

**The Representation of the Fool in the Elizabethan Age
and Its Significance Today**



by

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Dedication

To My Family

Introduction



What gave rise to the fool in the Elizabethan dramatic literature? How does it relate to the lover figure? How has it withstood the test of time?

Historically, fools are a recurrent stock character in the dramatic arts. They are not always as dynamic or wise as the Renaissance iteration under investigation in this paper. They can, however, be traced to earlier Greek and Roman exemplars and are attributed to religious rituals within a pre-Christian framework. The function of the fool in its original conception was more than pure amusement, given that this figure was the initial truth teller of society whose task it was to mock the typical human vices of vanity, snobbery, and laziness. Later, he exemplified the seven deadly sins as seen in the whimsical figures of Bosch's famous painting of 1485 during the Early Renaissance in northern Europe. He appears here and there throughout the centuries following antiquity in literature and art. The historical influences of the fool were fundamental to the 16th century when creative minds appropriated his basic foibles and turned them into contemporary expressions of folly. Because the fool was ousted from the greater social framework, his alienation sharpened his insight into human nature. Perhaps he

is the first social critic and pop culture philosopher.

The fool thus stands apart from other stock characters in the history of literature and the arts. When Shakespeare's chose to feature him in his plays, his status rose in the eyes of historians. Studies appeared on the fool's origin and the nature of his specific influence. It is still a topic of much interest that is hardly exhausted. The purpose of my thesis is to continue the ongoing examination of the fool in the evolution of Renaissance literature and the performing arts and to trace his development and expression over time, finally arriving at the comedians of today. The parallels that are drawn will serve to help the modern "fools/comedians" attain the social stature of their antecedents. It doesn't matter who dominates the scene today; the point is to elevate people like Robin Williams and Jim Carey as a group to another level, with roots in antiquity and the English Renaissance.

The fool, while not an invention of the Renaissance era, emerged at that moment in new and

vital ways that are particularly relevant in modern times. The fool of ancient Greece and Rome is important not just for himself, but also as the antecedent of the more complex, wise and witty fool of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The 16th century fool is the character we know best today such that comparisons with modern comedians becomes apropos. According to Rosalie L. Colie in her book, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, the fool became a critical truth teller, a necessary plot device, and even a political tool, then and forever more (11). This figure in its various forms is defined with an emphasis on the unwitting vs. the wise fool. The fact that royalty, as well as noble families, employed professional clowns and jesters during the Renaissance contributed to the elevation in stature of both the fictional dramatic fool as well as the comedians of the day. The question is raised: why were playwrights, actors and jesters suddenly prized, as never before, with their professions, acquiring a newfound validity and societal esteem? The answer is found in cultural

mores and historical circumstances. These will be touched on as background for the thesis' hypothesis.

Religious and political upheaval, wars and the great schism within the Christian Church all contributed to seismic shifts in European society in the years leading up to Elizabeth I's rule of England and her dominance of the Renaissance era. Could the combination of these factors culminate in the ideal conditions necessary for the Renaissance fool to materialize? The fool trope, in his multiple manifestations, and contrary to commonly-held presumptions and colloquial insults that prevailed across cultures and languages, was not necessarily a negative or villainous character, but oftentimes a witty and astute critique of society and human frailties, offering a valuable outsider's perspective.

An interesting manifestation of the fool at this time is the lover. While this character may not fit neatly into the natural/artificial fool dichotomy, it is worth considering and exploring as an important if, sometimes temporary, version that Renaissance

writers and thinkers used extensively in their literature. Various lover characters in Elizabethan English drama were, as in ancient Greece, are often linked with fools: lovers as fools and fools as lovers (Kallendorf 341).

This paper, as support for its position about the parallel between the Renaissance and modern fool, traces the origin of a great literary figure who emerged during a fertile period in history when the complex and colourful character of the fool became woven seamlessly into the tapestry of society, finding expression in the contemporary drama of Shakespeare. In short, the fool is essential to literature, drama, and culture in general—then as now. A debt of gratitude is owed to this Renaissance figure, for our world would be unrecognizable without his influence. To gain a deeper understanding of the various elements that laid the foundation for the Renaissance fool to emerge in Elizabethan England and develop at such a rate over the course of Shakespeare's lifetime into the character we all love and recognize today, one must consider several

aspects of English history and society. A careful examination of a number of individuals who impacted Shakespeare and were subsequently immortalized in his plays is fundamental to gaining a well-rounded picture of how the fool character materialized and the new professions that were canonized as a result of his ascent.

Chapter One: The Emergence of the Renaissance Fool



Many modern scholars have studied the fool and made significant distinctions between the various types of fools in Renaissance literature, while also exploring

the influence of professional jesters in the creation of such characters.

"A fool thinks himself to be wise, but a wise man knows himself to be a fool." William Shakespeare.

The fool, a bumbling buffoon and the butt of jokes, is a well-recognized and appreciated stock character in dramatic literature. During the Renaissance, a time when nobility employed court jesters and professional clowns, fools achieved new status. In tandem with the social elevation of professional jesters, fools written into dramatic Renaissance literature developed in new and complex ways - even over the course of Shakespeare's lifetime. The word 'fool', a broad catchall phrase, calls to mind the silly, clumsy and socially inept persona with whom we are all so familiar. Inside this generality, however, exist a profound significance and value in the various functions of disparate fool types. The purpose and function of the fool character in Renaissance literature are varied and multifaceted.

The process of untangling its diverse roles and identities necessitates careful investigation of both primary sources and a survey of literary scholars.

Although fools existed in dramatic literature before the Renaissance, this stock character and all its variants underwent rapid transformation during this era to emerge renewed and redefined. Modern scholars of Renaissance literature make significant distinctions between the various fool types as they explore the roles of professional jesters in influencing the creation of such characters. Klapp defines fools as low status, untrustworthy, clumsy and stupid, and further identifies ten different varieties of fools used in Renaissance literature that are easily identifiable characters in the works of several playwrights of the era: (1) the antic fool, (2) the comic rogue, (3) the rash fool, (4) the clumsy fool, (5) the deformed fool, (6) the simple fool, (7) the weak fool, (8) the comic butt, (9) the pompous fool, and (10) the mock hero (p. 158). These simple fool forms find expression in many of Shakespeare's works and dramatic personae, but there

is another variant that Klapp does not mention - that of the wiser 'artificial' fool who uses his skills with intention. For the purposes of this paper, it is useful to characterize Klapp's ten types together as that of the unwitting or 'natural fool' varieties. Klapp's conceptual fool(s) is the object of ridicule; to be called 'fool' or otherwise identified with any of the above ten qualities is an insult or indication of a demotion in social status. His dramatic fool embodies a failure to uphold social norms and either a rejection of social mores and standards or being ousted by the rest of the group. Making a fool of someone in society is ascribing a lack of virtue or competence to that person. In dramatic literature, this deviation from social norms is a useful and often comical plot device.

Examples of natural fools are scattered throughout the pages of Shakespeare's plays. Dogberry, the inept policemen of *Much Ado About Nothing*, embodies several of Klapp's 'incompetent' fool varieties through his weakness, ineptitude, clumsiness with language and, above all, his

continual malapropisms, incorrect speech and knack for getting everything backward which makes his character such a successful comic device. In this passage, he claims it is his duty to leave thieves alone in order not to defile himself by association and therefore instructs his officers to do the same:

If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man; and, for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them, why the more is for your honesty.

Much Ado About Nothing III,3,1369

Similarly, Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, typifies the pompous fool, who believes he has a chance to woo his mistress, Olivia, thereby opening himself up to the pranks that the other characters play upon him so cruelly. His lack of humour along with his pomposity make him an easy target:

I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal: I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone. Look you now, he's out of his guard already; unless you laugh and minister occasion to Him, he is gagged. I protest I take these wise men, that crow so at these set kind of fools, no better than the fools' zanies.

Twelfth Night I,5,372

Such characters are pompous, incompetent, ignorant and even lecherous fools. However, they should never be confused with actual villains; instead, they remain in a class unto themselves. These fools are super-neurotic and self-serving to an extent that inhibits genuinely evil and malicious schemes. "The fool defines certain varieties of untrustworthy conduct. It operates as an avoidance symbol, discrediting leaders, movements, or

individuals which show weaknesses in terms of group norms" (Klapp p.162)

At this point, it is essential to distinguish between 'natural' and 'artificial' fool tropes. Fools were growing in societal esteem and prominence at an accelerated rate during the Renaissance period due in large part due to the popular convention of employing jesters and clowns in houses of nobility as well as the courts of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. These professionally employed jesters were wise and astute critics of society as well as accomplished dancers and musicians. Some of the most famous of these specialized jesters and fool performers had a direct and strong influence on Shakespeare's (as well as his contemporaries') dramatic works. Chris Wiley notes in his *Fooling Around the Court Jesters of Shakespeare*:

"The court jesters portrayed in Shakespeare's work are mostly based on the model of jesters in his own time. Elizabethan England was home to many interesting characters, including the court jester. The jester was a specialized fool, the

clown to the crown, placed one step below the queen—literally, since he normally sat at the queen's feet. Though some jesters were merely simple fools—singled out for their interesting physical abnormalities or bawdy humour that a king or queen found amusing—most court jesters were chosen for their wit and wiles. Those chosen jesters are an enigma in ways: valued for their jokes and silly nature, and yet they still had the ear of the queen. In many ways, the court jester was one of the few people allowed to speak frankly to a monarch without fear of punishment." (P.1)

Wiley and others, such as Robert H. Bell, examine professional jesters and compare them with dramatic stock character fool types, concluding that the elevation in social status of professional jesters influenced the growth and development of literary fools in Elizabethan drama. The jester is a restrained clown (Wiley), who uses wit and gags to amuse and poke fun at society. All monarchs of the

16th century, including Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, as well as wealthy noble families retained professional jesters as part of their household retinue, several of whom were also directly employed as actors in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. These pioneering fools influenced Shakespeare's work and directly impacted the characters memorialized in his plays such as Robert Armin, Will Kemp, Richard Tarlton, and Will Sommers, to name a few.

