THE FOOL AS WISDOM IN *KING LEAR*

by

FAITH JOSEPHINE MYERS
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to the required standard

[redacted]
Edward T. Berry

[redacted]
Michael R. Best

[redacted]
John Money

[redacted]
Nicholas V. Galichenko

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
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Supervisor: *Professor Edward Berry*

ABSTRACT

The Fool in *King Lear* has often been identified with moral wisdom. This view of him has prevailed since Enid Welsford and George Orwell, in the early years of the twentieth century, spoke of the Fool as "impartial critic" and "chorus" respectively. It is upheld in a very recent study by Siegfried Wenzel, who has compared Lear's Fool to the "humble fatuus" of the wise fool tradition. The thesis proposes a contrary reading of the Fool as confused and inconsistent. From the analysis of specific details in the Fool's speeches it attempts to show that Lear's Fool, far from being the assured and reassuring figure seen by many previous critics, has no consistent view of truth to offer, and that his uncertainty is an important crux in the play.

In the first chapter, Lear's Fool is contrasted with Shakespeare's earlier court fools, Touchstone, Feste, and, to a lesser extent, Lavatch. Shakespeare drops hints in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* that his fools are to be seen as voices of wisdom. Touchstone is confident of his own capacity to know and speak truth, and his confidence is justified in particular moments at which he "shoots his wit." Lear's Fool is by contrast diffident, and his speeches unincisive. Touchstone, and especially Feste, sustain and enrich the tradition of the fool as entertainer, and Peter Bryant feels this to detract from their didactic efficacy. This chapter suggests that their wisdom and humour are

mutually enhancing, and that Lear's Fool is not as funny as Touchstone and Feste, not because he is wiser than they are, but because he is less certain of his own wisdom.

Chapter Two discusses the relationship between King Lear and his Fool in the context of the King-Fool opposition in Christian homily. In Christian tradition from St. Paul, the fool is often a figure of paradoxical wisdom, asserting the existence of a clear moral order in which authority rests with God. He often reduces a proud King to his place. Shakespeare tempts us to see Lear as a foolish king reduced to his place by a wise fool, but in *King Lear* the homiletic pattern is radically reshaped. The Fool, faced with the wild experience of the storm, retreats inside proverbial wisdom as a way of protecting himself against the unknown. Lear, meanwhile, probes the void, and asks tragedy's unanswerable questions. The play sees a progressive undermining of the Fool's authority, culminating in his exhausted withdrawal at the end of Act Three.

In Chapter Three the Fool is contrasted with the play's other potential authority, Cordelia. The Fool is caught between worldly and unworldly values, whereas Cordelia is a fool in the unworldly Pauline sense. He is divided: she is whole. However, *King Lear* is a world without overt Christian justification, and its conclusion does not affirm Cordelia's unequivocal stance. It leaves us with the paradox that whilst the Fool and Cordelia are different kinds of fool, Lear's identification of them in his lament for his "poor fool" is appropriate, in that both are to be pitied for unmitigated suffering. Their con-

trasted, yet mutually qualifying, types of folly, deprive the play of an ethical centre.

Examiners: [redacted]

Edward I. Berry

[redacted]

Michael R. Best

[redacted]

John Money

[redacted]

Nicholas V. Galichenko

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INTRODUCTION

Writing her pioneering study of the Fool's social and literary history, first published in 1935, Enid Welsford describes Lear's Fool as the sage-fool of the tradition which she traces back to Medieval society and the Morality plays:

> Shakespeare makes the fullest possible use of the accepted convention that it is the Fool who speaks the truth. The mere appearance of the familiar figure in cap and bells would at once indicate to the audience where the 'punctum indifferens', the impartial critic, the mouthpiece of real sanity, was to be found.[1]

According to Enid Welsford, the Fool represents moral wisdom. She identifies him with a series of abstract virtues: impartiality, sanity, truth. The truth for which she sees him to stand is that of the Christian faith; he exemplifies love and loyalty, the values of the heart above those of the head, those of the spirit above those of the world. St. Paul believed that Christian truth would appear foolish in the world's eyes, though wise in the Eyes of God. In Christ, he said, "God has made foolish the wisdom of this world," and therefore, "if any man seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, so that he may be wise."[2] Welsford describes *King Lear* as "a dedicated reiteration of the wilder paradoxes of the Gospels and of St. Paul."[3] She believes the Pauline conception of the paradoxically wise fool to pass, unadulterated, into Lear's Fool.

Welsford's book has been influential, and her reading of Lear's Fool paved the way for much of the criticism which followed. In his

very recent article, "The Wisdom of the Fool" (1982), Siegfried Wenzel echoes Welsford's conclusions.[4] Wenzel is aware, as is Welsford, of the complexity of fool history. He cites examples of fools who were simply imbeciles, objects of amusement or derision, but, like Welsford, he isolates the wise fool of St. Paul as the paradigm for the Fool in *King Lear*. He points out the existence, in the late Middle Ages, of "a kind of tale whose hero is not simply a foolish person but a domestic fool; his behaviour is not a cause of laughter but rather elicits moral shock and reflection, especially in the audience within his own, fictional world. These," he says, "are the bitter fools who teach wisdom."[5]

Wenzel's examples of this type of wise fool are taken from preacher's handbooks. One of them, which appears in the *Summa praedicantium* (c. 1330s-40s) by the Dominican John Bromyard, tells of a great lord who gave his fool a bauble and commanded him "never to gefe his babull vnto he founde a more fool þan he was." When his master is dying, the fool proposes to him that he should send a carriage containing his worldly goods to his destination in the next world. The suggestion is that his master has elevated false material values above true spiritual values, a mistake for which the fool tells him "I holde þe a more fole þan I am. Haue þou now my babull." The tale concludes:

> þe lorde vnderstode þat wisdom was in his wordis. So forthwith he gafe grete almous and gafe away with his handis a grete parte of his goodis and disposid hym all to Godward and made an holy ende.[6]

As is the pattern in all the stories Wenzel quotes, the fool's intervention leads to his master's enlightenment and repentance. Wenzel's description of this pattern stresses the correspondence between

the fool's wisdom and the lessons of St. Paul. "In the thought of St. Paul, the notion of foolishness is used metaphorically to characterize the absolute difference between faith in Christ and belief in the values of the world." In these exempla, Wenzel continues,

> a literal fool is ironically set against men who are "wise" and powerful in the eyes of the world, but spiritually foolish. The court fool teaches true wisdom by reminding his audience to place God's love above false worldly values.[7]

Wenzel, like Welsford, proposes a direct connection between the wise fool of medieval tradition and the Fool in *King Lear:*

> It is surprising to note how similar the Fool of *King Lear* is to the humble fatuus of the sermon tales . . . he teaches Lear wisdom by leading him to self-understanding, and a significant part of this wisdom lies in Lear's coming to "feel" the plight of the poor: "O! I have ta'en / Too little care of this."[8]

The most widespread fool on the Elizabethan stage was not, however, the didactic fool of medieval tradition, but the entertaining clown. Will Kempe, one of the most popular of Elizabethan clowns, was a famous comic personality, renowned as an acrobat, balladeer, jig-maker and dancer. Kempe is believed to have been a member of Shakespeare's company until around 1600. It is most likely that he played early clown roles like Bottom and Launce. In the Q1 edition of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, which appeared in 1600, the name of Will Kempe occurs in IV.ii in place of that of Dogberry. Kempe's characteristic role, in the words of Charles Felver, was that of "the country rustic who made people laugh at his ignorance, his violation of the language, and his Dogberry-like dullness."[9]

The anonymous Parnassus plays, probably produced at Cambridge between 1598 and 1602, furnish suggestions that sophisticated theatre-goers were tiring of Kempe's low comedy routines. In a scene from the first of the three plays a clown is dragged on stage by means of a rope. The clown asks what he is to do, to which Dromo, his captor, replies:

> Why, what an ass art thou! Dost thou not knowe a playe cannot be without a clowne? Clownes have bene thrust into plays by head and shoulders ever since Kempe could make a scuruey face, and therfore reason thou shouldst be drawne in with a cart rope.[10]

It seems likely that there is in this speech a deliberate echo of Sidney, who in his *A Defence of Poetry*, first published in 1595, complains that contemporary dramatists "thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters with neither decency nor discretion."[11] Dromo proceeds to make several suggestions which are obviously satirical, aimed at the undiscriminating taste of the audience: "Why, if thou canst but drawe thy mouth awrye, laye thy legge ouer thy staffe, sawe a peece of cheese asunder with thy dagger, . . . I warrant thee, theile laughe mightilie." He then departs, and the clown, left alone on stage, grumbles: "This is fine y faith: nowe, when they haue noe bodie to leave on the stage, they bringe mee vp, and which is worse, tell mee not what I shoulde saye."[12]

As this little episode suggests, the Elizabethan clown was not always strictly speaking part of the play, but was used to entertain the audience during gaps in the action. The rope is a satiric device to suggest the unscrupulous manner in which clowns were brought on stage, often with no regard for dramatic decorum or continuity. This clown's

reluctance to take the stage suggests, by ironic contrast, that real clowns showed no such hesitation. Similarly, his lament that he has been given nothing to say satirizes the rapid extemporizing of actual clowns, of which we have no written account, merely the suggestive evidence of stage directions such as "Enter the clown beating a soldier, and exit," in *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, and the undateable quotation from Marlowe's *Faustus*: "Robin. I, a goblet, Ralph; I, a goblet! I scorn you, and you are but a etc."[13]

It would be unfair to a complex and various tradition to regard the satire of the Parnassus plays as the final word on Elizabethan clowning. However, the Elizabethan clown was often purely amusing, and much critical effort has been expended in reconciling this fact with the view that Lear's Fool represents truth. A major contribution in this area has been made by Charles Felver, author of a biography of Robert Armin, the actor who is widely believed to have played the parts of Touchstone, Feste and Lear's Fool. Armin, according to Felver, "surpassed the clownish witticisms and turns of the Tarlton-Kempe tradition," and "originated a new style of witty, songful, intellectual and socially mobile clowning."[14] Felver contends that Shakespeare, under Armin's influence, reacted against a concept of the fool as pure entertainer.

Hamlet's criticism of clowns has been taken by Felver among others as a dig by Shakespeare himself at Kempe and clowns of his fashion, following the example of the Parnassus plays. Hamlet objects that the comic opportunism of clowns detracts from the serious issues of the

play, and appeals to the players not to let this happen:

> And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them—for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered.
> *Hamlet*, III, ii, 38-43[15]

Shakespeare was evidently aware of the criticism that the clown distracted attention from serious questions, though he did not, as Felver supposes, necessarily share Hamlet's disapproval of the clown. Hamlet, himself a university student, might be expected to participate in the intellectual conspiracy against the popular tradition of stage clowning.

H.F. Lippincott is another critic who, like Charles Felver, has attempted to reconcile our knowledge of Elizabethan stage clowns with the idea that Shakespeare's fools represent truth. Lippincott suggests that Shakespeare reacted against the pure comic histrionics of Elizabethan clowns in favour of a morally significant role for the fool drawn from medieval tradition:

> Shakespeare reaches behind this popular British tradition to the medieval view of the royal fool, perhaps most clearly seen in Erasmus' "Letter to Martin Dorp" (1515). . . . "The sort of fools which princes of former times introduced into their courts were there for the express purpose of exposing and thereby correcting certain minor faults through their frank speech." Rather than merely banishing sorrow like Armin's Will Sommer, the principal function of Lear's Fool is clearly that of truthsayer.[16]

Lippincott disagrees with Felver's view of Armin's significance in this development. He quotes an example from one of Armin's plays in which Will Sommers, the famous fool of Henry VIII, is represented in conversation with his master. "Will's relation with Henry," Lippincott says,

"is the entirely acquiescent one—in Armin's words—of banishing the king's sorrow 'many a time.'" The innovation, Lippincott argues, was exclusively Shakespeare's own:

> Like the audience and Armin's kings, Lear expects to be diverted and entertained. But Shakespeare sends Lear a fool of a different sort, one not found in Armin—a speaker of truth—who specifically counters the expectations of both Lear and the audience. And it is clear from Lear's reaction that the Fool plays a new and unwelcome role. Kent's line "this is not altogether fool, my lord" suggests the disparity between the fool who mindlessly entertains and the fool who speaks the truth.[17]

Lippincott does not, however, define the truth which he takes the Fool to represent. It cannot be accepted unquestioningly that he means truth as Welsford defines it because, although many critics agree that the Fool embodies truth, they differ (not always consciously) in understanding the nature of that truth. George Orwell, in his essay "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool," written around 1903, describes Lear's Fool as "a sort of chorus, making the central situation clearer by commenting on it more intelligently than the other characters."[18] Orwell, like Enid Welsford, sees the Fool as an impartial commentator, a "chorus," who is the play's most "intelligent" voice. But whilst Orwell supports Welsford in seeing the Fool as a moral authority, he has a very different notion of the moral he bears.

According to Orwell, the Fool does not regard self-sacrifice as admirable, but as futile. He does not want to make Lear embrace poverty as the way to spiritual enrichment, as Welsford's argument suggests. He attempts instead to make Lear repent that he has made himself poor. In other words, the truth for which the Fool stands is that of worldly

common sense. In conclusion Orwell says: "Shakespeare had a considerable streak of worldliness in him, and if he had been forced to take sides in his own play, his sympathies would probably have lain with the Fool."[19]

This worldly truth is diametrically opposed to the truth for which Welsford believes the Fool to stand, but one equally present in the fool tradition. The word *fool,* used to describe Christians seen through the eyes of the world, was used reciprocally by Christians to condemn the blindness and sinfulness of worldly men. "The fool hath said in his heart *There is* not God."[20] This Biblical sense of *fool* was very much alive in the medieval centuries. St. Bonaventure sees folly as blindness to God:

> Whoever is not enlightened by such brilliance of things created must be blind; whoever is not awakened by their mighty voice must be deaf; whoever fails to discover the First Principle through all these signs must be a fool.[21]

Fool could define a worldly as readily as an unworldly view. It had a commanding position at both ends of the scale.

In keeping with the inherent duality of his name, the wisdom of a wise fool in medieval tradition is as often political as religious. Gower's *Confessio Amantis* provides an example of a fool giving solid political advice by telling his king that it is unwise to surround himself with flatterers.[22] Sometimes a fool's advice is political in explicit opposition to religion. Thomas More's fool, Henry Paterson, reputedly did his best to persuade his master to acknowledge the Royal Supremacy. According to Roper, More's son-in-law and biographer, the fool was puzzled by his master's foolish obstinacy: "'Why, what aileth

him that he will not swear? Wherefore should he stick to swear? I have sworn myself.'"[23] More, however, according to Roper, rejected the fool's wisdom, refused to compromise with the world, and went to his death a religious martyr.

It seems to me that the critical division over what "truth" the Fool represents reflects, not the wrong judgment of either Welsford or Orwell, but the partial judgment of both. As I see Lear's Fool, he does not stand for a singular and unequivocal truth; he is desperately ambiguous, caught between the two views of truth and of folly. John Danby, in his study of the play published in 1949, sees the Fool as a divided figure. His description of the Fool's language clearly recognizes the presence of ambivalence:

> It is not a carefree or happy verse, for all its capering and jauntiness. It is taut with anxiety and bafflement, with distress and bitterness. It is abrupt and bewildered.[24]

Danby, however, treats the Fool only briefly, as part of a larger consideration of Nature in the play. His comments are intuitive, not exhaustive, and he does not attempt to distinguish Lear's Fool from tradition. A vast amount of scholarly endeavour since the start of this century has gone towards establishing Lear's Fool in direct relation to the tradition of the wise fool. By making the Fool my central consideration, and exploring the possibility that in him we see the decline and fall of the wise fool, I hope to argue that the connection between folly and wisdom, so upheld in tradition, is severed in him.

