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Close Kin to a Clean Fool: Robert Armin's Account of Jack Miller[1]

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In a brilliant recent study of physical space in relation to fooling, Sarah Carpenter focused on Robert Armin's stories about Jemy Camber, the first of the fools included in Armin's *Foole upon Foole* (1600). At the heart of her rich analysis lies the contention that "Through the studied light-heartedness of [Armin's] stories he … offers surprisingly detailed insights into the theatrical and social history of the late sixteenth century" (Carpenter, p. 23). I would like to follow her example, as far as I can, in studying Armin's narratives of Jack Miller, whom he describes as a "cleane", that is a "pure", fool. Like her, I wish to look *through* the narratives to deeper implications not always explicitly pointed up by Armin himself but detectable from the stylistic and narrative management of the stories. This essay will argue that, in addition to the kinds of social and theatrical insights Carpenter identified, Armin's narratives explore the enigmatic relationship of the *pure* fool to the world around him. Before arriving at such a conclusion, however, one has to unpeel a lot of public and explicit affirmation about what the texts were supposedly doing.

1 I am very grateful to Professor Greg Walker for his advice on this paper, and to Professor Richard Hillman for the opportunity to speak to the Table Ronde in the University of Tours over a number of years.

Robert Armin urges the reader of *Foole upon Foole* to "read true" (sig. A2^{v}).[2] What does that mean? In one sense, it means not dismissing the subject matter of folly as a reflection of the *author's* failings, but rather considering it as what he calls "uncomfortable sleete", which "purgeth" the air and thus becomes "profitable rayne". The book is designed to be the cause of wisdom in others even if it is itself devoted to folly—in just the same way as it announces on the title page that it will show the lives, humours and behaviours of six sorts of fool "with their want of wit *in their shew of wisdom*" (my emphasis). The statement is ambiguous. What he means, I believe, is not only that fools offer an appearance of wisdom that is unfounded, but that their want of wit nevertheless produces scenes (shows) from which wisdom can be derived, as lessons can be learned from a play. The essential character of folly would thus appear to be that what it *is* and what it *allows when perceived* are profoundly different, this difference covering a range of areas where benefits arise from folly, including, most obviously, instruction. In this respect the book announces itself as exemplary in the strict sense of offering a set of acts and sayings, *exempla*, which if applied comparatively to one's own life would encourage or deter certain actions. The behaviour of fools no less than that of the wise can be ethically useful.

However, we should be wary of how we respond to Armin's apparent emphasis on the beneficent, wisdom-producing effects of contemplating folly. Although the title page seems to promote truth *above* sensation, describing the book as "Not so strange as true", this is the face which the publisher felt it proper for the book to present or, to change metaphor, it is the shop window for the purchaser—a shop window which is patently enticing under a show of modesty, allowing the reader to pretend to wisdom while actually buying the pleasures of folly. Armin's individual narratives often dutifully continue the promised instructive dynamic by summing up the stories of folly with neat or epigrammatic conclusions that pretend to proverbial, taxonomic, practical or other kinds of wisdom: "Thus fools thinking to be wise, become flat foolish" (sig. B1^{v}); "Here you have heard the difference twixt a Flat fool natural, and a Flat fool artificial" (sig. B2^{r}); "Goodman Homes … was not a little vexed at John's diligence, but he laid the rope ever after where John could not reach it" (sig. F2^{v}). If one purchased this book, one could thus claim to have gained wisdom from folly.