In *The Great Stage of Fools*, Bell lists several famous jesters whose names and reputations have withstood the test of time and can be recognized in famous portraiture and because they are memorialized in the names of modern day pubs and taverns. Many professional fools of the Renaissance period were indeed well-known celebrities of their day. Bell distinguishes natural and artificial fools, and jesters from clowns, maintaining that a jester is more sophisticated than a clown – an artificial fool who counterfeits folly for the entertainment of others (p. 12). He traces the influence of such jesters on the evolution in complexity of

Shakespeare's fictional fools demonstrable even over his lifetime.

The 'artificial' fool, who jests to amuse or poke fun, was one of the few allowed to speak and critique frankly without fear of punishment. Over the course of Shakespeare's career, the fool characters in his plays evolved, both comic and tragic, demonstrating a distinct shift in how Shakespeare and the culture that encapsulated him viewed the fool. Shakespeare's fools became distinctly wiser and more sympathetic characters over time. There is a notable swing away from earlier bawdy and vulgar humour; the early Shakespearian fool, who typically depended upon physical slapstick humour and sarcastic jokes to engage audiences, became radically more refined and intelligent, employing clever witticisms and philosophical reflections that resonated deeply with the crowd, then as now. Anyone who has experienced a stand-up comic in Las Vegas or a comedy club knows this for a fact. The monologues of television late night hosts are also a case in point; they are always based on the news and social values of the day.

The fool had license to criticize his master and society; the jester could save the world from himself. There is power and inherent danger in the ability of these astute, if foolish, critics to effect change with their searing accurate analyses and portrayals of reality. The wit of Touchstone in *As You Like It* is appreciated, as is folly in general, but it rapidly becomes something more potent than the former fools:

"Folly...It encompasses infatuation, homicide, jokes, or holiness; follies can be sublime or ridiculous, tragic or trivial. Folly's basic meaning is lack of reason, wisdom, or understanding—hence error, misperception, confusion."

(Shakespeare's *Great Stage of Fools*, Robert H. Bell)

Folly and foolery are indispensable tools with which we communicate and relate to one another. They provide context and counterpoint positions in the

cast of characters that make up a play and so often the stage of everyday life. Bell's high-resolution assessment of the situational differences of fools is essential when embarking on an examination of such characters. His work will feature more prominently in future chapters of this thesis.

In Shakespearian comedies such as *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, examples of foolishness as unwitting or natural abound. The foolish behaviour of the principal characters is caused by love and so can, in most cases, be overcome.

"Here many lovers resemble natural rather than artificial fools because, of course, anyone in love is a fool for love. Amorous idiocy or mad love involves many types of foolery, including contests of wit, masquerades, festivals, rituals, holidays, staged performances, and, most important for our purposes, trickery and subterfuge." (Bell)

This excerpt presents an interesting question of how to distinguish between temporary foolery and an irredeemable fool status. There is a natural tension between feeling and fooling. Conundrums and paradoxes are exposed and counterparts mutually implicated, inverted, identified and reversed. Benedict and Beatrice are a case in point as they duel with their wits throughout *Much Ado* until they finally come to their senses.

There are innumerable sub-varieties of fools, but the overarching types are the unwitting natural fool, ignorant of his digressions, and the artificial or wise fool who uses his wit for a purpose. The later type was employed in the Renaissance era in the households of the wealthy and gained prominence both societal and professionally. In jest, the witty fool makes the audience collaborators or participants in the illusion: he solicits spectators embroiling them in complicity.

As noted by Klapp, the fool category, with the use of ridicule and criticism, is commonly applied to modern entertainment and public discourse.

Shakespeare recognized the utility of such a character and wrote these complex characters into his plays, often basing them on celebrity jesters of his era. Today, comedians are influential public commenters as well as entertainers who use their wit as a weapon to discredit public leaders or movements, who, when deemed fool figures themselves, can fall into disgrace, a position from which it can be nearly impossible to restore one's reputation. Whether the label sticks or is temporary depends on the repetition of whatever behaviour led to it, as well as how redeemable the person is.

Several elements of the Renaissance environment - political, spiritual and cultural - coalesced in one nodal point in history, resulting in ideal conditions for the birth of the fool as he is still known and recognized today. A constellation of circumstances prepared the way for the grand entrance of the Renaissance fool onto the world stage. Klapp outlines the social necessity of the natural fool category and all its variants as a useful societal tool. Similarly, Wiley traces the rise of the wise fool in

Shakespeare's plays and argues for his visible formation and emergence. Scholars such as Bell delve into the importance and meaning of folly, foolery, and fools, on and off the stage. Renaissance nobility staffed their household retinues with professional jesters and fools, which legitimized and nourished the growth and elevation in social status of both the professional and fictional fool. Once formed, this persona changed little over ensuing centuries and is easily spotted in contemporary drama, television and the skits of successful comedians, who earn their living criticizing the 'establishment'. The Simpsons and Seinfeld would not be such popular television series if their brand of fool did not reveal and expose our human foibles and frailties to ourselves.

The ephemeral nature of the fictional fool, admitted everywhere and able to touch all we cherish and slip away unscathed, is a powerful image. Shakespeare, the great giant of English literature, recognized this fundamental ethereal nature of the fool and even represented himself as such. "Like Shakespeare, the fool is everyone and no one,

essential and yet without essence" (Bell p.138). Just as the plays and sonnets of the bard will ever remain an inexhaustible font of wisdom and insight into the human condition without fading nor going out of style, so, too, the fool never fails to amuse and elucidate, through wit and exemplification, our mortal flaws and limitations. A world without the fool, as formulated in the 16th Century, would be barren and empty. No wonder we revere our comics today. Comedy as a genre far outweighs drama in popularity.

Chapter Two: In Praise of Folly and the Protestant Reformation



Desiderius Erasmus wrote a letter and monologue dedicated to Thomas More entitled, In Praise of Folly

that praises folly and describes its uses and transformations. The Catholic Church reformation, Martin Luther and Henry VIII were part of very turbulent times and divisive issues that had a huge impact and are referenced in the plays. The serious implications of the seismic shifts taking place politically, socially and religiously contributed to the enormous success of staged plays and drama at the time.

As this paper is concerned with fools of various types and constitutions, the conversation would be incomplete without a consideration of concepts set forth by Erasmus in his famous essay, *In Praise of Folly*, of 1509. It predates the particular 'Renaissance fool' that Shakespeare and his contemporaries midwived into existence, and the concepts described both in Erasmus's letter to Thomas More (1509) and the essay itself (1511) are germane to the discussion. Attention should especially be given to those areas where his ideas align with notions of what fools and foolery mean, where

incongruities arise as well as to how he utilized folly as a mechanism to critique the establishment.

In *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus personifies folly as a spiritual being or force who narrates the essay and makes a convincing case for her crucial necessity to human existence in all aspects of life from infancy, through marriage and into old age. Erasmus claims that Folly relieves pain and suffering and makes life bearable; it maintains youth and wards off old age, allowing people to like themselves and others. How Erasmus frames folly and foolery is a crucial element in understanding how the fool character (natural and wise), as well as jesters, rose to such distinction in Renaissance England. As stated previously, the dramatic fool featured prominently in ancient Greece and subsequent periods. However, this character changed and developed drastically in the Renaissance age to emerge as a new and reformed entity that has remained a productive part of society ever since.

"And what is all this life but a kind of comedy, wherein men walk up and down in one another's

disguises and act their respective parts, till the property-man brings them back to the attiring house. Moreover, yet he often orders a different dress, and makes him that came but just now off in the robes of a king put on the rags of a beggar. Thus are all things represented by counterfeit, and yet without this there was no living." – Erasmus, In Praise of Folly

In Praise of Folly has been a starting point for several literary scholars who have studied the fool (see Enid Welsford and Barbara Swain). Billington points out that it is crucial to understand the theological background of Erasmus in order to understand why he fails to distinguish between fool types clearly. He was aware of the paradoxes and satire that seem at times quite blasphemous; yet he purposely ignored the differences between the types. His audience would have understood the context and underlying meaning of his purposeful ambiguity. People studying fools without it run into inconsistencies.

To expand on the contemporary context of In Parise of Folly, in 1517, the priest Martin Luther made 95 complaints of corruption against the Catholic Church, sparking the Protestant Reformation that led to centuries of political and religious strife. By the Renaissance, the effects of this schism had impacted all of British society; politics, philosophy and theology. Thus, an exploration of the consciousness of the people living through these waves of change is central to developing an understanding of this era with a perspective on the relative importance of folly.

Erasmus prefaces his essay with a letter to his dear friend, Thomas More, who was a lawyer, judge, philosopher and Renaissance humanist, as well as advisor to King Henry VIII; but when More opposed his separation from the Catholic Church, refusing to recognize Henry as head of church and state, he was arrested for treason and beheaded. In the 20th century, Pope John Paul II canonized More as a martyr and the patron saint of statesmen and politicians in the Roman Catholic Church.

Political and religious tensions of the era were volatile, continually shifting and commonly erupting into violence, as much about human existence and human beings' relationship to God and the world were brought into question. In his *Utopia*, More like Erasmus, is tolerant of fools both witless and artificial potentially, paving the way for the acceptance of fools and jesters as valuable and contributing members of culture and society.

In his letter of dedication to More, Erasmus speculates how others will receive this essay, preemptively answering the reproaches he imagines will come from his detractors. (Shickman 219) Would they snarl and declare his work in poor taste or would they ridicule and dismiss his efforts?

