially clear the author of the accusation of cruelty in exhibiting his fools. Actually, as Peter Cockett writes, "The fact that the book treats the mentally handicapped as figures of fun is the most likely cause for the scant attention it has received from scholars" (p. 144). I believe, however, that before judging, one ought to take into account cultural and epistemic differences, in order to avoid applying modern attitudes to a text of the past. Therefore, especially considering that Armin does not introduce moral comments when writing of his fools but simply tells stories about them in a documentary way, the words he uses to present Miller's speech disorder seem to reveal humane concern, exactly at a time when Bedlam Hospital was progressively becoming the resort for horrible displays of the inmates locked up there.¹³

That *Foole upon Foole* presents only scant details about Will Sommers' clothing has already been underlined, and the same applies to his physical appearance: of this fool Armin writes only that "Leane he was, hollow eyed as all report, / And stoop he did too" (*FuF*, sig. Er^v, ll. 7-8), so that it is easy to match these few words with the extant pictures of Henry VIII's court jester. According to Cocles' physiognomy, Sommers should have been a very wicked man:

The eyes depe in the head, as they were hydde that is, hollowe in and the syghte farre in, declare that man to be suspiciouse, maliciouse, long angry or muche Ireful, of a perverse maner, perfyet of memorye, bolde, cruell, lyghtlye lying, a threatner, a vycyouse leacherer, proude, enuiouse, and a deceaver. (sigs. B2^v-B3^r [chap. 16])

On the contrary, though, Sommers is praised in *Foole upon Foole* because of his generosity and his compassionate spirit, even if Armin narrates the witty (but certainly not vicious) jests and riddles of Henry's fool when facing Cardinal Wolsey.¹⁴

Neither does Armin devote many words to John of the Hospital's outward features: of this last fool in the series we learn only that he has "Two flaring eyes, a black beard, and his head / Lay on his shoulder still, as sicke and sad" (*FuF*, sig. Fr^r, ll. 9-10). From these expressions, as well, Armin's sympathy towards his subject seems to surface, rather than the attitude of someone ready to guffaw at a mentally disordered creature, or of a physiognomist who judges people only

¹³ See Mullini, "Pardon", pp. 250-52.

¹⁴ For parallels between, on the one hand, Sommers' technique when teasing Cardinal Wolsey and King Henry VIII with his riddles and, on the other, the Fool's riddling in *King Lear*, see Mullini, *Corruttore*, pp. 136-37, 142-79.

from their facial features. In sum, even if Armin sometimes seems to comply with his time's physiognomic discourse, he is not totally subservient to it, ready as he is to see beneath appearances.

The Moralising Frame

As already mentioned, in 1608 Armin had his *Fool upon Fool* reprinted, changed the title to *A Nest of Nimmies*, declared his name as its author, and added some parts to the old text. There is also a new paratextual item: instead of addressing his printer, binder and reader, he writes an introductory letter "To the most true and rightly compleat in all good gifts and graces, the generous gentlemen of Oxenford, Cambridge, and the Innes of Court." In it he claims to

have seene the stars at midnight in your societies, and might have Commenst like an asse as I was; but I lackt liberty in that, yet I was admitted in Oxford to be of Christs Church, while they of Al-soules gave ayme: such as knew me remember my meaning. I promised them to prove mad, and I thinke I am so, else I would not meddle with Folly so deeply. (*NoN*, sig. A2^r)

Nothing in the few biographical details we know about Armin sheds light on a possible visit of his to these institutions, but—as David Wiles observes—this dedication "establishes the work as a bid for intellectual recognition" (p. 140).

The anecdotes narrated in *A Nest of Nimmies* are exactly the same as those in *Foole upon Foole*, but there is an internal narrator, Sotto, who tells the stories to the World, a female character presented as

wantom sick, as one surfetting on sinne (in morning pleasures, noone banquets, after riots, night moriscoes, midnights modicoms, and abundance of trash trickt up to all turbulent revellings) . . . riches her chamberlaine could not keep her in, beauty her bed-fellow was bold to persuade her, and sleepy securitie mother of all mischiefe, tut her prayers was but mere prattle. (*NoN*, sig. A3^r)

The names chosen for the two main characters and for the lady's servants immediately show a certain abstract concern on the writer's part: Armin, by embedding his old stories in a new frame, seems to add allegorical connotations to them. Actually, at the end of each fool's jests, Armin introduces comments which often include the adjective or noun (or even verb) "morrall" or the adverb "morrally" (altogether they occur seven times). These words are present in Sotto's decoding of the meaning of the stories, for example: "By Jack Oates is Morrally meant

many described like him; though not fooles naturall, yet most artificiall. . . . By the knight is meant maintainers of foolery: By the Hall, the Inne where the cards of vanity causeth many to be bewitched" (*NoN*, sig. B4^r). Another example occurs after Jemy Camber's stories: "The Mule, morrally signifies the Divell, upon whose trot their fatnesse takes ease, and rides a gallop to destruction" (*NoN*, sig. Dr^v). Similarly, at the end of Jack Miller's jests, Sotto says: "I would faine Morrall of it, if you please. Leave was granted, for the World knew it would else bee commanded, and Sotto thus poynts at the Parable" (*NoN*, sig. E4^v).

The language of moral plays resounds here, as if Armin, after asking the educated members of the academy for recognition in the initial letter to the universities, were also looking for the public's praise of his philosophical depth. His discourse of folly had begun on the title page of *Foole upon Foole* with the Ciceronian motto "Stultorum plena sunt omnia"¹⁵—a saying not far removed from the "Stultorum infinitus est numerus" from the Book of Ecclesiastes (1:15) or, indeed, from Feste's remark in *Twelfth Night* that "foolery . . . does walk about the orb like the sun, it shines everywhere" (III.i.39-40). Now it appears transformed by the new frame surrounding the jests. This "philosophy of folly", though, apart from some satirical barbs, does not add much to its previous version. And when Sotto asks World to look into his "glass perspective" to see "into some (and in them thy selfe)", the fool's mirror—as in Hans Holbein's drawing illustrating a passage of *The Praise of Folly*—is once more introduced as an instrument of self-analysis.

Four out of six of the detailed physical descriptions of naturals present in *Foole upon Foole* have disappeared and been replaced by shorter and less rich verses. For example, the sixty pentameters devoted to Jacke Oates in *Foole upon Foole* give way to the twenty-four shorter lines of his presentation in *A Nest of Ninnies*, and—what is more significant—Armin adds moral comments to bodily features, such as the following: "Of nature curst, yet not the worst, / Was nastie, given to sweare, / Toylesome ever" (*NoN*, sig. A4^r, ll. 5-7), apparently unaware of the inconsistency deriving from the fact that in *Foole upon Foole* he had written of the same fool, "Sweare he would not, for which all lov'd him well" (*FuF*, sig. A3^v, l. 52). In the same way, the twenty-eight lines introducing "leane Leanard" are completely replaced by eighteen shorter lines, which, on the one hand, do not

15 This motto also appears in Thomas Dekker's *The Guls Horne-booke*, which was published in 1609, the year after the release of *NoN*.

mention the fool's envy, but, on the other, inform the reader that he is "subtill in his follie, / Showing right but apt to wrong, / When a'peared most holy" (*NoN*, sig. D2^r, ll. 14-16). In *A Nest of Ninnies*, the various fools remain real people, but their actions are explained as if they were *exempla*, meaning something on an allegorical level, in contrast to the historical basis on which *Foole upon Foole* pretended to be built. The allegorising turn is also signalled by the use of such terms as "embleme" and "parable" (*NoN*, sig. E4^v), and of the phrase "by the" as the introduction of a moral explanation (out of forty-two such occurrences, a good seventeen serve to let moral glosses be joined to the previous co-text).

Everything in this way becomes moralised, read through special lenses, and what in *Foole upon Foole* was a collection of realistic anecdotes having actual fools as protagonists has become in *A Nest of Ninnies* a nearly sermonising reinterpretation. The Erasmian idea of the first suit of fools is turned into something similar to moral instruction, and folly into an allegory, or at least a metaphor.¹⁶ In this way Sotto's "glasse prospective" (*NoN*, sigs. A3^r, A3^v), through which he shows Lady World the sequence of his six fools and which is often in the text simply named a "glasse", reveals itself to be both a conjurer's instrument and an early modern "translation" of the medieval *speculum*, in this case a *speculum stultorum*¹⁷—a tool for mild satire and, particularly, an instrument for knowing oneself. Armin's discourse of folly, through "these sixe parts of folly" (*NoN*, sig. A3^v), seems to look back at that sort of literature, when the author mixes the "mirror held up to nature" in *Foole upon Foole* with a "glass prospective" of moral significance.

Modern readers may wonder why Armin revised *FoF* in the way I have tried to exemplify. Unfortunately, there is no documentable explanation. However, one might surmise that Robert Armin, the son of a tailor, who in the 1580s had served as an apprentice in the London Company of Goldsmiths, and in 1614 would sign his will as a "Cittizen and Goldsmithe of London", desired to remain in readers' memory as a respectable and reputable writer, rather than as the mul-

16 See Gardette for an approach to *A Nest of Ninnies* in the line of Sebastian Brant's *Das Narrenschiff*.

17 See the volume with this title by Nigel de Longchamps. On the development of the mirror image in medieval and early modern literature, see Grabes. Sotto's glass might also have reminded Armin's contemporaries of the magic glass held, during the apparitions in Act Four of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, by the eighth king, a glass in which Macbeth—to his total dismay and fury—sees "many more" (IV.i.136) future kings derived from Banquo's offspring.

tifaceted interpreter of Shakespeare's fools.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the few parish documents witnessing his children's christening and his own death (the latter in 1615) attest that, in the minds of his neighbours, he remained a "player of Enterludes" (Felver, p. 77).

18 The information about Armin's last will and testament derives from Hotson, pp. 107-11. In the will there is no hint of Armin's theatrical profession or association with Shakespeare (see Felver, pp. 77-78).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- ARMIN, Robert. *Foole upon Foole* (London, 1600). Fac. rpt. *The Collected Works of Robert Armin*. Introd. J. P. Feather. 2 vols. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972. Vol. 1.
- . *The History of the Two Maids of More-clacke*. London: N[icholas] [Okes] for Thomas Archer, 1609. STC 773.
- . *A Nest of Ninnies* (London, 1608). Fac. rpt. *The Collected Works of Robert Armin*. Introd. J. P. Feather. 2 vols. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972. Vol. 1.
- COCLES, Bartholomeus. *A brief and most pleasau[n]t Epitomye of the whole art of Phisiognomie, etc.* Trans. Thomas Hill. London: Iohn Waylande, 1556. STC 5468. *Early Modern English Medical Texts* (EMEMT) CD-ROM. Comp. Irma Taavitsainen, Päivi Pahta et al. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010.
- DAVIES, John. *The Scourge of Folly*. London: E[dward] A[lld]e for Richard Redmer, 1611. STC 6341.
- DEKKER, Thomas. *The Guls Horne-booke*. London: [Nicholas Okes] for R. S[ergier?], 1609. STC 6500.
- ERASMUS, Desiderius. *Moriæ Encomium*. Paris, 1511.
- HEYWOOD, John. *Witty and Witless. The Plays of John Heywood*. Ed. Richard Axton and Peter Happé. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991.
- HILL, Thomas. *The Contemplation of Mankinde Contayning a Singuler Discourse after the Art of Phisiognomie*. London: [Henry Denham for] William Seres, 1571. STC 13482.
- LONGCHAMPS, Nigel (de). *Speculum Stultorum*. Utrecht, 1474.
- Psalter*. Autun, ca. 1470. Koninklijke Bibliotheek 76 E 8. (National Library of the Netherlands), The Hague. Online at <<http://www.kb.nl/en/special-collections/medieval-manuscripts/liturgical-manuscripts>>. (Accessed 20 August 2013.)
- Psalter of King Henry VIII*. British Library MS Royal 2 A XVI. Online at <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=30457>>. (Accessed 20 August 2013.)
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Works*. The Oxford Shakespeare, Compact Edition. Ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Secondary Sources

- ASPINALL, Dana E. "Robert Armin". *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*. Ed. Vicki K. Janik. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998. 41-49.
- BAUMBACH, Sybille. *Shakespeare and the Art of Physiognomy*. Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2008.
- COCKETT, Peter. "Performing Natural Folly: The Jests of Lean Leonard and the Touchstones of Robert Armin and David Tennant". *New Theatre Quarterly* 22.2 (2006): 141-54.
- FEATHER, J. P. Introduction [to *Foole upon Foole*]. *The Collected Works of Robert Armin*. 2 vols. Fac. rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972. Vol. 1. [n.p.].
- FELVER, Charles S. *Robert Armin, Shakespeare's Fool: A Biographical Essay*. *Kent State University Bulletin* 49.1. Kent State University Research Series, 5. Kent, OH.: Kent State University Press, 1961.
- GARDETTE, Raymond. "La vie, le péché et la mort dans une version élisabéthaine de la 'nef des fous': La Suite des fous de Robert Armin". *Caliban* 9 (1973): 3-17.
- GRABES, Herbert. *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*. Trans. Gordon Collier. Orig. pub. *Speculum, Mirror und Looking-Glass. Kontinuität und Originalität der Spiegelmetapher in den Buchtiteln des Mittelalters und der englischen Literatur des 13. bis 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- HOTSON, Leslie. *Shakespeare's Motley*. London: Hart-Davies, 1952.
- MULLINI, Roberta. *Corruttore di parole. Il fool nel teatro di Shakespeare*. Bologna: CLUEB, 1983.
- . "'Pardon my folly in writing of folly': les ouvrages sur la folie de Robert Armin". *Littérature et pathologie*. Ed. Max Milner. Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1989. 245-54.
- SOMERSET, J. A. B. "Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools, 1599-1607". *Mirror up to Shakespeare: Essays in Honour of G. R. Hibbard*. Ed. J. C. Gray. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. 68-81.
- WILES, David. *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Marie-Hélène BESNAULT, « Telling, Showing and Interpreting Mad Discourse in Renaissance Drama »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 41-62
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Telling, Showing and Interpreting Mad Discourse in Renaissance Drama

Marie-Hélène Besnault

Université François-Rabelais de Tours/CESR-CNRS

In both Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One*, and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, the plays which made their authors famous in the late 1580s, mad discourse is present, to a lesser extent in the first case, and more so in the second. Such discourse must have proved very popular, since Hieronimo's mad speeches received five anonymous additions in 1602, after Kyd's death, and after the appearance of other memorable mad scenes in the plays of Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists. By the closing of the theatres in 1642, many more mad scenes, which were often not present in the sources of the playwrights, came to be written. Madness was given both comic and tragic treatments in plays intended for performance by professional male actors or trained young choristers, and intended for a paying audience in a public theatre. Given the non-specific nature of the few stage directions to be found in some of the published dramatic texts, I attempt, with some audacity, in this performance-oriented essay, to help modern readers to visualise mad behaviours on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages.

Like many critics, I challenge the notion that verbal language is absolutely primary in drama. I assume that mad discourse, even more than other discourses, relies mainly on body language; that, in the theatre, mad behaviour is meant to be erratic, to shift abruptly

from laughter to tears, from moaning to shouting, and from senseless immobility to wild excitement; that vocal modulations increase the general impression of incoherence and inconsequentiality which characterises madness; and, finally, that the dramatic text is, in turn, energised, slowed down, exaggerated, naturalised, stylised, danced, sung, mumbled, etc., by the actors. In early seventeenth-century England, real-life mad behaviours could be observed and even aggravated by the custodians' or the visitors' whipping, tickling and pricking of the inmates of Bedlam or other madhouses. This pastime was, however, controversial. Theatre audiences may have found it difficult to discriminate between comedy and pathos. On the stage, Romeo could hyperbolically compare the torments inflicted on him by his unrequited love to such mistreatment and declare he was "Not mad, but bound more than a madman is: / Shut up in prison, kept without food / Whipped and tormented" (*Rom.*, I.ii.54-56)¹ without being taken seriously, while some compassion among the audience for real madmen was almost inevitable. This makes us more aware of the complex mixture of tonalities offered by texts containing dramatic mad discourse to the actors who interpreted them. Extreme flexibility was demanded of them.

Shakespeare's great actors playing mad Lear or mad Ophelia benefited from numerous internal and external stage directions, which give us more than hints about their performances. In *Hamlet*, for instance, Horatio *tells* the Queen and the spectators about the effects of despair on Polonius's daughter before these are *shown* as she enters. The reactions and comments of other characters complement Horatio's tale, and the actor's performance. Such a wealth of information is not always present in all the plays with mad parts produced between 1587 and 1642—hence my wish to focus on a few representative scenes. I shall not present them in chronological order, but according to the kind of madness shown, whether collective or not, and the help in imagining their interpretation provided by these richer directions, and by contemporary psychological treatises, such as Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

My first example emphasises Shakespeare's polyvalent textual direction of actors and of audience response. In his *Troilus and Cressida*, Cassandra's "Cry, Trojans, cry!" (II.ii.96) interrupts the hot debate among Troilus, Paris, Hector and Priam about the usefulness of keeping Helen in Troy. The subsequent dialogue gives

I All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Wells, Taylor et al.

many implicit internal directions. Priam's question, "What shriek is this?" (96), tells us a loud, shrill cry expressive of terror and pain is heard from within. Troilus recognises the voice of his "mad sister" (97), and Hector names her: "It is Cassandra" (99). Cassandra has clearly entered when she wildly repeats her cry for the third time and is told by Hector to calm herself: "Peace sister, peace" (102). Cassandra describes her own utterance as "clamours" (99), announcing "prophetic tears" (101) and a "mass of moan to come" (106), as "Troy burns" (111). She repeats her cry three more times, amplifying it. Then, with implicit vehemence and urgency, she invites Trojan "Virgins and boys, mid-age, and wrinkled old / Soft infancy that nothing canst but cry", to "add to my clamours" (103-5) their inarticulate utterance of emotion, and "practice [their] eyes with tears" (107). The dialogue between Troilus and Hector also highlights their differing views of Cassandra. While the younger brother disregards the "brainsick raptures" (121) of a mad sister, the elder shows respect for her inspired prophecy, her "high strains of divination" (112-13). There are two versions of the only external stage direction in this short sequence. Both are conventional signals, and herald most mad women's entrances in Tudor and Jacobean drama. In the 1609 Quarto we read: "*Enter Cassandra rauiug*"; in the folio version: "*Enter Cassandra, with her hair about her ears.*"² All distracted persons are supposed to rave, that is, to speak irrationally, or incoherently, wildly, frenziedly. And when women's hair is let down, dishevelled, loose or about the ears, it is a clear visual signal of madness, or rape.³ More interestingly, the fact that Cassandra never addresses her brothers and her father directly, and that Shakespeare gives her no exit, implies, I think, that in her agitated mental state and passionate excitement, she is blind and deaf to their presence and that she passes over the stage bearing her prophetic warning with vacant or staring eyes. As Foucault writes, "*le fou ouvrant les yeux ne voit que la nuit dans la lumière et de la lumière dans ses images*" (p. 262).

The source of mad discourse is here represented as inspired prophecy. It can also appear as divine punishment or as devilish possession. Dealing with madness in his *Treatise of Melancholy*, published in 1586, Timothie Bright, a physician but also a churchman, implicates both an excess of the "splenetick excrement" (p. 109) and divine retribution in melancholy patients: "Although no man is by nature freed from this affliction, in so much as all men are sinners, and being culpable

2 See Bevington, ed., II.ii.96 SD, and textual n. to 96.1.

3 See Dessen, pp. 36-38.

of the breach of God [*sic*] laws, incur the punishment of condemnation: yet is the melancholicke person more than any subiect therunto” (pp. 198-99). Little wonder that black magic and witchcraft are sometimes associated with madness in plays, often more seriously than in the case of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, when Feste, disguised as Sir Topas, pretends to free him, “the lunatic” shut up in a dark room, from “dishonest Satan” (IV.ii.23, 32). Burton himself calls melancholy the “Divels bath” (193.26)⁴ even in the last edition of his great work. *The Witch of Edmonton*, by Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley, presents a case of madness caused by the witchcraft of Elizabeth Sawyer, a real woman condemned and put to death in the same year of 1621, for having bewitched her neighbour, Anne Ratcliff. In Act Four, Scene One, a non-specific stage direction reads, “Enter Anne Ratcliff *mad*” (172 SD). In the text, we are confronted with the mad discourse of the victim, Anne. Besides calling for collective singing and dancing, using bawdy words, and attempting to scratch Elizabeth Sawyer’s face, she threatens to sue the witch, and to ask her pig to testify. Finally, according to her father, “away she brake; and nothing in her mouth being heard, but the Devil, the Witch, the Witch, the Devil; she beat out her own brains, and so died” (IV.i.205-7). The other mad discourse is that of the supposed witch. She often talks to her favourite familiar, the black dog she calls Tomalin, who, at one point, comes in coloured white: “Have I given up my self to thy black lust / Thus to be scorn’d” (V.i.4-5). In this topical play, the dramatists obviously capitalise on the legendary attributes of witches.

When witchcraft is concerned, the recourse to formulaic Latin exorcisms, or conjurations, as in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (I.iii.16-22), is frequent. They are generally performed in special costumes and accompanied by thunder and various demoniac apparitions. The Friar in George Chapman’s *Bussy d’Ambois* “puts on his robes” (IV.ii.31) and his Latin “exorcising rites” (24) to raise Behemoth “in some beauteous form / That with least terror [Tamyra] may brook his sight” (28-29). Behemoth’s text suggests spectacular light and sound effects: “Any of this my guard that circle me / In these blue fires, and out of whose dim fumes / Vast murmurs use to break, and from their sounds / Articulate voices” (52-55). When he sends one of his “knowing spirits”, Cartophylax, back to “that inscrutable darkness where are hid / All deepest truths” (48-49), there is a stage direction

4 All quotations from Burton, except where otherwise indicated, are from vol. I of the *Anatomy*, ed. Faulkner, Kiessling and Blair, and are referenced by page numbers, followed by line numbers.

that reads, “A torch removes”. More generally, there are special costumes, not only for devils and magicians, but also for mad characters. In *The Changeling*, for instance, by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, Isabella, the wife of Alibius, the asylum doctor, puts on the “habit of a frantic” (IV.iii.127) to hide her identity from one of her wooers, who does not penetrate her mad disguise and looks down on “this wild unshapen antic” (125).

By the choice of *Sanity in Bedlam* as the title of his *Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy*, Lawrence Babb, like Berger Evans in his earlier study, *The Psychiatry of Robert Burton*, highlights the contiguity between melancholy and madness in the minds of those who were concerned with diseases of the body and of the mind. Burton, who was a divine by profession, a scholar with an interest in medicine by inclination, spent probably more than thirty years of “his time and knowledge” (8.9) at Oxford laboriously collecting his “cento out of diverse writers” (8.11-9), ancient or contemporary, “for the common good of all” (8.9-10). His *Anatomy* was already a formidable concatenation when it was published in 1621. Its immediate success was such that numerous additions were included in its five subsequent editions. His work, relying like its precursors on the Galenist medical theory which was dominant in Europe during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, constitutes a valuable panorama of the medical and psychological ideas of the time, most of which had circulated in Latin before him. The indebtedness to Burton of John Ford, who collaborated with Dekker and other dramatists on at least five plays between 1621 and 1625 and went on to write his own love tragedies, has been attested by B. S. Ewing (*Burtonian Melancholy in the Plays of John Ford*). Presumably, many playwrights, actors and spectators came to know the *Anatomy*.

Not only does Burton, like Bright, believe in the universality of his malady since the Fall, but his extensive reading leads him to warn his reader that “Proteus himself is not so diverse; you may as well make the Moon a new coat as a true character of a melancholy man” (407.28-29), and “The four and twenty letters make no more variety of words in diverse languages” (407.25-26). Referring to the four humours—blood, phlegm, choler and black bile—he writes that melancholy is “differing according to the mixture of those natural humours amongst themselves, or four *unnatural adust* humours, as they are diversely tempered and mingled” (166.26-167.1-2). The two words I have italicised recur in all his chapters. The combination of those two defects leads almost inevitably to madness. Excessive combustion causing dryness and a scorching heat can make any humour “adust”. Differences can also arise from the seat of this malady — brain, heart,

or other parts of the body — and the kind of depravation from which vegetable, animal or vital spirits and humours suffer: “If the brain be hot, the animal spirits are hot, much madness follows with violent actions” (167.29–30); “If it trouble the minde as it is diversly mixt, it produceth several kinds of madness and dotage” (168.8–9).

Transference of spirits is also a possibility. Of the three kinds of spirits, “the vitall spirits are made in the heart of the naturall, which, by the arteries, are transported to all other parts: if these spirits cease, then life ceaseth, as in a syncope or swooning” (141.33–35). Chapman, in *Bussy d’Ambois*, gives the Count of Montsurry lines that can only be understood in the light of the medical theories of the times. When Tamyra, his wife, “seems to swoon” (IV.i.141 SD), he kisses her: “Look up, my love, and by this kiss, receive / My soul amongst thy spirits, for supply / To thine chased with my fury” (149–51). The jealous husband first hopes that his vital spirits, being transferable from one person to another through the physical senses, may revive Tamyra’s perturbed soul. He then realizes that his kiss cannot achieve the transfer because his blood is *troubled* by his jealous fury: “A headlong chaos murmurs within me, which I must digest / And not drown her in my confusions” (155–57).

Mad jealousy is, of course, a favourite with dramatists and audiences. But any intemperate passion of the mind can cause madness. “Passions cause many maladies, and wellnigh all are increased by them, for all that pain engendereth melancholy, which for the most part, nourishes all diseases”, writes Thomas Wright in 1601, when dealing with *The Passions of the Mind in Generall* (p. 63). Bright, earlier, had written on “Howe melancholie worketh fearefull passions in the mind” (p. 33 [title, chap. 9]). Zabina’s short mad sequence, in the last act of Christopher’s Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine, Part One*, exemplifies the effects of several of them. Bajazeth, having sent her to fetch water, has just brained himself against the cage in which he had long been held prisoner by Tamburlaine. In preceding scenes, the captive Turkish empress’s speeches, served by the author’s powerful lines, had been scornful, fearless and constantly vindictive, in spite of her being reduced to ignoble slavery and often exposed to the obscene mockery of Tamburlaine and his soldiers. When she was left alone with her despairing husband, her passionate rhetoric of hatred had, however, given way to one of passionate love: “I may pour forth my soul into thine arms / With words of love” (V.i.278–79); “Sweet Bajazeth” (282).

Clearly preparing the spectator for Zenocrate's remorse—"pardon me that was not moved with ruth / To see them live so long in misery" (367-68)—Marlowe chooses not to offer the Turkish empress's mad scene as "a goodly show for a banquet" (IV.i.55) to the usual mocking onstage audience. Only the spectators in the theatre see Zabina's distraught self in front of the cage where she beholds her dead husband's "skull all riven in twain, his brains dash'd out" (305). After a few conventional laments (306-8), culminating in pathetic invocations reminiscent of Senecan tragedy—"O Bajazeth! O Turk! O Emperor!" (308)—Zabina's "lavish tongue" breaks into raving fragments which contrast with Bajazeth's own final heroic discourse.⁵ The iambic pentameter is distorted and replaced by spondaic, then mostly trochaic prose. Yet, Zabina's short sentences are not defective. With one exception, they are all imperative, and suggest unhampered dominance, as well as a transformation of reality through imagination. It is through Zabina's jumbling together of various discourses that Marlowe creates a strong feeling of mental confusion, and through her telescoping past, present and future, as well as through obsessive repetitions, including her self-assertive "I"'s: "I, even I, speak to her" (312). The Turkish empress implicitly addresses her servants, Tamburlaine, his soldiers, the Turkish soldiers, and finally Bajazeth, in disorderly haste but with passion, alternately irascible and compassionate: "Down with him"; "Fling the meat in his face"; "Bring milk and fire"; "Let the soldiers be buried"; "Ah, save that infant, save him, save him!" (311-15). The rapid succession of monosyllabic words, orders and curses—"Give me the sword with a ball of wild fire upon it" (310-11); "Hell, death, Tamburlaine, hell!" (315)—gives a feeling of racing thoughts. Disorientation is, however, suggested in the traumatic picture of war powerfully conjured up by Zabina's words: "The sun was down. Streamers, white, red, black, here, here, here" (313). The printed text provides no explicit stage directions for this brief but intense mad scene, but it begs the actor to convey a whole range of embattled emotions and passions: extreme distress, rage, pride, scorn, compassion, horror, fury, loving fervour ("I come, I come" [316]) and, finally, glorious self-violence. The responsibility for making this moment a tragic peak falls largely on the vocal and expressive skills of the actor. The danger is to overdo them, and to make this tragic peak burlesque.

Of these extreme emotions, Burton says they are "perturbations and passions, which trouble the phantasie" (255.13). In melancholy men fantasy

5 Cf. Hillman, *Self-Speaking*, p. 244, as well as his essay in the present volume.

or imagination “often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things” (152.24-25). All the authors who dealt with perturbations of the mind say so.⁶ But only Burton offers so many pleasant digressions, graphic examples and “prodigious” symptoms borrowed from all kinds of authors, many of whom were poets. Whereas other treatises were mainly concerned with theories and “conceptions”, often as much theological as medical, the author of the *Anatomy* also explored “Symptomes, or Signes of Melancholy in the Body”⁷ with a sort of humorous voracity. These are the passages which I have found most useful in addressing my subject, especially when various sorts of madness are suggested by the stage directions.

When impersonating mad characters, actors could choose from hundreds of such “Symptomes . . . in the Body”, depending on the situation and the temperament of these characters (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic or melancholic), leaving aside internal symptoms like “gripping in their bellies” (382.7), wind, palpitation of the heart, slow pulse, hard black excrements, epilepsy, vertigo, “terrible and fearefull dreams” (382.9), except where the characters themselves referred to them. This is the case, for instance, when Leontes, in *The Winter’s Tale*, refers knowingly to a jealous man who “cracks his gorge, his sides, with violent hefts” (II.i.467). If collective, unspecific madness was represented, as in the “madmen’s morris” in *The Changeling*, when trained madmen and fools, guided by the “commanding pizzles” (IV.iii.62) of doctor Alibius and his assistant, are made to dance in a paid performance, “the more absurdity” of which “the more commends it” (58, 57), the actors could, in order to vary and enrich their body language, pick from long Burtonian lists. Of those who are “far gone”, and whose “mimical gestures are too familiar”, the Anatomist offers the following panoply of symptoms: “laughing, grinning, fleering, murmuring, talking to themselves, with strange mouthes and faces, inarticulate voices, exclamations” (382.25-27); “cold sweat . . . a leaping in many parts of the body . . . a kind of itching, saith Laurentius on the superficies of the skin, like a flee-biting sometimes” (382.16-17). Mad discourse, in such cases, would be mainly comic.

The last scene of *The Honest Whore, Part One*, by Dekker and Middleton, presents several madmen. Father Anselmo, the custodian, warns various visitors to

6 Cf. Thomas Walkington’s *Optick Glasse of Humours* (1607) and Pierre Charron’s *Of Wisdom* (translated in 1606).

7 The heading of Partition 1, Section 3, Member 1, Subsection 1 (pp. 381-84).

a Bedlam located in Milan that they must leave their weapons behind because, although some of his patients, “So apish and phantastike, play with a fether” (V.ii.158), and while “blemisht and defac’d, yet do they act / Such anticke and such pretty lunacies, / That spite of sorrow they will make you smile” (159–61), others might snatch their “rapiers suddenly” and “do much harm” (165). He has to tame them: “They must be used like children, pleas’d with toyes, / And anon whipt for their unrulinesse” (242–43). Although the friar has hidden reasons for acting as he does in a play that is mainly a comedy, what he says of the mad inmates’ “pretty lunacies”, and of his own whipping habits, is exhibited in three mad discourses. He first “*Discovers an old man, wrapt in a Net*” (V.ii.175 SD), whom he introduces as “A very graue and wealthy Citizen” (170) who “fell from ... himselfe” by “losse at Sea” (173) and has been in the asylum for seven years (173–74). This character provides numerous internal and external stage directions. Surrounded by seven visitors who speak to him and comment on his appearance—or are addressed by him and react to his lunacies, and sometimes indulge his whims—the “old man” is made to play with words, sounds and body language. He is relatively coherent in his chosen isotopy, which is related to his initial trauma, that of loss at sea: “i’m neither fish nor flesh” (186); “my net breakes still, and breakes, but Ile breake some of your necks and I catch you in my clutches” (192–94); “out you guls, you goose-caps, you gudgeon-eaters” (195–96). In such lines, even threats and incremental insults, with their repetitions, alliterations, assonances and consonances, are pleasing to the ear. The “very old man” (178) is said to “daunce in a net” (181) and pretends “theres a fresh Salmon in’t”, that he himself is “ouer head and ear in the salt-water”, in a “whirlpoole”, “fishing here for fiue ships” (188–92).

The actor who impersonates him would have been likely to gesticulate, perhaps “with a leaping in many parts of the body”, and to direct the gaze of his audience here and there. Numerous implicit internal stage directions in the text suggest changes of rhythm, facial expressions, gestic terms, interaction with the visitors: “thou shalt not speed me” (180); “O, doe not vex him pray” (184); “if you step one foot further” (188–89); “Stay, stay, stay, stay, stay—wheres the wind ... do you looke for the wind in the heauens?” (194–97); “ha ha ha ha, no no, looke there ... the winde is alwayes at that doore: hearke how it blowes, pooff, pooff, pooff” (197–99). The text suggests the actor’s clinging to one man or another, bursting into laughter, threatening, pushing, pulling, looking up, bulging his cheeks, puffing them out. The character almost stage-manages the scene, playing with the “heavens” above the stage, and one particular door in

the playhouse. His laughter is echoed by that of the visitors (200) in response to his rather childish “pooffing” and his metatheatrical references. Immediately rebuked as the roguish mockery of old age, this laughter is repeated twice by the supposedly “very old man”, probably in different modes and moods, as the very young actor plays with his “gray beard and head”, or rather wig, supposedly not “counterfet” (201-2), and pursues his interactive game with his visitors.

They humour him, agreeing to pass for his “eldest son” (203) or, in the case of the Duke, for his second son, holding out his hand, then kneeling down and agreeing to be treated like a foolish “varlet” with “ten-peny nails” (213-16), that is, devilish nails—“Sirra! thou there? hould out thy hand” (207-8)—and to be the butt of the comedy: “Looke, looke looke, looke: has he not long nailes, and short haire?” (210-11). After further fantasising about the nails of his son, who, as a promoter, “scrypt, and scrypt, and scrypt, till he got the diuell and all” (217-18), and, suiting his action to his words, showing how “he scrypt thus and thus, and thus, and it went vnder his legs” (218-19), the madman suddenly turns violent. He clears the decks for clamorous defensive action, first against “the Turkes gallies” (222), then against “the dambd Pirates who have vndone” (225) him and sunk his ship—that is, the visitors themselves. The latter cease to play and probably show divided feelings, as the old man destabilises their physical and moral positions. The actor needed to be a veritable gymnast, able to crawl and leap up and down, wrapped in his net, while skillfully imitating ominous sounds, like a child but with the terrified voice of an old man: “Bownce goes the guns—oooh! cry the men: romble romble goe the waters—Alas! there! tis sunke—tis sunck” (222-24). Although no extra sound effect is mentioned, there might have been accompanying thumps, cries and rumblings offstage to make the proceedings more spectacular. The whipping friar intervenes but finds it difficult to control his “unruly” client, who then asks for meat, a frequent request in dramatic mad scenes, and invites compassion: “looke you, here be my guts: these are my ribs,—you may looke through my ribs,—see how my guts come out . . . ” (236-38).

The friar orders this “very pitious sight” (240) to be taken away and replaced by two other madmen, individuals of fewer words and with different obsessions, one of which is jealousy, an obvious link to the theme of the play. As soon as he enters, the jealous individual accuses all the visitors of being “whoremongers” (255) who have lain with his wife: “whore, whore, whore, whore, whore” (256). I suppose he points to each of them in turn, identifying him as one or other of his supposed cuckolders, and orders him to “lye there” (259) next to his fellow

cuckolder, and next to his own wife. Having enumerated their whoring bawdy gestures with her, on her, under her, etc., and threatened to “prick” (268) them all, he ends with a kind of rigmarole or sing-song: “Fidler—Doctor—Tayler—Shoomaker,—Shoomaker—Fidler—Doctor—Tayler—” (268-70), which suggests that he hops or dances round them. This jealous madman, although far gone, is treated in a light way which makes us laugh, though we may resent the custodian’s treatment of him and others as commodities.