2 In quoting from this text I have retained spelling and punctuation but have modernised i/j and u/v.

But the reader would already have expected a more complex text than such conclusions suggest, because, while the title page offered to show the behaviour of different categories of fools, it also intimated that the author was not clearly distinct from his subject matter: "written by one, seeming to have his mother's witte, when some say he is filed with his father's fopperie" (sig. A1^{r}). Armin also gave on the title page his stage name as "Clonnico de Curtanio Snuffe", that is, "Snuff, the clown of the Curtain Theatre". The gap between those who are fools in life and those who play the part of fools on the stage is thus reduced, as the author who purports to instruct is revealed to play the fool as a profession.[3] In the same way the phrase "their shew of wisdom" ambiguously combined, on the one hand, the inadequate appearance of wisdom in those who are really foolish and, on the other, events staged to allow spectators to make inferences about wisdom. While the humour of Armin's narratives is dependent on the notion that fools and non-fools are *really* different, and the latter group can legitimately laugh at the former, the stories often create an overlap between these groups in a way analogous to the Renaissance commonplace that the real world could also be seen as a stage.

In fact, the endings of Armin's stories are not consistently instructive, and are certainly not conclusively so, because he is engaged in a challenging transformative enterprise that runs far beyond offering portable nuggets of wisdom. Instead, his anecdotes revivify for his readers what other people had already found entertaining when the events originally occurred, consequently turning the exemplary conclusions which folly might prompt into written comic routines, and shifting past pleasures from behaviour directly experienced into the pleasures of the present reader's imagination, where behaviour is looked at with the mind's eye. Consequently, Armin is committed to deploying rhetorical features not solely directed to serve moral narrative ends—such as the comedy punchline, variation in tone and affect, stylistic shifts between prose and poetry and between episodic narration and summarising mottoes or epitaphs. And these exist alongside (and sometimes in place of) didactic elements.

For instance, in the first of four stories about Jack Miller, the "cleane" fool born in Evesham, the climax is visual comedy: Jack had burned all his facial hair off by foolishly going after a pie which was still in a hot oven. When he sang to

3 The relationship between clowning, the expression of identity, and authorship in this and other early modern texts is explored in Preiss's important book, *passim*.

the household that night, their laughter came not from his usual tendency to stutter, but from his appearance with a face covered with beer froth to take out the heat. Armin ensures that this visual comedy can work for the *reader* by translating it into a clever and memorable simile. We are told that Jack "looked like a man that being asham'd to shew his face had hid it in a dry lome [loam] wall, and pulling it out againe, left all the hayre behinde him" (sig. $D3^{v}$). This *verbal* jest concludes the story because Armin knows it is necessary for the success of a comic routine to supplement the narrative of past events by giving an immediate readerly pleasure, thus making the scene more vivid in the imaginations of those who were not there.

In his second story about Miller, Armin's generalising proverbial conclusion is compromised by a sentiment which is quite different. Having been sent on an errand to deliver a dish of almond butter as a gift, Jack was tricked into taking the wrong road and got covered with mud. Because he was compulsively fastidious, he then washed himself so vigorously that he washed the butter away also. The climax of the story shows Armin delicately balancing feeling and distance. The Gentlewoman of the house, who had sent Miller on the errand, blamed herself for trusting to a rotten staff and told him to go and dry himself, so "Jack stood singing Derries fayre by the fire with a Jack of good beere, and while he dryed himselfe without, wet himselfe within, and there is all the thought he takes" (sig. $D4^{r}$). The conclusion, "Thus cleane fooles light still on beastly bargaines", actually takes the reader beyond didacticism into wit, since it plays on the meaning of clean as both "free from dirt" and "pure", and it plays on "beastly" as also meaning "natural", "instinctual" and "unthinking". But this generalised, proverbial sentence of conclusion is even more deeply qualified by the focus on Miller himself by the fire, drinking his beer and singing his song. Armin's playful antithesis of drying without and wetting within, and his mock criticism that Jack, like the fool he was, did this without a second thought for the cost of what he had done, cannot disguise the affection Armin feels, and wants us to share through holding that image in our mind's eye. Nor does it derail the satisfying emotional trajectory of the narrative which takes us from Jack's initial setting out on his task, through his anxiety about uncleanliness, his bathetic, and pathetic, fall into the mire, and finally to a happy conclusion, in which Jack the fool and "Jack" the tankard are drawn together.