"For my own part, let other men judge what I have written; though yet, unless an overweening opinion of myself may have made me blind in my own cause I have praised folly, but not altogether foolishly...The liberty was ever permitted to all men's wits, to make their smart

witty reflections on the common errors of mankind, and that too without offence. As long as this liberty does not run into licentiousness; which makes me the more admire the tender ears of the men of this age, that can away with solemn titles...Besides, he that spares no sort of men cannot be said to be angry with anyone in particular, but the vices of all." (3)

Erasmus's essay is fundamental to the discussion of fools in a number of ways. Stultitia, the narrator and female muse who personifies Folly, satirically pokes fun at the shortcomings of the upper classes and the faults of religious institutions. As a female she is an interesting departure from the maleness typically associated with jesters and clowns. Erasmus also does not distinguish between wise or simple fools the way other scholars have done. His lightheaded critique does not indicate a lack of faith in Catholicism of which he was a staunch supporter, but rather the folly and foolishness of the dogmatic, rigid and corrupt practices and people

who, through a lack of integrity and forthrightness, threatened its very existence.

Stultitia, or Folly, resists being defined, saying she will not accept definition or division of herself. (Vicki K. Janik, 2) as such attempts are absurd. (The irony that this position is communicated in a paper devoted to defining and articulating the various manifestations of fools is not lost on this author.) So far this paper has distinguished between the natural and unnatural or artificial fool with the caveat that these categories can be somewhat porous, and certain situations and dramatic personae do not always fit into them such as the foolish lover.

Erasmus playfully begs the question of whether wisdom and folly are indeed found in opposition to one another. The premise 'to be wise is to be governed by reason, while it is passion that rules the foolish' leads him to speculate on where one locates these attributes in the human body. Is reason confined to the brain and passion to the body, and therefore are human beings more predisposed to let their passions rule their wits? Erasmus argues in the

affirmative that folly is more dominant in the human condition than wisdom, and thus it is folly to resist it completely. Perhaps folly actually could be a means to humility and salvation. However, he warns, folly does not come unaccompanied since it is frequently followed by its close companions madness, laziness, flattery, self-love, oblivion, dead sleep, pleasure and intemperance (Adamczyk 28) which must be subdued. Folly and her companions often manifests in several obvious aspects of daily and social interactions, particularly in friendship and marriage.

From a religious perspective, Erasmus reasserted Chaucer's assertion of Christian folly as a means of salvation emphasizing the attitude of humility as integral to salvation. He explored an ancient paradox of Coninidentia Opposiorum, a mathematical hypothesis that posits the greatest and the very least cannot be increased (nothing greater than the greatest or less than the least). He thus concluded that in the final equation, they must be of equal immeasurable value, and therefore a fool (the least)

can represent God (the greatest). He further proposed that the true philosopher should be humbled by his ignorance and the limits to his knowledge and thus embrace his 'fool' nature. Therefore, the self-acknowledged fool is granted salvation.

"Just as nothing is more foolish than misplaced wisdom, so too, nothing is more imprudent than perverse prudence. And surely it is perverse not to adapt yourself to the prevailing circumstances, to refuse 'to do as the Romans do,' to ignore the party-goer's maxim 'take a drink or take your leave,' to insist that the play should not be a play. True prudence, on the other hand, recognizes human limitations and does not strive to leap beyond them; it is willing to run with the herd, to overlook faults tolerantly or to share them in a friendly spirit. But, they say, that is exactly what we mean by folly. (I will hardly deny it -- as long as they will reciprocate by admitting that this is exactly

what it means to perform the play of life.)” –
Erasmus, In Praise of Folly

The personified Folly plays with the moral and spiritual concerns of the day through satire and is, therefore, a mechanism for social critique, a strategy employed in a similar fashion today when stand-up comedians poke fun at politicians and satirize critical social issues. In the famous medieval morality plays, the artificial fool was often portrayed as malevolent with quite a lot of fluidity between fools as vice characters and vice characters as fools. There is evidence that the fool existed in medieval England in the surviving accounts of Hirard, the jester for the Saxon King Edmund Ironsides (referred to as a jocolator) as well as Rahere, who was Henry I's jester and referred to as a minstrel.

By contrast, for Erasmus, Folly herself does not mock or tease actual fools, clowns or jesters; instead it is the wealthy, kings, priests, merchants under attack, those in the upper strata of society.

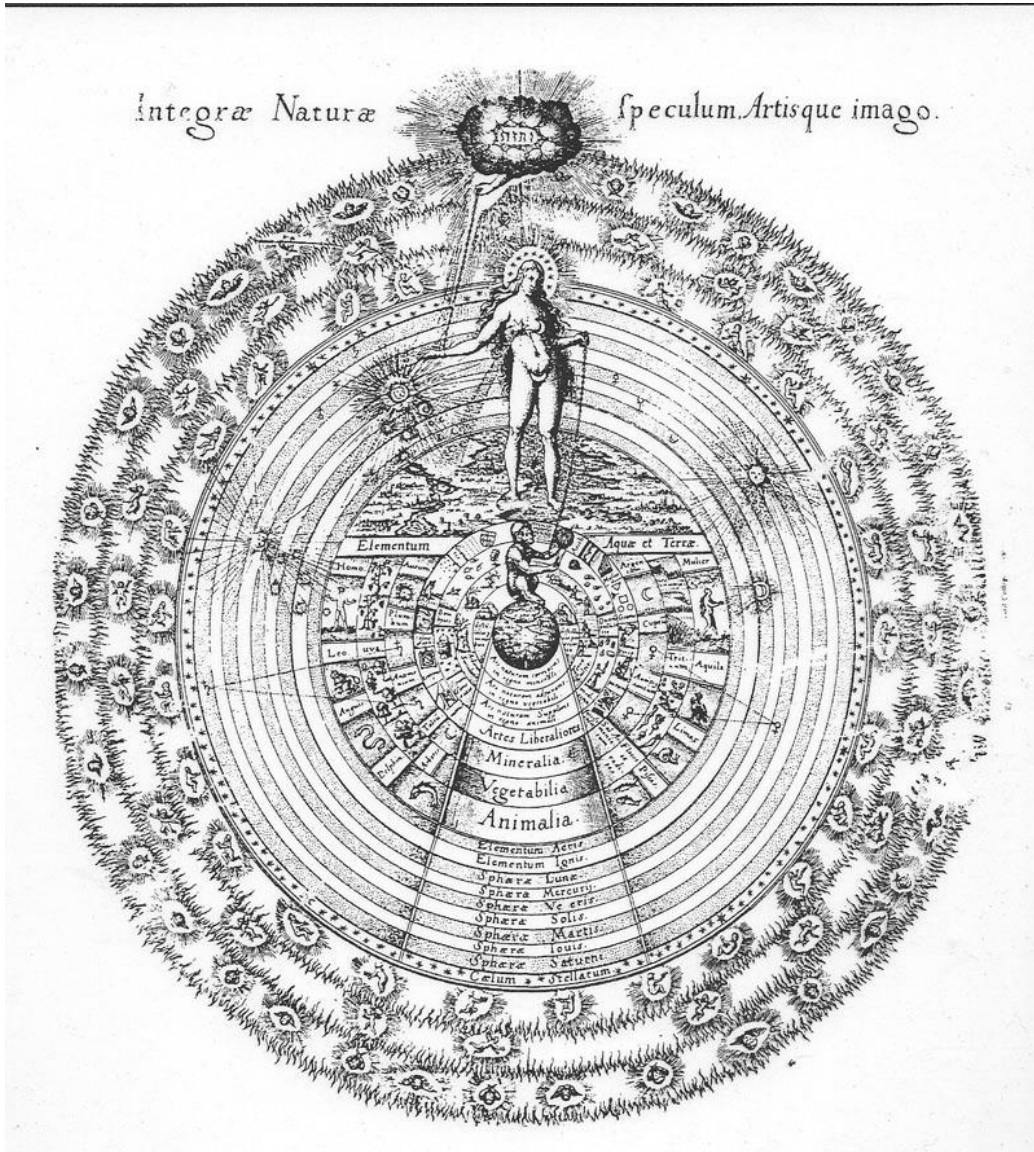
Nor are they mocked for their physical characteristics or modes of dress, but for their moral shortcomings and the interior values that are lacking and reveal their hypocrisy. In this way, Erasmus was attempting to awaken people to their own folly, humanness, imperfections and contradictions to encourage a more playful and reflective and ultimately honest approach to the topics of the day. This is a position that we would do well to reflect on when considering our own contemporary concerns both personally and on a global scale.

The ephemeral nature of the fictional fool was admitted everywhere and was able to touch people's lives. This transformation is clearly evidenced by comparing 'the relatively short five-year span Feste from Twelfth Night (1601/02' to 'Touchstone in King Lear (1606)'. Feste is given singing parts in Twelfth Night that require actual skill and for which Duke Orsino in scene IV compliments him (Chakravarti 231). The skilled Shakespearean fool is a departure from previous forms. The bumbling ineptness of his earlier fool characters falls into disuse as the wittier fool

emerges as a wise and adept commentator on all of human existence. This fool's purpose is not merely to amuse through parody, irony and satire, but to elucidate the paradoxes of human existence, i.e., the foils and frailties of human beings.

It is clear that many aspects of the Renaissance environment - cultural, spiritual, and political - created the ideal conditions for the emergence of the fools in all his manifestations, shades, and professional development such as his employment as a professional. This has led to the recognition and appreciation of 'fools' today. The constellations of social and political circumstances paved the way for the great development of the Renaissance fool, who continued to exist through modern times as seen in contemporary comedy in the skits of reputable comedians.

Chapter Three: Elizabethan Psychology



Murray Bundy argues that Shakespeare's plays were not merely didactic but were a thoughtful and in-depth investigation into the nature of morality of human beings and the state, as well as the fatal flaws of

both. Shakespeare's dramatic types exemplify this exploration of human capacity and limitation while pointing at an ideal.

What a piece of work is man,
How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty,
In form and moving how express and admirable,
In action how like an Angel,
In apprehension how like a god,
The beauty of the world,
The paragon of animals.
And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?
Man delights not me; no, nor Woman neither;
though by your smiling you seem to say so.