CHAPTER 1

LEAR'S FOOL AND HIS SHAKESPEAREAN PREDECESSORS

> He uses his folly like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit.
> *As You Like It*, V, vi, 106-7[1]

Duke Senior describes Touchstone as a fool who is very definitely "artificial." As distinct from a "natural" fool like Dogberry or Bottom, a rustic fellow who is simply idiotic, Touchstone is presented as a wise court jester who makes use of his profession as a fool to prove that he is really nothing of the kind. Charles Felver believes that the audience agrees with the Duke's characterization: "To the play-goer, Touchstone is clearly an artificial fool, making everyone he meets a victim of his wit."[2] As Felver sees it, Shakespeare, in the character of Touchstone, was trying to educate the Elizabethan audience in a new conception of the fool as a serious moral commentator. Thus, Felver suggests, the Duke's definition is one of a number of hints in the play that Shakespeare means this fool to be taken seriously. It follows and complements the longer description by Jaques in which Shakespeare "devotes more words to developing the special qualities of his [Touchstone's] wear and fooling than any other gentleman in Shakespeare."[3]

Jaques marvels at the existence of a fool who shows paradoxical signs of wisdom:

> When I did hear
> The motley fool thus moral on the time,
> My lungs began to crow like chanticleer
> That fools should be so deep-contemplative.
> *AYL*, II, vii, 28-31

Jaques is surprised that a fool should be capable of moral sentence and contemplation. "Motley" was the official costume of the court fool, which Touchstone shares with Feste and Lear's Fool (*Twelfth Night*, I, v, 55, and *King Lear*, I, iv, 143).[4] The word is repeated five times in Jaques' description. Shakespeare seems to insist on it, perhaps, as Empson speculates, as a way of signalling to his audience that he is representing a court fool, not letting a clown loose on his stage.[5] Besides making a distinction between an extraneous clown and a fool who is part of the play, it seems that Shakespeare wants us to associate the motley fool with moral wisdom. Jaques uses the word "moral" in his description, and in an earlier line from his speech the word "motley" occurs in conjunction with the attributes of literacy and intelligence. Touchstone is reported to have "rail'd" "In good set terms" and is "*yet* a motley fool" (17).

At the slightest encouragement from Duke Senior, Jaques enlarges on his description. He presents Touchstone as an astute observer and cryptic commentator on human behaviour, one who has "cramm'd" his brain "With observation, the which he vents / In mangled forms" (40-2). The encounter has left Jaques himself "ambitious for a motley coat" (43). He goes on to speak enviously of the verbal licence granted to fools to criticize their superiors openly, imagining for himself "as large a charter as the wind, / To blow on whom I please" (48-9). In his role as a self-appointed fool, Jaques will, he asserts, perform the healing duties of a moral surgeon; he will "through and through / Cleanse the foul body of th' infected world, / If they will patiently receive my

medicine" (59-61).

In spite of Felver's sense that Shakespeare is using Jaques' speech to introduce a novel theory about fooling, it is clear that this speech tells us as much about Jaques as about Touchstone. Jaques is a variation on a familiar type of stage figure in Shakespeare's day, the bitter critic who defends his abusive satire by claiming that such attacks as his are the only way to purge the world of its vices. His generous notion of universal reformation has at least a suspicion of pride, as the Duke is quick to see (64). Nowhere does Touchstone claim such an ambitious ideal for his motley profession. He is at times very keen to assert his wisdom, but at other times he is nonchalant about his capacity for moral sentence. After Rosalind has labelled him a dull fool and has sharpened her wit upon him, Touchstone answers simply: "You have said; but whether wisely or not, let the forest judge" (III, ii, 119-20). Jaques' idealism is not altogether consistent with his cynical glee at the prospect of taunting others without (as he thinks) the threat of retaliation: "And they that are most galled with my folly, / They most must laugh" (50-1). He relishes the thought of his listeners' discomfort, and there is in this a streak of malice which distinguishes him from Touchstone, and anticipates the later Shakespearean scourge, Thersites. It is not always the case, as Jaques believes, that men will suffer gladly the criticism of fools. The freedom of speech made the fool's profession a hazardous and unpredictable one. He might be rewarded with praise or money by a good-humoured victim like Viola (*Twlefth Night*, III, i, 44), but it is equally possible he might be

whipped by someone not so receptive to criticism who objected to his words as slanderous. Celia warns Touchstone that if he continues to criticize her father he risks being "whipped for taxation" (slander) (*AYL*, I, ii, 78-9).

Jaques' speech is not purely a characterization of the fool, as Felver believes, but a distinction of fool and satirist. Touchstone and Jaques, two would-be moral commentators, are implicitly contrasted throughout the play, which sees a reciprocal qualifying of the one by the other. In this speech, Jaques' pride is implicitly set against Touchstone's reserve, but later Jaques makes damaging comments on Touchstone's attachment to Audrey, which is motivated by physical desire. At the end of the play, for example, he tells the newly-married Touchstone: "And you to wrangling, for thy loving voyage / Is but for two months victuall'd" (V, iv, 190-91). Touchstone's marriage is by his own admission motivated almost exclusively by sexual appetite, because "man hath his desires" (III, iii, 72). At the conclusion, Jaques reminds us of the limiting singularity of Touchstone's motives, and makes us guarded in our response to him.

It would be distortingly simple to regard any of Shakespeare's fools as infallible voices of wisdom. Nonetheless, Jaques' speech does read like an attempt by Shakespeare to stake out a novel, if tentative, role for the fool as moral authority. Jaques does seem, as Empson wryly comments, "to go rather painstakingly through the theory of the thing."[6] One might imagine an Elizabethan audience, used to clowns of Kempe's ilk, sharing Jaques' curiosity and delight.

In *Twelfth Night* also it seems that Shakespeare goes out of his way to tell the audience what to think of the fool. Felver points to Viola's speech (III, i, 61 ff.), which he calls "an explanation and justification of the new fool's role to an audience accustomed to the older comic clown."[7] Viola's speech begins:

> This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
> And to do that well, craves a kind of wit.
> *TN*, III, i, 61-2[8]

Here again is the concept of the artificial fool, one who "plays" at being a fool whilst being in some way wise. Viola credits Feste with powers of observation like those which Duke Senior finds in Touchstone: "He must observe their mood on whom he jests, / The quality of persons, and the time" (63-4). The fool, she continues, is also a critic of men's faults; he must "like the Haggard, check at every feather / That comes before his eye" (65-6). The predatory image echoes Duke Senior's metaphorical description of Touchstone as a "stalking-horse" (a stalking horse was an object under cover of which a hunter pursued his game).[9] In conclusion, Viola judges the profession of folly to be "As full of labour as a Wise-man's Art," and echoes Feste's own conviction (*TN*, I, v, 34) that wisdom in a seeming fool is more commendable than folly in a supposedly wise man: "For folly that he wisely shows, is fit; / But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit" (68-9).

This technique by which the other characters testify to the fool's wisdom has been seen to operate in *King Lear* also. Empson writes: "The Fool claims that only he can tell Lear the full truth. Kent has the usual line intended to warn the audience that his clown is to be taken

seriously— 'this is not altogether fool, my lord.'"[10] A more recent critic, H.F. Lippincott, has compared Lear's Fool with Touchstone and Feste as a fool who is paradoxically wise: "We do not know for sure whether the Fool is natural or artificial but what is clear is that, like Touchstone and Feste, he is 'wise enough to play the fool.'"[11] A comparison of the first appearance of Touchstone with that of Lear's Fool suggests, however, that Lear's Fool is not as confident or competent a voice of wisdom as his predecessor.

It is tempting to view the scene where he first introduces Touchstone to us as a condensed form of Shakespeare's large-scale transition from foolish clowning to witty fooling. Touchstone appears at first to be simple-minded, illiterate and malapropistic, but he ends up scoring a victory of wit over his 'betters'. Before he has a chance to speak Celia describes him to Rosalind as a "natural" (born fool, half-wit), and makes it clear that she regards him as a simple butt for their jokes: "Nature . . . hath sent this natural for our whetstone; for always the dullness of the fool is the whetstone of the wits" (*AYL*, I, ii, 50-3). Initially he does appear to have a clownish incomprehension of difficult words:

> CELIA: Were you made the messenger?
> TOUCHSTONE: No, by mine honour, but I was bid to come for you.
> *AYL*, I, ii, 56-7

He then challenges them with a riddle about "a certain knight that swore by his honour they were good pancakes, and swore by his honour the mustard was naught." He goes on: "Now I'll stand to it, the pancakes were naught and the mustard was good, and yet was not the knight fore-

sworn" (61-5). Sceptically and mockingly they submit to his enlightenment:

> CELIA: How prove you that in the great heap of your knowledge?
> ROSALIND: Ay, marry, now unmuzzle your wisdom.
> (64-6)

He presents them with a nonsensical challenge: "Swear by your beards that I am a knave" (70). But they have no beards; Touchstone has anticipated their protest and he draws from it, triumphantly, the solution to the riddle:

> By my knavery, if I had it, then I were.
> But if you swear by that that is not, you
> are not forsworn. No more was this knight,
> swearing by his honour, for he never had any.
> (70-3)

Touchstone's sequence has a comic logic, and concludes in a neat moral point. The knight of whom he speaks is a favourite of Duke Frederick, Celia's father. The Duke's court, Touchstone suggests, is morally corrupt (and the signs are that he is right). His comment is astute enough to draw a sharp rebuke from Celia, who tartly defends the Duke (77) before warning Touchstone that he may be whipped for slander. Touchstone is indignant at the suggestion that he should forego his licence to point out the folly of the seemingly wise: "The more pity that fools may not speak wisely what wise men do foolishly" (80-1).

When Lear threatens his Fool with the whip the Fool retorts bitterly:

> Truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipp'd out
> when the Lady's Brach may stand by the fire and stink.
> *King Lear*, I, iv, 109-10[12]

He associates "Truth" with himself, seeming, like Touchstone, to be

confident of his own wisdom. Enid Welsford might point to this speech in justification of her reading of Lear's Fool as "the 'sage fool' who can see and speak the truth with impunity."[13] However, he is not always so self-assured.

When, like Touchstone in his meeting with Celia and Rosalind, Lear's Fool takes it upon himself to teach a lesson in wisdom, we glimpse in his speeches a sense that his traditional formulations have become inadequate:

> FOOL: Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.
> LEAR: Do.
> FOOL: Mark it, Nuncle:
> Have more than thou showest,
> Speak less than thou knowest,
> Lend less than thou owest,
> Ride more than thou goest,
> Learn more than thou trowest,
> Set less than thou throwest;
> Leave thy drink and thy whore,
> And keep in-a-door;
> And thou shalt have more
> Than two tens to a score.
> *Lr.*, I, iv, 113-25

The possibility of concluding this list of maxims with a neat didactic point is dissipated by the apparent nonsensicality of the formula "to have more than two tens to a score." It is possible that in these lines the Fool is referring to the financial interest which a man who upheld these expedient maxims would reap from his actions, though Tilley recognizes no such proverbial meaning in common use in Shakespeare's time.[14] The obfuscatory nature of the Fool's conclusion emerges more sharply by comparison with Florio's rhymed proverbs which Kenneth Muir identifies as a possible source of these of the Fool: "The bottom of your purse of heart, / To anie man do not empart. / Do not giue your selfe to plaie, /

Vnles you purpose to decaie . . . / Shun wine, dice, and lechery, / Else will you come to beggary."[15] Here, each pair of rhymed lines contains a maxim structured on the simple formula "Do not . . . Or else," whose power is reinforced by the rhymed words which set the vice against its result—plaie/decaie, lechery/beggary. This consistency of structure makes these lines didactically incisive; the riddling conclusion to the Fool's lines is by contrast frustratingly unincisive.

The Fool starts out confidently enough, appealing for Lear's attention with the claim that he has something to "teach," but instead of reaching a comic climax and moral resolution the Fool's lines peter out in riddle. This is the reverse process from the Touchstone episode, where the fool poses a problem, unravels it in steps, and finally comes clear, to the discomfort of his listeners. Compared with the insistently stressed and rhymed lines spoken by the Fool, the pace of Touchstone's exposition is leisurely, almost perambulatory. Unlike the Fool, who rushes out his utterance entire, Touchstone awaits the response of his listeners at each stage, which suggests his enjoyment at being able to command attention and his confidence that he is in control of the proceedings.

The Fool issues a series of maxims, each in a single line with the same simple syntactic construction repeated in each line. By contrast with Touchstone's drawing out of his proof, leading with almost pedantic logic to his concluding point, the economy of the Fool's passage is in places too severe, damaging to the point. "Learn more than thou trowest," for example, is artificially compressed and inverted when the normal

construction would be "Do not believe all you hear." The two-stress lines of the Fool's speech create a jangly rhythm which together with the emphatic rhyme—aaaaaabbbb—gives the lines a self-perpetuating quality, as if the voice which speaks them is caught in habitual utterances which the speaker feels have become stale.

This speech by the Fool has a self-thwarting quality which betrays a sense of misgiving about his role as a voice of wisdom. Touchstone's execution of his tale shows great self-assurance. From the reaction of his audience this self-assurance would seem to be justified; Celia's defensive recoil shows that his comment stings, and she is eventually provoked to the reluctant admission that Touchstone "sayest true"—her father's suppression of criticism has led to a "great show" of folly in the court (*AYL*, I, ii, 82-4). The Fool's audience is puzzled by his sententious utterance. Kent objects that it makes no sense—"This is nothing, Fool"—to which the Fool retorts:

> Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer; you gave me nothing for't.
> *Lr.*, I, iv, 126-8

There are several ways of playing this speech. "You can expect my words to have as much substance as those of an unpaid lawyer," the Fool seems to say. It was a common trick of fools to beg money in reward for their gags; perhaps the Fool is saying, "Give me money and I'll make better sense." He might be imagined shrugging off his confused little speech in the traditional histrionic gesture of begging for a tip. If so, his attempt falls flat-faced, for Kent does not tip him. Alternatively, the Fool might be saying that Kent, whom he takes to be the servant Caius,

is in no position to ask for clarification from a fool whose social status is not appreciably below his own. Thus, he is saying to Kent, "I'm not accountable to *you*." This could be said as a good-humoured joke, but it could also be said defensively. It may be that the Fool is not jesting at all, but that he is genuinely resentful about being asked to account for his speech. He might be touchy about being criticized, betraying an inner vulnerability. Whether this speech is played as a gag or joke, or as the Fool bitterly smarting under the knowledge of his own inefficiency, it does not amount to a defence or elucidation of his former speech.

In II, iv, the Fool again takes up the role of schoolmaster, and here his adopted pupil is Kent. When he finds Kent in the stocks the Fool's first response is to imply that Kent's loyalty to Lear is the foolish behaviour of a man who is blind to his own self-interest. "We'll set thee to school to an ant," he says, "to teach thee there's no labouring i' th' winter" (65-6). The example of the expedient ant has the effect of his earlier proverb "smiling as the wind sits" (I, iv, 98); by referring to a body of universal and verifiable wisdom it gives the Fool's words the force of objective truth. The Fool continues: "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after" (69-72). The example of the wheel reinforces that of the ant in drawing on the verifiable norms of nature—this time the force of gravity—to suggest that Kent has acted against the dictates of evident sense. However, after the irrefragable assurance of the preceding lines

the Fool suddenly and surprisingly retracts what he has said—"I would have none but knaves follow it, since a Fool gives it" (73-4)—and the verselet which follows this strange disclaimer has puzzled critics.

In it, the Fool sets his own loyalty to Lear against the disloyalty of "That sir which serves and seeks for gain," who, when "it begins to rain" will "leave [his master] in the storm." He shows a hint of moral distaste for such a "sir" whose loyalty is dictated by his own gain—a surprising twist from the preceding proverbs which emphasized loyalty as reprehensibly foolish. By filling in gaps which the Fool leaves open this ambiguity could be resolved, taking the Fool to mean that, according to the example of nature, loyalty is simply foolish, but that it is nonetheless consistent with the moral needs of men. Not that all men see this; great (titled) men will, the Fool implies, desert their masters in times of hardship, whereas lesser men will be faithful. This conviction would support a long-standing Christian sense that ordinary people are often morally more sound than their social superiors ("Out of the mouths of very babes, O Lord").