Armin's own interpretations of the wisdom that his anecdotes about fools might offer were determined to a degree by what he thought his audience would

appreciate and, in this respect, his explicit conclusions can offer less than the stories themselves seem to permit. For example, the climactic fourth story of Jack Miller concludes: "thus simple Jack made mirth to all, made the wisest laugh, but to this day gathered little wit to himselfe" (sig. E1^{v}). This particular story's announced nugget of wisdom would appear to be that we can learn things from the fool, though the fool himself cannot benefit in the same way—a sardonic invitation to the reader to dwell upon the limitations of the fool while enjoying the permission that wisdom gives to take pleasure from foolishness. But at the level of textual rhetoric, these anecdotes about fools prove to be complex communications, combining judgement with compassion, distance with sympathy, and acknowledging both the otherness of fools and the folly of us all. They reveal more than they purport to narrate, bearing witness, as Carpenter showed, to things beyond the surface detail—to facts, to attitudes, to prejudices, to the author's sense of his readers' needs. Armin's third and fourth narratives of the "cleane" fool, a fool whose pure nature as fool can be explored without the limiting taxonomy Armin uses for the others ("fat", "lean", "merry", "very"), walk the marches of different genres—comic anecdote, exemplum, and mythopoeia—and consequently offer much more than their official "script" announces. In particular, they explore the ontology of folly beyond both its moral and entertaining functions. They reveal that it is in folly's puzzling relationship to nature, a relationship at once metaphysical and visceral, that folly's closest kin can be discovered.

I would argue that the narrative density of the last two anecdotes evidences their quasi-mythical character, signalling them as light fictions which aspire to comment on the deeper nature of reality and of folly's place in it. How far Armin was himself conscious of doing this, how far he was satisfied with the surface pleasures of his anecdotes or felt his duty had been done through their moralistic or didactic conclusions, is hard to determine, especially because *Foole upon Foole* explicitly promotes other issues: the competing appeals of pleasure and instruction, or the overlap between fools and non-fools. But the narratives themselves reveal a mythopoeic urge which is ubiquitous in Renaissance English writing, and is always potentially there in the writing of *exempla*. We might also remember that Armin was an actor as well as a writer, communicating meaning through deeds, not just words, and this should remind us to look at what his stories *do*, not just at what they say. They do a lot more than what is overtly claimed for them.

The third of the four brief anecdotes about this clean fool recalls Armin's meeting with Jack Miller when Armin was with Lord Chandos's men playing the town of Evesham in Worcestershire, where Miller had been born and was much loved. Like the other stories, it blends diverse meanings into a narrative that the reader can respond to at different levels. The ending is offered as personal testimony to the ways in which the behaviour of a pure fool reverses norms: being whipped by the players for his folly "till the bloud came", Jack took his punishment "laughing; for it was his manner ever to weepe in kindnes, and laugh in extreames, that this is true my eyes were witnesses being then by" (sig. E1^{r}). The punctuation of the original, which separates the last statement about Armin's witness from the rest only by a comma, might give the impression that it is only the strange weeping and laughing that he is anxious to confirm as personal experience. However, the whole episode involved Armin personally, and that final statement properly applies to it all, for the anecdote intensively explores the pure fool's relationship with nature. The behaviour of a pure fool as shown in his emotional responses proves to be the opposite of what one would regard as natural but, as the story shows, nature may reverse its own norms when a fool is present, and this upsets the norms of status and value that apply in a comic exposé of the fool.