-Hamlet

The Elizabethan Golden Age represented massive political and religious upheaval as we have seen in the schism in the Christian Church and Martin Luther's proclamations. This was an age of discovery, scientific breakthroughs, alchemy and new and distant lands. Elizabethans were experiencing a broadening of

horizons in every sense; and although they began questioning and enlarging inherited precepts of the Middle Ages, many fundamental structures of belief and belonging remained in place that may not be obvious to the modern observer. For example, although drama itself is, as Tillyard rightly points out, anything but ordered and orderly, it may surprise the contemporary scholar to discover that the Elizabethan world view was predicated on a general conception of order so unquestioned and fundamental that it was barely mentioned explicitly "the conception of order is so taken for granted, so much a part of the collective mind of the people, that it is hardly mentioned except in explicitly didactic passages. It is not absent from non-didactic writing," (Tillyard, 9) This section will contextualize his work and the prevailing views of his time.

"Each of the Shakespeare histories serves a special purpose in elucidating a political problem of Elizabeth's day and in bringing to

bear upon this problem the accepted political philosophy of the Tudors. (Lily, Campbell, 125)

We will investigate the Elizabethan mind relying mainly on Shakespeare but also drawing on the contemplations of such literary thinkers as Wolfgang von Goethe, Coleridge Tillyard, Freud and Jung (archetypes), and consider the framework set out in contemporary publications by authors such as Bundy, White and Hunter. The goal is to provide a deeper conceptual understanding of what motivated the Elizabethan mind and ultimately how this relates to the character of the fool.

Renaissance literature and plays, especially those of the great bard himself, explore many facets and foibles of the human condition and represent common errors, blunders and foolishness common to the human condition. However, these plays are far more complex than the morality plays of the Middle Ages. In his article, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Psychology*, Bundy maintains that Shakespeare's plays were more than instructive and edifying to the

largely illiterate audience they presented a picture of the universal themes and struggles that have confronted humanity from time immemorial.

To aid in this quest to establish as clear a picture as possible of the Elizabethan mindset, we look to E.M.W. Tillyard and his *The Elizabethan World Picture* to ground our understanding in the mental and moral presuppositions that the Elizabethan scholars took for granted. Tillyard defines the real Elizabethan age as the twenty-five years between 1580-1605, a period characterized by a massive increase in artistic, philosophical and social development and discovery.

Renaissance ideology inherited many concepts and ideas from the Middle Ages; the prevailing wisdom of that time tended to divide all phenomena into threefold aspects or trilogies. For example, mental processes that issue from the liver, the heart, and the brain, or the corresponding soul aspects: vegetative, animal and rational; the brain front for imagination, middle for rationale, and the back for memory (Bundy 519) In the Elizabethan Renaissance

mind, this framework was still in existence but modified and elaborated. Tillyard describes it thus:

"Man is called a little world not because he is composed of the four elements (for so are all the beasts, even the meanest) but because he possesses all the faculties of the universe. For in the universe there are gods, the four elements, the dumb beasts, and the plants. Of all these man possesses the faculties: for he possesses the godlike faculty of reason; and the nature of the elements, which consists in nourishment growth and reproduction. In each of these faculties he is deficient; just as the competitor in the pentathlon, while possessing the faculty to exercise each part of it, is yet inferior to the athlete who specializes in one part only; so man though he possesses all the faculties is deficient in each. For we possess the faculty of reason less eminently than the gods; in the same way the elements are less abundant in us than in the elements themselves;

our energies and desires are weaker than the beasts'; our powers of nurture and of growth are less than the plants'. Whence, being an amalgam of many and varied elements, we find our life difficult to order. For every other creature is guided by one principle; but we are pulled in different directions by our different faculties. For instance at one time we are drawn towards the better by the god-like element, at another time towards the worse by the domination of the bestial element, within us." (Tillyard, 66)

This conceptual picture was deeply entrenched in European thought, and by the era of the Renaissance, the fabric of the universe and relative position of all things in it was taken quite for granted by the educated. If one does not come to Renaissance literary works with this in mind, it is easy to miss a great deal of the subtle presuppositions and ideas inherent in the work of that remarkable era. To fully appreciate the new emergent fool type that arose at this time, we must penetrate the Elizabethan mind as

deeply as possible--the mentality of a nation ordered and restricted by strict placement and formal positioning of oneself in relation to the physical and spiritual world. This formal manner of interpreting the configuration of the universe and relationship of things to and between one another was omnipresent in Elizabethan thinking; it set the stage for the rise of Humanism. A very well-defined and ordered structure of being paradoxically highlighted areas and instances where the rules could be bent, challenged or even turned upside-down. Tillyard points out, however, that the so-called secularization of the English did not mean a disregard for the theological and philosophical underpinnings of the culture that were ubiquitous in Renaissance England.

To drive this point home, Bundy (1924) quotes famous poet philosopher Wolfgang von Goethe;

"If we call Shakespeare one of the greatest poets, we mean that few have perceived the world as accurately as he, that few who have expressed

their inner contemplation of it have given the reader deeper insight into its meaning and consciousness" (516)

Bundy and Goethe (as well as countless other critics over the last several centuries) have acknowledged Shakespeare's profound grasp of human nature and his relationship to the world, touching on universal truisms that still reverberate across cultures and time. Indeed, Shakespeare's insights into the machinations of our interior and exterior realities were articulated to an elevated and unparalleled degree. For this reason, in describing the Elizabethan mindset, we rely to a large extent on what is revealed through his work and re-examine his insights from a psychological perspective.

'Shakespeare writes not for past ages, but for that in which he lives, and that which is to follow. It is natural that he should conform to the circumstances of his day, but a true genius will stand independent of those circumstances. It

is a poor compliment to a poet to tell him that he has only the qualifications of an historian.'

Coleridge

Bundy begins pragmatically and prudently reminding the reader that it is perilous to take for granted any personal perspectives and motivations of a given author, especially a playwright, or to attribute worldviews to his fictional work. In the case of Shakespeare, it is more problematic as he is generally considered to be a voice that approaches the universal and the sublime successfully bridging time, space and culture. Nevertheless, while some of Shakespeare's views evidently ran counter to what one would expect were the conventional attitudes of their specific era and society, in other ways his works may be seen as the embodiment of his era. As we undertake this task, it is critical that caution and care be exercised in examining Shakespeare's work and philosophy of life through the perspectives of his characters, remembering that assumptions about the man himself are convoluted.

Wolfgang von Goethe, a prolific writer poet and philosopher in his own right, describes his first encounter with Shakespeare's work as a personal awakening to life itself. In similar fashion, Coleridge asserted that the character of Hamlet was a vehicle to understanding our own minds. This notion was later upheld by Freud himself and then translated into the psychological framework and terminology of 20th century.

'Freud's most famous statement about Hamlet, indeed, his most famous contribution to Shakespeare scholarship generally, was to point out Hamlet's Oedipus complex. Conversely, Hamlet seems almost to have helped Freud formulate the conception of the Oedipus complex which turned out to be the cornerstone of orthodox psychoanalysis.' (Holland, 165)

Freud, coming from a psychoanalytical perspective, clearly appreciated the clarity with which Shakespeare describes the consciousness of the mind, but can we really ascertain through these

fictional accounts and dramatic personae what he himself thought about such things as ethics, passions, virtues and vices, self-restraint. Bundy argues that it may not be possible, nor indeed a worthy pursuit; instead it is more practical to contextualise his plays and establish what views he held that were contemporaneous to his era and that "anticipate the results of modern philosophical investigations" (518)

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,
 Observe degree, priority, and place,
 Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
 Office, and custom, in all line of order;
 And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
 In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd
 Amidst the other, whose med'cinable eye
 Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,
 And posts, like the commandment of a king,
 Sans check, to good and bad. But when the planets
 In evil mixture to disorder wander,
 What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,

What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
 Commotion in the winds! Frights, changes, horrors,
 Divert and crack, rend and deracinate,
 The unity and married calm of states
 Quite from their fixture! O, when degree is shak'd,
 Which is the ladder of all high designs,
 The enterprise is sick! How could communities,
 Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
 Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
 The primogenity and due of birth,
 Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
 But by degree, stand in authentic place?
 Take but degree away, untune that string,
 And hark what discord follows! Each thing melts
 In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
 Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
 And make a sop of all this solid globe;
 Strength should be lord of imbecility,
 And the rude son should strike his father dead;
 Force should be right; or, rather, right and wrong--
 Between whose endless jar justice resides--
 Should lose their names, and so should justice too.

Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking.

--S. The history of Troilus and Cressida ACT I SCENE

3

The Elizabethans had a very developed and complex sense of mankind's place in relationship to the hierarchical structure of nature, to the tangible world and the cosmos. Working from this perspective of godlike deficiency, human beings are constituted of an amalgam of different underdeveloped faculties, forces, elements and aspirations, such that it becomes easier to see how the Elizabethan mind would conceptualize the inner conflict and irrationality of Shakespeare's most famous tragic heroes. The rich three dimensionality of those figures, the depth of

their torment, has inspired scholars and intellectuals ever since.

Bundy elucidates the close relation between the head and the heart, between wit and passions, explaining that to the Elizabethans, the passions and instincts that propel us may begin in the heart but then move into the brain where they are tempered and guided by the reason of our intellect. This points to a duality between passion and reason that is ever present in Renaissance literature. This concept is well articulated by fool characters in Shakespeare's comedies and is expressed by Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, although she is not a fool but may be considered a lover-fool character type, a concept which will be explored in a subsequent chapter.

Viola. This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
 And to do that well craves a kind of wit:
 He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
 The quality of persons, and the time,
 And, like the haggard, cheque at every feather
 That comes before his eye. This is a practise

As full of labour as a wise man's art
 For folly that he wisely shows is fit;
 But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.
 --Shakespeare, Twelfth Night

The head and the heart stand in opposition to one another while reason and imagination mediate between the two. Per Richard Hooker, 'the mind while we are in this present life, whether it contemplate², meditate, deliberate, or howsoever exercise itself, worketh nothing without continual recourse unto imagination, the only storehouse of wit and peculiar chair of memory. On this anvil it ceaseth not day and night to strike, by means whereof as the pulse declareth how the heart doth work, so the very thoughts³ and cogitations of man's mind be they good or bad do nowhere sooner betray themselves, than [324] through the crevices of that wall wherewith nature hath compassed the cells and closets of fancy.'