As soon as this second madman sees the third one eating, the two fight with each other for the food, whether real or fantasised: porridge, flap-dragon, rope for parrot are all part of the mad menu (272, 276, 281). The exchanges are very brisk and soon become more violent. The threats to kill the second madman in various ways, because he will not give up a morsel or a spoonful of food, reach a climax in a “bounce” that supposedly kills the third madman, who probably falls to the ground, holding his head, as he yells, “Ooh! I’m slaine . . . my brains are beaten out . . . ring out the bel, for I am dead” (287-91), and asks to be buried “into a good pit hole” (298). The unruffled acceptance of Friar Anselmo—“Take em in both: bury him, for he is dead” (297)—suggests that he is used to what has become a routine. *The Honest Whore* was performed at the Fortune in 1604-5, and again at the Cockpit in 1638. As mentioned earlier, the action of the whole last scene and the happy denouement are set in a Milanese Bedlam. The length and variety of mad speeches and behaviours must have appealed to, and fascinated, a very mixed audience, including Queen Henrietta Maria in 1638. It is my guess that the spectators enjoyed the tension between sorrow and humour, sympathy and fear, silence and prolixity; they must have loved being a party to the wrangling and banging, and above all relished being induced to cross the thin borderline between reality and illusion(s).

In Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, when Ferdinand, one of her tyrannical brothers, hoping to drive the Duchess mad, decides “To remove forth the common hospital / All the mad-folk, and place them near her lodging” (IV.i.126-27), the actors again had to play “several sorts of madmen” (IV.ii.42). Their “action” in this case, is, however, far more equivocal and difficult to imagine. This time, certainly, the context is tragic. After the “hideous noise” (IV.ii.1), probably very loud and jarring, identified by the waiting-woman as “the wild consort of madmen” (1-2), and followed by a servant’s description of their social characteristics and diverse obsessions, eight madmen are “let loose” (58). What kind of consistency or inconsistency was Webster looking for? While one Madman sings a “song which

is sung to a dismal kind of music" (60 SD), and which contains many gloomy elements meant to dishearten the two women, who sit patiently, as if watching a masque, or rather an anti-masque, what is the subsequent behaviour of the others, when four of these madmen are given intermingling mad speeches? We are told of the Duchess's noble self-possession, which defeats her brother's purpose of continuing to harrow her soul. As indicated in the stage directions, "*Here the dance, consisting of 8 Madmen, with music answerable thereunto*" (102 SD), is performed. Is it again a jarring, wild consort, in keeping with wild, erratic dancing, or are the music and choreography meant to be conventionally sophisticated? Does aestheticism prevail over pseudo-realism? Are the four mad speakers meant to exhibit a type of body language that corresponds to their main obsessions: astrology and doomsday, hell as a glass house, lust and damnation, heraldry, the Geneva Bible, cuckoldry, constipation? Is the treatment of the dance similar to that of the previous singing, or does it contrast with it? No comments from the onstage audience allow us to answer these questions. I presume that a line such as "You'd think the devil were among them", which concludes the prologue (58), may sum up the general impression. Moreover, although Ferdinand is not present during this last torture inflicted on his sister, this mad scene, in its morbid theatricality, tells us much about the state of his diseased mind, and many of the mad speeches can be seen as extensions of his own insanity. Several passions—anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, lust, incestuous love—tear him apart and reach a climax in his final lycanthropy.

Referring to "*Lycanthropia*, which Avicenna calls *Cucubuth*, others *Lupinam insaniam*, or Wolfe madnesse, when men runne howling about graves and fields in the night, and will not be persuaded but they are Wolves or some such beasts", although some "call it a kind of melancholy", Burton states that he "should rather referre it to madnesse, as most doe" (133.19-21). He draws examples from diverse authors: Felix Plater, Hippocrates, Wier, Bodin and others. On the stage today, all kinds of hairy costumes emphasising the bestiality into which the duke has degenerated have made this other mad scene even more symbolically spectacular. This was perhaps the case on the Jacobean stage. Webster's text provides many internal stage directions for the actor playing Ferdinand: standing apart, looking up then behind himself fearfully, throwing himself down on his shadow to "throttle it" (V.ii.38), venting his rage, then "studying the art of patience" (45) while crawling on the floor, supposedly to drive six snails ... from Amalfi "to Moscow" (47-48), "like a sheep-biter" (50-51). To the character's contradictory

impulses—sly guardianship and aggressiveness—Burbage must have added voice modulations, abrupt changes of tempo and mood, and, above all, demonic intensity. The scene progressively evolves into slapstick or grotesque, as Ferdinand, “forced up” (52) by courtiers, faces the doctor who has vowed to “buffet his madness out of him” (26) and proceeds to “do mad tricks with him” (60). Asked to engage in a grotesque duel with forty urinals as weapons, then to cut capers, the lycanthropic duke is never afraid, never relents in his aggressiveness: “I will stamp him into a cullis, flay off his skin” (77–78). Meanwhile, Bosola, who stands apart silently, apparently awed, exclaims, “What a fatal judgment / Hath fall’n upon this Ferdinand!” (86). He seems to view his master’s “strange distraction” (86) as both satanic possession and divine retribution, a view shared by many in the seventeenth century.

The French writer Beauvois de Chauvincourt, in his *Discours de la lycanthropie* (1599), pictures his own response at the sight of “ces hommes tellement dénaturez, qui abastardis de leur première origine, quittant cette forme divine, se changent & transforment en une si immonde, cruelle & sauvage beste”: “je n’ai poil en teste qui ne dresse, une froide peur me glaçant le cœur, saisis tous mes membres” (p. 12). Bosola might share his fear and his belief that

telle abomination et meschanceté provient d’une pure volonté & libéral arbitre, détérioré et poussé par le soufflement ... d’un mauvais esprit. ... Ces loups non naturels sont vrais sorciers, qui ayant faict banqueroute à l’Eglise de Dieu, ont conjoint et lié leur perverse volonté avec celle de Satan. (pp. 14–15)

Ferdinand’s lycanthropy is, of course, a stupendous symptom of madness in the body and in the mind. It remains, however, a rare product of intemperate jealousy. Shakespeare has given us precious clues to interpret this malady. So has Robert Burton, who writes: “Of all passions ... this bastard jealousy is the greatest, as appeares by those prodigious Symptomes which it has and it produceth” (III: 297.15–18):

Besides those strange gestures of staring, frowning, grinning, rolling of eyes, menacing, gastly looks, broken pace, interrupt, precipitate, halfe turnes. He will sometimes ... impatient as he is, rave, roare, and lay about him like a madman, thumpe her sides, drag her about perchance. ... As an Hearne when shee fishes, still prying on all sides; or as a cat does a mouse, his eye is never off hers, he glotes on him, on her, doth at dinner, at supper, sitting, walking etc. (III, 298:4–27)

Many of these symptoms could be portrayed by the actor in order to show the sudden irruption of jealousy into Leontes' heart and its furious flare-up in *The Winter's Tale*, from "tremor cordis" (I.ii.112) to heart-breaking conviction: "Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a forked one!" (187). Intense staring, grim frowning, broken pacing, half-turns, and so forth, are pointed to by the internal stage directions, whether in Leontes' own speech ("the infection of my brains / and hardening of my brows" [147-48]), or in onlookers' comments: "You look / As if you held a brow of much distraction. Are you moved my lord?" (150-51). Asides voicing Leontes' suspicions soon turn into active "angling" (181) and proceed "from suspicion to hatred, from hatred to frenzy, madness, injury, murder and despair" (Burton, III: 304.4-5). Diseased imagination takes over, and speech was probably accompanied by facial contortions and obscene gestures:

But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,
As now they are, and making practised smiles
As in a looking glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere
The mort o' th' deer—O, that is entertainment
My bosom likes not, nor my brows. (117-20)

The jealous Leontes' discourse is more and more fragmented, as, in a kind of frenzy, he sees imaginary "goats, thorns, nettles, tails of wasps" (331) sully the whiteness of his sheets. He becomes increasingly vehement and full of rage, as he accuses Camillo of not confessing his "wife is slippery" (275): "You lie, you lie. / I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee" (301-2).

When Shakespeare dramatises the credulous Othello's descent into bestial, murderous jealousy, he gives him a paroxysmal mad speech just before "*He falls down in a trance*" (IV.i.40 SD). This speech exemplifies many characteristics of "choler adust", or "melancholy adust", degenerating into madness. "There is no difference betwixt a mad man and an angry man, in the time of his fit", writes Burton: "Anger, as Lactantius describes it, is a cruell tempest of the minde, making his eyes spark fire and stare, his teeth gnash in his head, his tongue stutter, his face pale or red" (269.9-13). Cardan, the Italian physician, according to the Anatomist, "holds these men of all other fit to be assasinats, bold, hardy, fierce and adventurous to undertake anything by reason of their choler adust" (401.1-2). Othello refers to his own trembling and shaking (IV.i.38, 40). His raving passion shatters the coherence of his speech, fragmenting it into monosyllabic words, repeating excruciating ones with scorched intensity: "Pish! Noses, ears, and lips!

Is't possible? Confess? Handkerchief? O devil!" (40-42). That this mad humour may "proceed from the divell" is one of the opinions reported by Burton (400.30). But Shakespeare, equivocal as often, allows us to experience some of the chaos in the speaker's mind. Who precisely is meant to confess? Cassio, after he is hanged? Or perhaps his wife? Or even the instigator of "such shadowing passion" (IV.i.39)? We tend to associate the "devil" with Iago, who rouses the monster in Othello, even more than with the insufferable images and perverted sensations that obscure the Moor's reason.

In Jacobean drama, the variety of mad discourses is more and more contained in one individual. I shall end my analysis with the case of Brachiano in Webster's *The White Devil*. In his death scene, he is "*presented in a bed*" (V.iii.80 SD), and his face, thanks, I presume, to the application of grease paint, must have the pallor of death, if we judge by the reactions of those present: "There's death in's face already" (80). The following stage direction specifies, "*These speeches are several kinds of distractions and in the action should appear so*" (81 SD). We are first confronted with two speeches which are very coherent. What "action" can turn them into different kinds of distraction? The first is the rash dismissal of someone—we assume it to be Vittoria—who is accused of real or imagined exactions: "Away . . . Make up your accounts" (81-84). Can some of Burton's symptoms be useful? Is the poisoned Brachiano supposed to be in turn furious or ridiculous, to shake and tremble, "talking to [himself] with strange mouthes and faces, inarticulate voices, strange gestures" (Burton, 382.26-27)? Brachiano's impatience, as suggested by Flamineo (Webster, *The White Devil*, V.iii.85), can be reflected in frantic efforts to raise his weak body and revive his hoarse voice. The second speech is a kind of *mea culpa*. Did the actor utter "the dusky raven" (87) with a croaking voice, and imitate the "cloven creatures" (89) and "the devil" (88) to which he refers by crooking his fingers? It is a plausible possibility. The abrupt change of subject, followed by an immediate change of decision—"Let me have some quails to supper"; "No: some fried dog-fish. Your quails feed on poison" (90-91)—initiates the descent announced by Lodovico into "the most brainsick language" (72) of a man whose "mind fastens / On twenty several objects, which confound / Deep sense with folly" (72-74). One could say of his mad discourse and that of many others what Horatio says about the mad Ophelia in *Hamlet*, that their "speech is nothing, / Yet the unshaped use of it doth move / The hearers to collection. They aim at it, / And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts" (Shakespeare, *Ham.*, IV.v.7-10). The hearers are both onstage and in the playhouse. For Ophelia's mad body-language, Shakespeare

provides many hints in his text: she “hems, and beats her heart, / Spurns enviously at straws” (5-6), sings and distributes flowers, moves from one person to the other, and “Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself / She turns to favour and to prettiness” (186-87). Webster’s Cornelia learns much from her, in her own mad scene, near the end of *The White Devil*.

Like many madmen in treatises, mad Brachiano does not recognise those who surround him; he swears he sees, “In a blue bonnet, and a pair of breeches / With a great cod piece. Ha, ha, ha, . . . stuck full of pins / With pearls o’th’head of them” (Webster, *The White Devil*, V.iii.97-101), the devil himself, whom he knows “by a great rose he wears on’s shoe / To hide his cloven foot” (102-4). Now behaviours such as a propensity “Upon a sudden to laugh, whoop, halloo, or run away, and swear they see or hear Players, Devils, Hobgoblins, Ghosts, strike, or strut, &c” figure among the symptoms enumerated by Burton (407.9-10). Far from running away, the duke is ready to “dispute with” the “rare linguist” he considers the devil to be (Webster, *The White Devil*, V.iii.104-5). He sounds overjoyed by the prospect, and the actor would probably have shown it in his eccentric gestures and his excited laughter. His drastic change of mood, when Vittoria says, “My lord here’s nothing” (105), and his abrupt return to financial problems are probably accompanied by frantic efforts to leave his bed, and by vehemence and scornful authority in his disgruntled voice: “I’ll not be used thus” (108). These spectacular mood swings and hallucinations, which Burton and his colleagues would probably have attributed to “corrupt phantasie that makes them see and heare . . . that which indeed is neither heard nor seene” (Burton, 424.9-10), or to possession by a devil, continue in Brachiano’s long mad scene. He describes, and points out to his bewildered onlookers, including Flamineo himself, a circus Flamineo who

Is dancing on the ropes there: and he carries
A money-bag in each hand, to keep him even,
For fear of breaking’s neck. And there’s a lawyer
In a gown whipt with velvet, stares and gapes
When the money will fall. How the rogue cuts capers! (Webster, *The White Devil*, V.iii.110-14)

His purely visual hallucination was probably reflected in shaking of the head and body, a face that mirrored pleasure, expectation and a mixture of childish wonder and eagerness to grasp the moneybags himself. A new peal of laughter greets the news that the lady he can see and does not recognize is Vittoria: his “Ha, ha, ha” can again be modalised, merry, cynical, witty, as he exclaims, “Her

hair is sprinkled with arras powder, / That makes her look as if she had sinned in the pastry" (117-18). Fear of his imminent death must cloud the superficial smiles of those who utterly depend on him, Vittoria and Flamineo, when he calls for a rat-catcher on seeing, so he believes, "six grey rats that have lost their tails, / Crawl up the pillow" (123-24).

Was it less difficult for an early seventeenth-century actor to keep the right balance of seriousness, compassion and laughter in the characterisation of this distracted dying man than is the case today? As always, presuming the actor was good and in good form, the audience must have been captivated by his virtuosity and his versatility. The evolution in Brachiano's madness from insight to spectacular grotesque distraction becomes parodic and paves the way for modern interpretations, which tend to be fully parodic. But the belief in witchcraft and Satan must have added a tension which vied with the distancing effect brought about by theatricality. I keep in mind Stanley Wells's reminder that "it is in performance that the plays lived and had their being" (p. xxxiii). I hope to have made some of the mad discourses on which I have focused my attention more alive, thanks to the explicit and implicit stage directions contained in the texts, to Robert Burton's "symptoms in the body", and to the approach to madness at the time. Telling, showing and interpreting all have a say in mad discourse. It may be worth seeking to apprehend these processes more fully.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- BEAUVOIS de Chauvincourt, Jean. *Discours de la lycantropie, ou De la transmutation des hommes en loups, par le sieur de Beauvoys de Chauvincourt, etc.* Paris: J. Rezé, 1599. Online at Gallica (Bibliothèque Nationale de France): <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k84878q.r=%09Beauvoys+de+Chauvincourt.langFR>>. (Accessed 6 July 2014.)
- BRIGHT, Timothie. *A Treatise of Melancholie, etc.* London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1586. STC 3747.
- BURTON, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling and Rhonda Blair. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- CHAPMAN, George. *Bussy d'Ambois*. Ed. Maurice Evans. New Mermaids. London: Ernest Benn, 1981.
- DEKKER, Thomas [and Thomas MIDDLETON for Part One]. *The Honest Whore. The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. 4 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1953–61. Vol. II.
- DEKKER, Thomas, John FORD and William ROWLEY. *The Witch of Edmonton. The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. 4 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953–61. Vol. III.
- KYD, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedy*. Ed. Philip Edwards. The Revels Plays. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959.
- MARLOWE, Christopher. *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*. Ed. Roma Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- MIDDLETON, Thomas, and William ROWLEY. *The Changeling*. Ed. N. W. Bawcutt. The Revels Plays. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*. Ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, et al. Introductions by Stanley Wells. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- _____. *Troilus and Cressida*. Ed. David Bevington. The Arden Shakespeare (3rd ser.). London: Arden Shakespeare (Thomson Learning), 1998.
- WEBSTER, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan. New Mermaids. London: Ernest Benn, 1975.
- _____. *The White Devil*. Elizabeth M. Brennan. New Mermaids. London: Ernest Benn, 1966.

WRIGHT, Thomas. *The Passions of the Mind in Generall* (1604). Ed. Thomas O. Sloan. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971.

Secondary Sources

BABB, Lawrence. *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy*. [East Lansing]: Michigan State University Press, 1959.

DESSEN, Alan C. *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

EVANS, Bergen. *The Psychiatry of Robert Burton*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1944.

EWING, B. S. *Burtonian Melancholy in the Plays of John Ford*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1940.

FOUCAULT, Michel. *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Le Monde en 10-18. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1964.

HILLMAN, Richard. *Self-Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama: Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's, 1997.

WELLS, Stanley. General Introduction. *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*. Ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor *et al.* Introductions by Stanley Wells. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. ix-xxxiii.

Bob GODFREY, « Melancholy and the Folly of Love »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 63-76
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Melancholy and the Folly of Love

Bob Godfrey
University of Northampton

I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness. (Shakespeare, *AYL*, IV.i.10-18)

Thus Jaques, at the opening to Act Four of *As You Like It*, leads us through a maze of differing effects of melancholy as expressed through different characters and circumstances. From this we might infer that Shakespeare was to some extent knowledgeable about melancholy. He certainly expected his audience to be able to follow Jaques' line, even if a true appreciation was tainted with Jaques' acerbic disposition to belittle, even make fun of, the various characters. This all-encompassing melancholy to which Jaques and Shakespeare refer also offers a line of discussion relevant to the discourses of folly.

Melancholy had been recognised as a common condition from earliest times, and it was traditionally associated with an excess of black bile creating a depressive imbalance in the four bodily humours. Hippocrates noted its effects, and Aristotle, in the *Problemata*, drew attention to it with a question: "Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics

or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious [i.e., melancholic] temperament?" (XXX.I.953a.10-14). This assessment leads one to suppose it was, amongst other possibilities, a symptom of deep thoughtfulness and creativity. Burton goes further to characterise excessive study as itself a major cause of the disease. During the medieval period, rather more invidiously, it came to be associated with *Accidia*, or Sloth, a direct reference, one might think, to its capacity to reduce the subject to inactivity, indecision and, on occasion, suicidal thoughts. *Accidia*, in its turn, was strongly linked with medieval teachings concerning the mortal sin of spiritual despair (Gowland, p. 69). By the time Robert Burton published his *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621 he had adopted the view, in accord with that of Cicero, that "no mortal man can avoid sorrow and sickness, and sorrow is an inseparable companion to melancholy" (I: 101). Following Galen, Burton also identified fear as a main ingredient of this disorder. He explains that "Many times by violence of imagination they produce it" (II: 11) and that, furthermore, they consider the danger peculiar to themselves and their own situation. In the body of his work, Burton itemised a plethora of symptoms and actual descriptions of melancholic states of mind and their physical effects, all of them rendered as a species of disordered behaviour, behaviour for which the individual sufferer was often held responsible. Perhaps the most original aspect of his concern with melancholy, however, was his conclusion that it was in fact a disease of the mind, a pathological condition that deserved sympathetic treatment rather than the traditional moral condemnation. In addition, he considered that melancholy appeared endemic in the period in which he was living. He even suggested that "Folly, melancholy, madness, are but one disease, *Delirium* is a common name to all" (I: 55), and it is in light of that broad definition relating those three conditions that it becomes possible to link melancholy and folly in the following discussion.

Turning to the relation between love and melancholy, Burton, in his introduction, suggested that all lovers were simply "mad", and love is described as "madness, a hell, an incurable disease" or "an impotent raging lust" (I: 153); in other words, love may indeed be regarded as a species of folly akin to madness. In the later part of his book, Burton included one whole Partition, as he called it, devoted to a condition he described as love-melancholy. Significantly, the engravings on his title page included a figure of the *inamorato* dressed in fashionable clothes, his hat pulled down over his eyes in a gesture of withdrawal, his arms folded in a resigned kind of way and books of music and poetry strewn about his feet. Love-melancholy is presented pictorially, therefore, as of a similar

significance as diseases like hypochondria, superstition and mania, conditions that also had their places on the title page.

This love-melancholy, as described by Burton, arises when what appears to be an insoluble barrier comes between the lover and the object of his or her desire. This may be as a result of the restraining conventions of courtship, the intervention of parents, unequal social status, including racial and religious differences, beauty and ugliness, intelligence and stupidity, desire and refusal, and, according to Burton, these factors include, rather surprisingly, jealousy. The representations of these situations in drama will, of course, be of varying degrees of intensity, as might be exemplified, for instance, in *Romeo and Juliet* or *As You Like It*, *Othello* or *The Winter's Tale*. But the point is that all or any of such circumstances can provide a dramatist with a ready-made plot that demands some kind of resolution. Whether that is comic or tragic in outcome will be according to his choice and/or according to the nature of the source from which he derives his story.

Early in the *Anatomy*, in the Partition concerned with love-melancholy, Burton cited the example of Calisto, who idolises Melebea (III: 136). Calisto's "soul was soused, imparadised, imprisoned in his lady" (140); the fire of love "devours the soul itself" (143). Although his source is *La Celestina*, rather than the anonymous play *Calisto and Melebea* that Rastell published about 1525, nevertheless the details are the same. The play represents Calisto as what Richard Axton calls, "an idle, Petrarchan mooncalf" purporting to suffer from a "fashionable courtly melancholy" (*Calisto*, ed. Axton, p. 18). Indeed, as is evident from Burton's own writing, the whole concern with love-melancholy derived as much from the Petrarchan tradition in poetry as it did from observations of actual experience. In the opening scene of *Calisto and Melebea*, Calisto's complaint arises from Melebea's outright rejection of him. The only reward that he gets from her for his proffered love is that she says, "where thou art present, / Whyle I lyff, by my wyll I wyll be absent" (ll. 71-72). In response he wails:

Lo, out of all joy I am fallyn in wo,
Uppon whom aduers Fortune hath cast her chauns
Of cruell hate, which causyth now away to go
The keeper of my joy and all my pleasauns. (ll. 73-76)

While such complaints, as I have suggested, have this long tradition in poetry, the clearly apparent love-melancholy reads, perhaps, like a new strain in the

drama, and the anonymous English playwright takes some pleasure in ridiculing Calisto on account of it. Indeed, Melebea has already given her judgement on

These folysh lovers then, that be so ameraus,
From pleasure to displeasure how lede they theyr lyfe,
Now sorry, now sad, now joyous, now pensyfe! (ll. 10-12)

When Sempronio, Calisto's servant and confidant, attempts to dissuade his master from his pursuit of the young lady, he emphasises the delusional nature of Calisto's love. His love-feelings are regarded by Melebea, Sempronio and Sempronio's low-life confederates as pure folly in the sense that they are, to them, a totally unrealistic obsession.

A similar vein of comedy is exploited in John Heywood's *A Play of Love*, published in 1533, where the first character to appear is Lover not Loved. In his debate with Loved not Loving, his situation emerges as extreme. As he expresses it,

Before I sawe her I felt no malady,
And syns I saw her I never was fre
From twayne the greatest paynes that in love be.
.....
Desyre is the first upon my first syght,
And despayre the nexte upon my first sewt.
.....
For hopeless and helpeles, in flames of desire
And droppes of despayre I smolder in fyre. (ll. 215-24)

Loved not Loving has no time for this argument. She claims, as would Melebea, that to be the subject of an unwanted love is far more painful. She argues vehemently against the case brought by Loving not Loved, and, as in Calisto's case, his position is the subject of some ridicule. It might seem, therefore, that most often dramatists see this condition as a subject for comic exploitation and a cause of laughter.

For Burton, however, love-melancholy was not merely a fashionable affectation to be scoffed at. He would want to insist instead that, on examination and despite the literary examples with which his work is littered, it goes beyond fashion and belongs rather to a universal melancholy that he sees as a disease of the mind. While lovers may look lean and pine away, this is, for Burton, "because of the distraction of the spirits" which causes disfunction of the liver, leaving the members weak "for want of sustenance" (III: 124). Lovers look lean and pine

“as the herbs of my garden do this month of May, for want of rain” (124). Burton’s diagnosis is maybe somewhat unreliable, since, as I have indicated, his main examples are taken from the poets. However, in light of Burton’s insistence that the condition should be taken seriously, it could also allow of an interpretation of the dramatic representation of this “disease” less as a mere literary trope and more as a species of naturalism. As the dramatists and poets suggest, however, the condition of love-melancholy is usually brought on by the obsessive contemplation of the figure of a beloved who, for a variety of reasons, remains inaccessible. Of course, not all examples are comic. Take, for instance, Burton’s own characterisation of the tragic predicament of Dido, Queen of Carthage. It gives a clear example of how the fever of love takes hold and overrules reason in the face of the object of desire. While Virgil himself is Burton’s source, I would draw attention to Christopher Marlowe’s representation of Dido, derived from the same original but providing an animated portrait of the condition. Dido, struck by Cupid’s dart, suddenly turns from Iarbas, who has courted her intently enough, and reveals her feelings for Aeneas:

I’ll make me bracelets of his golden hair,
 His glistening eyes shall be my looking glass;
 His lips an altar, where I’ll offer up
 As many kisses as the sea has sands;
 Instead of music I will hear him speak;
 His looks shall be my only library. (III.i.85–90)

This mood clearly matches the obsessive behaviour to which Burton draws attention. What is perhaps most remarkable about Marlowe’s play is the portrayal of three disappointed lovers: Anna, who loves Iarbas, who loves Dido, who loves Aeneas. For Iarbas, it seems, the passion is most extreme of all. When he is dismissed by Dido she says, “I charge thee never look on me”. He replies, “Then pull out both mine eyes, or let me die” (III.i.55). Dido’s distress as Aeneas leaves Carthage and herself behind is of a piece with such an extreme of love melancholy, as is her final suicide.

Shakespeare, of course, also reveals an interest in the condition of love, though with him, as with Rastell’s author and Heywood, it is very often represented as a comic extreme of folly. In *Twelfth Night*, for example, we are first introduced to Orsino, who is shown to be melancholy and in love with Olivia, who is denying him. His effete posturing does indeed seem ridiculous. Then Olivia,

in an impossible case, falls for Cesario, doubly misdirected, since the latter is Viola, a woman in disguise. Finally, Malvolio is tricked into aspiring to the love of Olivia. By virtue of these mis-directions, and with the aid of Feste, Shakespeare is able to reveal the absurdity of the supposed “Petrarchan” fallacy whereby the lover is obsessed with the image of their beloved, which is necessarily far from the reality.

Shakespeare presents a very similar image in quite another context in *Hamlet*. Whereas Malvolio’s yellow stockings, cross-garterings and smilings are held up as ridiculous, Hamlet’s display of love-melancholy as reported by Ophelia may well be meant to be taken seriously, when he appears to her

with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other. (II.i.78-81)

Polonius becomes convinced first that Hamlet is mad on account of love and that the cause of his madness is Ophelia’s rejection of him. For Claudius and Gertrude he describes how Hamlet

Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
Thence to a lightness, and, by this declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves,
And all we wail for. (II.ii.147-51)

Since Polonius is clearly a figure of ridicule to Shakespeare as well as to Hamlet, even this portrayal might create out of the image of the lover gone mad a sense of comedy within the tragic frame. But Hamlet, of course, has much else to be properly melancholy about. Burton also included in his *Anatomy* cases where love turns sour, as, for instance, in the case of Othello, when it can breed jealousy. This further manifestation of the love-melancholic state of mind also leads directly to a tragic outcome.

But to return to Jaques’ all-embracing melancholic disposition, it may be possible to characterise *As You Like It* as Shakespeare’s most delightful presentation of the extremes of love. Orlando’s love-sickness, for instance, is represented as no more nor less of a melancholy disposition than that of poor Silvius or that of young Phoebe. Nevertheless, Shakespeare represents Orlando’s behaviour in love

to be a folly, possibly akin to madness. It certainly seems so to Touchstone, who pillories him for carving Rosalind's name on the trees and hanging songs and sonnets on them. Furthermore, Celia claims that she found Orlando in the forest lying under a tree "like a dropped acorn" and "stretched along like a wounded knight" (III.ii.228, 233-34). Shakespeare surely must have seen those Oliver and Hilliard miniatures representing singularly dandified young men lying around apparently doing nothing much in a pastoral setting. Then, in a scene of the most delightful interplay between them, Rosalind taunts Orlando for his lack of the commonplace symptoms of the lover when she says he should have

A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not. ... Then your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation. (III.ii.358-66)

So Orlando is mocked from all sides about his love-sickness, and the sincerity of his feelings is severely challenged. Once better educated by Rosalind, however, he can become an acceptable suitor. There is also a reward for Silvius' fidelity in love, while Phoebe has to make do without Ganymede. In this case the love-melancholy has proved curable through leg-pulling and mockery and a sort of comic arbitrariness in resolution.

Thus even before 1621, when Burton published *The Anatomy of Melancholy* with its long section on love-melancholy, this condition had been treated dramatically in a variety of different ways. But a play that was first performed by the King's Men in about 1628 offers an intriguing contrast to the preceding examples. John Ford undertook to frame a plot upon the changed premise that love-melancholy might be more than a solipsistic affectation. The play in question is *The Lover's Melancholy*, a title that does rather beg the question, but is the playwright's attempt to represent something of Burton's argument in fictional form.

Some people argue, not without justification, that the plot is somewhat over-engineered to meet Ford's needs. Nevertheless, the play has moments of genuine feeling and theatrical vitality. It is set in the kingdom of Cyprus, where an elder monarch, Agenor, has recently died and his son Palador is now on the throne. However, before developing Palador's situation, Ford fashions the opening scene to represent a young man, Menaphon, just returned from a self-imposed exile. He had gone away for a year in the hope that he could cure himself of his love for Princess Thamasta. He has been unsuccessful. His friend, Prince

Amethus, who is brother to Thamasta, has to tell Menaphon that, in the year of his absence, she has shown no change in her feelings of antipathy towards him. From their conversation we also discover that Amethus himself is, at present, also unlucky in love. His beloved, Cleophila, cannot return his love because she is too busy tending to her deranged father, Meleander, himself in despair over the loss of a second daughter, Eroclea. These loves are further complicated by differing social status. So we may see that Ford has set up a double love-melancholy that will demand a resolution. During this opening conversation, however, we hear also that Palador, the young prince who has inherited the kingdom, seems in no mood to take on that responsibility. We hear that

He's the same melancholy man
He was at his father's death; sometimes speaks sense,
But seldom mirth; will smile, but seldom laugh;
Will lend an ear to business, deal in none;
Gaze upon revels, antic fopperies,
But is not moved; will sparingly discourse,
Hear music. (I.i.70-76)

As becomes evident in due course, all these symptoms are typical not just of melancholy *per se*, caused by the loss of his father, but of a love-melancholy the cause of which is, for the time being, concealed from both the audience and the other characters. Furthermore, Burton and many of his authorities would add to this personal difficulty the problem that a melancholy ruler makes a melancholy state, so it would seem that the amatory problems of Amethus and Menaphon may be of little consequence, compared to the condition of Palador and the possibly larger issues confronting the kingdom of Cyprus.

The plot develops with the arrival of a comic crew of courtiers surrounding a Doctor Corax, who takes on the big problem of discovering the cause of, and hopefully effecting a cure for, Palador's melancholy. Rhetias, a malcontent, challenges the doctor's capacity to cure anything, let alone the melancholic disposition. This opposition is important, since it draws attention to one of Ford's objectives, which is to embed in his drama a favourable account of Burton's exposition regarding melancholy and to give credence to the idea that melancholy is a disease that may be cured. In Act Three, when things are well under way, the doctor is finally challenged to render his diagnosis of Palador's condition and is questioned about his findings. He answers his critics:

Melancholy

Is not as you conceive, indisposition
 Of body, but the mind's disease...

.....

A mere commotion of the mind, o'ercharged
 With fear and sorrow; first begot i' th' brain,
 The seat of reason, and from thence derived
 As suddenly into the heart, the seat
 Of our affection. (III.i.100-2, 106-9)

This is, in effect, a very concise summary of Burton's position that, of course, can hardly do justice to the voluminous nature of his book but is certainly sufficient for an audience to take in. The doctor's critics pursue their point with the query, "There are sundry kinds of this disturbance?" (110-11). Corax's reply is again brief but direct:

Infinite: it were
 More easy to conjecture every hour
 We have to live, than reckon up the kinds
 Or causes of this anguish of the mind. (III-14)

Despite its brevity, Doctor Corax's account of Burton proves adequate to persuade his critics to allow him to proceed in the case. He then determines that a cure begins with a distraction, a prescription that holds good for Burton. So the Doctor persuades the Prince to view a Masque of Melancholy, and, fortunately, the Prince agrees.

The Masque itself sets out to present figures that show the qualities of melancholy in its many forms. So the conditions of Lycanthropy, of Hydrophobia, Delirium, Hypochondria, amongst others, are represented in the masque. Following these representations there is a pause in proceedings, arranged by the doctor, when the performance space is left empty. The Prince is disposed to enquire why, and the doctor explains:

One kind of melancholy

Is only left untouched; 'twas not in art
 To personate the shadow of that fancy.
 'Tis named Love-Melancholy. As, for instance,
 Admit this stranger here. ... (III.iii.92-96)

The doctor pauses while he selects a youth named Parthenophil from the audience and sets up a hypothetical situation that Parthenophil is enamoured of Princess Thamasta but finds it impossible to tell her of his love. The result is a disastrous example of love-melancholy, because

Love is the tyrant of the heart; it darkens
Reason, confounds discretion; deaf to counsel,
It runs a headlong course to desperate madness. (103-5)

Doctor Corax then addresses the Prince directly: “O, were your highness but touched home, and thoroughly / With this—what shall I call it—devil . . .” (106-7). At this point, Prince Parador cries, “Hold!”, the stage performance stops, he exits in confusion but demands that the youth Parthenophil attend his pleasure. The fact is that the Prince has half-recognised this youth: “For he is like to something I remember / A great while since, a long, long time ago” (IV.iii.29-30). It turns out, of course, that the youth Parthenophil is in fact the missing sister Eroclea in disguise. We, the audience, have come to know that a year or so ago she fled the kingdom to avoid the unwanted attentions of the old king Agenor. We have also come to know that she was betrothed to Palador by Agenor before the old man sought to take her for himself.

From this account it is not difficult to see how the play will turn out. But Ford provides a moving representation of the Prince’s reconstitution as a healthy loving and loved individual. Act Four, Scene Three, opens with Eroclea nowhere to be found and the Prince restless and unnerved, thinking that the Doctor’s masque was part of a plot to make him confess to the cause of his melancholy, an action which he has denied himself. For the first time, in private, the Prince reveals his true feelings when he says,

My heart has been untuned these many months
Wanting her presence, in whose equal love
True harmony consisted. (IV.iii.52-54)

But Eroclea has been placed to overhear his words and now approaches and kneels before him. Under the influence of his doubts, the Prince at first believes she is part of that plot and speaks to her harshly:

Stand up;
’Tis not the figure stamped upon thy cheeks,

The cozenage of thy beauty, grace, or tongue,
Can draw from me a secret that hath been
The only jewel of my speechless thoughts. (69-73)

The scene proceeds to the point where she has almost persuaded him to believe she is who she says she is. He continues to hesitate:

Join not too fast
Thy penance with the story of my suff'rings.
.....
But let me by degrees collect my senses. (118-19, 123)

When at last he has come round to see the truth of the situation, he concludes with "Come home, home to my heart, thou banished peace!" (136). A sententious conclusion it may be, but in the end the cure has been effected. The remaining plot issues are similarly resolved satisfactorily. Every Jack must have his Jill. But it is possible to see how Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* has influenced Ford in a positive way. The playwright has attempted to fashion a plot that can reveal some of the key symptoms of love-melancholy in a number of its forms. He has also been able to show how love-melancholy can take hold of a subject and thus appear more like the disease that Burton describes.

In conclusion, therefore, it may be understood that, in representing various forms of love-melancholy, playwrights from Anon. to Shakespeare through the sixteenth century seem to have been engaged in a critique of what, in much poetry of the period, may appear like an affected condition of folly at times akin to madness. In comedies, at least, the subject of the condition may be ridiculed as a means to a cure. The publication of Burton's *Anatomy* gave substance to the idea that such melancholy was not merely a folly, a fashionable whimsiness, but a genuine disease of the mind, even a genuine madness. Thus, under the influence of Burton's writing, Ford offered a more serious treatment of the condition and how it could or even should be dealt with through the medium of what might be called a sentimental comedy. It is not that he abjures altogether the pleasure of laughter—Dr Corax and a cast of hangers-on at court take care of that—but Ford takes the comedy beyond a "scornful tickling", beyond the discourses of folly, to a satisfying sense of reasoned closure.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- ARISTOTLE. *Problemata*. Trans. E. S. Forster. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. II. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- BURTON, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. 3 vols. London: John C. Nimmo, 1893.
- Calisto and Melebea. *Three Rastell Plays: Four Elements, Calisto and Melebea, Gentleness and Nobility*. Ed. Richard Axton. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979.
- FORD, John. *The Lover's Melancholy. 'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays*. Ed. Marion Lomax. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- HEYWOOD, John. *A Play of Love. The Plays of John Heywood*. Ed. Richard Axton and Peter Happé. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991.
- MARLOWE, Christopher. *Dido, Queen of Carthage. The Complete Plays*. Ed. J. B. Steane. London: Penguin Books, 1969.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *As You Like It*. Ed. H. J. Oliver. The New Penguin Shakespeare. London: Penguin Books, 1968.
- . *Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins. The Arden Shakespeare (2nd ser.). London: Methuen, 1986.