However, Kent's presence on the stage casts doubt on the adequacy of this proverbial formulation, since Kent is a "sir" whose loyalty to Lear is palpably exemplified by his sitting in the stocks as the Fool delivers these lines. The Fool, because of Kent's disguise, is not aware of this, but the audience is. It is possible that the Fool is thinking of Kent, a "sir" who, as far as he knows, has packed his bags and deserted Lear. Kent's presence is thus ironic at the Fool's expense. It deprives the Fool's opposition between the self-seeking sir and the

faithful fool of a justifying context. The Fool's speech thus reads like proverbial rhetoric cut loose from its mooring.

The verselet concludes with curious ambiguity:

> But I will tarry; the Fool will stay,
> And let the wise man fly:
> The knave turns Fool that runs away;
> The Fool no knave, perdy.
> *Lr.*, II, iv, 79-82

As in the schoolmaster speech to Lear, the final two lines of this speech have a chop-logic. In Renaissance English "knave" might mean simply "man," or more colloquially "fellow," and could be synonymous with "fool" when "fool" had its Biblical and medieval sense of "everyman in the eye of God."[16] Taking up the sense of "knave" as "fellow" the first line could mean "The fellow who runs away is a fool," but the second line seems to rely upon our understanding of a derogatory sense for "knave." The *O.E.D.* identifies such a usage of "knave," to mean "false, deceitful."[17] If this sense of "knave" is the intended one the first line sounds strange retrospectively: "the false man who runs away is a fool." This difficulty can be partly resolved by expanding the sense—the man who runs away would be false (combining both senses of "knave") and a fool also, since it is foolish to run away: at least the fool who stayed would not be false (but would he not be a fool?). The lines seem to offer no way out of the loyalty-folly conundrum.

Dr. Johnson, in the drive to tidy up the text of *King Lear* characteristic of his century, amended the Fool's lines to eliminate the logical lacuna:

> The fool turns knave who runs away;
> The knave no fool, perdy.[18]

The fool who runs away is a knave (a bad sort), whereas the knave (fellow) who stays is no fool. Although we still have to recognize a transition in meaning for "knave," the lines equate folly with infidelity, seeing fidelity conversely as wisdom; "fool" is antithetically opposed to "no fool." Empson writes of Johnson's revision: "Dr. Johnson tried to amend this into a Erasmus idea, that the knavish timeserver would be fooled at the final Judgement."[19] Collier, a later editor who was similarly baffled by these lines, adopted Johnson's alteration, and even went so far as to claim that the original reading was corrupt: "In the old editions the very contrary of what Shakespeare intended is expressed."[20] Johnson's reading has been followed by many critics, even in glosses on the unamended lines. Clarke, for example, writes: "Shakespeare, in his own noble philosophy, here affirms that the cunning rogue who deserts his benefactor in the time of reverse, from motives of prudence, shows himself fool as well as knave, moral miscalculator as well as moral coward."[21] More recently Charles Felver has taken these lines as evidence that the Fool in *King Lear* shows greater moral assurance than previous Shakespearean fools like Touchstone and Feste:

> For the first time in Shakespeare's development of the fool there is a hint that the improvident folly of the fool in following for love instead of gain shares a kinship with the Christian folly of doing what is unwise in the eyes of the world for righteousness rather than gain.[22]

However, in the absence of solid evidence that the text is faulty it seems to me that these readings can have no credibility, though they do testify to the puzzling nature of the Fool's utterance. The difficulty of the original lines complicates the moral issue, leaving us asking,

"What is folly" What is knavery?" Johnson's amendment in resolving the ambiguity of the original lines creates a fool who is more confident and consistent than the diffident and uncertain Fool created by Shakespeare.

Enid Welsford points out that the distinction between "knave" and "fool" was anyway a fuzzy one:

> "Fool" and "knave" were constantly coupled together, but not always in quite the same way . . . sometimes they were synonyms, sometimes emphasis was laid on the distinction between them.[23]

In the Fool's curious couplet the words are neither synonymous nor asynonymous; they will not settle into a definite relationship. They compound and defamiliarize one another's meanings. No doubt the distinction was a fuzzy one, but it is one which Lavatch, the court fool in *All's Well That Ends Well*, makes with perfect clarity. In response to Lafew's question, "Whether dost thou profess thyself—a knave or a fool?" Lavatch replies, "A fool, sir, at a woman's service, and a knave at a man's," and he enlarges on the opposition:

> I would cozen the man of his wife and do his service . . . And I would give his wife my bauble, sir, to do her service.
> *AWW*, IV, v, 25-8[24]

"Knave" here clearly means deceiver, trickster (cozener), whereas "fool" means lecher, though the sexuality it defines is curiously innocent because the fool imagines himself as the obliging servant of female lust. The opposition is stengthened by the fact that beneath Lavatch's bawdy suggestion of giving the wife his bauble lies the motif of the lover as fool, meek and submissive to the woman, his mistress. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, for example, Valentine characterizes Proteus as a foolish

servant of love: "Love is your master, for he masters you; / And he that is so yoked by a fool / Methinks should not be chronicled for wise" (I, i, 39-41).[25] The two words are rigidly asynonymous: "knave" a term of moral reproach because it implies the agent's responsibility for his ill deeds, "fool" amoral or pre-moral because it denotes an inevitable and natural subservience.

Lavatch represents a complex middle case between the confident and comic Touchstone and the diffident and pathetic Fool in *King Lear*. More melancholy and abrasive than Touchstone, he nonetheless thinks highly of his own powers of perception, a combination of qualities recognized in Lafew's description of him as "A shrewd knave and an unhappy" (IV, v, 60). Touchstone is a self-assured fool whom the other characters respect for his "wit." Feste, not as concerned as Touchstone to claim wisdom for himself, hopes at least that he is as wise as those who have pretensions to wisdom:

> Wit, and't be thy will, put me into good fooling! Those wits that think they have thee, do very oft prove fools: and I that am sure I lack thee, may pass for a wise man.
>
> *TN*, I, v, 30-4

Lavatch at one point claims to be a "prophet" who speaks the "truth" (*AWW*, I, iii, 56), though given his frequent tartness this may be said self-mockingly. At any rate, he is not looked to with the respect Duke Senior shows for Touchstone. The equation of the fool with wisdom, made explicit if only at moments in the comedies, is glanced at by the Countess of Rossillion as the fond illusion of a youthful past:

> To be young again, if we could, I will be a fool
> in question, hoping to be the wiser by your answer.
> *AWW,* II, ii, 37-8

Lavatch is a fool whom one may "hope," but cannot expect, to be wise. However, his neat antithesis of "knave" and "fool," compared to the dizzying destabilization of these words in the Fool's couplet, makes him less confused and confusing than Lear's Fool.

An article by Peter Bryant provides an implicit challenge to the large volume of modern scholarship which has been concerned with Shakespeare's fools as voices of wisdom. Bryant describes the Fool's presence in *King Lear* as "a comic and a theatrical one—like Touchstone's or Feste's." He goes on:

> We know him for his embodiment of what Santayana has called "the pure histrionic impulse" of the clown. His quips, parables, rhymes, and riddles draw attention to his superabundant energy, his character as performer par excellence.[26]

Whilst this assessment is radically opposed to my understanding of Lear's Fool, it has some justification for Touchstone and Feste. In their speeches, word play is indulged in largely or even purely for its entertainment value, to satisfy the "histrionic impulse" and "superabundant energy" which Bryant describes. However, there is nothing playful about the shocks of ambiguity in the speeches of Lear's Fool.

This claim can be verified by comparing a pun by Touchstone on the word "natural" with a pun by Lear's Fool on the subject of nature. Touchstone describes Corin, a country farmer, as "a natural philosopher" (*AYL,* III, ii, 31), where "natural" means both "showing inborn aptitude" and "idiotic." Touchstone favours the second meaning, as a joke at Corin's expense. Corin, Touchstone suggests, has no wit by either

nature or art. The pun is not so much deadly serious as a joke Touchstone cannot resist making for its own sake. Touchstone proceeds to challenge Corin about the virtues of his peasant lifestyle, and their subsequent debate upholds rather than resolves the paradox implicit in the pun. Touchstone at one point instructs the stubborn peasant to "Learn of the wise" (64), meaning himself, but Corin's imperturbable common sense makes him game in his own defence, and he resigns the battle with a dig at Touchstone's sophistication: "You have too courtly a wit for me; I'll rest" (68). Retrospectively, Touchstone's pun appears even more ephemeral and opportunist.

The following pun by Lear's Fool registers an awareness of painful incongruities in the moral world which suggests a fearful apprehension in their speaker:

> FOOL: Shalt see thy other daughter will use thee kindly; for though she's as like this as a crab's like an apple, yet I can tell what I can tell.
> LEAR: What canst tell, boy?
> FOOL: She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab.
> *Lr.*, I, v, 14-18

"Kindly" can mean "generously" or "in the same kind" (in the manner of Goneril, which is to say, "unkindly"). The Fool unravels his riddle to give the word the second meaning—Regan will taste as like Goneril as a crab does to a crab—but the other meaning of "kindly," having been coaxed out of the word, lingers as a covert criticism of the cruelty of Lear's daughters. Also, since "kind" is etymologically related to "kin," it points to the unnaturalness of daughters who are "unkind" to their father. Hamlet plays self-laceratingly on the same word when remarking on the incongruity of his relationship with Claudius (*Hæm.*,

I, ii, 65), and his pun, like that of Lear's Fool, reveals not a confident sense of control but a recognition of unsettling realities in the moral world in the face of which he feels vulnerable.

Touchstone's pun on "natural" is happily self-congratulatory; the fool is flattering his own wit, and it does not matter whether Corin realizes the joke or not (indeed it might be a more skilful joke if he did not). Lear's Fool affects a sly and secretive knowledge—"I can tell what I can tell"—though seemingly only to attract Lear's attention, for the comment he then makes is ominously clear—a crab is a crab, a Regan is a Goneril. He is not, like Touchstone, seeking to prove his own cleverness, but is giving vent to his fear and desperation. This is not jovial word play for its own sake. The Fool is disturbed by the bitter knowledge that his pun corresponds with a horrifying reality at the heart of nature.

To call Touchstone's pun, in distinction to that of Lear's Fool, comic, is not to deny that it has a serious implication in its dramatic context. The duality of meaning extends the play's exploration of "nature," more specifically of the relationship between nature and nurture: is the country peasant naturally wise or an unnurtured idiot? Touchstone decides the latter, and although his decision does not close the issue for the audience, it presses the audience to share the joke and thereby to put aside any complicating seriousness. The potentially unsettling aspect of duality is incidental as far as the comic fool is concerned. The puns of Lear's Fool pin himself, not just his listener, to the wall. Touchstone's manipulation of words for his own enjoyment

and to impress and amuse his listeners seems enviously light-hearted beside the fragile cringing of Lear's Fool at the gap between the two senses of "kindly."

Thus the comic pun, though it may make a serious moral comment, is delivered with a joy at its own cleverness which mutes its moral force. Walter Kaiser defines the paradoxically wise fool as one who conveys his wisdom through the medium of laughter:

> He manages to present truth by means of comedy, claiming to be wise when he laughs and to teach us wisdom when he causes laughter in us.[27]

In the speeches of Touchstone and Feste the balance between wisdom and comedy is usually finely achieved, as Kaiser's description suggests, though there are moments when the balance tips over into comedy.

At the start of *Twelfth Night*, III, i, Feste replies to Viola's question, "Dost thou live by the tabor?",

> No, sir. I do live by the church, for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church. (4-5)

Literal-mindedness, a defining quality of clowns like Will Kempe, is here indulged in by Feste, a sophisticated court jester. The context provides an explanation for this. Feste has just met Viola, a virtual stranger to him, and she is enquiring about his abode and profession: "Art not thou the Lady Olivia's fool?" (32). It was a mark of the fool's profession to play on words, often obliquely, for the purpose of entertaining. Feste, it seems, sees the opportunity for some diverting word play, in order to prove himself before Viola as the Lady Olivia's "corrupter of words" (37).

As their meeting progresses, it becomes even harder to discern the wisdom behind the humour. When Feste recognizes that words are equivocal he comically gets hold of the wrong end of the stick:

> I would my sister had no name . . . her name's a word, and to dally with that word might make my sister wanton. But indeed words are very rascals since bonds disgraced them.
>
> *TN*, III, i, 16-20

Feste attributes the potential lack of correspondence between word and deed to the fickleness of language, an awareness which comically by-passes the fickleness of action. His concern that a word might make his sister wanton forestalls the recognition that she may *be* wanton. Even when Feste hits on the causality "bonds . . . disgrace language" (our actions falsify our oaths) he reserves his reproach, illogically, for "rascal words." In his attempt to sustain his little turn before Viola, Feste jokingly inverts what is for Lear's Fool a fearful recognition: that reality (not just language) is deceitful.

Bryant points out that the fool was a routine character in popular entertainment and pastime. He notes that the playwright Nashe records how "the people began exceedingly to laugh when Tarlton first peeped out his head."[28] (Tarlton was probably the most famous of Elizabethan stage clowns; his popularity exceeded even that of Will Kempe.) It was not only on stage however that fools were regarded as entertainers; courts and noble households kept fools for the same purpose. One piece of evidence for this is the anonymous *Epytaphype of Lobe, the Kynges Foole*, which probably refers to a fool of Henry VIII:

> The losse of the, Lobe maketh manye sorye,
> Though ytt be not alle for thyn own sake,

> Butt the kyng and the queene thou madst so merye,
> With the many good pastimes that thou dydes make.[29]

Felver and Lippincott have suggested that Shakespeare abandoned the tradition of the fool as comedian and entertainer, and created Touchstone and Feste as wise fools rather than foolish clowns. Their criticism, however, as Bryant implies, overlooks the extent to which, in these two fools, Shakespeare continued and enhanced the tradition of the fool as entertainer.

Duke Senior is keen to emphasize Touchstone's wisdom, but Touchstone is described to the play's other Duke, Frederick, as "The roynish clown at whom so oft / Your grace was wont to laugh" (*ALY*, II, ii, 8-9). His disappearance is seen as the loss of a valuable entertainer. Hamlet recalls the sheer fun which Yorick, the old king's jester, brought to the court of Denmark,—his "gibes, gambols, songs, flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar" (*Ham.*, V, i, 183-5). The emphasis on the fool as comedian survives in Lavatch. The Countess, for all her scepticism about the fool's wisdom, is receptive to the amusement he can provide:

> I play the noble housewife with the time,
> To entertain it so merrily with a fool.
> *AWW*, II, ii, 54-5

The role of the fool as entertainer is developed most completely and delightfully in Feste. Sir Andrew Aguecheek speaks with envious admiration of this fool's capacity for entertainment:

> I had rather than forty shillings . . .
> I had so sweet a breath to sing, as the
> fool has. In sooth, thou wast in very
> gracious fooling last night, when thou
> spok'st of Pigrogromitus, of the Vapians

> passing the equinoctial of Queubus: 'twas very good, i' faith. I sent thee sixpence for thy leman.
>
> *TN*, II, iii, 19-26

Robert Armin, who most probably played the part of Feste in the first performances of *Twelfth Night* was, according to his biographer, a brilliant mimic and skilled singer.[30] Shakespeare, Felver suggests, conceived and created the character of Feste with the particular talents of the new fool in mind. "Pigrogromitus" sounds like a burlesque invention of Feste's, and the mock-scholastic language of "Vapians," "equinoctial," "Queubus," suggests that perhaps Feste was indulging in a long tradition whereby fools mocked the language of academics. Feste's talent for impersonation is seen directly later in the play when he assumes the role of Sir Topas the Curate and parodies the language of churchmen (*TN*, IV, ii). When praised for his acting of Sir Topas, he takes it as a compliment on his versatility: "I am for all waters" (65).