At the core of the story is this episode: the players were due to leave for Pershore, their next venue, and Jack had been locked up in a room in the Hart Inn because the townspeople did not want him to leave them and go with the players. "It was then a great frost new begun", we are told, "and the even [Avon, the Welsh *afon* = Severn] was frozen over thinly" (sig. D4^{v}). Despite precautions, Jack got out of the window and, as the players stood watching,

> he got downe very daungerously, and makes no more a doe but boldly ventures over the Haven, which is by the long bridge as I gesse some forty yardes over: tut, hee made nothing of it, but my heart aked to see it, and my eares heard the Ize crackt all the way. (sig. D4^{v})

Jack gets safely over to the players. Armin writes: "I was amazed, and tooke up a brickbat (which there lay by) and threwe it, which no sooner fell upon the Ize but it burst" (sig. D4^{v}). This would be a remarkable episode in any circumstances, but Armin's interest is caught up by something specific: "was not this strange that a foole of thirty yeeres was borne of that Ize which would not indure the fall of a brickbat: yes it was wonderfull me though[t]". What intrigues Armin is that the laws of nature seem to have been suspended to preserve the pure fool. Behind

his question one hears the whisperings of other metaphors, such as the "lightness" of folly, or of other narratives of preservation, such as St Peter walking towards Christ on the sea of Galilee, or of divine forethought, such as Hamlet's near-contemporary claim: "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii.165-66). But Armin leaves unresolved the matter of who or what exactly preserved Jack, and the ontological status of the pure fool remains mysterious. One cannot confidently assert which elements of the story are supposed to bear upon Miller's surprising preservation. Is the power of his love for the players a relevant part of it? Is his single-minded determination? By leaving this enigma, the tale escapes the limitations of *exemplum* to pose questions about how the constituent forces of reality compromise our normal evaluations. Armin allows the principles of material reality to be challenged in a way that demands that metaphysical values inflect the physical realm. The heavy adult fool walks safe; the lighter brickbat sinks to the bottom (and the likely fate of a non-fool walking on the ice is unclear). A similar association between things of extremely different value, though directed in order to debase the numinous below the material, is also present in Hamlet's remark to Horatio, developing a common *memento mori* trope: "Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till he find it stopping a bung-hole?" (V.i.198-200); "Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away" (V.i.208-9). The times of Armin's writing this anecdote (1600, the date of publication, being the latest date), his joining the Chamberlain's Men, and Shakespeare's composition of *Hamlet* are all sufficiently close to suggest at least a current interest in intersections of corporeal and immaterial value expressed through comparing extremes.

Armin also explores the fool's mysterious nature through questions of "identity".[4] Just as the laws of nature, shown in the ice which held Miller up, seem to set aside the pure fool from ordinary humanity, so the story shows a deep tension between, on the one hand, the fool's yearning for an identity other than his own and, on the other, reiterated proofs that he will be forever set apart from men. Armin employs, but also in a sense, implicates, his own identity in order to reveal that of the pure fool (an implication which he also played with on the title page as "Snuffe"). Miller's crossing the ice was prompted by his love of dramatic play, the players generally, and probably Armin himself. More than in many other anecdotes, Armin is actively present as a participant, and is explicitly

4 Preiss focuses on this episode in relation to identity and authorship; see p. 200.

so as a witness whose emotions are sometimes engaged but sometimes hidden. What starts and ends as an apparently dispassionate anecdote describing a fool's strange behaviour is at its mythic core a disquisition on folly, which measures Armin's professional identity against that of the clean fool. They have so much in common and yet so much that separates them. Armin is a player; Miller also loves to act. But while Armin is a member of a nobleman's acting company, the solitary Jack Miller is the patronised fool of the gentleman's house in which he is retained. Armin's theatrical impersonation is calibrated to professional and generic needs; however, as we shall hear, Jack's was obsessive and compulsive: the comedy of his acting apparently came not only from an uncontrollable stutter but also from his desire to play all the parts one after the other, as if Bully Bottom had actually got his way to play the lover, a tyrant, the lady and the lion. Armin was at this time a professional clown, and it seems that Miller was particularly drawn to him: the story says that, of Lord Chandos's men, he loved "especially the clowne, whome he would imbrace with a joyfull spirit, and call him grumball" (sig. $D4^{v}$). But Jack Miller's choice of name for Armin is revealing because it marks a desire for deeper kinship, almost identity, with him: Armin says that Miller would call him Grumball "for so he called *himselfe* in Gentlemen's houses, where he would imitate playes doing all himselfe" (my emphasis).[5] Here we see a version of the long-standing satirical dramatic trope of the "family of fools", though in this case it is pathetically sincere and desirous. Armin's rhetorical stance in this narration ambivalently reveals his sympathy but also his need to distance himself from Miller, for it is at this very moment, where Miller fashions an identity with him as Grumball, that Armin withdraws rhetorically from the anecdote, talking about "the clown" in the third person. In the ensuing middle section of the story, however, this distance is much reduced.