Book V. Ch lxxv.8 (Richard Hooker, *The Works of Richard Hooker*, vol.2 [1888])

Renaissance naturalism and Humanism emerged at this moment during the golden age of the 16th century, concepts that which placed human beings at the centre of nature's hierarchy while at the same time allowing for scientific inquiry into the machinations of humans and nature. In fact, it was a well established belief of the time that each individual, although flawed and deficient, was a microcosm of the entire universe and everything in it. Once again, Shakespeare is instructive.

Rosencrantz:

'My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

Which dates back to Nemesius of Syria who expressed similar concepts (p.4) in the fourth century.

Something missing here""

Elizabethan's in from all stratas of society held many worldviews in common and were operating from the same set of beliefs and presuppositions about the world and the universe, - having a common

theological bond. One could draw a convincing parallel between Shakespeare's exploration of the psyche to world explorers such as like Drake or Raleigh; his rich and well-rounded characters played with the hierarchical structures and given orderliness of things in a manner that must have shocked and intrigued his audiences such that the modern mind cannot comprehend its equivalent.

At this moment, a fissure in the fabric of English society was torn open by the schism in the church, the discovery of new lands, the absorption of cultural artefacts from abroad, as well as technological innovations like the printing press, the importance of which cannot be overemphasised. This unique constellation of circumstances allowed jesters to rise in prominence, influence the great bard, gain employment in the new and respectable role of actor and develop a fool archetype at once original and timeless.

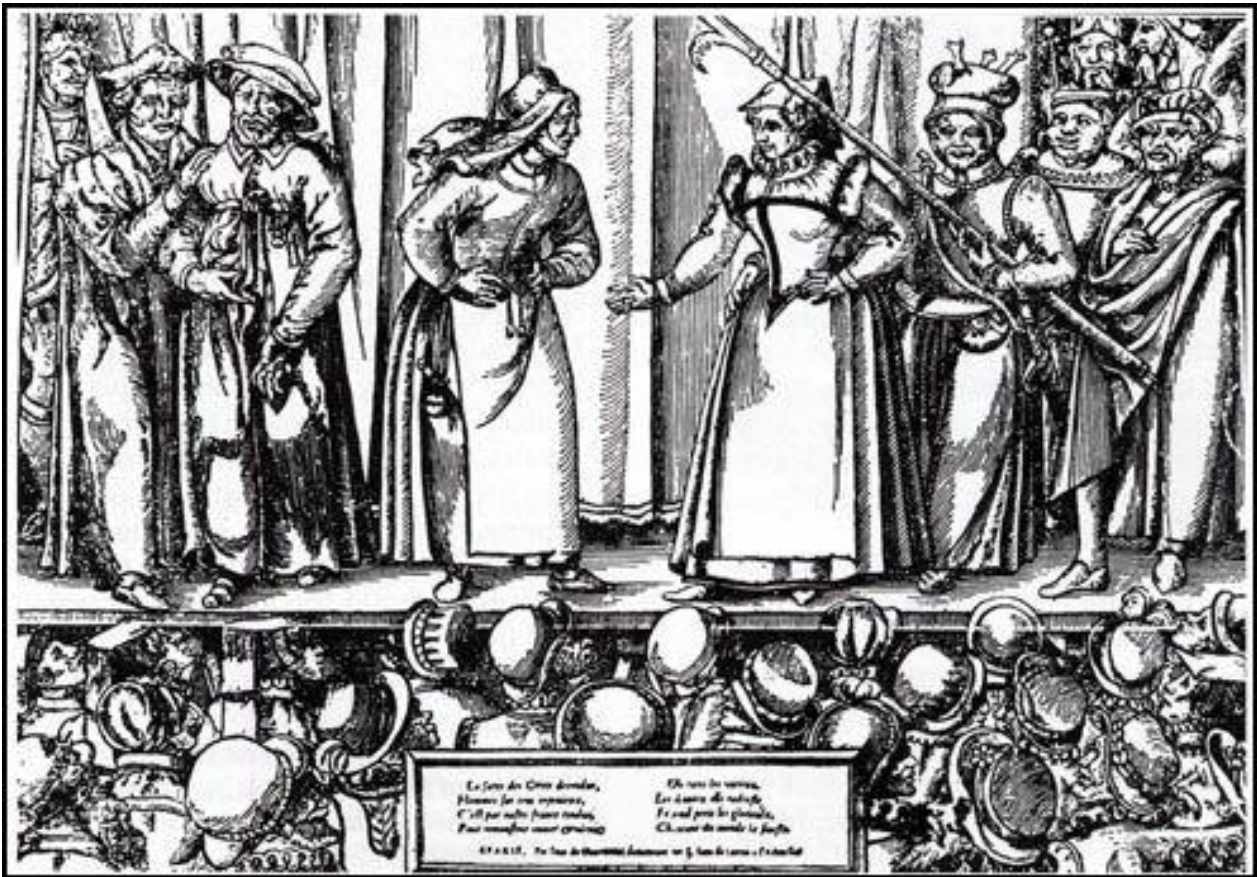
What of the psychological aspects of the era? How did Shakespeare contribute to the psychological understanding of man and his agency in the world?

Shakespeare, as did all of his contemporaries, took for granted a higher eternal soul and its capacity for will directed action (Bundy 530) 'Tell me where the fancy is bred, or in the heart or in the head?' Every moralist of the Elizabethan Renaissance would have endorsed the ideal of right conduct, as well as proper restraint of appetite, affection and imagination. Shakespeare was not the only one upon whom we should rely for insight into the psychological tenor of this period. Francis Bacon wrote, 'But the poets and writers of Histories are the best Doctors of this knowledge, where we may finde painted fourth with greate life, How affections are kindled and incyted: and how pacified and refrained: and how againe Conteyned from Act, and funder degree : how they disclose themselves, how they work how they varye, how they gather and fortifie, how they are inwrapped one within another, and howe they doe sighte and encounter one with another, and other the like particularities...'

The archetype of the fool (the wise fool) now emerges. Many professional fools and jesters were

employed by royalty and highly prized members of staff and family. Innate wisdom in 'simple' folk was emphasized as is evidenced by the 'finding' of simple country folk who were transplanted to court and employed as fools. The recognition of distinct limitations in the case of natural fools who would be identified today as perhaps handicapped, opened up a possibility of a deeper innate and simpler wisdom that could transcend social conditioning and reveal certain capacities. Fools were not mere objects of ridicule but, as has been established earlier on, they were often considered confidants and top advisors even to kings.

Chapter Four: Theatre and Propaganda



According to Lily Campbell, though the sequence of plays is important to the moral patterning of history, each of the Shakespeare histories serves a special purpose in elucidating a political problem of Elizabeth's day and in bringing to bear upon this problem the accepted political philosophy of the Tudors. She points out that Shakespeare chose for his

histories kings those who had already been accepted as archetypes and had been used over and over again to point particular morals. Shakespeare, like all other writers who used history to teach politics to the present, cut his to fit the pattern, and the approach to the study of his purposes in choosing subjects and incidents from history as well as in his altering the historical fact is best made with current political situations in mind. It is on the assumptions that history repeats itself that political mirrors of history can be utilized to explain the present. But it does not repeat itself in every detail, and while the larger outlines of historical fact must be preserved to be convincing, the details are often altered to make them more reminiscent of the present. 'I have, therefore...stressed the traditional nature of Shakespeare's interpretations and the effect of contemporary political situation upon the selection and alteration of historical facts in the plays' (Lily Campbell, 125)

It is relevant to ask, could Elizabeth I have used theatre as a means of educating the public? Gary B. Goldstein addresses this question, pointing out that the newly-born commercial theatre was the only mass medium available to her to address a wide range of political and social issues outside of the church. (Goldstein, 153) The printing press in 16th century Britain was already increasing the circulation of printed materials such as books and pamphlets; however, in London, unlike other major European cities, the publishing industry was purposely limited, and printing rights were restricted to members of a printers and booksellers guild. Between 1570-1579, there were only an average of 136 books published per year (154). It is for this reason that during Elizabeth's reign, despite the invention and adoption of the printing press, not enough books were produced for them to become a mass medium. Furthermore, most of the population at the time was illiterate.

In the early days of Queen Elizabeth I's reign, plays were performed in halls and public spaces by

travelling acting troops as they had done for hundreds of years throughout the middle ages in the same way that buskers and street performers do today. Goldstein contends that Elizabeth used the stage as a means of influencing the public's perception of political realities such as the war with Spain. The crown faced threats both internally (the Church schism) and externally (wars) and as such, she required playwrights to dramatize not only the success of England against Catholic France and Spain but also the demise and corruption of state enemies (166):

After decades of experience in dealing with state oversight of the Church, the press and the stage, the community of writers, actors, and their noble patrons would be able to discern with great sensitivity which topics and personalities would be safe from the antipathy of either the Master of the Revels or the Queen and her ministers" (Goldstein, 166) Lily Campbell also demonstrates that Shakespeare was a man of his time and fully engaged in the political arena.

In her book *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* she elaborates thus:

'The historical mirrors that Shakespeare held up to England before he wrote of Henry V were mirrors in which the Elizabethans could see their own national problems being acted out on the state before them, and in which they could witness the eternal justice of God in the affairs of the body politic. They [the plays] showed the conducts of the age, which endangered the state, threatening its peace and security. Bur in Hendry V the English are mirrored triumphant in a righteous cause, achieving victory through the blessing of God. A mood of exultation pervades the play.' (Lily Campbell, 255)

The use of theatrical entertainment as an instrument of mass education and propaganda dates back at least as far ancient Greece where it was mandatory for the public theatrical festivals that lasted for several days. In a similar fashion, theatre in the

Elizabethan era was also a tool for the dissemination of information and the validating of the queens political and social decisions, which were acted out through parallels drawn with previous ages and stories in legend and myth. As the audience was largely illiterate and audibility oriented (as opposed to visually oriented as audiences are today) this method of oration and enactment with word play, rhyme and meter was an effective way to reach as well as to entertain large masses of people.