Sir Andrew speaks also of Feste's "sweet breath," and his musical talents are exceptional among Shakespeare's fools. In II, ii, 40-45, he sings at the request of Sir Toby a light-hearted song of "Present mirth." In the following scene he entertains Duke Orsino in a very different tone with a self-indulgent lament (*TN*, II, iv, 51-66). In both cases he is given money in appreciation of his services. His response to the Duke's gratitude is significant:

> DUKE: There's for thy pains.
> FESTE: No pains, sir. I take pleasure in singing, sir.
> (67-8)

Feste here admits an independence from the substance of his songs (a painful song nonetheless gives him pleasure in singing it), which

distinguishes him from Lear's Fool, who enjoys no such happy detachment from his own words, but harps on the one theme of Lear's plight with tortuous insistence. Lear's Fool is not an entertainer who, like Feste, will perform on request a song of his patron's choice. He has none of this fool's gaiety and charm, his capacity to provide sheer amusement or relief. Far from providing a distraction from care, Lear's Fool, whom his master calls "A pestilent gall to me" (*Lr.*, I, iv, 112), is an incessant reminder of painful realities.

Bryant's emphasis on Shakespeare's fools as entertainers is a valuable corrective, in the cases of Touchstone and Feste, to Felver's reading of them simply as voices of moral wisdom. They are funny, and the humour they create is not always strictly justified in terms of its moral substance. But they are also undeniably, if irregularly, pithy and shrewd. Critics have been preoccupied with showing Touchstone and Feste to be either moral commentators or comic entertainers, and have, I think, missed the point that the wisdom and humour can be mutually enhancing. The clowning and entertaining give an unpredictability to the moments of wisdom which makes these moments, when they come, all the more impressive. Flashes of merriment are punctuated by flashes of wit, in an alliance of levity and seriousness by which the seriousness is intensified.

Thus it would not follow that Lear's Fool, because less comic than Touchstone and Feste, is necessarily wiser than they are. Touchstone's moments of "wit," though interspersed with moments of witless humour, are often more pungent than the speeches in which Lear's serious Fool

purports to instruct his audience. The Fool may neglect the fool's duty of entertaining because he feels less secure than his Shakespearean brethren about his capacity for moral sentence. Touchstone and Feste switch from humour to wisdom with ease; Lear's Fool, uneasy about his own wisdom, has no such leisure for humour. Where Touchstone and Feste are confident, he is diffident. Where they are funny, he is bitter and confused. His occasional flashes of lucidity betray fear and vulnerability, not the happy self-assurance we associate with Touchstone. They draw attention, not to the Fool's wisdom, but to the frightening nature of things.

CHAPTER 2

THE DWINDLING OF THE FOOL BEFORE TRAGEDY

According to a widespread critical view, the relationship between Lear and the Fool corresponds to a homiletic pattern in which Lear, the foolish king, learns a lesson in the wisdom of humility from his fool. Maynard Mack proposes a reliance on historical archetype when speaking of possible unacknowledged sources for *King Lear:*

> It is difficult to account for what Shakespeare made of the old play apart from the influence of some such governing archetypal theme as that embodied in folk and medieval renderings of the abasement of the proud king.[1]

Mack identifies the governing conception of the Lear-Fool relationship in lines which he quotes from the Magnificat: "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek."[2] The perception of marked parallels with the abasement theme in Christian homily has led to a widespread view that Lear figuratively becomes his Fool, and that this is why the Fool, having lost his dramatic purpose, disappears at the end of Act Three. Enid Welsford describes the movement of the King-Fool relationship as "the investing of the king with motley: the crowning and apotheosis of the Fool."[3] Empson is more explicit about the Fool's dramatic redundance: "The Fool has not been required after the storm scenes, because the mad king has taken over his functions completely."[4]

I want to argue that the homiletic echoes are definite, but distorted. In the world of *King Lear* the normative values which it is the

purpose of homily to affirm are broken down and challenged, and in this world the Fool's wisdom is weighed in the balance, set against realities in heaven and earth undreamt of in its philosophy. As the previous chapter attempted to show, the Fool has no consistent view of truth to offer. He strives for consistency; he cannot survive as a wise fool without it. Yet he is defeated by contradictions which exceed his powers of resolution. The Lear-Fool relationship sees, not the triumph, but the defeat of the fool. Lear survives because he dares peer into the unfathomable depths of the unknown.

The archetypal proud king of Christian tradition is, of course, Nebuchadnezzar. He is a fool in the common Old Testament sense of the word, a denier of God. Medieval theological works reiterate the basic fact that all sin as a rejection of God is folly. *Dixit insipiens in corde suo: non est Deus* runs the line in Medieval Psalters (xiv and liii), translated in the fifteenth century as "þe vnwise man seide in his herte: þer is not God."[5] Lydgate supports this identification of the fool: "Chyffe of folys, men yn bokys redythe / Ys he that nowther god lovethe nor dredethe."[6] The original fool in this sense was Satan, and pride in the Middle Ages was accounted the greatest of theological sins.

Early in the fifteenth century, however, this meaning of *fool* came into contact with the movement known as the *devotio moderna*, which in Walter Kaiser's words "gave the humble fool his most articulate theological justification."[7] This movement was associated with two men in particular, Thomas à Kempis in his *Imitatio Christi* and Nicholas of

Cusa in *De docta ignorantia*. Both men attended the school at Deventer which Erasmus was later to attend: the "holy simplicity" of Kempis, the "learned ignorance" of Cusa, and the "wise fool" of Erasmus are all ideologically derived from the philosophy of Christ taught in Deventer, a philosophy which "opposed the prevalent scholastic learning and exalted a simple Christianity and a way of life that imitated the foolishness of Christ."[8]

In *King Lear* it seems that Shakespeare might have created a peculiar fusion of the two senses of *fool* derived from medieval Christianity. Lear, like Nebuchadnezzar, is a proud king, who will submit to no authority higher than his royal self. He is abased by a fool who seems paradoxically wise. In the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar is addressed by a voice from heaven telling him that for his pride he will suffer a sharp reminder of God's power on earth:

> And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and several times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.[9]

The Fool's harsh rebuke to Lear spoken shortly after his first appearance in the play fits neatly into the archetypal pattern established by such precedents in which the proud king is abased by a voice of incontrovertible authority:

> When thou clovest thy crown i'th'middle,
> and gav'st away both parts, thou bor'st
> thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt: thou
> hadst little wit in thy bald crown when
> thou gav'st thy golden one away.
>
> *Lr.*, I, iv, 156-60

The Fool gains moral authority from the closeness of his language to a

tradition of such language for abasing a proud king. Nebuchadnezzar's creatural vulnerability is brought home to him as emphasis of the folly of his pride; he is made to dwell with beasts and to eat grass. In the Fool's speech the series of concrete nouns—"ass," "back," "dirt," "crown" (Lear's "bald" crown is opposed to his "golden crown"),—submits Lear's illusions of kingly inviolability to bitter mockery by emphasizing the creatural vulnerability which the king shares with other men. The Fool's analogy which sees Lear bearing an ass on his back deflates pretensions of kingly dignity as does the description of Nebuchadnezzar being passed over by the beasts of the field.

What the Fool is actually telling Lear, however, is something different, or at least more complex, than what God is telling Nebuchadnezzar. Kenneth Muir proposes a more direct source for the Fool's words in "Aesop's fable of the man, his two sons, and the ass."[10] In this fable, the erring father is an example, not of pride, but of self-neglect. In giving his land and wealth to his children, he has been foolishly unworldly. His bearing of an ass on his back is the culminating absurdity of his sacrifice of self-interest. The suggestion that Lear has over-humbled himself conflicts with the implications of pride in the verbs "clovest," "bor'st," "gav'st," and complicates the relation to the Nebuchadnezzar archetype.

The concrete nouns of the Fool's speech are comfortingly palpable after the preponderance of hugely gesturing abstractions in the opening scene of the play, where Lear's sense of invulnerability is reflected in the unreflecting confidence with which he employs the royal "we" in

a series of abstract formulations ("our fast intent," "our largest bounty," "we have this hour a constant will"). It is this sense of invulnerability which leads Lear to take upon himself the authority of the gods in cursing Cordelia, marshalling against her "the sacred radiance of the sun," "the mysteries of Hecate and the night," and "all the operations of the orbs / From whom we do exist and cease to be" (108-11).

Nebuchadnezzar confuses his own authority with that of God, but God has supreme power to punish his act of hubris. Immediately after He has threatened Nebuchadnezzar His threat is implemented:

> The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles *feathers*, and his nails like birds' claws.[11]

The lowest form of humiliation is reserved for the highest form of pride. The technique of repetition ("they shall drive thee . . . he was driven, they shall make thee to eat . . . he did eat") testifies to the omnipotence of God.

Lear's assumption of supernatural authority in cursing Cordelia parallels the blasphemous pride of Nebuchadnezzar, but in *King Lear* the gods are notoriously inscrutable. The Fool, whom we are initially tempted to see as a moral authority, proves finally unreliable. His harsh jibe quoted above, reproaching Lear as the culpable agent, sorts incongruously with a comment a few lines further on which identifies the ferocious cruelty of Lear's daughters as the cause of upheaval:

> For you know, Nuncle,
> The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,
> That it's had it head bit off by it young.
> So out went the candle, and we were left darkling.
> *Lr.*, I, iv, 212-15

In the previous analogy the verbs "clovest," "gav'st," and "bor'st," reinforce one another to specify Lear's wilful folly as responsible for the situation. This analogy, however, sees Lear as a pathetic victim whose over-indulgent goodness has been preyed upon by his rapacious daughter. The switch from harsh criticism to warm sympathy is surprising. It suggests conflicting feelings in the Fool which he is unable to reconcile. As a suggestion of the Fool's bewilderment, this long-range contradiction is enhanced by a local ambiguity. The emotional impact of this speech is to stress the horrific cruelty of Lear's daughters. Rationally, however, the Fool could be said to blame the over-indulgent parent, the hedge-sparrow who has fed its monstrous child for "so long" (too long?), and whose excessive devotion has worked against its own interests. The Fool's contradictory and fragmentary utterances are not susceptible of the neat moral point of a homily. His sense of being in the dark is the opposite of what we would expect of an enlightened fool.

The transmuted echoes of the Nebuchadnezzar archetype make us conscious that in *King Lear* we are being denied the moral certitudes of homily. Peter Bryant describes this process well:

> The archetype is the mad Nebuchadnezzar . . . well known in popular art and literature, as well as much glossed in the medieval commentaries. *King Lear* is not a medieval play, but it is rooted in medieval fictions. The Nebuchadnezzar echoes are inescapable. It is the pride, fall and exile of this figure which provide the pattern for the first four acts of *King Lear*. In *Lear*, tragic ends are to be reached, partly at least through allusion to earlier literary fictions and the kind of sense these make. Then he develops the given images ambivalently, as a first step towards alienating the familiar.[12]

The abasement of the proud king remained a motif in the Christian literature of the Middle Ages, for instance in the Robert of Sicily

romance cycle. Robert of Sicily, told by Emperor Jovinian in the Latin *Gesta Romanorum*, had appeared in other contexts in almost all the vernacular languages of Europe before the end of the fifteenth century.[13] There are ten extant English manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The main lines of the story describe the hubris of the king (sleeping during a church service), his subsequent degradation to the level of a fool, the intermediary voice of the angel explaining his fate as God's punishment of his pride, and his final repentance and restoration.[14]

In the version of the story reproduced in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, Robert is presented as a powerful king prey to the deadly sin of pride: "He þouhte more in worldes honour / þen in Crist, vr saueour."[15] The anonymous poet provides tangible evidence of the king's pride in a short dramatic episode. During a church service the king asks a priest to translate from Latin the famous lines from the Magnificat: "'Deposuit potentes de sede, / Et exaltauit humiles'" (40-41, p. 934). The king, convinced of his own invincibility, scorns the priest's words, and—a further profanity—proceeds to fall asleep in the pulpit.

During his sleep, he is replaced as King of Sicily by an impersonator who we are told is "Godes angel, his priude to felle" (66, p. 935). Robert awakes to find himself ejected from church as a thief, and labelled mad for claiming to be king. He gets involved in a brawl with the palace porter who similarly refuses to recognize him. He is brought before the angel, still protesting that he is king, but the angel

contradicts him: "ȝe art my fol" (153, p. 937). The angel threatens that Robert shall be made an actual fool, and Robert's fate proceeds with the remorseless logic of Nebuchadnezzar's degradation. He is shaven and made to eat his meal with hounds. He shares the animal abjectness of Nebuchadnezzar, growing ears and a tail. He is a fool in the sinful sense: one who is blind to the power of God. He is described as an "vnderlyng" (272, p. 941) who "couȝe no good" (had no wisdom) (180, p. 938).

In his role as court fool Robert visits his two brothers, the Emperor of Germany and the Pope, with the surrogate king. Neither of them recognize him, and both mock his claims to kinship. In the depths of despair he suddenly remembers the experience of Nebuchadnezzar, "A noble king," like himself, who was worshipped by Holofernes as a god:

> Olyferne swor euermor
> By God Nabugodonosor,
> And seide ȝer nas no God in londe
> But Nabugodonosor, ich vnderstonde;
> ȝerfore Nabugodonosor was glad
> ȝat he ȝe name of God had.
> (315-20, p. 942)

For his pride Nebuchadnezzar was exiled to the desert and made to eat "gras" (328, p. 943). Robert recognizes the correspondence between his situation and that of his Biblical predecessor, and is brought to see the justice of his disgrace: "Now am i wel lowe ipult, / And ȝat is riht ȝat i so be!" (347-8, p. 943). He freely acknowledges that he is a fool before God, and embraces his own littleness willingly: "Euere ȝi fol, Lord, wol i be" (363, p. 944). When the angel confronts him with a version of his pride, "Fool, art ȝou kyng?" the newly-repentant king

replies that he is "a fol; / And more ȝen fol, ȝif hit may be" (390-1, p. 944). He has passed from blind to wise folly, and is duly recompensed by God, reinstated to his kingdom.

In a recent article, "Some Romance Sources for *King Lear*," Donna Hamilton has argued for Shakespeare's immediate knowledge of the Robert of Sicily story. A version of the related romance cycle, Robert the Devil, had been reproduced in Thomas Lodge's 1591 prose work *The Famous true and historicall Life of Robert second Duke of Normandy, surnamed for his monstrous birth and behaviour Robert the Diuell*. "It seems rather certain," Hamilton writes, "that Lodge's work was a source for themes as well as incidents for *King Lear*."[16] She points out that Lodge's *Rosalynde* is a confirmed source for *As You Like It*. Her argument for direct indebtedness in this instance, however, relies overridingly on her conviction that *King Lear* shares the homiletic structure of the Robert stories:

> The obviousness of the parallels to Shakespeare's drama makes Mack's suggestion seem cogent indeed. The promise of the Magnificat, to bring down the mighty and exalt the humble, is realized in *King Lear* as well as in *Robert*.[17]

Through his experience Lear, like Robert, "passes from the deprivation of blind self-centredness and pride to the fulfilment which comes from love and humility."[18]

In support of her theory Hamilton compiles a series of parallels, most of which are insubstantial. She likens Robert's confession to a hermit to Lear's attitude to Edgar, but makes no attempt to say what the likeness is, or why it indisputably confirms the influence of Lodge. In view of the paucity of her evidence there is no reason to assume Shake-

speare's direct contact with the Robert stories, especially since these largely reiterate the Nebuchadnezzar pattern. Shakespeare's knowledge of the Nebuchadnezzar story cannot be doubted. Lavatch in *All's Well* makes an unquestionable reference to the Biblical king: "I am no great Nabuchadnezzar, sir; I have not much skill in grass" (IV, v, 18-19).

Hamilton's article fails more significantly when it proposes uncomplicated parallels between the abasement archetype and *King Lear*. If Lear, as Hamilton writes, learns love and humility, who teaches him? She does not mention the Fool, but from her reference to the exaltation of the humble and to the educative role of Edgar, one has the sense that she is following the mainstream of previous criticism as far as he is concerned. Her argument relies on a tacit assumption that the Fool has his part to play in Lear's reformation.