Secondary Sources

- GOWLAND, Angus. *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- LUND, Mary Ann. *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Pauline RUBERRY-BLANC, « “My masters, are you mad? Or what are you?”:
Discourses of Incivility and Madness in *Twelfth Night* »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 77-86
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

*“My masters, are you mad? Or what are you?”:
Discourses of Incivility and Madness
in Twelfth Night*

Pauline Ruberry-Blanc
Université François-Rabelais de Tours/CESR-CNRS

I would like to begin this essay by discussing what the word “civility” might have meant to the early modern dramatist. Throughout the sixteenth century the two meanings of the word as given in the *OED* seem to have coalesced: the first was “good breeding, culture, refinement”; the second was made up of a cluster of meanings centering on “good polity, orderly state (of a country), social order, as distinct from anarchy and disorder, good citizenship”. Erasmus’ popular conduct book *De Civilitate* helped civility replace the medieval concept of courtesy, which had applied especially to behaviour at court, although the rising middle classes were already appropriating courtesy codes in the late Middle Ages. The passage from medieval to Renaissance conceptions of ideal behavior was marked by the rift developing between blind religious faith and reason. The way in which an educated university elite and a rising merchant class conceived of man’s place in the universe paved the way for notions of civility that were less theological, more secular and person-oriented. As Benet Devetian has pointed out (p. 52) Rabelais’s dictum, “Fay ce que voudras [do what you will]” (*Gargantua*, p. 423 [bk. 1, chap. 57]) seems to have heralded the replacement of rules of elaborate conduct by an intuitive sense of right and wrong, by a natural civility based on a sense of personal honour that did not rely exclusively upon theological

dogma. Devetian's definition of courtesy and civility as "the extent to which citizens of a given culture speak and act in ways that demonstrate a caring for the welfare of others as well as the welfare of the culture they share in common" (p. 9) provides a workable framework that enables us to point out what he has termed "the system of interaction that posits no contradiction between loyalty to the well-being of the self and loyalty to the well-being of other selves" (p. 8).

As for what a sixteenth-century dramatist's understanding of the word "madness" comprised, it should be remembered that in Elizabethan England, people commonly attributed madness to supernatural causes, as in the Bible, but also to natural causes of a physical nature based on the theory of humours. For the Elizabethans these categories were not contradictory. The Bible favoured supernatural interpretations; the classics condoned both natural *and* supernatural explanations, beginning with Plato in the *Phaedrus*, who describes "two kinds of madness: one brought on by mortal maladies, the other arising from a supernatural release from the conventions of life" (p. 54 [265A]). (He proceeds to subdivide the latter kind into several varieties ascribed to different deities.)

OED entries testify to the fact that from the Middle Ages onwards, madness (or its synonym "woodness") was often conflated with folly, and that melancholy, too, appeared as a cognate term. Shakespeare certainly assimilates the three to the point where they seem interchangeable. So, explicitly, does Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*: "Folly, melancholy, madness, are but one disease, delirium is a common name to all." Taking up the perspective of Erasmus, Burton sees folly as universal: "all the world is mad, ... is melancholy, dotes" (I: 39). Apart from physiological palliatives, Burton's universal remedy, however unconvincingly applied, is the classical moral one of self-control, that is, the subordination, by the exercise of the will, of inevitable passions to the moderation of right reason, according to the Aristotelian *via media*, duly Christianised in terms of following the divine will.

What further interests me in this essay is the fact that the madness/folly/melancholy amalgam also connoted anger, one of the traditional Seven Deadly Sins, which in the Renaissance was increasingly associated with incivility. The extension of focus to the social and political sphere already evident in the late treatments of such raging tyrants as Herod and Nebuchadnezzar developed to include sociability in human relations generally. Witness the application of a still-current Latin proverb by Shakespeare's Timon in rebuking Apemantus:

Fie, thou'rt a churl; y'have got a humour there
 Does not become a man; 'tis much to blame.
 They say, my lords, *Ira furor brevis est*,
 But yond man is very angry.
 Go, let him have a table by himself,
 For he does neither affect company,
 Nor is he fit for't, indeed. (*Tim.*, I.ii.26-32)

Indeed, Alexander Barclay, in his free translation of Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools* (1509), gives the angry man aboard that vessel long, drooping ass's ears as a badge of office:

Assys erys for our folys a lyuray is
 And he that wyll be wroth for a thyng of nought
 Of the same leuray is nat worthy to mys. (cited by Goldsmith, p. 2)

Anger, of course, is only one manifestation of socially disruptive mad or foolish conduct. Shakespeare's plays are full of instances illustrating the principle, standard at least since Erasmus, that, while moderate pleasure is to be esteemed—what John Redford in the late morality play, *Wit and Science*, personifies as Honest Recreation—excessive indulgence of the passions and senses is pernicious and may be measured by forms of aberrant behaviour. The latter may include, moreover, any uncomely, immodest or indecorous practices, even when these have become so widespread as to pass for fashionable: hence the innumerable condemnations in the period's satire of affectations of dress, speech, or carriage. Such outward extravagances are infallible signs of inward deformity, notably self-love and presumption—a point amply illustrated, again, by Barclay, translating Brandt, who specifically and generally mounts attacks against “ye Courters and Galants disguised, / Ye counterfayt caytifs, that ar nat content / As God hath you made” (cited by Pompen, p. 231). Barclay adds a praise of his monarch, Henry VII, as a model of moral decency signified by outward decorum:

Beholde unto your Prynce;
 Consyder his sadnes, his honestye devyse;
 His clothyng expressyth his inwarde prudence;
 Ye se no example of suche inconvenyence
 In his Hyghnes, but godly wyt and gravityte. (cited by Pompen, p. 236)

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare uses such words as “mad” and “madness” more often than in any other of his plays. The quotation that figures in my title, “My masters, are you mad? Or what are you?” (II.iii.75), occurs when Malvolio rebukes Sir Toby and Sir Andrew for making too much noise at a late hour. Malvolio continues:

Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady’s house, that ye squeak out your coziers’ catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you? (75-79)

Shakespeare hereby seems to invite his audience to reflect on relationships that exist between madness and incivility. The disorder created by the revelers is not madness in the strict sense of the term, but indecorous behaviour, especially in Malvolio’s eyes. The play offers no clear-cut definitions of “mad” or “madness”, but provides a panoply of the different forms as evoked in discourses on the subject that were circulating at the time. The satiric commentators in the play, namely Feste and Maria, serve to guide the audience through the carnivalesque parade—up to the point where they themselves become part of the display. Even Sir Toby, perpetually drunk, does the same with respect to Sir Andrew, whom he clearly imagines as a controllable and exploitable commodity, infinitely capable of being egged on because so far beneath him in intelligence.

In Act One, Scene Three, where we first encounter Sir Toby, it is Maria who reminds him that he “must confine [himself] within the modest limits of order” (I.iii.6-7). Maria also refers to the “foolish knight” (12), Sir Andrew, whom she will directly expose and treat as a fool when she first meets him (54-55). Yet it is Maria who initiates the plot against Malvolio, provoked most immediately by his threat to inform Olivia about Maria’s encouragement of “this uncivil rule” (II.iii.104). Her revenge, on behalf of all the roisterers, aims at making him “a common recreation” (115) and certainly gains the appreciation of the audience. This is also, however, to set in motion an interrogation of the meanings of madness and incivility beyond Malvolio’s certitudes or her own.

Without a doubt, Malvolio is the classic *agelast* who would suppress all pleasure, and who, in exceeding his authority to restore order when he threatens Sir Toby with ejection from “my lady’s house”, amply reveals the self-love and presumption which Maria attributes to him, denying him even the sincerity he might claim as a puritan, a man of “godly wyt and gravity”, to recall Barclay’s words quoted above:

The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass, that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths. The best persuaded of himself: so crammed (as he thinks) with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work. (II.iii.124-29)

Shakespeare subsequently, in Act Two, Scene Five, treats his audience to a concentrated enactment of the effects of “imagination” (II.v.37), as Fabian points out. Even before finding Maria’s letter, Malvolio projects himself verbally and physically into fantasies of greatness centred on a marriage with his mistress, so that his absurd efforts to construe the text accordingly seem a natural extension of his deluded state of mind. The semiotics of dress, bizarre mannerisms, affected speech—all are called into play in ways recognisable from contemporary treatises. To those is added, when Maria prepares Olivia, expecting a servant “sad and civil” (III.iv.5), to witness her steward’s transformation, the element of religious melancholy—“He is sure possessed, madam” (8-9)—shortly to be developed in the encounter with Sir Toby, then pushed to an extreme through Feste’s intervention as Sir Topas.

In sum, Malvolio is constructed, with his own unwitting connivance, as an impossibly overdetermined quintessence of all signs of mad incivility, his self-image turned inside-out and turned against him. And he is ultimately confined and bound in a dark enclosure, conventionally played as involving the “hell” of the space beneath the stage. Despite, or in part because of, all the fun enjoyed in complicit fashion by on- and offstage audiences, this effect may come to seem a sort of scape-goating, a purging of qualities that are reflected, beneath the civil courtly surfaces, by the characters marked out as wise and sane. In this context, the threat of vengeance launched by the “notoriously abused” (V.i.356) Malvolio at the conclusion, ambiguously recognised by Olivia as a “poor fool” (348), does not merely comment with ironic obliqueness on the artificial harmony of the ending, like Jaques’ opting out of the dance in *As You Like It*, but insists on a recycling of human follies consistent with the “whirligig of time” (354). The latter is, of course, the vision of Feste, the spokesman for universal, contagious, vagabond folly, and it contrasts with the linear progression towards denouement in which Viola, aligned with the comic trajectory, puts her faith: “O time, thou must untangle this, not I; / It is too hard a knot for me t’untie” (II.ii.37-38).

Feste’s advocacy of folly may echo the Erasmian idea of its ubiquity, but he is specifically attached, however loosely, to the two main poles of the love dynamic, the households of Orsino and Olivia, whose relations are only superfi-

cially civil from beginning to end (witness Orsino's injunction to Cesario, "leap all civil bounds" [I.iv.20]). The ostentatious exorcism of self-love in Malvolio has, as its counterpart, the intimation that the love of both these figures is just as intensely, if not as grotesquely, solipsistic. Orsino's opening words ("If music be the food of love ..." [I.i.1 ff.]) convey the sense that he savours the sensual pain of unsatisfied love, while his insistence to Cesario that women lack men's capacity for love likewise turns in on itself and separates him from women in general:

There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much. They lack retention.
Alas, their love may be called appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,
That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt. (II.iv.89-95)

There is here an obvious ironic reprise of his own desires as described in his first speech, but also an echo of the treatises on love-sickness, such as that of André Du Laurens (1595; trans. 1599), who writes a chapter "Of another kinde of melancholie which commeth by the extremitie of love" (cited by Neely, p. 101).

Just previously Feste has put his finger on the pulse of Orsino's narcissistic passion when the Count offers to pay him for his song:

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything and their intent everywhere, for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing. (II.iv.70-74)

Would an audience have seen Feste as suggesting that he embark on the Ship of Fools?

Orsino delivers his affirmation of the male monopoly of love, ironically, in the presence of a woman who chooses, for no clear reason, to disguise herself and projects her own passion in the distanced form of an imagined sister. Distancing is, indeed, the operative mode for both, as Orsino hides himself behind a smoke-screen of futile embassies.

For her part, Olivia screens herself, not just behind a veil, in the scene of Cesario's first embassy, but behind an imagined grief for a brother seven-years dead. Again, Feste points out the illogical premise of her immoderate sorrow when he obtains Olivia's consent to let him "prove" her a "fool" (I.v.47):

Feste. Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?
Olivia. Good fool, for my brother's death.
Feste. I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
Olivia. I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
Feste. The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen. (54-59)

Later, Olivia is herself capable of seeing Malvolio's distracted condition as a foil to her own: "I am as mad as he / If sad and merry madness equal be" (III.iv.14-15). She stops short, however, of suspecting an admixture of self-love in her passion for Cesario, whereas we recognise this dimension of her impulse to possess, which is especially clear in her imposition of herself on Sebastian: "Nay, come, I prithee; would thou'dst be ruled by me!" (IV.i.57). The object of this unaccountable passion naturally suspects her or his own madness:

... I am ready to distrust mine eyes,
 And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
 To any other trust but that I am mad,
 Or else the lady's mad; yet, if 'twere so,
 She could not sway her house, command her followers. (IV.iii.13-17)

The lines turn back on themselves by way of our knowledge that there are several followers that Olivia cannot thoroughly command, beginning with Sir Toby, including Maria, and most recently and notoriously Malvolio.

Not surprisingly, the incivility of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew towards Sebastian likewise seems to him redolent of madness. And this takes us back to the function of anger in the play, suggesting that while such *furor brevis* is usually a negative force, it may in special circumstances conduce to revelation, discovery and comic denouement. Orsino's outburst against Cesario—"I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love, / To spite a raven's heart within a dove" (V.i.119-20)—performs a similar function. But we are not allowed to forget that the solutions thus offered to these hard knots are Gordian ones, dependent on the eligible matches the playwright conjures up, like doves from a magician's hat, not on the operations of vagabond folly left to its own relentless devices in a world where "the rain it raineth every day" (V.i.369, 373, 377, 381).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- BURTON, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed. Holbrook Jackson. 3 vols. Everyman's Library. London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1932.
- PLATO. *Phaedrus*. Trans. W. C. Helmbold and W. G. Ribinowitz. The Library of Liberal Arts. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956.
- RABELAIS, François. *Gargantua*. Ed. Pierre Michel. Preface Michel Butor. Folio. Paris: Gallimard, 1965.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *Timon of Athens*. Ed. H. J. Oliver. The Arden Shakespeare (2nd ser.). London: Methuen, 1963.
- . *Twelfth Night*. Ed. Elizabeth Story Donno. Introd. Penny Gay. Updated ed. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Secondary Sources

- DEVETIAN, Benet. *Civility: A Cultural History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- GOLDSMITH, Robert H. *Wise Fools in Shakespeare*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1955.
- NEELY, Carol Thomas. *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- POMPEN, Aurelius Cornelis Gerard. *The English Versions of the Ship of Fools: A Contribution to the History of the Early French Renaissance*. 1925; rpt. New York: Octagon, 1967.

Richard HILLMAN, « Signifying Nothing: Easier Done Than Said? »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 87-100
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 — CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Signifying Nothing: Easier Done Than Said?

Richard Hillman

Université François-Rabelais de Tour/CESR-CNRS

This essay's argument starts from a simple, indeed self-evident, premise—and risks, I'm afraid, not getting beyond it. At least, I tell myself, the point will be thoroughly made. It is just this: early modern drama is rich with allusions to foolish or mad discourse—for my limited purposes here it seems permissible to conflate the two—as being literally non-sensical, whereas, with very few exceptions, it is actually represented, and registered by the audience, as full of sense, however warped and indirect in expression. This is obviously true of the so-called wise fools, as also of those characters who counterfeit folly as part of a disguise: indeed, the inescapability of the central paradox may help to account for the plethora of these phenomena. The paradox is inescapable, no doubt, because of the very nature of theatre, and perhaps of language at large: according to the code that connects auditors and spectacle, we expect to encounter meaning on stage, not to be confronted with gibberish. If there is to be babbling, as there often is, it must serve some intelligible dramatic end.

Authors who dare to dabble in babble take care to contain and label it. Thus Feste is allowed only a brief—and textually indeterminate—moment of madman's *vox* in presenting Malvolio's eminently sane letter to Olivia:

Feste. . . . [Reads madly] "By the Lord, madam —"
 Olivia. How now, art thou mad?
 Feste. No, madam, I do but read madness; and your ladyship will have it as it ought to be, you must allow vox. (Shakespeare, *TN*, V.i.274-77)

Thus the stricken Cornelia in *The White Devil* initially strays only a few times from verse into prose (Webster, V.ii.31 ff.), and when officially pronounced "foolish" (V.iv.72), delivers her finely crafted and moving dirge in what the original stage direction calls "*several forms of distraction*" (91 SD), but obviously without spoiling its extraordinary dignity. Thus the fools and madmen of Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* make a mere passage over the stage, and thereby comment pointedly—intelligibly—on the main plot's forms of folly and madness. And thus, to reach back to Tudor models, the syllable-by-syllable "schooling" of Ignorance [*sic*] by Idlenes over one hundred lines in Redford's *Wit and Science* (ll. 450-550) serves to define the identity that will shortly be applied to Wit, along with the fool's coat, but is allowed only distantly to taint the fallen hero's speech, which Science still finds above his apparent condition: "Heere you what termes this foole here hath got?" (l. 748).

Hence, too, perhaps, what seems to be the absence from the religious drama in any language of a key medieval model for the motif of madness as divine punishment: the case of Nebuchadnezzar.¹ (It would be intriguing, of course, to know how far and by what means the latter's fall into madness was portrayed in the anonymous lost play on the subject that Henslowe's *Diary* indicates as having been a considerable success for the Admiral's Men in 1596-97.²) One offshoot of the Nebuchadnezzar model, the thirteenth-century French romance of *Robert le Diable*, notably transforms for a stage version the discursive sign of folly—unintelligible noise-making in lieu of speech—imposed upon the eponymous protagonist as penance for his manifold crimes: as Élisabeth Gaucher points out with regard to the poetic text, "L'aliénation passe par la régression à la bestialité. . . . Le fou ne communique pas par le langage, il hennit" (*Robert le diable: histoire d'une légende*, p. 37)—that is, neighs like a horse.³ The fourteenth-century dramatisation of the story, however, for the *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages* emphasises the fool's silence, even when tormented and humiliated:

1 See Fritz, pp. 26, 67-69, *et passim*, and, for a comprehensive overview, Doob.

2 See the *Lost Plays Database* at <<http://www.lostplays.org/index.php/Nebuchadnezzar>>. The dramatic treatments of which I am aware restrict themselves to other aspects of the story; see, e.g., the *Nabuchodonosor* of Antoine de La Croix (pub. 1561).

3 See *Robert le Diable*, ed. Gaucher, l. 1187.

“J’ay pitié de sa guise fole / Et de ce qu’il ne parle goute. / Il pleure, esgar! Esgar sanz doubte” (*Miracle de Robert le dyable*, ll. 1462–64). In a way that recuperates a mystery-play model, this not only lends his suffering a Christ-like passivity but effectively prepares for his noble eloquence when his penance has been fulfilled. Folly is thereby spiritually transfigured.

All in all, then, it is hardly surprising that even genuine fools and genuinely mad characters on the early modern stage should speak versions of sense. What is remarkable, however, is that the representational issue is regularly foregrounded—with seeming inadvertence but in ways that reveal some of the discursive and generic tensions involved.

The text that provides my title, and points to the central contradiction inherent in “signifying nothing” (Shakespeare, *Mac.*, V.v.28), may serve to initiate this part of the discussion. The speech and its moment are too well known to belabour; that is part of the point. Macbeth’s soliloquy dismissing life as “a tale / Told by an idiot” (26–27) has made its way into memories, anthologies and textbooks because it is one of the playwright’s most rhetorically poised and finally crafted verbal productions—signification *par excellence*, the antithesis of “sound and fury” (26). An actor may inject urgency and despair befitting the tragic context: the news of the queen’s death, conveyed by the “cry of women” (V.v.8), may palpably shake Macbeth’s self-styled immunity to “[d]ireness” (14) as the enemy approaches. But to allow the slightest tinge of anything like a loss of verbal, hence mental, control would contradict the text and turn pathos into bathos.

What we hear from Macbeth about the empty signifying of madness, moreover, is bound to be set off against what we have recently witnessed from Lady Macbeth, who ironically fulfils her earlier warning to him: “These deeds must not be thought / After these ways; so, it will make us mad” (II.ii.36–37). Certainly, she is made mad in a way that could not be more ostentatiously laden with significance. Far from “signifying nothing”, the “tale” composed of her distracted words and gestures conspicuously imposes something supremely horrific on reluctant interpreters—the Doctor and Gentle-woman.

A contrast may usefully be drawn with the death of the evil Queen in *Cymbeline*, likewise announced as part of the resolution but not actually depicted. She is said by the physician Cornelius to have expired

With horror, madly dying, like her life,
Which, being cruel to the world, concluded
Most cruel to herself. (Shakespeare, *Cym.*, V.iv.31–33)

Despite her true revelations, successively reported, the fact that we have not witnessed the least onset or expression of madness on her part, or indeed any psychological dimension beyond caricature, leaves infinite, if momentary, room for our imagination to operate. And what we imagine is nothing less than a self-annihilation at once physical, psychic and moral, an intense implosion of multiple nothings that explodes miraculously with renewed meanings for others, making sense of their lives in the finest tragicomic manner:

Cymbeline. Innogen,
 Thy mother's dead.
Innogen. I am sorry for't, my lord.
Cymbeline. Oh, she was naught, and 'long of her it was
 That we meet here so strangely. (269-72)

The difficulty of staging, as opposed to evoking, madness as “signifying nothing” is confirmed by what we hear and see in *Hamlet*, and also by what we do not. First, of course, we have to do with a pretended madman who super-abundantly serves up something in the more-or-less transparent guise of nothing. Distracted though he may truly seem, Ophelia, by contrast, is unmistakably the (no)thing itself—mentally enacting what Hamlet thinks should “lie between maids’ legs” (Shakespeare, *Ham.*, III.ii.117). When her condition is first evoked, the reporting Gentleman paints her discourse as an absent centre which interpretations strain to fill:

 Her speech is nothing,
 Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
 The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
 And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,
 Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
 Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
 Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. (IV.v.7-13)

What the audience actually witnesses a few lines later, however, is nearly the inverse of this picture. The themes and images of Ophelia’s voluble mad speech signify in particularly rich fashion, all the more so for their disjointed allusiveness. Her interlocutors, by contrast—Gertrude and Claudius—are all but reduced to speechlessness (“Nay, but Ophelia —” [34], “pretty lady” [41], “Pretty Ophelia —” [56]) and at a loss for interpretation (“Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?” [27]), except for gross approximation. “Conceit upon her father” (45),

pronounces Claudius, conspicuously hitting on only part of the truth. The interpretative function is more largely transferred to us, the offstage audience, who have more comprehensive information to bring to bear, notably regarding the fraught emotional relations between Ophelia and Hamlet.

This technique, a form of dramatic irony involving two layers of interpretation, with the offstage audience at least one step ahead of the onstage one, is worth identifying as a sleight-of-hand (or tongue) technique for enhancing the impression of mad discourse while keeping it, not merely contained, but dramatically functional—*artistically* coherent. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene is an obvious instance. The model of Ophelia has at least two virtually self-declared offshoots of this ilk: Webster's Cornelia, mentioned earlier, whose chief onstage interlocutor is her guilty son Flamineo, and, perhaps most remarkably, the Jailor's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, who risks all for Palamon. In the latter case, there is a striking progression from verse soliloquies signalling progressive distraction (Shakespeare and Fletcher, II.vi.1 ff., III.ii.1 ff.)—the verse in itself performing a containment function because it is socially anomalous—to what is perhaps the most extravagant prose raving in the canon (IV.iii.*passim*). Here, as is quite clear to us, the girl's mingled sexual frustration and guilt spill over into visions of hell verging on hallucination, while her father, the Wooer and the Doctor play interpretative catch-up.

The medico-sexual cure proposed evidently has the desired effect, to judge from the Jailor's later assurance of Palemon: "Sir, she's well restored / And to be married shortly" (V.iv.27-28). Still, it is notable that there is no further direct presentation of her. No doubt, the tragicomic machinery of the play has more pressing concerns at this point; the fact remains that genuine madness cured, of which there are few instances, since the condition is generally fatal, is here denied discursive expression. Given the doubt that is raised and allowed to circulate regarding this jejune marriage as a remedy for such profound and multiple alienation—not just sexual, but emotional and social—one is encouraged to supply the silence imaginatively with some version of the commonplace speech of conversion, repentance and acceptance that often, in early modern comic endings, seems to anticipate the effects of anti-psychotic medication—or lobotomy.

To what extent is poststructuralist linguistic and psychoanalytical theory useful in making sense of the theatrical eschewing of nonsense? Perhaps it does not take us very far, given the overriding practical imperatives previously

cited. Still, I continue to see the point, as I have done in earlier work,⁴ of thinking in terms of Lacan's conception of psychotic speech as characterised by the absence of the "existential subject of synchronic relations (*je*)" (Ragland-Sullivan, 199)—another way of stating the paradoxical condition of "speech" that is "nothing". I have proposed that medieval forerunners of early modern mad discourse, notably in the mothers of the slaughtered innocents and the *planctus* of Mary, tend to draw on the Transcendental Signified, the divine framework always already in place, to supplant the individual ego that threatens to slip out of place. In light of the containment mechanisms outlined above, it now seems to me possible to posit the audience's sense-making function as itself performing a similar role in early modern plays, and as doing so even when the notion of transcendental signification is either frankly abrogated or subversively undercut.

There is, broadly speaking, a distinction to be made here between the mad discourses of female and male characters. Zabina, the captive Turkish empress of *Tamburlaine, Part One*, may be taken to stand for the former. Her discovery of Bajazeth's body—"O Bajezeth, my husband and my lord, / O Bajazeth, O Turk, O emperor" (Marlowe, Vi.308-9)—instantly shifts her discourse so as to suggest the abrupt removal of that which anchored it, allowing it to slip into a prose string of images dominated by the stereotypical female fluids ("Bring milk and fire, and my blood I bring him again" [310]) and functions: "Go to my child. Away, away, away! Ah, save that infant, save him, save him!" (312-13). This is particularly disjointed and fragmentary speech, but it is far from gibberish. Its sense, however, is conditioned from outside. The audience assumes here a cultural and intertextual position, focused by the brutal specificities of the play-world ("Streamers white, red, black, here, here, here. . . . Hell, death, Tamburlaine, hell!" [314-16]), which abundantly supplies interpretative context—if we like, the missing synchronising "*je*". There is here a model that applies especially to female distraction, which is almost always triggered by the loss or unattainability of a loved one: Lady Macbeth is a notable exception, but not necessarily Cymbeline's queen, given the disappearance of her son Cloten, in whom she apparently saw something more than we do.

Isabella in *The Spanish Tragedy*, whose distraction over Horatio's death leads almost straight to suicide (but remains within the moderating bounds of verse), is another case in point. To the extent that her madness counterpoints that of Hieronimo, thrown into relief (and indeed evoked when she blames him for

4 See notably Hillman, *Self-Speaking*, pp. 239-46.

delay [Kyd, IV.ii.29 ff.]) is the specific pattern of the revenger's distraction. This pattern has, of course, been much discussed—by me among many others—but it may be possible to add a nuance from the present point of view. Revengers typically deploy their distraction, more or less distractedly, in service to the vindictive act conceived as a source of lost meaning, a device for reconstituting identity, usually at the acknowledged cost of their own death. (The Additions to *The Spanish Tragedy* seem calculated to enhance this schema.) In psychoanalytic terms, this is to invest the act with transcendental significance, so as to hold in place a discursive system that would otherwise fragment into nonsense. An alternative, if private (literally “idiotic”) “je” is thereby re-constituted. What Kyd's representation (if not invention) of this process in and through Hieronimo enables us to see—again, as interpreters, whose perspective provides a distancing and containing effect—is the constructed, artificial nature of the transcendentalising process.

This is hardly news from the moral point of view, given the ambivalence—to say the least—attached to acts of revenge in early modern English culture, dramatic and otherwise. But it seems useful to reconsider the point discursively, to recognise that the revenger's appropriation of language to produce “something” remains in fact a version of “speech” that is “nothing”. Hieronimo's (literal) elevation of the corpse of Horatio to the status of transcendental signified—the “strange and wondrous show” that will enable his speech to “make the matter known” (IV.i.185, 187), proves no means of evading the tongue's inherent deceptive power, as he seems at once to acknowledge and demonstrate in the bloody conclusion.⁵

If we return now (and this leads to my own less spectacular conclusion) to the two types of discursive folly that are self-containing—those of the wise fool and the pretended madman—it becomes easier to see that they are also self-negating, thanks to the presence of a double discourse—a version of “something” that counterbalances the outward show of “nothing”. Examples are numerous, and the terms are sometimes manipulated explicitly. Lear's Fool, in proposing that he and his master have effectively changed places, and thereby preparing for Lear's madness, first tells him,

I had rather be any kind o' thing than a Fool, and yet I would not be thee, nuncle; thou hast par'd thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing i' th' middle. (Shakespeare, *Lr.*, IV.iv.185–88)

5 For a fuller treatment of this issue, see Hillman, “Thomas Kyd”.

Then he nails the point down: “I am better than thou art now, I am a Fool, thou art nothing” (193-94). In this light, it is easier to see that Lear’s later claim to be something still—“Then there’s life in’t” (IV.vi.202)—is akin, in a momentary way, to the revenger’s illusory arrogation of artificial substance; appropriately, then, purportedly vast but unnamed “revenges” (II.iv.279) figure prominently in Lear’s fantasies.

The same play presents us with Edgar’s mad disguise, in assuming which he inverts the key terms: “Poor Turleygod! poor Tom! / That’s something yet. Edgar I nothing am” (II.iii.20-21). The “something” that is Poor Tom is recognisable, of course, as a Bedlam-beggar, and commentary usually settles for that identification, duly adding notes to Harsnett. I would like to suggest that the character’s double discourse may also carry older and more spiritually suggestive baggage. For there is at least one dramatic derivative of the Nebuchadnezzar tradition of folly as divine punishment that may be pertinent, even though it is extant, not in English, but in French. I return to the *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages*, but this time to a particularly curious and involved text entitled *Miracle de un parroisien esconmenié*—that is, of a parishioner excommunicated. The latter’s considerable problem is that he has been deservedly excommunicated for manifold sins and that, even though he has now repented, the curé who performed the rite has since died; no substitute, apparently, will be accepted by heaven. It will take, predictably, the intervention of Nostre Dame, who enlists the aid of the curé, now conveniently posted to paradise, to lift the curse.

She does so, however, when she is solicited by a pretended fool, none other than the son of the emperor of Alexandria, who has voluntarily taken the penance of folly upon himself to mortify his sinful state. In this guise he endures, like Robert le Diable, physical privation, as well as abundant humiliations and scorn, especially at the hands of sadistic tormentors, but he is far from mute: on the contrary, he maintains a double discourse of folly and pious wisdom, both in extreme form. As a pretended madman (“fol”) he spouts ample amounts of non-sense worthy of Poor Tom—his “Tureluru, va, turelu!” (l. 826) might even seem akin to “Turleygod” (Qa “Tuelygod”), a term which has never been explained⁶—but this is always contained within his purpose of doing good, to himself and to others.

6 Fritz, p. 357n5, cites a thirteenth-century occitan romance in which a man gone mad from jealousy sings “tullurutau”.

If we choose to see some process of spiritual education in the role assumed by Edgar, as no small number of critics do, there is a precedent here. I am far from suggesting, of course, direct knowledge by Shakespeare of this obscure fourteenth-century text. But that text may just be the key to the survival of a lost tradition, even one involving popular drama, of a kind akin to that which I have posited behind the representation of Joan de Pucelle and Talbot in *Henry VI, Part One*.⁷ In any case, a study of the discourses of folly, and particularly of the cohabitation of nothing and something, nonsense and sense, within the same character, should not leap to the conclusion that such doubleness is based merely on an inherited plot element, despite such folktale precedents as the fool-playing Amleth of Saxo and Belleforest. An early modern audience may just have been in the cultural position to know, if not better, at least differently.

7 See Hillman, "La Pucelle".

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- KYD, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedy*. Ed. J. R. Mulryne and Andrew Gurr. 3rd ed. New Mermaids. London: Methuen Drama, A. and C. Black, 2009.
- LA CROIX, Antoine de. *Nabuchodonosor. Tragi-comédie. L'argument pris du troisième chapitre de Daniel, avec le cantique des trois enfans chanté en la fournaise*. n.pl.: n.pub., 1561.
- MARLOWE, Christopher. *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One. Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*. Ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- MIDDLETON, Thomas, and William Rowley. *The Changeling*. Ed. N. W. Bawcutt. The Revels Plays. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958.
- Miracle de Robert le dyable. Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages. Publiés d'après le manuscrit de la bibliothèque nationale*. Ed. Gaston Paris, Ulysse Robert and François Bonnardot. 8 vols. Publications de la Société des anciens textes français. Paris: Firmin Didot, 1876-97. Vol. VI (no. 33).
- Miracle de un parroisien esconmenié. Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages. Publiés d'après le manuscrit de la bibliothèque nationale*. Ed. Gaston Paris, Ulysse Robert and François Bonnardot. 8 vols. Publications de la Société des anciens textes français. Paris: Firmin Didot, 1876-97. Vol. III (no. 17).
- REDFORD, John. *Wit and Science. Medieval Drama*. Ed. David Bevington. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.
- Robert le Diable: Edition bilingue*. Ed. Élisabeth Gaucher. Champion Classiques, série Moyen Âge. Paris: H. Champion: 2006.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *Cymbeline*. Ed. Martin Butler. The New Cambridge Shakespeare: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- _____. *Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins. The Arden Shakespeare (2nd ser.). London: Methuen, 1982.
- _____. *Macbeth*. Ed. A. R. Braunmuller. Updated ed. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- _____. *Twelfth Night*. Ed. Elizabeth Story Donno. Introd. Penny Gay. Updated ed. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- SHAKESPEARE, William, and John Fletcher. *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Ed. Lois Potter. The Arden Shakespeare (3rd ser.). London: Thomson Learning, 1997.

WEBSTER, John. *The White Devil*. Ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan. New Mermaids. London: A. and C. Black; New York: Norton, 1966.

Secondary Sources

DOOB, Penelope. *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974.

FRITZ, J.-M. *Le discours du fou au Moyen Âge, XII^e-XIII^e siècles*. Perspectives littéraires. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992.

GAUCHER, Élisabeth. *Robert le diable: histoire d'une légende*. Essais sur le Moyen Âge, 29. Paris: H. Champion, 2003.

HILLMAN, Richard. "La Pucelle and the Godons in the *Mistère du Siège d'Orléans*: Civic Pageant and Popular Tradition". *Les Mystères: Studies in Text, Theatricality and Urban Drama*. Ed. Peter Happé and Wim Hüskén. Ludus: Medieval and Early Renaissance Theatre and Drama, 12. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012. 167-88.

———. *Self-Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama: Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's, 1997.

———. "Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy". *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*. Ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 566-83.

Lost Plays Database. The University of Melbourne, 2009. Online at <http://www.lostplays.org/index.php/Main_Page>. (Accessed 5 March 2014.)

RAGLAND-SULLIVAN, Ellie. *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Olena LILOVA, « Manifestations of Folly in Henry Medwall's Morality Play *Nature* »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 101-112
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Manifestations of Folly in Henry Medwall's Morality Play Nature

Olena Lilova

Zaporizhia Classic Private University, Ukraine

Folly is the second name of Sensuality, one of the central characters in Henry Medwall's play *Nature*. Sensuality is the principal negative figure that competes with Reason in their struggle for influence upon Man. As is well known, in early Tudor morality plays the concept of evil was embodied in allegorical figures of the Seven Deadly Sins. In Medwall's play, besides the Sins themselves, we come across the character of Sensuality, who is supposed to direct them in order to have the necessary effect on Man. Making Sensuality the Sins' leader and equating it with Folly opens an interesting angle for reflecting about the essence and consequences of human depravity, as it is depicted in the early Tudor drama. Such a perspective also allows us to consider the playwright's involvement in the philosophic debates of the time.

It is important to keep in mind the fact that *Nature* was composed in the last years of the fifteenth century by an author who was in service to the chief religious authority in England—John Morton, who occupied the position of Archbishop of Canterbury in the years 1486-1500. John Morton is known to have taken an active part in the political events of the last quarter of the century. Among other opponents of Richard of Gloucester, he helped Henry VII to ascend the throne in 1485 and thereby found the Tudor dynasty in England.