Chapter Five: Fools and Lovers



SONNET 137

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
 That they behold, and see not what they see?
 They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
 Yet what the best is take the worst to be.
 If eyes corrupt by over-partial looks
 Be anchor'd in the bay where all men ride,
 Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,
 Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?
 Why should my heart think that a several plot
 Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?
 Or mine eyes seeing this, say this is not,
 To put fair truth upon so foul a face?
 In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,
 And to this false plague are they now transferr'd.

Shakespeare's fools were manifested in several forms, we've distinguished the natural and wise fools, but there is a further broad category that cannot be overlooked: the tragic or comic lover. The tragic lover is in a state of temporary insanity and ultimately has the ability to justify absurd and unseemly behaviour in the name of love which speaks

to the notion that love is blind. The lecherous fool or comic lover, on the other hand, is usually one who lusts after an unattainable lover and generally receives his comeuppance in the end. The lecher stock character is a type of villain, deserving of his misfortune and the scorn that is inevitably heaped upon him.

Lovers embody contradictions in a manner similar to the fool type discussed throughout this study. In her article, 'A Shakespeare's Comic lover', Katherine Jessup distinguishes the comic lover who is different from the romantic or tragic lover in significant ways (Roberts 111). The comic lover is lacking in many main aspects; he or she is not measured, rational, modest, or successful. Rather, the comic is a lover blinded by his or her reckless and lustful actions. The comic lover has the capacity to rationalize about the most ridiculous or egregious behaviour and is, therefore, somebody who may be characterized as a member of the fool family, i.e., a temporary fool, somebody consumed with blinding passion who acts in a manner clearly foolish to those around him. This kind

of fool, neither natural nor an artificial fool, is a tragic yet temporary fool trope that is also capable of redemption.

Lovers were tend not to embody dynamic or be in possession of especially well rounded or profound personalities. As shown by Antipholus in A Comedy of Errors:

"Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?
Sleeping or waking, mad or well-advised?
Known unto these, and to myself disguised?
I'll say as they say, and persevere so,
And in this mist at all adventures go."

- William Shakespeare, The Comedy of Errors

Foolish lovers are characters who serve to emphasize the grotesque and colourfully comedic aspects of themselves and their situations all the more. Their comedic aspect arises from their roles in the disorderly, chaotic narrative, and their clumsy efforts at building the amorous objectives are the starting-point for all dramatic complications, (Owen

95). This contrasts with the ideal lover image of physical attractiveness as well as graceful and sophisticated comportment.

The lecherous fool is the most irredeemable of the fool types, the object of ridicule and cruel contempt of both the other characters and presumably the audience as well. Malvolio is a good example of the lecherous fool. The lecherous fool as a deserving object of derision functions well as a narrative counterpoint to more idealistic types of lover-fools who merely suffer from temporary insanity and are frequently characterized by early love and obsession. The hilarity of Shakespeare's comedies is enhanced by the circuitous reasoning of the lover-fool characters (Herndl 301) and their inability to perceive the shortcomings or failings of the objects of desire. Moreover, the lecherous-fool lover was inappropriately enamoured of somebody unobtainable and arrogantly blind to his own shortcomings and incompatible with a love interest or tenderness. Roundabout reasoning and false logic abounded in comedies to the comedic delight of the audience. The

lecherous lover-fool was physically undesirable; his entire presentation incongruous with romantic love to such an extent that the ridiculous was comical despite his view of himself. A monstrous and ludicrous nature characterize this type of fool. Malvolio is a pompous ass who takes himself far too seriously.

In addition to featuring these caricatures of the lover who is oft times a type of fool, several narrative plot devices reoccur wherein the lover fool relationship is highlighted. The comedies, without exception, usually centre around the question of marriage. In Shakespearian drama, marriage represents more than the union of two lovers but also the achievement of happiness, promise and regeneration. The comedies go through degrees of turmoil and confusion, sexual tension, cross-dressing and mistaken identity but usually culminate with all characters being resolved with the proper partner and ending in a marriage. The symbolic power of marriage is exemplified in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and

Twelfth Night that both conclude with three marriages.

Before the nuptials can take place, however, there are requisite stages of misconception that take place and draw the characters as well as the audience into their intricate webs of mishap and confusion. Benedick and Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing* both scorn love and marriage; they disdain the follies of courtship and consider marriage beneath them. However, the other characters plot to bring them together by convincing them that each other's rudeness is actually a sign of affection. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a love potion mistakenly applied by Puck to Lysander's eyes, and the audience can then delight not only in the outrageous love talk he spouts at Helena, but also in her bewilderment.

Dramatic irony in Shakespeare's comedies is all-pervading, especially when the characters resort to disguise and cross-dressing, which inevitably leads to mistaken identity. In *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, the female protagonists attempt to pass themselves off as men. All of the comedies end in

happy marriages, while the confusion and errors of the protagonists lead to happy consequences and blunders that teach the characters the truths of their own hearts.

In the comedies, lover-fool trope is, in certain circumstances, a temporary condition of madness and even agony that benefits the sufferer in the end and validates the journey. In the tragedies, however, this is not the case as in *Romeo and Juliet*, where the protagonists' mutual infatuation leads to their demise.

'Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to

heaven;

And as imagination bodies forth

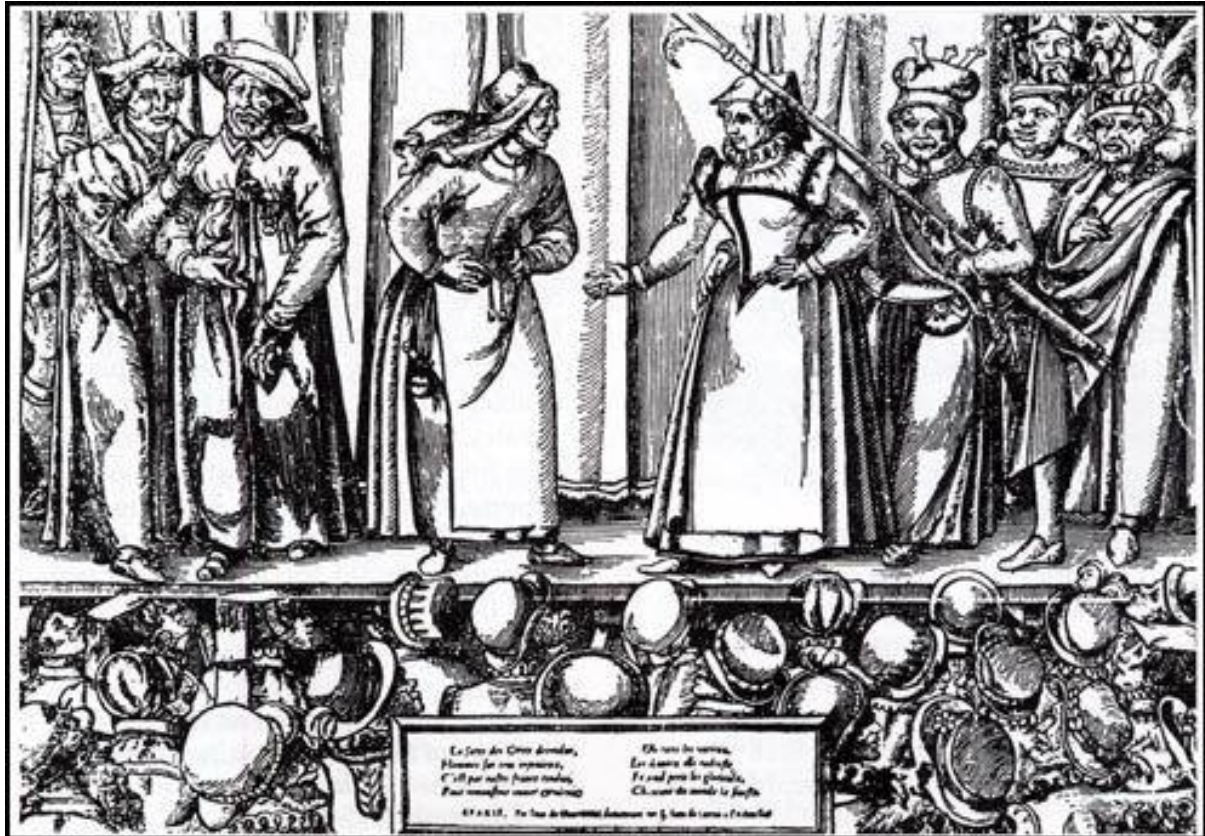
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen

Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing

A local habitation and a name.'

- William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream

Chapter Six: Literary Influences on Shakespeare's Fools



During the Renaissance, there was a dramatic expansion of scientific discovery, artistic expression and world exploration. But this developmental surge did not arise all of a sudden out of a void, but rather the growing consciousness in nearly every arena that characterizes this period of 'rebirth.' It provided the fertile ground for the

seminal fool character to grow into the Renaissance fool. The Elizabethans were the providential beneficiaries of thousands of years of accumulated wisdom. In theatre, as in philosophy and many other artistic mediums, inspiration was drawn from the great Greek and Roman plays. Ancient ancestors of the fool stock character in many forms can be found in the works of Theophrastus, Menander and Plautus, as well as in the famed Italian *commedia dell'arte*, although these models differ from the Elizabethan iteration of the fool. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the fool character existed in previous eras and cultures and eventually influenced Shakespeare's work. However, what arose in the English Renaissance was a new and more sophisticated version.

'Shakespeare was never an originator of plots.

For his *Comedy of Errors* he borrowed from Plautus quite unblushingly, just as he turned to Plutarch's *Lives* for his Latin tragedies, to Holinshed's *Chronicle* for his histories, and to numerous romances, story collections, and older

plays for his tragedies and romantic comedies. But if in his sole classical farce he did pour his romantic Elizabethan wine into an ancient Roman flask, he did so, certainly, because such containers were in vogue with the audience he was addressing, and not because he was trying to better the shape of the vessel.' (H. A. Watt, 401)

In point of fact, many of the scenarios in Shakespeare's plays are borrowed directly from classic literary sources such as Ovid, Plutarch, Livy, Theophrastus, Menander, Plautus, and Sappho. Julius Caesar and Coriolanus obviously take place in ancient Rome and draw parallels with the society in which Shakespeare lived. Even more interesting are the elements of comedy and narrative based on ancient Greek narratives. For instance, Menander and Plautus both used similar comedic ploys of mistaken identity, cross-dressing (usually a woman) irony and subtle sexual innuendo.