Although we are told Miller was drawn to the players generally, his venture onto the ice was overtly an attempt to join up with *Armin*: "he, I say, seeing them [the players] goe by, creepes through the window, and sayde, I come to thee, Grumball" (sig. $D4^{v}$). That "I say" from Armin is quite revealing, as it rhetorically integrates the narrator's voice with that of Miller, as a previous sen-

5 There is no evidence that Armin called himself Grumball at this time. Although there is ambiguity in the syntax, the context (which goes on to mention Miller's taking on all the parts of a play) suggests that it is Miller's choice to name Armin after himself, giving less foundation for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*'s suggestion that Armin "possibly" used the name Grumball. See the entry by Butler.

tence had also done by presenting Miller's words as *oratio obliqua* within Armin's: "and Jacke swore he would goe all the world with Grumball, that he would". One hears Jack Miller's voice rise up idiomatically *within* Armin's report. But in the end Armin wishes the anecdote to show otherness as well as likeness; his heartache at watching the risk which Miller takes on the ice is a recognisable, intelligent anxiety which marks out his own normality against Miller's extremes of emotion. Armin's sympathy qualifies Miller's desire for identity with him; Grumball passes over the ice indifferent to his own safety, while Armin is the rational man who proceeds to test the ice afterwards. Miller's loving commitment to his Grumball at the start is replaced by Armin's cool observation of the cruelty meted out to Miller by the other players, and his comment on Miller's extraordinary reversal of normal emotional reactions.

On the face of it, the story marks the *limits* of our kinship with the pure fool, however much that fool might want to breach them, and however much we may ourselves sometimes "play the fool"—whether we do so professionally or by our own stupidity. Armin suggests that the clean fool is ontologically different from the normal man, such an extreme version of our own propensities that the difference in degree constitutes a difference in kind, just as the laws of nature were somehow suspended when a fool walked on the ice, but afterwards reasserted themselves so that a brickbat went through it. Perhaps Armin, as a professional clown, was prompted to do this because he wished to assert the limits of his own kinship with the pure fool, and to preserve the distance implicit in his authoritative observation of Miller, thus confirming the superiority expressed by his authorship of *Foole upon Foole*. But it is the fool's love, his endearing need to be at one with a society of friends, that stands out for the reader in an affective contrast to the cooler judgement of Armin and the cruelty of the players. While he reveals hesitation about Jack's identification with him, it is Armin himself who creates this lasting impression for the reader, suggesting in the episode of the ice that nature's favour is not constrained by sane judgements.

However, if a desire to separate the pure fool from other human beings (including those who act as professional fools) can be traced in the third story, the fourth reveals more powerfully that fundamental forces *do* link the natural fool and those who enjoy his folly. Carpenter writes of Jemy Camber, the fat fool:

> By his clumsy and uncomprehending blundering through courtly and city space he confirms the common universalising role of the natural fool, who levels humanity to its simplest and least sophisticated form. This is a common theme throughout Armin's fool tales, and it is notable that in his final Jemy Camber anecdote he reverts to it more explicitly. (p. 22)