This is worth remembering while reading Medwall's drama because Man here appears to be not only the personification of the human race, that is, the apex of creation—"Byfore all other chyef of hys [God's] creance" (Medwall, l. 74)—but also someone "predestinate / To be a prynces pere" (ll. 893-94), that is, one endowed with power over other creatures on the earth. A parallel is thus drawn between the image of Man as a King of Nature and the idea of the secular power of the monarch over his subjects. A number of remarks made by the characters of *The World and Worldly Affeccyon* support this understanding of the figure: "And where ye shew unto me that thys Man / Is ordeyned to reygne here in thys empyr, / ... He to take upon hym as mighty governer, / Havyng all thing subdued to hys power" (ll. 425-26, 430-31); "Also he must nedys do as the Worlde doth / That intendeth any whyle here to reygne" (ll. 453-54); "Fyrst me semeth necessary to provyde / What maner folkys your sarvauntys shall be, / For surely ye ar nothyng accompanyde / Accordyng to a man of your degree" (ll. 533-36). Likewise, *Worldly Affeccyon* says, "Eke yt ys necessary for that behoye / That there be made some maner of purvyaunce / Wherby ye may bere out your coun-tenaunce" (ll. 700-2).

Having yielded to various temptations that *The World* (secular life) lures Man with, at the end of the play the central character gets rid of the Sins led by Sensuality and finally submits himself to Reason. That is what Nature expected Man to do from the very beginning, but it is only due to his age that Man succeeds in getting free from Sensuality's devastating influence. The age of such liberation is pegged at forty. It is noteworthy that when the play was written and performed for the first time, that is, in the very last years of the century, King Henry VII, born in 1457, had reached the age of forty years. It is worth mentioning that in medieval Europe, with life expectancy lower than it is now, forty years was considered to be quite the autumn of one's life.¹ In *Nature*, for instance, the period after forty is referred to as "croked old age" (l. 331). It is documented that, in those days people were believed to achieve their best form at the age of thirty to thirty-five.²

The implied possibility offered viewers of perceiving the character of Man as a monarch or a wielder of worldly power, and not just as a representative

1 See, e.g., Shakespeare's Sonnet 2: "When forty winters shall besiege thy brow. . . ."

2 It is interesting that Medwall was probably of the same age as the monarch, while John Morton, who might have used Medwall as a mouthpiece for his ideas, was twice as old.

of the human community as a whole, furnishes the playwright with a means of garnishing the timeless and spaceless storyline of the morality play with the topical, and consequently more specific, discourse of secular authority. “The point of political activity” (Соколов, p. 223)³ in Medwall’s play thus consists in the potential for explaining extravagancies that the king might have committed in his immaturity. At the same time, the playwright could have been expressing the hope that as soon as the monarch reached the age of forty years, he would no longer be ruled by his passions or emotions but would truly become an adherent of reason.

If we imagine the two opposed moral capacities of a human being—those of Reason and Sensuality—as two poles of a fixed axis of coordinates, then Man’s successful progression along this axis will be effected in terms of submission and dominion. His success would depend upon the choice of relations made with these two antagonistic forces. With regard to Reason, Man should take the subordinate position. In Medwall’s drama it is emphasised more than once that Reason is supposed to lead Man and govern him—witness, for instance, Nature’s first monologue: “Lo, here Reason to govern the in thy way, / And Sensualyte upon thyn other side. / But Reason I depute to be thy chyef gyde” (ll. 101-3); “yt ought to be overall / Subdued to Reason and under his tucyon” (ll. 164-65).

As far as Sensuality is concerned, Man should harness it. Otherwise he can lose his manlike image, turning into a wild animal, as Nature and Reason admonish him: “And yf thou abond the to passions sensuall, / Farewele thy lyber-tye—thou shalt wax thrall” (from Nature’s introductory monologue, ll. 167-68); “For Sensualyte in very dede / Is but a meane whyche causeth hym to fall / Into moche foly and maketh hym bestya / So that there ys no difference in that at the lest / Bytwyxt man and an unreasonable best” (from Reason’s first monologue, ll. 292-96).⁴ In this way, Folly can be interpreted as a logical consequence of one’s submission to Sensuality, or as the state of submission to the senses and inability to be governed by common sense.

Folly’s most evident manifestation in the play involves Man’s captivation by his new friends—the allegorical Vices, companions of Sensuality—and his eventual beating of Reason in the tavern, described vividly enough at the end

3 All translations from Russian are my own.

4 Also see Reason’s remark: “Of all hys gydyng I shuld take the enterpryse / When he lusteth not to follow my / But foloweth the appetytyes of hys sensuall affeccyon / As a brute best that lakketh reson?” (ll. 1344-47).

of the first half of the play.⁵ Before that the Vices hold their own and, as is traditional for morality plays, seem to be the most attractive characters in the work not only for Man but for the audience as well.

One may distinguish several ways by which Sensuality and the companions of Man exercise their receptive attractiveness for viewers of the performance. To begin with, no one knows better the etiquette, the do's and don'ts of polite manners accepted as norms in the world where Man finds himself to be the prince, than the Vices. Pride, for instance, teaches him a lesson in fashion trends, looking really funny in his role of a trickster who pretends to be a true expert in various spheres of worldly life. Secondly, the spectators' merry laughter could also be provoked by the Vices' free-and-easy, playful manner of talking⁶ and behaving when they do not show themselves to Man but spin intrigues behind his back or sort out their own relationship (as in, for instance, the farcical debate between Pride and Sensuality making clear which of them is the servant of the other [ll. 843-48]). Besides, a particular comic situation (which the audience couldn't but enjoy) is created when the Vices adopt new names to deceive Man as to their true nature. Thus Glotony becomes Good Felyshyp, Slouth turns into Ease, Wrath represents himself as Manhode, and so on. Pretending to be characters and qualities that they are not would have given the performers of the Vice-roles additional material for comic acting, much to everyone's delight.

Definitely, the most laughter-provoking comic situation in the play is the episode of the Vices' final mobilization to fight for Man. Sensuality, who was so willing to keep Man under his control, fails to convene his army to oppose Reason. The Vices demonstrate rivalry and lack of solidarity within their company. They turn out to be unready to renounce their personal comfort for the sake of the common cause.⁷ To Man's request to get together at one place, Bodyly Lust replies: "I had lever kepe as many flese / Or wyld hares in an opyn lese / As undertake that" (ll. 2146-48). Slouth, Envy and Glotony offer no more

5 "And wyth an angry loke, to my semyng, / Drew out hys sword wythout more taryeng / And smote Reason so on the hed / That I have great marvayll but he be now dede" (ll. 1190-93).

6 Colloquialisms are not rare in the speech of Sensuality when he talks to the Vices: "Hark, cosyn fyrst spede thys mater, / And yf yender man make the not good chere / As ony man that ever cam here, / Let me therefore be dede" (ll. 883-86); "Japes. Why say ye so?" (l. 1829); "He ys besy—harke in your ere..." (l. 1834). The same can be observed in the Vices' speeches.

7 Thus Glotony produces some cheese and a bottle of wine as his weapons in the military campaign (ll. 286-88).

help to Sensuality in this final struggle with Reason. Thus, it is only logical that the latter easily gains the upper hand in the confrontation.

In this way, the playwright makes himself clear enough, showing how man in general, and a person endowed with power in particular, should use his two inherent capacities—to reason and to sensuality. This opposition makes explicit the essential change in presenting the dichotomy of man's nature that occurred in early modern thinking. As is well known, medieval Christianity considered man as a contradictory creature, who is inherently divided between two conflicting substances—the higher one being the rational soul, which seeks to know God and do his will, and the lower one being the sinful body, which engenders man's craving for fleshly pleasures. Thus man was believed to have rational soul and irrational flesh.⁸ It was up to him to determine his existence in the next world by deciding how to go through his earthly endeavours—whether to prefer a spiritual or a sensual life. But even those human beings who consciously intended to devote their lives to God's service not infrequently had to fight with various manifestations of the body, that is, the senses and temptations they arouse.

In all fairness, it has to be added that the Christian Middle Ages treated the corporeal senses in rather an ambiguous way. On the one hand, they were acknowledged to provide man with the ability to perceive and to know the world and thus formed the individual by serving as “chief vehicles of cognition” (Nichols, p. vii). But at the same time, as S. G. Nichols shows by quoting St Augustine, St Paul, St Jerome, Guillaume de Deguileville and other authors in the “Prologue” to the collection of essays, *Rethinking the Medieval Senses* (2008), they were condemned as deceitful and foolish. An exception was sometimes made for hearing, which was believed to inform the understanding (Nichols, p. vii). This contradiction in understanding the role of senses in man's life makes another contributor to the same collection, H. Gumbrecht, describe the Middle Ages as “a time of extreme sensual starvation and of high sensual intensity” (Gumbrecht, p. 2). He concludes that, with regard to the medieval senses, one is dealing with a field of conflicting forces rather than a homogeneous discourse (p. 3). The medieval treatment of the senses is considered to be based on two conflicting premises: the Aristotelian sense-oriented approach to the material world as a means of survival, and “the Christian-Paulinian condemnation of the senses as making permanently present the original sin as an unavoidable road to perdi-

8 See Walker, “Cultural Work”, pp. 78–79.

tion” (p. 7). What makes the two medieval approaches similar is, in J. Küpper’s opinion, their vehemence in either praise or denunciation of the senses. Indeed, Küpper states that “the Christian Middle Ages had a hysterical relation to the senses” (p. 122), which became less strict with the early modern period’s increasingly intense preoccupation with *ratio*.

To return to *Nature*, it is obvious that the conflicting forces in Medwall’s play—those of Reason and Folly / Sensuality—can hardly fit in the medieval opposition of Soul and Body. Folly here correlates with man’s doubtful ability to cope with the capacities he possesses (sensuality, in this case), and not with his physical being. As to “the rational soul”, in the play it gives way to Reason, a transformation which reflects the prominence of rationalism in the European philosophy of the New Age, with reason treated as the principal criterion of esteem for all human intentions or achievements.

Thus, by focusing our attention on the more abstract level of the Sensuality-Folly combination in the play and reflecting on the meaning of sensuality in the system of philosophic views of the transient period of the Renaissance, we can make some interesting observations about the play’s message. Sensuality is known to have played a great role in the receptive aesthetics of the Renaissance. This concept’s predomination in the system of the epoch’s aesthetic principles had considerable impact on the aesthetic thinking of the time. For one thing, projective geometry—the science based on the principle of perspective bias, which would be formalised later on, in the seventeenth century—is rooted in Renaissance man’s sensual perception. This proves the thesis that sensual, or, to be more exact, visual perception can be given scientific (that is, mathematical) form (Юсев, pp. 55-57).

The key role of the senses and sensuality in forming an individual as well as in unlocking his creativity is emphasised in the writings of Italian humanists, both early ones and adherents of the Platonic Academy in Florence. The efforts to retrieve bodily pleasures as the highest good given to a human being were placed within the epicurean tradition by such scholars as Cosma Raimondi in his speech in defence of Epicurus (1530s), Lorenzo Valla in his dialogue *On Pleasure* (*De voluptate*, 1431) and Giannozzo Manetti in his work *On the Dignity and Excellence of Man* (*De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, 1452-53)—a rebuttal of Pope Innocent III; similar ideas are conveyed in the works of Poggio Bracciolini and others.⁹ Leon

9 See Горфункель, pp. 42-49.

Battista Alberti, in his major work on the art of building (*De Re Aedificatoria*, 1452), relies greatly on sensuality when speculating about beauty as a display of harmony (Лосев, pp. 279–80). The artist’s understanding of the beautiful is deemed to be based upon mathematically regulated sensuality.

The significance of sensuality in both the private and the social life of Renaissance man can hardly be overestimated.¹⁰ As the German scholar Eduard Fuchs shows in his illustrated history of morals, an enormous quantity of folk songs, Easter plays and novellas, private letters and legal papers, governmental decrees and rules of professional guilds, compiled in different European countries during the Renaissance, touched upon sensuality in its various forms and manifestations. Fuchs concludes that revolutionary epochs, like the Renaissance, cannot but be periods of “ardent sensuality”, with man as a creator of a new world, possessing remarkable power in the sphere of sensuality—erotic sensuality, in particular (Фукс, pp. 177–81).

As the prominent Russian philosopher and scholar of the last century A. Losev puts it, in the aesthetics of the Renaissance sensuality appears to be active and self-confident (Лосев, p. 57), while man, endowed with sensuality, “delights in his self-absolutisation and anarchism” (p. 65). Such a man is capable of producing Renaissance aesthetics of quite a different order from the ideals proclaimed by humanism or neo-Platonism. The anthropological focus of this different type of Renaissance aesthetics can be found in the essentially immoral personality that, in his “endless self-assertion and uncontrolled spontaneity of passions, affects and whims, engages in self-admiration and forms of wild and animalistic aesthetics” (Лосев, p. 120). Analysing this kind of Renaissance aesthetics, Losev originates the notion of “the dark side of titanism” as a phenomenon grounded in the uncontrolled individualism of the Renaissance (Лосев, pp. 120–22).

In Medwall’s *Nature*, we have a play written in the transient period when humanist ideas were just starting to draw the close attention of English intellectuals.¹¹ At the same time, the threats that the absolutely unfettered individual without any restrictions poses to himself and those around him were already the focus of attention for artists in those cultures where Renaissance tendencies

10 Evidence of poetic reflection on the topic can be found in the works of Italian authors from Dante on, e.g., “the wings / Of reason to pursue the senses’ flight / Are short” (*Divine Comedy, Paradise, Canto II*, ll. 56–58).

11 On the role of early Tudor drama as a forum for topical intellectual discussions or burning political disputations, see Walker, “Plays”, pp. 222–36.

developed earlier than in England—in Italy, for instance.¹² Given the intensity of the intellectual exchange between England and continental Europe in those days, popular ideas could spread easily in the lands where the Renaissance blossomed somewhat later. So the playwright's message in his morality that man should be ruled by reason to avoid ruin or mischief (see, for instance, Man's words: "I was forbyd by Reason / On my own fantasye to ron" [ll. 1005-6]) sounds quite prophetic as regards the early modern personality and society in general. In this larger epistemological context, too, Sensuality-Folly embodies the uncontrolled power of passions that has the capacity to conquer Man.

To conclude, Sensuality in *Nature* is characterised by a high degree of social and cultural referentiality, which makes it a salient example of the use of the Vice-figure as a basic generic marker of the Tudor interlude. It can be perceived as conveying an admonition to a monarch or to any person in general not to indulge in sensual pleasures. And, at the same time, one can see in it an artistic reflection on the spreading in late fifteenth-century Europe of "the dark side of titanism".

Thus the Vice-figure, notorious as a character with no definite identity, in *Nature* acquires considerable interpretative potential linked to the social and cultural realities of the day. Sensuality comes out as an excellent communicator, who knows the audience well enough to control the intensity of their perception of the performance. Folly is represented here as the consequence of Sensuality getting out of Reason's control, something that can be harmful for anyone, a sovereign in particular, by turning a person into an embodiment of vanity in search of bodily gratification. The play can also inspire reflection on sensuality, free from reason's control, as a force that forms specific attitudes to the world and man's self-positioning in it. In late Renaissance art, these "man-world" relations are represented as carrying great danger for man and society as well.

Either of the two levels of the Sensuality-Folly interpretation suggested here proves that allegorical figures in early Tudor drama were not so abstract as to be fully separated from their real-life context. In fact, they were often topical enough to mirror social reality and the intellectual debates of the time.

12 See Виппер, p. 77; Бицилли, pp. 152, 169; and Лосев, pp. 613-14, among others.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- DANTE Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Henry F. Cary. The Harvard Classics. New York: P. F. Collier, 1909-14. Vol. XX. Online at Bartleby.com (2001): <<http://www.bartleby.com/20/>>. (Accessed 3 March 2014.)
- MEDWALL, Henry. *Nature. The Plays of Henry Medwall*. Ed. Alan H. Nelson. Tudor Interludes, 2. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980. Online at <<http://ota.oucs.ox.ac.uk/scripts/download.php?approval/=ed65c44439cccfd4ca4>>. (Accessed 3 March 2014.)
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. The Arden Shakespeare (3rd ser.). London: Thomas Nelson, 1997.

Secondary Sources

- GUMBRECHT, Hans U. "Erudite Fascinations and Cultural Energies: How Much Can We Know about the Medieval Senses?" Introduction. *Rethinking the Medieval Senses*. Ed. Stephen G. Nichols, Andres Kablitz and Alison Calhoun. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. 1-10.
- KÜPPER, Joachim. "Perception, Cognition and Volition in the *Arcipreste de Talavera*". *Rethinking the Medieval Senses*. Ed. Stephen G. Nichols, Andres Kablitz and Alison Calhoun. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. 119-53.
- NICHOLS, Stephen G. "Prologue". *Rethinking the Medieval Senses*. Ed. Stephen G. Nichols, Andres Kablitz and Alison Calhoun. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. vii-x.
- WALKER, Greg. "The Cultural Work of Early Drama". *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Ed. Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 75-98.
- . *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

- Бицилли, Петр Михайлович. *Место Ренессанса в истории культуры*. Санкт-Петербург: Мифрил, 1996.
- Виппер, Борис Робертович. *Итальянский Ренессанс XIII-XVI века*. Курс лекций по истории изобразительного искусства и архитектуры. Том. II. Москва: Искусство, 1977.
- Горфункель, Александр Хаимович. *Философия эпохи Возрождения*. Москва: Высшая школа, 1980.
- Лосев, Алексей Федорович. *Эстетика Возрождения*. Москва: Мысль, 1982.
- Соколов, Данила Алексеевич. *Текст. Эпоха. Интерпретация: «Песни и сонеты» Ричарда Тоттела и английская поэзия Возрождения*. Санкт-Петербург: Филологический факультет СПбГУ, 2006.
- Фукс, Эдуард. *Иллюстрированная история нравов. Эпоха Ренессанса*. Перевод с немецкого В.М. Фриче. Москва: Республика, 1993.

Greg WALKER, « Folly in Lyndsay's *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis* Revisited »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 113-130
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifiques

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Folly in Lyndsay's Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis Revisited

Greg Walker
University of Edinburgh

In an insightful paper originally delivered at the 2011 Tudor Theatre Round Table in Tours (“The Politics of Unreason”), Sarah Carpenter explored the representation of different forms of folly in Sir David Lyndsay’s monumental drama, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, performed in Cupar in Fife in 1552 and on Edinburgh’s Greenside in 1554. Drawing on Heather Arden’s tripartite taxonomy (in *Fools’ Plays*, 2011) of fools’ roles in medieval literary culture, she argued that not only those who perpetrate acts of foolishness or evil (the *evil-doers*), but also the innocent, downtrodden *victims* of such acts, and those who use the licence of the fool to expose folly (the *accusers*) all partake of different aspects of a rich, conflicted tradition of folly discourses which stretches back to classical times.¹

Viewing Lyndsay’s play through a lens in which vice is one form of folly, and virtue another, almost every character in the play can be seen as a fool in one sense or another at some point in the dramatic action. Folly himself makes an appearance only at the very end. But one could list among the *evil-doers* not only Flattery, who explicitly announces himself to the audience

1 For other aspects of the folly tradition, see Walker, “Folly”; Lyall, pp. xxiii-xxiv; and Mill, “Influence”.

as “your awin fuill” (l. 629),² but all of the other vices, from Falset and Dissait, through Sensuality, Hameliness, and Danger, to the laddish courtiers, Placebo, Wantonness, and Solace, each of whom has a hand in drawing Rex into sin and the realm into misery. Similarly, among the play’s *victims* of folly, one must list Rex Humanitas himself (who admits of the vices that they “have playit me the glaiks [*made a fool of me*]” (l. 1879); the Sowtar (shoemaker) and Tailor, downtrodden and possibly cuckolded by their insatiable wives (the former also robbed of his money by the corrupt Pardoner in return for a blasphemous non-divorce); Pauper and John the Commonweal, the representatives of the benighted commonwealth; and even Chastity, who, while she is wise enough to see through the clergy’s infidelities, naively assumes that the temporal estates will welcome her, until they too send her away. Meanwhile, among the *accusers*, Pauper and John the Commonweal fulfil many of the requirements of the role, as do the virtues, Good Counsel, Verity, Chastity, and Divine Correction, the latter being the wrathful, judgemental aspect of the godhead whose Second Person was and is divine folly incarnate.

Such an analysis offers an illuminating account of the breadth and flexibility of the folly traditions as they existed in the middle of the sixteenth century. But if we extend the definition of dramatic folly effectively to include everyone in the play—the perpetrators of folly (witting and unwitting), its victims, and those who seek to expose it—then the drama’s central confrontations between reason and unreason, laity and clergy, rich and poor, become somewhat blurred, and the revelation of Folly’s *sermon joyeux*, delivered at the very close of the play, that we are all fools (“I think na schame, so Christ me safe / To be ane fuill among the laife [*rest*], / Howbeit ane hundredth stands heir by / Perventure als great fuillis as I” [ll. 4507–10]) would be no revelation at all, but simply a recapitulation of that which we always already knew. The number of fools is indeed infinite (the text for Folly’s sermon), and it is only those who recognise that they are fools who have any hope of wisdom.

This may, of course, have been Lyndsay’s intention. But I would like to pursue an alternative thought experiment in this essay, based upon the idea that Lyndsay wanted Folly’s sermon, like his entrance itself, to come as a surprise to

2 All references to the play are to Walker, ed. A film of the 2013 production of the play can be viewed on the “Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court” project website at <<http://www.stagingthescottishcourt.org/>> (accessed 23 February 2014).

his audiences, coming as it does after roughly two hours of seemingly wise dealing in the parliament of the Three Estates, in which the vices have been expelled, Good Counsel followed in the reordering of church and state, and learned preachers given the pulpit to replace the dumb dogs of Spirituality's ignorant, self-interested cabal. Diligence, the play's surrogate for Lyndsay, has even painstakingly read out a formal list of the reforms agreed by the Estates, some requiring a stanza of explanation, others two or even three, revealing in great detail just how the commonwealth is to be ordered hereafter. The implication seems clear: here is order after chaos, defined and exemplified in careful, indeed even somewhat pedantic, detail.

Folly's entry at this point seems designed explicitly to reverse the prevailing dynamic of Part Two of the play, which appeared to be leading to the defeat of foolishness and the triumph of reason and self-discipline, and to reintroduce the idea that folly cannot be expelled so readily, as, for better or worse, it is an inherent part of what it is to be human. But, of course, it is not *all* it is to be human. If everything and everyone is always foolish, then foolishness would be just another word for the human condition, which might make good sense theologically, but would prevent folly from providing an effective tool for the exposure of particular injustices. And this, I would argue, is how Lyndsay seems to have wanted to use folly in the *Satire*.

Sarah Carpenter suggested persuasively how the representatives of the common people, Pauper and John the Commonweal, could be considered fools: the former as he is "a ragged and simple poor man who angrily but helplessly seeks redress from the courts", is laughed at by Diligence for his "unsophisticated lack of understanding" and called "the daftest fuill that ever I saw" (l. 2015); the latter as his intrusion into the Parliament to speak truth to power "carries some of the force of Marcolf, the comically wise and outspoken peasant fool who challenges the intellectual wisdom of Solomon" (Carpenter, pp. 43-44). But, while John and Pauper are clearly presented as victims of an avaricious, self-interested clergy and an ill-governed state, and both speak out powerfully to expose the injustices perpetrated by churchmen, lay landlords, and the legal system, this does not, I would argue, necessarily make them fools. Some fools are victims or accusers, and some victims and accusers are fools, but not all of them are both. Crucial to the identification of folly would seem to be the presence of laughter, laughter *with*, but also laughter *at* the character concerned. And neither John nor Pauper is laughed at or laughed with in quite the ways that Folly or the vices

are. Thus a distinction is created between those figures whom the play represents explicitly as fools and those who are simply victims or expositors of folly.

John the Commonweal is rarely laughed at. His initial entry into the place, with the striking stage direction that he should either “loup” (i.e., leap) over the “stank” (the water-filled ditch that separates him from the parliament), “or els fall in it” (l. 2437 SD), clearly suggests the possibility of physical comedy. But once he is inside the parliament house, he rarely occupies anything but the moral and political high ground, and he does so on his own terms. He alone, for example, can identify the vices whom the King and the other estates seemingly cannot see:

Thair canker cullours, I ken them be the heads: *rotten tricks*
As for our reverent fathers of Spiritualitie,
Thay ar led be Covetice and cairles Sensualitie. *reckless*
And as ye se, Temporalitie hes neid of correctioun,
Quhilk hes lang tyme bene led be Publick Oppressioun: *by*
Loe quhair the loun lyis lurkand at his back. *lies lurking*
Get up, I think to se[e] thy craig gar ane raip crack. *neck crack a rope*
Loe, heir is Falsset and Dissait, weill I ken,
Leiders of the merchants and sillie crafts-men. *simple*
Quhat mervell thocht the Thrie Estaits backward gang, *It's no wonder that*
Quhen sic an vyle cumpanie dwels them amang,
Quhilk hes reulit this rout monie deir dayis, *ruled, long days*
Quhilk gars John the Common-weill want his warme clais. (ll. 2451-63)

When the clergy try to put him down through abuse and argument, he responds effectively, either with bold mockery, dismissing the Parson with “Sir Dominie, I trowit he had be dum! / Quhair Devil gat we this ill fairde blaitie bum?” (ll. 2776-77), or with a surprisingly well-informed knowledge of Scottish history. Thus, when arguing with the Prioress over the reputation and legacy of King David I (reigned 1124-53), the founder of “sa mony gay abayise” (l. 2966), he can declare with confidence that

King James the first, roy of this regioun,
Said that he [David] was ane sair sanct to the croun. *sore/harmful*
I heir men say that he was sumthing blind, *somewhat*
That gave away mair nor he left behind. *more than*
His successours that halines did repent,
Quhilk gart them do great inconvenient. (ll. 2989-94)

John does not speak in the riddling paradoxes of the witty fool tradition, but rather in plain terms, mingling fact and invective in equal measure. And when he speaks, he is listened to by those in power, not with amused tolerance, but with respect. Once he has named the vices that beset the Three Estates, he asks Correctioun in no uncertain terms to expel them. And Correctioun responds without comment or hesitation: “As ye have devysit, but [i.e., without] doubt it salbe done” (l. 2474). This is the embodiment of the commonwealth speaking; to place him among the play’s fools would be to underestimate his seriousness.

Pauper is a more ambivalent case, but here again I would argue that the play does not seem to want us to see him primarily as a fool. His entry into the place, begging for alms from spectators at a point when the action seems to have paused for an interval (“*the Kings, Bischops, and principall players being out of their seats*” [l. 1933 SD]) is certainly striking, blurring the distinction between play-world and audience-world in unsettling and affective ways.³ And the scene between Pauper and Diligence flirts with the comedy of abuse and ridicule familiar from the folly tradition. The latter calls Pauper (ironically) a “gudly companyeon” (l. 1938), more directly a “fals raggit loun” (l. 1939) and latterly “the daftest fuill that ever I saw” (l. 2015), but the comedy of abuse works both ways. Pauper responds in kind, insulting Diligence as no better than a jumped-up convict (“Quha Devil maid the[e] ane getill man, that wald not cut thy lugs?” [l. 1947]), and co-opts the audience in his mockery of his fancy attire: “Quhat say ye till thir court das-tards? Be thay get hail clais, / Sa sune do thay leir to sweir and trip on their tais” (ll. 1952–53). And it is Diligence who is comically wrong-footed by the exchange: “Me thocht the carle callit me knave evin to my face!” (l. 1954). When the latter thinks he has outsmarted the intruder by taking away the ladder leading to the King’s throne, thus seemingly trapping him up there, drinking Rex’s ale (“Loup now, gif thou list, for thou hes lost the ledder” [l. 1958]), Pauper jumps down regardless and carries on his complaint.

Pauper is no natural fool, then, even though he momentarily seems unsure about how many children he has (is it “sax or seavin” [l. 1935]?). His account of his misfortunes at the hands of his landlord and vicar is eloquent and moving, bringing a new tone of sincerity and concrete verisimilitude to a play that had hitherto operated on the level of allegorical abstraction.⁴ Nor does he deal in riddles or

3 See also Walker, “Cultural Work” and “Reflections”.

4 See Walker, “Reflections” and “Personification”.

comedy. Indeed, a good deal of what he says is taken directly from the words of Experience, the wise authority figure in the long didactic poem, *The Monarch*, or *Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour off the Miserabyll Estait of this World* (1552), that Lyndsay was writing at roughly the same time as the *Satire*.⁵ His appeals are direct, heartfelt and compelling, and his predominant mood is anger. He wants back the cows which his vicar took as mortuary dues on the deaths of his father, mother and wife, and he is begging his way to St Andrews in the attempt to get them back via the ecclesiastical courts. This quest may, as Diligence tells him, be a foolish one: the church courts will never give judgement against the interests of churchmen. But his role is not that of the hapless fool; rather, he has more in common with the Piers Plowman tradition or with Skelton's Colin Clout than with the fools of medieval convention.

If we narrow our definition of the play's fools a little to include, not all those characters with some connection to aspects of the folly tradition, but only those characters who are dressed as fools, or explicitly admit to being fools—that is, to Folly himself, Flattery (“your awin fuill”), the other vices, and the senior male clergy (revealed as fools when they are disrobed in the final scenes)—then a rather different and perhaps more powerful dynamic emerges from the architecture of the play. And here the pattern seems to be a clear movement away from allegory and generality toward direct social and political allusions, and an increasingly direct and insistent assault on social injustice as Lyndsay saw it, not in notional terms or from first principles, but through reference to very particular institutions, laws, and practices.⁶ It is the vicious, self-interested and short-termedly materialist vision of Spirituality and the corrupt influence of Flattery that represent Folly in the second half of the play, and it is this folly that the agents of reform work hard to expel, through argument, political action, legislation and finally acts of judicial “punitioun”.

The entry of Folly himself at the close of the play is both the culmination of that process of reform and the agent of its transformation into a prompt for the audience not simply to seek to change the world around them but also to transform themselves. The impact of Folly's entrance comes from the fact that, after five hours of a play that shifts from allegorical abstraction to ever-increasing *ad hominem* specificity, he nonetheless manages to crank up the particularity and

5 See, e.g., ll. 2760–71 of the play, which reproduce almost verbatim ll. 4696–4708 of the *Dialogue*.

6 See Walker, “Flytyng”, and Lyall, p. xxix.

audacity of the play's socio-political critique a notch or two further. The vices' scaffold speeches having suggested that everyone in the audience is complicit in the corruption that the vices represent, whether by watering down their wine, selling shoddy merchandise, cheating on their spouses, or generally trying to do down their neighbours for their own advantage, Folly then tells them that they are also fools if they think that legislation and administrative reform alone can return the community to economic and moral health. Reform must begin at home, and in the heart. Everyone is indeed a fool if they do not accept that the satire applies directly to them. And his sermon will suggest that they are in exalted company in their folly.

The play had begun with a conventional denial of any specific satirical intention. Diligence, with his tongue very firmly planted in his cheek, had promised the audience that the actors would deal only in generalities, naming no one in particular in what he promised would be an entirely playful entertainment:

Prudent peopill, I pray yow all,
 Tak na man greif in speciall, *No-one take particular offence*
 For wee sall speik in general, *only generally*
 For pastyme and for play. (ll. 70–73)

But, in the course of Part Two, Lyndsay has his vices name virtually every prominent family, and many prominent individuals in the Cupar community watching the 1552 performance, among the followers of Thift, Falset and Dissait. The vices mention “the great clan Jamesone, / The blude royal of Cupar toun” (ll. 4094–95), the Andersons and Pattersons (l. 4097), Lucklands, Wellands, Carruthers and Douglasses (l. 4107), the Cupar burgess Tam Williamson (l. 4098), the tailors Andrew Fortune (l. 4154) and “Tailyeour Baberage” (l. 4157), “the barfut deacon, Jamie Ralfe” (l. 4160), Willie Cadyeoch (l. 4163), the Cupar brewers (l. 4166), and Geordie Sillie (l. 4184), to name only a few of the real families and burghers whom Lyndsay draws into the business of the play, to the point where the barrier between play-world and audience-world has been thoroughly dismantled. And then he ends the drama with the still more specific and *ad hominem* accusations of Folly, which widen the purview of the satire to take in the wider world of current religious and diplomatic politics and the microcosm of every spectator him or herself. The community, he suggests, has not been purged of vice and folly after all, for they lie within all of us. The effect of Folly's sermon is thus not to universalise foolishness to the point where it ceases to be a useful tool of social analysis

(which might seem at first glance to be the implicit burden of his text: infinite are the number of fools), but to particularise it still further. It roots the vicious, self-destructive folly he condemns (as distinct from the playful, nonsensical folly he himself embodies) in very specific institutions, practices, and individuals, some far away and long ago, but others very close at hand indeed.

It is just as Flattery is leaving the stage, not to exile, but to continue his work of subverting the clergy (“I will with ane humbill spreit / Gang serve the Hermit of Lareit, / And leir him for till flatter” [ll. 4299–301])⁷ that the text offers the laconic but ominous stage direction, “Heir sal enter Foly”. And Folly bursts into the place with a cheerful greeting to the audience, to tell Diligence about his unfortunate encounter with a sow whom he encountered running loose on Cupar’s Shoe-gate—an encounter that ended with Folly upended in a dung-hill. This story is an emblem of a world-turned-upside down and criminally neglected; the pig routs the human, and no one restrains their livestock or cleans the public streets, prompting Folly to curse the burgh officials whose responsibility it is to keep civil order:

I wald the officiars of the toun,
That suffers sic confusioun,
That thay war harbreit with Mahown,
Or hangit on ane gallows.
Fy, fy, that sic ane fair cuntrie
Sould stand sa lang but policie. (ll. 4330–35)

This is Good Counsel’s portentous opening lament, delivered afresh in a comic, and very local, vein.⁸ It seems to take away the vicious edge that characterised Flattery’s brand of folly and offer instead a carnivalesque vision of folly as a joy-

7 The reference to the Hermit is itself double-edged, as Lyndsay’s view seems to have been that, far from needing Flattery to corrupt him, he was already a prime example of clerical hypocrisy and corruption. The shrine of Loreto claimed to be the site of miraculous cures, and so became a magnet for pilgrims, who Lyndsay suggested were being defrauded. In *The Dialogue* he cited among those clerics who are motivated solely by “thare particular profite”, “specially that Heremeit of Lawreit. / He pat the comoun peple in believe / That blynd gat seycht and crukit gat thare feit, / The quhilk that pail[y]ard no way can approve” (ll. 2688–92).

8 “I have maid my residence / With hie princes of greit puissance / In Ingland, Italie, and France, / And monie uther land. / Bot out of Scotland, wa, alace, / I haif bene fleimit lang tyme space, / That garris our gyders all want grace, / And die befor thair day; / Becaus thay lychtlyit Gude Counsall, / Fortune turnit on thame hir saill, / Quhilk brocht this realme to meikill baill, / Quha can the contrair say?” (ll. 574–85).

ously protean form of human carnality, a shit-stained but ultimately harmless surrender to the body in all its perverse desires and anxieties. But more is to follow. When given the chance to preach, he turns from scatological humour and bawdry to more serious political comment. He has, he declares, “foly hats” (fools’ hoods) to sell, and hangs them on the pulpit as an advertisement of his wares (ll. 4488-89). Taking as his text the familiar words of Ecclesiastes 1:15, “*stultum numerus infinitus*” (the number of fools is infinite), he begins to enumerate the catalogue of fools, starting in general terms with “Earles, duiks, kings, and empriours” (l. 4514), indeed with any fools with their eyes set so fast on the present moment that they lose sight of the interests of their immortal soul: “Sum dois as thay sould [*as if they should*] never die, / Is nocht this folie, quhat say ye?” (ll. 4526-27). But then he narrows the focus to merchants who break the law and defy the elements to squeeze a little more profit from their overseas trade (of whom he could safely assume there would be some present in the audience), to old men who marry young girls (likewise), and then to spiritual fools, specifically those who “takes in cure / The saullis of great diosies, / And regiment of great abesies, / For gredines of warldlie pelfe” (ll. 4566-69). As Diligence hints, this is dangerous talk. The elephant in the room here is that the majority of those who have taken appointments as bishops or abbots for financial reasons in recent memory were not members of a professional clerical caste, easily scapegoated and symbolically expelled, but the younger sons of noblemen and the illegitimate sons of James V, four of whom were made abbots *in commendam* before they reached the age of ten during the 1530s (Cameron, pp. 261-62). Folly responds guardedly that if “fuillis speik of the prelacie / It will be hauldin for heresie” (ll. 4579-80), but “[e]x operibus eorum cognoscetis eos” (l. 4578) (by their works ye shall know them [Matt. 7:20]). For the noblemen present (and we know that a “great part of the nobility” of Scotland was present for the Edinburgh performance of 1554) this jibe would have struck uncomfortably close to home. Folly begins to look like a fundamental buttress of the Scottish political architecture.