In Plautus's *Menaechmi*, a set of twins is separated at birth and the work includes various

stock characters such as the parasite, the comic courtesan, the overbearing wife, and the quack doctor. This farcical comedy follows the chaos and hilarity that ensues when both twins end up in Syracuse and are mistaken for each other by their servants, beloveds and enemies. This play was a major source of inspiration for Shakespeare's *A Comedy of Errors* in which he adapts the same theme of separated twins but adds another set of twin servants who belong to their twin masters, also separated at birth. Naturally, this results in mistaken identities, wrongful punishments, and accusations of madness, infidelity and theft.

Similarly, in writing *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare drew inspiration from *Gl'Ingannati*, otherwise known as *The Deceived*, written in the Italian *commedia dell'arte* in 1531 which also features mistaken identity, cross-dressing and infidelity. In keeping with the carnivalesque nature of *commedia dell'arte*, the actors came from a tradition of wearing masks such that even in a play where they did not use masks, the actors inhabited the stock character roles

as if they wore them. Thus, the personalities of the actors themselves did not emerge through the roles but were covered over by the actors' adherence to type. In fact, in *commedia dell'arte*, the mask refers both to an actual mask and a stock character type. This contrasts greatly with the English stage performers who developed followings in their own rights and whose particular characteristics were written into Shakespeare's plays.

The fact that Shakespeare's plots and themes are not original does not in any way detract from their significance. Rather, it demonstrates the global transmission of art and ideas across cultures and time characteristic of the Renaissance period when artists and thinkers were thoroughly entrenched in delving into a rich past. It helps to deepen our understanding of the cultural resources at Shakespeare's disposal.

Chapter Seven: Professional Jesters and Fools



The jesters of yesteryear like Kemp, Armin, and Tarlton were the star comedians of their day. Perhaps they are the unsung predecessors of today's comics.

‘...when we look historically at the Fool’s place in society, the evidence show that he survived through wit and tricks: both arts of the

entertainer. To be a professional Fool today does not depend on costume (apart from the circus clowns) but on a high degree of individualistic talent and it would be necessary to write analytic biographies of individual comedians to pursue their Fool inheritance.' (Billington 123)

We have covered the major societal shifts that produced the perfect environment for the emergence of the Renaissance fool to manifest when he did including the strife of the Protestant Reformation, the psychological and political views of Elizabethan England, and the historical precedents that inspired Shakespeare's plays. We now focus on the influence of Shakespeare's contemporaries, the people who had a direct impact on his work, and how his literary fool trope developed over time. The influence of certain key players - actors and jesters - was vital to the fools' transformation and inspired Shakespeare's work and the characters he created. The fundamental transformation from a low slapstick comedic jester in the early works giving rise to the elevated

sophisticated wise fool in later plays is key to understanding how the fool was established.

Professional jesters had grown in prominence and societal esteem by the Renaissance era. This is evidenced by the popular convention of employing clowns and jesters in the houses of nobility and the courts of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. These professionally employed jesters were astute and wise critics of society and often accomplished musicians and dancers. During the Renaissance, the fictional fool went through a tremendous growth spurt as reflected in the literature of the time. Richard Tarlton is considered one of the greatest and wittiest jesters of his era and was a favourite of Queen Elisabeth I. In addition to his skills as a comedic performer, he was a poet, writer, playwright an accomplished dancer musician and fencer. He is credited with helping to transform theatre into the mass popular medium of entertainment that it became. Tarlton's career began before Shakespeare rose to fame and was arguably instrumental in paving the way for his huge success. Tarlton came, as did many of

the famous players of Renaissance England, from humble beginnings. He is recorded to have been a swineherd or a watercarrier (Richard Dutton et al., eds., *Hanwell Shakespeare*, p. 24.). This indicates that the theatre and the performing arts were also a means of climbing the social hierarchy, which had previously been far more rigid and insurmountable. His epitaph reads, 'he of clowns to learn still sought/ But now they learn of him they taught,' which is fitting given the enormous influence he had on Renaissance fools and jesters. He made a study of natural fools to flesh out the artificial characters he embodied on the stage. Several sources exult his hilarious antics and merriment; he made fun of vice characters and minstrels in his plays and performances.

William Kemp was a renowned jester and dancer of the Renaissance era who followed in the tradition of Tarlton, even taking over many of his famous roles after his demise. Kemp, and later Robert Armin, were contemporaries of the bard. Kemp is credited with originating several of Shakespeare's most famous

characters, including Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*. He was also believed to have played Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Lancelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*, and Falstaff. He and Armin were both members of *The Chamberlains Men*, later known as the *King's Men*, a theatre troop for whom Shakespeare wrote many of his plays. Kemp wrote bawdy jigs that incorporated music, dancing and physical humour, four of which have survived to this day.

Robert Armin shared Tarlton's humble beginnings, serving as an apprentice to a goldsmith. In the 1580's, he was discovered by Tarlton. Armin and Tarlton became friends as Tarlton took the younger man under his wing. He recognised Armin's astute humour, quick wit and uncanny talent for improvisation as he made him his protégé. Armin displayed an intelligence that would later become his most distinguishing feature

'Stage critics and historians emphasize that Armin's

influence rests in elevating the Tarltonesque clowns' rustic knockabout role to more sophisticated representations wherein these clowns become courtly fools, infusing wisdom into the dramatic circumstances in which they operate' (Janik, 41)

Armin, upon being discovered befriended Tarlton and was taken under his wing. Tarlton recognised Armin's astute humour and quick wit and made him his protégé. Eventually Armin took over for the famous William Kemp as the main performer with the Chamberlain's Men. He is known to have also starred as Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and as Touchstone in *As You Like It*, although these are roles that were likely written for Kemp and later adopted and adapted by Armin. In describing the distinguishing characteristics of Armin's approach to the stage, Aspinall states that he had a more tangible knowledge of cultural place and tone that insinuated licensed position, and an idiom that vaguely signaled anxious conflict between cultural milieus (42). His posh wit showed originality and generated a new line of

sagacious fools. It is likely that he also played the role of Abel Druger in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* and that of Robin in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

These are by no means the only influential personalities surrounding and shaping Shakespeare's work, but the records of their talents and proclivities help us understand the characters that developed over Shakespeare's career. Tarlton, a master reveller and humourist, was the first of these three 'stars' who assessed the careers of those that followed him. Kemp and Armin further fleshed out the dimensions of the fool characters they embodied through high wit, astute critiques and insights into their society as well as their own psychology. Shakespeare and this remarkable group were contemporaries, and one wonders about the conversations they might have had at this remarkable spot in history.

Chapter Eight: Contemplations on Modern Fools



The Renaissance fool character differs greatly from its Greek and Roman antecedents; this is a new creature born out of extraordinary circumstances who has thrived over the centuries and is easily

recognizable in today's modern entertainment. Like Tarlton and Armin, Charlie Chaplin came from humble beginnings that are characterised by Green (Janik 127) as unrelievedly grim and disturbing. Chaplin was able to transform real life misery into consoling laughter in a way that few have ever accomplished. His father was an alcoholic who died early after which his widowed mother descended into poverty, finally ending up in a workhouse where she and Charlie were separated. Living in abject poverty, Chaplin was able to find work in child actor productions, and eventually he experienced a meteoric rise in fortune as an actor, comedian and filmmaker. From the beginning, Chaplin had an intuitive grasp of the possibilities of film. Chaplin's most famous character is the eccentric tramp with shoes and clothes that are patched and far too big, and who is always down on his luck. The Tramp is also the title of a silent film starring Chaplin, which he wrote and directed in 1915. The Tramp was an extremely success fool character, able to laugh at himself and reveal

the bazaar and ridiculous nature of the world around him.

'You know this fellow is many-sided, a tramp, a gentleman, a poet, a dreamer, a lonely fellow, always hopeful of romance and adventure. He would have you believe he is a scientist, a musician, a duke, and a polo-player. However, he is not above picking up cigarette-butts or robbing a baby of its candy. And, of course, if the occasion warrants it, he will kick a lady in the rear—but only in extreme anger!'

--Charlie Chaplin

The tramp is a homeless, destitute figure always bullied by policemen, struggling to survive in a hostile world and starved for love; his attempts at romancing women and outsmarting policemen are pathetic, endearing and funny because of the manner in which he confronts his difficulties pragmatically and humbly. It is ingenious how he came up with such an uncanny and yet relatable character who could

transform even the worst predicaments into poignant moments. 'Chaplin's true genius is in reminding us, with seemingly inexhaustible variety, that we human beings are laughingly consistent in our ability to discourage our own best instincts.' (Green, 132)

Enid Welsford, a leading scholar on fools, wrote extensively and in admiration of Charlie Chaplin, considering him to be a modern day court-fool. Like the fools of the Renaissance era, his was skilled in many performance disciplines: acting, dancing, jesting and filmmaking, to name a few. The fool character is equally at home in the world of imagination as in reality. He is quick witted and nimble on his feet, clever and original. Chaplin's work forces viewers and audiences to entertain his perspective on the oppressive world he inhabits and struggles against in every film.

Like Tarlton and Armin, there is no doubt that Chaplin's work inspired other comedians and filmmakers who learned from this original version of slapstick humour that he formed through the relatively new medium of film. The Marx Brothers were

likewise from humble beginnings and used their experience growing up as the poor children of German immigrants in Manhattan in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to inform their work. The stage characters they created worked harmoniously together and became iconic figures in film history. These wise fools, like Tarlton, Kemp, Armin and Chaplin are shrewd commenters on humanity and reveal the unreliability and ultimate ineffectiveness of human understanding. They demonstrate that humankind's only power is limited by language and reason and that our final limit is our mortality.