When the Fool in reply to Lear's question "Dost thou call me fool, boy?" says, "All thy other titles thou hast given away: that thou wast born with" (I, iv, 145-7), he might be felt to reproduce the distinction so clearly made by the wise angel in *Robert of Sicily* between the king's worldly status and his essential littleness in relation to God. Lear's title "king" contrasts with what he in fact is, a fool. Robert's claim "i am kyng, and kyng wol be" is met by the angel's unfaltering calm: "þou are my fol." However, in place of an omniscient angel we have in *King Lear* a Fool who, when he tries elsewhere to define the essence of Lear, shows a characteristic inconsistency. In one instance Lear in divesting himself of authority is seen to have forfeited selfhood: "thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing i'th'middle," the

Fool tells Lear, and "I am better than thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing" (I, iv, 183-4 and 190-1). Elsewhere, though, the Fool's analogies suggest that Lear's action has exposed an essential self which is vulnerable and needs protection. He adduces the example of the "oyster" and his "shell," and of the snail who in giving away his "house" leaves himself exposed, "his horns without a case" (I, v, 25, 27, 30). From these inconsistencies we begin to see the Fool, not as a divinely inspired authority who sees the true order of things, but as a figure who is intellectually baffled and emotionally torn by conflicting feelings.

"For nothing happens in this world which isn't full of folly, performed by fools among fools."[19] The conviction that all men are equally foolish is the defining principle of Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*. First published in 1511, the work was still widely read in Elizabethan times and even had a good English translation on the market. The work is a celebration of the humble fool who recognizes and accepts his own frailties with good grace. It praises, in Empson's words, "the ordinary simple man who is felt to be somehow right about life though more pretentious figures fail to see it."[20] The title is a description of the narrative method as well as a dedication. Not only does Erasmus praise folly but he does so through the mouth of folly herself, who is fittingly attired in "jester's garb" (p. 63).

Folly claims the whole of humanity as her own, and is sharp to criticize the pride of those who claim any exclusion from the broad mass of fools. With irreverent gaiety she emphasizes mankind's common beginning:

> The propagator of the human race is that part which is so foolish and absurd that it can't be named without raising a laugh. From this amusement of mine, drunken and absurd as it is, spring haughty philosophers, monks, kings in their purple, pious priests and holy pontiffs.
>
> *P of F*, p. 71

Folly includes kings in her list, and William Willeford points out that the king, the supreme worldly authority, who is nonetheless human, is particularly vulnerable to the charge of folly. This is why, Willeford argues, the king-fool opposition has become an imaginative archetype in many literatures.[21] One case which Willeford quotes is that of a Russian jester who was ceremonially invested with all the titles of his sovereign master: "the fool thereafter was variously called the Patriarch of Russia, the king of Siberia or the king of the Samoyeds," and Willeford contends that this example "is a particularly direct concession to the truth of Rabelais' remark that those who bear the crown and sceptre are born under the same constellation as those who wear the cap and bells."[22]

Rabelais' comment provides a particularly apt summary of Erasmus' attitude towards the king-fool opposition. In the following comment from *Praise of Folly* Erasmus aims his anti-hierarchical sentiments exclusively at kings:

> The fact is, kings do dislike truth, but the outcome of this is extraordinary for my fools. They can speak truth and even open insults and be heard with positive pleasure. (p. 119)

Even a king cannot resist the charm of a fool, Folly claims, which is "extraordinary," as kings are normally reluctant to hear the voice of "truth."

In the king-fool opposition, as Erasmus sees it, the fool, as the voice of essential wisdom, has the moral upper hand over the king. In the following example from *King Lear* the Fool might be said to display a sense of moral advantage which draws on the Erasmian notion of the fool's wisdom. Lear chides his Fool as "A bitter Fool," and the Fool proposes to teach Lear an important distinction:

> FOOL: Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter Fool and a sweet one?
> LEAR: No, lad; teach me.
> FOOL: That lord that counsell'd thee
> To give away thy land,
> Come place him here by me,
> Do thou for him stand:
> The sweet and bitter fool
> Will presently appear;
> The one in motley here,
> The other found out there.
> *Lr.*, I, iv, 134-44

This is a bit of one-upmanship for a wise fool over a foolish king, and falls right into Erasmus' camp. The Fool craftily asks his master to stand in for the fictional lord who counselled his foolish act. This puts the king in a potentially embarrassing spot, since it implies that he is himself responsible for the act, whilst ostensibly saying "Of course, *you* couldn't be stupid enough to do such a thing." The Fool admist that he is a "bitter" fool, "bitter" because aware of the potential consequences of Lear's action, as Lear, the "sweet" (naive) fool is not. Syntactically the Fool's verse aligns "sweet" and "motley," but logically there can be little doubt that "motley" is here associated with the bitter wisdom of the fool who speaks the truth. The rhyme scheme is displaced from abab in the first quatrain to cdde in the second, which brings adjacent rhymes into unexpected alignment. The syntax is corre-

spondingly transposed from the predicted order ab (sweet and bitter) to ba ("the one in motley . . . the other out there). In this example the Fool's obliqueness works to the end of clarity. He manages to draw attention to his own cleverness without detracting from the force of his criticism. The point which he makes is clear: the Fool despite his "motley" garb is not the biggest fool; the King himself has earned this title.

There are moments, however, at which the Fool shows less consistency and confidence in making a point of which Erasmus would have approved. Within the total context of the Fool's speeches we might take the preceding example as a hint by Shakespeare that the Fool was formerly adept at his job, a speculation which makes his current uncertainty the more poignant.

Lear at one point asks the Fool, "When were you want to be so full of songs, sirrah?", and the Fool replies:

> I have used it, Nuncle, e'er since thou
> mad'st thy daughters thy mothers; for when
> thou gav'st them the rod and putt'st down
> thine own breeches,
> Then they for sudden joy did weep,
> And I for sorrow sung,
> That such a king should play bo-peep,
> And go the fools among.
> *Lr.*, I, iv, 167-74

This speech begins with the kind of language traditionally wielded against a proud king by his wise fool. The fact of his physical vulnerability is impressed upon Lear; "breeches" boldly deflates pretensions of dignity, as does the implication of pain and physical indignity in seeing Lear punished by the rod. "Thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers"

points an accusing finger at Lear, identifying his wilfulness as the cause of the disturbance of things from their usual patterns. But having singled out Lear's behaviour for criticism the Fool then hints at the unnaturalness of his daughters—the surprising conjunction of "joy" and "weep" casts an acerbic glance at the hypocrisy of Goneril and Regan. The Fool's confession to having felt "sorrow" at Lear's fate, and the awesome admiration in "such a king," is a sudden and violent switch from the harsh derisiveness of the analogy which holds Lear up as a subject for ridicule.

"Bo-peep" was a game which involved the blindfolding of one of the participants.[23] Lear's becoming a fool is associated, not with wisdom, but with blindness. The Fool does not suggest, as Erasmus might, that Lear has found his proper place among fools, but that he has forsaken his true place. There is no note of moral triumph in the Fool's apprehension that Lear has lowered himself to the level of a fool, which is a sign of how far this Fool diverges from the archetypal pattern in which the wise fool corrected the errors of a foolish king with unflinching and incontestable rigour. The final two lines of the Fool's song are fraught with perplexity and grief.

The complexity of attitude seen in the conjunction of the Fool's analogy comparing Lear to a wilful child ("thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers") and the awful admiration in "such a king" is a measure of the Fool's divergence from Erasmus' happy and confident fool. Simultaneously it provides a clue to see how far Lear diverges from the type of the childish old man which is another Renaissance topos reinforced by

Erasmus. Folly lists the characteristics common to old men and children:

> white hair, toothless mouth, short stature, liking for milk, babbling, chattering, absurdity, forgetfulness, thoughtlessness, everything in fact. The nearer people approach old age the closer they return to a semblance of childhood, until the time comes for them to depart this life, again like children, neither tired of living nor aware of death. (p. 80)

This type of old man characterized by physical feebleness and mental oblivion is recalled by Jaques in the set-piece speech on the seven ages of man. The seventh of the ages he typifies thus:

> Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.
> *AYL*, II, vii, 163-6

The Fool's closeness to Lear throughout the first three acts helps focus a childishness in Lear which corresponds to Erasmus' description of the foolish old man living in a comforting world of illusion. This childishness is the aim of Goneril's reproof—"Old fools are babes again" (I, iii, 20). Simultaneously, however, the Fool helps focus another quality in Lear's childishness, which is Lear's fitfully manifested propensity for cutting through layers of illusion and asking with a child's simplicity basic, painful, moral questions to which the dramatic action provides no reply.

When Lear first meets the Fool in I, iv, we see a different side of Lear from the proud king of the opening scene. He is receptive to the possibility of being instructed by his "pretty knave" (94)—"No, lad; teach me" (136), leading the Fool on with questions: "Dost thou call me fool, boy?" (145), "What two crowns shall they be?" (154),

"When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?" (167). The diffidence and evasiveness of the Fool suggest the inability of his wisdom to cope with Lear's readiness to learn. When Goneril reproaches Lear for the behaviour of his knights we see in him the stirrings of a sense of his own vulnerability:

> Does any here know me? This is not Lear:
> Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, his discernings
> Are lethargied—Ha! waking? 'tis not so.
> Who is it that can tell me who I am?
> *Lr.*, I, iv, 223-7

The succession of brief questions and the syntactic awkwardness of the construction "Either his notion weakens, his discernings are lethargied," register a sense of confusion, from which Lear attempts to wrest himself in "Ha! waking? 'tis not so," only to slip back into with his final penetrating question "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" It is the worldly wisdom of the Fool which leads Lear back inside his illusion of personal invulnerability. In Lear's next speech, prompted by the Fool's implication that in forfeiting authority ("May not an ass know when a cart draws the horse?"), he has become less than he was ("Lear's shadow"), Lear retreats inside a closed sense of himself as the inviolate king and the father who must be obeyed. Those abstract nouns from the opening scene again make their purchase on the situation—"the marks of sovereignty, knowledge and reason"—and are shortly succeeded by Lear's curse of sterility on Goneril.

In I, v, there is an increasing sense of the inadequacy of the Fool to deal with the situation. His proverbial utterances are contrasted with Lear's aspirations towards a more sublime vision, and here it seems

that Lear has transcended his readiness to listen to the Fool. The Fool harps on practicality and expedience, Lear on morality and cause, and this releases an unsettling sense of characters talking past rather than to one another:

> LEAR: I did her wrong,—
> FOOL: Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?
> LEAR: No.
> FOOL: Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.
> LEAR: Why?
> FOOL: Why, to put's head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case.
> LEAR: I will forget my nature. So kind a father!
>
> *Lr.*, I, v, 24-31

Lear meets all the Fool's attempts to engage him in conversation with monosyllabic replies ("No," "Why?"), absorbed in his own thought. "I did her wrong" is probably a recognition of his own culpability in banishing Cordelia, following his more prolonged outburst in the previous scene (I, iv, 265 ff.). The Fool interprets Lear's folly as a sacrifice of self-interest. But Lear's mind is working on the level of sin, not of error. The note of self-reproach continues in "I will forget my nature. So kind a father!", though in his next speech it is suddenly displaced by savage vengefulness: "To tak't again perforce! Monster ingratitude!" (37). The rapid alternation of the speeches of Lear with those of the Fool brings out the rapidity of the huge shifts in Lear's thought and makes acute the inadequacy of the Fool's proverbial wisdom to accommodate the vast conflicts within Lear's mind.

Heilman describes the Fool as the externalized consciousness of Lear,[24] though what is striking in this scene is the psychic independence of Lear from the Fool. This independence can be brought out more

clearly in comparison with the interview between Feste and Olivia in which the verbal parallelism of the speeches shows the two characters picking up each other's words:

> FESTE: Misprision in the highest degree! Lady, 'Cucullus non facit monachum'; that's as much to say as I wear not motley in my brain. Good madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool.
> OLIVIA: Can you do it?
> FESTE: Dexteriously, good madonna.
> OLIVIA: Make your proof.
> 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.
>
> *TN*, I, v, 50-6, 61-7

Feste falls recognizably into the tradition of the fool who sees the folly of the supposedly wise. He confidently presents and wins his case in the manner of a lawyer. He begins his address to Olivia with a high-sounding legal term "Misprision" and a humorous bit of pedantry (the Latin phrase), and asks leave to prove that it is the great lady Olivia, not himself, who is the fool. Olivia having granted her permission, Feste swiftly executes his proof, damning Olivia with her own words, and triumphantly concludes, "Take away the fool, gentlemen."

On the heath, the vast unsignalled shifts in Lear's mind as he probes the meaning of the storm are set against the Fool's shrinking from the confrontation. Lear's initial invocation of the end of the world is succeeded by the Fool's frightened plea:

> O Nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house
> is better than this rain-water out o' door.

> Good Nuncle, in, ask thy daughters blessing;
> here's a night pities neither wise men nor
> Fools.
>
> *Lr.*, III, ii, 10-13

The urgency of the Fool's plea and the decisiveness with which he pronounces the hostility of external nature to be more fearful than the corruptions of civilization ("court holy-water" is a proverbial ironic term for flattery) are surprising. This is the only direct and uncomplicated piece of advice he gives in the play, and conveys a now painfully unconcealed vulnerability. Lear is oblivious to the Fool here, absorbed in his own craving to seek out the cause of the storm, which he sees first as the "servile" ally of his "pernicious" daughters, then as a just retribution for mankind's unpunished crimes (21-2, 51-3). The thunder that will not now peace at his bidding replaces the image of convenient bounty which his opening speech created (I, i, 63-4, where he speaks of "shadowy forests" and "champains rich'd"), and the abstract nouns with which he had coddled himself in that opening scene now probe the world for objective truth (he speaks of "sin," "ingratitude," "justice").

The Fool, ignored by Lear, retreats behind the assurances of proverbial wisdom. His next speech has a tenuous relevance to the dramatic situation:

> He that has a house to put's head in has a
> good head-piece.
> The cod-piece that will house
> Before the head has any,
> The head and he shall louse;
> So beggars marry many.
> The man that makes his toe
> What he his heart should make,

> Shall of a corn cry woe,
> And turn his sleep to wake.
> For there was never yet fair woman but she
> made mouths in a glass.
> *Lr.*, III, ii, 25-36

The verselet is syntactically compressed so that its sense is difficult, and would be the more so for a theatre audience without the opportunity of retrospective reading. The word "house," initially a verb, becomes retrospectively a noun by the implication of "any," and the shift from the first two lines is difficult—"cod-piece" and "head" which have been antithetically opposed in the first two lines are now yoked together. "So" at the start of line four implies a straightforward connection with what precedes which the line does not have. Similarly in the second half of the stanza the sense is oddly twisted and compressed, and the concluding line again begins with a conjunction, "For," implying a connection with what proceeds which is not however evident. An attempt to unravel the speech would make it read something like: "the man who elevates sexual passion above reason will corrupt both his body and his mind." The equation of sexual passion and folly could be felt to reflect guilt upon Lear for fathering daughters who have become an evil to him, though Lear is not a promiscuous young man but a very old one about whose sexual passion we know nothing (whereas we know that Gloucester has fathered an illegitimate son).

Tolstoy finds the Fool's speech unintelligible; he complains that in this scene the Fool "keeps uttering senseless words in no wise related to the situation."[25] Orwell speculates that Tolstoy may have had reasons of his own for this impatience, but Tolstoy's reaction is nevertheless

an indication of the problem. It seems to me that the arbitrariness of the Fool's speech is to be attributed to his desperation. He will cling to the known as a way of protecting himself against the unknown. The dubious relevance of his words to the dramatic situation makes them seem less an attempt to come to terms with the present situation than a shirking of the challenge. His verselet sets its neat pattern against the raging chaos of the elements reflected in the broken syntax and great rhythmic surges in Lear's speeches. Speech, in the Fool's habitual vein, becomes a way for him of holding out against the void.

In ironic opposition to the sacred sense of "marry," the word suggests in the Fool's speech the marrying of lice through the copulation of beggars, an irony which cynically deflates the possibilities of the word and contrasts with Lear's attempt to feel out the implications of such huge moral abstractions. In the later scene where Lear himself talks with disgust about sexual passion (IV, vi, 110-30) he has often been seen to be directly reproducing the Fool's attitude. But this identification neglects Lear's capacity to respond against his own cynicism, to resist its tendency to close his sensibility. His ragings about women ("Down from the waist they are Centaurs") are succeeded by a sudden plea for the purification of his own mind: "Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, / To sweeten my imagination" (129-30).