And it is not just unnamed spiritual fools who must wear his folly hats, but specifically also the friars of nearby St Andrews, who had as recently as 1551 been engaged in a vociferous and public dispute over whether the Lord’s Prayer might be directed not only to God the Father, but to the saints as well:

Sa, be this prophesie plainlie appeirs, *by*
That mortall weirs salbe amang freirs. *wars among*

Thay sall nocht knaw weill in thair closters, *cloisters*
 To quhom thay sall say thair *Pater Nosters*.
 Wald thay fall to and fecht with speir and sheild, *Should*
 The Feind mak cuir quhilk of them win the feild! (ll. 4636–41)

According to the martyrologist John Foxe, the St Andrews disputation was prompted by a sermon given there by the English Dominican friar, Richard Marshall, Prior of Newcastle, that stressed that the Pater Noster should only be directed to the godhead, when local practice had encouraged directing it to the saints. A local friar, named “Toittis” by Foxe (but perhaps, as Joanne Kantrowitz suggests, one Richard Cottis), was put up to defend the local practice, and the result was an unseemly squabble, in which mocking squibs were posted on the walls of the abbey church. The matter finally ended up on the agenda of the Provincial Council that closed in January 1552, and so was very recent news when Folly referred to it in Cupar in the following June, and in Edinburgh two years later.⁹ It was also contentious, as, rather than being merely a passing curiosity, the controversy touched directly upon an issue central to the reforming debates, and of considerable importance to Lyndsay himself: the status of the saints and the appropriate degree of devotion to be paid to them. A good deal of the heat in his poem *The Dialog* was generated by the poet’s contempt for the excesses of what he portrayed as saint worship in Scotland, the “idolatrous” veneration of their images, and the wasteful pilgrimages undertaken to their shrines:

[Y]e princis of the preistis that suld preche,
 Quhy suffer ye so gret abutioun?
 Quhuy do [y]e nocht the sempyll peple teche
 Quhow and to quhome to dress thare orisoun?
 Quhy thole [y]e thame to ryn from toun to toun
 In Pylgrimage tyll ony Ymagreis,
 Hopand to get thare sum Salvatioun,
 Prayand to thame devotlye on thare kneiss? (ll. 2645–52)

So Folly’s allusion to the friars squabbling over whether even the Pater Noster might not be redirected to the saints was designed both to touch still raw local nerves and to push forward the most contentious of national debates.

9 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1576 edition), bk. 8, pp. 1489–90. See also Kantrowitz, pp. 17–21.

More audaciously still, perhaps, Folly accuses the great powers of Europe, including Scotland's ally and protector, Henri II of France, and the Pope himself, of being unchristian fools, an allegation which would, in the first case, seem politically and diplomatically incendiary, and, in the second, skirt dangerously close to heresy. Having sought, and gained, from Rex permission to speak of kings, he then produces his final hood, "Ane nobill cap imperiell" (l. 4590), which is, he says,

nocht ordanit bot for doings *only*
 Of empreours, of duiks, and kings.
 For princelie and imperiall fuillis,
 Thay sould have luggis als lang as muillis. *ears, mules'*
 The pryde of princes withoutin faill,
 Gars all the warld rin top ovir taill. (ll. 4590-96)

What is at stake here is the substantial and immediate business of European politics and war. Reminding his audience of the support that France has recently given Scotland against the incursions of the English, he laments that the Holy Roman Emperor is now shaping "for till be ane conqueror", moving his ordinance against "the nobill king of France" (l. 4603). Indeed,

All the princes of Almanie, *Germany*
 Spaine, Flanders and Italie,
 This present yeir ar in ane flocht: *a stir*
 Sum sall thair wages find deir bocht. (ll. 4609-12)

Even "the Paip with bombard, speir and scheild, / Hes sent his armie to the field" (ll. 4613-14):

Is this fraternall charitie,
 Or furious folie, quhat say ye?
 Thay leird nocht this at Christis scuill; *learned, school*
 Thairfoir, I think them verie fuillis.
 I think it folie, be Gods mother,
 Ilk Christian prince to ding doun uther. (ll. 4617-22)

The reference is, as Anna Jean Mill noted long ago, to the so-called Schmalkaldic War of 1551-53, fought between France and an Imperial-Papal alliance ("Representations", pp. 640-41). And that the criticism was aimed at all the princes involved,

friends and foes alike, is reinforced by the extended discussion of the same conflict in the *Dialogue*:

The Empriour movis his ordinance
Contrair the potent Kyng of France;
And France rychtso with gret regour,
Contrar his freinde the Empriour;
And rycht swa France agane Ingland;
Ingland also aganis Scotland;
And als the Scottis with all thare mycht,
Doith feycht for tyll defend thare rycht. (ll. 5396–403)

And what is the root cause of this dissension? “Iknaw no ressonabyll cause quharefore, / Except Pryde, Covatyce, and vaine glore” (ll. 5394–95). On one level, this is, of course, a familiar Erasmian condemnation of needless internecine conflict among Christian powers, but its immediacy, referring to a war that was still to be resolved in 1554, and implicating Scotland as well as her foes in the unchristian folly, gives it a potency beyond the commonplaces of refined scholarly debate.

Finally, Folly hands the “folly hat imperial” to Rex himself, telling him to part it among his fellow rulers, a gesture that would have made clear that he, and the king for whom he stands in some ways a surrogate, James V, was as culpable in folly as the others. For in 1540 James had conspicuously had his royal crown redesigned for the coronation of his queen, Mary of Guise, at Holyrood, converting it into a closed crown imperial, as part of a conscious programme of ceremonial and artistic self-presentation as an imperial ruler along Continental lines that also saw the ambitious renovation and redesign of his palaces at Falkland, Stirling and Linlithgow in the French style.¹⁰ When it was performed in Cupar in 1552, and still more when it was reprised in Edinburgh in 1554, before Mary herself, newly appointed as Regent, and her council, the self-lacerating nature of the allusion would have been all too plain. Among the royal fools who had turned their back on Christian wisdom had been Scotland’s last king, Mary’s own husband, and Lyndsay’s former pupil and much-loved master, James himself. If Folly is inbuilt into the foundations of church and state in Scotland, this exchange seems to suggest that it reaches to the very capstone of the structure: the king himself.

10 See Norman Macdougall, “Foreword”, in Cameron, p. xi, and Shire, pp. 69–72.

By the final scene, then, the *Satire* has come a long way from the “general” pastime promised by Diligence at the outset. Its final aim seems to have been to implicate everyone watching the play in the sinful folly that is its target, not by declaring consistently that everyone and everything is always foolish, but by revealing in a carefully staged sequence of declarations that here in Scotland folly is rampant, and every member of the audience bears a share of the blame for its success, and for its consequences. They do so, not simply because they are human, and to be human is to be inherently foolish, but primarily because they pursue particular short-term, seemingly self-interested goals at the expense of the longer-term interests of the commonwealth. Folly’s speech, like those of the vices which precede it, thus suggests that the politics of folly are both intensely personal, a matter for husbands and wives, the buyers and sellers of merchandise, the keepers of shrines and the pilgrims who visit them, and also Europe-wide. Its strongholds are in the palaces of Rome and Paris, Brussels and Stirling, as well as in every Cupar and Edinburgh household.

That it is Folly who delivers the final, political *coup de grâce*, declaring at the end of a play that had seemingly assured its audiences that all the abuses it listed would be put to rights, that fools we are and to folly we must return, is a fitting reflection of the paradoxical, multifarious, ambiguous power of the Fool on the sixteenth-century stage. Lyndsay’s Folly in himself embodies all three of the fool roles suggested in Arden’s typology. He is the seemingly innocent victim of his wife’s explosive illnesses and excessive alcoholic consumption (ll. 437–440), and of the Cupar sow’s allegedly murderous, or at least castratory, malice (“Sir, scho hes sworne that scho sall sla me, / Or ellis byte baith my balloks fra me” [ll. 4352–53]). He is the would-be evil-doer who bawdily pursues the attractive woman in the audience on the strength of their, one assumes wholly imaginary, sexual history (ll. 4430–60). And he is the accuser and truth-teller who exposes the unchristian, unreasonable madness of princes, popes, friars, merchants, old men and young women, and their neighbours, in France, Germany and England, but most especially here and now, and in Scotland. His appearance as the last actor in a five-and-a-half-hour drama of collective self-exploration and communal reform brings something new to an already well-stocked table (and notably something that Lyndsay had not thought it necessary to include in the earlier, rudimentary version of the drama played before James V as an interlude in 1540). That something would seem to be the idea of folly as both a lacerating and a healing phenomenon. Folly inserts the sharpest of scalpels to lance the most pri-

vate of boils (the unacknowledged truth that our king, our nobles, our friars and ourselves must all share in the blame for the state of the commonwealth), but he also reaches out to embrace the audience in an ultimately salvific moment of shared laughter. The idea that the number of fools is infinite is thus both a troublesome idea and a comforting one—the first step in the journey to real reform, for commonwealth and each individual spectator alike.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- FOX, John. *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1576 edition). Sheffield: HRI Online Publications, 2011. Online at <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>>. (Accessed 19 February 2014.)
- LYNDSAY, David. *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis. Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Ed. Greg Walker. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- . *The Monarch or Ane Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour off the Miserabyll Estait of this World. Sir David Lyndsay, Selected Poems*. Ed. Janet Hadley Williams. Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2000. 183–205.

Secondary Sources

- ARDEN, Heather. *Fools' Plays: A Study of Satire in the "Sottie"*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- CAMERON, Jamie. *James V: The Personal Rule, 1528–1542*. East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998.
- CARPENTER, Sarah. "The Politics of Unreason: *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* and the Practices of Folly". *Folly and Politics*. Ed. Richard Hillman and Pauline Ruberry-Blanc. Theta – Tudor Theatre, vol. X. Publication online, Scène Européenne, Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, Université François-Rabelais de Tours—CNRS, 2013 (<<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/publications/Theta10/fichiers/pdf/Carpenter.pdf>>). 35–52. (Accessed 19 February 2014.)
- KANTROWITZ, Joanne Spencer. *Dramatic Allegory: Lindsay's Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975.
- LYALL, Roderick J. Introduction. *Ane Satyre of The Thrie Estaitis*. By David Lindsay. Ed. Roderick J. Lyall. Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1989. vii–xliii.
- MILL, Anna J. "The Influence of the Continental Drama in Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*". *Modern Language Review* 25 (1930): 425–42.
- . "Representations of Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*". *PMLA* 47 (1932): 636–51.
- SHIRE, Helena M. "The King in his House: Three Architectural Artefacts belonging to the Reign of James V". *Stewart Style, 1513–1542: Essays on the Court of James V*. Ed. Janet Hadley Williams. East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996. 62–96.

- WALKER, Greg. "The Cultural Work of Early Drama". *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Ed. Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 75-98.
- _____. "Flytyng in the Face of Convention: Protest and Innovation in Lindsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*". *Interludes and Early Modern Society: Studies in Gender, Power, and Theatricality*. Ed. Peter Happé and Wim Hüskén. Ludus: Medieval and Early Renaissance Theatre and Drama, 9. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 211-38.
- _____. "Folly". *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance Literary History*. Ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 321-41.
- _____. "Personification in Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*". Ed. Bart Ramakers and Walter S. Melion. *Intersections: Personifying Meaning and Emotions*. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2015.
- _____. "Reflections on Staging Sir David Lyndsay's *Satire of the Three Estates* at Linlithgow Palace, June 2013". *Scottish Literary Review* 5.2 (2013): 1-22.

Sam GILCHRIST HALL, « *Richard II*: Folly, Degeneracy and Deformity »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 131-148
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Richard II: *Folly, Degeneracy and Deformity*

Sam Gilchrist Hall

Royal Holloway, University of London

Folly and Degeneracy

The paradoxical wisdom of folly is less manifestly apparent in *Richard II* than in plays such as *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*, which contain fully-fledged wise fools who question the values of the sensible world. However, insofar as Shakespeare employs five voices—the Duchess of Gloucester, the dying Gaunt whose voice is like that of a “prophet new-inspired” (*R2*, II.i.31),¹ the two Gardeners and the Welsh Captain—that are estranged from the values of Richard’s court to comment upon two ideas of central importance to the play’s action, the “witless wisdom” (Ryan, p. 94) of folly is present in this play. It is these characters that make manifest the link between the king’s personal degeneracy and the degeneration of England.

In Shakespeare’s histories, the concept of degeneracy is frequently employed as a byword for a disregard for the values of the established order; in this connection, it has an affinity with the word “folly”, signifying a dangerous, even sinful, misapprehension.² According to Bolingbroke, Richard was “unhappied and dis-

1 All quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Greenblatt *et al.*

2 See *OED*, defs. 1a, c, 2a, b.

figured clean” by Bushy and Green because they “Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him” and “Broke the possession of the royal bed” (III.i.10, 12, 13). Ironically, of course, it is Bolingbroke who is responsible for Richard’s being “Doubly divorced”, breaking “A twofold marriage: ’twixt my crown and me, / And then betwixt me and my married wife” (V.i.71, 72–73). As the word “degenerate”’s etymological root implies—from the Latin *genus*, which signifies “birth, descent, origin; offspring; kind; race; family; nation or gender” (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v., 1)—the noun “degenerate”, which comes from the adjective, is “One who has lost, or has become deficient in, the qualities considered proper to the race or kind; a degenerate specimen; a person of debased physical or mental constitution” (*OED*, s.v., 1). In Richard’s case, this is bound up with property in general and primogeniture in particular. Because of his extortion of the commons and because he has “gelded” his cousin Hereford of his “patrimony”, Northumberland considers him a “Most degenerate king” (II.i.238, 263).³

The aberrant sexual behaviour of Holinshed’s Richard attracts the chronicler’s scorn because it threatens the legitimacy of the royal *genus* and because the king’s behaviour is supposed to be exemplary. Holinshed comments, in an observation absent in Polydore Vergil (his main source),⁴ that Richard committed the “filthie sinne of lecherie and fornication, with abhominable adulterie, *speciallie in the king*” (Bullough, ed., p. 408 [my emphasis])—this particular vice is one of Richard’s “follies” (IV.i.275) in the now obsolete sense of folly as “lewdness” or “wantonness” (*OED*, def. 3a). To be degenerate is to violate the past by flouting the deep-rooted expectations or opinion of how you should behave in the present or how you will behave in the future. Thus it is to shatter the petrified historical constructs of form and precedence. When Hotspur reports to Henry IV the instrumental prodigal Hal’s mockery of chivalric conceits, the Prince’s contempt for the established order of things is palpable. Rather than holding court with his father, Hotspur reports that Hal has said that he intends to go to the “stews, / And from the common’s creature pluck a glove, / And wear it as a favour, and with that / He would unhorse the lustiest challenger” (V.iii.20–23).

Paving the way for *Henry IV*, Parts One and Two, in which it is of central importance, the concept of degeneracy is subjected to close (and critical) scru-

3 In a probable dramatic source for Shakespeare, the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock*, Lancaster (John of Gaunt) also employs this word to describe Richard: “A heavy charge, good Woodstock, hast thou had / To be Protector to so wild a prince, / So far degenerate from his noble father” (I.i.27–29).

4 See Rosenstein, p. 143.

tiny at the close of *Richard II*. Moments after Hotspur and Henry IV have discussed Hal's aberrant behaviour, the theme is replayed in Aumerle's thwarted attempt to depose Henry (his uncle)—a degenerate king according to the rules of primogeniture. Aumerle's father, York, in what his wife argues is an action that violates the bonds of kinship, betrays his son to the king and is praised by the latter as a paradigm of constancy: "O loyal father of a treacherous son! / Thou sheer, immaculate, and silver fountain, / From whence this stream through muddy passages / Hath held his current and defiled himself" (V.iii.57-61). It is primarily through the idea of degeneracy—either from the head of the body politic or from one's family—that Shakespeare dramatises the dialectic between the individual and society in *Richard II*. We must not forget it is the actions of Bolingbroke, a character bound to the preservation of his *genus*, that cause the social and political upheaval, the deposition, which the play dramatises.

Despite Richard's protestations to the contrary, "the breath of worldly men" can and indeed does "depose / The deputy elected by the Lord" (III.ii.52-53). For, as Katharine Eisaman Maus notes, "If being a king and having a kingdom were completely inseparable—if the realm, were, so to speak, permanently soldered to the monarch—usurpation would be an impossibility" (p. 26). Moreover, it is hard to say who is more degenerate: Hal or Henry, York or Aumerle. The play dramatises the fall of a degenerate king's realm into the hands of one whose claim is degenerate because it breaks with the rules of inheritance. In terms of legitimacy—a concept which underpins the idea of degeneracy, since one must degenerate from a legitimate position in society, one's family or moral standing—the play's action lies somewhere between Scylla and Charybdis.

But a second, perhaps richer, vein of degeneracy is to be found in the way the concept of legitimacy—along with the intimately related concept of honour—is used by the play's nobility as a mask for a wholly instrumental set of relations, premised entirely on self-preservation and self-aggrandisement. The discord with which the play opens, in which the "ceremonious form of the appeal of treason" (Maus, p. 4) is used to cloak Hereford's knowledge of Richard's complicity in Woodstock's murder, is followed by the scene in which John of Gaunt is upbraided by his brother's widow. She accuses him of being degenerate because he—one of "Edward's seven sons", one of "seven vials of his sacred blood" (I.ii.11-12)—fails to avenge his brother's murder:

Thou dost consent
In some large measure to thy father's death

In that thou seest thy wretched brother die,
 Who was the model of thy father's life.
 Call it not patience, Gaunt, it is despair.
 In suff'ring thus thy brother to be slaughtered
 Thou show'st the naked pathway to thy life,
 Teaching stern murder how to butcher thee.
 That which in mean men we entitle patience
 Is pale cold cowardice in noble breasts. (25-34)

She attempts to motivate Gaunt's action in the present by recalling memories of an idealised past. For the second time in the play, we see the Christian value of turning the other cheek bow to ideals of honour—Mowbray and Hereford have already refused Richard's (admittedly feeble) demand that they "Forget, forgive, conclude and be agreed" (I.i.156). The chivalric honour (see I.i.182, 183, 184, 191) that both men invoke fractures their bond of obedience to the king. Not only the authority of a king, but also the virtue of patience—pejoratively linked in the Duchess's speech to "mean men" and "pale cold cowardice"—means less to these characters than appearing to be honourable.

The ironies of the Duchess of Gloucester's speech expose the self-serving core of the concept of legitimacy. She appeals to Gaunt's sense of pride and then his desire for self-preservation, rather than the desire to defend his *genus*, which one might have suspected to be, to a certain extent, innate. "Old John of Gaunt" may indeed be "time-honoured" (I.i.1)—as per Richard's formal epithet, with which this play opens—but, despite his defence of absolute regal authority, the assumption that Gaunt embodies the values of the good old days of chivalry is undermined early in the play by the Duchess's speech.

In *Thomas of Woodstock*, the tyrant Richard is impressed that Tresilian—a "Janus-like" (I.ii.65) fawning lawyer and parasite—has thought up the idea of "Blank charters, to fill up our treasury, / Opening the chests of hoarding cormorants / That laugh to see their kingly sovereign lack" (III.i.7-9). Shakespeare reverses the significance of the bestial image of the gluttonous cormorant to describe the voracious greed of Richard's inner circle.⁵ In a desperate plea for the king to, in Northumberland's words, "make high majesty look like itself" (R2, II.i.297), Gaunt piles one commonplace about the perils of prodigality onto

5 Ralph Robinson's 1551 translation of More's *Utopia* renders the Latin "*helluo*", which signifies "glutton" (see More, ed. Miller, pp. 64-68), as "cormorant" (More, ed. Bruce, p. 22). This word is used in Hythloday's attack on the Tudor enclosures to describe the voracious sheep eating away the livelihoods of the poor, all in the name of the production of a profitable commodity, wool.

another, suggesting that the ruthless pursuit of self-interest is only ever self-destructive:

He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes.
With eager feeding food doth choke the feeder.
Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,
Consuming means, soon preys upon itself. (II.i.36-39)

Invoking the licence granted to fools and dying men, Gaunt inveighs against the madness into which society has degenerated. He concludes his famous praise of England, “This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle” (II.i.40), by stating that England

Is now leased out—I die pronouncing it—
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of wat’ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.
That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself. (59-66)

Evidently, Richard’s own “blank charters” (I.iv.48) turn out to be not so much writing that conquers as writing that deposes. However, his legal discourse, which seeks to order reality, illustrates the darker side of reason’s desire to categorise and put the world to use.

Once this desire is fulfilled, that which had been fixed becomes exchangeable—like Gaunt’s “coffers”, which are transformed to “make coats / To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars” (I.iv.60-61). The “shame” of which Gaunt speaks is connected to the king’s degeneracy in two interrelated ways. First, because he exults in the works of man, Richard is idolatrous. As David Hawkes explains:

The pursuit of fleshly pleasures or worldly goods indicates a misconstrual of the *telos* of the human being. To be carnal is to forget that the body is a means to a spiritual end. Such a fleshy consciousness will systematically reduce the spiritual to the material, the subjective to the objective. It is, in other words, a *fetishistic* consciousness. (p. 58)

As Gaunt makes clear, the “bonds” that enact this quantification are material: written script is ultimately perishable, liable to become “rotten”. To put one’s faith in such bonds, in humanly produced contracts rather than divine revela-

tion, is a misapprehension or folly that endangers the soul. Such a fetishistic consciousness is dangerously foolish, since it misapprehends the world, seeing it as possessing cornucopian plenitude, whereas, in and of itself, without the hope of salvation and resurrection, the world is barren, and human activity utterly bereft of significance.

Secondly, Richard's behaviour is utterly at odds with how a Christian prince should behave. As Erasmus argues at length in his *Institutio Principis Christiani* (1518), the earthly pomp and decadence that kings like Richard revel in can be measured only by the privations of their subjects.⁶ Richard "wax[es] great" as a result of "others' waning" (2*H6*, IV.ix.18), in the manner that Shakespeare's Alexander Iden, ruminating in his country garden, considers to typify the modern world. Furthermore, by being captivated by the external signifiers of kingship, he actually negates it, for, as Erasmus explains in explicitly theatrical terms: "If all that makes a king is a chain, a sceptre, robes of royal purple, and a train of attendants, what after all is to prevent actors in a drama who come on stage decked with all the pomp of state from being regarded as real kings?" (p. 215). A consequence of such fetishism, then, is that it elides the distinction between a player king and a real one.

In desperation, Gaunt jokes about the similarities between his cadaverous appearance and his name. Without his property, his name is a free-floating signifier bereft of any material referent. The object of his erstwhile (idolatrous) pride becomes the object of his scorn. As Maus brilliantly shows (pp. 17ff.), the very names of the nobility attest to the way their identity—or *property* in the early modern sense of a distinguishing feature—is determined by what they own.

This piece of moribund humour is absent from Shakespeare's sources:

King Richard. Can sick men play so nicely with their names?

John of Gaunt. No, misery makes sport to mock itself.

Since thou doest seek to kill my name in me,

I mock my name, great King, to flatter thee.

King Richard. Should dying men flatter with those that live?

John of Gaunt. No, no, men living flatter those that die.

King Richard. Thou now a-dying sayst thou flatt'rest me.

John of Gaunt. O no: thou diest, though I the sicker be.

King Richard. I am in health; I breathe, and see thee ill.

6 See Erasmus, p. 225.

John of Gaunt. Now He that made me knows I see thee ill:
Ill in myself to see, and in thee seeing ill.
Thy deathbed is no lesser than thy land,
Wherein thou liest in reputation sick. (II.i.84-96)

Gaunt's name has become as polysemous as a word in the mouth of a fool. Although Richard dismisses this critique as the words of a "lunatic lean-witted fool" (116), Gaunt, in the transvaluative manner of the wise fool, actually turns reality on its head by playing on the dual significance of the word "ill": the ill man is morally healthy; the healthy man is dangerously ill in moral terms. Gaunt ironically adopts the position of one of Richard's flatterers so as to warn him about the deceptive nature of their eloquent counsel, as opposed to his riddling wordplay, which is as erudite as Lear's Fool's castigations of his master, and far removed from the inarticulate language of lunacy. Because his son returns to England specifically to make good his name, Gaunt's self-deflation holds a residual significance: it creates a structural irony. Arguably, it tacitly makes a mockery of Henry's entire project of reclaiming his birthright.

As Jonathon Baldo contends, history consists as much of "erasure, rewriting and forgetting" (p. 67) as it does of remembrance, so to destroy the documentation of someone's existence is to write them out of history. This is precisely what Richard's flatterers attempt to do to Bolingbroke. His sense of vulnerability to historical erasure is palpable when, in a kangaroo court, he indicts them for *logocide*. They have

From my own windows torn my household coat,
Razed out my imprese, leaving me no sign,
Save men's opinions and my living blood,
To show the world I am a gentleman. (III.i.24-27)

The proliferation of first-person pronouns in connection with his property certainly supports Maus's argument. Furthermore, Bolingbroke's return makes it clear that concerns about the duplicity and mutability of words in the face of the reality they purport to signify are not simply a problem of representation: for words shape history.

Deformities

To examine the theme of history's form and deformity, it is necessary to consider the exchange between the Gardeners, absent from the sources, which puts the historical narrative of the nobles and gentry on hold. Far from offering comic relief—an idea commonly used to discount the significance of fools (wise and otherwise), plebeian characters and clowns alike—their exchange is rife with tensions, tensions that resonate throughout the play. As with the Clowns in *Hamlet*, the Porter in *Macbeth* and Falstaff's language of exuberant corporality in *Henry IV*, Parts One and Two, the language of these plebeian characters not only reflects upon the main action, but also betrays an uncanny grasp of significant patterns of imagery, tropes and metaphor that run throughout the "serious" action of the play. Furthermore, they "brush history against the grain" (Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", p. 258), deforming the received account of history by their very presence. In particular, these men, who work up to their elbows in matter, but speak in elegant blank verse, display an intuitive grasp of a conflict at the heart of Shakespeare's representation of history: namely, the antinomical nature of historical narration. The problem with an unreflexive and objective narration of history is that its own form belies it. In one of the very first theorisations of historical practice, Lucian's "How to Write History", the satirist contends that the object of history is, in a certain sense, an aesthetic one, since it is to "superinduce upon events the charm of order" (Lucian, p. 132). To write history is to give the formal organisation intrinsic in representation—something, which in an objective sense, is *not*—to the formless multiplicity of what has been.

Perhaps this tension accounts for the striking contrast between form and chaos in the exchange between these two characters and, indeed, in the play as a whole:

Gardener [to First Man]. Go, bind thou up yon dangling apricots
Which, like unruly children, make their sire
Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight.
Give some supportance to the bending twigs.
[To Second Man] Go thou, and, like an executioner,
Cut off the heads of too fast-growing sprays
That look too lofty in our commonwealth.
All must be even in our government.

You thus employed, I will go root away
 The noisome weeds which without profit suck
 The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers.
First Man. Why should we, in the compass of a pale,
 Keep law and form and due proportion,
 Showing as in a model our firm estate,
 When our sea-wallèd garden, the whole land,
 Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,
 Her fruit trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined,
 Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs
 Swarming with caterpillars?
Gardener. Hold thy peace.
 He that hath suffered this disordered spring
 Hath now himself met with the fall of leaf.
 The weeds which his broad spreading leaves did shelter,
 That seemed in eating him to hold him up,
 Are plucked up, root and all, by Bolingbroke. (III.iv.30-53)

This exchange offers a précis of the play's themes and imagery. Prodigal offspring that threaten to destroy the achievements of their fathers must be "Cut off" to prevent lasting damage to the abundance of England. This "sea-wallèd garden" is infested with parasitical creatures and "weeds". In addition to echoing Bolingbroke's description of himself as a gardener and the king's flatterers as "caterpillars of the commonwealth, / Which I have sworn to weed and pluck away" (II.iii.165-66), as with the image of the "cormorants", Shakespeare inverts the significance that the image of the "caterpillars" accrues in the second half of the source.⁷ In the latter part of *Woodstock*, Tresilian's trickster-servant, Nimble, insults a group of common people, from whom he is extorting money, by calling them "caterpillars" (III.iii.145), while here the word is re-employed by a worker to describe the venality of "the Earl of Wiltshire, Bushy, Green" (R2, III.iv.54).

This imagery of parasitical existence is significant not only because it attests to how the grotesque register lies at the heart of the play, but also because it is associated with the nature of dramatic representation in the period. For instance,

7 As Richard Hillman shows, this word was previously employed in *Woodstock* to describe Richard's flatterers (p. 178). Moreover, "According to *OED*, 'caterpillar' had been applied for roughly a century to social parasites; playwrights may have especially relished the term, given Stephen Gosson's 1579 polemic, *The Schoole of Abuse, Containing a plesent inuectiue against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Iesters, and such like Caterpillers of a Commonwealth*" (Hillman, p. 223n7); my thanks to Prof. Hillman for drawing my attention to this fact.

A second and third blast of retrait from plaies and theaters (1580), the second part of which is sometimes attributed to Anthony Munday,⁸ like many of the contemporary anti-theatrical polemics, views theatre as a degenerate activity, which tempts its audiences, who “prodigal consume” (p. 21) this commodity, to replicate the atrocities they see on stage: real-life desires and emotions are dangerously easily infiltrated by represented ones. People’s “insatiable desire [for] filthie plesure” (p. 21) of the theatre not only allures “scholars . . . from their studies” (pp. 76-77), but, far worse, is intrinsically idolatrous: “we despise the Lordes table, and honor Theaters; at a worde, we loue al things, reuerence al things, God alone seemeth vile to vs” (pp. 16-17). One need only think of the modern notion of the matinee idol to observe the continuing association between actors and idols.

The tract continues, observing that itinerant players debase their patrons both financially and morally:

since the reteining of these *Caterpillers*, the credite of Noble men hath decaied, & they are thought to be couetous by permitting their seruants, which cannot liue of themselues, and whome for neerenes they wil not maintaine, to liue at the deuotion or almes of other men, passing from countrie to countrie, from one Gentlemans house to another, offering their seruice, which is a kind of beggerie. (pp. 75-76)

Obviously, the actor’s art and the plays themselves are commodities. Thus they are objects of the implacable desire that characterises a fetishistic consciousness, which, never satisfied, restlessly and relentlessly shifts from desiring one thing to another. Shakespeare’s telling of history, however, makes it apparent that through theatre, a commodity, the dangers of an objectifying or fetishistic consciousness, which, as we have seen, reduces kingship to stage playing, can be diagnosed. Richard is captivated by the signifiers of authority; and in this he is like the idolatrous tyrant of the *Trauerspiel*, of whom Benjamin writes, “His unfaithfulness to man is matched by his loyalty to those things [the symbols of kingship] to the point of being absorbed into contemplative devotion to them” (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 156).

In contrast to the plebeian characters in the rest of the Second Tetralogy, the Gardeners speak with “law and form and due proportion”. This registers

8 The first blast, implicit in the title, is Gosson’s *The School of Abuse*; the “second blast” is a partial translation of the fifth-century treatise *De gubernatione Dei*, by Salvian of Marseilles; in the “third blast”, the author compares the observations of the “second blast” with the theatre of the late sixteenth century.

the play's obsession with form and formality in the face of material disorder, the way in which weeds tend to grow even in the most carefully maintained of gardens. Analogies between the state of the nation and the state of a garden—ill-maintained or otherwise—abound in both of the play's two main sources. In *Woodstock*, Lancaster reflects on the duties and achievements of himself and his brothers, making the comparison between statecraft and gardening:

Thus princely Edward's sons in tender care
Of wanton Richard and their father's realm
Have toiled to purge fair England's pleasant field
Of all those rancorous weeds that choked the grounds
And left her pleasant meads like barren hills. (V.vi.1-5)

Likewise, in Holinshed, horticultural degeneration acquires a providential significance. In the year of Richard's deposition, "old baie trees withered, and afterwards, contarie to all mens thinking, grew greene againe, a strange sight, and supposed to import some unknowne event" (ed. Bullough, p. 396).

Shakespeare puts this providential rendering of history into the mouth of the Welsh captain, so as to gesture towards the abuse of history, the way in which giving form to multiplicity, a process intrinsic to representation, can lead to manifestly erroneous conclusions:

'Tis thought the king is dead. We will not stay.
The bay trees in our country are all withered,
And meteors fright the fixèd stars of heaven.
.....
And lean-looking prophets whisper fearful change.
Rich men look sad, and ruffians dance and leap;
The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
The other to enjoy by rage and war.
These signs forerun the death or fall of kings. (R2, II.iv.7-9, 11-15)

Of course, the irony is that, for all his dire imagery of the *mundus inversus*, it is the Welshman's decision to leave that is in no small part responsible for the earth-shattering event he foresees in the stars. When the Gardener, silencing the protests of the First Man, suggests that Richard's fall is a result of his tolerance of a "disordered spring", the tension between historical allegorisation, in which Richard indulges, and personal agency, which Bolingbroke employs to its full power, comes to the fore. The Gardener evokes images of autumnal, natural

decomposition when he uses the “fall of leaf” as a metaphor for Richard’s fall. But he also makes it clear that this fall is not part of an organic cycle. It is the consequence of an intervention, for Bolingbroke has “plucked up” these “weeds”, Richard’s parasitical flatterers, “root and all”.

Shakespeare uses the Gardeners to reflect upon the history in which the other characters are embroiled. England, the Gardeners make clear, is “full of weeds” not because the land or some higher power somehow intuitively feels Richard’s fall, but because the lethal combination of Richard’s prodigal kingship and Bolingbroke’s ambition has created chaos. Furthermore, this interlude illustrates an idea about history which becomes increasingly apparent in Shakespeare’s telling of it: what appears natural—be it the orderly and productive state or its microcosmic analogy, the garden—is a consequence of man’s efforts. As in the demonic Iago’s horticultural analogy, “Virtue, a fig! ’Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners” (*Oth.*, I.iii.316-18), the garden here epitomises the way in which reason projects its own desires and demands onto what it calls nature.

The Gardener’s reflection, “All must be even in our government”, makes clear the link between statecraft and representation: the former must be even-handed and calm, while the latter lends an “even” form to reality’s multiplicity—the idea towards which I have been gesturing. The Gardener also echoes the under-garrisoned York’s abrupt reflection, after a series of self-interruptions, that “All is uneven” (II.ii.121), from shortly before; this discontinuous utterance lapses from mainly iambic pentameters into a fragmented line consisting of a dactyl followed by a trochee,⁹ reflecting metrically what his panicked observation denotes.

On the one hand, if we read the Second Man’s observation fairly literally—“Why should we, in the compass of a pale, / Keep law and form and due proportion?”—then it poses a potentially incendiary question: why *should* the working man “Keep law and form and due proportion”—obey and be productive—when those assumed to be his moral superiors consume all he produces and fail to adhere to seemingly natural laws. On the other hand, this comment is re-played in the deposed king’s reflection on his fall:

9 This line is presented as a fragment in the Norton/Oxford edition.

How sour sweet music is
 When time is broke and no proportion kept.
 So is it in the music of men's lives.
 And here have I the daintiness of ear
 To check time broke in a disordered string;
 But for the concord of my state and time
 Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
 I wasted time, and now doth time waste me,
 For now hath time made me his numb'ring clock. (V.v.42-50)

He can sense aesthetic discord, a lack of “proportion”, but could not govern his state harmoniously. Even as Richard approaches death he remains, as Zenón Luis-Martínez puts it, an “allegory monger” (p. 690), preferring to make himself a hapless, albeit self-dramatising, victim of “time” in the *de casibus* vein,¹⁰ rather than admitting that he has been deposed because of human action.

Indeed, “When Richard asks the Queen to tell his ‘lamentable tale’”, writes Lukas Lammers, “he explicitly asks for a particular version of his suffering to be passed on. Significantly, however, this tale does not simply coincide with that the play has shown” (p. 153). Richard’s “lamentable fall” does not “send the hearers weeping to their beds”, nor do they, as he supposes, when—with characteristic modesty—he compares himself to Christ, “mourn in ashes, some coal black, / For the deposing of a rightful king” (V.i.44, 45, 49-50). The particularities of the present historical moment are tacitly devalued through the suggestion that Richard’s story is just another example of a general theme, one of many “sad stories of the death of kings” (III.ii.152).

It is primarily through estranged voices—the widow, the rustic clowns, the dispossessed Gaunt and the superstitious Welshman—that *Richard II* critiques its diverse (and, at times, contradictory) historical sources, rather than simply replicating their assumptions. It comes as little surprise in a text so vitally concerned with how to write history that Shakespeare provides a clue for the play’s interpretation, one which engages the pervasive imagery of visual and cerebral reflection in the play. This clue is furnished by a historically irrelevant—but dramatically essential—interpolation, the dialogue between the young queen and Bushy about her objectless “unborn sorrow” (II.ii.10). Bushy’s attempt to cheer her up is drawn from the seriocomic world of anamorphic paintings, suggesting that her sorrow at losing the king is what generates her uncanny premonitions:

¹⁰ See Budra, pp. 85-95.

For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects —
Like perspectives, which, rightly gazed upon,
Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry,
Distinguish form. (II.ii.16–20)

Through a form that does not make positive truth claims in the manner that chronicles must necessarily do, Shakespeare enables the audience to view history “awry” through these five marginal voices, silent in his sources. This telling of history shows how such estranged voices can point out the folly—in the sense of misapprehension—of history’s victors, those who usually authorise the past.