This is true also of the final Jack Miller story. Certainly, the author preserves his *and our* distance from the natural fool: firstly, through his right to give a final exposition of the story; secondly, by his claim there that the anecdote has shown the utilitarian value of the natural fool; and thirdly, by his assertion that the fool cannot benefit from the instruction he unknowingly affords: "thus simple Jack made mirth to all, made the wisest laugh, but to this day gathered little wit to himselfe" (sig. $E1^{v}$). As at the end of many anecdotes from *Foole upon Foole*, it appears that a final separation between the natural fool and those who may be his closest kin requires restating. But, even more clearly than in the previous anecdote, the fourth story itself defies that separation, its narrative reaching such a level of thematic and metaphorical density that it speaks *in its own right* of the common ground we share with the natural fool.

I have argued that Armin's stories operate on different levels, as exemplary instruction, as biographical and autobiographical anecdote, as free-standing comic routines, and as myths which reveal more profoundly the ontology of folly in the world. Viewed through the mythic lens, the Jack Miller we encounter in the fourth story becomes the perfect instance, the mythical exemplar, of forces that contend within *every* human and can be seen operating at social, psychological, and physiological levels. This is the form that the universalising impulse identified by Carpenter takes in this story. Certainly, there is a causal relationship between the natural fool and the foolish pleasure he imparts to those who are not natural fools but go to him for entertainment. Furthermore, folly can, as this story amply demonstrates, lead wiser folk into foolish behaviour, expanding itself to incorporate more and more people, as we see claimed in the sermon of Folly in David Lyndsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, which finally embraces audience, nation and the world.[6] This proliferation is a tendency one recognises in other Armin anecdotes, and in other plays and discussions of the period. Thus Thersites, a role that Armin may have played, says in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*:

6 See Lyndsay, ll. 4500-647.

> Agamemnon is a fool to offer to command Achilles; Achilles is a fool to be commanded of Agamemnon; Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool, and Patroclus is a fool positive. (II.iii.61-64)

But I would argue that, notwithstanding that folly is often shown as centrifugal in its *effects*, reaching out to encompass the world, the last Jack Miller story suggests that the true connection between the natural fool and ordinary people, who are his closest kin, is not functional, contingent, consequential, but rather a shared human struggle, an "agōn" in the Greek sense—primal at its most extreme, visceral in its physical effect, and potentially terminal, but always latent in the joyful onrush of life and, indeed, paradoxically constitutive of that joy.

The struggle which the fourth story will explore is not exclusive to it but can be found embedded in the society out of whose anxieties and constraints early modern commentators write about laughter. Henry Peacham in *Thalia's Banquet* writes that the mere sight of Tarleton poking his head through the curtain "Set all the multitude in such a laughter, / They could not hold for scarce an hour after".[7] The key word there for us is "hold". For Peacham, spectator laughter is in tension with constraint, and specifically with self-restraint. The implicit model of audience response to professional foolery offered here by Peacham is of resistance overcome by fooling. But the same model is also implicit in Armin's description of the failings of the natural fool. Miller's only "fault" was a physical characteristic which was uncontrolled, and was uncontrollable:

> What should I saye? his parts were straight and good.
> Onely one fault was grose unto the eye:
> In places before whom so ever he stood,
> He needes must drivvle, had a Lord been by. (sig. D3^{r})

The fool's body commands him beyond any social constraint that might supervene to save him. As in the remark of Peacham about Tarleton's audience, failure of control is also felt by those who watch Jack Miller. It is with this that Armin concludes his opening poem about the fool: "Stut [stutter] he would much, which made the saddest heart, / To laugh out-right they neither will or choos'd" (sig. D3^{r}). Here it seems that fooling (whether artificial or natural) takes the spectator into a realm where self-imposed social constraints are undermined, and we end up closer to the pure fool's subjection to uncontrollable impulses. One

7 See Peacham, Epigram 94, sig. C8^{r} (spelling modernised). Walker cites this in McGavin and Walker, p. 34, but in the service of a different argument.

might characterise this underlying tension in a variety of ways—physiologically, socially, perhaps even psychologically as a conflict between id and ego. But Armin's fourth anecdote of Jack Miller achieves such iterative density of detail on the topic that it comes over as a myth about the nature of reality, which it sees as a struggle between release and constraint, flow and stoppage, movement and stasis. The fool and the fool's spectators are all caught up in this common struggle, and all exhibit the compelling effect of *both* these opposing forces.