Lear's sudden extension of sympathy to his Fool is an analogous moment of self-transcendence:

> LEAR: Come, your hovel
> Poor Fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
> That's sorry yet for thee.

FOOL: He that has and a little tiny wit,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
For the rain it raineth every day.
III, ii, 69-72

The Fool's song asserts the practical necessity for a man who finds himself in a difficult situation to make the most of his comforts. Its expedient wisdom could be seen as the Fool's coming to terms with his situation. Yet this wisdom of self-preservation cannot embrace Lear's inability to "make content with his fortunes fit," to satisfy himself by taking shelter on such a night because for him the storm is not as unaccommodating as things in his mind that would hurt him more. The Fool cannot reciprocate Lear's extension of sympathy and concern. The condensation of "little" to "tiny" is a cynical and alienating touch. His attempt to fit the frighteningly physical storm into a pattern of such events seems less like flexibility of mind than a sealing off of sensibility born of an inability to adapt to the *present* situation.

In the next scene on the heath, the Fool is eclipsed by Edgar as Lear concentrates his attention on this new source of interest. Lear swings from the extreme microcosmic narrowness in which he applies his situation to the whole world—"Death, traitor! nothing could have subdu'd nature / To such a lowness but his unkind daughters" (III, iv, 69-70)—to the boldness of his deeply probing question—"Is man no more than this?" (100-1)—to which he submits himself as he strips away his clothes in an attempt to get to the reality about humanity. The Fool's reaction at this point is to urge caution: "Prithee, Nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night to swim in" (108-9). Given the extremity

of the situation, this seems like silly advice. The Fool has already appealed to Lear and been ignored. There appears to be an element of mockery in this speech which was absent from the original, earnest plea. Empson comments that it "suggests Lear's hunger of the mind as a kind of perverse pleasure."[26] There are similar hints of an almost masochistic craving for experience on Lear's part in the Fool's description of Lear lowering his breeches to his daughters' rod (I, iv, 170), and his likening of Lear's attempt to control his impending madness to a cook knapping live eels on the head (II, iv, 119-20). It seems as if the Fool, sensing the hopelessness of his own advice, has become merely cynical towards Lear. Lear at any rate is paying little attention to the Fool. Edgar is for the probing king "the thing itself" (104), a source of authority whom Lear treats with respect as his "philosopher" (151), and who he believes can answer all those questions which burn in Lear's mind: "What is the cause of thunder?" (151). In the rest of this scene the Fool is reduced to making odd, brief comments on the way things are going: "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (77).

In III, vi, Lear's imaginary trial of Goneril and Regan in the farmhouse, the Fool is even more withdrawn and embittered. Lear's organization of a trial reflects his craving for explanation of his experience. Moments of supreme pathos which see Lear childishly absorbed in a world of illusion—"The little dogs and all, / Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me" (61-2)—give way to searing questions which show him to be still more concerned with the cause of what has

happened to him than with revenge for his sufferings:

> Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts? (74-6)

The Fool mocks the pretense at trying Goneril: "Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool" (51), but his attempt to point out the irony of the situation fails to have an insurmountable authority because the situation cannot be contained by irony.

The Fool's final comment in the play, "And I'll go to bed at noon" (83), has been seen as a masterly stroke of irony. Zitner feels it to have a cruel resonance, directed against the hallucinating king. He believes the Fool to be saying with sarcastic scepticism "There will be as much supper in the morning as bedtimes at noon."[27] Cameron Andrews has pointed out that "to go to bed at noon" had the proverbial sense of indulging in sexual pastimes, and he, like Zitner, feels the phrase to be damagingly ironic to Lear:

> For Lear may "entertain" Poor Tom for one of his hundred, may imagine he is lying in his royal bed, with attendants to draw the curtains; the Fool whose eye of anguish never closes, knows the truth. As so often in the play, he attempts to open Lear's eyes. Lear, he asserts, will find his expectations mocked . . . the Fool attacks by means of sarcastic parody. Lear, he says, will be as likely to receive his supper in the morning as he himself will be to find the chill and privation of this night the prelude to an afternoon of dalliance in a safe, snug bed.[28]

However, these interpretations fail to appreciate the contrary pulls of this scene. If Lear has deserved the Fool's irony, he has also somehow gone beyond the Fool. The Fool seems to recognize this. If he is being ironic, it is not out of a sense of confident superiority, but of savage desperation. His weary and withdrawn behaviour throughout this scene

conveys, not a sense of moral vindication, but of defeat. Blunden believes that in his final line the Fool is presaging his untimely death, with a secondary meaning in "bed" of "grave."[29] This supports my feeling that the Fool is giving expression to an impending exhaustion consistent with his gradual withdrawal from the action. We are left at best with the paradox that what is being contrasted in this scene is the lunacy which can look into the mystery of things with the sanity which shuts out the inscrutable.

The Fool is both judge and judged. His criticisms of Lear justly emphasize Lear's folly, though he himself clings more rigidly to known certainties even as those certainties are stripped away. Lear's probing questions bring out the untenability of the Fool's traditional formulae in a surprising divergence from the tradition in which the fool corrects the errors of the great men. This suggests the inadequacy of Robert Heilman's summary of their relationship: "The most inclusive paradox, then, is that the Fool exposes the folly of the supposedly wise master of men, the king."[30] Shakespeare adapts tradition to point away from moral resolution; Lear's voice undermines the traditionally authoritative voice of the Fool.

The Fool's withdrawal from the play, exhausted, is the dramatically consistent end in *King Lear* to a figure who was traditionally a voice of moral authority. King Lear survives his Fool, and later speaks the lines to Gloucester which we might be tempted to take as a continuation of the Fool's wisdom:

> Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:
> Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
> We wawl and cry. I will preach to thee: mark.
> When we are born, we cry that we are come
> To this great stage of fools.
> IV, vi, 176-80

Lear reproaches the manically despairing Gloucester, and exhorts him to be "patient." It is a lesson which he has tried to impress on himself more than once: "You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!—" (II, iv, 269); "No. I will be the pattern of all patience, I will say nothing" (III, ii, 37-8). The Fool's patience cracked along with his wisdom. Lear's capacity for adaptation and survival gives some credibility to Empson's claim that "Lear really is in some mysterious manner the type of that patience which can experience reality."[31]

Lear's final anguished question, "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all?" (V, iii, 305-6), is met by silence. The gods are non-committal. The Fool is not even present to attempt an answer. *Praise of Folly* and the Christian homily which preceded it are there in the background of *King Lear* as a vast fund of significance on which the play draws. But the play effects a massive reconfiguration of God, king and fool relative to one another, and instead of secure answers, leaves us with the weight of Lear's questions.

CHAPTER 3

CORDELIA AS "POOR FOOL"

And my poor fool is hang'd!
King Lear, V, iii, 304

As the previous chapter attempted to show, the word *fool* in Christian homily meant one of two clearly distinct things: a denier of God, or a Christian believer. The latter would be a fool in the world's eyes, though wise in the Eyes of Heaven. Lear's Fool does not fit this clear-cut definition of folly, since he is neither the worldly nor unworldly fool, but is confused and inconsistent. Cordelia, however, can be seen as a fool in the direct Pauline sense. She sacrifices worldly interest when rescuing Lear, and places her trust in a benevolent heaven (cf. IV, vii, 14-5, where she prays to "kind gods" to "cure" Lear). The Fool's failure to be the authoritative figure of fool tradition is contrasted with Cordelia's singularity in adhering to the Pauline ideal, but the integrity which she exhibits is in the end no more vindicated than the Fool's uncertainty.

Many critics of *King Lear* have found the Fool's disappearance at the end of Act Three puzzling. A.C. Bradley believes that it was a failure on Shakespeare's part not to account more clearly for the fate of the Fool: "It seems doubtful whether his failure to give information about the fate of the Fool was due to anything more than carelessness or an impatient desire to reduce his overloaded material."[1] There is, however, a widespread belief that the Fool is remembered in Lear's final

anguish, that when Lear wails "And my poor fool is hang'd!" he is recalling the Fool.

Joshua Reynolds supports this reading of the much disputed line:

> Lear appears to have a particular affection for this Fool, whose fidelity in attending him, and endeavouring to divert him in his distress, seems to deserve all his kindness. "Poor fool and knave", says he, in the midst of the thunder-storm, "I have one part in my heart that's sorry yet for thee." It does not, therefore, appear to me, to be allowing too much consequence to the Fool, in making Lear bestow a thought on him, even when in still greater distress.[2]

One might say for Reynolds that at least he read Shakespeare's text in an age which preferred the version of Nahum Tate, but his summary of the Lear-Fool relationship has in it something of Tate's sentimentality. It is crude to speak merely of Lear's affection for the Fool; affection is one element in Lear's feeling, arguably seen at this moment on the heath when he urges the Fool into the hovel, but Lear's indifference to the Fool's pleas until this moment is by-passed in Reynolds' account. Reynolds speaks only of the Fool's "fidelity" and his endeavour "to divert [Lear] in his distress," and leaves out of account the Fool's threats of desertion and his undeniable bitterness towards Lear.

A more striking thing even than Reynolds' failure to do justice to the complexity of the Lear-Fool relationship is his insensitivity to the psychological situation in which Lear speaks these lines. Cordelia's sudden and terrible death is described with crass euphemism as a "still greater distress" for Lear than his experience on the

heath. Steevens, a later editor, recognizes this problem with Reynolds' reading: "That the thoughts of a father, in the bitterest of all moments, while his favourite child lay dead in his arms, should recur to the antick who had formerly diverted him, has somewhat in it that I cannot reconcile to the idea of genuine sorrow and despair."[3]

Malone supports Steevens in the conviction that "fool" in this context refers to Cordelia alone. A recollection of the Fool, Malone suggests, would be a futile irrelevance, injurious to psychological consistency. He observes:

> Lear, from the time of his entrance in this scene to his uttering these words, and from thence to his death, is wholly occupied by the loss of his daughter. He is diverted, indeed, from it for a moment by the intrusion of Kent, who forces himself on his notice; but he instantly returns to his beloved Cordelia, over whose dead body he continues to hang. He is now himself in the agony of death; and surely at such a time, when his heart is just breaking, it would be highly unnatural that he should think of his Fool.[4]

Malone goes on to point out, also in support of a point made by Steevens, that Lear earlier (272) reports having just seen Cordelia hanged, a fact whose consequences for the disputed line are clearly set out by Cowden Clarke:

> We do not believe that Shakespeare would have made the bereaved father recur for even one moment to any other thought of loss than the one before him—his murdered daughter. Furthermore, if Shakespeare had intended to denote a tender reminiscence of the Fool on the part of his old master, and to take the opportunity of definitely stating the mode of the Fool's death, we do not think that he would have made this the opportunity, or *hanging* the means by which the lad came to his end; he would not have reserved Lear's mention of the faithful jester until

> a time when the father's whole soul is engrossed with but one idea, nor would he have committed the dramatic tautology, as well as the dramatic injury to tragic effect, of making the Fool, as well as Cordelia, hang'd.[5]

To these arguments from psychological and dramatic consistency, Verplanck adds one of grammatical consistency: "Since Lear in the same breath addresses Cordelia—'And thou no breath at all'—it seems to me evident that it is to Cordelia alone that the phrase can allude."[6]

The weight of critical opinion is against the view that it is the Fool and not Cordelia who is lamented in this line. There is, however, a more sophisticated argument than that of Reynolds for the recollection of the Fool in this line, which is that in his grief Lear becomes confused and identifies the Fool and Cordelia in his own mind. Lear does not mean one or the other, but both (even though the audience may not see the connection). Knight, like Reynolds, picks up the echo of the heath scene, though he makes of it a psychologically more subtle and persuasive interpretation:

> In the depth of his distress during the storm Lear says: "Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart that's sorry for thee." And now, when the last and deepest calamity has fallen upon him, his expressions shape themselves out of the indistinctness with which he views the present and the past, and Cordelia is his "poor fool."[7]

Empson methodically and skilfully works through the occurrences of the word "fool" in the play (forty-seven in all), and argues that Shakespeare deliberately constructed a pattern of significance around them. Given this consciousness of the word "fool," Empson suggests, it is unlikely that Shakespeare did not recognize that his use of

"fool" in this context would recall the Fool to the audience's mind. "Fool," he feels, "seems extraordinarily out of place to describe Cordelia," and he concludes:

> In fact, the word seems likely to puzzle the audience whichever way round you take it. One must suppose, as Bradley did, that his mind has wandered so far that he no longer distinguishes the two . . . Lear is now thrown back into something like the storm phase of his madness, the effect of immediate shock, and the Fool seems to him part of it. The only affectionate dependent he had recently has been hanged, and the only one he had then was the Fool.

According to Empson, Shakespeare is not committing dramatic tautology (as Malone feared), but Lear is: "The point is not that they [Cordelia and the Fool] are alike—it is shocking because they are so unlike—but that he [Lear] must be utterly crazy to call one by the name of the other."[8]

Empson suggests that the Fool provides a substitute for Cordelia in Lear's mind, but that the connection is an irrational one. Other critics have proposed a tangible connection between the Fool and Cordelia; Willeford, for instance, speaks of "a deep and mysterious relationship between the Fool and the redeeming daughter of the king, Cordelia."[9]

Willeford feels that the Fool keeps Cordelia before us during her absence. The Fool's allegiance to Cordelia is established even before he appears, in the Gentleman's suggestion that his absence is prompted by hers: "Since my young Lady's going into France, Sir, the Fool hath much pined away" (I, iv, 71-2). When the Fool enters he makes a gesture of forsaking Lear, and offers his coxcomb to Kent:

"Why, this fellow has banish'd two on's daughters, and did the third a blessing against his will: if thou follow him thou must needs wear my coxcomb" (100-2). The Fool suggests that Lear is too blind to see that the consequences of his actions are quite contrary to his intentions. In enriching two daughters he has effectively "banish'd" them from any concern for him, and in impoverishing the third he has unwittingly blessed her, presumably because she has been adopted by a husband who appreciates that she is "most rich, being poor" (I, i, 249). Behind the comment lies the Fool's fearful knowledge of Goneril's and Regan's selfishness, and of Cordelia's essential goodness. The uncanny shrewdness of the remark lies in its use of "banish'd"; Lear has actually banished Cordelia—the Fool's sardonic inversion reminds him of that, and confronts him with the hard fact that he has put himself at the mercy of Goneril and Regan. At the onset the Fool, it seems, is clearly on the side of Cordelia.

However, the Fool is using his moral insight here to advise Kent to forsake Lear. Now that Lear is out of favour with Fortune it would be foolish to be loyal, the Fool tells Kent: "and thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly; there, take my coxcomb" (98-9). When she is a prisoner of Edmund's troops, Cordelia says that if it were not for Lear's plight, she would not be downcast at her own: "For thee, oppressed king, I am cast down; / Myself could else out-frown false Fortune's frown" (V, iii, 5-6). Her worldly misfortune is of little consequence to her beside her love for him. The Fool's counsel of self-interest

could be reconciled with Cordelia's example of selflessness by taking it as a test of Kent's loyalty. Empson might say the Fool is warning Kent that renunciation means giving up all hope of worldly success; in other words that he is telling Kent "don't look to be rewarded for this," and thus stating a version of the lesson which Orwell thinks he has for Lear: "Give away your lands if you want to, but don't expect to gain happiness by doing so. Probably you won't gain happiness. If you live for others, you must live for others, and not as a roundabout way of getting an advantage for yourself."[10]

Recalling the two senses of *fool* from Christian homily, it could be argued that the Fool presents Kent with the motivation of the worldly fool, and warns him that it is hard to give up one's self-interest, but that if he follows Lear he must give it up. But is it not making the Fool less ambiguous than he really is to say that his harping about the folly of self-divestment is merely an attempt to teach Kent and Lear a lesson in the pain of humility? The Fool repeats this advice to Kent in II, iv. 70-2: "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break they neck with following; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after." If he is just testing Kent's loyalty, surely by this point, when he is sitting in the stocks for having delivered Lear's message, Kent has passed the test? The Fool too has stayed with Lear, but his advice to Kent seems to me to signify an inner uncertainty about the wisdom of his own loyalty.