In this respect, Shakespeare sketches out a kind of history, developed in the rest of the Tetralogy, that corresponds with Adorno’s injunction in *Minima Moralia* that

Perspektiven müßten hergestellt werden, in denen die Welt ähnlich sich versetzt, verfremdet, ihre Risse und Schründe offenbart, wie sie einmal als bedürftig und entstellt im Messianischen Lichte daliegen wird.¹¹ (p. 283)

The dominant values and ideals of the Ricardian age, the historical narratives from which the play draws, and the anti-theatrical polemics of Shakespeare’s time are viewed askance, through fiction, so as to shed light on the contradictions and irrationalities inherent within them. While Luis-Martínez is not entirely wrong to suggest that Shakespeare’s play views history as “a mournful experience” (p. 676) of perpetual catastrophe—the deposition that the play dramatises catalyses the “civil butchery” (1*H*4, I.i.13) that the two parts of *Henry IV* stage so vividly—it is necessary to add that the perspective from which these catastrophes are viewed is that of a future in which any narrative of history’s progression takes into account the persons and ideas that have been destroyed or muted in the name of progress.

Like the anamorphic painting to which it alludes, this play—with its insistently self-dramatising tyrant, its suspiciously eloquent rustics and its dialectical assault on what passes for the values of honour and legitimacy—foregrounds its own artifice, its removal from the world, so as to illuminate the intellectual paucity and moral bankruptcy of the serious “real” world, foolishly hoodwinked by appearances.

11 “Perspectives must be produced that move and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its cracks and crevices, as abject and disfigured as it will one day appear in the messianic light”; my translation.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- ERASMUS, Desiderius. *The Education of a Christian Prince*. Trans. Neil M. Cheshire and Michael J. Heath. *The Collected Works of Erasmus*. 89 vols. Vol. XXVII. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986. 200–87.
- HOLINSHED, Raphael, et al. *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* [excerpts]. *The Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Ed. Geoffrey Bullough. 8 vols. Vol. III. London: Routledge, 1960. 387–415.
- LUCIAN. “How to Write History”. *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*. Trans. H. W. and F. G. Fowler. 4 vols. Vol. II. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905. 110–37.
- MORE, Thomas. *Utopia. The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*. Trans. and ed. Clarence H. Miller et al. 15 vols. Vol. IV. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965.
- . *Utopia. Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, The New Atlantis and The Isle of Pines*. Ed. Susan Bruce. Trans. Ralph Robinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 1–134.
- A second and third blast of retrait from plaies and theaters the one whereof was sounded by a reuerend byshop dead long since; the other by a worshipful and zealous gentleman now aliue: one showing the filthines of plaies in times past; the other the abhominacion of theaters in the time present: both expresly prouing that that common-weale is nigh vnto the curse of God, wherein either plaiers be made of, or theaters maintained. Set forth by Anglo-phile Eutheo*. London: Henrie Denham, 1580. STC 21677.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. New York: Norton, 1997.
- Thomas of Woodstock or King Richard the Second, Part One*. Ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge. *The Revels Plays*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Secondary Sources

- ADORNO, Theodor. *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben. Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. 20 vols. Vol. IV. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003.
- BALDO, Jonathan. *Memory and Forgetting in Shakespeare's Histories*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- BENJAMIN, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. London: Verso, 2009.

- _____. "Theses on the Philosophy of History". *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 255–67.
- BUDRA, Paul. *A Mirror for Magistrates and the De Casibus Tradition*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- HAWKES, David. *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580–1680*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001.
- HILLMAN, Richard. *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002.
- LAMMERS, Lukas. "'Eyed awry'—Richard II and the Shapes of History". *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 147 (2011): 145–54.
- LUIS-MARTÍNEZ, Zenón. "Shakespeare's Historical Drama as *Trauerspiel*: Richard II—and After". *English Literary History* 75 (2008): 673–704.
- MAUS, Katherine Eisaman. *Being and Having in Shakespeare: Oxford Wells Shakespeare Lectures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Comp. P. G. W. Glare et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- ROSENSTEIN, Roy. "Richard the Redless: Representations of Richard II from Boccaccio and Polydore to Holinshead and Shakespeare". *International Conference on Travels and Translations in the Sixteenth Century: Selected Papers from the Second International Conference of the Tudor Symposium*. Ed. Michael Pincombe. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. 137–48.
- RYAN, Kiernan. *Shakespeare's Comedies*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Martina PRANIĆ, « “The purpose must weigh with the folly”: The Role of Falstaff
in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* Plays »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 149-164
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

“The purpose must weigh with the folly”: The Role of Falstaff in Shakespeare’s Henry IV Plays

Martina Pranić

Free University, Berlin / Charles University, Prague

“In every thing the purpose must weigh with the folly” (Shakespeare, *2H4*, II.ii.168-69), Prince Hal announces with conviction to Poins at the very end of Act Two, Scene Two, of *Henry IV, Part Two*. They have just conspired to play yet another prank on Falstaff. At Poins’s suggestion, Hal has consented to a “low transformation” (167): they plan to disguise themselves as drawers at hostess Quickly’s tavern, to wait on Falstaff and catch him unawares as he suspends his customary bravado and shows his “true colours” (163). The folly of Hal’s masquerade has in this case a very plain purpose: to provide some idle jest in the intermission between battles, while the throne is still occupied, and Hal can still profit from the procrastination of responsibility. Yet the jesting Prince is further justified by an ulterior motive: the seemingly harmless joke is bound to expose the grotesque champion of Hal’s “rude society” (Shakespeare, *1H4*, III. ii.14) as a deceitful parasite who seeks personal advancement through association with Hal’s “princely heart” (III. ii.17). Since Falstaff is yet again affirmed a fake, Hal’s own performance as England’s prodigal son gains ever more validity. And therefore, a far greater purpose is in the course of the two parts of *Henry IV* being weighed with this folly of literally gargantuan proportions.

It is Hal’s true purpose that is central to the two plays. As early as the second scene of the first act in *1 Henry IV*, Hal

briefly lifts his own mask for the benefit of the audience and delivers a manifesto of his solitary enterprise of regal self-fashioning. And the scale of such a purpose required the employment of one of the most carefully constructed figures of folly in the Shakespearean canon. It required the invention of Falstaff. In order to solidify his sworn reformation, the Prince will conclude his transformation in an act of exorcism against the “old, white-bearded Satan” (II.iv.451) and finally “banish plump Jack” (467). As for the purpose of this paper, it will discuss the received perception of Falstaff as a celebrated comic creation and offer some thoughts on his discourse of folly and the character’s purpose in the world of the two plays.

Judging by the number of works that refer to him, Falstaff’s reputation seems as huge as his fictional person. He is the king of crossing the boundaries of media, and has found his way into literature, painting, opera, film, even comic books—by directly inspiring Volstagg, the somewhat less flawed companion to the eponymous hero of *Thor*.¹ Critical regard for the foolish fat knight followed popular opinion closely, if not always in sentiment, then certainly in the amount of attention this comic literary construct has so far received. Throughout the dusty old tomes of character criticism, Falstaff was celebrated as vigorously as he was chastised; his genealogy was carefully established and scrupulously rebuked many a time; and his role in the peculiar structural arrangement of the Second Tetralogy was discussed nearly *ad nauseam*. As often happens, critical consensus was never established, and Falstaff has been approached from many different angles.

The braggart knight’s intertextual portrayal resembles a uniquely protean beast, whose malleability seems to allow him to fit into numerous moulds. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Alfred Ainger recognized in Falstaff the Vice of the morality plays, who “was invariably a comic character; not at all with any view to make light of sin, but in order thereby to make sin contemptible. Just so the fat knight Oldcastle [i.e., Falstaff] would be sure to be made as ridiculous as possible for popular presentation” (Ainger, I: 129). This line of descent has many adherents,² and is prompted explicitly by Falstaff’s identifying himself with the Vice through the latter’s weapon of choice, in his characteristically pompous bluster: “If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, I’ll never wear hair

1 The character of Volstagg was created by Jack Kirby, one of the doyens of the American comic book scene, and was first introduced into the plot of *Thor* in August 1965.

2 See, e.g., Wilson, Bethell, Spivack and Kaiser.

on my face more" (1*H*4, II.iv.130-33.) Enid Welsford saw in Falstaff the pinnacle of the buffoon tradition of "the incorrigibly impudent rogues, the irrepressible mischief-makers" whose "gross men of the earth . . . knew well that the normal physical functions of the body have always provided the human race with an inexhaustible source of merriment" (Welsford, pp. 50-51). Harold C. Goddard resorted to mythical explications, claiming that Falstaff carried "the proportions of a mythological figure. He seems at times more like a god than a man. His very solidity is solar, his rotundity comic" (Goddard, I: 178). Northrop Frye discerned another very important type in the fat knight: "Falstaff is a mock king, a lord of misrule and his tavern is a Saturnalia" (Frye, p. 11).

The figure of the Lord of Misrule is built into one of the most resilient interpretations of Falstaff, and it was C. L. Barber who perhaps most famously took this path in a discussion of the festive elements in the *Henriad*. As he wrote, "the Falstaff comedy, far from being forced into an alien environment of historical drama, is begotten by that environment, giving and taking meaning as it grows. . . . Shakespeare dramatizes not only holiday but also the need for holiday and the need to limit holiday" (Barber, p. 219). Whereas it used to be customary to read Falstaff's narrative thread in the two parts of *Henry IV* as a satirising mirror-image of the historical events in the plays, Barber sees the dynamic relation between the historical and the comedic action as saturnalian, Falstaff's misrule functioning as a safety-valve, and his subsequent banishment as a consolidation of the newly established rational rule of Hal as king. Given that Barber was writing before the Anglo-American discovery of Bakhtinian thought, an obvious temptation would be to develop this saturnalian interpretation further and employ carnivalesque theory. Falstaff could be read as a champion of the lower bodily stratum and as emblematic of a carnivalesque worldview that celebrates the vitality of the popular, of life, and renewal. Indeed, a number of critics have done so. In such a reading, the tavern realm over which Falstaff presides indeed *becomes* the lower bodily stratum of the play as a whole, pitched against the cold and calculated mind absorbed into the political everydayness that Hal will come to represent. This reading would endorse the Falstaffian festival as a subversive strand that, even though seemingly eliminated at the end, ultimately continues to destabilise any authoritative power that threatens to contain it. "Carnival, like the king, never dies" (Laroque, p. 95), concludes François Laroque in his largely Bakhtinian analysis of the Falstaff-Hal dichotomy.

As satisfactory and compact as it may seem, the carnivalesque interpretation does, however, suffer from certain instabilities. While it is true that Falstaff appeals to the popular taste, he can hardly be said to represent the people. Taking Falstaff to be an embodiment of the carnivalesque does not account for his pronounced individualism, or for the fact that none of his spoken lines actually echo any kind of coherent popular voice. Yet his rampant individualism, like many of his other properties, is deeply contradictory: two of the things he seemingly indulges in the most, namely laughter and sack-drinking, are both ubiquitous social lubricants that presuppose communality.

Communal as he may be, Falstaff in the *Henriad* is far from being a spirit of the people. If anything, he is a detached commentator seemingly unaffected by interests other than his own. A case in point is the soliloquy on how he has “misused the King’s press damnably” (1*H*4, IV.ii.12–13), which exposes the unfair ways of the Elizabethan recruiting system. In times less politically correct than our own, this speech must have generated roars of laughter from the audience, yet now it is often recognized as employing his habitual rhetoric of excess to lampoon the unfortunate, the lowest class of society. Quite like his discourse, Falstaff’s laughter is nowhere near the carnival laughter of all the people. As Bakhtin conceptualised it in *Rabelais and His World*,³ communal laughter included and engulfed everyone and was timeless in nature, rather than directed toward isolated events. Conversely, Falstaff uses laughter precisely to ridicule individuals and particular events, and he does so to gain personal advantage. As Indira Ghose has shown in *Shakespeare and Laughter*,⁴ the Falstaffian laughter is often an end in itself, and his satirising antics face “the danger inherent in any satire—that of spilling over into sheer entertainment” (Ghose, p. 158).

Yet, paradoxically, the fact that Falstaff is a solipsistic and often bluntly immoral force has hardly soiled his reputation as Shakespeare’s most endearing comic creation. Even his completely unethical commentary exhibits a sharp wit, which has proved a guarantee of his enduring charm, and his tomfoolery often points up the hypocritical sombreness of the historical characters: his unforgettable rendition of the old king in the “play extempore” (1*H*4, II.iv.271) is but one example. The nimble prose he speaks, which differentiates and excludes him from the historical blank-verse-speaking world, is even more inflated than his

3 See esp. the chapter, “Rabelais in the History of Laughter”, in *Rabelais and His World* (pp. 59–145).

4 See Ghose, esp. pp. 156–63.

own body, and he relies on it to get himself out of any corner. One of the pleasures of Falstaff is ultimately a cruel one: like Hal and Poins, the audience enjoys seeing him distressed, as distress is surely to trigger his discursive brilliance. And yet his famous wit hardly ever amounts to much and is ultimately a fool's truth: spoken in jest and generally ignored. That may also be the location of his appeal: he is a misleader of youth that has no authority; his territory is a morally dubious state of denial, such as one allows oneself before assuming worldly responsibility.

Falstaff's festive character, however, has a darker side, which can be described as a degeneration of the carnivalesque and is closely related to the concept of time. Characterised by liminality, Falstaff is located at the closure of a popular tradition and the beginning of a new order—one represented by Hal, the redeemer of time, and one that cannot (or will not) accommodate him. This locus converges historically with the transformation of the carnival, the moment that saw the constraining of festivals into temporally bound forms. The corrupt carnival, and by extension the corrupt brand of folly, that Falstaff exemplifies is a product of the transformation of the social time that Bakhtin described in *Dialogic Imagination* as unifying, productive and generative. This form of time Bakhtin located within the pre-class agricultural stage of social development that gets articulated in later literature, especially the folkloric bases of the Rabelaisian chronotope.⁵ Bakhtin emphasises the connection of the carnival with the largely idealised “time of labor ... of productive growth ... not separated from the earth or from nature”, in which “everyday life and consumption are not isolated from the labor and the production process.” According to time thus conceptualised, there is “no precise differentiation of time into a present, a past, and a future (which presumes an *essential individuality* as a point of departure)” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 207; original emphasis). Martin Procházka criticises Bakhtin's notion of unifying time, pointing to the

rash generalization [that] ignores the deep gulf between the sacred and the profane, festivity and everydayness. It is based on a backward-looking romantic utopia, idealizing the life of the folk community and identifying it with natural rhythms. (Procházka, “Shakespeare's Illyria”, p. 6)

That is yet another reason why Falstaff is not a true embodiment of the carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense, as he is sharply disconnected from all

5 See Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, esp. pp. 206–10.

romanticised utopian festivals. And the world of *Henry IV* is one that has a clear differentiation between the holiday and the everyday.

It is Hal who is in control of the essential individuality as a self-fashioned future monarch, and Falstaff strives to follow. He corrupts the carnival, but his lack of understanding how the time for festivals and jests has come to function makes him unfit for participation in Hal's world. This change is signalled by the transformation that social time undergoes: from the unifying force and the hope of salvation, it is changed to units measured mechanically, coordinated by the clock. Falstaff's very introduction on the stage and into the text has him speak the words, "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" (1*H*4, I.ii.1) Apart from establishing his familiarity with the Prince, the line enquires after a temporal beginning, trying to determine whether it may be time for jest. Falstaff functions outside of conventional time, as Hal leads us to believe. He has no reason to be "so superfluous as to demand the time of the day" (I.ii.10-11), "[u]nless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds" (6-8), and so on. As he lists common markers of festival culture, Hal's catalogue locates Falstaff within a world set apart from the everyday. But unlike Falstaff, who will spend the greater part of the two plays obstinately trying to prolong the time for jest and revelry, Hal understands the impulse behind limiting the festive. His programmatic monologue revealing his duplicitous character resonates with this understanding:

If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work
But when they seldom come, they wish'd for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents. (1*H*4, I.ii.194-97)

Temporally restricted festivities such as Hal advocates have been described by Foucault as heterotopias, defined as different spaces, "actually realized utopias" (Foucault, p. 178) that always link some kind of fictitious projection with actuality and start functioning fully once a break with traditional time is established. The heterotopic festival is bound by a time that Foucault sees as "time in its most evanescent, transitory, and delicate form" (p. 182). Such a festival is easier to control, as it requires a stricter licence. Falstaff is guided by an unflinching desire to lead an existence free of care and responsibility, a desire almost to inhabit an unconstrained heterotopia of the festival. Oblivious to the internal rules of transient festivities that Hal is to master, he is obstinately bent on per-

petuating folly. That also seems to be his major fallacy, at least in the world of Shakespearean history, where Hal has the power to make festive heterotopias temporally conditioned.

Falstaff represents the transformation of the carnivalesque that leads to its loss of integrating and recuperating powers. By the second part of *Henry IV*, he will have degenerated even further into the mode of fallen carnival. The crucial scene takes place in the third act of the play, when Justice Shallow ruminates on the allegedly glorious times the two old men shared, the times that may be said to look back to the carnival spirit in its uncorrupted form. The Falstaff of *Henry IV* does not belong to that time and concurs with Shallow's chatter evasively—"We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow" (2*H4*, III.ii.209-10)—evoking yet another mechanical measurement of time. When midnight chimes, the end of a day is marked, and Falstaff could be marking the end of an understanding of time. The line was made famous by Orson Welles, who had based his entire sentimental interpretation of the Shakespearean text on the supposed wistfulness Falstaff expresses. Yet Falstaff is there, I believe, far from just wistful. In his second visit to Shallow in Act Five of the same play, he will pragmatically follow his selfish interests and proceed to cheat the foolish justice out of a thousand pounds. And this thievery is a deed that clearly belongs to a time that values profiteering more than communality, and one that is able to produce festivals merely as a form of temporally conditioned heterotopias.

The very fact that Falstaff is rejected has earned him forgiving and sentimental interpretations. He is often seen as a collateral victim in Hal's coming-of-age story. And in this story, Hal is a master performer. In a world so strategically dependent upon the theatricality of regal power and the performativity of politics, where rhetoric is in service to war, and men are "food for powder" (1*H4*, IV.ii.46), Hal will rise to the challenge of the role that awaits him in *Henry V*. Compared to Hal's calculated brilliance, Falstaff is a largely ridiculous fool who toys with the margins of historical action, hoping to procure some money for his consumption-infected purse, some sack to satisfy his unquenchable guts, and the laughter of others to justify his existence. His folly is on full display once he steps onto Hal's main stage. Falstaff's actions in the battle, while at the same time caricaturing a very human fear and unwillingness to participate in the gruesome affairs of the war—"I would 'twere bed-time, Hal, and all well" (1*H4*, V.i.123) is one of his pleas—serve to establish his unsuitability for the world Hal is trying to fashion.

The beginning of the battle is marked by his famous catechism on honour, once again sharply contrasted with the ideology of the state and power. In the catechism, Falstaff may to our ears sound unusually serious, his nihilistic words betraying an awareness of the relativity and constructiveness of grand causes, reflecting perhaps even his own brand of twisted pacifism. But on the stage of history he is inept, and his words are null and void. His further actions, namely, saving his own skin by counterfeiting death and his counterfeit killing of Hotspur, solidify his cowardice but also reaffirm his resilience. The fake killing—or, literally, faking a fake killing, as the killing is, of course, theatrical and Hotspur is not actually cold—is the single action of Falstaff that has any consequence. Hal will afterwards display uncanny kindness towards him by supporting his display of heroism and secure him a role in the post-Shrewsbury world, as in the second part of the play. Falstaff is, therefore, no less a performer than Hal is, his histrionic personality throughout the two plays casting a comical shadow over the more serious players.

Falstaff is, however, blinded by folly: he does not completely comprehend the seriousness of the historical realm, but enjoys the play for its own sake. For him, the play is the thing wherein he hopes to capture not merely the conscience, but also the heart of the future king. His love for Hal is sometimes read as charged with homoeroticism, and his devotion has been compared to that of the speaker of the *Sonnets to the Fair Youth*.⁶ Falstaff iterates his love for the Prince freely. In a misplaced speech that is seemingly directed to Poins, but that in fact affirms everything he had thus far said about Hal, Falstaff declares,

I have forsworn his company hourly any time this two and twenty years, and yet I am bewitched with the rogue's company. If the rascal hath not given me medicines to make me love him, I'll be hanged; it could not be else: I have drunk medicines. (*1H4*, II.ii.16–19)

The example is not solitary: if Hal loves him, he will stop mocking his cowardice in the robbery; if he loves him, he will practice an answer to his father in a “play extempore” (II.iv.271). And trying to slither out of hostess Quickly's accusations in front of Hal, he trumpets and exaggerates: “A thousand pound, Hal? A million. Thy love is worth a million. Thou owest me thy love” (III.iii.135–36). Falstaff

6 The argument is developed in William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral*, first published in 1935 (see the chapter, “They That Have Power”), and W. H. Auden's essay, “The Prince's Dog” (first published in 1948, reprinted in the 1962 collection, *The Dyer's Hand*), but is driven to its full articulation in Jonathan Goldberg's *Sodomities* in the chapter, “Desiring Hal”.

is a fool in his actions, as well as his affections. And underneath its ridiculousness of expression, his love for Hal can almost be taken as the only remotely honest thing about him, something which exposes him to flights of Hal's fickle affection.

This love-fool's vulnerability Falstaff masks with a discourse of folly and the employment of lies. His lies, which are truly "like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (1*H*4, II.iv.218-19), have opened up a way into a somber critique of his role in the *Henriad*. He becomes, as James Calderwood termed it, an emblem of the "fallen language" that permeates the plays' portraying of multiple crises: of kingship and regal power, of allegiances and friendship, of rhetoric, but most of all of truth. In Calderwood's sobering analysis,⁷ Falstaff appears as a creature entirely made up of words, allowed on the stage only after Bolingbroke has manoeuvred his way to the throne, debasing true legitimacy and legitimising base lies. Calderwood's Falstaff is a master of improvisation and a devious manipulator of language, the ultimate artist of relativisation, whose irreverent humour exposes all value as empty. And as such, he has been denied all meaningful agency, intervening in the historical world only with the preposterous claim of having killed Hotspur. He cannot act in the historical field because "[s]o stuffed with speech is he that doing is beyond him, he can only *be*—for there is an inevitable inertia to the word in itself as opposed to the inherently kinetic thrust of action" (Calderwood, p. 43)—a diagnosis that may well befit certain aspects of Prince Hamlet. This overwhelming stasis prevents Falstaff from ever plotting, so even in that he is doomed to be defeated by action and plot, which are supposed to run the politics of history. For Calderwood, this Falstaff embodies Shakespeare's final decadent basking in the "tendency toward sensual verbal indulgence" (p. 41) pushed to the very pinnacle of irrepressible hilarity, where it threatens to devour the plot that stands for progress of the state. Which, in the end, is why it needs to be killed off.

Encountering darker visions of Falstaff in criticism is not overly common. Falstaff, as appealing as the best incarnations of folly often are, has sometimes caused critics to approach his case uncritically. One such account came from Harold Bloom, who magnanimously declared he could find no fault in Falstaff, who was, in his view, along with Hamlet, "a miracle in the creation of personality" (Bloom, p. 53), a master of language unparalleled in Western literature, whom "we need ... because we have so few images of authentic vitality and even

7 See Calderwood, esp. pp. 39-46.

fewer persuasive images of human freedom” (p. 55). Bloom’s Falstaff is often on the verge of dangerously overshadowing the play that spawned him, and becoming a sublime creation of Art meant to induce fear and trembling—a view that loses sight of the fact that Falstaff is primarily a morally dubious character. As Procházka points out, falling in line with Calderwood,

Falstaff’s boisterous rhetoric is no mere carnival of words: it is represented as a potentially dangerous power whose nature can become violent and even military. In using Falstaff, Hal learns to use lie as a pragmatic rhetoric of war geared to political purposes” (“New Languages”, unpaginated)

Hal requires the lie of Falstaff, as much as the world of history requires the realm of the tavern, because they need to be appropriated as counterpoints that will establish the truth of kingship and, in turn, the legitimacy of the historical narrative. And Falstaff’s presence in this narrative is quite brutally exploited by the ultimate end that Hal is pursuing. As Richard Hillman puts it, expounding on Falstaff’s production for the purpose of destruction, “[h]e is, in the final analysis, a spirit conjured—by Hal, in part, but with the abettance of the text at large—precisely in order to be laid, and, if the spirit is made flesh with improbable excess, the fatter the scapegoat, the more efficacious his ritual slaughter” (Hillman, p. 116). The folly of Falstaff becomes weighed with the political purpose of the play.

However, even the completely unmasked, dark Falstaff is not the end of all interpretation. Falstaff’s fallen rhetoric is a discourse of folly, a wilful employment of unreason in the name of laughter, and his lies are intentional inversions of the officially sanctioned truths. Having used up the lies, Hal cuts Falstaff off in his final rejection with “How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!” (2*H*₄, V.v.44), and for the first time since he has stepped onto the stage, Falstaff is at a loss for words. He is eliminated from discourse and, together with his clique, banished “till their conversations / Appear more wise and modest to the world” (101-2). Strictly speaking, Falstaff is neither a fool, however foolish he may be, nor a jester, regardless of how much he enjoys a good jest. But he is wise enough to *play* the fool, to appropriate the fool’s discursive tools. And in doing so, he must be aided by his environment—his audience within the play, as well as the audience of the play—because folly, that rather dangerous protean phenomenon, is as much discursively produced as it is historically conditioned. That Falstaff is finally banished is ultimately Hal’s choice: he is the one to stipulate what passes

for folly and how long it is desirable to put up with it; he has the power to summon, but also to cancel laughter.

Just like laughter, a phenomenon that can be at once disruptive and subversive, but still susceptible to sanction, early modern discursive folly had its rules of application, and in order for it to work, it needed to involve a temporary suspension of moral judgement. We seem to understand this principle still, since the immensely popular characters of today's commercial culture are known to be morally despicable, as Homer Simpson and Eric Cartman often are—two animated caricatures of the deeply flawed common man, both of whom arguably have something of Falstaff in them. Which is not to say that early modern folly or its employment was immoral in itself—quite the contrary; if we are to judge from Erasmus's example, employing folly sometimes also meant affirming virtue. But Falstaff's folly, albeit masterly and singular, is of a fallen kind if it becomes an end in itself. It is as seductive and contagious as a specific kind of transformed theatre—one that has discovered the marketability of entertainment. Ghose concludes that

what Shakespeare dramatizes in *Henry IV* is the potential risk that inheres in the idea of play. At the beginning of the play, Hal and Falstaff share a world of playful abandon that leaves its trace on their speech. . . . But the danger inherent in play is that of losing the ability to differentiate between reality and fantasy. Falstaff loses track of the real world. (p. 158).

A concluding remark might suggest at this point that there may not be one Falstaff to end all Falstaffs, although this essay did not set out to make this point. In my own readings he is usually at least two-sided, his Janus faces pleasing and repelling simultaneously. This double potential was well illustrated by two recent noteworthy Falstaffs. In 2010, Roger Allam delivered in many ways a magnificent Falstaff at the Globe Theatre. Utilising all the peculiarities of the Globe stage, as well as the full theatricality of the character, Allam's hilarious rendition brought to the surface all the endearing aspects of the fat knight. Collaborating with his charmed audience in forming the character, literally playing for the pit, Allam made the early modern lines speak directly to the modern spectator. His success was recognised with the Olivier Award in 2011.

The following year BBC2 released *The Hollow Crown*, a star-packed television series—as brilliantly cinematic as the latest television productions get—that adapted Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy. In it, the Falstaff of Simon Russell Beale was faced with a different medium, and an environment with no groundlings

with whom to share his jokes. Beale created a Falstaff who from the very beginning seemed completely aware of his own moral complexities. Smaller in stature than might be expected, he surprisingly shuffled around a lot. He also lacked the expected *basso profundo* of a Falstaff, and never completely convinced one of how, with such apparent guilt on his shoulders, he managed to hold the attention of Tom Hiddleston's remarkably princely Hal. And yet, his more serious scenes on the battlefield, and especially the rejection, were delivered with such quiet, sombre weight that he succeeded in uncovering a very dark layer of the character. For his Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part Two*, Beale was awarded a BAFTA for best supporting actor in May 2013. Both Allam and Beale are rightly renowned for their interpretative abilities, and their Falstaffs—two Falstaffs that could not be further apart—very vividly represent the unresolved ambivalent potentialities of the role.

As I hope this survey has shown, Falstaff functions very well as an example of multiplicity. If we perceive culture as a web of different systems of signification, Falstaff is best described as one of its hefty nodes, suspended between different popular, literary and theatrical traditions that all contribute to the character's polyvocality, but none of which describes him completely on its own. Falstaff is a character that formed and continues to form connections within this multidimensional network, which is also poly-temporal, as Falstaff in the text not only brings together all the Falstaffs of the past, but also already contains interpretations of the future. And all these new interpretations are bound to reflect upon as well as bring us back to the original text, finding new meanings in it and reshuffling the old, in a way perhaps reminiscent of Shakespeare's own attitude towards his historical sources.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- SHAKESPEARE, William. *King Henry IV, Part 1*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. The Arden Shakespeare (3rd ser.). London: Thomson Learning, 2002.
- . *King Henry IV, Part 2*. Ed. A. R. Humphreys. 6th ed. rev. The Arden Shakespeare (2nd ser.). London: Methuen, 1967.

Secondary Sources

- AINGER, Alfred. *Lectures and Essays*. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1905.
- AUDEN, W. H. *The Dyer's Hand, and Other Essays*. New York: Random House, 1962.
- BAKHTIN, Mikhail Mikhailovic. *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. New ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.
- . *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- BARBER, C. L. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- BETHELL, Samuel Leslie. *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*. New York: Staples Press, 1948.
- BLOOM, Harold, ed. *Shakespeare's Henry IV (Parts One and Two)*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2004.
- CALDERWOOD, James L. *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad: Richard II to Henry V*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.
- EMPSON, William. *Some Versions of Pastoral*. Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1950.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. "Different Spaces". *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*. Ed. J. D. Faubion. Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Penguin, 2000. 175–85.
- FRYE, Northrop. *Northrop Frye's Writings on Shakespeare and the Renaissance*. Ed. Troni Y. Grande and Garry Sherbert. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- GHOSE, Indira. *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.
- GODDARD, Harold C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. 2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

- GOLDBERG, Jonathan. *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- HILLMAN, Richard. *Shakespearean Subversions: The Trickster and the Play-text*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- KAISER, Walter Jacob. *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- KIRBY, Jack. *Journey into Mystery* 119 (August 1965). New York: Canam Publishers.
- LAROQUE, François, "Shakespeare's 'Battle of Carnival and Lent': The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered (1 & 2 Henry IV)". *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*. Ed. Ronald Knowles. Early Modern Literature in History. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1998. 83-96.
- PROCHÁZKA, Martin. "'New Languages': Pragmatism, Rhetoric and War in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy and Ford's *Perkin Warbeck*". Unpublished paper presented at the Erasmus Mundus Intensive Programme event, "Staging European Identities: Memory, Conflict and Commerce in Early Modern European Culture", Charles University, Prague, 28 May 2013.
- . "Shakespeare's Illyria, Sicily and Bohemia: Other Spaces, Other Times, or Other Economies?" *Shakespeare's Illyrias: Heterotopias, Identities, (Counter) histories*. Ed. Martin Procházka. Prague: Faculty of Arts, 2002. 130-50.
- SPIVACK, Bernard. *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.
- WILSON, John Dover. *The Fortunes of Falstaff*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943.

Laura CHRISTOPHE, « Madness and Viciousness: The Example of Webster's Ferdinand »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 165-176
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Madness and Viciousness: The Example of Webster's Ferdinand

Laura Christophe

Université François-Rabelais de Tour/CESR-CNRS

The subject of *The Duchess of Malfi* (written by John Webster in 1616) is the fierce opposition of two brothers, the Duke of Calabria and the Cardinal, to the remarriage of their sister, a young widow, and the disobedience of that sister, who chooses to marry her steward in secret. The main reason given for this opposition is familial honour, as was the case in the former versions of the story (the first one written by Matteo Bandello in 1554 and its adaption by François de Belleforest in 1566, itself translated by William Painter in 1575). However, from the first scenes of Webster's drama, we understand that, for him, this opposition based on supposed honour is too thin to transform a tragic story based on real facts into a tragedy, moreover a tragedy of blood in agreement with the tastes of the time.

In the first version of the story, the Duchess and her husband Antonio are shown as victims of the two brothers' tyranny. Webster's adaptation is not different in this respect, but to convert this pathetic story into a horrifying spectacle, Webster needed an extra ingredient: a villain based on the Senecan type.¹ The two brothers share this function, although they have different character traits: the Cardinal is cold, merciless and

¹ For further information about Seneca's influence on English drama, see Charleton, Cunliffe, and Jacquot and Oddon, eds.

Machiavellian; the Duke is tyrannical, choleric and lustful. The latter is a character of excess, and this excess, which throughout the drama flirts with madness, is finally transformed into real insanity. I would like to demonstrate that most of the elements that make the work a tragedy of blood are linked to Ferdinand's folly. This is the keystone holding in place the motifs of lust, cruelty and bloodshed that produce the impact of Webster's play.

It is first necessary to analyse the notion of madness itself, which is represented in several forms, progressing from excess to insanity as Ferdinand's character develops. Ferdinand is, from the start, a villain, who is not devoid of reason but refuses to respect its dictates. He is a tyrant, conscious of his power and of the fact that this power allows him to override reason). His viciousness helps him go against reason and, by going against it and committing abnormal acts, he finally loses it completely and becomes insane. Besides, he is a character who at first simulates madness, who uses it as a mechanism for purging his perverted mind of all his noxious and lustful thoughts and visions, but who is finally infected by the madness that he himself, to some extent, has created.

This development allows us to study different types of misbehaviour linked to the notion of madness: lack of reason associated with excess, unhealthy imaginings and insanity. It will be clear from what follows that those perspectives create, in various ways, the set of sensations and impressions characteristic of the Tragedy of Blood.

The different aspects of Ferdinand's madness will be analysed through his language and the comments made about him by other characters. It is important to examine signs of madness in Ferdinand's speeches before he becomes truly insane, and to study the impact of this underlying madness on the sense of tragic doom.

I shall therefore focus initially on Act One, where Ferdinand appears as a moody tyrant. Next to be considered will be Act Two, Scene Five, in which, after the discovery of his sister's marriage, Ferdinand pretends to be mad in order to give vent to his perverted language. Finally, I will discuss Ferdinand's changing attitude in Act Four, just prior to his total insanity.

Ferdinand as a Moody Tyrant

Although the first act of the play does not present the duke as a mad character when he first appears, we can already see signs of his future derangement. Just

embodied by the Cardinal. The latter agrees with this discourse but does not say much during the confrontation with the Duchess. As for Ferdinand, we can see that his motives are different. The ambivalence of his discourse on marriage lies in the way he fantasises the image of woman as an evil and lustful creature:

For they whose faces do belie their hearts
Are witches, ere they arrive at twenty years—
Ay: and give the devil suck. (I.i.309-11)

And women like that part which, like the lamprey,
Hath ne'er a bone in't. (336-37)

This mixing of infernal vocabulary and sexual metaphor shows fear regarding feminine sexuality and, at the same time, a certain delectation in talking about it. This particularity of character will be more fully displayed in the second act, where the notion of incest appears, but we can already see Ferdinand's unhealthy imagination at work. This gap between Ferdinand's arguments and what the audience perceives about his thoughts, in combination with the fact that he always does whatever he wants even if it is unreasonable, sets the tragic plot in motion. Thanks to his excessive behaviour, which is tinged with madness, we already know that the Duchess's disobedience cannot escape punishment.

At this point in the analysis, we can see that Webster changed many things in his sources in order to transform the story into a real tragedy. In the different *nouvelles*, the Duchess's marriage is the initial situation. She knows when marrying her steward that her brothers will not accept it, and she succeeds in hiding it for a while. The story becomes tragic when the marriage and the birth of the children are discovered. In the play, the opposition is introduced before the marriage, so we know that the Duchess's choice will have consequences, and the character of Ferdinand reinforces this knowledge. As Ferdinand's madness develops, its impact on the tragedy becomes all-important.

Feigned Madness

The first words of Ferdinand at the beginning of Act Two, Scene Five, are: "I have this night digg'd up a mandrake / ... / And I am grown mad with't" (II.v.1-2). It would be strange for a real madman to be conscious of his state and to announce it in this way. And in fact, this declaration is a way of justifying the flood of rage

that follows. With respect to the representation of madness, this scene progresses in two stages. The first is merely grotesque; the second is more disturbing, in that the false mad man starts to become a real one.

The first part of the scene is composed of his declaration of madness, which is too artificial to seem genuine. Ferdinand keeps describing his symptoms and the way to treat them, using a series of extravagant images, while the Cardinal, who wants to know what is wrong, is not given a clear answer. The dysfunctional dialogue lends a grotesque dimension to the scene. In this context, the claim of Ferdinand to be concerned with lost honour (II.v.20-21, 33-36) resounds with a hollow emphasis.