The anecdote begins by recounting the usual entertainment that Miller provided, apparently innocently: the song "Derry's Fair", in which one phrase, "brave beggers", brought on his stutter.[8] Armin first emphasises Jack's compulsion to continue in his song against all distractions that might stop him. "The jest was to heare him pronounce brave beggers, and his quallity was after he began his song, no laughing could put him out of it" (sig. Er). Realising this, some wit asked him instead to say "Buy any flawne, pasties, pudding pyes, plumbe pottage, or pescods". Miller's agony ensued when he tried to do so against the stoppage of his stutter. Armin's phrasing is significant: "O it was death to Jack to do it, but like a willing foole he felte it. . . . And ever as he hit on the word he would pat with his finger on his other hand, that more and more it would make a man burst with laughing, almost to see his action: sometime he would bee pronouncing one word while one might go to the doore and come againe" (sig. Er). Paradoxically, the physical movement which Jack uses to try to break through the stoppage and let his communication flow again, the iterative tapping on his resistant hand, if anything signals exactly the reverse, marking the time of this obstruction, as the repeated plosives would have done, and demonstrating physically his agony at being unable to continue with the sentence. It prompts Armin to comment on the length of time this struggle went on, and perhaps significantly, he measures it in terms of movement to a door, a domestic point where obstruction and openness meet. This anecdote has other moments where time is specified, and the reference to a door here is matched by one to windows later, which are also, of course, points of stoppage and of flow.

Armin then extends this opening account of the fool's impasse by looking at the two different effects of laughter on female spectators: one who sought to constrain her laughter for social reasons, and one who gave in to it, laughing uncontrollably at the first woman. Both suffer as a consequence. By choosing

8 This anecdote is also included in *Records of Early English Drama: Herefordshire | Worcestershire*, pp. 392–93.

only female examples, one could say that Armin's account is implicitly gendered in a predictably disparaging way, but I do not believe his point is primarily about of female spectatorship; rather he is, in the casually misogynistic and socially defensive way that his male readers would have expected, using female responses to display the folly latent in the human condition. The first woman is so anxious not to damage her social position by giving way to immoderate laughter that she strains herself to the point where instead she loudly breaks wind. The second woman laughs so much at the first woman's failed attempt to resist social humiliation that she seems to have had a stroke, and falls into a swoon. The episode is full of details which intensify and focus the contending forces of stoppage and flow. The first woman strained against her inward laughter and consequently "gave out" the flatulent evidence of that struggle. By contrast, the second woman goes with the flow of her laughter, so that her systems effectively shut down and she suffers a kind of paralysis. The fart is followed by a mock quest for the culprit, which is then brought to an end when people spy a blush, which the person guilty of the fart cannot hold back, the body betraying her yet again. This then leads the poor woman to assert her married status as a way of defending herself against the laughter of others. Armin's choice of verb is significant: she "stood" upon her marriage. On the other hand, the woman who does give way to her laughter, instead of standing, falls backwards in a swoon; and who breaks her fall?—the fool, "which stood (by fortune) at her back and was her supporter" (sig. E1^{v}). The spectators, at first on a figurative hunt for the person guilty of the fart, then literally rush to open the windows to let air in for the woman in a faint: "downe they burst the windowes for ayre", but, as Armin says, there was little need to do it at a run because the woman did not recover for nine or ten days afterwards.