'The three Marx Brothers, Groucho, Chico, and Harpo, like all great clown, point at the absurdity of desire, the frailty of discourse, and the ineffectiveness of action. Each of the Marx Brothers targets one of these three admittedly overlapping domains. Groucho underscores the folly of human desire; Chico process the inadequacies of discourse composed of language and patterned in reason; and

Harpo emphasizes the inconsequence of action' (Janik,
300)

And then at last comes death, and with a pin
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!

--Richard II, Shakespeare

In this paper, we have traced several significant factors that influenced and enabled Shakespeare to develop the fool in his repertoire from a mere clown into a wise critic and advisor of kings. We have distinguished between natural and unnatural fool tropes, the bawdy slapstick types and the witty verbal virtuosi, the redeemable lover-fools and irredeemable lecherous ones. The fool in all his glorious manifestations has informed and shaped culture and society, a force so omnipresent that it can be difficult to discern its particular components and their respective functions.

Erasmus personified Folly, which he considered a vital element of cultural and religious life and even suggested that acceptance of folly could be a means of maintaining humility and attaining salvation. The Elizabethan complex view of mankind's relationship to the world within their ordered structure of the

universe included the view that human beings are all constituted of an amalgam of different underdeveloped faculties and deficiencies, whether they be kings or beggars. This perspective allowed a space to exist within the structured world and cosmos for the jester to enter public and governing arenas and wreak hilarity and havoc while questioning and poking fun at the presumptions they held so confidently. The schism within the Christian church, wars with Spain and other catastrophes did not derail this collective gesture of inviting laughter and even ridicule of the state and those who existed within it. The outsider, the other, the fool could share unpopular and offensive perspectives in a spirit of goodwill and mirth.

Into this extraordinary zeitgeist, Shakespeare rose to fame and developed fictional characters in tandem with the external realities of his day as evidenced by examining the chronological order of his works and noting the increased complexity and depth with which he imbued his fool characters. The inspiration for his characters was largely derived

from the actual actors and writers with whom he interacted over the course of his lifetime. How would Feste have materialized without the influence of Armin? Armin himself might have remained an anonymous apprentice or laborer were he not discovered and mentored by Tarlton, both of whom, like all intellectual giants, must necessarily stand on the shoulders of the greats who preceded them. All of these aspects are as facets of a jewel that represents a perfect portal in time and space through which the Renaissance fool made his grand entrance.

In concluding, let us consider the function of the fool on a large scale spanning cultures and time, and how the Renaissance witty fool manifests in the twenty-first century. Reverend Alan Watts (6 January, 1915-16 November, 1973) was a British philosopher, writer, and speaker who discusses the function of the fool in a lecture available online. He maintains that modern society does not make full use of the wise fool or jester character as monarchs once did in Renaissance times. Today, much like in days of yore, fools and jesters, comedians and satirists are

esteemed for the laughter and merriment with which they amuse and enliven their spectators. However, this is but a superficial function of the Renaissance fool in our society.

The jester sat at the foot of kings; he poked fun at that which was serious and caused monarchs and influential figures to laugh at themselves, at their earthly concerns and constraints and to notice their limitations and shortcomings. In a similar fashion, monks or alchemists would keep grinning skulls on their desks to remind themselves of their mortality and the temporal nature of their corporeal existence. In short, the fool reminded those in power of their human limitations and not to take themselves too seriously. By contrast, cartoonists, satirists and stand-up comics do not sit at the feet of kings, nor are they employed or even encouraged by governments or governing institutions. The sophisticated function of the court fool is not only to poke fun and provoke laughter and jest, but also to remind monarchs or those in power of their humanity.

The role of the wise fool during the Renaissance, and in the periods that followed, was of an archetypal truth teller, often portrayed as a figure in a motley coat or in bells or caps that indicated to the audience that this was an 'impartial critic'. Modern entertainment, media and the Internet now allow for a greater dissemination of knowledge and an exponentially larger platform for critical voices that the broader public audience can access on a global scale. (Billington 109). Instead of welcoming polyphonic discourses and dissent and questioning of the current paradigm in which we live, governments and politicians are largely humorless and even punitive to those who criticism their policies. Shakespeare's era was not one of peace and stability but of volatile eruptions of war and violence amidst a changing theological, social and cultural landscape. However, their effect was not to make society or those in power grow more serious and constrained by their duties. Nay, it was actually the opposite. Elizabethans were evidently so confident in their positions, spiritually, politically and

culturally that they could easily withstand harsh and astute criticism without being threatened or shutting down descent in the form of jest.

Shakespeare, a true man of his era, played into this atmosphere of confident and sage judicial mirth. His fictional wise fools demonstrate acute intellect by engaging in language games, riddles and puns, and by twisting the meaning of words. Shakespeare drew inspiration from every aspect of his world including the colleagues with whom he collaborated; then as any great artist would, he transmitted their collective wisdom through his characters in his plays, memorializing the actual figures as well as the fictional ones while transforming the notion of fool forever. The motifs of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets are rooted in ancient myth, describing universal truisms that are archetypally human, creating pictures that have made his work iconic throughout the world. Goethe, Pushkin and Dante, as well as countless others, regarded him as a major influence in their prolific works. Across languages and cultures, his work has built a bridge with the

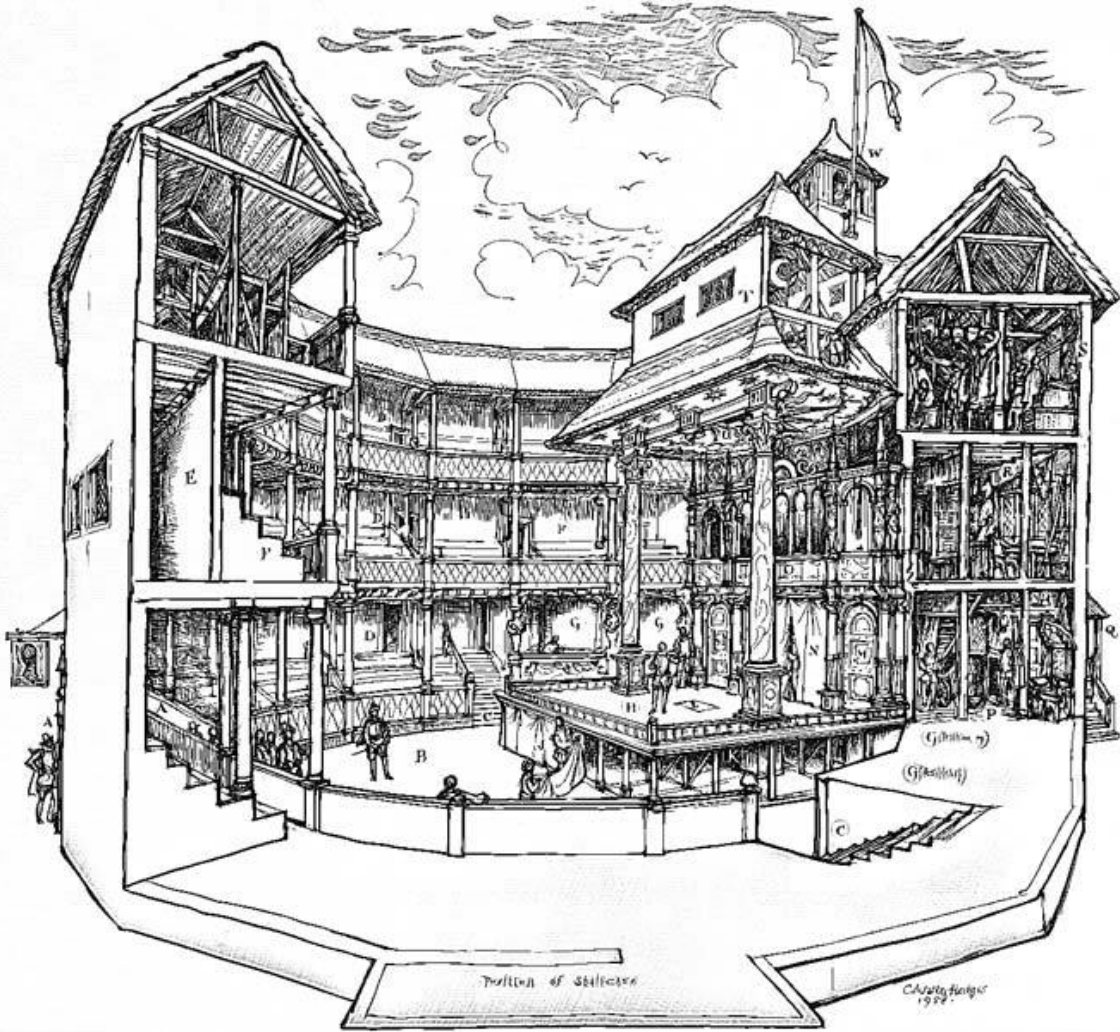
ability to mirror the themes of love and hate, war and peace and freedom and tyranny, themes embodied in his timeless and beloved characters.

Shakespeare's fool was born in the Golden Age and with it came the new theatrical professions of actor and playwright. This wise and necessary character, while derived from his Greek and Roman literary ancestors, is wholly different and distinguishable by a variety of unique characteristics. The fool character is malleable' lovers can step in and out of fool-hood,' fools can be wise and wise men can become fools. Fools, through jest and wit, remind us of our shortcomings, finitude and mortality and not to take ourselves too seriously. The Renaissance fool is maintained in art, literature and to a certain extent in public discourse, but not in social intuitions, Jestling and laughter keep rulers humane and less inclined to tyranny. Shakespeare ingeniously took the extant fool trope from ancient times and reconstituted him on the page and on the stage, reminding us that the wise fool is a healthy and essential element of modern entertainment as well as

broader societal discourse; we lose it, and our sense of humour, at our collective peril.

'The fool's standpoint is that all social institutions are games. He sees the whole world as game playing. That's why, when people take their games seriously and take on stern and pious expressions, the fool gets the giggles because he knows that it is all a game.'

-Alan Watts



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