Yet Ferdinand does not manage to be the revenger he wants to be, the defender of honour: he is like a false Hamlet. It is as if the author wants to show that honour is not a sufficient motive for the tragedy, that the drama needs something more, and that this pattern of revenge for honour is as artificial as Ferdinand's appropriation of mental distraction. Nevertheless, in the subsequent part of the scene, the real preoccupation of Ferdinand emerges, and so does his madness.

As was the case during the confrontation with the Duchess, Ferdinand, carried away with his own language, cannot help focusing on his sister's sexuality. The Cardinal encourages this obsession by talking about women's inconstancy, and, in doing so, he opens the door to Ferdinand's lustful fantasies. When the Duke says,

... talk to me somewhat, quickly,
Or my imagination will carry me
To see her, in the shameful act of sin. (II.v.39-41),

we can see, despite the denial, that his imagination is already concentrated on his sister's sexuality. This is confirmed by the words which follow:

Happily with some strong thigh'd bargeman;
Or one o'th' wood-yard, that can quoit the sledge,
Or toss the bar, or else some lovely squire
That carries coals up to her privy lodgings. (43-45)

In this passage, which juxtaposes sexual metaphors and clichés, we can detect a kind of perverse pleasure in the way Ferdinand pictures his sister sexually. After that, he calls her "whore" twice in the same sentence (47-48).

The Cardinal's reaction to Ferdinand's change of behaviour is revealing and incremental. He first says, "you fly beyond your reason" (46), then compares him to a beast (57), and finally asks, "Are you stark mad?" (66). Thus, when Ferdinand's madness loses its artificial quality and asserts itself as incestuous desire, this madness is perceived and recognised for what it is by his interlocutor.²

Finally, as madness starts to become a major motif, the central idea of the tragedy is put in place: the Duchess will not be free because of her brother's incestuous desires. This is quite an unusual theme but much more suitable for this kind of tragedy than the question of honour. In a way, the motif of madness, linked with incest, allows the tragedy to fulfil itself and allows Ferdinand to be the villain he has to be. The evocation of Seneca's Atreus in *Thyestes*—"Or else to boil their bastard to a cullis" (II.v.71)—is an effective means of indicating the degree of evil Ferdinand is going to attain.

Ferdinand concludes the scene by saying:

Till I know who leaps my sister, I'll not stir:
That known, I'll find scorpions to string my whips,
And fix her in a general eclipse. (77-79)

"Who leaps [his] sister" is the only real preoccupation. By using this expression, Ferdinand shows that the true problem for him lies in the sexual act: his sister's body must not be touched, and the thought that it is provokes the jealous fury that will carry the play to its tragic end.

2 In "*The Duchess of Malfi*: Comic and Satiric Confusion in a Tragedy", Jane Marie Luecke says:
Ferdinand is a more complex creation. Given only his stated motive for his frenzy at his sister's marriage—family honour or inheritance—his madness is more properly a fitting device for tragi-comedy. But this conception is almost an insult to Webster's tragic sense. For this reason, I cannot believe that Ferdinand's madness is anything less than incest-driven. Given this motive we have indeed the subject matter and characters befitting tragedy. (p. 279)

This statement confirms that the play needs a motive as strong as incest to become a thorough tragedy. However, for Luecke, Ferdinand's folly makes him a weaker character than the Duchess and Bosola:

Unhappily, however, the Duke does not have the dimension, does not come alive as a character, to the same degree as do the Duchess and Bosola. . . . Ferdinand is a revenge villain for whom the spectator has no sympathy; consequently he exhibits the rage of a madman rather than the torment of a man caught in the whirlpool of a fatal passion, and his death evokes only the emotion of happy relief. (pp. 279-80)

In my view, Ferdinand's madness is rather a keystone of the tragic construction of the play.

The Way to Insanity

Through the third and fourth acts of the play, Ferdinand does not really show any signs of madness; he is deliberately closing his trap around the Duchess. Antonio's words aptly sum up the situation:

He is so quiet, that he seems to sleep
The tempest out, as dormice do in winter:
Those houses that are haunted are most still,
Till the devil be up. (III.i.21-24)

These last words are also prophetic.

The way Ferdinand mentally tortures the Duchess, with the severed hand, the wax figures and the madmen, reveals his extreme perversity and the fertility of his imagination in a macabre way. Ferdinand, in trying to drive his sister mad, gives the impression of wanting her to be more like him. We see at several points how he considers his sister to be a part of himself; this is reinforced by the fact that they are twins, as he will tell Bosola later. He appears to want to merge their two personalities; he considers that his sister should be like him and belong to him. The scene of the madmen furnishes a contrast between Ferdinand's kind of folly and real insanity; it is also a prelude to what is going to happen to Ferdinand in the last act of the play. This scene deserves detailed analysis, but since the focus here is on Ferdinand's behaviour, I will move forward to what happens to him after his sister's death.

At the end of the fourth act, Webster provides a striking twist in the unfolding situation: Ferdinand accuses Bosola of his sister's death and denies his own responsibility. It seems at first that he is finally recovering his reason: he describes the way things should have been if he had not been "distracted of [his] wits" (IV.ii.277). This confirms the point made earlier, that, were it not for Ferdinand's behaviour, the Duchess's marriage would not have been brought about the tragedy. However, the way Ferdinand returns to reason paradoxically proves that he is moving forward into madness, because a sane man would recognize his own culpability. Here he seems rational but his rationality is based on false premises.

Ferdinand is, in fact, a character who constantly acts beyond the bounds of reason because of vicious drives, madness, or both. Even when he acts or speaks with all his faculties, he is still moved by unhealthy impulses. In this scene, we might think that cupidity moves him, that he is trying to find a way not to pay Bosola for his services, that he has been planning for a long time to put the blame upon him. But what we have seen in the previous scenes suggests that the real aim is to convince himself of his innocence of his sister's death, which he cannot accept. His very sincerity indicates the aggravation of his madness.

It is striking to see how some of Webster's scenes can be read in different ways; concerning Ferdinand, they often have two sides: Ferdinand may seem to be the embodiment of absolute evil, but the subtext shows that there is something deeper and darker in his character which is harder to define. Webster seems to be presenting the stock character of the villain in a novel light: he shows Ferdinand's conformity to this type, and at the same time, by highlighting the mechanisms of madness, he transforms him into something far more complex and individualised.

Ultimately, thanks to this combination of a typical villain on the Senecan model with a highly psychological treatment of madness (not as sheer insanity but as chronic mental disturbance), Webster creates a consummate villain with multiple facets. His underlying madness prevents him from being reasonable and pitiful, but he is capable of executing his plans until the Duchess's death. Things change after that. The last words of Ferdinand in Act Four, Scene Two, are: "I'll go hunt the badger; by owl-light: / 'Tis a deed of darkness" (IV.ii.332-33). This statement, which is senseless in the context, confirms his growing insanity. As in other cases, Ferdinand's last words in a scene shed light on the meaning of what he said just before and foreshadow what will happen to him afterwards.

As we have seen, Ferdinand's madness is linked to the principal developments in the plot. It impels the real tragic conflict; it justifies the most horrible scenes (such as the mental torture and murder of the Duchess); and it places the end of the play in the mode of Revenge Tragedy, because, thanks to Ferdinand's change of mind, Bosola becomes Antonio's partner in revenge.

Thus, as soon as Webster does not need Ferdinand as a vector for the plot anymore, his madness is transformed into genuine insanity and becomes an aesthetic feature. Ferdinand's divagations, which feed the last scenes, together with the theme of lycanthropy and all the medical folklore that is bound to it, complete and perfect the baroque atmosphere that characterises the play. Lycan-

thropy is added to the curiosity cabinet which already contains the cut hand, the wax figures and the madmen.

Conclusion

Ferdinand's madness is not of a simple nature; constantly evolving, it appears to be a combination of a lustful, cruel and macabre temperament, which hides an incestuous desire, and a mental disturbance connected to his status as a twin. He cannot accept that the Other which he considers as a part of himself could have a separate life. His last words, "My sister! O! my sister! there's the cause on't" (V.v.71), show that the complex knot that binds these two characters is the cause of all the tragic action.

Madness in this complex form is an element that allows Webster to give more depth to his play, to justify the action and horrors that are staged in it and to give it a baroque aura. Thanks to the motif of madness and Webster's psychological approach to it, the character of the villain is, to some extent, detached from its formal origins. He is still violent and excessive, but his underlying mental disease makes him more complex and more individual, in a way, more modern.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- BANDELLO, Matteo. "Il signor Antonio Bologna sposa la duchessa di Malfi e tutti dui sono ammazzati". *Novelle*. Vol. I: *La prima parte delle Novelle*. Ed. D. Maestri. Alessandria: Edizione dell'Orso, 1992. Novella 16.
- BELLEFOREST, François de. "L'infortuné mariage du seigneur Antonio Boloigne, avec la Duchesse de Malfi, & la mort piteuse de tous les deux". *Le second tome des Histoires tragiques*. Paris: R. Le Magnier, 1566. Histoire 19. Source: Gallica, Bibliothèque numérique de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
- PAINTER, William, ed. and trans. "The infortunate marriage of a Gentleman, called Antonio Bologna, with the Duchesse of Malfi, and the pitifull death of them both". *The Palace of Pleasure: Elizabethan Versions of Italian and French Novels from Boccaccio, Bandello, Cinthio, Straparola, Queen Margaret of Navarre, and others*. Ed. Joseph Jacobs. London: D. Nutt, 1890. Vol. II, no. 22.
- WEBSTER, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Ed. John Russell Brown. 2nd ed. The Revels Plays. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.

Secondary Sources

- CHARLTON, H. B. *The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy: A Re-issue of an Essay Published in 1921*. Publications of the University of Manchester, 226; English Series, 24. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1946.
- CUNLIFFE, John W. *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy*. 1893; rpt. Hamden, CT: Archon, 1965.
- JACQUOT, Jean, et Marcel Oddon, eds. *Les tragédies de Sénèque et le théâtre de la Renaissance: Études de P. Bacquet [et al.]*. Preface by Raymond Lebègue. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1964.
- LUECKE, Jane Marie. "The Duchess of Malfi: Comic and Satiric Confusion in a Tragedy". *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 4.2 (1964): 275-90.

Peter HAPPÉ, « Satirising Folly in Some of Jonson's Late Comedies »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 177-198
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

Satirising Folly in Some of Jonson's Late Comedies

Peter Happé
University of Southampton

In this paper I shall focus upon three of Jonson's later plays which illustrate some features of his substantial presentation of folly: *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), *The Devil Is an Ass* (1616) and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633). Some of these characteristics might have appeared in earlier work, but I would like to suggest that in the plays I discuss, folly is a major ingredient in the theatrical achievement, as well as reflecting Jonson's views about the nature and function of comedy. The late plays as a group are notable for their innovation and the fact that they are individually conceived and distinct from one another as regards subject matter and technique, and yet there is some evidence that Jonson had some persistent ideas about folly and comedy, though he never made a direct and formal exegesis as far as we know.

At the beginning of his *Works*, printed in 1616, stands a newly-written Prologue to *Every Man in His Humour*, a play which he had revised especially for this publication. In it he deplores the romantic comedy of his predecessors and he sets an objective to "sport with human follies, not with crimes" (Pro.24).¹ This distinction between folly and crime is presented in such a way as to claim

1 References are to individual titles or to poetry collections within *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. Bevington, Butler, Donaldson *et al.*; the titles of poetry collections are followed by poem numbers plus line numbers.

that entertainment is a primary purpose and that, though he may have a moral perspective, he is not seeking blame or punishment. The latter, as we shall see, is manifest in the conclusions of the three plays under review here.

It is perhaps Jonson's misfortune that so often we are drawn to define his achievement by comparing him with Shakespeare: I am afraid I am going to do so again here. One of the most striking aspects of his treatment of folly is his avoidance of the traditions of stage clowns and fools which Shakespeare inherited and developed extensively. Recent work on the Elizabethan and Jacobean presentation of folly has elaborated on Shakespeare's exploitation of the performing skills of the two fools Will Kempe and Robert Armin.² Kempe appeared as Lance in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and later as Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*, and was succeeded in the Lord Chamberlain's Men by Armin in 1599, who presumably played Touchstone, Feste and Lear's Fool, among other roles. Their comic styles were different, and Shakespeare made use of both. Kempe was large and clumsy with a grotesque face, while the witty Armin was wiry and dextrous, and of short stature. Kempe's performing style recalled the clumsy rustic clowns like Richard Tarlton, who himself had a long life on and off the stage, while parts were created for Armin which depended upon witty and ingenious language. If we put Dogberry against Touchstone, we find essentially that the former is the object of ridicule, while the latter survives by bringing out the folly in nearly everyone he meets. Both, however, have contrasting aspects within the plots of the respective plays, in as much as Dogberry does indeed, in spite of his comic and pretentious incompetence, reveal a dangerous villainy, and Touchstone is embarrassed by his marriage with the bucolic Audrey. Shakespeare accommodated these different styles in his plays and made the performance by these actors a significant feature. Sometimes the fool elements were free-standing, with little effect upon the plot, giving specialised entertainment opportunity for the performers. Such was Lance's soliloquy in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which featured his dog and no doubt gave scope for Kempe to improvise (IV.iv.1-33). It may be that Shakespeare was always conscious of opportunities to entertain, and he may have been motivated by the need to provide regular employment for the skills of fellow members of the Chamberlain's Men.³ Quite frequently he provided a secondary part for a clown as a foil, as in the Second

2 See Wiles, McMillin and MacLean, Thomson, Campbell, and Hornback.

3 Kempe was one of five actor-shareholders from 1598.

Gravedigger in *Hamlet*, and the Shepherd, labelled as a Clown in the text, who works scenes with Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*.⁴

From about 1597 Ben Jonson had an active presence as actor and author on the London stage and he was certainly aware of these ways of presenting folly, but, with a few minor exceptions, he avoided the techniques and practices employed by Shakespeare and the fools he worked with, pursuing instead his own perceptions of the nature of comedy. Possibly he was concerned that the fools might pervert the main work of the play, an uneasiness expressed by Hamlet who urges that the clowns “speak no more than is set down for them” (*Ham.*, III.ii.39).⁵ If there is no formal manifesto, there are nevertheless a number of relevant items scattered through the works which help to focus Jonson’s view about comedy and folly’s place in it and to a large extent these contrast with Shakespeare’s practice.⁶

It cannot be doubted that Jonson knew about the kind of stage fooling mentioned above. As early as 1607 he puts fools and devils alongside “antique relics of barbarism” (*Volpone*, Epistle, l. 60), and it is possible that the role of Carlo Buffone, who is described as a “jester” in Jonson’s notes on the characters in *Every Man out of His Humour* (1599), owes something to the clown tradition. But Jonson at this early stage has circumscribed his impact by making him offensive: “His religion is railing and his discourse ribaldry.”⁷ The Stage-Keeper in *Bartholomew Fair* laments the absence of the famous rustic clown “Master Tarlton” (Ind.27-30).⁸ What he actually says does not condemn Tarlton in so many words, rather the contrary, yet there is no doubt that this mention of him is meant by Jonson to make him seem outmoded. The Gossips in *The Staple of News* (1626), for their part, are more egregiously misguided, and they are used to signal the passing of old ways of comedy. Tattle recalls that her “husband, Timothy Tattle (God rest his

4 See Happé. Similarly, Touchstone is supported by William, the simpleton clown, in *AYL*, V.i.

5 In his note on this passage in the Arden Shakespeare, Jenkins cites a passage by Richard Brome, *The Antipodes* (II.ii.40-49), where an actor is condemned for improvising “to move mirth and laughter ... [as] in the days of Tarlton and Kempe” (47-48).

6 Perhaps it is worth remembering at this point that Jonson was a professed admirer of Shakespeare, in spite of such differences in practice, as the dedicatory poems he contributed to Shakespeare’s First Folio in 1623 confirm. Donaldson (p. 37) has suggested that Jonson played a significant role in the preparation of this volume.

7 Steggle has shown that the role of Buffone is based upon Charles Chester, a real-life jester who earned his living by railing, a sort of tavern fool.

8 Tarlton died in 1588. But for Brome, a follower of Jonson, this was “Before the stage was purg’d from barbarism” (*Antipodes*, II.ii.49); cf. Creaser, ed., *Bartholomew Fair*, Ind.28n.

poor soul), was wont to say there was no play without a fool and a devil in't" (1 Intermean, 25-26) and Censure, her companion, subsequently echoes her (2 Intermean, 1-2). They demonstrate a lack of understanding and enjoyment of the play they are witnessing and a complementary addiction to older types of comedy. Allied to this is their longing for a Vice, and Tattle recalls how he was carried off to hell on the fiend's back and his dexterity with his wooden dagger (2 Intermean, 5-11).⁹ Jonson's linking of clowns with the Vice, who featured extensively in the interludes from about 1550, is historically plausible, and it is reflected in *The Devil Is an Ass* (1616), where Satan himself perceives that the Vice is now outmoded (I.i.79-88).¹⁰

Jonson's distaste for the stage conventions of fools and clowns is matched by his interest in the theory of comedy which appears at various times in his writings. In the dialogue between Mitis and Cordatus in *Every Man out of His Humour* we find Jonson reflecting upon choices of plots. Mitis complains at one point

that the argument of his comedy might have been of some other nature, as of a Duke to be in love with a Countess, and that Countess to be in love with the Duke's son, and the son to love the lady's waiting maid; some such cross-wooing, with a clown to their servingman. (III.i.407-10)

The presence of the clown in this ironical blueprint, which brings the plot of *Twelfth Night* to mind, illustrates Jonson's wish not to make use of clowns.

As far as the general objectives of comedy are concerned, Jonson identifies the poet's objectives as having the highest moral value. He makes the point in his prefatory Epistle to *Volpone* (1606), where he declares that it is "the office of a comic poet to imitate justice and instruct to life, as well as purity of language or stir up gentle affections" (Epistle, ll. 91-92). Much later we find him seeking the authority of ancient precedents in the *Discoveries*. Although many of the items in this commonplace book are translations or adaptations, it is likely that by appropriating them Jonson was at least demonstrating his interest in what they recorded, even if this does not amount to giving full endorsement. Folly appears in several items, which reveal that Jonson had a distinct sense of its limits and the difficulty of overcoming it: "No precepts will profit a fool" (*Discoveries*, ll. 1256-57).

9 As in Fulwell, *Like Will to Like*, l. 1213 SD, and Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest*, l. 1858 SD.

10 Actually, Jonson does make use of the Vice convention in this play by reversing the convention that the Vice is carried off to hell on the devil's back by ensuring that Pug, his devil, is carried off by Iniquity (V.vi.74-77).

In a long passage with the marginal heading “*De Stultitia*” he compares grownups with children in their foolish appreciation of trifles, with cockleshells and hobby-horses for the one and statues and gilded roofs for the other. He ends the passage, which is derived from Seneca, by attributing what is really the greater folly of adults to the love of money (ll. 1025–32). Further limitations of folly appear in the lack of wisdom: “a fool may talk, but a wise man speaks out of the observation, knowledge and use of things” (ll. 1322–24). A similar breadth is required of the poet, who must read many authors, for if he learns only from himself, “he confesseth his ever having a fool for his master” (l. 1780). These precepts are interesting because they do not reflect the Erasmian perception of the wisdom which is to be found embedded in folly.

Jonson’s perception of the characteristic limitations of dramatic folly is expressed directly in a passage derived from Heinsius, *In Horatium notae*, but specifically recalling and adapting Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Observable characteristics of performances by clowns are seen critically, as is the reaction of audiences to them:

Nor is the moving of laughter always the end of comedy; that is rather a fowling for the people’s delight or their fooling.¹¹ For as Aristotle says rightly, the moving of laughter is a fault in comedy, a kind of turpitude that depraves some part of man’s nature without a disease. As a wry face without pain moves laughter, or a deformed vizard, or a rude clown dressed in a lady’s habit and using her actions; we dislike and scorn such representations, which made ancient philosophers ever think laughter unfitting in wise men. . . . As also it is divinely said of Aristotle that to seem ridiculous is a part of dishonesty, and foolish. (ll. 1866–75)

Though the passage is not Jonson’s originally, we may regard it as substantially representative of his view because it reveals an interest in the effect upon audiences, one of his primary concerns. The idea that the audience itself was made a fool of by the clowns is particularly of interest when we look closely at how folly is presented in the later plays. We might at least suppose that he was apprehensive that the prestige of clowns might be a distraction and might inhibit his wish to make the audience “understanders” rather than befooling them.¹²

These strictures on the effects of comedy discourage the exploitation of folly for engendering vulgar laughter, and instead Jonson seeks a more elevated objective. His interest in this as a phenomenon of the laughter in the theatre is explicit, and he is critical of its clown tradition. As always, his attitude to audi-

11 “Fowling” implies bird catching. It may imply a reference to “dotterel”; see below, n. 18.

12 “To make the spectators understanders” (*Love’s Triumph through Callipolis* [1631], Pro.1).

ences is divided between approval and condemnation. His censure is partly a complaint about “the beast, the multitude”, who love nothing that is right and proper, and whom he blames for what amounts to their immoral laughter:

This was theatrical¹³ wit, right stage jesting, and relishing a playhouse invented for scorn and laughter; whereas, if it had savoured of equity, truth, perspicuity, and candour, to have tasted a wise or learned palate, spit it out presently. (ll. 1893–96)

He adds that “This is truly leaping from the stage to the tumbrell again, reducing all wit to the original dung cart” (ll. 1899–1900).¹⁴

To these theoretical considerations we can also add Jonson’s practice in the masques. Fools and clowns make appearances from time to time, but their effect is closely circumscribed. Those called “clown” are usually meant to be rustic characters, rather than the essentially stage performers who follow the popular convention. There is a morris of Clowns in *The Entertainment at Althorp* (1603), and twelve she-fools dance in *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* (1611). Cock-erel, Clod, Townshead and Puppy are called clowns in *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (1621), where they are tricked by the Gypsies and have their pockets picked. There are named clowns in *The King’s Entertainment at Welbeck* (1633), one of whom, called Stub, has not worn boots because he will be expected to dance, a motif used for John Clay in *A Tale of a Tub*, as we shall see. There is a possibility that William Rowley, the clown actor, played the eponymous leader in *Christmas His Masque* (1617), but his costume was not that of a clown, and similarly in *Chloridia* (1631), Jeffrey Hudson, the Queen’s dwarf, may have played the Dwarf Post from hell.¹⁵ Merefool in *The Fortunate Isles and Their Union* (1625), whose name suggests pure folly, is described as “a melancholic student in bare and worn clothes” (*Fortunate Isles*, l. 13). These scattered incidents are the nearest Jonson comes to the professional stage clowns in the masques, and it would seem that the convention had little relevance to the kind of entertainment he was concerned to provide at court. It is, however, noteworthy for our purpose here that in his marginal note 3 to *Love Freed* (l. 762), he writes, “no folly but is born of ignorance”, a point

13 Note Jonson’s pejorative connotation for this word here.

14 In his poems, Jonson frequently identifies fools who do not measure up to his standards: see *Epigrams* 28.22, 52.56, 56.13, 61.1–2, 90.1; *Forest*, 11.65–68; *Underwood*, 6.1, 25.51–52, 29.58.

15 See *Althorp*, l. 409; *Love Freed*, l. 758; *Gypsies*, l. 505; *Welbeck*, l. 672; *Christmas*, l. 252; *Chloridia*, l. 368; and *Fortunate Isles*, l. 696.

of view which again negates the possibility of Erasmian wise fools. Ignorance rather than evil is Jonson's target.



Bearing in mind the link between folly and ignorance, I propose to consider in the rest of this paper three plays which were written in the second half of Jonson's career and which illustrate his interest in the continuing variety of comic form. They all are concerned with the exposure of folly and its theatrical exploitation, and they often have distinctly political overtones. We shall find that there are a few echoes of the tradition of stage fooling, but these are rare, and the majority of the features discussed here show Jonson's strikingly inventive interests. I would add that none of these plays were included in the Folio of 1616, and it may well be that this was a time of change in Jonson's writing life. Possibly the retrospective processes of assembling and to some extent revising his works led him to innovation. It should emerge from the following that in *A Tale of a Tub*, Jonson's treatment of folly is somewhat different from that in the other two plays.

Jonson's lifelong interest in comedy took on new aspects in *Bartholomew Fair*, and his interest in the presentation of folly is integral to the play. I would like to illustrate this by brief reference to Justice Overdo and Zeal-of-the-Land-Busy and a more detailed consideration of his technique in the presentation of the foolish Cokes. This necessarily selective treatment is partly due to the fact that the Fair attracts so many foolish characters, bearing out, perhaps, a sense that it is to an extent a feast of fools. But, as Peter Barnes has pointed out (p. 44), the inhabitants of the fair are engaged in making a living, and it is some of the visitors who most exhibit eccentricity and obsession, and it is among these that we find Jonson attacking their follies. That does not mean, however, that there are no serious concerns in the play. The characterisations of Overdo and Busy are both reflections of Jonson's socially alert comedy and concomitant polemic, the one a critique of the exercise of public authority and the other of religious motivation. Both these characters are manifestations of folly, and both are chastened by their ineffectiveness. Overdo, the Justice of the Peace who presides over the special Court of Pie Powders having jurisdiction over the Fair, takes on a disguise as Arthur of Bradley (II.ii.101), a foolish and mad character found in a popular ballad, in order to identify what he calls "enormitees" in others. He makes a foolish mess of his enquiries and at one point is suspected of being a pickpocket

and put in the stocks (IV.i.29). He gravely misreads the character of Edgworth, the ingenious and successful “professional” pickpocket whom he seeks to preserve from the villains he judges to be corrupting him (II.iv.33–34). By the end of the play he has achieved nothing by his muddled misuse of his own authority. As John Creaser has suggested, the play followed James I’s dismissal of the addled Parliament in June 1614 and Jonson was underlining flaws in James’s use of his own authority (Introd., p. 261). The self-prediction in his opening soliloquy is sustained: “They may have seen many a fool in the habit of a justice; but never till now, a justice in the habit of a fool” (II.i.8–10).

Like Overdo, Busy is also put in the stocks. In his case, there is a more obvious moral implication in the characterisation, as he is shown to be corrupt and greedy. Jonson uses Quarlous as a means of describing this foolish character from the outside, as it were. The description includes the idea of a “lunatic conscience” and “the violence of singularity in all he does” (II.iii.156–57). Busy’s discourse is loaded with rhetorical condemnation of evils in others: “The wares are the wares of devils, and the whole Fair is the shop of Satan!” (III.ii.47–49). In spite of this condemnation, he quickly responds to the smell of roast pig, scenting after it like a hound (93–94 SD). He encourages others to follow him into Ursula’s booth with the specious argument that “We ’scape so much of the other vanities by our early entering” (105–6). Once his appetite is satisfied, he inveighs against the Fair with renewed zest, exposing evidence of what he alleges is its devilishness and its popery. Leatherhead loses patience with him and has him put in the stocks for disturbing the peace. Busy responds by rejoicing in his affliction and resumes his witnessing of abuses which in Puritan fashion he regards as being in need of reformation (IV.vi.102). Jonson is exploiting the language of the Puritans as well as their moral attitudes, and once again the folly he perceives turns upon foolish inconsistencies perceived satirically.

The apogee of Busy’s folly is achieved in the last act of the play, when his moral pretensions in criticising drama are exposed by the Puppet Dionysius. Here Jonson is addressing and breaking through some conventional ideas which attacked the theatre, particularly the moral argument that plays are sinful because they involve cross-dressing. When the puppet reveals that he, or rather it, has no sex, Busy is entirely confuted. At this point, Jonson really does cut short his foolish rhetoric: his two remaining speeches are minimal and entirely free of the wordy polemic he had previously used. As with his treatment of Overdo, Jonson uses these foolish aspects of Busy’s behaviour to comment upon a con-

temporary problem, the control of revolutionary Presbyterian sentiment, as well as the anti-theatrical sentiment of some Puritans.¹⁶

In the characterisation of Cokes, Jonson comes a little closer to the tradition of stage fools, and some of his actions and comments could well be played effectively by an actor operating in the stage fool tradition, particularly as Cokes is so gullible, inviting a response as though he were a natural fool. He is not exposing the follies of others so much as revealing his own vulnerability and exciting mockery for it. In order to accentuate this, Jonson provides onstage comments, and he has Cokes show off his folly to all who are watching, whether onstage or in the audience. Jonson does nevertheless create an individual character who is articulate about himself and has a distinct role to play among the variety of customers at the fair. Notably, he is not a rustic: he has plenty of money, which he spends foolishly, and is described in the cast list as “an esquire of Harrow”. As far as narrative is concerned, we see him lose his purses, one by one, and Nightingale steals his sword, cloak and hat (IV.ii.42) as his misfortunes mount.

But it is the dramatic mode through which this decline is presented which makes his folly so prominent. Jonson uses different dramatic techniques by means of the comments made about Cokes and his self-revelation in his own language. In the external description of him, Wasp, his Man, plays a significant role, and he gives us an indication of what is to come by his introductory description. According to him, and referring to the topic of ignorance, Cokes has learned nothing from his schoolmasters, and all he can do is sing tunes he hears sung by others. Besides suggesting Cokes’s empty-headedness, this also gives a hint of how the dramatist is going to befool him, and Wasp proves prophetic, as well as alerting the audience. Wasp’s comments are enhanced when he carries Cokes off on his back in the theatrical motif we have already noted, whereby the Devil carried the Vice off to hell in some interludes. As the play develops, Wasp’s devastating comments show him mocking his master insistently, mostly in ways Cokes cannot understand, so that there is a hint here of the interplay between the witty and natural fools of stage tradition.¹⁷ Between the two episodes in which Cokes loses his purses, Wasp sarcastically encourages him to buy worthless merchandise and gives him the words which help to establish his folly: “A resolute fool you are, I know, and a very sufficient Coxcomb” (III.iv.32). Jonson makes opportunities

16 See Creaser, *Introd.*, pp. 263–64.

17 Wasp links Cokes and Overdo: “Because he [Overdo] is an ass and may be akin to the Cokeses” (II.vi.15).

to label Cokes as a fool: besides his name, which means “simpleton”, and “cox-comb” and “fool”, we find “ass” (I.v.34, II.vi.15) and “bobchin” (III.iv.67). However, the commentary upon Cokes is not confined to Wasp, for in Act Three, Scene Five—a set piece of comedy in which Cokes loses his second purse—Jonson employs another pair of observers in Winwife and Quarlous, who witness the action, praise the skill of the pickpocket and, by their comments, ensure the audience do not miss details of the folly visible on the stage. We shall probably never know whether the ingenious business by which Edgworth tickles Cokes’s ear while he searches first the wrong pocket and then the correct one was an invention in the playhouse, as the scene was rehearsed by inventive actors able to work an audience, or whether Jonson invented it entirely himself, but he has incorporated this moment of folly into the printed text. There is a further fascinating detail here, in that Edgworth refers to what is about to happen as “Dorring the Dotterel” (IV.i.16), a phrase which links this episode with the folly of Fitzdottrel in *The Devil Is an Ass*, through the proverbially foolish plover who is so easy to deceive.¹⁸

Cokes has his own language, and a good deal of it points directly to his own folly. This comes through his simple enthusiasm for what he encounters. His self-betrayal is best illustrated by his comments during the second pickpocket episode. The song, in which he enthusiastically joins in singing the burden, is about pickpocketing, and he foolishly boasts that he has not (yet) lost his second purse. He exclaims in a way which is cleverly self-reflective that “The rat-catchers’ charms are all fools and asses to this” (III.v.115–16), and a moment later, as he again shows that he still has his purse, he boasts with clumsy irony to Mrs Overdo, “Sister, I am an ass! I cannot keep my purse!” (126). Repetition and the memory of the audience play a part in this episode.

During the puppet show towards the end of the play, Cokes performs further foolish actions. He is utterly captivated by what he sees, and his device of identifying the toys he has bought from Leatherhead with the characters played by the puppets intensifies the picture of his quaint folly. He makes his pipe into Pythias and his drum into Damon (V.iii.185, 230). But here Jonson has more than one objective, as he breaks down the whole idea of theatrical illusion and so brings into question the purpose of performance. Because Cokes presses the action forward by his impatience, and by the occasions when he speaks for

18 Cf. Merecraft’s remark, “anything takes this dott’rell” (II.viii.59).

the puppets himself in his own words (V.iii.200-1), the idea of theatrical illusion is undermined. When he enquires whether Leatherhead has been hurt by the puppet, the reply is, "O no! / Between you and I, sir, we do but make a show" (V.iv.221-22).

Jonson's exposure of folly in this play depends upon the invention of characters who have coherent personalities and who show a significant level of self-consciousness and self-regard. He does use stage devices which could have served clowns and fools and their diverting of the audiences, but these are embodied in discernible personalities. This is achieved in part by the contradictions which these characters embody, especially in Overdo's remarkable misapplication of justice and Busy's conflicted moral stance. Such paradoxes are part of Jonson's preoccupation with stimulating his audiences toward moral judgement. But even here there is an exploitation of ambiguity, for when we come to the end of the play, it seems there is no resolution for most of the follies raised, and there remains a feeling that they will continue. If the characterisation of Cokes owes something to the techniques employed in the stage fool tradition, there is one important addition: egregious though his folly may be, he is essentially innocent, and indeed his stupidities are so great that he may arouse some pity, which is interwoven with mockery. We might also feel for the enthusiasm he exhibits in the two main scenes of folly, the pickpocketing and the puppet play.

In *The Devil Is an Ass*, as we have noted, Jonson was considering the presentation of folly onstage and looking for a new way, in order to deal with some abuses of the time that he perceived. To do so he does pick up on the traditional motif of two entwined parts representing folly in the characters of Fitzdottrel and Pug the devil who comes to serve him. This relationship is based upon misconceptions and misunderstandings, and these continually bring attention back to the folly of both characters. Ignorance again plays a part. Thus, when Fitzdottrel becomes dissatisfied with Pug's service, he decides to keep him on because he likes the name Devil chosen by Pug for his time on earth. This foolish decision is compounded because Fitzdottrel had been anxious to meet a devil and is frustrated that he cannot find one, even though Pug has reassured him that he really is the very thing sought. It is quite difficult to distinguish which is the greater specimen of folly. The title of the play draws attention to Pug as an ass, and he is far from the figure of menace and deception traditionally attributed to a devil. But Fitzdottrel is egregiously foolish, and attention is drawn to this by his own actions, the actions of others and the comments which are made upon him.

The initial human event is that Fitzdottrel agrees to submit his wife to a conversation with Wittipol in return for an expensive cloak. This bargain is described as “the price of folly” by Wittipol (I.iv.59), and Manly, his companion, remarks that “if it were not for his folly I might pity him” (I.vi.61-62), a sentiment which might have applied to Cokes, as we noticed earlier. Later Fitzdottrel shows his folly in being taken in by Merecraft, who seeks to sell projects to him, including the use of dogskins and making wine from raisins (II.i.65-75, 96-107). It is still later that we find Merecraft’s comment that “anything takes this dott’reil” (II.viii.59). Perhaps his greatest folly is being taken in by Wittipol, who is now disguised as a Spanish Lady come to teach Mrs Fitzdottrel fashionable manners. Fitzdottrel is so smitten by “her” that he wishes to make her his heir. The word “fool” is widely used, and synonyms proliferate: “moonling”, “cokes”, “nupson”, “ass”, are all to be found, and then there is the name Fitzdottrel itself, as we have noted. The identification of his folly continues into the last act, when he is persuaded to pretend that he is possessed by the devil. Wittipol calls him a fool during this performance (V.viii.86) and Manly sees him as venting his follies (153).

But if there is a prominence of folly in Fitzdottrel, Pug shows much the same ineptitude in his conduct of affairs. He becomes involved in the relationship between Mrs Fitzdottrel and Wittipol because her husband sets him on guard to monitor her movements. When Wittipol calls, she is far too clever for Pug, and in instructing him to tell Wittipol not to do exactly what she wants him to do, she makes use of him as a messenger to prepare for an assignation. Pug is utterly confused by her instructions, and as he goes off to carry them out he exclaims with unconscious irony, “This is some fool turned!” (II.ii.61). Near the end of the play, Satan sums up Pug’s achievements on the day he has been allowed to spend on earth in order to do as much evil as possible. He has been beaten by his master; he has failed to facilitate a “deed of darkness” (seduction); he has been cheated of a valuable ring by means of a false beard and a reversible cloak, and allowed human beings to realise that they can do more harm than a devil:

Whom hast thou dealt with
 Woman or man, this day, but have outgone thee
 Some way, and most have proved the better fiends? (V.vi.61-63)

The two roles of Fitzdottrel and Pug are closely interwoven, and each seems to enlarge the folly of the other. They are each entrapped in their follies, and nothing they do seems to make it possible for them to shake off the hold

which folly has upon them. If their incompetence and misjudgements were not so ridiculous, they would be tragic in their inevitability. The intricacy of their interrelationship may be funny and ingenious, but it is also a reflection of Jonson's rather pessimistic approach to public affairs in this play. The resourceful evils of the inhabitants of London far exceed Pug's foolishly incompetent attempts to produce evil results for his day in town. His concern with the evils of London life, with greed and corruption, are matched with unease about the problem of monopolies and those who exploit them. At this point in his career, Jonson was probably at his most influential. Though he was loyal to James I, he was also circumspectly critical of royal policies, particularly regarding monopolies, and in this play we can see both sides of his thinking. Folly is thus made a part of a wider purpose, and the ingenuity of his exploitation of it may be entertaining, but it reflects the serious role of the poet who might, in Jonson's conception of the poet's role, advise the monarch.