This is a story of language flowing and language baulked; laughter impeded and laughter freed; the onward passage of time and time halted, either by repeated action or by physical stasis; air stopped, produced, breaking out and allowed to rush in again; physical constraint undermined, and then physical release obstructed; control *and* lack of control both punished by the exigencies of the body; the fool first as initiator of chaos and then as the person stopping a victim from serious injury. Kinetic processes, some physiological, some linguistic, some figurative, some literal, are held in tension with stoppages, obstructions, paralyses. As humans, we appear to be in a constant struggle between letting go and holding in. Human laughter and human impotence appear conjoined in a

paradoxical link between the onrush of life on the one hand, and on the other, obstructions placed in its way by our own human nature as physical or social beings. This anecdote, drawing together the agōn of a natural fool and ordinary spectators, discloses our fundamental human susceptibility to losing control, whether that takes the form of dribbling, stuttering, laughing, falling, flatulence or unconsciousness. It lets us glimpse a common humanity—and although it does not say so explicitly, it mythically adumbrates that mortal moment when the flow of time and breath and language will eventually stop for each of us, not only for the natural fool. Our delight in the show of folly has fear of death as its mirror image.

It is a comic text, of course: the old woman in the swoon eventually recovers; the embarrassed woman still has her marriage to console her; the fool, who has spread so much folly around, in the end *can* be distinguished from the rest of us because he does not benefit as we do from the laughter he inspires, and Armin has still more fools on whom to exercise his literary and professional authority. The message of the text is that we endure, and can continue to take delight in folly *pro tem*. But the final impression is of the all-embracing precariousness of life.

Armin is thought to have played the part of the clown Feste in *Twelfth Night*, ending the play with "The rain it raineth every day". It is a song whose mysterious power lies in its wistful yoking of extremes: the life of man and trivial "toys", adulthood and thievery, dying and drunkenness, the creation and the everyday:

> A great while ago the world begun,
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
> But that's all one, our play is done,
> And we'll strive to please you every day. (V.i.401-4)

It is a far more delicate production than the stories about Jack Miller, but a readiness to see the universal in the local is common to Armin's and Shakespeare's texts. They draw the extremes of humanity together, and they show the fundamental struggle of life accommodated within its pleasures. As they affirm present or future joy, they nuance it with the realisation that things come to an end.

The title page of *Foole upon Foole*, promising the delight of "Six sortes of sottes", is also graced with a woodcut of a horned snail on a leaf. Richard Preiss explains that it was used twice by Edward Allde:

> In 1600, though, it was new, and Allde's name is otherwise absent [from *Foole upon Foole*]; we are consequently unsure whether to read it biographically or thematically. Is it a printer's device or an emblem? (p. 197).

For the potential reader, however, it might well have functioned as an enticement to enter the traditionally comic realm of the snail: a world of visual and literary grotesquerie, which, for hundreds of years, had delighted in yoking together, and playing with the potential similarity and dissimilarity between, a knight and a snail, often shown in battle with each other.[9] To that reader it would have promised the world of the socially marginal, the subversion of norms, and comic extravagance in which opposites of value and status were brought together. After this titillating allusion to comic tradition, however, Armin's actual text moves the reader on to something subtler, and more personally affecting. In the more mythopoeic tales of Jack Miller, Armin first finds natural law mysteriously suspended to preserve the life of the "cleane" fool, and then looks further past the traditions of denigratory play, beyond the overtly comic appeal of his own volume with its professionally exploitative use of fools, to discover that, for all that divides them, there is a profound and natural kinship between such a fool and the wiser spectator or reader.

9 See, for example, the British Library Medieval Manuscripts blog for 26 September 2013; Camille, pp. 31-36 and 105; and the York plays' *Crucifixio Christi*, ll. 117-18, where it serves to put the soldiers crucifying Christ into this marginal comic tradition. The symbolism of the motif has been variously explained in satirical, political and religious terms.

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