If the Fool is to be identified with Cordelia, and seen to keep her values of charity and compassion before the audience, what are we to make of his oppressive insistence on self-preservation, which seems at times to echo the values of Goneril and Regan? After his initial allusion to Cordelia the Fool does not mention her again. He reproaches Lear, not for banishing Cordelia, but for his folly in giving up his land. It is the material, not the personal side of Lear's action that he emphasizes. John Danby comments on his list of maxims "Have more than thou showest, / Speak less than thou knowest" (I, iv, 116-7 ff.):

> Goneril has already charged Lear with the vices of the old regime, riotous "Epicurism and Lust"—the excess of those impulses which, in the mean, are sociability, comradeship, free self-expression, and love. The Fool prescribes the complementary vices of the new dispensation: a riot of acquisitiveness, self-protection, suspicion.[11]

Danby's description presents us with a picture of the Fool uneasily poised between Goneril and Cordelia.

It might be felt that his emphasis on Lear's material loss is the Fool's way of venting his bitterness at the loss of Cordelia, which he finds too painful to mention. The undercurrent of vehement bitterness in his speeches may suggest that the Fool has the loss of Cordelia, not Lear's possessions, closest to his heart. In the play's opening scene Cordelia's "Nothing" provokes Lear to chide her with "Nothing will come of nothing" (88-9). There is an echo of this moment in I, v, 128-32, where the Fool asks Lear "Can you make no use of nothing, Nuncle?" Lear replies, "Why no, boy; nothing can be

made out of nothing," and the Fool retorts: "Prithee, tell him, so much the rent of his land comes to: he will not believe a Fool." The Fool may be taunting Lear with the memory of Cordelia's "Nothing." By silently recalling Cordelia whilst ostensibly pointing out that Lear has sacrificed his land, the Fool may be trying to make Lear see that his greatest loss has nothing to do with land. By what he does say the Fool hints at a larger loss to Lear left unsaid.

Given the larger context of the Fool's speeches, however, it seems to me distorting to read these lines as saying to Lear, "your land doesn't matter a hoot—it's your daughter you've lost." The echo of Cordelia's "Nothing" works against rather than for the connection between them. Her "Nothing" is prompted by a moral contempt for the idea of sullying the spiritual with material concerns. Love, for her, is not a material, to be bought and sold, as Lear buys expressions of love and her sisters sell protestations of it. "Love, and be silent" (I, i, 61) is her principle. She cannot heave her heart into her mouth; the metaphor of unnatural violence conveys the depth of her loathing for materialism which parades as love.

The motivation behind the Fool's use of "Nothing" seems to me quite different. He stands precariously in the middle ground between Goneril's materialism and Cordelia's spiritualism. "Nothing" recurs with obsessive insistence in the Fool's speeches as his fearful apprehension of what Lear has become: "I had rather be any kind o'

thing than a fool; and yet I would not be thee, Nuncle; thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing i'th'middle" (I, iv, 181-4), "Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning; now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing" (I, iv, 188-91). In both of these examples the Fool admits that he would not change his own admittedly miserable station for that of Lear. It is hard to reconcile his frank confession of self-interest with the idea that he is a reflection of Cordelia. In the Fool's eyes Lear is not "Nothing" because he has rejected Cordelia, but because he has put himself at the mercy of Goneril and Regan. In the first example Lear has divided himself between Goneril and Regan—pared his wit on both sides—and in the second he has put himself at the mercy of Goneril's frowning. Of course, there is a causal connection between Lear's banishing of Cordelia and his vulnerability at the hands of her sisters, but the Fool chooses not to emphasize it.

The following speech by the Fool portrays self-interest as the sole motivating force behind human action:

> Fathers that wear rags
> Do make their children blind,
> But fathers that bear bags
> Shall see their children kind.
> Fortune, that arrant whore,
> Ne'er turns the key to th'poor.
> II, iv, 46-51

The Fool proposes a chain of causality in human relationships which is based entirely on self-interest. Children are indifferent to fathers who are poor, and interested merely selfishly in fathers who

are rich. There is nothing humane about humanity once you get beneath appearances (even Cordelia?). The rhyme scheme, which sets the father's assets rags/bags against the children's reponse in the respective case blind/kind, gives a ruthless certainty to the stark vision. What makes the speech even more disturbing is its distribution of blame. The idea that fathers, by wearing rags, *do make* their children blind implies that the fathers are at fault. This is surely perverse; he should say that children ought to care for impoverished fathers, rather than that fathers ought not to be poor?

Cordelia believes that Lear's plight constituted a moral claim upon his daughters which it was unnatural of them to ignore: "Had you not been their father, these white flakes / Did challenge pity of them" (IV, vii, 30-1). The Fool's shocking inversion may be deliberately outrageous, designed to make us recoil from it in favour of the moral norm. If this is a view which people consciously reject, it should strengthen their opposition to evil and their pity for its victims, and thus bring them closer to the example of Cordelia. However, the Fool's bitterness to Lear over Lear's yielding of his land makes it more likely that he wants to be taken at his word here. He appears to be saying that evil is inscrutable and will take advantage of another's weakness: it is reprehensibly naive not to see this, and to see it makes self-interest, in the sense of self-protection, justified. Thus, if you neglect your legitimate self-interest, as Lear has done, then you are in some way responsible for the consequences. In the second couplet the verbal construction

"Shall see" describes an inevitable reaction. It is no good blaming the evil, they are invulnerable to moral criticism, the Fool seems to say. To be blind to this fundamental truth of human nature is, he implies, a form of gratuitous folly. It is to invite others to take advantage. Hence the image of the hedge-sparrow whose devotion to feeding its young leads to its own destruction by them (I, iv, 212-5).

In his later example of a man "that, in pure kindness to his horse, buttered his hay" (II, iv, 122-3), the Fool suggests that goodness itself may die in its own too much. Kenneth Muir points out that "it was a common trick of cheating ostlers to grease the hay of horses committed to their care; the horses, disliking grease, were kept from feeding, and the ostler could steal their provender."[12] This man buttered the hay out of "pure kindness," but his goodness was self-defeating (presumably the horse still disliked the grease). The implied contrast with the notorious self-interested practice does not, as one might expect, commend this man's peculiar generosity. It rather complements the Fool's vision in his exempla about parents and children. Not only do we need to protect ourselves against the selfishness of others but also, it seems, against our own charitable impulses.

The vision of the world suggested in the Fool's exemplum sounds disconcertingly like that of Goneril; it is safer to "fear too far" than "trust too far" (I, iv, 327-8). But the Fool does not always show the fearful cringing in the face of evil which he appears to advocate. He avails himself of the opportunity to express his hatred

of Goneril, who confides in Oswald that the Fool is a major source of irritation between her and Lear (I, iii, 1). When she comes before Lear in I, iv, the Fool cannot refrain from provoking her:

> Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue; so
> your face bids me, though you say nothing.
> Mum, Mum:
> He that keeps nor crust nor crumb,
> Weary of all, shall want some.
> That's a sheal'd peascod. (192-6)

The Fool's insolent quip is what sparks off Goneril's rebuke to Lear: "Not only, Sir, this your all-licens'd Fool" (198). Immediately she has concluded her reproof, the Fool presents the image of the hedge-sparrow decapitated by its monstrous child. This is his version of what Goneril is doing by reproaching her father. It is a horrifying juxtaposition, suggesting a dark purpose beneath her plausible and civil words.

The asides of Cordelia in the opening scene present us with another and disturbing interpretation of her sisters' motives than the ones articulated by them, and the repetition of the dramatic technique in the case of the Fool strengthens the connection between him and Cordelia. Whereas Cordelia's contempt is concentrated on her sisters' hypocrisy, however, the Fool aims his speech more at Lear. "He that *keeps* nor crust nor crumb" implies a reprovable negligence on Lear's part. It is Lear's own carelessness which is to be blamed—a feeling consistent with the Fool's apprehension that evil is morally inviolable. With Gonerils and Regans around, men have to be self-interested to protect themselves, he wants to say. This is an

understanding which Danby describes well:

> Self-interest does not only lead to an aggressive outpouring among one's fellows. It leads also to a self-protective shrinkage within one's shell. Man is a poor, cowering, threatened creature, and will do well to look after himself as best he can.[13]

But the total effect of the Fool's speech is more complex than Danby's summary indicates. His vituperative outbursts against Goneril suggest a moral outrage at Goneril's action which he cannot reconcile with a philosophical acceptance of evil. If one cannot negotiate with evil, as the Fool implies elsewhere, why reproach it, as he does here? If evil is omnipotent, why put oneself at risk by criticizing it?

The Fool has proposed a model of the world ruled by Fortune. Lear's plight has come about because he is out of favour with Fortune. Kent is advised by the Fool to court the whims of Fortune, and to desert Lear now that he is moving down on Fortune's wheel. Within this pattern, Goneril and Regan can be seen as the favourites of Fortune. The Fool suggests that this is indeed the case when, rather than blaming children for tolerating or inducing the poverty of their fathers, he blames instead "Fortune, that arrant whore." It is Fortune, an amoral and impersonal force, who "Ne'er turns the key to th' poor." In this couplet, however, we might begin to spy a crack within his scheme. Fortune's wheel is perfectly round; it is impossible, given her mechanical neutrality, that she should never turn the key to the poor. The Fool's loathing of inequality cannot readily be reconciled with the doctrine of an evenly-dispensing Fortune, whose action it is to take back what she gives away, and vice versa.

A view of the world as dominated by Fortune is not happily compatible with a doctrine of individual responsibility. Cordelia, with her superior spiritual integrity, scorns the blows of Fortune and places emphasis on the moral choice of the individual. The Fool hovers with desperate uncertainty between the Fortune model and the moral repulsion against Goneril and Regan which cannot be justified within the Fortune scheme.

Enid Welsford believes that although intellectually the Fool sees both sides of the argument between Goneril and Cordelia, in his heart he knows who is right:

> Now the Fool sees that when the match between the good and the evil is played by the intellect alone it must end in a stalemate, but when the heart joins in the game the decision is immediate and final. "I will tarry, the Fool will stay—And let the wise man fly." That is the unambiguous wisdom of the madman who sees the truth.[14]

If this is so, what are we to make of the Fool's behaviour towards Kent who, like himself, serves Lear? Kent follows Lear out of ancient feudal loyalty; Lear is his master, and he never questions the advisability of remaining loyal to him. Kent's motivation in adopting disguise is disarmingly simple. He will go on serving Lear because he loves him, in the simple hope that "thy master, whom thou lov'st, / Shall find thee full of labours" (I, iv, 6-7). Gloucester, a member of Kent's generation, shows a similar unquestioning loyalty when he vows to relieve Lear's suffering, whatever the cost to himself: "If I die for it, as no less is threatened me, the king, my old master, must be reliev'd" (III, iii, 17-19).

Such compulsive loyalty, given Lear's situation, is, as the Fool sees it, questionable. If, as Welsford suggests, the Fool is fundamentally convinced of the wisdom of continuing loyalty to Lear, why does he twice suggest to Kent that it is foolish to follow Lear? The relationship between the Fool and Kent is one of friction. When the Fool first comes in, Lear has just taken the newly-disguised Kent into his service, after Kent has given proof of his loyalty by taking Lear's part against Oswald. The Fool complicates Kent's moment of triumph by offering him his coxcomb (I, iv, 93). The message is obvious: "if you follow him, you're a fool." Once the Fool has had his say, the clear-minded Kent chides his speech as nonsensical— "This is nothing, Fool."

In II, iv, the Fool is savagely gleeful to discover Kent in the stocks: "Ha, ha! he wears cruel garters" (II, ii, 7). When Lear goes out to seek his wayward daughter Kent asks the Fool: "How chance the king comes with so small a number?", and the Fool quips sarcastically, "And thou hadst been set i' th' stocks for that question, thou'dst well deserv'd it" (59-61). He goes on to patronize Kent, suggesting that he needs a lesson in worldly wisdom: "We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee there's no labouring i' th' winter." Kent, perhaps impatient, or dismissive, asks, "Where learn'd you this, Fool?" Kent nearly always concludes his speeches with "Fool," as if to remind the Fool of his inferior station, but in this instance the Fool delivers a cruel reminder that Kent's present situation is more laughably foolish than his own: "Not i' the stocks, Fool" (84).

For the uncomplicated Kent, the Fool is bewildering. For the Fool, Kent's unreflecting loyalty, seen from his own tortuous confusion, appears either enviable or despicable. Certainly the two characters do not share an understanding about why they remain with Lear. Cordelia's spontaneous recognition of the value of Kent's loyalty contrasts with the Fool's earlier criticisms of Kent. She receives Kent with warm gratitude for his services to Lear: "O thou good Kent! how shall I live and work / To match thy goodness?" (IV, vii, 1-2).

John Danby, in spite of his appreciation of the Fool's complexity, supports Enid Welsford in the conviction that there is never any doubt about the Fool's ultimate allegiance. "While he counsels flight, with wiseman and knave, he will not desert the king."[15] His loyalty to Lear, says Danby, is unshakeable. Is it? He hesitates to follow Lear in I, iv, and has to be shooed out by Goneril: "You, Sir, more knave than fool, after your master" (313). It would not do to make too much of this moment. Maybe the Fool is uncertain whether Lear is about to make another re-entry, as he had at line 291. Maybe he wants to overhear what Goneril will say to Albany in explanation of the incident, out of the loyal motive of spying on those who might do his master harm. Nonetheless, given the complexity of the Fool's attitudes, this moment at which he is left alone with Goneril has suggestive power. He finally leaves by affirming his loyalty to Lear, and there is an element of decision in this speech which may suggest that a real, if temporary, hesitation between Lear and Goneril has just been overcome:

> Nuncle Lear, Nuncle Lear! tarry, take the Fool with thee.
> A fox, when one has caught her,
> And such a daughter,
> Should sure to the slaughter,
> If my cap would buy a halter;
> So the Fool follows after. (314-320)

The Fool's cry to Lear could be pronounced with emphasis on "thee," as if he is saying "I don't want to stay with them, after all." Goneril should be hanged, she is "A fox" (though not yet caught); nonetheless a "fox" who should be hanged if the Fool's cap would buy a halter (presumably it won't), "So"—the word implies a decision at last—the Fool will follow Lear.

At a later stage, on the heath, Kent has to urge the Fool to go on with Lear: "Come, help bear thy master; / Thou must not stay behind" (III, vi, 98-9). But we never see the Fool again. We do not know that he dies; an apprehension of premature death is only one possible explanation of his final comment. Does he desert Lear? It is a feasible possibility, given the division and contradiction we see in him. He is caught between the two alternatives of Goneril and Cordelia, neither of which he finds acceptable. He is left no middle ground; as Danby puts it "He remains helplessly immobilised by a handy-dandy of opposites neither of which he can choose."[16] He sees the inhumanity of sheer self-interest, and is repelled by it, but on the other hand he sees no sanction for self-sacrifice, and in this sense he cannot be said to anticipate Cordelia.

Given this irreducible ambiguity, the fact that Shakespeare does not account precisely for the fate of the Fool may be dramatically

powerful. To give him a precise fate would be to place him in relation to the moral dilemma which his ambiguity enhances.

Empson, I think, is right; Shakespeare is too conscious in his choice of words not to anticipate that "fool," even in the situation of Cordelia's death, would recall the Fool. Cordelia and the Fool are identified for Lear, but the point is that the connection is irrational. There cannot be a greater contrast between the Fool, paralyzed by contradiction and progressively weakening under the strain, and Cordelia with her integrity and restorative power.