In one respect, however, the egregious folly of Fitzdottrel is turned to good effect. Wittipol's original approach to Mrs Fitzdottrel appears to be an attempted seduction, and indeed his courtship of her is made physically explicit at one point (II.vi.70 SD). But in the end, his success in his disguise as the Spanish Lady reveals Fitzdottrel's folly over his extravagance. When Mrs Fitzdottrel, who describes herself as "matched to a mass of folly" (IV.vi.20), appeals to Wittipol for help, he responds with friendship and support rather than sexual predation. He makes sure that she is no longer threatened by her husband's foolish waste of the marital resources by securing a measure of financial independence for her, even though at the end of the play she is still tied to her husband. In spite of this unexpected benefit, folly remains potent.

In terms of the theatrical traditions we have been discussing, Jonson's manipulation of folly in this play avoids the stage convention of the fool and the clown, and it modifies the presence of the devil to bring out the folly to be found in the incompetent Pug. He creates a world in which folly plays a large part without an abstract personification. His reading of folly in the character of Fitzdottrel exploits the comedy of misapprehension, and it leaves us in the end without the punishment of sin, but at least with a moral sense that there were wrongs to be righted and there are some people who have the intellectual resource to ameliorate social wrongs.

These two plays were written when Jonson was at his most eminent as a playwright, and they share their view of folly and their exploitation of theatri-

cal methods of identifying it. The endings which are reached in each imply that folly is widespread, and they share a detailed exposition of it, one rich in theatrical ingenuity.

In the Prologue to *A Tale of a Tub*, Jonson gives his audience a conspectus which suggests that he was still interested in exploring the possibilities of comedy:

No state affairs, nor any politic club
Pretend we in our tale, here, of a tub,
But acts of clowns and constables today
Stuff out the scenes of our ridiculous play.
A cooper's wit, or some such busy spark,
Illumining the High Constable and his clerk
And all the neighbourhood, from old records
Of antique proverbs, drawn from Whitsun-lords,
And their authorities at wakes and ales,
With country precedents and old wives' tales,
We bring you now, to show what different things
The cotes of clowns are from the courts of kings. (Pro.1-12)

In this conspectus he links the play to two theatrical traditions: farce and the festival kind of entertainment associated with rural communities. The latter, as far as Jonson is concerned, contains Whitsun lords, old wives' tales, and old proverbs and is appropriate to clowns. His choice implies the festival licence of such entertainment. He calls his play "ridiculous", the most likely sense of which comes from the classical Latin *ridiculus*, meaning "capable of arousing laughter" (*OED*). He makes it clear that this kind of entertainment is very different from that which entertains court audiences. Though he still received some financial support from the king, his work was no longer as welcome at court as it had been under James I.

But the court perspective may still be implied in what is portrayed, if only as a distanced view. Many of the characters behave foolishly, and much of the action is about decisions which are misguided, and some are based upon selfish motives. The farcical mode, together with the complex plot, which has many twists and turns and so is hard to disentangle, ensures that we do not take the characters seriously and are moved to laughter by their ridiculous predicaments rather than anything else. In spite of the bad behaviour of some characters, who deceive others for their own gain, the play does not contain severe moral judge-

ments, and there is a distinctly benign ending, in which reconciliation is the chief objective.

Because the Prologue claims that the play avoids state affairs or politics, we are no doubt alerted to the possibility that Jonson is up to something. There are indeed some serious elements in the presentation of the role of the High Constable, Toby Turf, now given a greater role in local affairs by the government's policy, and some satirical anti-Laudian hits at the parish priest, Chanon Hugh. But the confusions and other devices of farce are the main ingredients. These include disguise (one character when disguised is called "broom beard"), mistaken identity, lies and deceptions, inspired opportunism, and wandering about and getting lost between a multiplicity of locations in several villages centred on the country parish of St Pancras in north London. The main event, on St Valentine's Day, is preparation for the intended marriage of Audrey, Turf's daughter, to John Clay, a tilemaker and the bridegroom designated by her parents. This intention is frustrated by the conflicting aspirations of three other suitors, and in the end she marries an unexpected fourth, Pol-Marten, the usher. But all these participants in the courting game, including Audrey herself, hardly raise any emotional interest, and it is the reduction of their adventures to this ridiculous level which chiefly helps to establish the genre of farce.

However, there are two characters who might be considered survivals of the Elizabethan stage traditions of folly. In both, the skills of the clowns might have been valuable, even though Jonson still resists the concept. With John Clay, the would-be bridegroom, and Hannibal Puppy, the Constable's general servant, we catch glimpses of both the natural and the witty fool of earlier plays. Such a retrospect would conform to other items in the play indicating that Jonson was hinting at a Tudor setting. Clay is simple-minded, and he makes an immediate impact on his first entrance through his costume, which Jonson has ensured is described in the dialogue. He explains that he has come wearing wisps of straw on his feet, as he knew that there would be dancing on his wedding day and he didn't want to wear boots for that.¹⁹ His chamois doublet and sausage hose are admired by Turf (I.iv.10-11). However, things go badly for Clay, as he is falsely accused of a robbery at St John's Wood by Hilts, the servant of Squire Tub, another suitor for Audrey. This accusation depends upon recalling his conspicuously foolish costume for identification, and it adds the further details that his

19 This links him with Stub, as noted earlier.

pinned-up breeches were like pudding bags, and he was wearing yellow stockings and had his hat turned up with a silver clasp (II.ii.125-27). As events unfold following this accusation, Clay feels threatened by the law, and, fearing he will be hanged, he runs away, only to be discovered much later in the play hiding in a barn. But by now it is too late, as Audrey has been married off to someone else. The last we hear of him is that he is sitting at the wedding feast, which had originally been intended to be his, unable to eat and still weeping in fear of being hanged (V.viii.5-7). As far as the management of folly in the play is concerned, it is conspicuous that Clay is given very little to say, and, while we cannot be sure what he might have improvised in performance, it looks as though Jonson was exercising restraint as far as this foolish character is concerned.

Hannibal Puppy's name is a clue to his function, as it makes a play on Ball, a common name for a dog, and so fits with Puppy. He is indeed much concerned with ingenious, but usually pointless word games through the play, as he carries out his main role, which is to be a servant to Constable Turf, entrusted with carrying out his master's requirements. This probably aligns him with the witty servant of classical comedy, and this would seem to be the most likely theoretical justification for Jonson's characterisation. He is not a moral figure, but he is given a number of comic situations which are entertaining. The absence of moral significance relates to the objective of farce and the ridiculous actions he gets up to support this. Thus at one point he is seized upon to be a Valentine by Lady Tub and her maid Dido Wisp, who choose to share him, and so he makes a play upon being a half-Valentine to each. His part is embellished with word tricks including an elaborate pun on sun/son (III.v.53-66), two extravagant comic laments about loss, a bravura display of panic, which must have been fun for the actor to perform, when he mistakes Clay hiding in the barn for a lurking "Satin" (III.ii.1-26, V.iii.14-18 and IV.v.24-48), and, when things are going wrong, a mock heroic and fanciful doom-laden prophecy purportedly made by one of the animals in the farmyard sacrificed ahead of Audrey's wedding (III.ix.55-77).²⁰ Sometimes he adopts a heavy Middlesex accent (as at III.v.46-53). In a moment of crisis over the loss of Audrey, Lady Tub becomes so exasperated by his tricks that she tells him to "leave jesting" (III.v.53). The last piece of fooling associated with him is his marriage to Dido Wisp, one of his half-Valentines; their union seems to depend on the fact that both their names are connected with Carthage (V.v.1-6). These

20 This mock heroic passage has a precedent in Livy, *Histories*, 35.21.4.

comic characteristics give an opportunity for a versatile performance from the player, and they may recall the skills embodied in the tradition of stage fools. It is not clear whether there was a specialist actor available to Jonson at the time, but it does seem as though here he was writing a part requiring particular performance skills in comedy.

//

In three of the plays I have considered here, Jonson deliberately modified the stage traditions of folly discernible on the Elizabethan stage, which were still alive in the work of other dramatists. His practice was largely determined by his concern with the moral value of comedy, and he regretted what he saw as the exploitation of folly for superficial and even degrading entertainment. After *The New Inn* was mocked off the stage in 1631, he railed in disgust upon the contemporary stage in his “Ode to Himself”. There he speaks of those who make plays “larding your large ears / With their foul comic socks” (ll. 36–37).²¹ In his later plays, Jonson’s exposure of human follies persistently avoids the fool and clown conventions of his youth. In three plays I have not discussed here, *The Staple of News* (1626), *The New Inn* (1629) and *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), it is hard to find roles which recall the dominance of the stage fools in earlier years. *A Tale of a Tub* differs somewhat because Jonson wanted it to succeed as a farce, and in attempting this he did return in some measure to the stage techniques of folly he had earlier questioned. But even here the folly he perceives is found in the world he creates in the exercise of authority by a magistrate and a constable and the pretensions of a Laudian “Chanon”. Comedy retained for him a moral purpose, and in pursuit of such an objective he regularly set off in different directions, even though he was alert in entertaining his audience. He saw that actors could be entertaining in the presentation of folly on the stage, and in the examples I have been describing, his inventiveness is apparent. Rather than rely upon the tradition of stage clowning, Jonson sought to intrigue his audiences by his inventive excursions into the representation of folly. Traditional elements, where they do survive, are largely points of departure.

21 Cf. Shirley, *The Coronation*: “There doth flow / No undermirth, such as doth lard the scene / For course delight, the language here is cleare. / And confident our Poet bad me say, / Heele bate you but the folly of a Play” (Pro.22–26).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- BROME, Richard. *The Antipodes*. Ed. Ann Haaker. Regents Renaissance Drama Series. London: Edward Arnold, 1967.
- FULWELL, Ulpian. *Like Will to Like. Tudor Interludes*. Ed. Peter Happé. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972.
- JONSON, Ben. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*. Ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, Ian Donaldson *et al.* 7 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *As You Like It*. Ed. Michael Hathaway. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: University Press, 2009.
- . *Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins. The Arden Shakespeare (2nd ser.). London: Methuen, 1982.
- . *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Ed. William C. Carroll. The Arden Shakespeare (3rd ser.). London: Thomson Learning, 2004.
- SHIRLEY, James. *The Coronation. The Dramatic Works of James Shirley*. Ed. William Gifford and Alexander Dyce. 6 vols. London: John Murray, 1833.
- WAGER, William. *The Longer Thou Livest. The Longer Thou Livest and Enough Is as Good as a Feast*. Ed. R. Mark Benbow. London: Edward Arnold, 1968.

Secondary Sources

- BARNES, Peter. “Bartholomew Fair: All the Fun of the Fair”. *Jonsonians: Living Traditions*. Ed. Brian Wolland. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. 43–50.
- CAMPBELL, Kathleen. “Shakespeare’s Actors as Collaborators: Will Kempe and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1996)”. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona: Critical Essays*. Ed. June Schuster. New York: Garland Publishing, 1996. 179–87.
- CREASER, John. Introduction to *Bartholomew Fair*. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*. Ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, Ian Donaldson *et al.* 7 vols. VI: 255–68.
- DONALDSON, Ian. *Ben Jonson: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- HAPPÉ, Peter. “‘All mine own folly’: The Function of Folly in *The Winter’s Tale*”. *Folly and Politics*. Ed. Richard Hillman and Pauline Ruberry-Blanc. Theta—Théâtre Tudor, vol. X. Publication online, Scène Européenne, Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, Université François-

Rabelais de Tours – CNRS, 2013 (<<http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/publications/Theta0/fichiers/pdf/Happé.pdf>>). 217–38. (Accessed 3 September 2014.)

HORNBACK, Robert. *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009.

McMILLIN, Scott, and Sally-Beth MACLEAN. *The Queen's Men and their Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

STEGGLE, Matthew. "Charles Chester and Ben Jonson". *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 39 (1999): 313–36.

THOMSON, Peter. "Clowns, Fools and Knaves: Stages in the Evolution of Acting". *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Vol. I: Origins to 1660*. Ed. Jane Milling and Peter Thomson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 407–23.

WILES, David. *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

John J. McGAVIN, « “Nice Opinion—God of Fools”: Drummond of Hawthornden and Folly »,
« Theta XI, Théâtre Tudor », 2013, pp. 199-212
mis en ligne en septembre 2014, <<https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta11>>.

Theta XI

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard HILLMAN

Mentions légales

Copyright © 2014 — CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

Date de création

septembre 2014

“Nice Opinion — God of Fools”: Drummond of Hawthornden and Folly

John J. McGavin
Southampton University

William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585–1649) in the early nineteen-seventies account of Robert H. MacDonald (and previous Scottish critics) emerged, with some justice, as a very assiduous literary borrower. MacDonald wrote, “But even in an age that saw much ‘pilfering’, when the practice of imitation was generous however ambiguous the theory, the scale of Drummond’s plunder was exceptionally ambitious” (*Library*, p. 24). This judgement has been nuanced in recent years to acknowledge Drummond’s own poetic voice and his deeper understanding of poetic genre. For example, David Atkinson identifies an attractive directness in the religious poetry, while noting “creative tension” (p. 190) as Drummond mediated between the competing Catholic and Protestant theological traditions from which he took his sentiment and imagery. And Michael Spiller (“Quintessencing”) has shown the painstaking creativity with which Drummond expanded his poetic output, reordering poems to create a first collection (1616) as the distillation of a Petrarchan sequence. This young man, who kept an assiduous record of the plays he watched while he was supposedly studying law in Bourges, has also emerged as a uniquely valuable witness to individual dramatic spectatorship in the period.¹

1 See McGavin, “Spectatorship”. Drummond was not the only such commentator, but his account is extensive and distinctively Scottish in its describing European rather than English drama. For English responses to English theatre, see Whitney.

But the problem won't go away: Drummond's creativity and derivative-ness co-existed deeply entwined; for him, imitation did not simply lead to invention but continued to constrain it; his most unique contribution to culture lay in the secondary activity of recording spectatorship, creatively insightful about others' creations, but dependent on them. A prolific reader of radical contemporary drama, kind host of Ben Jonson and *amanuensis* for Jonson's vinously opinionated comments on his fellow writers, Drummond did not himself write plays. Instead, he contributed to the most externally constrained of theatrical genres, in which a deep knowledge of contemporary taste could work with traditional structure to serve defined, prearranged ends: he wrote, that is, for the royal entries into Edinburgh of James I in 1617 and Charles I in 1633.² Similarly, in later life he turned to history, a genre in which his imagination, scholarship and poetic sensibility could give new life to received narratives through re-writing or, indeed, translation.³

One might not think such confined creativity especially distinctive of the early seventeenth century—it's a pattern we can all recognise—but Drummond was (and remains) a significant enough figure in Scottish culture to deserve special examination. This was a man with a continental education and international tastes who remained resident in Scotland to oversee the family estates after the death of his father; valued by major figures in the Jacobean and Caroline court, but in the end honoured by his local civic neighbours rather than by the monarchs he praised and whose domestic tragedies he deplored;⁴ a member of the gentry class deeply concerned with elite values but forced to express them through elegant correspondence rather than day-to-day engagement with those at court. For example, he corresponded with Sir Robert Ker of Ancram, gentleman of the bedchamber of King Charles I, consoled him during his temporary exile from the court of King James, knew of Ker's relations with John Donne and Samuel Daniel, and acquired at least one important literary manuscript which represented this link.⁵ He remained a large fish in a small pool. Drummond is

2 See Drummond, *Poems and Prose*, pp. 83–87 (“Forth Feasting”) and 133–35 (“The Entertainment of the High and Mighty Monarch . . . 15 June 1633”).

3 See, e.g., his *History of Scotland from the Year 1423 until the Year 1542*, published as *The History of the Lives and Reigns of the Five James's, Kings of Scotland*, in Drummond, *Works*, pp. 1–116. See also Rae.

4 Drummond records his burgessships, awarded by Haddington, Edinburgh, Canongate and Linlithgow, in his journal (Drummond, *Poems and Prose*, pp. 193–94).

5 See his letter of 7 June 1621 to Sir Robert Ker, in which he refers to an imperfect copy of Samuel Daniel's *Hymen's Triumph*, the masque performed at the wedding of Lady Roxburgh. He donated

almost emblematic of the cultural fault-lines which occurred when James left to rule both Scotland and England from the south. But I think there is a deeper paradox of *mentalité* in Drummond, which coincides with these circumstances. (I can't say that it was *caused* by them, for, having met literary figures face-to-face in London, he does not seem to have resented the life of a rural gentleman after his father's death, and he knew the classical models which validated such a life.⁶)

The paradox in Drummond's outlook which drove both his creative output and its limitations can be better understood if we explore it through the notion of folly and what folly might have meant for him. But to do this, one has to look at his work obliquely. For example, Drummond was content to exhibit folly where genre dignified the performance. One sees this in his "Encomiastike Verses before a book entitled *Follies*". Here, he rather obviously signals his knowledge of Erasmus in the opening two lines ("At ease I red your Worke, and am right sorrye / It came not forth before *Encomium Morie*") to prevent the reader misconstruing the performed folly of his rhymes, which link "bonnets" and "sonnetes", "Tartares" and "gartares", and in a way which Byron would later match in finding a rhyme for "Kentucky", Drummond links the most influential poet of the times, "Torquato Tasso", with "pecorious asse, ho!"⁷ If, on the other hand, one wishes to explore Drummond's more private concern with folly, particularly revealing is a group of humorous stories which Drummond copied down in his *Miscellanies*, the same volumes in which he excerpted many passages from contemporary English and continental drama, around the years 1609 to 1612.⁸

A Butcher's son being appointed to deliver a speech for some of the little towns of France, at the approach of Henry IV, being dasht [abashed], repeated sundry times, "Je suis ... Je suis ...". "Et que diable est [*sic*] vous?" said the king. He replied, "le boucheur de la ville, Sire, et voici mes brebis!"⁹

this to the town "college", now Edinburgh University, where it is among the Laing papers as EUL De.3.69. For the letter, see Ker Family, Marquis of Lothian: "Letter of William Drummond of Hawthornden to Sir Robert Ker, Earl of Ancram", National Records of Scotland, GD40/2/13/26. For evidence of his correspondence during Ker's exile on the continent, see McGavin, "Thomas Ker".

6 Spiller, "Drummond, William, of Hawthornden".

7 Drummond, *Poems and Prose*, pp. 140-41. Byron's rhyme was "... buck, he" (*Don Juan*, Canto VIII, stanza 61).

8 The anecdotes are from Hawthornden MSS, vol. VIII, Drummond *Miscellanies*, NLS MS 2060, fols. 19^v and 37^v. I have modernised the text of the anecdotes.

9 I have here conflated two versions of the joke which Drummond copied down on fols. 19^v and 37^v.

The Prince of Condé, entering Rouen: when an advocate had begun his speech “Hannibal ce Grand Guerrier . . . ”, and stammered, the prince (being without boots and a shower falling) said, “Hannibal était boté [*sic*]; je ne suis pas! Aduançons!”

Queen Elizabeth entering Bristol, a speech was to be delivered to her. The honest man began, “May it please your sacred Majesty, I am the mouth of this Town.” And then, all amazed, forgot the rest. She spying, said once or twice, “Speak, good mouth!”

The theatrically knowledgeable Drummond took great pleasure in *any* blurring of the boundary between the play world and the real world, but these comic anecdotes form a subcategory about a kind of folly which evidently delighted him. They record moments when a lack of social confidence revealed itself in the disruption of public theatricality—as if playing one’s part socially and playing a part in theatre were two sides of the same coin. An honest man, an advocate, a butcher, all stammer or are amazed and forget everything they have learned when confronted with royalty or aristocracy. The butcher falls out of the fiction back into reality; the advocate fails to sustain the fiction, so that his audience becomes pressingly aware of reality; and the man who is overwhelmed by the reality of the queen’s presence is humorously reminded by her of the fiction which should be dominant in his mind. These are jokes about performances which could not be sustained when they were overwhelmed by the realities of the social drama. The world of theatrical performance is here in an abrasive relationship with the performative constraints of a dramaturgical society.¹⁰ Folly, together with its embarrassing and memorable humiliations, is the consequence.

But, as so often with humour, delight is not the end of the matter. The shame of public exposure seems to lie at the root of these anecdotes, revealing a deep psychological association for Drummond between scripted theatricality and social behaviour. Here one confronts the ambivalence of folly: that what we delight in and what we fear may be the same, and what we condemn in others may be what we are most anxious about in ourselves. This truth received wonderful theatrical expression in the recent production by Greg Walker and Tom Betteridge of David Lyndsay’s *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, when the Hat of Folly was put on various heads and spectators laughed while still anxious that it might be passed to themselves (which was of course the fundamental message

10 The term “dramaturgical” as applied to society comes from social geography. For further discussion of its relevance to Scotland, see McGavin, *Theatricality*.

of the episode).¹¹ The surface structure of the comic anecdotes displays an élite patronising pleasure in the incapacity of others below Drummond's own gentry level to subdue their sense of social inferiority: Drummond is the spectator looking on and enjoying others' discomfiture. Whether or not Drummond, seasoned spectator and gentleman, was sufficiently imaginative to consider the relationship in reverse, to see himself as the potential object of others' spectatorship (and I believe he was), the stories still imply an anxiety on Drummond's part about sustaining the social performance, and sensitivity towards the opinions of those who might be looking on, judging him along with the rest of us as we try to do our best on this great stage of fools, or "Maze of fooles", as Drummond termed it in his contribution to the Entry of Charles (*Poems and Prose*, p. 134, l. 33).

However, we *do* have evidence that Drummond was aware of the complex issues surrounding folly, both as it might be found in other people and as it might be imputed by other people to oneself. We have it locally from his reading of Marston's *Parasitaster*.¹² I would claim that we also have it in his self-educational programme of intensive reading and excerpting from contemporary plays. But it can also be argued that Drummond's awareness of folly shows itself ultimately in the very limitations of his artistic achievement.

Parasitaster or The Fawn, by John Marston, was published in 1606, and read by Drummond in 1609.¹³ He took substantially more excerpts for his *Miscellany* volume from this play than any other, and even included extracts from Marston's Preface to the edition. *Prima facie*, the play seems to counsel a kind of ethical egocentricity, in that it emphasises self-knowledge. The Preface and Drummond's excerpting open with Seneca's warning in *Thyestes* against dying well-known to others but ignorant of oneself: "Qui nimis notus omnibus ignotus moritur sibi". Self-knowledge appears to be the driving force of the play: the Duke of Ferrara's

11 This performance and discussion relating to it are available at <<http://www.stagingthescottish-court.org>> (accessed 1 March 2014).

12 Drummond's extracts from Marston's *Parasitaster or The Fawn* are found in Hawthornden MSS, vol. VII, Drummond Miscellanies, NLS MS 2059, fols. 344^v-48^v.

13 This is attested by Hawthornden MSS, vol. VII, *Drummond Miscellanies*, NLS MS 2059, fol. 361^r, where it is listed with the other English play texts in the same order as they are extracted in the body of the volume. One of the extracts suggests that Drummond was using the second Quarto; he followed the Q2 compositor's misunderstanding of Marston's wishes at V.i.207: Q2: "lou'de of him"; Drummond: "lou'd of him"; Q1: "lou'de of Her". The second quarto was printed in the same year as the first (1606), and was Marston's corrected text. The volume is still in Edinburgh University Library. Quotations from Marston's *Parasitaster* are taken from Blostein, ed.

eventual recognition of his own folly in seeking a younger wife is what legitimises his exposure of folly in others. It gives credibility to his final role as pageant master creating a pageant in which Folly (as part of a remarkable group including War, Laughter, and Beggary) follows after Cupid (V.i.150). Self-knowledge authorises him to be the agent of Marston's desire to generalise folly to include the pageant's fictional courtly spectators, and by implication all who watch the play. This is a move reminiscent of what Lyndsay had done sixty years earlier in the final scene of the *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, and it is described by Marston's duke of Urbino, Gonzago, as a "parliament" (V.i.474), though it lacks Lyndsay's political bite, remaining at the level of élite self-criticism—which is not very far from élite self-congratulation: the sensations of wry acknowledgement or genuine repentance can themselves be enjoyed and credited to one's courtly status. The Duke asks of his neighbour from Urbino, "What, grave Urbin's duke? Dares Folly's sceptre touch his prudent shoulders?" (V.i.437-38). One can imagine the unspoken reply, "Alas, yes; but I'm still the duke!"

More fundamentally, however, self-knowledge in *Parasitaster* is paradoxically attentive to the opinions of others, anxious about them even as it tries to marginalise them, in just the way I have suggested is evident in Drummond's comic anecdotes about artistic failure coming from social inadequacy. Drummond extracts from the Preface Marston's lines, "since other mens tongues ar not vith in my teeth why / should I hope to gouerne them" (corresponds to Blostein, ed., "To My Equal Reader", p. 69, ll. 34-35). In context, Marston is acknowledging that it lies beyond one's powers to control *malicious* detraction, but Drummond's first extract from the play proper is of a broader sentiment which places responsibility back on the individual, regardless of the motives of others: "Honor auoids not onlie iust defame / but flies all meanes that may il voice his name" (corresponds to Blostein, ed., I.i.15-16). One should avoid doing anything that *might* attract criticism, not just those things that would justly draw it on oneself. In this case, the Duke of Ferrara's brother, Renaldo, is commenting on the Duke's decision to leave his dukedom in the care of the brother while he visits Urbino, but Renaldo's more sweeping advice to be cautious reveals the weight of social constraint which bears upon the élite of society. It appears that there are many who would take the opportunity to place Folly's hat upon one's head and anyone with a sense of honour will avoid such occasions. In the event, the duke refuses to alter his desire despite the risk that some will criticise him for lightness or triviality. His life will not be "forced" and "tugged along" "and all to keep

[placate] the god of fools and women, Nice Opinion" (corresponds to Blostein, ed., I.i.57-60). Drummond excerpts this line from a number which express similar sentiments. Of course, the problem with such excerpts is that it is hard to see how much of the original context was working in the excerpter's mind when he chose the passage, and how much would have remained when he revisited it. There are many places where one feels that Drummond took a *bon mot* from a play for his collection or, indeed, deleted one he had previously taken, without thought to its theatrical context, saving it for possible use in other contexts. This particular case also has an element of ambiguity. He writes "an old man" in the margin, thus appearing to limit the sentiment to such a character. This respects the original play, for the Duke is indeed an older man seeking to break out of the austere constraints thought suitable to his age. But it is not certain that Drummond saw this expression as applying *only* to an old man. Indeed, the excerpts which precede and follow this one make more obvious reference to age, and the marginal comment may have been intended to apply as much to them. More suggestively, Drummond's manuscript rendering suggests that he is taking the sentiment out of its context and seeing it as a general definition: when copying out "To keep the God of fooles and vomen Nice opinion", he underlines the "God of fools" bit, leaving himself with a definition of "nice opinion".

So what *exactly* do fools (and, in Drummond's casually fashionable misogyny, "women") have as their god? The word "nice" had so many possible meanings in the early seventeenth century that it functioned as a generalised value term, taking its substantive meaning from the precise context in which it was used. The context here suggests that Marston, like other satirists of the period, understood "nice opinion" as, in Blostein's phrase, "the uninformed judgement of the multitude" (n. to I.i.59). And this is where we confront the paradox in Drummond, and indeed a paradox in folly. If uninformed opinion is the god of fools, it is rightly to be despised, and one should not care about what such fools say. But this indifference can only be earned by caring enough about opinion to educate oneself to proper information. Fools are at once ill-informed and also too ready to value the current ill-informed opinion, but one cannot wholly ignore them: one has to make oneself better informed and, as Renaldo said to his brother, one has to avoid giving an opportunity for criticism. As a social player living under the spectatorship of the world, and subject to the judgements of others, one cannot in the end control these judgements. However, one can act to reduce the likelihood that one will be *justly* accused of folly or, equally horrid,

be accused of folly by those whom one respects. It is apparently a sign of folly to make ill-informed opinion into your god, but, at the same time, it would be folly not to be mindful of opinion's force and to do all one could to avoid acquiring a bad reputation. Just as in the revealing anecdotes which showed Drummond's delight at inferiors who proved unable to sustain a public performance because of the overwhelming effect of social reality, opinion is here a cause of both contempt and concern. Because of the spectatorship of society, folly is thus the great "object" of the young seventeenth-century nobleman: hidden behind the surrogate enemy of "nice opinion", diverted from the self by misogyny or class comedy, constrained by pithy formulations and naturalised by a hundred years of literary tradition, folly is still the abiding horror to which one obsessively returns and in which one finds a kind of playful joy. It is the obverse of a performative, dramatic society—however much one despises ignorant criticism, one does not wish to be thought to play the fool on the great stage of life. And Drummond did what he could to acquire the knowledge to avoid this possibility, at the same time shielding himself from the fact that he was trying to do so.

Drummond's self-educative programme of selecting extracts from the plays he read was one means of avoiding the imputation of folly. They evidently helped to give him those current parameters of taste and judgement which would ensure that he could sustain his cultural performance for those élite whose opinions were not "nice", and also acquire a status to protect him from those who were less knowledgeable. He hoovered up what was current in poetry and might be used again: metaphors, similes, insults, set-piece descriptions, imagery. He looked also for the structures of witty thought: antitheses, sarcasm, ripostes which might help him shape his conversation, even if politeness would not permit their re-use, for example, "I shal loose my vits. R be comforted 3ow ha non to leyse" (corresponds to Blostein, ed., II.i.413-14).¹⁴ Elegant phrasing, *sententiae*, definitions of character "types" were all helping to shape Drummond's mental world to a pattern satisfactorily established by existing literary models. In a rare moment of explicit self-revelation, he actually comments "excellent" in the margin against the following extract: "Vertue and Visdome ar not fortunes gifts therefore / those yat fortune can not make vertuous, sche / comonlie makith rich" (corresponds to Blostein, ed., IV.i.608-10)—this is well shaped,

14 The "R" here probably stands for "reply" or "riposte" or some such word.

witty, re-useable, and, of course, comforting for a gentleman who did not have the wealth to inhabit court circles. It is also *originally* Montaigne's.

The extracts most obviously aimed at sustaining future social performance are those which Drummond identified as "compliment". He could even alter the original so as to record the compliment in the form it might have if he were actually to use it, as in: "I and al my fortunes ar deuoted I protest most relligiouslie to your se[lf]rvice. I vow my awne selfe onlie proud in being acknowledged of 3ow". The original in Marston (Blostein, ed., III.i.316-18) was less smooth, included reference to "my family", which would have been inappropriate in Drummond's situation, and the speaker went on to describe himself as the other's "creature"—evidently a step too far for Drummond. Trivial, artificial and insincere though this attention to compliment may seem to us, it would have been an important pressure point in forming gentlemanly relations, and getting it wrong might damage one with the reputation of folly. (Shakespeare uses it in this way more than once.¹⁵) We can on occasion see the consequences of this early training in practice. Compare, for example, the shape of his address to Sir Robert Ker in the 7 June 1621 letter referred to above—"forgiue my Long Silence, Which was not caused by forgetfulnesse of what I am owne, but by respect. for in these busye tymes I thought in your behalfe from mee a tedious importunitie a greater wrong than respectiue silence"—with this 1609 extract from Thomas Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters*: "In this forgiue me for that being a stranger / to 3ow I make my vay so bold and presume / rather vpon 3our kindnes then 3our knouledge".¹⁶

So far I have presented Drummond's programme of excerpting in a rather instrumentalist way: a deliberate banking of other people's material so as to sustain one's own cultural performance—and it *was* that. In terms of UK Higher Education, Drummond would provide the ideal evidence that one's creative work had had an "impact". In this respect, Drummond offers a pragmatic secular parallel to the "protestant aesthetic" of drawing benefit from idolatrous theatre.¹⁷ But one could also argue that his derivativeness answered a more ethical imperative: after all, how does one know oneself as a social being except by acquiring a wide range of perspectives from others, learning how the world is

15 See, e.g., Agamemnon's irritated response that Aeneas, who has apparently failed to recognise him, is either scorning the Greeks or is a most ceremonious courtier (*Tro.*, I.iii.233-34).

16 Hawthornden MSS, vol. VII, *Drummond Miscellanies*, NLS MS 2059, fol. 221^r.

17 See, e.g., Diehl.

seen by others and trying to see it through their eyes? Self-knowledge, which is the ideal, is dependent on an imaginative appreciation of how others view oneself. A spectator of others, one must also acknowledge oneself as the spectacle, and try to view with the audience's eyes. Attentiveness to opinion, with all the constraints on action that such a process may bring, and with all the emotional turmoil that may attend it, is still an unavoidable route to wisdom. Getting the balance right is the challenge.

It is no accident that Drummond was at once a uniquely valuable witness to early modern spectatorship, an excerpter of drama, a voracious reader of continental plays and poems, but himself worked only in predictable theatrical modes, was a "silver" poet who aimed at established models, and who attempted to mediate between the literary languages he had received from the competing Protestant and Catholic religious traditions. He had the outlook of a creator who was also a social being aware of others looking at him, just as he was of looking at them; of someone whose retiring from the highest levels of public life gave him local affirmations of his worth in the various burgesships he received from Edinburgh and elsewhere, while permitting him also to view the highest honours as things not to be aimed at or even worth enjoying; someone whose country seat permitted him to avoid the more obvious dangers of committing social folly under a courtly gaze but at the same time did not let him escape the paradox of needing to know others' opinions in order to avoid such an accusation. This mentality prevented him from travelling the dangerous ground that goes with major creativity. He could not enter the realm of Milton, for example, though Milton knew and used Drummond's work for his own more radical individualistic purposes.¹⁸ But, in an age when the motto *casus ab alto gravior* ("a fall from a height is more severe") had currency, perhaps Drummond's secondary achievements are testimony to what he would have regarded as a deeper ethical achievement—that he knew himself, and, even if he did not rise to the heights, he did not descend to folly. He managed, *though at a cost*, to sustain his cultural credibility and avoid falling victim to "Nice opinion", the "God of fooles".

18 See Corns, p. 227.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- DRUMMOND, William. Hawthornden MSS, vol. VII, *Drummond Miscellanies*. National Library of Scotland MS 2059.
- _____. Hawthornden MSS, vol. VIII, *Drummond Miscellanies*. National Library of Scotland MS 2060.
- _____. “Letter of William Drummond of Hawthornden to Sir Robert Ker, Earl of Ancram”. National Records of Scotland, GD40/2/13/26.
- _____. *Poems and Prose [of] William Drummond*. Ed. Robert H. MacDonald. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press [for] the Association for Scottish Literary Studies; London: Chatto and Windus, 1976.
- _____. *The Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*. Ed. J. Sage and T. Ruddiman. Edinburgh: James Watson, 1711.
- MARSTON, John. *Parasitaster or The Fawn*. Ed. David A. Blostein. The Revels Plays. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978.
- SHAKESPEARE, William. *Troilus and Cressida*. Ed. David Bevington. The Arden Shakespeare (3rd ser.). London: Thomson Learning, 1998.

Secondary Sources

- ATKINSON, David. “Flowres of Sion: The Spiritual and Meditative Journey of William Drummond”. *Langage cleir illumynate: Scottish Poetry from Barbour to Drummond, 1375-1630*. Ed. Nicola Royan. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 181-91.
- CORNS, Thomas N. “The Achievement of ‘On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’”. *A Companion to Milton*. Ed. Thomas N. Corns. 2nd ed. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 226-31.
- DIEHL, Huston. *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- MACDONALD, Robert H., ed. *The Library of Drummond of Hawthornden*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971.
- MCGAVIN, John J. “Spectatorship in Scotland”. “Fresche Fontanis”: *Studies in the Culture of Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*. Ed. Janet Hadley Williams and J. Derrick McClure. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. 287-305.

- _____. *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.
- _____. "Thomas Ker of Redden's trip to the Low Countries, 1620". *"Joyous Sweit Imaginatioun": Essays on Scottish Literature in Honour of R. D. S. Jack*. Ed. Sarah Carpenter and Sarah M. Dunnigan. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 155-75.
- RAE, Thomas I. "The Historical Writing of Drummond of Hawthornden". *The Scottish Historical Review* 54 (1975): 22-66.
- SPILLER, Michael R. G. "Drummond, William, of Hawthornden (1585-1649)". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online ed. (2007) at <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8085>>. (Accessed 1 August 2013.)
- _____. "'Quintessencing in the Finest Substance': the Sonnets of William Drummond". *Langage cleir illumynate: Scottish Poetry from Barbour to Drummond, 1375-1630*. Ed. Nicola Royan. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 193-205.
- WHITNEY, Charles. *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.