At the end of III, vi, the Fool's last appearance in the play, he is weary and withdrawn. The gap between him and Lear is at its greatest, with Lear in the deepest phase of madness. In IV, iii, we hear from a Gentleman of Cordelia's arrival, and of her compassion at Lear's suffering:

> now and then an ample tear trill'd down
> Her delicate cheek; it seem'd she was a queen
> Over her passion; who, most rebel-like,
> Sought to be king o'er her. (12-15)

Whereas in the Fool they create division, discordant elements harmonize themselves in Cordelia. Her control over her grief is precarious but achieved. Her passion is "rebel-like," but she is seemingly "queen" over it. The struggle between restraint and sensitivity concludes in a delicate balance, with an occasional though "ample" tear. The image of a tear "trilling" down Cordelia's cheek begins the association of Cordelia with music (and thus with harmony) which she later strengthens when she prays for Lear's "untun'd" senses to be wound up (IV, vii, 16-17).

The Gentleman's words provide a vision of relief and hope which the play has been desperately lacking. He proceeds to enlarge on the comforting promise of Cordelia's restorative power:

> You have seen
> Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears
> Were like, a better way. (17-19)

The poetry once again describes elements of strife finely balanced and integrated, made to complement rather than compete with one another. Sunshine and rain at once is a rare event, though one which is associated with spring-time, and thus with forces of restoration and renewal. The Fool's exit coincides with Cordelia's return, not because, having represented her during her absence, he is now no longer dramatically necessary, but to heighten the contrast between them. Cordelia's return comes as a blessing after doom.

Cordelia has grown in stature during her absence because the values which she exhibits have been painfully lacking. In the opening scene of the play she refuses to pander to Lear's whims, and might be accused of a stubborn pride. There is a touch of superiority and sarcasm when she says, perhaps thinking of her forthcoming marriage, these blunt words to her father:

> Happily, when I shall wed,
> That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
> Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
> Sure I shall never marry like my sisters
> To love my father all.
>
> *Lr.*, I, i, 99-103

We might be tempted to see the father in his child when, in response to Cordelia's wilfulness, Lear proudly snipes: "Let pride, which she

calls plainness, marry her" (128). Yet Shakespeare perfects a remarkable paradox in the figure of Cordelia. These hints of imperfection are so slight, and are anyway consistent with an honesty which, given the hypocrisy of her sisters, is admirable, that whilst they save her from abstraction, we hardly think of them as faults. They make her human, yet somehow beyond reproach. She has not the cold remoteness, but all the suggestive potency, of a symbol.

The distinction between Cordelia and the Fool can be gauged more directly in their respective attitudes towards Lear. Cordelia's purity and concentration of motive towards her estranged father contrast retrospectively with the inconsistent feelings of the Fool towards Lear. The Fool is demonstrably bitter towards Lear, whereas no resentment sullies Cordelia's love for him. When Lear tells her that she of all people has "cause" to resent him, she replies, "No cause, no cause" (IV, vii, 74). For the Fool, Lear was always partly to blame for the situation in which he found himself. For Cordelia, no grudge he could have given Goneril and Regan deserved the suffering he received at their hands:

> Mine enemy's dog,
> Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
> Against my fire. And wast thou fain, poor father,
> To hovel thee with swine and rogues forlorn,
> In short and musty straw? Alack, alack!
> IV, vii, 36-40

Her spontaneous and unadulterated pity for "poor perdu" brings before us a sense of the horror of Goneril's and Regan's action much amplified from that which the Fool, with his equivocal position, created. The

Fool, himself a divided figure, did not succeed in calming Lear and restoring his sanity. It is Cordelia's example of selflessness, her unconditional forgiveness of Lear, which calms his tormented thoughts and leads him to a gesture of conciliation and peace: "Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish" (84). The transformation we see in Lear from the raging madman on the heath to the humble figure who frankly admits his own foolishness is to be attributed in large measure to Cordelia. It is in no way prepared for by the Fool.

Cordelia is a fool in the Pauline sense. Humble and unworldly, she is the pattern of Christian folly. She represents in its purest form the folly at which Edmund scoffs when he describes Edgar as "a brother noble, / Whose nature is so far from doing harms / That he suspects none; on whose *foolish* honesty / My practices ride easy!" (I, ii, 176-9). It is the same folly at which Goneril scoffs in Albany, when he objects that to sever her own interest from that of her father will lead to anarchy, and she retorts: "No more; the text is *foolish*" (IV, ii, 37), and calls him for his misgivings "a moral *fool*" (57) and "vain *fool*" (62). And it is the folly which the Fool mocks in Lear, when he implies that Lear is a fool for giving away his land. That the Fool shares the perspective of Goneril and Edmund in levelling the charge of folly against actions not based exclusively on self-interest, is a mark of how distinct he is from Cordelia. As Orwell remarks, "the difference between a saint and an ordinary human being is a difference of kind and not of degree."[17]

The Fool, then, is fissured, where Cordelia is whole. But in the world of *King Lear* Cordelia's wholeness makes her vulnerable, for it leads to her capture and death at the hands of Edmund. This is a very different world from that of Nahum Tate's reconstruction, where Cordelia, reunited with Lear and married to Edgar, survives as a living example to the world of the moral that "Truth and Vertue shall at last succeed."[18] Tate omits the Fool, whose complex presence threatens the ethical centrality of Cordelia. There is no such assurance of the victory of virtue in Shakespeare's tragic world, and if Cordelia compares positively with the Fool, in that she helps Lear to attain a peace of mind, however transient, which the Fool could not, she also compares negatively with him, at least to those who can see her form of folly as admirable and as futile. St. Paul was well aware that in the eyes of the world the martyr will appear futile. What is foolish to the worldly man is wisdom to the man who trusts in heaven. All we can say to this is that through the contrast of the Fool and Cordelia Shakespeare does not dismiss the worldly view.

The fool for Christ's sake is, in the end, comforting, but tragedy is not. Because he is divided against himself, and can see both sides of the division between Goneril and Cordelia, the Fool may seem the wisest voice in the play. It could even be said that he offers us a way out of the seemingly unbridgeable gap between Goneril and Cordelia, by advocating, in contrast with their extremes of good and evil, a principle of expediency which does not fail to appreciate virtue yet can protect itself against evil. But the Fool never

formulates a consistent philosophy, and to distil one from his fragmentary and often contradictory utterances is false to the experiential complexity of his speeches. His fate is that of a fool deprived of his licence from within.

In *King Lear* we are invited to contrast two kinds of folly and to witness the failure of both. The Fool has to defend the fool's traditional claim to know and speak truth, to be the voice of wisdom; a task at which he fails in the world of tragedy. Cordelia is a fool whose disregard for worldly success would make her superlatively wise in heaven's judgment, but whose foolishness makes her vulnerable (physically and morally) in a world where her "kind gods" are not assured of victory. The Fool fails to be a fool; Cordelia fails through being a fool. His weakness and her strength are represented as equally vulnerable in Lear's lament "And my poor fool is hang'd!" This line is at its most powerful if we feel that both Cordelia and the Fool are present in "fool." Both are fools, although they are fools in different ways. The singular noun which connects them is thus, strictly speaking, illogical. There is a logic of the feelings, however, as well as a logic of concepts, and Lear may be using the term "fool" in its routine sense as an expression of endearment, which he feels for both of his "poor fools." He has separately called his other Fool "poor," and he now repeats the epithet with Cordelia as its primary referrent. Although the Fool and Cordelia are different kinds of fools, both are "poor," and it is with the recognition that both are to be pitied for suffering which has not been rewarded with

insight or vindication that this line yields its full poignancy. Folly, in both the senses represented by Cordelia and the Fool, had been a synonym for wisdom. In *King Lear* it has no such ontological security.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]Enid Welsford, *The Fool*, 2nd ed. (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1961), p. 269.

[2]1 Cor., Chapter 1, verse 20 (commenting on Isa., Chapter 29, verse 14) and ff.; Chapter 3, verse 18 ff.

[3]Welsford, p. 271.

[4]Siegfried Wenzel, "The Wisdom of the Fool," in *The Wisdom of Poetry*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982), p. 225 ff.

[5]Wenzel, p. 227.

[6]Wenzel, pp. 230-31.

[7]Wenzel, pp. 237-38.

[8]Wenzel, p. 240.

[9]Charles S. Felver, *Robert Armin, Shakespeare's Fool* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, 1961), p. 9.

[10]"The Pilgrimage to Parnassus," in *The Three Parnassus Plays*, ed. J.B. Leishman (London: Ivor Nocholson and Watson, 1949), p. 129.

[11]"A Defence of Poetry," in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 114.

[12]"The Pilgrimage to Parnassus," p. 130.

[13]The first of these examples is pointed out by Olive Mary Busby, in *Studies in the Development of the Fool in the Elizabethan Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 25; the second is noted by Felver, p. 21.

[14]Felver, p. 31.

[15]Harold Jenkins, ed., *Hamlet* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982). All further references to this work appear in the text.

[16]H.F. Lippincott, "*King Lear* and the Fools of Robert Armin," *SQ*, 26 (1975), 248-9.

[17]Lippincott, p. 249.

[18]*The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), p. 287 ff.

[19]Orwell, p. 298.

[20]Ps. 53, verse 1.

[21]St. Bonaventure, "The Mind's Journey to God," in *The Works of Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck (New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960), p. 16.

[22]John Gower, "Confessio Amantis," VIII. 3945-4026, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), Vol. III, pp. 346-48.

[23]Welsford, p. 162, quotes this example from Roper's *The Life of Sir Thomas More Knight*.

[24]John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), p. 102.

CHAPTER 1

[1]Agnes Latham, ed., *As You Like It* (London: Methuen, 1975). All further references to this work appear in the text.

[2]Felver, p. 44.

[3]Felver, p. 43.

[4]A motley costume is commonly thought to be brightly chequered or patched, but Leslie Hotson, in *Shakespeare's Motley* (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1952), argues that this image of the fool is an invention of 19th century medieval revivalists. The costume of an Elizabethan jester, Hotson argues, was of varicoloured thread, but was drab, like a tweed.

[5]William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*, 3rd ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977), pp. 114-15.

[6]Empson, p. 120.

[7]Felver, p. 30.

[8]J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik, ed., *Twelfth Night* (London: Methuen, 1975).

[9]The Arden editors believe this line should read "*Not* like the haggard. . . ." A haggard was an untrained hawk, and they argue that Viola is saying that the fool's criticisms should be considered and restrained, not ungoverned. This reading fits better with the image of controlled power in "stalking horse," but there is insufficient textual evidence to justify an emendation.

[10]Empson, p. 130.

[11]Lippincott, p. 249.

[12]Kenneth Muir, ed., *King Lear* (London and New York: Methuen, 1972). Muir follows the New Cambridge editor in citing "the Lady's Brach" here. The more usual reading, "Lady, the brach" seems to me more justified, as it maintains a stricter opposition between the excluded dog, "Truth," and the deceitful or flattering bitch who is allowed to stay.

[13]Welsford, p. 251.

[14]Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), p. 587. Tilley quotes two entries under "score," neither of which elucidates the Fool's usage.

[15]Kenneth Muir, ed., *King Lear*. Muir quotes these proverbs from Florio's *Second Fruites* in his editorial comment.

[16]The *O.E.D.* points out that "knave" could mean simply "A male child, boy," and "fool" could be used synonymously, to mean an ordinary (male) person, "without its modern sense of insulting contempt."

[17]*O.E.D.* defines "An unprincipled man, given to dishonourable practices; a base and crafty rogue."

[18]Johnson's revision can be found in The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, ed. Arthur Sherbo, Vol. VIII (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 678.

[19]Empson, p. 132.

[20]Horace Howard Furness, *King Lear,* A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1908), p. 145.

[21]Furness, *King Lear,* p. 145.

[22]Felver, p. 61.

[23]Welsford, p. 239.

[24]G.K. Hunter, ed., *All's Well That Ends Well,* 3rd. ed. (London: Methuen, 1959).

[25]Clifford Leech, ed., *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (London: Methuen, 1969).

[26]Peter Bryant, "'Nuncle Lear,'" *English Studies in Africa,* 20 (1977), p. 35.

[27]Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 12.

[28]Bryant, p. 35.

[29]Barbara Swain cites this example in *Fools and Folly During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 56.

[30]Felver, p. 55.

CHAPTER 2

[1]Maynard Mack, *"King Lear" in Our Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 49.

[2]Mack, p. 50.

[3]Welsford, p. 271.

[4]Empson, p. 152.

[5]The Holy Bible in the earliest English versions made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his followers, ed. J. Forshall and F. Madden (n.p.: Oxford University Press, 1850), p. 173. The Wycliffe translation of "insipiens" as "vnwise" seems to have prevailed until the sixteenth century, despite fifteenth century illustrations to the Latin consistently using the figure of a fool.

[6]Prologue to the *Mumming at Hertford,* MS Trin. Coll. Camb., R.3.20, p. 40, 9 and 11.

[7]Kaiser, p. 9.

[8]Kaiser, p. 9.

[9]Dan., Chapter 4, verse 32.

[10]Kenneth Muir, *King Lear,* editorial comment.

[11]Dan., Chapter 4, verse 33.

[12]Bryant, p. 27-8.

[13]Lillian Hornstein, "*King Robert of Sicily:* Analogues and Origins," *PLMA,* 79A (1964), 13-21.

[14]Hornstein, "*King Robert of Sicily:* A New Manuscript," *PMLA,* 78A (1963), 453-58.

[15]W.H. French and C.B. Hale, ed., *Middle English Metrical Romances* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1930), II, 934, lines 33-4. Subsequent page and line references are in parenthesis after entries in the text.

[16]Donna B. Hamilton, "Some Romance Sources for *King Lear: Robert of Sicily* and *Robert the Devil*," *Studies in Philology*, 71 (1974), 173.

[17]Hamilton, p. 175.

[18]Hamilton, p. 175.

[19]A.H.T. Levi, ed., *Praise of Folly* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971). Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition, and are noted in parenthesis after quotations from the text.

[20]Empson, p. 105.

[21]William Willeford, *The Fool and his Scepter* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 213.

[22]Willeford, p. 160.

[23]Kenneth Muir, ed., *King Lear*, editorial comment.

[24]Robert Heilman, *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 186.

[25]Orwell, p. 288.

[26]Empson, p. 138.

[27]Sheldon P. Zitner, "*King Lear* and Its Language," in *Some Facets of "King Lear,"* ed. Rosalie Colie and F.T. Flahiff (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 13.

[28]Michael Cameron Andrews, "'And I'll go to bed at noon,'" *N & Q*, 25 (1978), 151.

[29]Edmund Blunden, "Shakespeare's Significances," in *Shakespeare Criticism 1919-1935*, comp. Anne Ridler (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 336.

[30]Heilman, p. 187.

[31]Empson, p. 136.

CHAPTER 3

[1]A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1905), p. 258.

[2]Furness, ed., *King Lear*, Variorum Edition, p. 345.

[3]Furness, p. 345.

[4]Furness, p. 346.

[5]Furness, p. 347.

[6]Furness, p. 347.

[7]Furness, p. 346.

[8]Empson, p. 152.

[9]Willeford, p. 191.

[10]Orwell, p. 298.

[11]Danby, p. 106.

[12]Kenneth Muir, ed., *King Lear*, editorial comment.

[13]Danby, p. 108.

[14]Welsford, p. 269.

[15]Danby, p. 113.

[16]Danby, p. 110.

[17]Orwell, pp. 298-9.

[18]Nahum Tate, *The History of King Lear* (London: Cornmarket Press, 1969), p. 67.

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VITA

Surname: MYERS Given Names: FAITH JOSEPHINE

Place of Birth: HULL, ENGLAND Date of Birth: 7 JANUARY 1961

Educational Institutions Attended,
with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

TRINITY COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE	1979 to 1982
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, B.C.	1982 to 1983
	____ to ____

Degrees, Diplomas, Etc., Awarded,
with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. (Honours)	1982	University of Cambridge

Honours and Awards:

University of Victoria Scholarship 1982/83 .

Publications:

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THE FOOL AS WISDOM IN *KING LEAR*

Author [redacted]
Signature

FAITH JOSEPHINE MYERS
Name

August 11th 1983
Date